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PRINCESS

By M. G. McCLELLAND.

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CHAPTER XVII.

Thorne came across the room and stood opposite.

The weeks rolled by, and gradually Mrs. Mason grew convalescent. She was still confined to her room, but the worst of the pain was over, and she could lie on the sofa by the fireside and have Berkeley read aloud to her in the evenings. Blanche, if she happened to be there, would sit on a low chair beside the sofa, busy with some delicate bit of fancy work, and later in the evening Berke would take her home. Sometimes Pocahontas would bring her work and listen, or pretend to listen, with the rest, but oftener she would go into the parlor and play dreamily to herself for hours. She had taken up her music industriously and practiced hard in her spare moments.

She had been playing a long time one evening in April, and had left the piano for a low chair beside the open fire. She was tired. Although spring had come, the evenings were chill and the room was large. Her hands were cold and she spread them out to the blaze. The heavy curtains billowed and sank and billowed again, as intrusive puffs of wind crept officiously through the crevices of the old casements. Blanche and Berkeley were with her mother and they were reading "Lorna Doone." She had read the book a week ago and did not care to hear it over.

The front door opened quietly—it was always on the latch—and footsteps came along the hall; quick, eager footsteps, straight to the parlor door; the knob turned. No need to turn her head, no need to question of her heart whose step, whose hand that was, to guess whose presence filled the room.

Thorne came across the room, and stood opposite, a great light of joy in his eyes, his hands outstretched for hers. Benumbed with many emotions, Pocahontas half rose, an inarticulate murmur dying on her lips. Thorne put her gently back into her chair and drew one for himself up to the hearth rug near her; he was willing to keep silence for a little space, to give her time to recover herself; he was satisfied for the moment with the sense of her nearness, and his heart was filled with the joy of seeing her once more. The lamps were lit, but burning dimly. Thorne rose and turned both to their fullest brilliancy; he must have light to see his love.

"I want to look at you, Princess," he said gently, seeking her eyes, with a look in his not to be misunderstood; "it has been so long—so cruelly long, my darling, since I have looked on your sweet face. You must not call the others. For this first meeting I want but you—you only, my love! my queen!" His voice lingered over the terms of endearment with exquisite tenderness.

Pocahontas was silent—for her life she could not have spoken then. Her gray eyes had an appealing, terrified look as they met his; her trembling hands clasped and unclasped in her lap.

"How frightened you look, my darling," Thorne murmured, speaking softly and keeping a tight rein over himself. "Your eyes are like a startled fawn's. Have I been too abrupt—two thoughtless and inconsiderate? You would forgive me, love, if you knew how I have longed for you; have yearned for this meeting as Dives yearned for water—as the condemned yearn for reprieve. Have you no smile for me, sweetheart—no word of welcome for the man whose heaven is your love? You knew I would come. You knew I loved you, Princess."

"Yes"—the word was breathed rather than uttered, but he heard it and made a half movement forward, the light in his eyes glowing more passionately. Still, he held himself in check; he would give her time.

"You knew I loved you, Princess," he repeated. "Yes, you must have known. Love like mine could not be concealed; it must burn its way through all obstacles from my heart to yours, melting and fusing them into one. Don't try to speak yet, love, there is no need to answer unless you wish. I can wait—for I am near you."

Pocahontas rallied her forces resolutely, called up her pride, her womanhood, her sense of the wrong he had done her. If she should give way an instant—if she should yield a hair's breadth she would be lost. The look in his eyes, the tenderness of his voice, appeared to sap the foundations of her resolution and to turn her heart to wax within her.

"Why have you come?" she wailed, her tone one of passionate reproach. "Had you not done harm enough? Why have you come?"

Thorne started slightly, but commanded himself. It was the former marriage, the divorce; she felt it keenly—every woman must; some cursed meddler had told her.

"My darling," he answered with patient tenderness, "you know why I have come—why it was impossible for me to keep away. I love you, Princess, as a man loves but once in his life. Will you come to me? Will you be my wife?"

The girl shook her head and moved her hand with a gesture of denial; words she had none.

"I know of what you are thinking, Princess. I know the idea that has taken possession of your mind. You have heard of my former marriage and you know that the woman who was my wife still lives. Is it not so?" She bent her head in mute assent. Thorne gazed at her pale, resolute face with his brows knit heavily, and then continued:

"Listen to me, Princess. That woman—Ethel Ross—is my wife no longer, even in name; she ceased to be my wife in fact two years ago. Our lives have drifted utterly asunder. It was her will, and I acquiesced in it, for she had never loved me, and I—when my idiotic infatuation for her heartless, diabolical beauty passed—had ceased to love her. At last even my presence became a trouble to her, which she was at no pains to conceal. The breach between us widened with the years, until nothing remained to us but the galling strain of a useless fetter. Now that is broken and we are free"—there was an exultant ring in his voice, as though his freedom were precious to him.

"Were you bound or free that night at Shirley?" questioned the girl slowly and steadily.

A flush crept warmly over Thorne's dark face and lost itself in the waves of his hair. He realized that he would meet with more opposition here than he had anticipated. No matter. The prize was worth fighting for—worth winning at any cost. His determination increased with the force opposed to it, and so did his desire.

"In heart and thought I was free, but in fact I was bound," he acknowledged. "The words I spoke on the steps that night escaped me unawares. I was tortured by jealousy and tempted by love. I had no right to speak them then. Nothing can excuse or palliate the weakness which allowed me to. I should have waited until I could come to you untrammeled—as now. I attempt no justification of my madness, Princess. I have no excuse but my love, and can only sue for pardon. You will forgive me, sweetheart"—using the old word tenderly—"for the sake of my great love. It's my only plea." His voice took a pleading tone as he advanced the plea hardest of all for a woman to steel her heart against.

Pocahontas gazed at him in bewilderment, her mind grappling with an idea that appalled her, her face blanching with apprehension and her form cowering as from an expected blow.

"Must I understand, Mr. Thorne, that love for me suggested the thought of divorcing your wife?" she questioned hoarsely. "That I came between you and caused this horrible thing? It is not—it cannot be true. God above! Have I fallen so low! Am I guilty of this terrible sin?"

Thorne's quick brain recognized instantly the danger of allowing this idea to obtain possession of her mind. Fool! he thought furiously, why had not he been more cautious, more circumspect? Dexterously he set himself to remove the idea or weaken its force—to prove her guiltless in her own eyes.

"Princess," he said, meeting the honest, agonized eyes squarely, "I want to tell you the story of my marriage with Ethel Ross, and of my subsequent life with her. I had not intended to harass you with it until later, if at all; but now I deem it best you should become acquainted with it, and from my lips. I will explain many things.

Then he briefly related all the miserable commonplace story. He glossed over nothing, palliated nothing; bearing hardly now on his wife, and again on himself, but striving to show throughout how opposed to true marriage was this marriage, how far removed from a perfect union was this union. Pocahontas listened with intense, strained interest, following every word, sometimes almost anticipating them. Her heart ached for him—ached wearily. Life had been so hard upon him; he had suffered so. With a woman's involuntary hardness to woman, she raised the blame from Thorne's shoulders and heaped it upon those of his wife. Her love and her sympathy became his advocates and pleaded for him at the bar of her judgment. Her heart yearned over him with infinite compassion.

If Thorne had kept silence and left the matter there, and waited until she should have adapted herself to the new conditions, should have assimilated the new influences which crowded thick upon her, it would have been better. But he could not keep silent—he had no patience to wait. He could not realize that the things which were as a thrice told tale to him had an overwhelming newness for her. That the influences which had molded his thought were very far removed from the influences which had made her what she was. He could not understand that, while the world had progressed, this isolated community had remained stationary, and that the principles and rules of conduct among them still were those which had governed his world in the beginning of the century.

He saw that her sympathy had been aroused, that she suffered for and with him, and he could not forbear from striving to push the advantage. He went on speaking earnestly; he demonstrated that this marriage which had proved so disastrous was in truth no marriage, and that its annulment was just and right, for where there was no love, he argued, there could be no marriage. With all the sophistry, with all the subtle arguments of which he was master—and they were neither weak nor few—he assailed her. Every power of his brilliant intellect, every weapon of his mental armory, all the force of his indomitable will was brought to bear upon her—and brought to bear in vain.

Calm, pale, resolute, she faced him—her clear eyes meeting his, her nervous hands folded tightly together. She would not give way. In their earnestness both had risen, and they stood facing each other on the hearth rug, their eyes nearly on a level. The man's hand rested on the mantel and quivered with the intensity of his excitement. The woman's hung straight before her, motionless, but wrung together until the knuckles showed hard through the tense skin. She would not give way.

Thorne was startled and perplexed. Opposition he was prepared for, argument he could meet and possibly refute, tears and reproaches he could subdue—but dumb, quiet resistance baffled him. Suddenly he abandoned reason, cast self control to the winds and gave the reins to feeling. If he could not convince her through the head, he would try a surer road—the heart. Though proof against argument, would she be proof against love? He knew she loved him. He felt it in every fiber of his being, every pulse of his heart—and he was determined to win her at all hazards. His she must be. His she should be.

"My love!" he murmured, extending his arms with an appealing tenderness of look and gesture. "Come to me. Lay your sweet face on my breast, your dear arms around my neck. I need you, Princess; my heart cries out for you and will not be denied. I cannot live without you. You are mine—mine alone, and I claim your love; claim your life. What is that woman? What is any woman to me save you, my darling—you only? My love! My love! It is my very life for which I am pleading. Have you no pity—no love for the man whose heart is calling you to come?"

Pocahontas shivered and bent slightly forward; her face was white as death, her eyes strange and troubled. The strength and fire of his passion drew her toward him as a magnet draws steel. Was she yielding? Would she give way?

Suddenly she started erect again and drew back again. All the emotions, prejudices, thoughts of her past life; all the principles, scruples, influences amid which she had been reared crowded back on her and asserted their power. She could not do this thing. A chasm black as the grave, hopeless as death yawned at her feet; a barrier as high as heaven erected itself before her.

"I cannot come," she wailed in anguish. "Have you no mercy, no pity for me? There is a barrier between us that I dare not level; a chasm that I cannot cross."

"There is no barrier," responded Thorne vehemently, "and I will acknowledge none. I am a free man; you are a free woman, and there is no law, human or divine, to keep us asunder, save the law of your own will. If there be a chasm—which I do not see; which I swear does not exist—I will cross it. If you cannot come to me, I can come to you, and I will. You are mine and I will hold you—here in my arms, on my breast, in my heart. Have you and hold you, so help me God!"

With a quick stride he crossed the small space between them and stood close, but still not touching her.

"Have you no pity?" she moaned.

"None," he answered hoarsely. "Have you any for me—for us both? I love you—how well, God knows, I was not aware until tonight—and you love me I hope and believe. There is nothing between us save an idle scruple, which even the censorious world does not share. I ask you to commit no sin; to share no disgrace. I ask you to be my wife before the face of day; before the eyes of men; in the sight of heaven!"

Could she be his wife in the sight of heaven? It was all so strange to her, she could not understand. Words, carelessly heard and scarcely heeded, came back to her and rung their changes in her brain with ceaseless iteration. It was like a knell.

"Nesbit," she said wearily, using his name unconsciously, "listen and understand me. In the eyes of the law and of men you are free; but I cannot see it so. In my eyes you are still bound."

"I am not bound," denied Thorne fiercely, bringing his hand down heavily on the mantel; "whoever tells you that I am lies, and the truth is not in him. I've told you all—and yet not all. Ethel Ross, the woman who was my wife—whom you say is my wife still—is about to marry again. To join her life—as free and separate from mine as though we had never met—to the life of another man. Isn't that enough? Can't you see how completely every tie between us is severed?"

Pocahontas shook her head. "I cannot understand you and you will not understand me," she said mournfully; "her sin will not lessen our sin, nor her unholy marriage make ours pure and righteous."

Thorne stamped his foot. "Do you wish to madden me?" he exclaimed; "there is no sin, I tell you, nor would our marriage be unholy. You are torturing us both for nothing on God's earth but a scruple. I've argued, reasoned and pleaded with you, and you refuse to weigh the argument, to listen to the reason, to yield to the persuasion. You are hard and opinionated and obstinate. You set up your individual judgment against the verdict of the world and deem it infallible. You are hard to yourself and cruelly hard to me, for, as there is a God in heaven, I believe you love me, even as I love you. Oh, my love! my love!" His voice melted, his arms closed around her. "Why do you try me beyond my strength? Why are you so cruel to us both? See; I hold you safely; your heart beats on mine; your dear face is on my breast. Stay with me, my darling, my own, my wife," and soft, clinging, passionate kisses pressed down on hair and cheek and lips; kisses that burned like flame, that thrilled like strong wine.

For a moment Pocahontas lay quietly in his arms, lulled into quiescence. Then she wrenched herself free and moved away from him. It had been said of her that she could be hard upon occasion: the occasion had arisen, and she was hard.

"Go!" she said; her face was as ashes, but her voice firm; "it is you who are cruel; you who are blind and obstinate. You will neither see nor understand why this thing may not be. I have showed you my thought, and you will not bend; implored you to have pity, and you are merciless. And yet you talk of love! You love me, and would sacrifice me to your love; love me, and would break down the bulwarks I have been taught to consider righteous to gratify your love. I do not understand; love seemed to me so different, so noble and unselfish. Leave me; I am tired; I want to think it out alone."

Thorne stood silent, his head bent in thought. "Yes," he said presently, "it will be better so. You are overwrought—your mind is worn with excitement; you need rest. Tomorrow, next week, the week after, this matter will wear a different aspect. I can wait, and I will come again. It will be different then."

"It will never be different." The voice was low, the gray eyes had a hopeless look.

Thorne repeated his assertion in the gentle, persistent tone of one who is patient with the unreasonableness of a frightened child. His determination to win success never faltered, rather it hardened with opposition into adamant, but he was beginning to realize his blunder. He had overwhelmed her, had brought about an upheaval of her world so violent that, in her bewilderment, her dread of chaos, she instinctively laid hold on the old supports and clung to them with desperation. She must have time to think, to familiarize herself with the strange emotions, to adapt herself to the changed conditions. Only one other thing would he say. He held in reserve a card which he knew ere now had proved all powerful with conscientious women. To gain his end he would stop at nothing. He took both her hands in his and played his card deliberately.

"Think over it well," he said; "weigh every argument, test every scruple. My life is in your hands. I am not a religious man, nor a good man, but you can make me both. Give me the heaven that I crave, the heaven of your love and I will be by it ennobled into faith in that other heaven, of which it will be the foretaste. But refuse; deny the soul that cries out to you; thrust aside the hands that seek to clasp you, as the truest, noblest, honest thing they have ever touched, and—on your head be it. I have placed the responsibility in your hands and there it rests."

With a lingering look into her eyes and a fervent pressure of her hands, he turned and slowly left the room.

Back to the mind of the girl, standing motionless where he had left her, came, unwished and unbidden, the memory of a summer night out yonder beside the flowing river. She seemed to see again the swaying of the branches in the moonlight, and to hear the lulling wash of the water against the shore; to hear also a quiet, manly voice fighting down its pain, lest the knowledge of it should wound her, saying, simply and bravely: "Don't be unhappy about me, dear. I'll worry through the pain in time or grow accustomed to it. It's tough just at first, but I'll pull through somehow. It shall not spoil my life either, although it must mar it; a man must be a pitiful fellow who lets himself go to the bad because the woman he loves won't have him. God means every man to hold up his own weight in this world. I'd as soon knock a woman down as throw the blame of a wasted life upon her."

Plain words, poorly arranged and simply spoken, for the man who uttered them was not clever, but brave, manly words, for all that. The girl turned from the unwelcome memory with a sharp, impatient sigh that was almost a groan. It pained her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Pocahontas told her mother of Thorne's proposal and her rejection of it.

The next day Thorne quietly returned to New York without making any attempt to see or communicate with Pocahontas again. He had considered the situation earnestly, and decided that it would be his wisest course. Like a skilled general, he recognized the value of delay. Failing to carry the citadel by assault he resorted to strategy. In the girl's love for him he possessed a powerful ally. There was a traitor in the camp of his adversary, and sooner or later it would be betrayed into his hands; of this he was convinced, and the conviction fortified him to trust to the result of time.

Pride and principle were in arms now, holding love in check, but it would not be so always; soon her woman's heart would speak, would wield an influence more powerful and resistless from the concentration engendered by repression. Now, too, she was braced by the excitement of personal resistance; she was measuring her will with his will, her strength with his strength. Let him withdraw for a time, and what would follow? The outside pressure, the immediate need of concentrated effort removed, there would inevitably ensue a state of collapse; purpose and prejudice would sink exhausted, the strain on the will relax, the weapons fall from the nerveless hands. Then the heart would rally its forces, would collect its strength for the field; external conflict suspended, internal strife would commence, fierce, cruel and relentless as internecine struggles ever are. Was there any doubt of the result of the battle? It only needed time. Time, quietude and earnest thought, free from the disturbing, stimulating power of his presence.

He could wait; every affection of her loving, constant heart, every fiber of her self sacrificing nature would fight for him; prejudices, even the most deeply rooted, must yield in time to love. When he should come again it would be to claim his victory.

No thought of abandoning the pursuit crossed his brain; no impulse of ruth stirred his heart. Did she suffer? So did he—keenly, cruelly. Let her end this torture for them both; let her lay aside these senseless scruples and place her hand in his. His arms were open to her, his heart yearning for her; let her come and anchor in the sure haven of his love.

Pocahontas told her mother very quietly of Thorne's visit, his proposal and her rejection of it; just the bare facts, without comment or elaboration. But Mrs. Mason had a mother's insight and could read between the lines; she did not harass her daughter with many words, even of approval, or with questions; she simply drew the sweet, young face down to her bosom a moment and held it there with tender kisses. Nor did Berkeley, to whom his mother communicated the fact, volunteer any comment to his sister. After what had passed, Thorne's proposal was not a surprise, and to them the girl's answer was a foregone conclusion. Poor child! the brother thought impatiently, the mother wistfully, how much bitterness would have been spared her could she only have loved Jim Byrd.

During the weeks that followed Thorne's second return north the two families were thrown together more and more intimately. Blanche's engagement and Warner's increased illness served to break down all restraints. All through the winter the boy had steadily lost ground, and as the spring progressed, instead of rallying as they hoped, his decline became more rapid. The best advice was had, but science could only bear the announcement of bereavement; there was nothing to be done, the doctors said, save to alleviate pain and let the end come peacefully; it was needless to worry the boy with change or bootless experiments. Even to the mother's willfully blinded eyes and falsely fed hopes conviction came at last that her son's days were numbered.

Berkeley, Royall and other of the neighboring gentlemen took turns in aiding with the nursing and the night watches, as is the custom in southern country neighborhoods where professional nurses are unknown.

Of all the kindly friends that watched and tended him through long weeks of illness the one that Warner learned to love the best was Berkeley Mason. There was a thoughtful strength in the nature of the man who had suffered, the soldier who had endured, which the weaker nature recognized and rested on. To the General during this time of trouble the young man became, in very truth, a son; the old debt of kindness was canceled and a new account opened with a change in the balance.

As is usual in cases of lingering consumption, the end was very sudden—so sudden, in fact, that Norma, still away with her northern friends, received the telegram too late for word or look or farewell kiss. She was traveling with Mrs. Vincent and the message followed her from place to place.

On a still, beautiful May morning, Warner was laid to rest in the Lanarth graveyard beside poor Temple Mason. It was the boy's own request, and his mother felt constrained to comply with it, although she would have preferred interring the remains of her child beside those of her own people at Greenwood. The story of the young life beating itself out against prison bars had taken strong hold of the lad's imagination, and the fancy grew that he, too, would sleep more sweetly under the shadow of the old cedars in the land the young soldier had loved so well.

Norma and Pocahontas stood near each other beside the new made grave, and as they quitted the inclosure their hands met for an instant coldly. Pocahontas tried not to harbor resentment, but she could not forget whose hand it had been that had struck her the first bitter blow.

After Warner's death Mrs. Smith appeared to collapse, mentally as well as bodily. She remained day after day shut in his chamber, brooding silently and rejecting with dumb apathy all sympathy and consolation. Her strength and appetite declined, and her interest in life deserted her, leaving a hopeless quiescence that was inexpressibly pitiful. Her husband, in alarm for her life and reason, hurriedly decided to break up the establishment at Shirley and remove her for a time from surroundings that constantly reminded her of her loss.

In the beginning of June the move was made, the house closed, the servants dismissed and the care of the estate turned over to Berkeley. With the dawning of summer the birds of passage winged their flight northward.

CHAPTER XIX.

"My daughter," she said, "this can make no difference."

There comes a time in human affairs, whether of nations or individuals, when a dull, exhausted calm appears to fall upon them—a period of repose, a lull after the excitement of hurried events, a pause in which to draw breath for the renewal of the story. Grateful are these interludes, and necessary for the preservation of true equipoise, but they are not interesting, and in novels all description of them is carelessly skipped over. In stories we want events, not lingerings.

The summer passed quietly for the family at Lanarth, broken only by the usual social happenings, visits from the "Byrd girls," as they were still called, with their husbands and little ones; a marriage, a christening, letters from Jim and Susie, and measles among the little Garnetts. In August Pocahontas and her mother went for a month to Piedmont, Virginia, to try the medicinal waters for the latter's rheumatism, and after their return home Berkeley took a holiday and ran up to the Adirondacks to see Blanche.

Poor Mrs. Smith did not rally as her family had hoped, and the physicians—as is customary when a case baffles their skill—all recommended further and more complete change. They must take her abroad and try what the excitement of foreign travel would do toward preventing her from sinking into confirmed invalidism. General Smith, who had abandoned every care and interest for the purpose of devoting himself to his wife, embraced the proposal with eagerness, and insisted on the experiment being tried as speedily as possible.

Blanche could not help some murmers, both inwardly and to Berkeley, at the long separation in store for them, and the lover, although himself a little rueful, heartened her up with bright prophecies for their future. An immediate marriage for them was out of the question, for since Warner's death Mrs. Smith clung to her younger daughter with absolute dependence. The last of September was decided on for sailing, as that would allow General Smith time to enter Percival at school, and to complete other necessary arrangements before the family departure. The management of Shirley would remain in Berkeley's hands, and the house would continue closed until the return of the travelers.

To Nesbit Thorne the summer had appeared interminable, and every golden hour had been shot with lead. He had passed the season partly in the Adirondacks with his relatives and partly in New York; but he was always oppressed with the same miserable unrest, the same weary longing. It would appear at times impossible for him to hold to his resolution of waiting until after the remarriage of his ci-devant wife before again seeking Pocahontas. He yearned to be with her, to hold her hands and gaze into her eyes, so intensely at times that it required the utmost exertion of his will to prevent himself from boarding the first southward bound train. He was forced continually to remind himself that if he should yield to the impulse he should be guilty of egregious folly—having waited so long, he could surely wait a few weeks longer. Ethel's marriage would dissipate every shadow of a tie between them, and with that fact fully established Pocahontas must hear him.

In deference to Cumberland prejudice Mrs. Thorne's marriage had been deferred until September—to that lady's great annoyance. She saw no reason for delay, nor any necessity for humoring the Cumberland old fogyism, and in delicate, ambiguous terms she conveyed this opinion to her lover, and discovered, to her surprise and indignation, that he disagreed with her. Some concession was due to the feelings of his family, and he did not wish to be hurried; on this ground he intrenched himself and defied the world to move him. When Cecil made a point he held to it with the obstinacy characteristic of mediocrity, and Ethel, not being exactly in a position to dictate, and requiring moreover some portion of the Cumberland countenance, was forced to acquiesce.

Some weeks before the day appointed for her marriage Ethel removed herself and her belongings to the house of a poor and plastic aunt, who was in the habit of allowing herself to be run into any mold her niece should require. According to their agreement, Ethel gave her whilom husband due notice of her plans, and Thorne at once removed the child to Brooklyn and placed him under the care of a sister of his father's, a gentle elderly widow who had known sorrow. His house he put in the hands of an agent to rent or sell, furnished, only removing such articles as had belonged to his parents. The house was hateful to him, and he felt that should the beautiful new life of which he dreamed ever dawn for him, it must be set amid different surroundings from those which had framed his matrimonial failure.

Still in deference to the Cumberland prejudice, the remarriage of Ethel Thorne took place very quietly. It was a morning wedding, graced only by the presence of a few indifferent relatives and a small crowd of curious friends. The two Misses Cumberland, handsome, heavy browed women, after much discussion in the family bosom and some fraternal persuasion, had allowed themselves to be seduced into attending the obnoxious nuptials and shedding the light of the family countenance upon the ill doing pair. Very austere and forbidding they looked as they seated themselves, reprobatively, in a pew far removed from the chancel, and their light was no better than the veriest darkness.

Twelve hours after the marriage had been published to the world another marked paper was speeding southward, addressed this time to Pocahontas and accompanied by a thick, closely written letter. Thorne had decided that it would be better to send a messenger before this time to prepare the way for him. In his letter Thorne touched but lightly on the point at issue between them, thinking it better to take it for granted that her view had modified, if not changed. The strength of his cause lay in his love, his loneliness, his yearning need of her. On these themes he dwelt with all the eloquence of which he was master, and the letter closed with a passionate appeal, in which he poured out the long repressed fire of his love: "My darling, tell me I may come to you—or rather tell me nothing; I will understand and interpret your silence rightly. You are proud, my beautiful love, and in all things I will spare you—in all things be genile to you; in all things save this—I cannot give you up; I will not give you up. I will wait here for another week, and if I do not hear from you I will start for Virginia at once—with joy and pride and enduring thankfulness."

Pocahontas took the paper to her mother's room, the letter she put quietly away. She would answer it, but not yet; at night—when the house should be quiet she would answer it.

The lines containing the brief announcement were at the head of the list:

MARRIED.

CUMBERLAND—THORNE.—At the Church of the Holy Trinity, Sept. 21, 18—, by the Rev. John Sylvestus, Cecil Cumberland to Ethel Ross Thorne, both of this city.

Mrs. Mason laid the paper on the little stand beside her chair. "My daughter," she said, looking up at the girl seriously, "this can make no difference."

"No, mother," very quietly, "no difference, but I thought you ought to know."

In her own room, at night, when the house was still, the girl sat with the letter in her lap thinking. The moonlight poured in through the open window and made a map on the floor, whereon slender shadows traced rivers, mountains and boundaries. In the trees outside the night insects chirped, and bats darted and circled in the warm air.

If only she could think that this made a difference. She was so weary of the struggle. The arguments which formerly sustained her had, with careless iteration, lost their force; her battleworn mind longed to throw down its arms in unconditional surrender. Her upbringing had been so different; this thing was not regarded by the world in the same light as it appeared to her; was she overstrained, opinionated, censorious? Nesbit had called her so—was he right? Who was she, to set up her feeble judgment against the world's verdict—to condemn and criticise society's decision?

Divorce must be—even Scripture allowed that; a limb must be sacrificed sometimes that a life might be saved. True, the process had always appeared to her in her ignorance an operation of cruel anguish, from which the patient came halt or lame or blind for life, but what if she should be wrong? What if the present crablike propensity for the renewal of the missing part was the natural and sensible condition. This wicked woman—this wife who had recklessly thrown aside life's choicest gift—was happy; she had replaced her lopped off limb with a new one, and it was well with her. Norma had said long ago that "any woman who trifled with her happiness because of a scruple was a fool." Was Norma right? Was her hesitation senseless, doltish folly?

The boundaries of the moonlight shifted; a long irregular cape, like a shining finger, stretched out across the floor and touched the hem of her dress. From behind the screen in the fireplace came a little sound, as though a mouse were rustling fragments of torn paper.

If she could only recognize that this marriage had made a difference. It was so wearisome, this strife with a heart that would not admit defeat, a love that fought on and would not die. What was required of her?—nothing; nothing save to sit with folded hands and let happiness flood her life like sunshine—only to lay away the letter in her desk and wait silently for her lover to come to her. Her lover—the man whose influence had changed the monotonous calm of existence into the pulsing passion of living—the man who loved her; whom she loved. No words were need-

(*Continued on fourth page.*)