

## CHAPTER XIX

### MARRIAGE

In that atmosphere of perfect bliss Godfrey's cure was quick. For bliss it was, save only that there was another bliss beyond to be attained. Remember that this man, now approaching middle life, had never drunk of the cup of what is known as love upon the earth.

Some might answer that such is the universal experience; that true, complete love has no existence, except it be that love of God to which a few at last attain, since in what we know as God completeness and absolute unity can be found alone. Other loves all have their flaws, with one exception perhaps, that of the love of the dead which fondly we imagine to be unchangeable. For the rest passion, however exalted, passes or at least becomes dull with years; the most cherished children grow up, and in so doing, by the law of Nature, grow away; friends are estranged and lost in their own lives.

Upon the earth there is no perfect love; it must be sought elsewhere, since having the changeful shadows, we know there is a sky wherein shines the sun that casts them.

Godfrey, as it chanced, omitting Isobel, had walked little even in these sweet shadows. There were but three others for whom he had felt devotion in all his days, Mrs. Parsons, his tutor, Monsieur Boiset, and

his friend, Arthur Thorburn, who was gone. Therefore to him Isobel was everything. As a child he had adored her; as a woman she was his desire, his faith and his worship.

If this were so with him, still more was it the case with Isobel, who in truth cared for no other human being. Something in her nature prevented her from contracting violent female friendships, and to all men, except a few of ability, each of them old enough to be her father, she was totally indifferent; indeed most of them repelled her. On Godfrey, and Godfrey alone, from the first moment she saw him as a child she had poured all the deep treasure of her heart. He was at once her divinity and her other self, the segment that completed her life's circle, without which it was nothing but a useless, broken ring.

So much did this seem to her to be so, that notwithstanding her lack of faith in matters beyond proof and knowledge, she never conceived of this passion of hers as having had a beginning, or of being capable of an end. This contradictory woman would argue against the possibility of any future existence, yet she was quite certain that her love for Godfrey had a future existence, and indeed one that was endless. When at length he put it to her that her attitude was most illogical, since that which was dead and dissolved could not exist in any place or shape, she thought for a while and replied quietly:

"Then I must be wrong."

"Wrong in what?" asked Godfrey.

"In supposing that we do not live after death. The continuance of our love I know to be beyond any doubt, and if it involves our continuance as individual entities--well, then we continue, that is all."

"We might continue as a single entity," he suggested.

"Perhaps," she answered, "and if so this would be better still, for it must be impossible to lose one another while that remained alive, comprising both."

Thus, and in these few words, although she never became altogether orthodox, or took quite the same view of such mysteries as did Godfrey, Isobel made her great recantation, for which probably there would never have been any need had she been born in different surroundings and found some other spiritual guide in youth than Mr. Knight. As the cruelties and the narrow bitterness of the world had bred unfaith in her, so did supreme love breed faith, if of an unusual sort, since she learned that without the faith her love must die, and the love she knew to be immortal. Therefore the existence of that living love presupposed all the rest, and convinced her, which in one of her obstinate nature nothing else could possibly have done, no, not if she had seen a miracle. Also this love of hers was so profound and beautiful that she felt its true origin and ultimate home must be elsewhere than on the

earth.

That was why she consented to be married in church, somewhat to Godfrey's surprise.

In due course, having practically recovered his health, Godfrey appeared before a Board in London which passed him as fit for service, but gave him a month's leave. With this document he returned to Hawk's Hall, and there showed it to Isobel.

"And when the month is up?" she asked, looking at him.

"Then I suppose I shall have to join my regiment, unless they send me somewhere else."

"A month is a very short time," she went on, still looking at him and turning a little pale.

"Yes, dear, but lots can happen in it, as we found out in France. For instance," he added, with a little hesitation, "we can get married, that is, if you wish."

"You know very well, Godfrey, that I have wished it for quite ten years."

"And you know very well, Isobel, that I have wished it--well, ever since I understood what marriage was. How about to-morrow?" he exclaimed, after a pause.

She laughed, and shook her head.

"I believe, Godfrey, that some sort of license is necessary, and it is past post time. Also it would look scarcely decent; all these people would laugh at us. Also, as there is a good deal of property concerned, I must make some arrangements."

"What arrangements?" he asked.

She laughed again. "That is my affair; you know I am a great supporter of Woman's Rights."

"Oh! I see," he replied vaguely, "to keep it all free from the husband's control, &c."

"Yes, Godfrey, that's it. What a business head you have. You should join the shipping firm after the war."

Then they settled to be married on that day week, after which Isobel suggested that he should take up his abode at the Abbey House, where the clergyman, a bachelor, would be very glad to have him as a guest.

When Godfrey inquired why, she replied blandly because his room was wanted for another patient, he being now cured, and that therefore he had no right to stop there.

"Oh! I see. How selfish of me," said Godfrey, and went off to arrange matters with the clergyman, a friendly and accommodating young man, with the result that on this night once more he slept in the room he had occupied as a boy. For her part Isobel telephoned, first to her dressmaker, and secondly to the lawyer who was winding up her father's estate, requesting these important persons to come to see her on the morrow.

They came quickly, since Isobel was too valuable a client to be neglected, arriving by the same train, with the result that the lawyer was kept waiting an hour and a half by the dressmaker, a fact which he remembered in his bill. When at last his turn came, Isobel did not detain him long.

"I am going to be married," she said, "on the twenty-fourth to Major Godfrey Knight of the Indian Cavalry. Will you kindly prepare two documents, the first to be signed before my marriage, and the second, a will, immediately after it, since otherwise it would be invalidated by that change in my condition."

The lawyer stared at her, since so much legal knowledge was not common among his lady clients, and asked for instructions as to what the

documents were to set out.

"They will be very simple," said Isobel. "The first, a marriage settlement, will settle half my income free of my control upon my future husband during our joint lives. The second, that is the will, will leave to him all my property, real and personal."

"I must point out to you, Miss Blake," said the astonished lawyer, "that these provisions are very unusual. Does Major Knight bring large sums into settlement?"

"I don't think so," she answered. "His means are quite moderate, and if they were not, it would never occur to him to do anything of the sort, as he understands nothing about money. Also circumstanced as I am, it does not matter in the least."

"Your late father would have taken a different view," sniffed the lawyer.

"Possibly," replied Isobel, "for our views varied upon most points. While he was alive I gave way to his, to my great loss and sorrow. Now that he is dead I follow my own."

"Well, that is definite, Miss Blake, and of course your wishes must be obeyed. But as regards this will, do not think me indelicate for mentioning it, but there might be children."

"I don't think you at all indelicate. Why should I at over thirty years of age? I have considered the point. If we are blessed with any children, and I should predecease him, my future husband will make such arrangements for their welfare as he considers wise and just. I have every confidence in his judgment, and if he should happen to die intestate, which I think very probable, they would inherit equally. There is enough for any number of them."

"Unless he loses or spends it," groaned the lawyer.

"He is much more likely to save it from some mistaken sense of duty, and to live entirely on what he has of his own," remarked Isobel. "If so, it cannot be helped, and no doubt the poor will benefit. Now if you thoroughly understand what I wish done, I think that is all. I have to see the dressmaker again, so good-bye."

"Executors?" gasped the lawyer.

"Public Trustee," said Isobel, over her shoulder.

"They say that she is one of these Suffragette women, although she keeps it dark. Well, I can believe it. Anyway, this officer is tumbling into honey, and there's no fool like a woman in love," said the lawyer to himself as he packed his bag of papers.



Isobel was quite right. The question of settlements never even occurred to Godfrey. He was aware, however, that it is usual for a bridegroom to make the bride a present, and going to London, walked miserably up and down Bond Street looking into windows until he was tired. At one moment he fixed his affections upon an old Queen Anne porringer, which his natural taste told him to be quite beautiful; but having learned from the dealer that it was meant for the mixing of infant's pap, he retired abashed. Almost next door he saw in a jeweller's window a necklace of small pearls priced at three hundred pounds, and probably worth about half that amount. Having quite a handsome balance at his back, he came to the conclusion that he could afford this and, going in, bought it at once, oblivious of the fact that Isobel already had ropes of pearls the size of marrowfat peas. However, she was delighted with it, especially when she saw what it had cost him, for he had never thought to cut the sale ticket from the necklace. It was those pearls, and not the marrowfat peas, that Isobel wore upon her wedding day. Save for the little ring with the two turquoise hearts, these were her only ornament.

A question arose as to where the honeymoon, or so much as would remain of one, was to be spent. Godfrey would have liked to go to Lucerne and visit the Pasteur, but as this could not be managed in war time, suggested London.

"Why London?" exclaimed Isobel.

"Only because most ladies like theatres, though I confess I hate them

myself."

"You silly man," she answered. "Do you suppose, when we can have only a few days together, that I want to waste time in theatres?"

In the end it was settled that they would go to London for a night, and then on to Cornwall, which they hoped fondly might be warm at that time of year.

So at last, on the twenty-fourth day of December of that fateful year 1914, they were married in the Abbey Church. Isobel's uncle, the one with whom she had stayed in Mexico, and who had retired now from the Diplomatic Service, gave her away, and a young cousin of hers was the sole bridesmaid, for the ceremony was of the sort called a "war wedding." Her dress, however, was splendid of its kind, some rich thing of flowing brodered silk with a veil of wondrous lace.

Either from accident or by design, in general effect it much resembled that of the Plantagenet lady which once she had copied from the brass. Perhaps, being dissatisfied with her former effort, she determined to recap it on a more splendid scale, or perhaps it was a chance. At any rate, the veil raised in two points from her head, fell down like that of the nameless lady, while from her elbows long narrow sleeves hung almost to the ground. Beautiful Isobel never was, but in this garb,

with happiness shining in her eyes, her tall, well-made form looked imposing and even stately, an effect that was heightened by her deliberate and dignified movements. The great church was crowded, for the news of this wedding had spread far and wide, and its romantic character attracted people both from the neighbouring villages and the little town.

Set in the splendid surroundings of the old Abbey, through the painted windows of which gleamed the winter sun, Godfrey in his glittering Indian uniform and orders, and his bride in her quaint, rich dress, made a striking pair at the altar rail. Indeed it is doubtful whether since hundreds of years ago the old Crusader and his fair lady, whose ashes were beneath their feet, stood where they stood for this same purpose of marriage, clad in coat of mail and gleaming silk, a nobler-looking couple had been wed in that ancient fane.

Oddly enough, with the strange inconsequence of the human mind, especially in moments of suppressed excitement, it was of this nameless lady and her lord that Godfrey kept thinking throughout the service, once more wondering who they were and what was their story. He remembered too how the graves of that unknown pair had been connected with his fortunes and those of Isobel. Here it was that they plighted the troth which now they were about to fulfil. Here it was that he had bidden her farewell before he went to Switzerland. He could see her now as she was then, tall and slender in her white robe, and the red ray of sunshine gleaming like a splash of blood upon her breast. He glanced at

her by his side as she turned towards him, and behold! there it shone again, splendid yet ominous.

He shivered a little at the sight of it--he knew not why--and was glad when a dense black snow-cloud hid the face of the sun and killed it.

It was over at last, and they were man and wife.

"Do these words and vows and ceremonies make any difference to you?" she whispered as they walked side by side down the church, she observed of all observers. "They do not to me. I feel as though all the rites in the world would be quite powerless and without meaning in face of the fact of our eternal unity."

It was a queer little speech for her to make, with its thought and balance; Godfrey often reflected afterwards, expressing as it did a great truth so far as they were concerned, since no ceremonial, however hallowed, could increase their existing oneness or take away therefrom. At the moment, however, he scarcely understood it, and only smiled in reply.

Then they went into the vestry and signed their names, and everything was over. Here Godfrey's former trustee, General Cubitte, grown very old now, but as bustling and emphatic as of yore, who signed the book as one of the witnesses, buttonholed him. At some length he explained how he had been to see an eminent swell at the War Office, a "dug-out"

who was an old friend of his, and impressed upon him his, Godfrey's, extraordinary abilities as a soldier, pointing out that he ought at once to be given command of a regiment, and how the eminent swell had promised that he would see to it forthwith. Oh! if he had only known, he would not have thanked him.

At last they started for the motor-car, which was to drive them in pomp three hundred yards to the Hall. Some delay occurred. Another motor-car at the church gate would not start, and had to be drawn out of the way. Three or four of the nurses from the hospital and certain local ladies surrounded Isobel, and burst into talk and congratulations, thus separating her from Godfrey.

Overhearing complimentary remarks about himself, he drew back a little from the porch into the church which had now emptied. As he stood there someone tapped him on the shoulder. The touch disturbed him; it was unpleasant to him and he turned impatiently to see from whom it came. There in front of him, bundled up in a rusty black cloak of which the hood covered the head, was a short fat woman. Her face was hidden, but from the cavernous recesses of the hood two piercing black eyes shone like to those of a tiger in its den. After all those years Godfrey recognised them at once; indeed subconsciously he had known who had touched him even before he turned. It was Madame Riennes.

"Ah!" she said, in her hateful, remembered voice, "so my little Godfrey who has grown such a big Godfrey now--yes, big in every way, had

recognition of his dear Godmamma, did he? Oh! do not deny it; I saw you jump with joy. Well, I knew what was happening--never mind how I knew--and though I am so poor now, I travelled here to assist and give my felicitations. Eleanor, too, she sends hers, though you guess of what kind they are, for remember, as I told you long ago, speerits are just as jealous as we women, because, you see, they were women before they were speerits."

"Thank you," broke in Godfrey; "I am afraid I must be going."

"Oh! yes. You are in a great hurry, for now you have got the plum, my Godfrey, have you not, and want to eat it? Well, I have a message for you, suck it hard, for very, very soon you come to the stone, which you know is sharp and cold with no taste, and must be thrown away. Oh! something make me say this too; I know not what. Perhaps that stone must be planted, not thrown away; yes, I think it must be planted, and that it will grow into the most beautiful of plum trees in another land."

She threw back her hood, showing her enormous forehead and flabby, sunken face, which looked as though she had lived for years in a cellar, and yet had about it an air of inspiration. "Yes," she went on, "I see that tree white with blossom. I see it bending with the golden fruit--thousands upon thousands of fruits. Oh! Godfrey, it is the Tree of Life, and underneath it sit you and that lady who looks like a queen, and whom you love so dear, and look into each other's eyes for

ever and for ever, because you see that tree immortal do not grow upon the earth, my Godfrey."

The horrible old woman made him afraid, especially did her last words make him afraid, because he who was experienced in such matters knew that she had come with no intention of uttering them, that they had burst from her lips in a sudden semi-trance such as overtakes her sisterhood from time to time. He knew what that meant, that Death had marked them, and that they were called elsewhere, he or Isobel, or both.

"I must be going," he repeated.

"Yes, yes, you must be going--you who are going so far. The hungry fish must go after the bait, must it not, and oh! the hook it does not see. But, my leetle big Godfrey, one moment. Your loving old Godmamma, she tumble on the evil day ever since that cursed old Pasteur"--here her pale face twisted and her eyes grew wicked--"let loose the law-dogs on me. I want money, my godson. Here is an address," and she thrust a piece of paper upon him.

He threw it down and stamped on it. In his pocket was a leather case full of bank-notes. He drew out a handful of them and held them to her. She snatched them as a hungry hawk snatches meat, with a fierce and curious swiftness.

Then at last he escaped, and in another minute, amidst the cheers of

the crowd, was driving away at the side of the stately Isobel.

At the Hall, where one of the wards had been cleared for the purpose, there was a little informal reception, at which for a while Godfrey found himself officiating alone, since Isobel had disappeared with General Cubitte and the brother officer who had acted as his best man. When at length they returned he asked her where she had been, rather sharply perhaps, for his nerves were on edge.

"To see to some business with the lawyer," she answered.

"What business, dear?" he inquired. "I thought you settled all that this morning?"

"It could not be settled this morning, Godfrey, because a will can only be signed after marriage."

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "Give me a glass of champagne."

An hour later they were motoring to London alone, at last alone, and to this pair Heaven opened its seventh door.

They dined in the private sitting-room of the suite which under the inspiration of Isobel he had taken at a London hotel, and then after the curious-eyed waiters had cleared the table, sat together in front of the fire, hand in hand, but not talking very much. At length Isobel



rose and they embraced each other.

"I am going to bed now," she said; "but before you come, and perhaps we forget about such matters, I want you to kneel down with me and say a prayer."

He obeyed as a child might, though wondering, for somehow he had never connected Isobel and Prayer in his mind. There they knelt in front of the fire, as reverently as though it burned upon an altar, and Isobel said her prayer aloud. It ran thus:

"O Unknown God Whom always I have sought and Whom now I think that I have found, or am near to finding; O Power that sent me forth to taste of Life and gather Knowledge, and Who at Thine own hour wilt call me back again, hear the prayer of Isobel and of Godfrey her lover. This is what they ask of Thee: that be their time together on the earth long or short, it may endure for ever in the lives and lands beyond the earth. They ask also that all their sins, known and unknown, great or small, may be forgiven them, and that with Thy gifts they may do good, and that if children come to them, they may be blessed in such fashion as Thou seest well, and afterwards endure with them through all the existences to be. O Giver of Life and Love Eternal, hear this, the solemn marriage prayer of Godfrey and of Isobel."

Then she rose and with one long look, left him, seeming to his eyes no more a woman, as ten thousand women are, but a very Fire of spiritual love incarnate in a veil of flesh.