

CHAPTER VII

"The feeling you call The Fear has never come to me," I said to her.

"And if it had I think it would have melted away because of a dream I once had. I don't really believe it was a dream, but I call it one. I think I really went somewhere and came back. I often wonder why I came back. It was only a short dream, so simple that there is scarcely anything to tell, and perhaps it will not convey anything to you. But it has been part of my life--that time when I was Out on the Hillside. That is what I call The Dream to myself, 'Out on the Hillside,' as if it were a kind of unearthly poem. But it wasn't. It was more real than anything I have ever felt. It was real--real! I wish that I could tell it so that you would know how real it was."

I felt almost piteous in my longing to make her know. I knew she was afraid of something, and if I could make her know how REAL that one brief dream had been she would not be afraid any more. And I loved her, I loved her so much!

"I was asleep one night at Muircarrie," I went on, "and suddenly, without any preparatory dreaming, I was standing out on a hillside in moonlight softer and more exquisite than I had ever seen or known before. Perhaps I was still in my nightgown--I don't know. My feet were bare on the grass, and I wore something light and white which did not seem to touch me. If it touched me I did not feel it. My bare feet did not feel the grass; they only knew it was beneath them."

"It was a low hill I stood on, and I was only on the side of it. And in spite of the thrilling beauty of the moon, all but the part I stood on melted into soft, beautiful shadow, all below me and above me. But I did not turn to look at or ask myself about anything. You see the difficulty is that there are no earthly words to tell it! All my being was ecstasy--pure, light ecstasy! Oh, what poor words-- But I know no others. If I said that I was happy--HAPPY!--it would be nothing. I WAS happiness itself, I WAS pure rapture! I did not look at the beauty of the night, the sky, the marvelous melting shadow. I was PART of it all, one with it. Nothing held me nothing! The beauty of the night, the light, the air WERE what I was, and I was only thrilling ecstasy and wonder at the rapture of it."

I stopped and covered my face with my hands, and tears wet my fingers.

"Oh, I cannot make it real! I was only there such a short, short time. Even if you had been with me I could not have found words for it, even then. It was such a short time. I only stood and lifted my face and felt the joy of it, the pure marvel of joy. I only heard myself murmuring over and over again: 'Oh, how beautiful! how beautiful! Oh, how BEAUTIFUL!'

"And then a marvel of new joy swept through me. I said, very softly and very slowly, as if my voice were trailing away into silence:

'Oh--h! I--can--lie--down--here--on--the grass--and--sleep . . .

all--through--the night--under--this--moonlight. . . . I can
sleep--sleep--'

"I began to sink softly down, with the heavenliest feeling of relaxation and repose, as if there existed only the soul of beautiful rest. I sank so softly--and just as my cheek almost touched the grass the dream was over!"

"Oh!" cried Mrs. MacNairn. "Did you awaken?"

"No. I came back. In my sleep I suddenly found myself creeping into my bed again as if I had been away somewhere. I was wondering why I was there, how I had left the hillside, when I had left it. That part WAS a dream--but the other was not. I was allowed to go somewhere--outside--and come back."

I caught at her hand in the dark.

"The words are all wrong," I said. "It is because we have no words to describe that. But have I made you feel it at all? Oh! Mrs. MacNairn, have I been able to make you know that it was not a dream?"

She lifted my hand and pressed it passionately against her cheek, and her cheek, too, was wet--wet.

"No, it was not a dream," she said. "You came back. Thank God you came

back, just to tell us that those who do not come back stand awakened in that ecstasy--in that ecstasy. And The Fear is nothing. It is only The Dream. The awakening is out on the hillside, out on the hillside! Listen!" She started as she said it. "Listen! The nightingale is beginning again."

He sent forth in the dark a fountain--a rising, aspiring fountain--of golden notes which seemed to reach heaven itself. The night was made radiant by them. He flung them upward like a shower of stars into the sky. We sat and listened, almost holding our breath. Oh! the nightingale! the nightingale!

"He knows," Hector MacNairn's low voice said, "that it was not a dream."

When there was silence again I heard him leave his chair very quietly.

"Good night! good night!" he said, and went away. I felt somehow that he had left us together for a purpose, but, oh, I did not even remotely dream what the purpose was! But soon she told me, almost in a whisper.

"We love you very much, Ysobel," she said. "You know that?"

"I love you both, with all my heart," I answered. "Indeed I love you."

"We two have been more to each other than mere mother and son. We have been sufficient for each other. But he began to love you that first day

when he watched you in the railway carriage. He says it was the far look in your eyes which drew him."

"I began to love him, too," I said. And I was not at all ashamed or shy in saying it.

"We three might have spent our lives together," she went on. "It would have been a perfect thing. But--but--" She stood up as if she could not remain seated. Involuntarily I stood up with her. She was trembling, and she caught and held me in her arms. "He cannot stay, Ysobel," she ended.

I could scarcely hear my own voice when I echoed the words.

"He cannot--stay?"

"Oh! the time will come," she said, "when people who love each other will not be separated, when on this very earth there will be no pain, no grief, no age, no death--when all the world has learned the Law at last. But we have not learned it yet. And here we stand! The greatest specialists have told us. There is some fatal flaw in his heart. At any moment, when he is talking to us, when he is at his work, when he is asleep, he may--cease. It will just be ceasing. At any moment. He cannot stay."

My own heart stood still for a second. Then there rose before me slowly, but clearly, a vision--the vision which was not a dream.

"Out on the hillside," I murmured. "Out on the hillside."

I clung to her with both arms and held her tight. I understood now why they had talked about The Fear. These two who were almost one soul were trying to believe that they were not really to be torn apart--not really. They were trying to heap up for themselves proof that they might still be near each other. And, above all, his effort was to save her from the worst, worst woe. And I understood, too, why something wiser and stronger than myself had led me to tell the dream which was not a dream at all.

But it was as she said; the world had not learned the Secret yet. And there we stood. We did not cry or talk, but we clung to each other--we CLUNG. That is all human creatures can do until the Secret is known. And as we clung the nightingale broke out again.

"O nightingale! O nightingale!" she said in her low wonder of a voice.

"WHAT are you trying to tell us!"