

Meade L. T.

David's Little Lad



L. Meade

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Chapter One This is the Story within the Story

Yes, I, Gwladys, must write it down; the whole country has heard of it, the newspapers have been full of it, and from the highest to the lowest in the land, people have spoken of the noble deed done by a few Welsh miners. But much as the country knows, and glad and proud as the country is, I don't think she knows quite all – not exactly what mother and I know; she does not know the heart history of those ten days. This is the story within the other well-known story, which I want to write here.

On a certain sunny afternoon in September, 1876, I was seated up in the window of the old nursery. I say *in* the window, for I had got my body well up on the deep oak seat, had flattened my nose against the pane, and was gazing with a pair of dismal eyes down on the sea, and on some corn-fields and hay-fields, which in panoramic fashion stretched before my vision.

Yes, I was feeling gloomy, and my first remark, after an interval of silence, was decidedly in keeping with my face and heart.

"Gwen," I said, "what is it to be buried alive?" Gwen, who was singing her charge to sleep to a lively Welsh air, neither heeded nor heard me.

"Gwen!" I repeated in a louder key.

"Men are false and oft ungrateful,
Derry derry dando,"

sang Gwen, rocking the baby, as she sang, in the most dexterous manner.

Gwen had a beautiful voice, and I liked the old air, so I stayed my impatient question to listen.

"Maids are coy and oft deceitful,
Derry derry dando,
Few there are who love sincerely,
Down a derry down.
Say not so, I love thee dearly,
Derry derry down down,
Derry down down derry."

"None but thee torment and teaze me,
Derry derry dando,"

I shouted in my impetuous manner, and leaving my seat, I went noisily to her side.

"Gwen, I *will* be heard. I have not another soul to speak to, and you are so cross and disagreeable. What is it to be buried alive?"

"Tis just like you, Gwladys," said Gwen, rising indignantly. "Just after two hours of it, when I was getting the darling precious lamb off to sleep, you've gone and awoke him. Dear, dear! good gracious! there never was such a maid!"

Gwen retired with the disturbed and wailing baby into the night nursery, and I was left alone.

“None but thee torment and teaze me,
Derry derry dando,”

I sang after her.

Then I returned to my seat on the window-sill, curled myself up tighter than ever, flattened my nose again against the pane, and began to think out my dismal thoughts.

Yes, my thoughts were undoubtedly dismal, and very melancholy must my eyes have looked, and absurdly long and drawn down the corners of my mouth. Had anybody been there to see, they must have pronounced me sentimental in the extreme; but no one was by, and – there was the rub – that was the reason I looked so melancholy. Even Gwen, rocking baby to sleep, could be disturbed at least by my long drawn sighs, but Gwen had retired into the night nursery, out of reach of my despondency, and though I could hear her cheerful voice in the distance, she certainly could no longer hear me. I was utterly alone.

I pressed my face against the window pane, and gazed at the scene before me. It was a fair scene enough. A broad sweep of sea, the waves sparkling in the sunshine – some rugged rocks – a little patch of white sand; all this lay close. In the distance were some hills, magnificently clothed. To the right, I saw oak, ash, beech, in their autumn dress; to the left, yellow fields of corn, an orchard or two; some mowers were cutting down the corn, and laughing merrily; some children were eating apples in the orchards – over all a gentle breeze stirred, and the sun shone out of an almost cloudless sky.

Yes, the scene was very fair, but I did not appreciate it. My eyes had rested on those trees, and those hills, and that sea all my life – I was tired of the unvarying monotony. Nothing wearied me so much as when visitors came to stay with mother, visitors who did not know our country, and who consequently went into raptures over our Welsh scenery. I am quite sure now that the raptures were genuine, but at the time they seemed to me very like duty talk. I always listened contemptuously; I always answered carelessly, “Oh, yes, the place is well enough;” and I always thought bitterly in my heart of hearts.

It is easy for you, fine sir or madam, to speak and to admire, who need only stay in this place for a week or fortnight, but what if you had to live here *always*, from year’s end to year’s end. If you had to see the meadows, and orchards, and sea, and the old grey house, and the trees and sky – in short, all the fair landscape, not only in its summer glory, but in its winter desolation, would not the country then appear a little tiresome to you? Might you not then find an occasional visit to Cardiff, and an occasional ride across the fields, and a far from occasional stay at home, slightly wearying, and might it not possibly occur to you that yours was a dull life? For this was my fate. I had always lived at Tynycymmer. I had always seen the hills clothed with trees in the distance; I had always watched the ripening fruit in the orchards, and the ripening corn in the fields. In short, I was a Welsh girl who had never gone out of Wales in her life. Never had I even seen Gloucester, never had I set foot on English soil.

Circumstances too many to mention had conspired to thus isolate me. I had once paid a visit, when a little child, to North Wales, but all the rest of my sixteen years had been spent with mother, at Tynycymmer, in the county of Glamorganshire. A rich country, a rambling, romantic old home, a fair scene, where gentle care had tended me, this I acknowledged, but I also knew that I was tired, weary, sick of it all.

With my absurdly dismal face gazing outward, I repeated the question to myself, which nurse Gwen had refused to answer; “What is it to be buried alive?”

The question had arisen in my mind from a paragraph in a local paper, which I had seen to-day. This paragraph was headed “*Buried alive.*”

It contained an account of some colliers in a not very distant part of Glamorganshire, who had been killed in a mining accident, truly buried in their full health and strength by the sudden giving way of a column of coal.

I had read the paragraph aloud to mother and David at breakfast.

I had seen David's face flush and then grow pale, had heard mother say, "That place is not far from Ffynon; I am glad the accident did not happen in our mine, David."

"Thank God! and it might have been," from David.

Then mother added —

"Things will mend in the old place soon, my son."

"I trust so," from David.

Then expressions of pity and sympathy from both pairs of lips, for the injured and killed.

In this sympathy I had freely joined, for I was not hard-hearted; then I had forgotten the circumstance. The widows and children in the dismal coal country might be weeping and mourning, but I, Gwladys Morgan, in my fair home, in this fair land, had no room for them in my selfish heart. In half an hour I had ceased to remember the paragraph in the *Hereford Times*, all but its heading. But the heading, as I said, haunted me; it had another meaning besides going down into the bowels of the earth, and finding its walls close round one, and feeling oneself shut into a living tomb. It had another meaning besides the palpable and material horror of slow starvation and of coming madness. Of these things I could form no conception, but I could conceive of other things, and feel them through and through my childish and inexperienced heart. I imagined another meaning to the words, and this meaning I hunted up and pondered over, with a deeper and deeper melancholy, adding strength to my gloom.

Having roused up the skeleton, I clothed it with flesh, I filled its veins with warm young blood, I made its limbs fair and round, I gave to its face the healthy hue of youth, I coloured its eyes blue, and its hair a golden brown, and I called it, when I had given it life and being, Gwladys Morgan.

I took this fair young person of my creation, and buried her in a living tomb; true, the fresh air of heaven still blew upon her, the sun shone over her head, and the flowers blossomed at her feet. She could walk through lovely gardens, she could watch the coming and going of the fresh tide, on the fresh ocean, she could repose at night in the softest of beds, in a spacious oak-lined room. She could receive counsel and love, from the kind and tender lips of mother and brother. All this she could have, but still she was in a tomb, and the name of the tomb was Tynycymmer. Her body was free, as far as the walls of her prison allowed it, to roam, but her mind, with its noble aspirations, her soul, which had conceived great and possible commissions of wide and ever-widening usefulness, these were shut up in a tomb; in short, this feeling, breathing creature, with her talents and her longings, was buried alive.

Having consigned Gwladys to this fate, I went on to imagine the result. She would struggle in vain for freedom, she would beat with her wings — poor imprisoned bird — against her cage, she would pant and long for a less confined air, for emancipation from her living grave, she would suffer in uncomplaining silence, and then gradually, her mind would recoil upon itself, her aspiring soul would cease to struggle, and starved out with earth's hard fate, would soar to nobler worlds! — (here my tears began to drop).

But I had not done yet; I imagined still further, and in all its minutest details, the body's decay of this suffering creature. How thin and hollow, how pale and worn the once round and rosy cheeks would become! what a pathetic and far-away look of sad yearning would enter the blue eyes! how the curling hair would begin to grow! — I did not like the idea of the hair growing thin, it was not poetical — had not nurse Gwen a great bald division in her hair, a division clefting her raven locks asunder, deep and wide as a potato ridge? No, I substituted thin locks for grey, and so completed the picture.

Over my completed picture I should assuredly have wept, had not, at this opportune juncture, the blue eyes, which were certainly anything but dim as yet, descried, bowling smoothly along the road, and making swift advances to Tynycymmer, a little pony-carriage, driven by a pair of hands,

very well fitted for their present task, that of keeping two spirited ponies in order. Into the long, winding avenue the carriage dashed, down the avenue it sped, and the next instant it had drawn up at the front entrance, and a large, strongly-made man was helping a delicate, stately woman to alight. The strong man was my brother, the woman was my mother.

Quick as lightning, I had left my seat in the nursery window, had wreathed my face with smiles, had filled my heart with laughter, had, for the time being, banished every trace of the ugly, bad dream in which I had been indulging, had descended the stairs almost like an arrow from its bow, had lifted mother bodily up the steps, and placed her amid my own and David's laughter, in the old oak arm-chair, the family heirloom, the undoubted gift of some old Arch-Druid ancestor, which stood in the wide entrance hall.

"Well! mother, what an age you've been away! Did you catch the first train this morning? Aren't you dreadfully tired? What was it like, was it glorious? Were there crowds of people? Did the Bishop preach? Is the music ringing in your ears? Doesn't your head ache? And oh! *did* you get a new fashion for my blue silk gown?"

These questions I poured out, toppling them one over the other, down on my knees the while, removing mother's boots, and encasing her dear, pretty feet in a pair of warm, fur-lined slippers.

"I saw one or two nicely-dressed girls," began mother slowly, whereupon I suspended my operations with her feet, and looked up with a face of absorbed interest.

"And, Gwladys," said David, laying his hand on my shoulder, "you are to come to-morrow, the Messiah is to be sung, and I will take you over."

"Oh! oh! oh!" I exclaimed, beginning to dance about, but then observing that mother was gazing at me a little sadly, I stopped short, and exclaimed with a sudden burst of unselfishness —

"The pony-carriage only holds two; I don't want to take mother's place."

"No, my darling, I am tired, I should not care to go again to-morrow, and I want you to hear the Messiah."

"We must start even earlier than to-day, Gwladys," continued David, as he led the way to the supper-room. "We nearly missed the train this morning, and I have unfortunately failed to get reserved seats, but you don't mind a crowd?"

"I *love* a crowd," I answered energetically; looking and feeling, as I spoke, a totally different creature from the sentimental being who had gazed with dismal eyes from the nursery window, half an hour before.

"What kind of voice had Madame Edith Wynne, mother, and did you hear Sims Reeves?"

"Sims Reeves did not sing to-day, but he will to-morrow in the Messiah," replied mother.

"And I shall be there to-morrow!" I exclaimed again, then a sudden thought darted through my brain, and I fell into a reverie.

In my great excitement and delight at the prospect of going to Hereford, to the festival of the Three Choirs, I had forgotten something which now returned to my memory with painful consciousness. I had nothing to wear. My blue silk, my beautiful navy blue, mother's last present, was still unmade, and my white dress was with the laundress. My white dress, though simple and childish, was new and tolerably fashionable, and in no other could I think of appearing before the great and gay world of Hereford, on this my first visit.

"Mother," I said, jumping from my seat, and upsetting a cup of hot tea over Gyp the terrier, "I must go this very moment to speak to Nancy at the lodge; she has got my frock, and she must iron it to-night."

Without waiting for a reply, I ran out of the room, and bonnetless and hatless sped up the avenue. The light autumn breeze tossed my curls into wild confusion, my gay voice rose, humming a merry Welsh air. Very far away now were my gloomy thoughts, very like a child I felt, as I walked on. My mind was fully occupied with my promised treat, my dreams were all rainbow tinted, my world

all tinged with sunshine and glory. The only cloud that shadowed the gay expanse of my firmament was the possibility of my white dress not being ironed in time for me to wear.

Chapter Two

David, I am Tired of Tynycymmer

When I reached the lodge, Nancy, a stout, red-faced Welsh woman, came out to meet me, accompanied by a troupe of wild-looking children, who stood round and stared with open eyes and mouths, for Miss Morgan of Tynycymmer was a great person in their eyes.

“Is my white dress ready? Nancy; I want to wear it to-morrow morning early.”

“Eh! dear, dear, Miss Gwladys,” dropping a profound curtsy. “Eh! goodness me! yes, I’ll h’iron it to-night, miss. Get out of that, Tum,” addressing her sturdy-limbed son, who had placed himself between his mother and me.

“I know what Tum wants,” I said. “Here, Tum, Dai, Maggie, catch!”

I threw some halfpence amongst the children, and turned away.

As I did so, two ladies came out of the lodge; one, a handsome dark-eyed girl, a casual acquaintance of mine, came eagerly to my side.

“Now, Miss Morgan, I call this provoking; what right have you to go away, just when I want to know you!”

“What do you mean?” I asked, bluntly.

“You are going away from Tynycymmer?”

“Indeed we are not,” I said.

“Well, but my mother heard it from – oh! I forgot,” blushing deeply and looking confused. “I was not to say. Of course it is not the case, or you would know – just idle gossip; I am sorry I mentioned it, but so glad you are not going.”

“Good-night,” I said, holding out my hand.

I had retraced a few steps home, when my little friend ran after me.

“Please, please, Miss Morgan, you won’t speak of this; I should get into trouble, indeed.”

“Oh, dear, no!” I answered, lightly; “there is nothing to repeat. Make your mind easy.”

The girl, satisfied, ran away, and I walked on.

But I was not so cool and unconcerned as she supposed her words had excited me, her words had aroused both discontent and hope. I forgot my certain pleasure of to-morrow, in the bare possibility of a greater and a wider pleasure, and as a moth round a candle, my thoughts fluttered round the magic words, “You are going away.”

Could they be true? could the gossip the girl had heard be correct? How certain she looked! how startled and frightened, when she found herself mistaken. And, little fool! she had made me promise not to betray her, just too when I wanted to solve the mystery. Oh, if only she might be right! if only we might be going to leave this dull life, this stupid country existence! Could it be the case? gossip was often mistaken, but seldom utterly without foundation. I asked myself this question tremblingly and eagerly. Instantly I had a reply. Sober reason started to the forefront of all my faculties, and said —

“It is impossible; the girl has made a mistake; the gossip is false. How could you leave Tynycymmer? Is not David master here? does not the place belong to David, as it did to his father before him? and do not he and mother love every stone in the old house, every tree in the old ground? would not the idea, the most distant idea, of going away break their hearts?”

Yes, it was quite out of the question that mother and David could think of leaving Tynycymmer. But my little friend had said nothing about mother and David, she had only whispered the delicious and soul-stirring words, “*You* are going away.”

Perhaps I was going to school; perhaps some London cousins had asked me to pay them a visit. Oh! yes, this last thought must be right, and how pleasant, how lovely, how charming that would be!

I should see the Houses of Parliament, and Westminster, and visit the Parks, and the Museums, and Madame Tussaud's.

Yes, certainly this was going to happen. Mother had not told me yet, which was a little strange, but perhaps she had heard it herself very suddenly, and had met some friends, and had mentioned it to them. Yes, this must be the mystery, this must be the fire from whence the smoke of Sybil's gossip came. I felt it tingling from my throat down to my very toes. I was *not* going to be buried alive. So cruel a fate was not in store for me. I should see the world – the world of beauty, of romance, of love, and all possible things might happen to me. I skipped along gaily.

David was smoking his pipe, and pacing up and down under some trees which grew near the house. The short September sun had set, but the moon had got up, and in the little space of ground where my brother walked, it was shedding a white light, and bringing into relief his strongly marked features.

David's special characteristic was strength; he possessed strength of body, and strength of – mind, I was going to say, but I shall substitute the word soul. His rugged features, his height, his muscular hands and arms, all testified to his great physical powers. And the repose on his face, the calm gentleness and sweetness that shone in his keen, dark eyes, and played round his firm lips, showed how strong his soul must be – for David had known great trouble.

I mention his strength of character here, speaking of it first of all in introducing him into my story, for the simple reason that when I saw him standing under the trees, I perceived by the expression of his face, that he was yielding to a most unusual emotion; he looked anxious, even unhappy. This I took in with a kind of side thought, to be recurred to by and by, but at present I was too much excited about myself. I walked with him nearly every evening when he smoked, and now I went to my usual place, and put my hand through his arm. I longed to ask him if the surmise, which was agitating my whole being, was correct, but by doing this I should betray Sybil, and I must not even mention that I had seen her.

"What bright cheeks, and what a happy face!" said David, looking at me affectionately, "are you very glad to come to the Messiah with me? little woman."

"Yes," I answered absently, for to-morrow's treat had sunk into insignificance. Then out it came with a great irrepressible burst, "David, I am *longing* to see London."

David, who knew nothing of my discontent, who imagined me to be, what I always appeared to him, a child without the shadow of a care, or a sorrow, without even the ghost of a longing outside my own peaceful existence, answered in the tone of surprise which men can throw into their voices when they are not quite comfortable.

"London, my dear Gwladys."

"Yes, why not?"

"Well, we don't live so very far away from London, you may see it some day."

It was quite evident, by David's indifferent tone, that he knew nothing of any immediate visit in store for me. I bit my lips hard, and tried to say nothing. I am sure I should not have spoken but for his next words.

"And in the meantime you can wait; you are very happy, are you not?"

"No, I am not. I'm not a bit happy, David," and I burst into tears.

"What's this?" said David in astonishment.

"I am not happy," I repeated, now that the ice was broken, letting forth some of my rebellious thoughts, "I'm so dull here, I do so want to live a grand life."

"Tell me, dear, tell me all about it?" said David tenderly. To judge from the tone of his voice he seemed to be taking himself to task in some strange way. The love in his voice disarmed my anger, and I spoke more gently.

"You see, David, 'tis just this, you and mother have got Tynycymmer, you have the house, and the farm, and all the land, and, of course, you have plenty to do on the land, riding about and seeing

to the estate, and keeping the tenants' houses in order, and 'tis very nice work, for 'tis all your own property, and of course you love it; and mother, she has the house to manage, and the schools to visit, but I, David, I have only dull, stupid lessons. I have nothing interesting to do, and oh! sometimes I am so dull and so miserable, I feel just as if I was buried alive, and I do so want to be unburied. I have no companions. I have no one to speak to, and I do long to go away from here, and to see the world."

"You would like to leave Tynycymmer!" said David.

"Yes, indeed, indeed I should. I should dearly love to go out into the world as Owen has done; I think Owen has such a grand life."

Here I paused, and finding that David did not reply, I ventured to look into his face. The expression of his silent face was peculiar; it showed, though not a muscle moved, though not a feature stirred, the presence of some very painful thought. I could not believe that my words had given birth to this thought, but I did consider it possible that they might have called it into fuller being; quickly repentant I began to apologise, or to try to apologise, the sting out of my words.

"You know, David, that you and mother are not like me, you both have plenty to interest you here. Mother has the schools, and, oh! a thousand other things, and you have the place and the farm."

"And I have my little lad."

"Of course – I forgot baby."

"Yes, Gwladys," said David, rousing himself and shaking off his depression, "I have my son, and he won't leave me, thank God. I am sorry you find your home dull, my dear. I have always wanted you to love it, there is no place like it on earth to me."

He took my hand very gently, and removed it from his arm, then walked with great strides into the house. His face and manner filled me with an undefined sense of gloom and remorse.

I followed him like a guilty thing. I would not even go into the drawing-room to bid mother good-night, but went at once up to my own room. When I got there, I locked the door; this conversation had not tended to raise my spirits. As I sat on my bed, I felt very uncomfortable.

What an old, old room it was, and all of oak, floor, walls, ceiling, all highly-polished, and dark with the wear of age. Other Gwladys Morgans had carved their names on the shutters, and had laid down to rest on the great four-post bedstead. Other daughters of the house had stood in the moonlight and watched the silent shining of the waves. Had they too, in their ignorance and folly, longed for the bustle and unrest of the great wide world, had they, too, felt themselves buried alive at Tynycymmer? With David's face in my memory, I did not like these thoughts. I would banish them. I opened a door which divided my room from the nursery, and went noisily in. What an awkward girl I was! I could do nothing like any one else; every door I opened, shut again with a bang, every board my foot pressed, creaked with a sharp note of vengeance. Had nurse Gwen been in the nursery, what a scolding I should have merited, but nurse Gwen was absent, and in the moonlit room I advanced and bent over a little child's cot. In the cot lay a boy of between one and two, a rosy, handsome boy, with sturdy limbs, and great dark-fringed eyes; he was sleeping peacefully, and smiling in his sleep; one little fat hand grasped a curly, woolly toy dog, the other was flung outside the bedclothes; his little pink toes were also bare. With undefined pain still in my heart, and David's face vividly before me, I bent down and kissed the child. I kissed him passionately, forgetting his peculiar sensitiveness to touch. He started from his light slumbers with a shrill baby cry, his dark eyes opened wide. I took him out of his crib, and paced up and down with him. For a wonder I managed to soothe him, skilfully addressing him in my softest tones, rubbing my forehead against his soft cheek, and patting his back. The moon had left this side of the house, and the room was in complete shadow, but I did not think of lighting a candle, for to the child in my arms the darkness was too dense for any earthly candle to remove; he was David's little lad, and he was blind.

Chapter Three

Some Day, you will See that he is Noble

I have said that David's great characteristic was strength, but by this I do not at all mean to imply that he was clever. No one ever yet had called David clever. When at school he had won only second or third class prizes, and at Oxford very few honours had come in his way.

He had a low opinion of his own abilities, and considered himself a rather stupid, lumbering kind of fellow, not put into the world to make a commotion, but simply, as far as in him lay, to do his duty.

David was never known to lecture any one; he never, in the whole course of his life, gave a piece of gratuitous advice; he could and did advise when his advice was directly demanded, but he was diffident of his own opinion, and did not consider it worth a great deal. To the sinners he was always intensely pitiful, and so gentle and sorrowful over the erring, that many people must have supposed he knew all about their weaknesses, and must once have been the blackest of black sheep himself.

No, David possessed none of the characteristics of genius; he was neither clever nor ambitious. To be in all men's mouths, and spoken highly of by the world, would not have suited him at all; he cared, we some of us thought, almost too little for man's opinion, and I have even on one occasion heard Owen call him poor-spirited.

But all the same, I am not wrong in saying that David's great, and grand, and distinguishing characteristic was strength. He possessed strength of body, soul, and spirit, to a remarkable degree. Long ago, in the past ages, there were men of our house, men who ate roast beef, and quaffed beer and cider, and knew nothing of the weak effeminacy of tea and coffee; these were the men who would laugh at a nerve ache, who possessed iron frames, and were of goodly stature. Of course we degenerated since then, our lives became less simple, and more luxurious, and our men and women in their paler cheeks and slighter frames, and bodies capable of feeling bodily suffering, bore witness to the change.

But David was a Morgan of the old race – tall, upright, broad, with massive features, neither handsome nor graceful, but strong as a lion. He had never in his life known an ache, or a day's serious illness. When Owen and I suffered so much with the measles, David did not even stay in bed; so also with whooping-cough, so also with all other childish maladies. He caught them of course, but they passed over him lightly as a summer breeze, never once ruffling his brow, or taking the colour from his cheek. Yes, David was strong in body, and he was also strong in mind; without possessing talent, he had what was better, sense; he knew which path was the wisest to tread in, which course of action would lead, not to the happiest, but to the best result. His mind was of that calm and rare order, which decides quickly, and once for all; he was never troubled with indecision, and he never asked of others, "What shall I do here? There is a lion in my path at this juncture, how shall I overcome him?" No, he slew his own lions, and in a silent warfare, which gave no token of the tears and blood expended by the victorious warrior.

But the strongest part of David, that which made him the man he was, was his soul; and here, he had asked for and obtained, the aid of a higher Power.

His was the sort of character that never could have got on without the conscious presence of a God. His soul must be anchored upon some rock which would balance the whole equilibrium of a grand but simple nature.

His faith was primitive, and undisturbed by modern doubts. He took the commandments of God in their obvious and literal meaning, he believed what the apostle said when he told men to "pray without ceasing;" he hearkened to him again, when he entreated men to "search the Scriptures;" he was a man of few rather than of many words, but he always found some to cry to God with; he cared

very little for books, but he read his Bible daily. Thus his views of life were clear and unclouded. He was put into the world to do his duty. His duty was to love God better than, and his neighbour as well as, himself. This simple rule of action comprises much, and here David acted right nobly, and proved the strength of his soul. And he was early tried, for our father died when he was twelve years old, and then the most obvious part of the duty which stared him in the face lay in the text, "Bear ye one another's burdens." This was one of David's plainest and earliest duties; a duty which he performed humbly, hardly knowing that he performed it at all. Others leant upon him, and he bore their burdens, so fulfilling the law of Christ.

I think I may truly say of David, that he was the most self-sacrificing man I ever met.

But for all that, for all his gentleness, his kindness, his affection, he was not my favourite brother, nor was he my mother's favourite son.

I remember an early incident which revealed this fact in my mother's heart, and perhaps unduly biassed my own.

I was standing, shortly after my father's death, in the deep recess of the nursery window – I was standing there watching David and Owen, both home for their holidays, pacing up and down on the gravel sweep in front of the house. David was very strong, and showed his superior strength in his great size even then, but Owen was very beautiful. David was stout and clumsy, Owen slightly made and graceful. As I watched them, mother came behind me, put her arms round my tiny waist, kissed my brow, and whispered as she looked at the two lads —

"My noble boy!"

"Which? mother," I asked.

"My Owen," replied mother.

I opened my eyes very wide, gazed again with new wisdom at the boys, perceived the superior beauty of the one, worshipped the beauty, and from this time I loved Owen best.

And Owen was very lovable, Owen was beautiful, brilliant, gay, with lofty ambitions, and versatile showy talents. If his affections wanted depth, they never wanted outward warmth. His smile was a thing to remember, his caress was worth waiting six months to obtain. How well I remember those summer holidays, when he flashed like the sunshine into the dull old house, when his whistle and gay laugh sounded from parlour to cellar. When Owen was at home, Tynycymmer was the happiest place in the world to me; then mother put on her best gowns, and wore her most festive air, then my lessons, always scant and desultory, were thrown to the four winds, and I was allowed unbridled liberty. What fishing expeditions we made all round the coast! how daring were our exploits!

I was much younger than my brothers, but the brothers were always gentle to the only little sister – both the brothers – but while I oftenest rode on David's broad shoulder, I received most caresses and most loving words from Owen, so I loved Owen best. So too with mother, she thought very highly of that broad-shouldered, plain-faced, sensible lad, who was so ready to fly at her slightest bidding, so anxious to execute her smallest command. She said over and over again that David was the best boy that widowed mother ever possessed, and that he was the comfort of her life. But her eye never brightened at his approach, as it did when Owen came and sat by her side; to David she gave her approval, but to Owen she gave of the fulness of her mother's love.

He was an exacting boy, and from those who gave much, he demanded more.

Though David was the eldest and the heir, Owen had double his allowance of pocket money when at school; but then Owen was delicate, fastidious, refined; he needed small indulgences, that would have been wasted on David's coarser strength. He was taught accomplishments, for he was an inborn artist, and his musical ear was fine. At Oxford he entered an expensive and learned college, but then his intellect was of the first order. For every indulgence he demanded, an excuse was found; and for every granted indulgence, he was only loved the more.

To the worship of his women folks, Owen returned an easy, nonchalant regard; but David he loved, to David he gave his strongest and deepest affection. And yet David was the only one who

opposed him, the only one who was not carried away by his fascinations, the only one who read him aright; and some of the heaviest burdens of David's youth, had been borne because of, and through Owen. I heard it dimly whispered, first in the early college days, something about Owen and his wild oats. It came to me through the servants, and I did not know what it meant. I was an innocent country child, I had never even read a novel. Owen was sowing his wild oats. I remember puzzling over the phrased I should have forgotten what was to me so meaningless an expression, but for some events that happened about the same time. Mother got some letters, which she would not show to me, which she carried away to her own room to read, returning to my presence, some time after, with her eyes red with weeping. Then there was a visit from a man, a lawyer, nurse Gwen informed me, who brought with him piles of papers, and was closeted with mother for the best part of a day; and soon after, most wonderful of all, David came home suddenly, in the middle of the term, came home without Owen, and I was informed that Owen had gone abroad for a time, and that David was not going back to Oxford any more. David settled down quietly at home, without taking his degree, and his coming of age, which took place a couple of months after, was let pass without any celebration. This made a deep impression on me, for we four, mother, David, Owen, and I, had so often spoken of it, and of the grand things that should then be done. Never a Morgan had come of age yet, without oxen being roasted whole, without beer and cider flowing freely, without dancing and festivity. But this Morgan stepped into his honours quietly; the day unnoticed, except by an extra kiss from mother and sister, his brother far away, his own brow thoughtful, and already slightly careworn.

The tenants were angry, and voted him stingy – close – an unworthy son of the ancient race, no true chip of the old block, and fresh signs of what they considered closeness and nearness, were soon forthcoming. Several servants, amongst them the housekeeper, were dismissed, the establishment was put upon a smaller scale, a humble pony phaeton was substituted for the old and time-honoured family coach. I was twelve years old at that time, a good deal with nurse Gwen, and many words, unmeant for my ears, were heard by me. The substance of them all lay in this remark —

“If the young master gave the tenants any more of his closeness, he would be the least popular Squire Morgan who ever lived at Tynycymmer!”

Indignant, and with tears in my eyes, I sought David, told him what I had heard, and demanded an explanation.

“There is nothing to explain, dear,” he replied. “We have lost some money, and are obliged to retrench for a bit. But don't repeat the servants' foolish talk to the mother, Gwladys, 'twill only pain her.”

After this, we settled down very quietly, no fresh event occurring for some time. David went more and more amongst the people, acquainting himself with every man, woman, and child on the estate, winning his way just in the most natural way into their hearts, learning all about their private history, finding out exactly where the shoe pinched John Thomas, and where Thomas John's sorest trouble lay, until gradually I heard nothing more of his stinginess, but much of his love, and when he took the babies in his arms, and called the tiny children by their names, the mothers prayed God to bless the young squire with a fervour they had never used for the old.

This took place very naturally, and mother's face began to grow contented and happy. Still, Owen never came home; he was spoken of lovingly, hopefully, but neither mother nor David mentioned his return, and I grew tired of asking questions on this subject, and tired of wishing him back. I dreamed dreams of him instead, and imagined with pride the great deeds he must be doing, and the glory he must be winning. So far away, so little mentioned, his return so indefinite, he became clothed with a halo of romance to me. My love grew in intensity, and I magnified my beautiful and gifted brother into a hero. It was just then David's great joy, and also his great trouble, came to him.

We Morgans of Tynycymmer were very proud. Why not? we were poor, old, and Welsh – quite enough to account for any haughtiness we might assume. We believed ourselves to be, if not the direct descendants, at least a collateral branch of that Morgan, son of Leir, some time a king of this land,

after whom this county was named. There was a time when to be a true Morgan, of Glamorganshire, meant more to its happy possessor than many a higher sounding title. Of course that time and its glory had passed away, years had deprived us of more than the old stout hearts of our ancient ancestors; our gold had also taken to itself wings, our grey and ivy-covered home had fallen, much of it, into ruins, and our broad and goodly acres passed into the unloving hands of strangers. Still, firmly as the limpet to the rock, the poorer we grew, the more did we attach ourselves to the wild old Welsh country. Each squire of Tynycymmer bringing home, in his turn, a bride who often possessed neither money nor beauty; but always something else, without which she could never have married a Morgan of our house – she had pure, untainted Welsh blood in her veins. None of the Morgans were so foolish, so unfaithful to the old stock, as to marry an English woman; if our gold was scant, our blood at least was pure. So we went on, each fresh master of Tynycymmer a little poorer than his father, when suddenly and unexpectedly a chance came in our way. There was born into the world, a Morgan either more sensible or more lucky than his progenitors; a Morgan who, going abroad to seek a bride, brought home one who not only could boast of blue Welsh blood, but had also beauty and a fortune. This lucky Morgan was my father, his rich and lovely bride my mother.

Esther Williams was the daughter of a Glamorganshire man. Her father possessed, at the other side of the county, a fine extent of coal country, and a very large fortune was he able to bestow upon his only child. The fortune consisted of some coalfields, and with the rental from these my father was able to restore Tynycymmer to much of its ancient splendour. My mother's family was not so old as ours, but being true Welsh, and having beauty and a fortune, this fact was graciously overlooked by us, and we condescended to use her money to our own aggrandisement. I have said that we were a proud family – but of us all, there was none who so upheld the family traditions, and who so rejoiced in the family honour, as the one who was herself only a Morgan by marriage, my mother.

Of the days when she was only Esther Williams, she never cared to speak; her money was never “her money,” but the “Morgans’ money.” Money that brought fresh glory to the old house, was honoured indeed – she regarded herself individually, as a humble instrument destined to do much good – for herself, her appearance, her character, she felt little pride or satisfaction; but for the sake of the name given to her by her husband, she would indeed walk with stately mien, and uphold her dignity to the last; and well she could do it, for though a little woman, she was singularly dignified and graceful-looking, and was, in short, every inch worthy of the high position she believed herself to have attained. She possessed the dark eyes and raven locks of the true Welsh woman. How I came to be fair-haired and blue-eyed remained a mystery, and was reckoned rather a disgrace. When a tiny child, Gwen had impressed this fact upon me, and I remember blushing and looking distressed, when fair people were mentioned. Yes, my mother was a beautiful woman; I have a vivid memory of her, as she looked in my father's lifetime, dressed in the time-honoured black velvet, the old jewels flashing in her hair, as bending down her haughty dark face, until it touched my fair one, she filled my greedy and receptive little brain with the ancient stories of our house.

I heard of the ghosts and the deeds of vengeance from Gwen, of the fairies and deeds of glory from mother.

Yes, my mother was very beautiful, and with the exception of two specks in the fair fruit of her heart, the best woman I know. How loving she was, how tender, how strong, how brave! But the specks marred the full perfection: one speck was her pride, the other her unjust preference for Owen. At the time of which I write, I did not consider this preference unjust, for I too loved Owen best, but even then I had felt the full power of her pride. I mention it here in order to make David's sorrow and David's joy more fully understood.

Those retrenchments which took place when David came of age, were no small sorrow to mother. When the housekeeper went away, and many of the servants were dismissed, when the old coach was not sold, but put out of sight in some unused coach-house, when the horses were parted with to the highest bidder; – mother felt pain, though of her feelings she never spoke, and to their

expression she gave no vent; her pride was hurt by this lowering of the Morgans' importance, but her very pride was its own shield in preventing its betrayal, and *she* knew then, though I did not, why these things were done. But a year later, that pride received another blow. I remember the beginning of it. The postman brought to us a letter. I say to *us*, for all our letters, with the exception of those few received when David returned so suddenly from Oxford, were public property. This letter contained news. A distant cousin of mother's had died in London; had died and left one orphan daughter quite unprovided for. This cousin was a Williams, but though calling himself by the well-known Welsh name, was no true Welshman: his family had long ago settled in England, had married English wives, and had become, in mother's opinion, nobodies. The unprovided daughter had not written herself, knew nothing indeed about the letter, but a friend of hers in despair how best to help her, had ventured to inform Mrs Morgan of Tynycymmer, that her cousin's child was a pauper.

"Have her here on a visit," said David, promptly.

Mother, her heart full of sorrow and pity for the lonely girl, assented at once. Amy Williams was invited and came.

And now came mother's trouble and the shock to her pride, for David fell in love with the penniless English girl.

I am not surprised at it, and looking back on it now, I am glad. Amy was the only person I ever met who understood David, and who appreciated him. I am glad for his sake, and hers, that they had one short happy year together. For however tender and considerate David was with mother, on this point he was firm; he thought more of Amy's happiness than mother's pride, and he married Amy though mother opposed it bitterly. Of course I did not hear a great deal about it. I was very young, only fourteen, at the time, and mother ever kept her feelings well under control, and not one of the servants even guessed how much she disapproved of this marriage; but I remember on David's and Amy's wedding-day, running in to mother to show her my white muslin bride's-maid's dress, and mother kissing me, and then saying, with concentrated bitterness, "Had Owen been the eldest son, whatever his faults, he would never have given me the pain David has done to-day."

Fond and proud as I was of Owen, I did not quite like mother to say that of David on his wedding-day. Well, he and Amy were married; they spent a week in North Wales, another week in London, and then came home. Mother wanted to transfer the reins of authority into Amy's hands, but Amy would not take them; she was the meekest little thing I ever knew, she was quite too meek to please me. I never got to know her, I never really cared for her; but she suited our David, and he suited her. His presence was to her as the sun to the flower, and truly he was a great sun for the little fragile thing to bask in. I am sure she had a great deal in her which David alone could draw out, for after talking to her he always looked happy, his whole face in a glow. Looking back on it now, I can recall nothing brighter than David's face during that year. I have said that Amy was meek, I never remember her showing any spirit but once, but that occasion I shall not quickly forget. She and I were sitting together in the arbour overhanging the sea. She was not very well, and was lying back in a little wicker chair, and I was seated at her feet, arranging different coloured sea weeds. As I worked, I talked of Owen. I did not mean it in the least, but as I spoke of my favourite brother, of his beauty and talent, I unconsciously used David as a foil to show him off by. I was speaking more to myself than to Amy. I was not thinking of her at all.

Suddenly she started to her feet, her pale face grew crimson, her soft brown eyes flashed angrily.

"Gwladys," she said, "little as you think of David now, some day you will see that he is a nobler man than a thousand of your Owens."

"How can you speak so, when you don't know Owen," I retorted, the hot blood of the Morgans flying into my cheeks at this unexpected show of spirit.

"I know David," she replied, and she burst into tears.

Poor little Amy! that night a son was born to her and David, and that night she died.

Perhaps had mother and I understood Amy, and cared for her more, David might have told us something of the sorrow which followed quickly on his joy. Most of the time between Amy's death and her funeral, he spent in her room. After the funeral he went away for a week; he told neither mother nor me where he was going! we never heard how or in what part of the world he spent that week; on his return he never mentioned the subject. But his face, which on the day of Amy's funeral was convulsed with agony, was after that short absence peaceful, and, I say it without expecting to be misunderstood, even happy.

It was about this time I really noticed what a religious man my brother was. With all his want of talent, he knew the Bible very well, and I think he was well acquainted with God. It must have been God who gave him power to act as he did now, for if ever a man truly loved a woman, he loved Amy; but he never showed his sorrow to mother and me; he never appeared before us with a gloomy brow. After a time even, his face awoke into that pathetic joy which follows the right reception of a great sorrow.

I *did* once see him, when he thought no one was by, dropping great tears over the baby.

"My boy, my little motherless lad," I heard him say.

I longed to go up and comfort him; I longed to tell him that I cared for Amy now, but I did not dare. Mother, too, who had not loved her in life, could not speak of her in death. So David could only tell his sorrow to God, and God comforted and heard him, and the baby grew, healthy, handsome, strong, worthy in his beauty and his strength of the proudest Morgan of the race, and David loved him; but, alas! the little lad was blind.

Chapter Four

Owen is Coming Home

I managed to hush little David into a sound sleep, before Gwen returned from her supper in the old servants' hall. When I had done so, I went back to my room and undressed quickly, hoping much that I too would soon sink into slumber, for I was in that semi-frightened and semi-excited condition, when Gwen's stories about the Green Lady – our Welsh Banshee – and other ghostly legends, would come popping under my eyelids, and forcing me to look about the room with undefined uneasiness. I did sleep soundly, however; and in the morning the brilliant sunshine, the dancing waves which I could even see from my bed, put all my uncomfortable fears to rest. To-day I was to visit Hereford, for the first time to set my foot on English soil. Laid out on a chair close by, lay my clean white muslin dress. I must get up at once, for we were to start early, the distance from our part of Glamorganshire to Hereford being very considerable. I rose and approached the window with a dancing step; the day was perfection, a few feathery clouds floated here and there in the clear blue of the sky, the sea quivered in thousands of jubilant silver waves, the trees crimsoned into all the fulness of their autumnal beauty. My heart responded to the brightness of the morning; ages back lay the ugly dreams and discontented thoughts of yesterday. I was no longer enduring the slow torture of a death-in-life existence. I was breathing the free air of a world full of love, glory, happiness. In short, I was a gay girl of sixteen, going out for a holiday. I put on my white dress. I tied blue ribbon wherever blue ribbon could be tied. I had never worn a bonnet in my life, so I perched a broad white hat over my clustering fair curls, made a few grimaces at myself in the glass, for reflecting back a pink and white and blue-eyed image, instead of the proper dark splendour of the true Morgans; consoled myself with the thought that even blue eyes could take in the beauties of Hereford, and ears protected by a fair skin, could yet communicate to the soul some musical joys. I danced downstairs, kissed mother and David rapturously, trod on Gyp's tail, but was too much excited, and too impatient, to pat him or beg his pardon; found, under existing circumstances, the eating of a commonplace ordinary breakfast, a feat wholly impossible; seated myself in the pony-carriage full ten minutes before it started; jumped out again, at the risk of breaking my neck, to adorn the ponies' heads with a few of the last summer roses; stuck a splendid crimson bud into my own belt; hurried David off some minutes too soon for the train; forgot to kiss mother, and blew a few of those delightful salutes vigorously at her instead; finally, started with a full clear hurrah, coming from a pair of very healthy lungs, prompted by a heart filled, brimming over, leaping up with irrepressible joy. Oh! that summer morning! Oh! that young and happy heart! Could I have guessed then, what almost all men have to learn, that not under the cloudless sky, not by the summer sea, but with the pitiless rain dropping, and the angry waves leaping high, and threatening to engulf all that life holds dearest, have most of God's creation to find their Creator? Could I have guessed that on this summer day the first tiny cloud was to appear, faint as the speck of a man's hand, which was to show me, in the awful gloom of sorrow, the face of my God?

From my fancied woes, I was to plunge into the stern reality, and it was all to begin to-day. When we got into the train, and were whirling away in the direction of that border county, which was to represent England to me, my excitement had so far toned down as to allow me to observe David, and David's face gave to my sensations a feeling scarcely of uneasiness, but scarcely, either, of added joy. Any one who did not know him intimately, would have said what a happy, genial-looking man my brother was. Not a wrinkle showed on his broad forehead, and no shadow lurked in his kind eyes; but I, who knew him, recognised an expression which had come into his face once or twice, but was hardly habitual to it. I could not have told, on that summer morning, what the expression meant, or what it testified. I could not have read it in my childish joy; but now, in the sober light of memory,

I recall David's face as it looked on that September day, and in the knowledge born of my sorrow, I can tell something of its story.

My brother had looked like this twice before – once on his unexpected return from Oxford; once, more strongly, when Amy died. The look on David's face to-day, was the look born of a resolution – the resolution of a strong man to do his duty, at the risk of personal pain. As I said, I read nothing of this at the time; but his face touched me. I remembered that I had rather pained him last night. We had the carriage to ourselves. I bent forward and kissed him; tossed my hat off, and laid my head against his breast. In this attitude, I raised to him the happiest of faces, and spoke the happiest of words.

“David, the world is just delicious, and I do love you.”

David, a man of few words, responded with a smile, and his invariable expression —

“That's right, little woman.”

After a time, he began to speak of the festival.

He had been at the last celebration of the Three Choirs at Hereford. He told me a few of his sensations then, and also something of what he felt yesterday; he had a true Welshman's love of music, and he spoke enthusiastically.

“Yes, Gwladys, it lifts one up,” he said, in conclusion, “I'd like to listen to those choirs in the old cathedral, or go to the top of the Brecon – 'tis much the same, the sensation, I mean – they both lift one into finer air. And what a grand thing that is, little woman,” he added, “I mean when anything lifts us right out of ourselves. I mean when we cease to look down at our feet, and cease to look for ever at our own poor sorrows, and gaze right straight away from them all into the face of God.”

“Yes,” I said, in a puzzled voice, for of course I knew nothing of these sensations; then, still in my childish manner, “I expect to enjoy it beyond anything; for you know, David, I have never been in any cathedral except Llandaff, and I have never heard the ‘Messiah.’”

“Well, my dear, you will enjoy it to-day; but more the second time, I doubt not.”

“Why? David.”

“Because there are depths in it, which life must teach you to understand.”

“But, dear David, I often have had *such* sad thoughts.”

“Poor child!” a touch of his hand on my head, then no more words from either of us.

Just before we reached Hereford, as I was drawing on my long white gloves, which I had thrown aside as an unpleasant restraint during the journey, David said one thing more, “When the service is over, Gwladys, we will walk round the Close, if you don't mind, for I have got something I want to tell you.”

It darted into my head, at these words, that perhaps I was going to London after all. The thought remained for only an instant, it was quickly crowded out, with the host of new sensations which all compressed themselves into the next few hours.

No, I shall never forget it, when I have grey hairs I shall remember it. I may marry some day, and have children, and then again grandchildren, and I shall ever reserve as one of the sweetest, rarest stories, the kind of story one tells to a little sick child, or whispers on Sunday evenings, what I felt when I first listened to Handel's “Messiah.” David had said that I should care more for it the second time. This was possible, for my feelings now were hardly those of pleasure, even to-day depths were stirred within me, which must respond with a tension akin to pain. I had been in a light and holiday mood, my gay heart was all in the sunshine of a butterfly and unawakened existence; and the music, while it aroused me, brought with it a sense of shadow, of oppression which mingled with my joy. Heaven ceased to be a myth, an uncertain possibility, as I listened to the full burst of the choruses, or held my breath as one single voice floated through the air in quivering notes of sweetness. What had I thought, hitherto, of Jesus Christ? I had given to His history an intellectual belief. I had assented to the fact that He had borne my sins, and “The Lord had laid on Him the iniquity of us all;” but with the ponderous notes of the heavy music, came the crushing knowledge that *my* iniquities had added

to His sorrows, and helped to make Him acquainted with grief. I was in no sense a religious girl; but when “Come unto Him, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and He will give you rest,” reached my ears, I felt vibrating through my heart strings, the certainty that some day I should need this rest. “Take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him.”

“His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.” I looked at David, the book had fallen from his hands, his fine face was full of a kind of radiance, and the burden which had taken from him Amy, and the yoke which bade him resign his own will and deny himself, seemed to be borne with a sense of rejoicing which testified to the truth of how lightly even heavy sorrow can sit on a man, when with it God gives him rest.

The opening words, “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God,” would bring their own message at a not very distant day; but now they only spoke to me, something as a mother addresses a too happy, too wildly-exultant child, when she says in her tenderest tones, “Come and rest here in my arms for a little while, between your play.” Yes, I was only a child as yet, at play with life; but the music awoke in me the possible future, the possible working day, the possible time of rain, the possible storm, the possible need of a shelter from its blast. To heighten the effect of the music, came the effect of the cathedral itself. It is not a very beautiful English cathedral, but it was the first I had seen. Having never revelled in the glories of Westminster, I could appreciate the old grey walls of Hereford; and what man had done in the form of column and pillar, of transept and roof, the sun touched into fulness of life and colouring to-day. The grey walls had many coloured reflections from the painted windows, the grand old nave lay in a flood of light, and golden gleams penetrated into dusky corners, and brought into strong relief the symmetry and beauty of aisle and transept, triforium and clerestory. I mention all this – I try to touch it up with the colour with which it filled my own mind – because in the old cathedral of Hereford I left behind me the golden, unconsciously happy existence of childhood; because I, Gwladys, when I stepped outside into the Cathedral Close, and put my white-gloved hand inside David’s arm, and looked up expectantly into David’s face, was about to taste my first cup of life’s sorrow. I was never again to be an unconscious child, fretting over imaginary griefs, and exulting in imaginary delights.

“Gwladys,” said David, looking down at me, and speaking slowly, as though the words gave him pain, “Owen is coming home.”

Chapter Five

Why did you Hesitate?

Let no one suppose that in their delivery these words brought with them sorrow. I had been walking with my usual dancing motion, and it is true, that when David spoke, I stood still, faced round, and gazed at him earnestly, it is also true that the colour left my cheeks, and my eyes filled with tears, but my emotions were pleasurable, my tears were tears of joy.

Owen coming home!

Nobody quite knew how I loved Owen, how *my* heart had longed for him, how many castles in the air I had built, with him for their hero.

In all possible and impossible dreams of my own future, Owen had figured as the grand central thought. Owen would show me the world, Owen would let me live with him. He had promised me this when I was a little child, and he was a fine noble-looking youth, and I had believed him, I believed him still. I had longed and yearned for him, I had never forgotten him. My love for my good and sober brother David was very calm and sisterly, but my love for Owen was the romance of my existence. And now he was coming home, crowned with laurels, doubtless. For he had been away so long, he had left us so suddenly and mysteriously, that only could his absence be accounted for by supposing that my beautiful and noble brother had gone on some very great, and important, and dangerous mission, from which he would return now, crowned with honour and glory.

"Oh, David!" I exclaimed, when I could find my voice, "is it true? How very, very happy I am."

"Yes, Gwladys," replied David, "it is true; but let us walk up and down this path, it is quite quiet here, and I have a story to tell you about Owen."

"How glad I am," I repeated, "I love him more than any one, and I quite knew how it would be, I always guessed it, I knew he would come back covered with glory. Yes, David, go on, tell me quickly, what did my darling do?"

I was rather impatient, and I wondered why David did not reply more joyfully, why, indeed, at first he did not speak at all. I could see no reason for his silence, the crowds of men and women who had filled the cathedral had dispersed, had wandered to hotels for refreshment, or gone to explore, if strangers, the beauties and antiquities the old town possessed. There was no one to molest or disturb us, as we walked up and down in this quiet part of the Close.

"Well, David," I said, "go on, tell me about my darling."

"Yes," said David, "I will tell you, but I have got something else to say first."

"What?" I asked, impatiently.

"This; you have made a mistake about Owen, you imagine him to be what he is not."

"What do I imagine him to be?" I asked, angrily, for David's tone put into my heart the falsest idea it ever entertained – namely, that he was jealous of my greater love for Owen.

"What do I imagine?" I asked.

"You imagine that Owen is a hero. Now, Gwladys, you cannot love Owen too much, nor ever show your love to him too much, but you can do him no good whatever, if you start with a false idea of him."

I was silent, too amazed at these words to reply at once.

"I tell you this, Gwladys," continued David, "because I really believe it is in your power to help Owen. Nay, more, I want you to help him."

Still I said nothing, the idea suggested by David's words might be flattering, but it was too startling to be taken in its full significance at first. What did it mean? In all my dreams of Owen I had never contemplated his requiring help from me; but David had said that my ideas were false, my dreams mistaken. I woke up into full and excited listening, at his next words.

“And now I mean to tell you why you have not seen Owen for so long – why he has been away from us all these years.”

“Four years, now,” I said. “Yes, David, I have often wondered why you gave me no reason for his long, long absence. I said nothing, but I felt it a good bit – I did indeed.”

“It was a story you could hardly hear when you were a little child. Even now I only tell it to you because of Owen’s unlooked-for and unexpected return; because, as I say, I want you to help Owen; but even now I shall only tell you its outline.”

“David, you speak of Owen’s return as if you were not glad – as if it were not quite the happiest news in the world.”

“It is not that, my dear.”

“But why? Do you not love him?”

“Most truly I love him.”

“Well, what is the story? How mysterious you are!”

“Yes, I am glad,” continued David, speaking more to himself than to me. “I suppose I ought to be *quite* glad – to have no distrust. How faithless Amy would call me!”

When he mentioned Amy, I knew he had forgotten my presence – the name made me patient. I waited quietly for his next remark.

As I have said, he was a man of few words. His ideas moved slowly, and his language hardly came fluently.

“There are two kinds of love,” he began, still in his indirect way. “There is the love that thinks the object it loves perfection, and will see no fault in it.”

“Yes,” I interrupted, enthusiastically; “I know of that love – it is the only kind worth having.”

“I cannot agree with you, dear. That love may be deep and intense, but it is not great. There is a love which sees faults in the object of its love, but loves on through all. Such – ”

“Such love I should not care for,” I interrupted.

“Such love I could not live without, Gwladys. Such is the Divine love.”

“But God’s love is not like ours,” I said.

“No, dear; and I have only made the remark to justify myself – for, Gwladys, I have loved Owen through his faults.”

I started impatiently; but David had now launched on his tale, and would not be interrupted.

“Yes,” he continued, “I loved and love Owen through his faults. I know that mother thought him perfect, and so did you. I am not surprised at either of your feelings with regard to him – he was undoubtedly very brilliant, and on the surface, Gwladys, you might almost have said that so noble a form must have held a noble soul. I do not say this will *never* be so; but this was not so when you knew him last.”

I would have spoken again, but David laid his hand on my arm, to silence me.

“He had much of good in him; but he was not noble; he had one great weakness – pleasure was dearer to him than duty. Even when a little lad he would leave his tasks unlearned, to play for half an hour longer with you; this was a small thing, but it grew, Gwladys – it grew. And he had great temptations. It was much harder for him to do the right than for me; he was so brilliant – so – so, not clever – but so ready-witted. He was a great favourite in society, and society brought with it heaps of temptations. He struggled against the temptations, but he did not struggle hard enough; and his natural weakness, his great love for pleasure, grew on the food he gave it.

“We were in different colleges, and did not see each other every day. He made some friends whose characters – well, they were not men he ought to know. I spoke to him about this; poor fellow! it has lain on my heart often, that I may have spoken harshly, taking on myself elder brother airs, and made myself a sort of mentor. I *could* not do this intentionally, but it is possible I may have done it unintentionally. I felt hot on the subject, for the fellows I spoke against seemed to me low, in every sense beneath his notice. I did not know that even then, they had a hold on him which he could not,

even if he would, shake off. He got angry, he – quarrelled with me. After this, I did not see him for some time. I blame myself again here, for I might have gone to him, but I did not. He had said some words which hurt me, and I stayed away.” David paused. “Yes,” he continued, taking up his narrative without any comment from me, “I remember, it was the middle of the term. I was sitting with some fellows after dinner; we were smoking in my rooms. I remember how the sun looked on the water, and how jolly I felt. We were talking of my coming of age, and I had asked all these fellows to help me to celebrate the event at Tynycymmer, when suddenly a man I knew came to the door, and called me out; he was a great friend of mine, he looked awfully white and grave; he put his arm inside mine, and we went down through Christ Church meadows to the edge of the river. There, as we stood together looking down into the river, and nodding, as if nothing were the matter, to some men of our college as they rowed past us; there, as we stood and listened to the splash of the oars, my friend told me about Owen. A long story, Gwladys. Shall I ever forget the spot where I stood and listened to it? As I said, I am not going to tell you the tale; it was one of disgrace – weakness – and sin. Evil companions had done most of it, but Owen had done some. It was a long story, dating back from the day of his first arrival; but now the climax had come – Owen had fallen – had sinned. I never knew until my friend spoke, how much I loved Owen. I blamed myself bitterly. I was his elder brother. I might have so treated him as to win his confidence, and to save him from this. He had fallen by means of the very temptations that must assail such a nature as his, and I, instead of holding out a helping hand, had stood aloof from him. In this moment of agony, when I learned all about his sin, I blamed myself as much as him. I started off at once to find him, I could not reproach him. I could only blame myself. When I did this, he burst into tears.”

Here David paused, and I tried to speak, but could not.

“Owen had sinned,” he continued, “and in such a way that the most public exposure seemed inevitable. To avoid this, to give him one chance for the future, I would do anything. There was one loophole of escape, and through that loophole, if any strength of mine could drag him, I was determined Owen should come. I could not leave Oxford, but I wrote to my mother. Her assistance was necessary, but I felt little doubt of her complying. I was not wrong. She helped me, as I knew she would. Nay, I think she was more eager than I. Between us we saved Owen.”

Here David paused, and taking out his handkerchief, he wiped some moisture from his brow.

His words were hardly either impassioned or eloquent; but no one knew, who did not hear them, with what pain they came slowly up from his heart.

Then I ventured to put the question which was hanging on the top of my lips —

“What was his sin?”

“The sin of weakness, Gwladys. The sad lacking of moral courage to say no, when no should be said. The putting pleasure before duty, that was the beginning of it. Then evil companions came round; temptation was yielded to, and, at last, the very men who had ruined and tempted him, managed to escape, and he was left to bear the brunt of everything. However, my dear, this is a story you need not know. I have told you the little I have, because, now that Owen is coming home, I want you to have a truer idea of his character, so that you may help him better. I need and want you to help him, Gwladys. I have said all this to you to-day for no other reason.”

I said nothing. David looked into my face, and I looked into his, then he went on.

“After that dreadful time at Oxford he went abroad, and I came home. Now he, too, is coming home.”

“To live with us at Tynycymmer?” I asked.

“No, no, my dear; he is coming home with a definite purpose; I have had a long letter from Owen, I must tell you some of it. He always wrote to me while he was away, but his letters, though tolerably cheerful, and fairly hopeful, were reserved, and seemed always to have something behind. I used to fear for him. Dear fellow, dear, dear fellow, my weak heart fears for him still, and yet with

it all, I am proud and thankful. There *is* something great in Owen, otherwise this would never have so weighed on his mind.

“I must tell you that to save Owen, I had to spend money; that really was no sacrifice to me, a thing not worth mentioning, but it seems to have weighed much on him. In his letter, he told me that he has never ceased working hard at his profession, learning all he can about it. He says that he is now nearly qualified to work as a mechanical engineer; and in that particular department he has made mining engineering his special study. In his letter he also said that he had done this with a definite hope and object.

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