

## CHAPTER LXX

Angela went home very thoughtful. The next three days she spent in writing. First, she wrote a clear and methodical account of all the events that had happened since Arthur's first departure, more than a year ago, and attached to it copies of the various documents that had passed between herself and George, including one of the undertaking that her husband had signed before the marriage. This account was in the form of a statement, which she signed, and, taking it to Mr. Fraser, read it to him, and got him to sign it too. It took her two whole days to write, and, when it was done, she labelled it "to be read first." On the third day she wrote the following letter to go with the statement:

"For the first time in my life, Arthur, I take up my pen to write to you, and in truth the difficulty of the task before me, as well as my own want of skill, tends to bewilder me, and, though I have much upon my mind to say, I scarcely know if it will reach you--if, indeed, this letter is ever destined to lie open in your hands--in an intelligible form.

"The statement that I enclose, however, will--in case you do not already know them--tell you all the details of what has happened since you left me more than a year ago. From it you will learn how cruelly I was deceived into marrying George Caresfoot, believing you dead. Oh, through all eternity, never shall I forget that fearful night, nor

cease to thank God for my merciful escape from the fiend whom I had married. And then came the morning, and brought you--the dead--alive before my eyes. And whilst I stood in the first tumult of my amaze--forgetful of everything but that it was you, my own, my beloved Arthur, no spirit, but you in flesh and blood--whilst I yet stood thus, stricken to silence by the shock of an unutterable joy--you broke upon me with those dreadful words, so that I choked, feeling how just they must seem to you, and could not answer.

"And yet it sometimes fills me with wonder and indignation to think of them; wonder that you could believe me so mad as to throw away the love of my life, and indignation that you could deem me so lost as to dishonour it. They drove me mad, those words, and from that moment forward I remember nothing but a chaos of the mind heaving endlessly like the sea. But all this has passed, and I am thankful to say that I am quite well again now.

"Still I should not have written to you, Arthur; I did not even know where you were, and I never thought of recovering you. After what has passed, I looked upon you as altogether lost to me for this world. But a few days ago I went at her own request to see Lady Bellamy. All she said to me I will not now repeat, lest I should render this letter too wearisome to read, though a great deal of it was strange enough to be well worth repetition. In the upshot, however, she said that I had better write to you, and told me where to write. And so I write to you, dear. There was also another thing that she told me of sad import

for myself, but which I must not shrink to face. She said that there lived at Madeira, where you are, a lady who is in love with you, and is herself both beautiful and wealthy, to whom you would have gone for comfort in your trouble, and in all probability have married.

"Now, Arthur, I do not know if this is the case, but, if so, I hasten to say that I do not blame you. You smarted under what must have seemed to you an intolerable wrong, and you went for consolation to her who had it to offer. In a man that is perhaps natural, though it is not a woman's way. If it be so, I say from my heart, be as happy as you can. But remember what I told you long ago, and do not fall into any delusions on the matter; do not imagine because circumstances have shaped themselves thus, therefore I am to be put out of your mind and forgotten, for this is not so. I cannot be forgotten, though for a while I may be justly discarded; it is possible that for this world you have passed out of my reach, but in the next I shall claim you as my own.

"Yes, Arthur, I have made up my mind to lose you for this life as a fitting reward for my folly. But do not think that I do so without a pang, for, believe me, since my mind emerged stronger and clearer from the storms through which it has passed, bringing back to me the full life and strength of my womanhood, I have longed for you with an ever-increasing longing. I am not ashamed to own that I would give worlds to feel your arms about me and your kiss upon my lips. Why should I be? Am I not yours, body and soul?

"But, dear, it has been given to me, perhaps as a compensation for all I have undergone and that is still left for me to undergo, to grasp a more enduring end than that of earthly ecstasy: for I can look forward with a confident assurance to the day when we shall embrace upon the threshold of the Infinite. Do not call this foolish imagination, or call it imagination, if you will--for what is imagination? Is it not the connecting link between us and our souls, and recalling memories of our home. Imagination, what would our higher life be without it? It is what the mind is to the body, it is the soul's thought.

"So in my imagination--since I know no better term--I foresee that heavenly hour, and I am not jealous for the earthly moment. Nor, indeed, have I altogether lost you, for at times, in the stillness of the night, when the earthly part is plunged in sleep and my spirit is released from the thralldom of the senses, it, at indefinite periods, has the power to summon your beloved form to its presence, and in this communion Nature vindicates her faithfulness. Thus, through the long night rest comes upon me with your presence.

"And at last there will come a greater rest; at last--having lived misunderstood--we shall die, alone, and then the real life or lives will begin. It is not always night, for the Dawn is set beyond the night, and through the gates of Dawn we shall journey to the day. It is not always night; even in the womb of darkness throbs the promise of the morning. I often wonder, Arthur, how and what this change will

be. Shall we be even as we are, but still, through unnumbered ages, growing slowly on to the Divine, or, casting off the very semblance of mortality, shall we rise at one wide sweep to the pinnacle of fulfilled time, there to learn the purposes and mark the measure of all Being.

"How can I know? But this I believe, that whatever the change, however wide and deep the darkness which stretches between what is and what is not yet, we cannot lose ourselves therein. Identity will still be ours, and memory, the Janus-headed, will still pursue us, calling to our minds the enacted evil and that good which, having been, must always be. For we are immortal, and though we put off the mortal dress --yes, though our forms become as variable as the clouds, and assume proportions of which we cannot dream--yet shall memory companion us and identity remain. For we are each fashioned apart for ever, and built about with such an iron wall of individual life that all the force of time and change cannot so much as shake it. And while I am myself, and yet in any shape endure, of this be certain--the love that is a part of me will endure also. Oh, herein is set my hope--nay, not my hope, for hope upon the tongue whispers doubt within the heart, but the most fixed unchanging star of all my heaven. It is not always night, for the Dawn is set beyond the night; and oh, my heart's beloved, at daybreak we shall meet again!

"Oh! Arthur, even now I long for the purer air and flashing sympathies of that vast Hereafter, when the strong sense of knowledge shall

scarcely find a limit ere it overleaps it; when visible power shall radiate from our being, and living on together through countless Existences, Periods, and Spheres, we shall progress from majesty to ever-growing majesty! Oh, for the day when you and I, messengers from the Seat of Power, shall sail high above these darkling worlds, and, seeing into each other's souls, shall learn what love's communion is!

"Do not think me foolish, dear, for writing to you thus. I do not wish to make you the victim of an outburst of thought that you may think hysterical. But perhaps I may never be able to write to you again in this way; your wife, if you are married, may be jealous, or other things may occur to prevent it. I feel it, therefore, necessary to tell you my inmost thoughts now whilst I can, so that you may always remember them during the long coming years, and especially when you draw near to the end of the journey. I hope, dearest Arthur, that nothing will ever make you forget them, and also that, for the sake of the pure love you will for ever bear me, you will always live up to your noblest and your best, for in this way our meeting will be made more perfect.

"Of course it is possible that you may still be free, and, after you know that I am not quite so much to blame as you may have thought, still willing to give your name to me. It is a blessed hope, but I scarcely dare to dwell upon it.

"The other day I was reading a book Mr. Fraser lent me, which took my

fancy very much, it was so full of contradictions. The unexpected always happened in it, and there was both grief and laughter in its pages. It did not end quite well or quite badly, or, rather it had \_no\_ end, and deep down underneath the plotless story, only peeping up now and again when the actors were troubled, there ran a vein of real sorrow and sad, unchanging love. There was a hero in this odd book which was so like life--who, by the way, was no hero at all, but a curious, restless creature who seemed to have missed his mark in life, and went along looking for old truths and new ideas with his eyes so fixed upon the stars that he was always stumbling over the pebbles in his path, and thinking that they were rocks. He was a sensitive man, too, and as weak as he was sensitive, and often fell into pitfalls and did what he should not, and yet, for all that, he had a quaint and gentle mind, and there was something to like in him--at least, so thought the women in that book. There was a heroine, too, who was all that a heroine should be, very sweet and very beautiful, and she really had a heart, only she would not let it beat. And of course the hero and heroine loved each other: of course, too, they both behaved badly, and things went wrong, or there would have been no book.

"But I tell you this story because once, in a rather touching scene, this hero who made such a mess of things set forth one of the ideas that he had found, and thought new, but which was really so very old. He told the heroine that he had read in the stars that happiness has only one key, and that its name is 'Love,' that, amidst all the mutabilities and disillusionings of our life, the pure love of a man and

woman alone stands firm and beautiful, alone defies change and disappointment; that it is the heaven-sent salve for all our troubles, the remedy for our mistakes, the magic glass reflecting only what is true and good. But in the end her facts overcame his theories, and he might have spared himself the trouble of telling. And, for all his star-gazing, this hero had no real philosophy, but in his grief and unrelenting pain went and threw himself into the biggest pitfalls that he could find, and would have perished there, had not a good angel come and dragged him out again and brushed the mud off his clothes, and, taking him by the hand, led him along a safer path. And so for awhile he drops out of the story, which says that, when he is not thinking of the lost heroine, he is perhaps happier than he deserves to be.

"Now, Arthur, I think that this foolish hero was right, and the sensible heroine he worshipped so blindly, wrong.

"If you are still unmarried, and still care to put his theories to the test, I believe that we also can make as beautiful a thing of our lives as he thought that he and his heroine could, and, ourselves supremely happy in each other's perfect love, may perhaps be able to add to the happiness of some of our fellow-travellers. That is, I think, as noble an end as a man and woman can set before themselves.

"But if, on the other hand, you are tied to this other woman who loves you by ties that cannot be broken, or that honour will not let you



break; or if you are unforgiving, and no longer wish to marry me as I wish to marry you, then till that bright hour of immortal hope--farewell. Yes, Arthur, farewell till the gate of Time has closed for us--till, in the presence of God our Father, I shall for ever call you mine.

"Alas! I am so weak that my tears fall as I write the word. Perhaps I may never speak or write to you again, so once more, my dearest, my beloved, my earthly treasure and my heavenly hope, farewell. May the blessing of God be as constantly around you as my thoughts, and may He teach you that these are not foolish words, but rather the faint shadow of an undying light!

"I send back the ring that was used to trick me with. Perhaps, whatever happens, you will wear it for my sake. It is, you know, a symbol of Eternity.

"Angela Caresfoot."