Jones Susan Morrow

A Girl of the North. A Story of London and Canada

Susan Jones

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

The world called it failure: he called it success, and the thought evolved itself into happiness for a time.

George Archer was a man of unusual talent and power. He had translated the most recent book by a celebrated Danish naturalist, besides which he had acquired some fame as a naturalist on his own account; and the small world of men, who trouble about such things, mentioned his name with a certain amount of respect as that of one to whom mysteries are revealed.

He was rich. He had travelled all over the world. At last, wishing to go to Canada, the idea of writing a book on the different varieties of Canadian fish came to him with the charm of inspiration, of freedom, and of novelty.

He was singularly unpractical, and given to great enthusiasms.

The glamour of Canada fell upon him; he was fascinated by the long cold winter, with its tempests and swinging winds, its drifting snow, and the endless battle with the princes and powers of the air: by the spring, too, with its force when all the brooks ran and overflowed with the melting of the snow in the hot sun, and the glorious long, light, glowing days, when everything broke into life with suddenness. After this came a gorgeous summer, with hot vibrating days, which brought magnificent flowers into blossom; and then autumn with its Indian summer and stillness – a sort of grey stillness, as if the dear dead came back for a space. The wind died then, and there was only a movement of the air laden with sweetness as it passed over blueberry barrens and lonely stretches of black, still lakes, which possessed the charm of the unknown, the fascination of the forest crowded with moose and bears. George Archer loved the country with its colouring of triumph – trees, sky, and water, all shared in the same glory.

When he came out, he brought letters to various people in Canada, and he collected many important facts for his piscatorial work during his first summer – in the autumn he met Naomi Fontaine, one quarter French, more than a quarter English (her enemies added one half Indian). Archer loved her and married her.

They settled down in an old house, which he rebuilt and made more than comfortable. It stood near an arm of the sea, about two miles from a town called Musquodobit, and in the middle of woods, of salmon rivers, and lakes.

They were happy – perfectly, gloriously happy. They made no plans for the future. To-day was theirs; they loved it, and for three years their happiness lasted. Then Naomi died of pneumonia, and left him alone with their daughter Launa.

Mr. Archer stayed at Musquodobit, for he had no desire to return to England, his relations having received the news of his marriage with certain questions – was Naomi a native? Their idea of natives was hazy, and ran to wild orgies, cannabalism, and no clothing. Had she any relations? George said she was a Roman Catholic and a Canadian, then the letters grew fewer and fewer. Archer did not remember his people. He loved his life; the freedom of it enthralled him. He fished and hunted at the same time he pursued the research about bones, which brought him many letters, much contradiction, and labour.

He could not bear to leave the land which Naomi had loved, whilst dwelling there without her was misery and torment, and yet he loved it too. That land exercises an indescribable fascination over

impressionable folk; its intenseness, its wild beauty and passion, the rapid, boiling rivers full of fish, and the quiet, still lakes; the grandeur of the granite rocks, the hills, and vast forests of pine, fir, and maple; and, above all, the turbulent rapture and stormy joy of the sea, crashing against the iron-bound coast. Archer's home was situated about one hundred yards from the shore. The bay was well sheltered, and two miles below lay the open sea. It was near enough to be within reach when Archer wearied of the calm of the bay; and near enough for them to hear it surge, moan, and roar at times, and to be always in sun and storm – altogether loveable.

Launa Archer was an ugly baby. When her mother died she was a year old, and soon became intelligent enough to interest her father. He was often away, and left her in charge of her nurse Eliza, who loved her; and the child grew from babyhood into a sprite of mischief, always cheerful, always laughing, often naughty, and fond of forgiving Eliza, with much kindness and bounteousness, when she reproved her.

Mr. Archer's house, "Solitude," was a large building, with an appearance of care and comfort. There were neighbours three and four miles away. But he cared little for them while Naomi lived, and less after her death. So Launa grew from infancy into childhood alone. She played with the dogs, and in summer let them run among the long grass, which was for hay, and which their wild bounding did not improve. How she loved to see them tearing through it and chasing each other. And then she spent days by the brook, sailing boats and paddling and splashing. Many mighty fleets she launched, which sailed away and never came back, drifting down the current to the sea. She played with the big white daisies in the pasture, and gathered them with huge yellow buttercups. She dabbled in the salt water, and ran up and down the beach, while the dogs hunted the kingfishers and yapped in vain at the crows. It was a heavenly life for a child – lonely never, solitary, perhaps, for she had but frequent glimpses of her father, who journeyed north, south, east, and west, seeking many things, principally forgetfulness, or rather a memory that should revive no pain.

CHAPTER II

When Launa Archer was ten years old her father realised that she must be taught; so he went forth to seek a governess.

Mr. Archer had grown into a silent man, as is often very naturally the case with men who spend much of their lives in the woods. But Launa found him an excellent companion, full of knowledge about all the beasts of the field and fowls of the air, and able to tell wonderful stories of "Ring, the king's son," Norwegian fairy stories, and Indian legends. Archer found the governess problem hard to solve. For once in his life he distrusted his own inclinations, and asked advice of Mrs. Butler, the wife of one of his neighbours. She had no children, but she longed to be consulted about Launa, on the principle that childless women know most about children. Mrs. Butler disapproved of Launa, for she was shy, had retired under the table during one of Mrs. Butler's visitations, and refused to come forth until the lady had left, giving as an excuse that Mrs. Butler shook hands too much and too often.

Mrs. Butler grew voluble, and George Archer somewhat distressed. She strongly advised school; indeed, it was her war-cry. School would endow Launa with lady-like habits. Her listener frowned. School would give her pleasant companionship, and a knowledge of all those things which it was necessary for young ladies to acquire.

"Is not curiosity, the hereditary tendency of Mother Eve strongly inherent in all women?" asked Mr. Archer. "Launa will learn for herself."

"Yes, perhaps," vaguely murmured Mrs. Butler. "Still, if I were you I would send her to school."

George Archer immediately became conscious of many things he did not want his Launa to become or to learn. She would either be miserable at school or dislike "Solitude" on her return thither; either result would be disagreeable. He wanted Launa to remain natural; consequently he did not advertise for a governess. He had an idea he might meet a suitable teacher. Mrs. Butler told him that in all probability he would marry such a paragon as he desired, and he smiled without contradicting her.

He visited his friends at Baltimore, New York, and Halifax, which was near where he lived, and in New York he found what he sought. Her name was Black; she was a German-American. Her age was thirty, though her face suggested forty and her figure twenty. When she played the piano Archer almost worshipped her talent. He had found the long-looked-for solace – in the music he saw Naomi; they were together again. And whenever Miss Black played he seemed to lose himself in a heavenly dream. If she could teach the wild little lady at "Solitude" to play! Miss Black could row and paddle; she had read, and did read; she could walk far, and play tennis. She was full of intelligence, and her German was good.

It seemed to the perplexed parent that the day of the millennium was about to dawn when he went, home with this trophy. If the dogs and Launa liked her then he could dare to be content.

Launa had never known anyone she did not like except Mrs. Butler, who reciprocated the feeling. The idea of a governess had no dreaded associations for her; a companion was her greatest desire. Eliza had grown too fat to climb fences and to go out in the canoe – a form of pleasure she dreaded and detested, for Eliza could not swim, nor would she learn.

Miss Black – Launa christened her "Whitey" – was a success. When Mrs. Butler heard of her she said the world would talk, but when she saw Whitey's livid face and weather-beaten countenance, she wanted to know what her history was, and talked about Mr. Archer's lonely and defenceless situation as though he were a castle facing north-east.

The dogs loved Miss Black; her sitting-room was always a haven of refuge when they were wet and tired, also when Launa had steeplechases and Fatsey, an old dog, would not and could not jump over a broomstick three feet from the ground, then, he too, sought sanctuary with Whitey.

Whitey taught Launa music, and the child worked earnestly, undismayed by the drudgery, with the hope of some day being able to play like her teacher, and her reward always came in the form of

freedom for a while. With Whitey, she read many books, stories, history, and poetry. And as Miss Black had travelled far and wide she made all she taught interesting.

This odd couple were very happy together. In the winter they snowshoed, going for long tramps through the woods. They were frequently out in stormy weather, for Miss Black loved the wind as much as Launa did, and the wild turmoil of snow and tempest attracted them both. They explored the whole surrounding country together. Miss Black and Launa were also very fond of wandering to the far away lakes – the big black lakes with long shadows and deep reflections of trees and rocks – lakes whose solitude and silence filled one with a sort of apprehension, that whispered of horrors, past or to come – the ghosts of dead braves might wander there as a foretaste of the happy hunting ground. The hills were high and steep, covered with brushwood which was very thick, and at intervals there were rocks and holes that made climbing perilous, but Launa and Miss Black did not mind difficulties. On one occasion Mr. Archer took them to camp out for a week and to fish. How they loved it! The queer smell of the wood smoke, the joy of cooking in the ashes, and the talk round the fire in the twilight before bedtime, when the stars came out and the moon hung half-way up in the sky, while the firelight threw shadows all around, making the white birch trees look ghostly in the dim light, while in the distance the little stream rushed on to the sea.

CHAPTER III

When Launa, who had a queer, passionate temper, a horror of restraint of any kind, and a great dislike to being disappointed or thwarted, was fifteen, she was tall, and slight, all arms and legs, with long thin fingers, and well-shaped feet. Her skin was tanned, with a tinge of red in her cheeks, her eyes were brown, as was her hair. She could paddle, and walk on snowshoes like an Indian, her voice had a low soft richness in it that reminded Mr. Archer of a squaw – which made him wonder whether there had been Indian blood in Naomi or not?

But Launa had a stronger look than her mother; she was less of the dainty French girl, and she possessed a greater desire to rise, to achieve something, possessing a less sublime acquiescence in fate or destiny than Naomi, who had been sweeter, more yielding, and fulfilling Mr. Archer's preconceived, primeval idea of a woman. Sometimes he feared for his daughter, and that curious belief in herself, which she displayed with a half-expressed idea, that she would be able to command fate, an early sign of her masterful independence.

"When I am big," Launa said to her father one day, "I shall write a book about the woods and the Indians; no one writes about them, or seems to know how."

Her father smiled.

"You must learn to keep still."

"The arranging and selecting of ideas must be difficult," she said, "and I always come to grief over commas. I love full stops, but Whitey says my sentences are jerky. It must be difficult to disguise one's mood when writing books, to write when one is tired or weary; I could not do it."

"You will perhaps be glad to do it some day." Then changing the subject, he said, "I am going to the Reserve to-day, will you come?"

"What time shall we go?"

"At three," he answered.

Launa rushed off to order tea to take with them, as well as some tea and sugar for presents to the Indians.

They drove about six miles to the Reserve. It was a desolate piece of country, and lay along the side of a large lake, from which ran a little trout stream. The Indians lived in cottages, poorly built shanties, and they welcomed the Archers with joy. There was an old grandmother, a terrible old person in a red flannel bed-jacket, a very short skirt, and a short pipe, which she smoked with fervour. Her grey hair hung down on both sides of her brown face, and she waved her long thin fingers as she related tales of her magic cures, for she was a doctor and made herb decoctions for anyone who was ailing. She talked in a low mysterious voice.

"I give him little medicine, yer know," she said, with a leer and a drawl, nodding her funny old head with an air of confidence in her listener's understanding and belief.

Miss Black was afraid of her, and always felt sure that Mrs. Andrew would not be too good to omit mixing poison with her medicine, if she considered it desirable the sick person should not recover.

Launa listened to the old grandmother's stories with rapt attention, until Andrew, the witch's husband, came to say he had lighted a fire by the lake, and that Abram had launched his canoe to take Launa in it after tea.

Andrew and Launa caught some trout, which they cooked at the wood fire, and Launa made tea. She presented Mrs. Andrew with a large parcel of it to that lady's joy, though she merely grunted her thanks, and then offered Launa a cup out of her own tea-pot. But as the Indians seldom or never empty the tea-pot (they consider it a waste to throw away the old leaves, and keep on adding a few new ones, which they let boil to get their full flavour), Launa knew better than to drink it. It was, in truth, a deadly concoction.

Abram pushed his canoe into the water, and taking a paddle in one hand started with a little run and then jumped into the end of the canoe, which shot out into the middle of the lake. It was a wonderful jump, and Launa never tired of seeing it.

"There is no one who can do that as Abram does," she said with admiration. "He is splendid, isn't he, Andrew? Abram, Abram!" called Launa. "Take me up to the end of the lake!"

He brought the canoe in again, and she took her paddle and knelt in the bow. They went off together, her firm figure, with its graceful arm movement, erect, muscular, and supple. Oh! the joy of those days! The joy of living and of doing! The rapid, firm strokes, and the movement!

Launa paid her visit to the opera house in New York, whither her father took her with Miss Black for a winter, and then her dreams were realised. She heard the "Nibelungenlied," "The Meistersinger," "Tannhauser," besides selections from "Parsifal"; she also attended numerous concerts. Music took the place of her out-of-door life, and she became so absorbed in it that she only occasionally missed and regretted her former wanderings. It was as if she had experienced its wonderful power for the first time, and drank from a cup of intoxicating sweetness.

She went to dances, and discovered that men found her attractive, and naturally she soon learned how to make herself agreeable. At the same time she realised that most men love a woman for her bodily charm.

"Men are very animalish, Whitey," said Launa one day, after having made a successful appearance at an evening reception.

Miss Black gasped. She had ignored the existence of men as lovers, except in history and in books, while teaching Launa.

"All men are not alike," she said vaguely.

"No, of course not. Father is perfect. Few men are like him."

When they returned to "Solitude," Launa worked with renewed ardour, and practised with joy – she wanted to play well. She read all sorts of books, and after a course of lectures on Greek literature, she turned with avidity to Plato, to Epictetus. Of German books she read many; to Miss Black's regret she had outgrown Marlitt. For a woman who could do things, who did not fear storm or rain, Miss Black was singularly afraid of the knowledge of good and evil. Evil belonged especially to the poor and low, and to men, who gave it up when they put on dress-clothes, and were in the society of ladies – the humanising influence of ladies! A dress suit was the veneer that completely covered the brute-beast in a man.

About this time Launa turned affectionately to her father. She found him sympathetic, for he understood her, and he never gasped.

"You remind me of your mother," he said one day to her.

"Tell me about her," she said, flushing with pleasure.

"She was very sweet – how can I tell you? I loved her; half of me, the best, the happy half died with her; it was as if I were killed… And we were so happy."

"It was terrible," said Launa. "Life, father, seems sometimes to be horribly, terribly sad." She said this with the air of one who has made a new discovery, and it amused her father.

"Why is it?" she asked.

"I do not know."

"And what is the good?"

He did not answer.

It dawned upon the small world round "Solitude" that Launa was attractive, and so the inhabitants came to visit and to criticise. They all went to Quebec, and they stayed several nights at different houses, where she enjoyed herself, and where she was admired – especially at one of the balls she attended.

Among all the men she met, English as well as Canadian, for there was a garrison in Halifax, a man named Paul Harvey interested her most. He was a Canadian, who possessed a place about twenty

miles from “Solitude.” He was tall and dark. His skin was tanned from the out-of-door life he led; he had a peculiarly high forehead, and high cheek bones, and his body had the lithe look common to men who spend their lives in doing, and who are never troubled with superfluous flesh. His keen eyes glanced into one’s inner consciousness, and seemed hard, until he smiled. He walked with the Indian stride, which is quick and quiet. Of course he could ride, and he had the strong capable hands of a man who has been brought up to do things, and who could do them well. Paul Harvey and Launa soon became firm friends, for they understood each other. They loved the same things; the witchery of the woods, of the canoe, and of the sea was real and tangible to them both, and he loved music, as did she. In the long spring days they often met, and he was full of admiration for this girl, who was so strong and so fearless.

George Archer frequently invited Paul to “Solitude,” without the least idea of encouraging any feeling on Paul’s part for Launa, who in her father’s eyes was still a child; that any man should think of her as a possible wife never occurred to him, but then Archer’s idea of a wife (the other man’s wife) was a submissive woman, and Launa was not that.

One day in May Mr. Archer had gone to Chezettcook to fish, and Launa was anxious to pay him a visit. Paul expressed himself desirous of driving her down to the river which her father owned.

So the two left “Solitude” at two o’clock on a still day, very sultry and hot; a haze lay thick over the land, and the sun shone red with a lurid glare, for the haze was the smoke of fires in the woods.

They drove along very rapidly, not talking much, though occasionally Paul would look at her and she at him, and they smiled with a sense of well-being and mutual bliss.

“I think,” said Paul at last, “that the Bible makes a mistake when it says, ‘Godliness with contentment is great gain’; it should be love.”

“Oh, Paul,” she exclaimed. “The smoke! it is getting so thick.”

Paul was holding his head down.

“Shall we turn back? The fire is crossing the road in front of us. I am afraid we can’t get through it.”

He turned his horse quickly.

“Launa, it seems as if it were cutting us off.”

They were in a winding road, a crosscut. He started Micmac at a gallop. If the fire were before them! There was a long hill to climb.

The trap swayed and jolted, for the road was bad. They were tearing along; the wind was behind them, and they could hear the crackle which was getting nearer, rising to a hideous roar. A river crossed the road below the hill – had they time to get to it?

Paul wrapped the rug round his companion, put it over her head, and covered her mouth.

“Keep it tight,” he exclaimed, “and sit still.”

Then he began to use his whip, having tied his own handkerchief over his mouth. Micmac was going more slowly in spite of the whip; it seemed as if he were terrified and paralysed by the pursuing fiend.

“You are not afraid,” said Paul with difficulty, through his handkerchief.

“No,” gasped Launa, “not with you.”

He put his hand on her shoulder.

“Keep your mouth well covered; the fire is before us. We must go through it.”

On, on they tore; the smoke almost choked her. It was so terribly thick that Paul could not see Micmac, though his eyes burnt, and he kept them open with difficulty. Then the flames ran up a dead pine tree in front of him, and shed a lurid light through the smoke. The heat was intense; he shut his smarting eyes, and trusted Micmac would keep the road.

“Oh, if the bridge – a wooden bridge – were not down!” “Were not down!” repeated itself; “Were not down!”

They were in the midst of the fire now; the roaring was tremendous, and the trees were flaming and crackling on all sides. Paul covered his eyes with one hand, and used the whip with the other. It was like the finish of a race, a race for life, down the hill at a gallop. But the bridge? It had already caught, and the wood was smoking, when Micmac stopped with a jerk, and Paul jumped out and took hold of him.

"You must, old boy, you must," he murmured. "Once over we are pretty safe. Good horse, good horse!"

The trembling Micmac refused again; the bridge was hot, and frightened him. Then he went at it with a rush, with Paul still at his head, half-running, half-dragged by the horse. The river was wide, and the wind was from the north, blowing the fire down on them over the road, but not across the stream in the direction in which they were going.

Paul got into the trap quickly, and Micmac galloped on and on and on until, though the smoke was still thick, they were safe. At last Paul pulled up, and looked back. The road along which they had come was a sheet of flame, and he shuddered as he thought of what might have happened. There were so many pine trees to burn, and to fall burning, while the side of the river on which they were was covered with alder bushes and rocks, and the wind, too, was blowing that way.

"Now!" he gasped hoarsely, for his throat was dry and parched. "Now!"

And Launa threw off her rug. Paul was black, his face was flaming and smutty, his cap had blown off, and his hair stood on end. Her rug was singed. Micmac had a burn, where a piece of wood had fallen on him, and he was trembling when Launa got out and patted him, talking while she did it.

"My darling," murmured Paul, going up to her, "you are safe; you behaved like an angel."

He looked at his hands and did not touch her.

"So did Micmac. Look at him, and you – you are burnt, your hands are sore. Oh, I am so sorry! Do, do drive back to 'Solitude,' and – and – "

"Yes?"

"Oh, drive back!" she said.

They took a short cut across a half made road, and so got behind the fire. Paul talked very little, and she not at all, though she heard "My darling" over and over again, and wondered.

Paul stayed at "Solitude," and after dinner Launa, Whitey, and he sat on the veranda and watched the fire, still burning in the distance. The whole sky was in a blaze, but luckily the wind was dying down. They could see the flames running from tree to tree; they could hear the roar, but they were quite safe, for the water was between them. In the dark, Paul silently, secretly took her hand, and they talked to Miss Black of the annual regatta, and of Canadian ferns. A few stars blazed high up in the sky, the others were dimmed by the lurid glow, and the aspen tree quivered in the dying breeze, while the waves of the incoming tide tapped the boats gently below.

Launa felt in that state of happiness, which says, "*Last, last, last.*"

The annual regatta came off that year in July. Everyone knows the St. Aspenquid Regatta. There were the usual boat races, and excitements and innocent fooleries; but the best of all was the canoe race for the championship of Canada. Paul Harvey had entered for it with his friend Jack Howston.

Before the start they both came to the steam launch, from which Launa was viewing the races. Harvey, with his strong half-brown, half-white arms bare above his elbows, looked like work. After a word or two with Launa, as she leaned down to him, they paddled away to the start. She heard the pistol shot and the hoarse murmur of the crowd, proclaiming the race had begun. Far away in the distance the brown canoes could be seen; Launa watched breathlessly as they came nearer. The paddles flashed in the sun and on the gleaming dancing water. To Launa, the long, strong, slow strokes with the absence of haste was maddening; she stood, not daring to move, watching the white forms as they came nearer, nearer, the iron muscles in each man showing up as he paddled on and on. Paul's canoe was third in the contest.

"Third," announced Launa. Her voice sounded level, she was just able to hide her apprehension lest he might fail, and her longing for his success, which, nevertheless, made her desirous of burying her face in her hands until the race was over. Her hostess, Mrs. Montmorency, stood near her, serene, alert, and slight, enjoying her successful party with a little interest in the races, and a little curiosity as to Launa's attitude towards Paul Harvey.

The men ahead were doing their utmost; in the second canoe, too, they were working hard; but the men in the dark canoe seemed to be dead, dull – what was it?

The crowd shouted "St. John, St. John!" for the canoe owned by that town was in front. Disappointment was in the cry. But suddenly the third canoe gave a spring; it shot forward with a leap, and a bound, and a swirl through the water, and then on and on. The two men were working, straining. They passed the second canoe, and the finish was near; the strong sinews under the arms of the two men showed up clearly. Had they waited too long?.. On they crept, and at last with a final, splendid rush – oh, the ease of it, the seeming lack of effort – the brown canoe shot ahead of the other. They had won, won. Amid shrieks, cheers, and waving of handkerchiefs the heroes, the winners paddled away to change.

Launa had been on the verge of tears, caused by excitement, fear, apprehension, and heaven knows what besides. She was unable to drink her tea because of a lump in her throat. Paul paddled alone over to her, and climbed on board the *Lethe*.

"You've won," she said. "I am very glad."

"And so am I – glad. I am more than glad. It means good luck; it means I shall win my heart's desire; it means – " he almost said "You."

Launa did not answer; she gave him her hand as if they had met for the first time, and he held it longer than a man does when saying, "How do you do?" It was like an involuntary childish caress.

He stayed with her until it was time for the single canoe race, for which he was acting umpire. She was sweet, with a delightful unexpectedness which fascinated him, as did her varying good looks, her firm, lithe body.

"I wish they had a ladies' canoe race," he said. "You would enter for it, would you not?"

"Oh yes."

"They will certainly have one next year, and you will win."

Launa laughed.

"I must go," he said with regret. "But I shall soon come back."

"We shall leave soon now," said Mrs. Montmorency. "Will you come and dine at Paradise to-morrow, Paul? We are going over there, and shall drive home by moonlight. Perhaps you will come and meet us?"

"Thank you," he replied. "I will."

Then he got into his canoe, and Launa watched him paddle away with slow strokes – regretful strokes they seemed to her. His paddling was so unlike that of the other men, so strong, and his body swayed to the motion. Mrs. Montmorency brought up a Mr. Evans and introduced him to Launa. He was a young Englishman, with a respect for the institutions of his country, a love for his dinner, and for pretty women.

He began by asking whether Launa considered Miss Montmorency pretty, and whether she liked Wagner. His theories were that a man can tell a woman's character most quickly from her ideas on the subject of other women, as well as from the music she affects.

Near them sat Mr. Archer and the hostess talking. Launa heard a word here and there as she listened to Mr. Evans' agreeable remarks, and then she heard her father say:

"Harvey is a fool or worse. The Indians will not stand it. Peter Joe came to me about it; he says he would kill him, only that he is sure he would be hanged for it."

"You think they will take some quiet revenge," said Mrs. Montmorency, "and more deadly."

"Yes, I do."

“In their mind a child constitutes marriage?”

“If its father does not want to marry anyone else,” he answered. “They will be satisfied if he lets things alone, but he won’t.”

“He does want to marry?”

“I think so. Money will considerably improve his house, and pay off some of the mortgages; he will, I expect, take a wife with money.”

“It is terrible, and such a pity. I always liked Mr. Harvey for his mother’s sake, and I have ever made him welcome.”

“I advised him to marry her – the squaw,” said Mr. Archer. “It will finish him socially, but in other ways it will make a man of him. Harvey is – ”

Here they walked away to the bow of the *Lethe*, and Launa’s companion talked on, and she answered him.

She impressed him with her interest, her air of being fascinated by him, and all the while she was in torment. Harvey had held her hand! She took off her pale tan suede glove and threw it into the water. It burnt her; her hands felt hot.

Her quick action puzzled Mr. Evans.

“Miss Archer, your glove! Is it a challenge? Do you mean me to go after it?”

“No, no,” she answered. “I hate it; I do not want it. Oh, we are going.”

The *Lethe* had steam up, and was puffing and moving slowly.

“I am so glad. It is very hot. How cool the air is.”

They passed Paul in his canoe. He waved his hand to Launa, who was staring into the water, and appeared absorbed in the depths or in her companion.

CHAPTER IV

That night Launa could not sleep. She was so angry with Paul Harvey and with herself; she loathed herself. Her ideas of men and their passions were those of a young girl, to whom passion is unknown, to whom men appear as gods. She considered a man must love a woman by whom he has a child. Love, love! Paul was the father of a squaw's child – of a squaw's child; it reiterated in her brain until she almost writhed with anguish. She had thought of him as always her own. The shame of it! And worse than shame, the pain, because she would have to give him up. Oh, to get home! To be able to wander about alone! Away on the big barrens where she could move as she liked, and tire herself out. Their wind-laden sweetness would revive her, their vastness would bring peace; she was so tired of the life away from "Solitude." She forgot how much joy hope had always given to her. She had hoped. The past tense is easily conjugated once, but to live in the past for ever, to regret for ever is torment, death-like torment. She resolved not to regret, not to suffer, and so she read Carlyle until daylight.

Next day Mrs. Montmorency's party drove to Paradise. There were wonderful beech woods in which to walk. Paul met them there. His first look was for Launa; she was standing talking to two men, and he joined them and waited with patience, until at last he asked her to go for a walk.

"No, thank you," she said. "I am too tired to walk."

"I want to show you the trees. Come into the wood and sit down, you can rest there."

"Well, I will walk," she answered.

She looked at him with an involuntary air of appeal. She was not afraid of him, she assured herself, only afraid of herself. Some day he might tell her things, ask her questions, and she, through weakmindedness, might answer. They started to walk, and she still meditated. Why should she think he cared for her? Ah yes, and why did she want him to care? These questions opened an endless vista of ideas and feelings before her. She felt indifferent for the moment, as no doubt he did.

"The view is lovely," she exclaimed at last. "Let us go to the village."

"What are you thinking about?" he asked, coming nearer and looking at her.

"Of many things. I think in heaven I should miss the sweetness of the air which is here."

"So should I."

They walked down the road past a cluster of Indian cottages. A young squaw with a baby in her arms sat in front of one of them. Launa looked at her and at the child; its hair was more curly, and not quite so black as the long, straight locks of Indian children.

"What a queer baby!" she exclaimed.

She looked at her companion. He was digging with his stick in the red clay of the road; his eyes were hidden; a red flush mounted to his forehead, and he was singularly embarrassed. She turned away and walked slowly on, followed by him in silence.

"What is that noise?" she said.

They heard a sound like a moan quite near them, and it grew louder; something – some animal – was suffering intensely.

"Look!" she cried.

In a ditch by the roadside lay a horse, thin, so thin that his bones seemed as if they would come through his skin. A few children clustered round, throwing stones at it at intervals and poking it with sticks. Blood slowly oozed from a wound in its head, and its poor body was covered with sores.

"Do something," she said, and her voice quivered with the horror of it. "Can't we put it out of its misery? Whose horse is it?"

Paul had driven away the children, and gone close to it.

"Someone has half shot it; it must be in torture."

"Go and borrow a rifle," she said. "I will stay here and keep away those little fiends. Do go."

"You are not afraid?"

"Afraid? No, only so sorry. What horrible, unavailing suffering! Go, and be quick."

He walked briskly away, and she strolled up and down. The children came near to stare at her, but they ceased to torment the horse. She could not bear its eyes; they seemed to beg of her to kill it, and she could do nothing. She clasped her hands together with such force that they hurt her as she longed and longed for Paul's return. It began to grow dusk. She had forgotten tea, and the rest of the party – would they be looking for her, and imagining all sorts of things? Meanwhile the horse's moans grew louder; the young squaw with the baby came slowly down the road – the baby was crying.

Launa asked if she knew who owned the horse.

"A man named Morris, who lives down the road four miles away. He turned him out to die; he is too old to work or eat."

The baby wailed.

"Your child is ill," said Launa.

"Yes," grunted the girl, who was so young and almost pretty; "my grandmother cursed him."

"Cursed him?"

"Because of his father, he – "

"Oh," interrupted the other, "will Paul never come? If he would only be quick."

She could not bear these revelations. The moans of the horse and the shrill misery of the child were torturing her.

Someone suddenly threw a stone from behind the shelter of a spruce tree; it struck the horse, which gave a sharp scream. In the distance Launa heard footsteps. She ran down the road. It was Paul.

"I am so glad you have come," she said breathlessly, quickly. "Hurry. Did you get a rifle?"

"Are you *glad*?" his voice changed. "Yes, I have it."

"The horse is suffering so terribly."

He looked at her with a certain wistfulness which was unusual.

He is going to tell me he is sorry for *that*, she thought, remembering the squaw and the child who had come near them.

"Go, go and put him out of his misery," she said, with quick anger and excitement. "There is so much torture, so much suffering for animals, women, and children. Oh, God! it is awful!"

He turned and saw the Indian girl.

"You," he said merely, but with bitterness, almost hatred, in his tone. "Go away."

"You are a brute," said Launa, "to talk to her in that way. What has she done? Go and kill the horse."

"Not until you are further away," he said, with gentleness. "He may, and probably will, scream. That woman is not fit for you to talk to or to touch."

For one moment Launa felt afraid, and she wanted to ask him to come with her down the road out of earshot, away from it all. The twilight was growing dense. The horse would scream; ugh! how horrible the suffering! There were witches abroad in the night – witches of selfishness, of pain, of terror. She wanted Paul to put his arms round her, to kiss her, even with the girl near with his child in her arms. She felt degraded, and yet loath to let him leave her, until she remembered the horse.

"Come with me," said Paul, and he took her hand and led her down the road. "There is a big rock here. You will wait for me? Sit down and I will wrap your cloak round you; you are cold."

Her teeth chattered with apprehension as he walked firmly back. She listened with her fingers in her ears, hearing only the thump of her heart beating. One, two sharp reports and a sort of checked scream told her it was over before he came back.

They walked quickly to the hotel, where the rest of the party were waiting dinner. They were curious as well as hungry, and anxious to hear the result of all this wood walking. They discovered nothing; neither Launa nor Paul appeared happy, or at ease. He ate his dinner with indifference; she ate nothing, and felt as if all her body, beginning with her teeth, was beyond her control.

Before they left to drive home he said: —

"You misunderstood me to-night. I want to tell you about that squaw."

"I know it. Do not tell me."

"You are angry with me because of her. I could not help it."

"I despise a man who could not help it," she answered. "I am sorry for her and for you. You could shoot the horse."

"You are angry about her?" he asked again.

"I am outraged, not merely angry. Why," she continued suddenly, "should there be one law for me and one for her? I could not bear anyone who treated her claim as nothing. She will belong to you, be one of you – " she paused.

"I would never treat her claim as of no value," he said quickly, "but – "

"You will never come again to me," she said.

Had she said too much? Would he understand? She continued:

"Do not explain. Be careful – they may think of revenge."

"That is enough. And so it is good-bye? Good-bye, then."

Mrs. Montmorency took Launa home with her in the brougham. They talked about clothes, while Launa remembered the queer dark evening, the half-pretty Indian girl, and heard the wailing sobs of her baby, and then she saw Paul's face full of anger. Love was there, hatred as well, as he said, "Go away," to the girl. She shuddered, and he thought her angry – simply angry – good that he could think she felt so slight an emotion. Women are angry every day with their maids, and their dressmakers, and their rivals, and it leaves no impression, not even a wrinkle; there remains no ache whatever, unless it be weariness.

"I *love* crepon," she said to Mrs. Montmorency. "It is so soft and graceful."

Paul Harvey did not go again to "Solitude." Miss Black lamented his absence loudly. From inquiries she made she learned that he had gone away to the Restigouche with some Englishmen to fish.

Launa took up shorthand as a sedative, and worked with great diligence. But she learned nothing. However, as neither her father nor Miss Black was aware of this, because of their utter ignorance of shorthand, its failure as an attainable subject caused no surprise to them.

Mr. Archer went to New York, and then Launa frequently took long wandering walks – over stretches of rocky country with narrow, gloomy, cuttings full of granite boulders, where there were caves.

One day she went, in her canoe, up a stream, until she reached a chain of lakes where she could paddle on and on – far away into space – where the stillness was maddening yet restful.

The peace of autumn, of approaching death, lay on the woods. The maples, with their gorgeous colouring, shone and flamed in the bright sun; the birches were yellow, almost gold, in the brilliant light; occasionally a leaf fell slowly, it reminded Launa of a ghost of the end; there was dread in the creeping slowness, as of the invincible, powerful march of a quiet enemy. The breeze sprung up gently, it rippled the water, and stirred the tall pine trees slowly with a rhythmic movement, and the sun began to sink. She gazed again and again at the warm rapturous colouring, the triumph of the trees at the end of their summer life, for the leaves have a glorious finish, and then she turned her canoe round and paddled swiftly back to "Solitude."

Everything there was in confusion; Miss Black had been taken suddenly ill. She was still unconscious, and they had sent for the doctor, who arrived only to tell them she was dead.

Launa did not know her father's address. Miss Black's relations were merely cousins, to whom her death and funeral were matters of indifference.

So Launa stayed alone with the dead woman weeping tears of sorrow – some tears were for the loss of companionship, some for the love and never ceasing care. The idea of a funeral was terrible to her; death meant earth and creepy things. At last Mr. Archer got his telegram, and came home.

Launa felt as if the end had come to her. Death, the intruder, had entered into her life; he was a powerful enemy, and hitherto she had only regarded him as a sleeping brother.

Mr. Archer's grief was not perfunctory, he grieved honestly and really. Miss Black was his friend – if any longing for a nearer and perhaps dearer connection (the dearness thereof is wont to depart when the nearness is an accomplished fact) had ever crossed his mind, it had crossed only and never taken root. The constancy of man is more frequently attributable to circumstances than to everlasting love.

Mr. Archer observed that Launa had grown different – older, more absorbed in something, more sympathetic. Always a child of deep emotions, she had developed into a woman. But because her heart was not navigable to floundering old women, the world near "Solitude" called her cold, unfeeling, and indifferent.

Her father regretted this alteration. She had been a child, but apparently death had stepped in and changed her.

He studied her gravely and with attention. "Solitude" was dreary. Launa's admirers grew weary of vain visits, of fruitless attempts to see her, and they ceased to come. They said she was in love with an unknown man; they had to account for her refusal to see them, and pique and vanity suggested this solution.

After a long, cold winter, spring was beginning. All life was breaking out again. The world was glad, triumphant, new, and Mr. George Archer's mind turned to England. Launa must go there for change of scene and air, so they left Canada on the first of May.

Launa and Paul had never met since the memorable day he had shot the horse. Mr. Archer casually mentioned that Paul was in Montreal. Launa had a burning desire to hear tidings of him, but she repressed it; she pushed it back, back, back in her mind, far away into those cupboards everyone has, and keeps locked and sealed always, by sheer force of will.

CHAPTER V

The long streak of smoke from the steamer's funnel lay black on the calm sea; the strong throb of the engines sounded like the measure of a waltz to Launa. She sat on deck every day after the first woe of sea-sickness was over, and felt utterly and completely miserable. She wanted to go back again, for the ache of unconquered pain remained in her heart. She gave herself a little shake and tried to make herself agreeable to a young man who was returning to England to be married. He told her happily that the engines were playing the "Wedding March"; to her it was a hateful discord, with the refrain of a waltz to which she had danced with Paul. The young man hummed Mendelssohn, and she heard Paul's voice, and fancied his kisses on the warm cheek of the squaw.

"When I am married I would rather have the 'Dead March in Saul' played than that," said Launa at last.

The triumphant whistler gazed incredulously at her. He found her irresponsive, so he left her alone, and went to get a whisky and soda. No doubt the poor girl was feeling sick. She would not argue about anticipation and realisation, or time and love. She seemed so cold. He could imagine her sailing on through life alone. She evidently did not care for men; anyhow she did not encourage him.

Launa was occupied with her thoughts. She was trying to seal up her life as if it were a book and could be put away. The long, uneventful days were good for reflection, but they were trying and full of remorse and regret.

"I am young," she said to herself; "only nineteen, and I will forget," said her mind, "and I wish for Paul," said her heart, which was like the ship's engines – an essential part of movement and life.

"Hearts," she said to the young man with anticipations, when he returned, "are only necessary to one's being as the engines are to a steamer."

She considered herself very wise.

"You are so young," he answered, wondering why she should mention her heart.

Just then Mr. Archer appeared at the companion door to breathe the air. He was writing a paper on the intestines of salmon and grayling. The young man turned to him and said:

"Miss Archer compares our hearts to the engines."

"A very good way," murmured the father.

The young man left them and went to play poker; they were an unsuitable pair. Mr. Archer came over to Launa, who turned quickly to him.

"Father, I heard you talking to Mrs. Montmorency that day on the *Lethe*– about Mr. Harvey – was it true?"

Mr. Archer frowned.

"What did you hear?"

"Something about – a squaw and a child."

"It was quite true about the squaw and the child," he answered slowly.

"Ah!" she exclaimed with a little gasp. "Then a man can think of two women at the same time."

Then he turned and looked at her.

"Men are very brutal."

"You said he was thinking of marriage?"

"He is."

She turned her face away from him, for his kind, penetrating look hurt her, and just then she needed him to be cross to her.

"Why do you ask me these questions, child?"

"Because it seemed so strange to me – I could not understand him."

"Merely strange and not brutal? Nothing to you? Well, you hardly knew him, Launa."

"Nothing to me," she repeated, and her father returned to his writing.

The young man with anticipations saw his departure, and hastened to talk to Launa. He was singularly anxious to realise the pleasure of Miss Archer's society; she was quite original.

"You look pale," he said, with solicitude.

"Do I?"

"And worried. As if someone were dead."

"Some one is dead."

"Relations of yours? Cheer up. Wait until you get to London."

"And then?"

"Then? Oh, you can have a good time. You can have the best of good times in London – the very best – and forget everything disagreeable, too. I give you my word, it is just like morphia. When I am in a hole, and feel down on my luck, I go to town."

"Is that the fog? I think I should not like the after effect of morphia."

"Fog?" he asked. "No, it isn't fog, and yet it is fog, too; it deadens the brain. When someone threw me over, you bet I felt bad. I went up to town and forgot for a week. I did, really."

"A week! It lost its effect in a week, so quickly?"

"Well, she wrote then and forgave me, and *I* hadn't done anything wrong; *she* flirted. But she took me back, and I just licked her boots."

"But suppose she had not taken you back?"

"Then I should have lived and forgotten her; I'm hanged if I wouldn't," he said, with energy. "Life does it."

"Life? – you mean time."

"I mean living it down."

"But suppose you could not forget? Suppose you were so fond that you thought of her always?"

"I would forget. I mean – Well, I couldn't, you know," he said, and laughed. "Now I've got her, you see, and don't need to try. I do not mind telling you – you seem so interested, and are so sympathetic to-day – that I only forgot her when it was noisy and all that. But when I was alone and quiet – at night, you know – I was miserable. You have nothing like that to worry you, Miss Archer? It is very kind of you to take so much interest in my trouble. You won't think of your relations when you get to town. Are they in Canada?"

"Yes."

"And one died – a girl, I suppose? And the others want to interfere with you; they want you to be dull because they are? Relations always do that. Now, I have an aunt – she's a caution; she thinks I ought not to marry. But I would not stand that. Have you any aunts in town?"

"No. My father has a cousin; Mrs. Carden is her name."

"She won't bother you, I expect. You are lucky. Your father adores you. You have plenty of money, and are young. My Aunt Maria is a – Oh, the very deuce."

Here he launched forth into anecdotes of his relations, and Launa murmured a polite accompaniment to his reminiscences until the bell rang for dinner.

"We'll meet after dinner, won't we, and finish our talk? It's very jolly," he said. "You have such a nice voice, too."

"You have done me a great deal of good," she answered. "Time is all one wants."

"And life, amusement, and love," he added softly, with a glance at her, which, considering the state of his feelings for another lady, was unnecessarily kind.

"Leave out love," she answered. "I am hungry."

On deck after dinner when he looked for her she was not to be seen, so he concluded she was tired and had gone to bed, wherefore he played poker.

But Launa was not tired. She had hidden from him. His talks about his Aunt Maria had no interest for her, except when she regarded them as a narcotic, and then his musings were soothing. That evening she wanted to think and to be alone.

Her father had insisted on her drinking champagne at dinner. Mr. Archer said a voyage was exhausting, and he looked weary. He had not recovered from the surprise which his daughter's questions had produced. Were they caused merely by curiosity – the curiosity of an ignorant girl – or by interest? Curiosity is merely an inheritance from Eve; interest is the first instinct towards a man when a woman loves him or is going to love him.

"Launa must drink champagne to-night," he decided. "And soon we shall be in London. But why did she ask those curious questions?"

Launa took some cushions and rugs and went forward behind the boats. The steamer was surging on, the wind was rising, and the waves were breaking below with big white heads of foam. She began to think; she drew a picture of it all for herself in her mind and called herself a fool. Suppose Paul were there on the steamer, suppose he came to her with love in his eyes, and he were hers for the time – and that was it, that was what hurt – for the time, perhaps only for a time. Would she be willing to take him at the price of another woman's shame? And to know and to remember what was between her and him, like a bar, or a hand – the warm soft hand of a woman! No, it was over. She would shut up the book. Paul was dead, her Paul, the Paul she loved – she would think of him as she did of her dead mother – sometimes. But her mother was with the angels, and Paul was alive. She shivered a little; it was cold and damp, and the swirl of the waves as the steamer rushed through them was cruel.

She resolved to begin again, to rub out the writing of the first episode of life – such a new book to her – and to make the page ready for London and fresh impressions.

When the Archers arrived in London they took a flat near the Thames Embankment, and Launa revelled in new clothes, music, and horses. Her father soon had many friends. His wee world was exciting itself about the question of bones of fish, and he flung himself with ardour into the controversy.

After some days of continual absence on his part, and loneliness on Launa's, she went to him and said: —

"I want to know some women. I love nice women. Don't you know some?"

He looked surprised.

"There is your cousin, Lavinia Carden; she lives in town. I will take you to see her. Her husband is dead; poor man, he never was happy. He yearned for the country and for pigs – Lavinia only appreciated bacon, and would not live out of Bayswater. A month at the seaside was all poor Carden got in the way of country."

"I shall not like her."

"She will give you good advice, Launa," he said, laughing. "You don't like that."

Mrs. Carden lived in a semi-detached house, beyond Bayswater, far from the region of the fashionable, in the heart of cheap villadom, where twelve pennies had to make a little over a shilling. Endeavouring to save a farthing on one's rolls or one's fire-lighters is an absorbing occupation, and it seems to have most interest for those to whom it is immaterial whether they do save their farthing or not. Mrs. Carden had one son. When he was at home she saw what she considered life – an occasional visit to the theatre, or a dull dinner party, both reached with due propriety in a four-wheeler.

Mrs. Carden was a selfish woman, with a firm belief in her own opinions, and her own importance; anyone who contradicted her or disagreed with her was at once a detestable person. Her affection for her son was expressed in long letters, and the frequent use of "dearest." But her love was variable, and when he was at home he disturbed her breakfasts, while her nights were made feverish by his late hours, which kept the hall gas a-light until sometimes past twelve o'clock. Her servants assumed a more frivolous demeanour on his arrival, and it seemed to her that while their caps were coquettishly crooked and smart, her stiff house became sometimes slightly untidy.

Charlie Carden was in a line regiment stationed at Malta, with one hundred and fifty pounds a year besides his pay. His mother wondered why he never became dashing, or soldier-like, or anything of a hero, with a sprinkling from the pepper-pot of wickedness – to possess this is the bounden duty

of every man when he puts on a red coat or a sword. Carden remained dull, and his mother almost despised him; he was not even selfish, nor did he bully her.

George Archer and Lavinia Carden were second cousins, she was the only relation left whom he had known as a boy. His recollections of her were hazy. In these she figured as a muslin-fichued, sandy-haired girl, in whose face piety and cruelty struggled for mastery; now she parted her hair deliberately in the middle, and indulged in them both. In her youth she had regarded George as a possible husband, and, not loving him, had forgotten him, therefore when reminded of his existence she felt angry with him. Was it not his fault that she had married a man whose only inclinations were to have a farmyard, against which she had had to struggle all her life?

The day before the Archers went to 52 Lancaster Road a note was sent to Lavinia to prepare her for their visit. Mrs. Carden therefore left off her cap for the afternoon, braving the smile of her parlourmaid with the fortitude of a widow who has given up hope of a second marriage, and who suddenly finds the wonderful idea returning with unwonted sweetness – brought back to her by the visit of a man who was long ago considered a possibility. His fondness for a walk from church on Sunday evenings with her had more than proclaimed this fact. She forgot he had a daughter, and that it was five and twenty years since they had met.

The outside of Lavinia's house was grey. Inside her drawing-room suggested the past and dust, which was constantly being removed; its mark was on the carpet, the walls and the furniture. Only the red blinds shed a little cheerful light, which the drab curtains chastened and subdued.

Mrs. Carden began by relating reminiscences of the family, and then pitied George Archer for his long residence among Colonists. He explained that his residence was quite voluntary, and that he regarded it as the happiest period of his life.

"Did you think my father was obliged to live in Canada whether he liked it or not?" asked Launa; "that he was suffering an unwilling exile?"

"Not exactly that," said Mrs. Carden. "Where are you staying?"

When she heard of the flat, and contemplated Launa's boots and dress, she murmured to herself, "Money."

"George, sometimes when you are busy I should be so glad to take care of Launa; I would take her to – " She paused. Where could she take Launa? "We might go to the Zoo."

"Thank you very much," said Launa politely. She did not press Mrs. Carden to name the day for this expedition; she was not favourably impressed by her relative.

"You will come and dine with us, Mrs. Carden," said Launa.

"Call me Lavinia," said Mrs. Carden.

"Come any evening next week; which one will suit you?" asked Mr. Archer.

"Next Thursday," answered Lavinia.

Then they talked of Mr. Archer's old home, and looked at photographs of the whole of the family.

"Those happy days," murmured Mrs. Carden, not without an uneasy feeling that her hair was growing thin at the parting; besides, she began to feel cold without her cap.

They drank weak tea, and Lavinia asked Launa her impressions of England.

"I think London is perfectly delightful," she answered. "I don't like the horses much. You use bearing reins. The river is quite perfect, and so different from ours. And yet sometimes I long for a stretch of rocky country, for more freedom. But the music and the life are so interesting. Yes, I love London."

"Horses, river, life," repeated Mrs. Carden.

A horse to her was a vehicle of locomotion, like an engine; it conveyed her to the station or to a party. Some deluded beings owned horses; she preferred hers hired, with no responsibility as to legs or grooms.

"You love boating and freedom," remarked Mrs. Carden. "They are both often dangerous."

"In this country, yes – where freedom frequently ends in trespassing," answered Launa.

"Or worse – the loss of one's reputation," Lavinia said with decision.

Then she turned to George and told him anecdotes. She conversed rapidly and loudly; when she was a girl her family had told her she was arch.

When they rose to go she said: "George, my dear son will be at home in a few days. May I bring him to dine? Launa, he is your cousin."

"Do bring him," said Mr. Archer; "Launa will be glad to see him, I know."

What a name – Launa! reflected Lavinia after their departure. What a fatality there is in our annexing the Colonies! Still, there is money behind the girl, and she is young.

By which reflection we may infer that Mrs. Carden thought of her son in connection with the money and Launa.

The Archers went home in a hansom.

"You call her a woman, daddy; now I call her a fossil," said Launa. "She is not the sort of woman friend I need. I want a living woman – not one who has existed on husks until she withers everyone who goes near her."

"She is a type," he answered vacantly.

"She is an imitation. Show me some one who is brave – who has or knows life."

"Would you like Mrs. Phillips to come and see you? She is Sir John Blomfield's daughter, a widow and young. She wants to know you."

"I am doubtful, not whether she will like me," with sublime conceit, "but whether I shall like her."

"You must try her," he laughed.

His daughter amused him with her odd ideas.

However, when Mrs. Phillips did come, Launa approved of her.

All this time Launa was learning. She was filled with a desire to know and see more; people and life were so interesting. It was like a new play. She noticed how differently her father, herself, and the others were affected by it, and the noise was soothing, even at times deadening.

Launa found Mrs. Phillips entertaining. She explained some of the parts in this vast human drama. She found Miss Archer absurdly young in many of her notions, and absurdly old in others.

"I want to see everything," said Launa, "and to live myself. It is terrible to feel oneself growing old. It will soon be over, and I haven't done what I meant to do."

Mrs. Phillips laughed.

"Go on. What did you mean to do?"

"I should like," said Launa, "to be happy."

"So should we all. Tell me more."

"I want to play a little first, and then – to make the world a little brighter for someone."

"If I were you, I would simply play myself and leave the others alone. Playing is real and not difficult. Once you begin to mix other people in your life, with your or their happiness depending on you, you will probably be very miserable."

The admiration of one woman for another is sincere when it is felt when with her, and not merely expressed to a man.

Mrs. Phillips admired Launa for her youth, for her length of limb, and for her slight, graceful body and her warm brown skin. Launa's mind was attractive. She made friends quickly; she seemed very adaptable; everyone interested her. Some men adored her as they had done at Musquodobit. To others, with a taste for sensuality, she was an indefinite slight girl, while to the few she was wholly desirable – madly desirable. Of course to the crowd she was just a girl.

Music exercised all its old fascination for her. She practised with diligence, and she listened greedily. It transported her to "Solitude," to the wild sea there, to the rivers and lakes, the life which she loved and missed, which life and Paul she strove every day to forget. And in music she was with

him. It was a dream life – she lived in it. Paul was dead to her, but for all that he existed sometimes. She was stared at in her canoe on the river, her paddling was so strong and vigorous, her body so lithe, her arms so round and firm as she took long, almost masculine, strokes, and nowhere did she miss Paul so much as she did there.

CHAPTER VI

The Cardens both went to dinner.

Captain Carden was a nondescript. He might have been attractive if he had ever appeared interested. He was tall, fair, with grey eyes, and very ugly hands, which were forced into notice because of his constant endeavour to hide them. Launa regarded mother and son with curiosity, for they were English and new, and reminded her of the characters in Trollope's novels. Neither Charlie Carden nor his mother appeared to have found much to interest them in this world. They were ignorant as well as superior, and gloried in knowing nothing, unlike Mrs. Phillips's friends, who were anxious to know everything, and to impress outsiders with their knowledge.

The Archers talked first about the opera. Mrs. Carden's ideas of it were limited to "Pinafore" as new and "Martha" as old. German opera and Wagner were nothing to her, nor did she care about books.

Captain Carden talked about horses to Launa, who gathered that he fancied his own opinion as well as his own horses and prowess.

Mrs. Carden thought George should ask her to take the head of the table; she considered Launa too young. She was disappointed when she found the table was round.

Mrs. Phillips and Mr. Herbert were the other guests. Mr. Herbert was an ugly, short man, with a square face, and a stubbly black moustache. He was a journalist – besides which he was clever. Shortly he was going to Canada to write articles for some papers on the country and its resources.

"You are going to write to me, too," said Mrs. Phillips.

"Yes," he replied, with a glance, full of – what?

Launa saw it; here was a man and a woman who clearly were of moment to each other. Launa was so absolutely ignorant of men; she knew only one man, and she tried to forget him. She had believed in them all as a class, and in their chivalrous respect for women – indefinite women – and in their everlasting love for one particular woman at last, but her belief was tottering.

That all men were brave she believed, too, it was part, an essential part, of her idea of a man, as all women are lovely and good. Of course she knew women existed with protruding teeth, who have no attraction, but men do not *love* them. Mrs. Carden she classed among them.

Captain Carden talked to her with assiduity. He told her he found London dull.

"I hate the people; they are so difficult to know. I have called over and over again on the Huntingdons. You know who he is? Lord Huntingdon in the War Office. And I go often to the club for billiards, but no one is friendly, and society is very difficult to get into."

"But do you not go in for something? Don't you ride, or row, or play golf? I think all men should care for things of that sort, even for making love."

"I never make love; that means marriage, and I have no money."

"Do you ride?" she asked, feeling perfectly indifferent as to his reply. "All soldiers do."

This conversation was so profoundly insipid.

"Sometimes; but I hate it. I am always afraid of falling off. I go in for it because the regiment would not think much of me if I didn't. But I hope I have not bored you," with a sudden change of tone. "We are cousins, you know, and it is so funny how intimate I can be with you; there are so few women I like, or with whom I can be confidential."

Launa ate an almond with deliberation.

"Perhaps some day you will come for a drive with me. I might hire a safe horse."

"Oh, no, thank you. Please do not trouble, I do not like safe horses."

Mr. Archer turned to Captain Carden and asked about Malta, and Launa watched Mrs. Phillips, who was talking very little, while Mr. Herbert's conversation was incessant. His air was persuasive, his eyes eager, ardent, full of desire.

At ten the Cardens departed. Charley Carden had time to assure Launa again that she was the only woman with whom he could be confidential. Mrs. Phillips was to stay the night. Launa and she had bedrooms adjoining, with a door of communication. They both put on dressing-gowns, and Lily Phillips went into Launa's room.

"You are not sleepy, are you? Shall we talk?"

"Sit here," said Launa, "in this comfortable chair."

There was a small fire.

"I am always cold," said Launa. "I love a fire."

"What do you think of Mr. Herbert?"

"I think him clever, and he evidently likes you."

"Yes, he is clever. But tell me, Launa, are you modern?"

"In what way?"

"Would you ask a man who loved you if he had a past? Would you object to it if he had?"

"If a past were a present I would object. Can't men be without past? Is there always a woman they have loved first?"

She seemed to hear the wailing of a child and the rustling of the trees, and to feel the fresh breeze. She shuddered. Mrs. Phillips observed the shudder and the look.

"I do not object. Men are different; they are coarse. They like kissing – indiscriminate kissing."

Launa laughed, and said, "Go on."

"If I love a man I shall not care what he has – past, present, anything, if he loves me. I would like one man to really love me."

"You have been married," suggested Launa.

"But not loved. My husband was nice; we never quarrelled, but we never made it up. Nice men do not love women; they ask us to marry them, to be mothers to their children. Devils love us and often leave us."

For some time there was silence.

"You like Mr. Herbert?" again asked Mrs. Phillips.

"He wants to marry you," said Launa.

"He thinks he does. I am afraid of marriage. I am four-and-twenty and I feel fifty; he is thirty and seems twenty."

"If I were a man," said Launa, "I would love you. You are not merely beautiful; you are more – not only attractive, you will never grow old."

"Thank you, dear," said Mrs. Phillips; "that is a compliment."

Mrs. Phillips was small and slight; her hair was a very dark brown, her lips were red, her eyes large and dark blue. Her mouth was the most beautiful part of her face. Her fascination was great; men loved her, went mad over her, and loved her still. She was not good-tempered; a man would never have chosen her for his friend merely. She was variable; not the least of her attraction was that men never could tell how she would treat them. Some women lose their power by their variableness; Mrs. Phillips gained hers. She was cold, yet she could have been passionately fond; but she worshipped self-control, and considered a man ceases to care for a woman when once he is sure of her.

"I shall marry him," she said. "I think I shall. He is not poor, but I shall never live with him."

"Why not? What will you do?"

"Though he cares for me, he will grow tired of marriage, and so shall I. The accessibility of a wife is so dull. I shall live in my own flat, and he can keep his rooms. Our marriage notice in all the papers will be followed by a week's honeymoon, and then he can go back to his work, and I can play. He must love me better for not being sure of me at breakfast, weary of me at dinner, and asleep in the drawing-room at night. All the attraction of the – " she paused – "of the others will be mine. I shall be his wife. We can entertain, and he will be sure of me."

"Do men always grow tired of us?" asked Launa, "even if or when they love us?"

"Not always tired, but secure. If they were merely tired, they would let us alone. They cease to desire to please us; we belong to them. Ah, my dear, love! do men love us? Yes, they love us, but do they love one woman?"

Launa's clock struck twelve.

"I must go to bed," said Lily Phillips. "I shall not kiss you. Women should never kiss each other. Good-night."

"Good-night," repeated Launa.

"That Carden man will want to marry you, Launa. Beware of them both. He is a worm, and has awful legs!"

A few nights after this, Mrs. Phillips took Launa to a ball given by some bachelors – eligible, delightful young men – whose reputation for wickedness was wholly obliterated by their fortunes or the want thereof.

Captain Carden was there. He had procured his invitation with great difficulty. The mother of one bachelor had cause for gratitude towards him. Her son was in his regiment, and when his reputation promised to become inconveniently large, Captain Carden for once used his wits, saved him from the consequences thereof, and the family felt they owed Captain Carden something. Mrs. Carden rejoiced. She thanked Providence for having delivered the sons of the enemy into her hand, and piously glanced at the ceiling (where a brass chandelier hung, symbolic of the worship of light, also brass) when Charlie related his success. He disliked Mrs. Phillips. She circumvented him by introducing several men to Launa before Captain Carden could demand more dances than he had a right to expect. But then she could give him only two.

"Mr. George will amuse you, dear," said Mrs. Phillips to Launa. "He is clever, and will tell you about his books."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.