Eleanor"s House

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BY WILLA SIBERT CATHER

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“Shall you, then,” Harriet ventured, “go to Fortuney?” The girl threw a startled glance toward the corner of the garden where Westfield and Harold were examining a leak in the basin of the little fountain, and Harriet was sorry that she had put the question so directly. Ethel’s reply, when it came, seemed a mere emission of breath rather than articulation.

“I think we shall go later. It’s very trying for him there, of course. He hasn’t been there since.” She relapsed into silence,—indeed, she had never come very far out of it,—and Harriet called to Westfield. She found that she couldn’t help resenting Ethel’s singular inadeptness at keeping herself in hand.

“Come, Robert. Harold is tired after his journey, and he and Ethel must have much to say to each other.”

Both Harold and his wife, however, broke into hurried random remarks with an eagerness which seemed like a protest.

“It is delightful to be near you here at Arques, with only a wall between our gardens,” Ethel spurred herself to say. “It will mean so much to Harold. He has so many old associations with you, Mrs. Westfield.”

The two men had come back to the tea-table, and as the younger one overheard his wife’s last remark, his handsome brown face took on the blankness of disapproval.

Ethel glanced at him furtively, but Harriet was unable to detect whether she realized just why or to what extent her remark had been unfortunate. She certainly looked as if she might not be particularly acute, drooping about in her big garden-hat and her limp white frock, which had not been very well put on. However, some sense of maladroitness certainly penetrated her vagueness, for she shrank behind the tea-table, gathering her scarf about her shoulders as if she were mysteriously blown upon by a chilling current.

The Westfields drew together to take their leave. Harold stepped to his wife's side as they went toward the gate with their guests, and put his hand lightly on her shoulder, at which she waveringly emerged from her eclipse and smiled.

Harriet could not help looking back at them from under her sunshade as they stood there in the gateway: the man with his tense brown face and abstracted smile, the girl drooping, positively swaying in her softness and uncertainty.

When they reached the sunny square of their own garden, Harriet sank into a wicker chair in the deep shadow of the stucco wall and addressed her husband with conviction:

"I know *now,* my dear, why he wished so much to come. I sensed it yesterday, when I first met her. But now that I've seen them together, it's perfectly clear. He brought her here to keep her away from Fortuney, and he's counting on us to help him."

Westfield, who was carefully examining his rose-trees, looked at his wife with interest and frank bewilderment, a form of interrogation with which she was perfectly familiar.

"If there is one thing that's plainer even than his misery," Harriet continued, "it is that she is headed toward Fortuney. They've been married over two years, and he couldn't, I suppose, keep her across the Channel any longer. So he has simply deflected her course, and we are the pretext."

"Certainly," Westfield admitted, as he looked up from his pruning, "one feels something not altogether comfortable with them, but why should it be Fortuney any more than a hundred other things? There are opportunities enough for people who wish to play at cross-purposes."

"Ah! But Fortuney," sighed his wife, "Fortuney's the summing up of all his past. It's Eleanor herself. How could he, Robert, take this poor girl there? It would be cruelty. The figure she'd cut in a place of such distinction!"

"I should think that if he could marry her, he could take her to Fortuney," Westfield maintained bluntly.

"Oh, as to his marrying her! But I suppose we are all to blame for that—all his and Eleanor's old friends. We certainly failed him. We fled at the poor fellow's

approach. We simply couldn’t face the extent of his bereavement. He seemed a mere fragment of a man dragged out from under the wreckage. They had so grown together that when she died there was nothing in him left whole. We dreaded him, and were glad enough to get him off to India. I even hoped he would marry out there. When the news came that he had, I supposed that would end it; that he would become merely a chapter in natural history. But, you see, he hasn’t; he’s more widowed than before. He can’t do anything well without her. You see, he couldn’t even do this.”

“This?” repeated Westfield, quitting his gardening abruptly. “Am I to understand that she would have been of assistance in selecting another wife for him?”

Harriet preferred to ignore that his tone implied an enormity. “She would certainly have kept him from getting into such a box as he’s in now. She could at least have found him some one who wouldn’t lacerate him by her every movement. Oh, that poor, limp, tactless, terrified girl! Have you noticed the exasperating way in which she walks, even? It’s as if she were treading pain, forbearing and forgiving, when she but steps to the tea-table. There was never a person so haunted by the notion of her own untidy picturesqueness. It wears her thin and consumes her, like her unhappy passion. I know how he feels; he hates the way she likes what she likes, and he hates the way she dislikes what she doesn’t like. And, mark my words, she is bent upon Fortuney. That, at least, Robert, he certainly can’t permit. At Fortuney, Eleanor is living still. The place is so intensely, so rarely personal. The girl has fixed her eye, made up her mind. It’s symbolic to her, too, and she’s circling about it; she can’t endure to be kept out. Yesterday, when I went to see her, she couldn’t wait to begin explaining her husband to me. She seemed to be afraid I might think she hadn’t poked into everything.”

While his wife grew more and more vehement, Westfield lay back in a garden-chair, half succumbing to the drowsy warmth of the afternoon.

“It seems to me,” he remarked, with a discreet yawn, “that the poor child is only putting up a good fight against the tormenting suspicion that she hasn’t got into anything. She may be just decently trying to conceal her uncertainty.”

Harriet looked at him intently for a moment, watching the shadows of the sycamore-leaves play across his face, and then laughed indulgently. “The idea of her decently trying to conceal anything amuses me. So that’s how much you

know of her!” she sighed. “She’s taken you in just as she took him. He doubtless thought she wouldn’t poke; that she would go on keeping the door of the chamber, breathing faint benedictions and smiling her moonbeam smile as he came and went. But, under all her meekness and air of poetically foregoing, she has a forthcomingness and an outputtingness which all the brutality he’s driven to can’t discourage. I’ve known her kind before! You may clip their tendrils every day of your life, only to find them renewed and sweetly taking hold the next morning. She’d find the crevices in polished alabaster. Can’t you see what she wants?” Mrs. Westfield sat up with flashing eyes. “She wants to be to him what Eleanor was; she sees no reason why she shouldn’t be!”

Westfield rubbed the stiff blond hair above his ear in perplexity. “Well, why, in Heaven’s name, shouldn’t she be? He married her. What less can she expect?”

“Oh, Robert!” cried Harriet, as if he had uttered something impious. “But then, you never knew them. Why, Eleanor made him. He is the work of her hands. She saved him from being something terrible.”

Westfield smiled ironically.

“Was he, then, in his natural state, so—so very much worse?”

“Oh, he was better than he is now, even then. But he was somehow terribly off the key. He was the most immature thing ever born into the world. Youth was a disease with him; he almost died of it. He was so absorbed in his own waking up, and he so overestimated its importance. He made such a clamor about it and so thrust it upon one that I used to wonder whether he would ever get past the stage of opening packages under the Christmas tree and shouting. I suppose he did know that his experiences were not unique, but I’m sure he felt that the degree of them was peculiarly his.

“When he met Eleanor he lost himself, and that was what he needed. She happened to be born tempered and poised. There never was a time when she wasn’t discriminating. She could enjoy all kinds of things and people, but she was never, never mistaken in the kind. The beauty of it was that her distinctions had nothing to do with reason; they were purely shades of feeling.

“Well, you can conjecture what followed. She gave him the one thing which made everything else he had pertinent and dignified. He simply had better fiber than any of us realized, and she saw it. She was infallible in detecting quality.

“Two years after their marriage, I spent six weeks with them at Fortuney, and even then I saw their possibilities, what they would do for each other. And they went on and on. They had all there is—except children. I suppose they were selfish. As Eleanor once said to me, they needed only eternity and each other. But, whatever it was, it was Olympian.”

II

Harriet was walking one morning on the green hill that rises, topped by its sprawling feudal ruin, behind Arques-la-Bataille. The sunlight still had the magical golden hue of early day, and the dew shone on the smooth, grassy folds and clefts that mark the outlines of the old fortifications. Below lay the delicately colored town,—seen through a grove of glistening white birches,—the shining, sinuous curves of the little river, and the green, open stretches of the pleasant Norman country.

As she skirted the base of one of the thick towers on the inner edge of the moat, her sunshade over her shoulder and her white shoes gray with dew, she all but stepped upon a man who lay in a shaded corner within the elbow of the wall and the tower, his straw hat tilted over his eyes.

“Why, Harold Forscythe!” she exclaimed breathlessly.

He sprang to his feet, baring his head in the sun.

“Sit down, do,” he urged. “It’s quite dry there—the masonry crops out—and the view’s delightful.”

“You didn’t seem to be doing much with the view as I came up.” Harriet put down her sunshade and stood looking at him, taking in his careless morning dress, his gray, unshaven face and heavy eyes. “But I shall sit down,” she affectionately assured him, “to look at you, since I have so few opportunities. Why haven’t you been to see me ?”

Forscythe gazed attentively at her canvas shoes, hesitating and thrusting out his lower lip, an impetuous mannerism she had liked in him as a boy. “Perhaps—perhaps I haven’t quite dared,” he suggested.

“Which means,” commented Harriet reproachfully, “that you accredit me with a very disagreeable kind of stupidity.”

“You? Oh, dear, no! I didn’t—I don’t. How could you suppose it?” He helped her to her seat on the slant of gray rock, moving about her solicitously, but avoiding her eyes.

“Then why do you stand there, hesitating?”

“I was just thinking”—he shot her a nervous glance from under a frown —“whether I ought not to cut away now, on your account. I’m in the devil of a way in the early morning sometimes.”

Mrs. Westfield looked at him compassionately as he stood poking the turf with his stick. She wondered how he could have reached eight-and-thirty without growing at all older than he had been in his twenties. And yet, that was just what their happiness had done for them. If it had kept them young, gloriously and resplendently young, it had also kept them from arriving anywhere. It had prolonged his flowering time, but it hadn’t mellowed him. Growing older would have meant making concessions. He had never made any; had not even learned how, and was still striking back like a boy.

Harriet pointed to the turf beside her, and he dropped down suddenly.

“I’m really not fit to see anyone this morning. These first hours—” He shrugged his shoulders and began to pull the grass-blades swiftly, one at a time.

“Are hard for you?”

He nodded.

“Because they used to be your happiest?” Harriet continued, feeling her way.

“It’s queer,” he said quietly, “but in the morning I often feel such an absurd certainty of finding her. I suppose one has more vitality at this time of day, a keener sense of things.”

“My poor boy! Is it still as hard as that?”

“Did you for a moment suppose that it would ever be any—easier?” he asked, with a short laugh.

“I hoped so. Oh, I hoped so!”

Forscythe shook his head. “You know why I haven’t been to see you,” he brought out abruptly.

Harriet touched his arm. “You ought not to be afraid with me. If I didn’t love her as much as you did, at least I never loved anything else so well.”

“I know. That’s one reason I came here. You were always together when I first knew her, and it’s easy to see her beside you. Sometimes I think the image of her—coming down the stairs, crossing the garden, holding out her hand—is growing dimmer, and that terrifies me. Some people and some places give me the feeling of her.” He stopped with a jerk, and threw a pebble across the moat, where the sloping bank, softened and made shallower by the slow centuries, was yellow with buttercups.

“But that feeling, Harold, must be more in you than anywhere. There’s where she wined it and breathed it and stored it for years.”

Harold was looking fixedly at the bare spot under his hand and pulling the grass-blades out delicately. When he spoke, his voice fairly startled her with its sound of water working underground.

“It was like that once, but now I lose it sometimes—for weeks together. It’s like trying to hold some delicate scent in your nostrils, and heavier odors come in and blur it.”

“My poor boy, what can I say to you ?” Harriet’s eyes were so dim that she could only put out a hand to be sure that he was there. He pressed it and held it a moment.

“You don’t have to say anything. Your thinking reaches me. It’s extraordinary how we can be trained down, how little we can do with. If she could only have written to me—if there could have been a sign, a shadow on the grass or in the sky, to show that she went on with me, it would have been enough. And now—I wouldn’t ask anything but to be left alone with my hurt. It’s all that’s left me. It’s the most precious thing in the world.”

“Oh, but that, my dear Harold, is too terrible! She couldn’t have endured your doing it,” murmured Harriet, overcome.

“Yes, she could. She’d have done it. She’d have kept me alive in her anguish, in her incompleteness.”

Mrs. Westfield put out her hand entreatingly to stop him. He had lain beside her

on the grass so often in the days of his courtship, of his first tempestuous happiness. It was incredible that he should have changed so little. He hadn't grown older, or wiser, or, in himself, better. He had simply grown more and more to be Eleanor. The misery of his entanglement touched her afresh, and she put her hands to her eyes and murmured, "Oh, that *poor* little Ethel! How could you do it?"

She heard him bound up, and when she lifted her face he was half the length of the wall away. She called to him, but he waved his hat meaninglessly, and she watched him hurry across the smooth green swell of the hill. Harriet leaned back into the warm angle of masonry and tried to settle into the deep peace of the place, where so many follies and passions had spent themselves and ebbed back into the stillness of the grass. But a sense of pain kept throbbing about her. It seemed to come from the spot where poor Forscythe had lain, and to rise like a miasma between her and the farms and orchards and the gray-green windings of the river. When at last she rose with a sigh, she murmured to herself, "Oh, my poor Eleanor! If you know, I pity you. Wherever you are, I pity you."

III

The silence once broken, Forscythe came often to Mrs. Westfield's garden. He spent whole mornings there, watching her embroider, or walked with her about the ruins on the hilltop, or along the streams that wound through the fertile farm country. Though he said little himself, he made it supremely easy for her to talk. He followed her about in grateful silence while she told him, freely and almost lightly, of her girlhood with Eleanor Sanford; of their life at a convent-school in Paris; of the copy of "Manon Lescault" which they kept sewed up in the little pine pillow they had brought from Schenectady; of the adroit machinations by which, on her fete-day, under the guardianship of an innocent aunt from Albany, Eleanor had managed to convey all her birthday roses out to P�re-la-Chaise and arrange them under de Mussel's willow.

Harriet even found a quiet happiness in being with him. She felt that he was making amends; that she could trust him not to renew the terrible experience which had crushed her at their first meeting on the hill. When he spoke of Eleanor at all, it was only to recall the beauty of their companionship, a thing she loved to reflect upon. For if they had been selfish, at least their selfishness had never taken the form of comfortable indolence. They had kept the edge of their zest for action; their affection had never grown stocky and middle-aged. How, Harriet often asked herself, could two people have crowded so much into ten circumscribed mortal years? And, of course, the best of it was that all the things they did and the places they went to and the people they knew didn't in the least matter, were only the incidental music of their drama.

The end, when it came, had, by the mercy of Heaven, come suddenly. An illness of three days at Fortuney, their own place on the Oise, and it was over. He was flung out into space to find his way alone; to keep fighting about in his circle, forever yearning toward the center.

One morning, when Harold asked her to go for a long walk into the country, Harriet felt from the moment they left the town behind them that he had something serious to say to her. They were having their d�jeuner in the garden of a little auberge, sitting at a table beside a yellow clay wall overgrown with wall-peaches, when he told her that he was going away.

"I don't know for just how long. Perhaps a week; perhaps two. I'd hate to have

you misunderstand. I don't want you to underestimate the good you've done me these last weeks. But, you see, this is a sort of—a sort of tryst," he explained, smiling faintly. "We got stranded once in an absurd little town down on the Mediterranean, not far from Hy[illegible]res. We liked it and stayed for days, and when we left, Eleanor said we'd go back every year when the grapes were ripe. We never did go back, for that was the last year. But I've been there that same week every autumn. The people there all remember her. It's a little bit of a place."

Harriet looked at him, holding her breath. The black kitten came up and brushed against him, tapping his arm with its paw and mewing to be fed.

"Is that why you go away so much? Ethel has told me. She said there was some business, but I doubted that."

"I'm sorry it has to be so. Of course, I feel despicable—do all the time, for that matter." He wiped his face and hands miserably with his napkin and pushed back his chair. "You see," he went on, beginning to make geometrical figures in the sand with his walking-stick, "you see, I can't settle down to anything, and I'm so driven. There are times when places pull me—places where things happened, you know. Not big things, but just our own things." He stopped, and then added thoughtfully, "Going to miss her is almost what going to meet her used to be. I get in such a state of impatience."

Harriet couldn't, she simply couldn't, altogether despise him, and it was because, as he said, she did know. They sat in the quiet, sunny little garden, full of dahlias and sunflowers and the hum of bees, and she remembered what Eleanor had told her about this fishing-village where they had lived on figs and goat's milk and watched the meager vintage being gathered; how, when they had to leave it, got into their compartment and flashed away along the panoramic Mediterranean shore, she had cried—she who never wept for pain or weariness, Harriet put in fondly. It was not the blue bay and the lavender and the pine hills they were leaving, but some peculiar shade of being together. Yet they were always leaving that. Every day brought colors in the sky, on the sea, in the heart, which could not possibly come just so again. That to-morrow's would be just as beautiful never quite satisfied them. They wanted it all. Yes, whatever they were, those two, they were Olympian.

As they were nearing home in the late afternoon, Forscythe turned suddenly to Harriet. "I shall have to count on you for something while I am away, you

know.”

“About the business? Oh, yes, I’ll understand.”

“And you’ll do what you can for her, won’t you?” he asked shakily. “It’s such a hellish existence for her. I’d do anything if I could undo what I’ve done—anything.”

Harriet paused a moment. “It simply can’t, you know, go on like this.”

“Yes, yes, I know that,” he replied abstractedly. “But that’s not the worst of it. The worst is that sometimes I feel as if Eleanor wants me to give her up; that she can’t stand it any longer and is begging me to let her rest.”

Harriet tried to look at him, but he had turned away his face.

IV

Forscythe’s absence stretched beyond a fortnight, and no one seemed very definitely informed as to when he might return. Meanwhile, Mrs. Westfield had his wife considerably upon her hands. She could not, indeed, account for the degree to which she seemed responsible. It was always there, groping for her and pulling at her, as she told Westfield. The garden wall was not high enough to shut out entirely the other side: the girl pacing the gravel paths with the meek, bent step which poor Harriet found so exasperating, her wistful eyes peering from under her garden-hat, her preposterous skirts trailing behind her like the brier-torn gown of some wandering Griselda.

During the long, dull hours in which they had their tea together, Harriet realized more and more the justice of the girl’s position—of her claim, since she apparently had no position that one could well define. The reasonableness of it was all the more trying since Harriet felt so compelled to deny it. They read and walked and talked, and the subject to which they never alluded was always in the air. It was in the girl’s long, silent, entreating looks; in her thin hands, nervously clasping and unclasping; in her ceaseless pacing about. Harriet distinctly felt that she was working herself up to something, and she declared to Westfield every morning that, whatever it was, she wouldn’t be a party to it.

“I can understand perfectly,” she insisted to her husband, “how he did it. He married her to talk to her about Eleanor. Eleanor had been the theme of their courtship. The rest of the world went on attending to its own business and shaking him off, and she stopped and sympathized and let him pour himself out. He didn’t see, I suppose, why he shouldn’t have just a wife like other men, for it didn’t occur to him that he couldn’t be just a husband. He thought she’d be content to console; he never dreamed she’d try to heal.”

As for Ethel, Harriet had to admit that she, too, could be perfectly accounted for. She had gone into it, doubtless, in the spirit of self-sacrifice, a mood she was romantically fond of permitting herself and humanly unable to live up to. She had married him in one stage of feeling, and had inevitably arrived at another—had come, indeed, to the place where she must be just one thing to him. What she was, or was not, hung on the throw of the dice in a way that savored of trembling captives and barbarous manners, and Harriet had to acknowledge that almost anything might be expected of a woman who had let herself go to such

lengths and had yet got nowhere worth mentioning.

“She is certainly going to do something,” Harriet declared. “But whatever can she hope to do now? What weapon has she left? How is she, after she’s poured herself out so, ever to gather herself up again? *What* she’ll do is the horror. It’s sure to be ineffectual, and it’s equally sure to have distinctly dramatic aspects.”

Harriet was not, however, quite prepared for the issue which confronted her one morning. She sat down shaken and aghast when Ethel, pale and wraith-like, glided somnambulantly into her garden and asked whether Mrs. Westfield would accompany her to Fortuney on the following day.

“But, my dear girl, ought you to go there alone?”

“Without Harold, you mean?” the other inaudibly suggested. “Yes, I think I ought. He has such a dread of going back there, and yet I feel that he’ll never be satisfied until he gets among his own things. He would be happier if he took the shock and had done with it. And my going there first might make it easier for him.”

Harriet stared. “Don’t you think he should be left to decide that for himself?” she reasoned mildly. “He may wish to forget the place in so far as he can.”

“He doesn’t forget,” Ethel replied simply. “He thinks about it all the time. He ought to live there; it’s his home. He ought not,” she brought out, with a fierce little burst, “to be kept away.”

“I don’t know that he or anyone else can do much in regard to that,” commented Harriet dryly.

“He ought to live there,” Ethel repeated automatically; “and it might make it easier for him if I went first.”

“How?” gasped Mrs. Westfield.

“It might,” she insisted childishly, twisting her handkerchief around her fingers. “We can take an early train and get there in the afternoon. It’s but a short drive from the station. I’m sure”—she looked pleadingly at Harriet—“I’m sure he’d like it better if you went with me.”

Harriet made a clutch at herself and looked pointedly at the ground. “I really don’t see how I could, Ethel. It doesn’t seem to me a proper thing to do.”

Ethel sat straight and still. Her liquid eyes brimmed over and the tears rolled mildly down her cheeks. “I’m sorry it seems wrong to you. Of course you can’t go if it does. I shall go alone, then, to-morrow.” She rose and stood poised in uncertainty, her hand on the back of the chair.

Harriet moved quickly toward her. The girl’s infatuate obstinacy carried a power with it.

“But why, dear child, do you wish me to go with you? What good could that possibly do?”

There was a long silence, trembling and gentle tears. At last Ethel murmured: “I thought, because you were her friend, that would make it better. If you were with me, it couldn’t seem quite so—indelicate.” Her shoulders shook with a sudden wrench of feeling and she pressed her hands over her face. “You see,” she faltered, “I’m so at a loss. I haven’t—anyone.”

Harriet put an arm firmly about her drooping slenderness. “Well, for this venture, at least, you shall have me. I can’t see it, but I’m willing to go; more willing than I am that you should go alone. I must tell Robert and ask him to look up the trains for us.”

The girl drew gently away from her and stood in an attitude of deep dejection. “It’s difficult for you, too, our being here. We ought never to have come. And I must not take advantage of you. Before letting you go with me, I must tell you the real reason why I am going to Fortuney.”

“The real reason?” echoed Harriet.

“Yes. I think he’s there now.”

“Harold? At Fortuney?”

“Yes. I haven’t heard from him for five days. Then it was only a telegram, dated from Pontoise. That’s very near Fortuney. Since then I haven’t had a word.”

“You poor child, how dreadful! Come here and tell me about it.” Harriet drew

her to a chair, into which she sank limply.

“There’s nothing to tell, except what one fears. I’ve lost sleep until I imagine all sorts of horrible things. If he has been alone there for days, shut up with all those memories, who knows what may have happened to him? I shouldn’t, you know, feel like this if he were with—any one. But this—oh, you are all against me! You none of you understand. You think I am trying to make him—inconstant” (for the first time her voice broke into passionate scorn). “But there’s no other way to save him. It’s simply killing him. He’s been frightfully ill twice, once in London and once before we left India. The London doctors told me that unless he was got out of this state he might do almost anything. They even wanted me to leave him. So, you see, I must do something.”

Harriet sat down on the stool beside her and took her hand.

“Why don’t you, then, my dear, do it—leave him?”

The girl looked wildly toward the garden wall. “I can’t—not now. I might have once, perhaps. Oh!” with a burst of trembling, “don’t, please don’t talk about it. Just help me to save him if you can.”

“Had you rather, Ethel, that I went to Fortuney alone?” Harriet suggested hopefully.

The girl shook her head. “No; he’d know I sent you, and he’d think I was afraid. I am, of course, but not in the way he thinks. I’ve never crossed him in anything, but we can’t go on like this any longer. I’ll go, and he’ll just have to—choose.”

Having seen Ethel safely to her own door, Harriet went to her husband, who was at work in the library, and told him to what she had committed herself. Westfield received the intelligence with marked discouragement. He disliked her being drawn more and more into the Forscythes’ affairs, which he found very depressing and disconcerting, and he flatly declared that he wanted nothing so much as to get away from all that hysteria next door and finish the summer in Switzerland.

“It’s an obsession with her to get to Fortuney,” Harriet explained. “To her it somehow means getting into everything she’s out of. I really can’t have her thinking I’m against her in that definite, petty sort of way. So I’ve promised to go. Besides, if she is going down there, where all Eleanor’s things are–-”

“Ah, so it’s to keep her out, and not to help her in, that you’re going,” Westfield deduced.

“I declare to you, I don’t know which it is. I’m going for both of them—for her and for Eleanor.”

V

Fortuney stood in its cluster of cool green, half-way up the hillside and overlooking the green loop of the river. Harriet remembered, as she approached it, how Eleanor used to say that, after the south, it was good to come back and rest her eyes there. Nowhere were skies so gray, streams so clear, or fields so pleasantly interspersed with woodland. The hill on which the house stood overlooked an island where the haymakers were busy cutting a second crop, swinging their bright scythes in the long grass and stopping to hail the heavy lumber-barges as they passed slowly up the glassy river.

Ethel insisted upon leaving the carriage by the roadside, so the two women alighted and walked up the long driveway that wound under the linden-trees. An old man who was clipping the hedge looked curiously at them as they passed. Except for the snipping of his big shears and occasional halloos from the island, a pale, sunny quiet lay over the place, and their approach, Harriet reflected, certainly savored all too much of a reluctance to break it. She looked at Ethel with all the exasperation of fatigue, and felt that there was something positively stealthy about her soft, driven tread.

The front door was open, but, as they approached, a bent old woman ran out from the garden behind the house, her apron full of gourds, calling to them as she ran. Ethel addressed her without embarrassment: “I am Madame Forscythe. Monsieur is awaiting me. Yes, I know that he is ill. You need not announce me.”

The old woman tried to detain her by salutations and questions, tried to explain that she would immediately get rooms ready for Madame and her friend. Why had she not been told?

But Ethel brushed past her, seeming to float over the threshold and up the staircase, while Harriet followed her, protesting. They went through the salon, the library, into Harold’s study, straight toward the room which had been Eleanor’s.

“Let us wait for him here in his study, please, Ethel,” Harriet whispered. “We’ve no right to steal upon anyone like this.”

But Ethel seemed drawn like the victim of mesmerism. The door opening from

the study into Eleanor's room was hung with a heavy curtain. She lifted it, and there they paused, noiselessly. It was just as Harriet remembered it: the tapestries, the prie-dieu, the Louis-Seize furniture—absolutely unchanged, except that her own portrait, by Constant, hung where Harold's used to be. Across the foot of the bed, in a tennis-shirt and trousers, lay Harold himself, asleep. He was lying on his side, his face turned toward the door and one arm thrown over his head. The habit of being on his guard must have sharpened his senses, for as they looked at him he awoke and sprang up, flushed and disordered.

"Ethel, what on earth—?" he cried hotly.

She was frightened enough now. She trembled from head to foot and pressed her hands tightly over her breast. "You never told me not to come," she panted. "You only said," with a wild burst of reproach, "that you couldn't."

Harold gripped the foot of the bed with both hands and his voice shook with anger. "Please go down-stairs and wait in the reception-room, while I ask Mrs. Westfield to enlighten me."

Something leaped into Ethel's eyes as she took another step forward into the room and let the curtain fall behind her. "I won't go, Harold, until you go with me," she cried. Drawing up her frail shoulders, she glanced desperately about her—at the room, at her husband, at Harriet, and finally at her, the handsome, disdainful face which glowed out of the canvas. "You have no right to come here secretly," she broke out. "It's shameful to her as well as to me. I'm not afraid of her. She couldn't but loathe you for what you do to me. She couldn't have been so contemptible as you all make her—so jealous!"

Forscythe swung round on his heel, his clenched hands banging at his side, and, throwing back his head, faced the picture.

"Jealous? Of whom—my God!"

"Harold!" cried Mrs. Westfield entreatingly.

But she was too late. The girl had slipped to the floor as if she had been cut down.

VI

One rainy night, four weeks after her visit to Fortuney, Forscythe stood at Mrs. Westfield's door, his hat in his hand, bidding her good night. Harriet looked worn and troubled, but Forscythe himself was calm.

"I'm so glad you gave me a chance at Fortuney, Harold. I couldn't bear to see it go to strangers. I'll keep it just as it is—as it was; you may be sure of that, and if ever you wish to come back–-"

Forscythe spoke up quickly: "I don't think I shall be coming back again, Mrs. Westfield. And please don't hesitate to make any changes. As I've tried to tell you, I don't feel the need of it any longer. She has come back to me as much as she ever can."

"In another person?"

Harold smiled a little and shook his head. "In another way. She lived and died, dear Harriet, and I'm all there is to show for it. That's pitiful enough, but I must do what I can. I shall die very far short of the mark but she was always generous."

He held out his hand to Mrs. Westfield and took hers resolutely, though she hesitated as if to detain him.

"Tell Ethel I shall go over to see her in the morning before you leave, and thank her for her message," Harriet murmured.

"Please come. She has been seeing to the packing in spite of me, and is quite worn out. She'll be herself again, once I get her back to Surrey, and she's very keen about going to America. Good night, dear lady," he called after him as he crossed the veranda.

Harriet heard him splash down the gravel walk to the gate and then closed the door. She went slowly through the hall and into her husband's study, where she sat quietly down by the wood fire.

Westfield rose from his work and looked at her with concern.

“Why didn’t you send that madman home long ago, Harriet? It’s past midnight, and you’re completely done out. You look like a ghost.” He opened a cabinet and poured her a glass of wine.

“I feel like one, dear. I’m beginning to feel my age. I’ve no spirit to hold it off any longer. I’m going to buy Fortuney and give up to it. It will be pleasant to grow old there in that atmosphere of lovely things past and forgotten.”

Westfield sat down on the arm of her chair and drew her head to him. “He is really going to sell it, then? He has come round sure enough, hasn’t he?”

“Oh, he melts the heart in me, Robert. He makes me feel so old and lonely; that he and I are left over from another age—a lovely time that’s gone. He’s giving up everything. He’s going to take her home to America after her child is born.”

“Her child?”

“Yes. He didn’t know until after that dreadful day at Fortuney. She had never told anyone. He says he’s so glad—that it will make up to her for everything. Oh, Robert! if only Eleanor had left him children all this wouldn’t have been.”

“Do you think,” Westfield asked after a long silence, “that he is glad?”

“I know it. He’s been so gentle and comprehending with her.” Harriet stopped to dry the tears on her cheek, and put her head down on her husband’s shoulder. “And oh, Robert, I never would have believed that he could be so splendid about it. It’s as if he had come up to his possibilities for the first time, through this silly, infatuated girl, while Eleanor, who gave him kingdoms–-”

She cried softly on his shoulder for a long while, and then he felt that she was thinking. When at last she looked up, she smiled gratefully into his eyes.

“Well, we’ll have Fortuney, dearest. We’ll have all that’s left of them. He’ll never turn back; I feel such a strength in him now. He’ll go on doing it and being finer and finer. And do you know, Robert,” her lips trembled again, but she still smiled from her misty eyes, “if Eleanor knows, I believe she’ll be glad; for—oh, my Eleanor!—she loved him beyond anything, beyond even his love.”