

# **The Woman Who Saved Me**

Frances Hodgson Burnett

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# The Woman Who Saved Me

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## Part I

THE medical man was holding my wrist and talking, and I was not listening. In the first place, I knew more about myself than he could tell me; in the second, I should scarcely have understood what he was saying if I had listened; and in the third, I was in so listless and indifferent a condition of mind that I did not care to listen — did not care to answer — did not even care to look, as I was half unconsciously looking at the dead brown leaves twisting in the eddying wind that whirled them down the street.

How dull it all looked! how dull the dragging days were! how I was beginning to hate the big, obtrusive stone houses, and dread the long gray patch of November sky showing itself over the roof, and alternately drifting leaden clouds and drizzling leaden rain that made the wide flagged pavement wet and shining with the slop of passing feet! I had always disliked the English winter, but I had never lost spirit in any other winter as I had during this one. Three months of its slow, dull birth had added a hundred-fold to the listless misery which had become almost a part of myself, and more than once I had almost hoped that its ending would end my life. If during that wretched autumn I had hoped for anything, I had hoped for this, however vaguely; but the time had often been when I had been so utterly indifferent to life or death that I had not even cared to wish for either.

I was in one of the worst of these moods to-day, and when the doctor came it was at its strongest; so, as he talked to me I scarcely listened, but looked out at the whirling leaves and dust in silence. But, though I was not listening, I could not help hearing his last words.

"And as I told Mr. Leith," he was saying, "I cannot be responsible for the result if you do not go."

I began to listen then, though I scarcely knew why.

"Go?" I repeated, "where am I to go, and why?"

"Anywhere," was his emphatic reply. "To the sea-side — to some country place — to Yarmouth — to Swansea — to Switzerland — anywhere away from London."

"But why?" I asked again, beginning to wonder if the man did not, after all, know something more than I had fancied.

"Because," looking at me steadily, "if you remain here you will die in two months, and Mr. Leith will blame me."

"Will he?" I muttered, half unconsciously — "would he blame anybody?"

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Doctor Branaird looked at me again — keenly this time — but he said nothing.

"And I may go anywhere out of London?" I said, after a short pause.

"Anywhere," he answered — "though I should advise the sea-side."

"And you have spoken to my husband about it?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?" I asked this unwillingly.

"He said that he hoped the change would improve your health."

I looked out at the leaves in the street again. It was so like him. I knew what it meant. I must decide for myself. He did not care. I might live if I cared for life — die if I chose.

"I have a friend in Bamborough," I said after a while, "I will go there."

Dr. Branaird rose and took his hat.

"Do," he advised — "Bamborough is just the place I should have chosen for you, had I not thought it best to let you choose for yourself. There is plenty of strong sea-breeze on the Cornish coast, and your friend will improve the tone of your nervous system if she is anything of a woman."

So he left me, and so I turned to the street again and stared blankly at the dead leaves and the patch of gray November sky. But I could not watch it long. For the first time in many long months a certain quiet excitement crept upon me, brought about by the thoughts that drifted into my mind concerning my friend at Bamborough — concerning Lisbeth Grant.

We had been girls together and we had loved each other. We had been to each other what girls seldom are — we had been faithful, though for four years Lisbeth had been a wife, and though she was the mother of three children. I knew she was faithful to me still, notwithstanding that since her wedding-day we had never seen each other.

"My hands are full, Gervase," she had written to me once, — "and my heart is full too — to the brim. Hugh and his children fill it as they fill the hands. They give me no time to stagnate. They keep the hands at work and the heart at work too — loving, hoping, thinking for them — and I am sure the beating is more in time for the work the children bring. But they have not crowded you out, Gervase, you may be sure of that. There is all the more room because they have made it larger. The children have made me love you more than ever."

"Yes," I said to myself as I got up from my chair — "yes, I will go to Lisbeth. If I am going to die, better die with Lisbeth than here."

I did not love my husband — I had never loved him, I told myself. It was not even love that had made us happy in the first months of our marriage. It had only been a weak mockery after all, and we had both learned the truth too late. Even the little child that had scarcely drawn a breath could not soften our hearts towards each other. And, worse than this, out of my wretchedness had grown a shadow of sin and despair. I looked backwards sometimes to a fancy I had long left behind — to a fancy that I thought my husband had long blotted out, and looking backward so, I fell into a wonder at what now seemed my blindness. That man would have loved me; there would have come no bitter words from him, — that man would have been true to me through life and death; his love would never have died, burning out the more rapidly for the very strength of its first flame.

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I did not often wait for my husband, but I waited for him that night. I wanted to tell him of my decision. Not that I fancied he would care for my absence or presence, — he was past that; we were both past it. Still I would show just so much grace as to make a pretense of consulting him.

"I am going to Bamborough," I said to him, "to visit Lisbeth Grant. Doctor Branaird advises me to do so." And I glanced at him carelessly.

He had just come in, and tossed his hat upon a sofa in his careless fashion, and now he was standing upon the hearth looking silently into the fire. He did not raise his eyes.

"I hope you will find your health improved," he said.

"I hope so," I returned briefly.

But he was not quite easy, I could see, and I must confess to some slight surprise. The old black lines came out on his forehead, but they were not angry lines; they were something new to me in their changed expression. He was so fidgety too, and even more taciturn than usual. But I took no notice of the change until after we had supped and he had been reading for half an hour, when he suddenly broke the silence by flinging his book upon the sofa after his hat and speaking to me abruptly:

"You are not worse than usual," he said, "are you?" I did not look up this time, but went on working steadily. "I think not," I answered; "I am sure not."

I would not tell him the truth. He should have had sight clear enough to discover it for himself.

He got up, and coming to the side of the hearth upon which I was seated, caught hold of my netting silk, so stopping my work.

"That is not true," he said — "it is one of your fables."

"One of my fables?" I returned quietly.

He took hold of my hand and held it up so that my loose sleeve fell back from my arm.

"Yes," he said, "it is a fable. Look at your arm — look at your wrist, see how your bracelet fits it. It was as round as a baby's before" — and here seeming to recollect himself, he let my hand drop.

I looked at it myself as I settled my sleeve again, and as I looked I smiled faintly. My beautiful arms had been my pride once, and now the heavy gold bracelet slipped loosely up and down over a white surface that was little more than delicate skin and slender bone. Perhaps after all Doctor Branaird was right — I had better leave London.

So the next day I went to Bamborough and Lisbeth. But early in the morning, as I stood before the mirror in my dressing-room, my husband came to me. I was surprised again, for of late there had been so little pretense at sentiment between us that I had scarcely expected he would care to make any farewells. But I discovered in a very few moments that this was what he had come for, and I felt myself excited and nervous. This surprised me too. If we had loved each other I might have understood the feeling; but since we did not love each other, what could it mean? He stood by my toilet-table, looking pale and agitated for a few minutes after his entrance, and then he broke the awkward silence:

"You will need money," he began.

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I interrupted him.

"No," I said, "you mistake. I do not need any. Thank you."

"Very well," he answered, "if that is the case I suppose it is useless to offer you any. But if you should require anything — wish anything — I hope you will write to me about it."

"Thank you again," I replied. "I will write to you once a week whether I wish anything or not."

He lingered a few minutes longer and then turned to go.

"Then as I shall not see you again I will bid you good-bye," he said; "you will not return until — "

"I recover or die," I interrupted. "If Bamborough agrees with me no better than London has done, Doctor Branaird says I shall die in two months; so good-bye."

I scarcely knew what feeling of desperation prompted me to make a speech so reckless, but it was a feeling desperate enough.

"Gervase!" he exclaimed.

I would not look at him, but in the mirror I saw reflected on his face a pallor as ashen as the pallor of death. Sometimes in after months I wished that I had looked at him more straightly.

But he said nothing more — only waited a moment and then came to my side.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye," I answered. And the next moment he had touched my cheek lightly with his lips and was gone.

It was late when I reached Bamborough, and the tide was coming in under a red, fog-obscured sun. I looked out of the carriage window as I drove from the station through the narrow streets, and looking I saw little more than an immense expanse of sea, and a dry and wet brown beach where fishermen were lounging, fishermen's children shouting and playing, and fishermen's boats drawn up and fastened upon the sand with chains. I had always felt drawn towards the sea with a curious sense of fascination, and this evening the fresh salt air blew so coolly upon my cheeks that I had a quiet, half-defined feeling that I was not sorry I had come to Bamborough.

And at her open door Lisbeth stood ready to welcome me, and my first glance showed me the same handsome womanly face and handsome womanly figure, neither face nor figure a whit unfamiliar or a whit less perfect for the crown of comely matronhood. Two of her children clung to her flowing skirts, her handsome baby clasped her neck, and as she stood there smiling, I thought of Cordelia, and my heart warmed, — Lisbeth's strength and beauty always warmed it.

She caught me in the one arm her child left free, and drew me into the hall, pressing her warm red lips to mine.

"My dear!" she said, "my dearest!" and it seemed as though she had for the moment no other words to utter. Her very voice warmed me and put life into my veins. I clung to her, enjoying her tender caresses, but scarcely speaking a word, for at least Lisbeth understood what my silence often meant and would not reproach me with it. She did not ask me any questions. It seemed that in an instant she comprehended everything, for she carried me to my room and took off my wrappings as if I had been a child and she my mother. I could not help noticing the mother touch in her strong, gentle hands, and the mother tone in her voice.

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"I will show you my children as soon as you are rested," she said, "but you must rest first, Gervase. Your husband's telegram did not prepare me for seeing you look so changed."

I felt a sudden pulsation of the heart.

"My husband's telegram!" I said — "did he send one?"

"Yes," she answered, "very early this morning, to say that you were coming."

I answered not a word. Why had he done this? If we had loved each other, I should have known that it was because he could not brook the thought of my meeting even the momentary chill of an unexpected reception; but now the news only startled me.

But though she spoke no word, Lisbeth's eyes lost nothing. I knew that she was searching me even when she spoke of other things, and I knew that she was searching me when, after she had called her children into the room, she stood near me in her royal mother pride, with her little one in her fair, strong arms.

"This is Hugh's boy," she said, touching the crumpled brown curls of her eldest. "Look up, Lawrence. See, Gervase — Hugh's eyes."

They were magnificent children. Lisbeth's perfect, healthful nature had dowered them, and her unwarped, fearless soul shone out of their childish eyes. A desolate aching filled my breast as Lisbeth stood near me with them. Her life was so full — mine so empty. I had never loved children very much — had seen very little of them — and of my own baby I had seen nothing but the poor little cold body I had for one moment caught a glimpse of as Roger bent over it, shaken with a man's terrible weeping. I thought of this when I looked at Lisbeth's children, but no tears came into my eyes. I was wondering vaguely if I were a wicked woman, and if my faded, empty life were my punishment. I do not think I had ever loved my baby or wept for it — Roger had ceased to love me long before its birth, and I had learned to know what a mistake I had made.

But I lived again that day as I talked to Lisbeth. We sat by the fire after tea — she with her child on her breast, and I on a lounging chair near her, until the heavy fog had crept over the sands and up into the little town, hiding even the red lights. We had so much to say, and we were alone together for the first time since we had parted four years ago. Hugh was absent on business, and the children had gone to bed, so we went over the four years again — but until the close of the evening Lisbeth said nothing of my husband. At length, after a silence, she lifted her eyes from the fire and looked at me tenderly — searchingly — sadly.

"And you are happy, Gervase?" she said. I could not answer her at first, but after a silent struggle the words came. I could not tell a lie to Lisbeth.

"Happy! no, I am wretched."

She looked at me for a moment longer and then spoke again.

"Gervase," she said, "if your little child had lived — " I broke in upon her, losing all self-control in a wild, sudden passion of uncontrollable weeping.

"No — no!" I cried out. "Better as it is — far, far better as it is."

She moved her seat nearer to me and drew my head down upon her lap with that tender mother touch.

"Gervase," she said softly, "you think you do not love your husband."

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"How did she know? for she seemed to understand me in an instant. I cried out again in the midst of my passionate sobs.

"I have never loved him," I said — "he has never loved me. It was a mistake — it was all wrong from first to last, and he is wretched too."

It was all told then — the miserable secret that had grown to its full strength in my own heart alone. It was all told in one brief rash speech — no, not quite all. The rest would be a secret forever even from Lisbeth.

But I had wept myself into calmness at last, and we had been talking together again, though with longer silence between our words than there had been before, when in one of these silences I heard the front door open, and felt a great rioting rush of the boisterous sea wind, and there were sounds of a man's footsteps in the hall, and a man's voice flung out a scrap of song: —

"I am come, its deeps are learned —

Come, but there is naught to say:

Married eyes with mine have met,

Silence! Oh! I had my day,

Margaret, Margaret?"

I was trembling from head to foot.

"The rush of night wind has made you shiver," Lisbeth said.

But I scarcely heard her.

"Who is it?" I asked breathlessly, though I knew so well —

"It is Hugh's cousin," was her answer. "I forgot to tell you. It is Ralph Gwynne."

## Part II

I HAD been nearly a month at Bamborough and my health was improving slowly. As Doctor Branaird had prophesied, Lisbeth had strengthened my nerves. Her perfect health and spirits roused me as nothing else would have done, and I found myself growing stronger from their force of example. It might be, too, that since I was relieved from my husband's presence a pressure was removed that had been too heavy for me. But, though I was so much better, I was creeping towards the goal of health very slowly, and it seemed that a breath of renewed pain would undo all.

"You do not gain color fast enough," Lisbeth said to me one morning. "You do not get enough of the sea breeze. You must go out with Ralph again to-day, Gervase."

I had often been out with Ralph.

He looked up first at Lisbeth and then at me.



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"I am entirely at Mrs. Leith's service," he said, "and I think you are right, Lisbeth; she needs more air." I got up and walked to the window, so that my back was turned to both of them, but Ralph Gwynne followed me and looked out over my shoulder.

Bamborough looked better than usual this morning. An adventurous ghost of sunshine was casting a clear bright light over the brown sands and gray waves, and over the huts and boats and sturdy brown-legged children. It gave to Bamborough in November a pretense of fresh animation that three times as much sunshine could not have been able to give to London. So I carelessly remarked to Ralph Gwynne.

"Is it bright enough to tempt you out -- with me?" he said in a low voice.

He knew I was not strong enough to refuse. He had not changed. He was the very Ralph Gwynne who had led me, years before, into a girlish romance that was like a dream of heaven, and had only ended when Fate separated us and put between us and our untold love a whole world. But now it was different. There was more than a whole world between us; there was the past, the present, and the future. I at least had suffered since we bade each other an indefinite farewell -- I at least could not love as I had once loved. Sometimes before the very thought of love my whole nature rose up and battled fiercely. At first I think that I was only indifferent; but in the end I fancied that this man understood me a little, and sorrowed a little over the woman's blunder I had made.

"Let us ask no questions of each other," he had said to me once. "We have both suffered. Let us trust each other."

It was just what I needed. I should never have told him what I felt, but I was not sorry that one human soul understood the misery the dragging days held for me. So this morning as we walked along the beach we were both silent. It was our custom to be oftener silent than inclined to speak. We both listened to the moan of the breakers and watched the long line of foam out at sea; and at last both by one accord stopped where a cluster of rocks sheltered us from the wind. I sat down, but Ralph Gwynne remained standing, with his back against a rock and his arms folded. At length he spoke to me.

"It is three years to-day," he said, "since you were married."

The sudden, hurried beating of my heart almost suffocated me. I had forgotten until this moment, and the rush of old memories overpowered me. I remembered the very day -- just such a day as this, with sunshine warming even the leaden November sky, and whitening the piled edges of the clouds. I had thought it bright then. I remembered too how the day had closed in as I stood at the window of my new home with Roger's arms folded about me and his heart beating against mine. I could scarcely speak steadily, but I managed to do so at length.

"So long?" I said coldly; "yes, I believe you are right. Where were you? How did you learn it?"

He did not look at me; his eyes were fixed steadily on the far-away white line of foam.

"I was in Calcutta," he answered. "The news had been a long time on its way and reached me on this very day -- the day that was to be your wedding-day. I shall not forget it easily."

I dropped my glove, and as I stooped to pick it up a sudden recollection flashed across my brain. One day, three months after our marriage, Roger had come home with a budget of news from Calcutta, and among other things had referred to the intense heat and the prevalence of sunstroke among the foreign inhabitants.

"My informant is one of the travelers for Amboyse Derig," he said, "and he tells me that the very day he left -- the day we were married, Gervase -- one of the salesmen was struck down with it. He was talking to one of our clerks who had just arrived from England -- talking about our wedding too, Hegblase says -- and he saw the young fellow change color and stagger, and in a minute more he fell like a shot. Gwynne his name was, I believe

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— Ralph Gwynne."

So one man had suffered for me at least — one man's love had not died a natural death in a few brief months.

Ralph put his hand into his pocket and drew forth a letter.

"This was handed to me last night," he said. "It bears a London post-mark."

I did not offer to take it for a moment. I knew he had searched me to the core, that he had seen every fruitless pang and bitter humiliation of the past two years. My letters to my husband had been regularly sent, but his answers had been few and far between, and my pride had forced a fresh sting upon me even while I was otherwise indifferent to the neglect. So I hesitated now, and the next moment Ralph Gwynne came to my side as if drawn there by an uncontrollable impulse. A gleam of light shot over his dark face.

"You do not care to take it," he said. "The very sight of it is a new torture. Let me throw it into the sea, Gervase."

His vehemence actually startled me into self-control. "That would be a new reading of old laws," I said. "No, give it to me."

He submitted without a word. But I did not read the letter. It had come too late for perusal, I said to myself. So I held it in my hand carelessly, making a show of an ease I could not feel.

It was in my hand when we returned and I sat down before the fire in Lisbeth's room. The sea breeze had done me no good this morning. I was tired and worn out, and drooping into a chair before I removed my wrappings, sat silent, resting my chin upon my hand and holding the letter loosely.

Lisbeth came in to find me sitting thus, and at her first glance at me I saw a strange shadow cross her face.

"Tired, Gervase?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered briefly.

She crossed the room to the fire and knelt down, on pretense of brightening the hearth a little with the brush she held in her hand. The next minute she turned her fair, gracious face full upon me.

"And you have not read your husband's letter?" she said. "Why, Gervase?"

"Because I am not going to read it," I replied, and then, ruled by some sudden wretched impulse, I flung it into the fire.

But Lisbeth said nothing. I wondered at the time whether it was possible for her calm, healthful nature to comprehend the morbid misery that possessed me. I fancied not. The broad, even current of her life's affection had swept on undisturbed, bearing on its smooth surface many flowers. She could not understand me and my weak miseries and weaker regrets.

I hid my face in my hands when she left the room, and abandoned myself to thought. I could not explain why it was that during this month at Bamborough I had scarcely once thought of returning to London and my husband. If ever my mind had recurred to the thought, I had shrunk from it with a misery almost intense. I felt that I could not go back now unless, as I had hoped, in a coffin, shut out forever from his sight.

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As I sat by the fire I was wondering vaguely how he would meet me if treated thus — whether he would be touched for a moment with some remembrance of those first days of our marriage, when we had at least fancied we loved each other.

Two hot tears falling upon my hand startled me from my reverie just in time to hear Lisbeth coming down stairs with her child in her arms, and singing to it softly. Should we have loved each other better — Roger and I — if my baby had not died, — I asked myself with a pang.

Lisbeth came in and sat down near me again, still singing softly, still holding her baby upon her shoulder as she rocked her chair. O how I envied her her strength and happiness! She was so strong and happy; her handsome baby was so light a burden in her arms; her quietly busy ways so womanly gracious. I looked at her lovely, clear-browed face, and at the coronal of thick light-brown braids across her stately head; I looked at her peaceful eyes, and the soft mouth that seemed made for children's kisses, and, remembering her girlhood, gave the palm to the beauty of her mother life.

Her calm, radiant face struck me to the heart's core. Often during the last year I had told myself that I was only one of the many, that my mistake was only the mistake all women suffer from — the mistake of hoping for a happiness the world cannot hold. But Lisbeth broke down my theory.

I did not write to London again. The correspondence had only been a matter of courtesy at first, and a shadow of neglect could end it.

Ralph Gwynne did not go away, as Lisbeth had told me he intended doing. He had changed his mind, he said. Bamborough agreed with him, and the India house had prolonged his furlough in consideration of his past services and present ill health. He did not look ill, I thought, and I told him so. But he stayed at Bamborough from day to day, and the longer he stayed the more strongly his old power reasserted itself. Not that I loved him. I was past that. Love could not come back to me, but I had loved him once with all the fervor of a girl's romance, and at least he loved me and had not forgotten the past. One tithe of such love as he poured at my feet, in actions that were unspoken words, might have won me back to my husband and peace.

I did not repulse him. The listless wretchedness that ruled me would have prevented that, even if there had not been a faint fascination in the miserable aggrandizement of feeling that at least one man had been true to me, and was true to me yet. I used sometimes to wonder that Lisbeth never guessed at the truth. She rarely spoke to me of my husband — never of Ralph Gwynne — and yet I was always conscious of a restraining influence in her simple presence. A glance from her would check my recklessness. She held me back by a thread when nothing else on earth could have controlled me.

And so the days drifted by, and I strolled upon the sands with my old lover, and sat in the shelter of the rocks with him, and let him say what he would, scarcely listening, as I watched the waves and the incoming and outgoing boats and dipping sea-gulls.

After my husband's letters ceased coming I did not grow better, even slowly. I grew nervous and restless — even more nervous and restless than I had been in London. The old red spot came back upon each cheek, I did not sleep well, and when night came on I often spent hours at my window watching the driving clouds, and listening to the chanting of the fishermen in the late-returning Bamborough boat.

I was sitting thus one night when I heard a low knock at my door, and opened it to find Lisbeth standing there, shawl-wrapped and without a light.

"May I come in, Gervase?" she asked.

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I opened the door wider that she might pass.

"Of course," I said; "you know that. What is it, Lisbeth?"

"It is nothing," she answered --- "only that I heard you moving and thought I would come and sit with you. Hugh is out."

We both went back to the window, and she knelt down in a girlish fashion of hers, resting an arm upon the window-ledge and turning her fair face up to the night sky and the starlight.

"I hope you are wrapped up well, Gervase," she said after a while.

"I am quite warm enough, thank you."

"You must take care of yourself, you know," she said in her sweet, even voice, "for your husband's sake."

I smiled.

"For my husband's sake," I said, "yes."

"When he wrote to me last," she began, taking no notice of my words.

I started a little.

"When he wrote to you!" I exclaimed. "When did he write to you?"

"Yesterday," she said; "last week, the week before --- every week since you have been here. He was afraid you would not speak quite freely of your wants, and he was anxious to hear all about your illness, and to be quite sure that no wish was left ungratified."

I leaned back in my chair, and held to the cushioned arms for support. My breath was coming quickly and a sudden heat had flashed to my face. I could not understand this, but a strange feeling of joy took possession of me --- though I told myself that I did not love this man and had never loved him.

"Your illness has been a great anxiety to him, Gervase." Lisbeth went on still, with her face turned upward in the twilight --- "and it has troubled him more since you came here. He has felt your absence deeply.

I did not speak in answer, but I was weak woman enough to feel another thrill of mingled pain and pleasure. Lost as the past irrevocably was, it had yet a strong power over me. As there never was a husband colder than mine, so there had never been a bridegroom more impassioned in affection; and, even in this winter of indifference, I could remember days in the dead summer when his untiring love had wakened me to a happiness almost divine, ephemeral as it had proved. Glancing at Lisbeth, the thought struck me that under her quiet speeches and quiet manner there lay a deeper thought for me than I had fancied, and then there flashed across my mind a remembrance of times when she had silently stood between me and the man who was my evil genius.

At this moment I recognized the man's power for evil over me as I had never done before, and a curious sense of repugnance came upon me with my recollection of something I had sometimes seen sleeping in his quiet persistence. I could not understand the influence that stung me to anger and roused my pride, but I never failed to succumb to it, nevertheless, and it invariably roused me to some fresh rashness of speech or action. But though I said little to Lisbeth, the pang of remembrance softened my heart, and before she left me I had made up my mind to write a few words to my husband, at least; and when she was gone I drew my desk towards me and wrote them

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— only a few words.

"Your wife Gervase."

I had not ended a letter thus for two years, and I hesitated a moment before I wrote the signature. But despite the lingering of pen over paper they were written at last, and as I looked at them I felt the warm blood beat into my cheeks, and my head drooped upon my clasped hands. Should I send them or not? I thought of Ralph Gwynne, and of what I had suffered, and my letter's fate was almost sealed. But even as I paused, a soft little cry from Lisbeth's room broke upon my ear. It was hushed the next moment, but the tiny voice had turned the scale.

I put the letter into its envelope and sealed it with a new resolution. I would try to retrieve something of the past, at least. I would do no new wrong. I would cherish no bitterness against my dead child's father. If I could not be happy I would endeavor to be patient. It might not be for long — it could not be for long, I knew.

"I will give it to Ralph Gwynne to post in the morning," I said aloud — "it will show him that — "

I did not finish my sentence, because I dared not, even in the silence of my room. Even to the readers of this record I have not told all that my reckless misery drove me to. I could not justify my weakness, and otherwise had better be silent.

The sun was shining bright and warm into the breakfast-room when I went down with my letter in the morning, and the salt sea wind blew fresh through the open window up from the beach. As I had lain awake in the night a change seemed to have come over me, and under its influence I forgot the dull November days and pitiless November skies in this one rare chance of morning warmth and sunlight.

Ralph Gwynne was alone in the room, his stubborn persistency showing itself as it always did in his waiting for my coming.

I went to him at once, holding my letter in my hand.

"I have a letter here I am anxious shall reach London to-night," I said, looking straight into his face. "I thought I would give it into your charge at once, as you generally go into Bamborough earlier than any one else. Will you post it for me?"

He held out his hand and took it from me, slipping it into his vest pocket with scarcely a glance, but I knew that he had seen the superscription by the instantaneous change in his face. It was a very slight change, almost an imperceptible one in fact, but I saw it notwithstanding and caught its meaning.

"I envy your husband," he had said to me once — "I pity him — I hate him."

And just at the moment this abrupt, passionate speech, which was only one of many such, was embodied in the faint change that passed over his dark face, as he leaned upon the window ledge and looked out calmly enough at the fishermen working upon the beach.

He did not even refer to the letter in the commonplace conversation we drifted into. The momentary shadow left him so entirely that I found myself wondering if he had altogether forgotten it. But though he did not refer to the letter, before Lisbeth came in he spoke of my husband.

"I did not know," he said, after an interval of silence — "until yesterday I did not know that your husband had ever visited Bamborough."

## The Woman Who Saved Me

The words were so unexpected that I glanced up quickly to see what they might signify, but to judge from his careless, averted face, they might have held no significance at all.

"I did not know," I said coldly, "that my husband had visited Bamborough at all. If he has been here I have been kept in ignorance of the fact."

"He has been here," he said indifferently, "often."

I did not make any reply. I knew well enough that he intended to force me to questioning him, but I was not in the mood to question, and so was silent. If my husband had been to Bamborough in secret, whatever his motive might be, he had hidden it from me, and the mystery was only a new thread in the web of his distrust, so it might pass. It was only a fresh sting, but I felt it at the time all the more deeply because of my last night's resolve and the three words with which I had ended my letter. I made no comment, I did not even speak of it to Lisbeth when she came. I buried it in my own heart, as I was prone to bury my miseries.

When breakfast was over I wandered out on the beach alone. I did not often walk alone, but this morning even Lisbeth herself would have been unwelcome.

Down upon the sands where the rocks clustered together, and where the boats oftenest came up to the little cove, was my favorite resting-place, and there I took my seat as usual upon a large flat stone. The brawny fishermen knew me, and the barelegged, shouting children knew me too, and as I sat there there were few who passed me without a good-natured greeting. I had amused myself with watching them often, but they did not amuse me now. I was dull and wretched again. It was a trivial thing to be wretched about, this slight concealment, which might have had no motive, but it had dampened my spirit and made me indifferent and miserable once more. The brown, bare-legged fishermen passed to and fro, mending their nets in the sun, and wading in and out of the water, but I scarcely saw them; the children shouted and chased each other like happy, uncouth young savages, but I did not notice their play. I saw nothing but the sea and sky, and a boat whose tiny sail seemed growing larger as it neared the shore, until a shadow fell before me, and I glanced up half impatiently and saw Ralph Gwynne. He took a seat at my side, and then spoke to me carelessly.

"I thought I should find you here," he said.

"You did not go to Bamborough, then," was my cold comment.

"No," hesitatingly and slowly; "I thought I would see you first."

I looked out at the boat again absently; it was coming nearer to the land, and I felt a faint sort of interest in it, because I saw a woman at the prow, and the woman had a child thrown over her shoulder.

"Why?" I asked.

He did not answer me at first, but turned on his elbow, and spoke to one of the net-mending fishermen who sat not far from us.

"Who is coming in, Gunnle?" he asked; "your women don't fish, do they?"

The man touched his hat good-naturedly.

"Some on 'em does," he said; "this un doent though, this un 'ats comin [sic] in. She's bin o'er to Banbro' fur work. It's Janey — Janey an' th child, little Roger."

## The Woman Who Saved Me

I moved impatiently, though I scarcely knew why. The boat was almost upon the beach, and the next minute the man who was in it jumped out and waded up, dragging it in by its chain with a great splash of the sea water, and then the woman turned her head, and as she got up I saw her distinctly. She was a handsome young creature, tall and straight and shapely, and very unlike the rest of the Bamborough women, with her long violet eyes, and thick curling red brown hair.

"Look at her, Gervase," Ralph Gwynne whispered, "and look at the child."

He had no need to tell me to do so, for I was looking at them both. There was a certain proud, steadfast sadness which attracted my attention in the girl's face, and I could not help noticing that she did not look at any of the bystanders when she replied to their friendly greetings. But as she passed the place where I sat my eye caught hers, perhaps because I had looked at her so steadily, and I observed that the instant she saw me a hot deep color ran up to her forehead, and she walked on hurriedly, holding her child more tightly.

As soon as she was gone Ralph Gwynne turned again to the old fisherman, and spoke to him just as he had spoken before.

"She's a handsome creature," he said, "and the child is handsome too. Who is her husband?"

The old fellow glanced up at me.

"Savin' the lady's presence," he said in a low voice, "she haint got none — Janey haint. We're all sorry for her here. There haint one of us but is sorry for Janey. She never was a bad 'un, but she was handsome an' unfortnit, and she's seen a sight o' trouble. She doent say much to none on us, because she doent like to face us, but she knows we feel friendly to'rds her, Janey does, and she knows we feel friendly to'rds little Roger."

"Roger?" I broke out abruptly, scarcely knowing what I said.

The old man looked up at me, rubbing his weather-beaten forehead as if I puzzled him by my vehemence.

"Yes'm," he said, "his name it's Roger Leith, and its named for — "

I did not stop to hear the rest. For a moment the whole horrible truth flashed upon me, and I staggered to my feet blindly, clinging to Ralph Gwynne, who had risen too. "Come away," I said; "take me away somewhere — farther down the beach — anywhere out of sight."

He did not speak to me, nor I to him, until he had half carried, half dragged me to the very rock shelter where we had sat the day he handed me my husband's letter, and there I dropped upon the sands, hiding my wretched face in my hands.

"Tell me the truth," I panted; "tell me — You knew this!"

He looked down at me with some vague pity in his eyes, and though I knew that he would have forged a lie to suit his purpose, I knew that this was no lie, and that he believed it even more steadfastly than I did.

"Yes," he answered, "I knew it."

"And came to prove it to me?"

"Yes."

## The Woman Who Saved Me

I knew then what I had never known before. I knew that even in my misery I had mocked myself with a delusion. I knew that I had never loved this man, even as I fancied I did, through the contrast of his warmth with my husband's coldness; I knew that through all I had been weaker than the weakest of women, for I had loved my husband and I loved him still.

I broke into a low, wretched, hysterical laugh.

"You might have spared me this much," I said. "If my ignorance was not bliss, it was folly to be wiser than I was — to know more of my humiliation than I did."

"It would have been folly to let you add to the humiliation by relenting towards the man who has trampled you in the dust," he said passionately. "I swore that you should not send this letter — am I to keep my oath?"

I held out my hand for it.

"No!" I cried out sharply, "give it to me."

He handed it to me, and as I touched it the remembrance of what it contained and how I had been duped rushed upon me with the force of a whirlwind. I tore it into a hundred pieces and scattered it on the sand.

"There," I said, "it is gone — forever."

He came and bent over me, a little later, as I sat with my face buried in my hands, and he touched my shoulder, for I did not look up at him.

"And you will listen to me, Gervase!" he said.

I shook his hand off quickly, for his touch angered me — but I had made up my mind.

"Yes," I answered him, "I will listen."

.....

I sat crouched before my window, feeling cold and sick and weak, but still with my mind full of my desperate resolve. I had written my farewell letter to my husband, and it lay upon the table. I had written my farewell letter to Lisbeth and told her all, in the faint hope that Lisbeth would believe what no one else on earth would believe — in the faint hope that Lisbeth would believe my solemn word, when I told her that even at the worst I should not be so utterly lost as the world would deem me. I had laid my things all back into my trunks, even to the merest trifle. The very dress I wore was one I had myself purchased. I had not retained in my possession a single thing my husband had ever given to me — not even the sapphire ring that had been the pledge of our betrothal. And now that all my preparations were made, I was waiting at my opened window for the signal that was to come to me from the beach below. I had thrown myself adrift on the broad ocean of chance, and the waves might fling me upon what shore they would, for the momentary passion of misery had settled into passive despair.

"When women lose all, as I am doing," I had said to Ralph Gwynne that night, "they generally have something at stake, some love or hope, but I have none; I had risked all I had to risk, and lost all I had to lose. You are clinging to a mad hope if you think to win me even in the course of time. I tell you I shall never love you. I will leave England with you, not because I love you, but because I love my husband and cannot bear to see his face again. I will be honest with you. I take all to give nothing. If you love me enough to help me, well and good; if not, leave me here and I will go out into the world alone."



## The Woman Who Saved Me

And he had held to his purpose and agreed. Of course he did not believe me strong enough to battle against his stubborn persistence, and of course he was false in professing to be honest; but I knew my own steady strength of obstinate endurance, and he did not. And here, in the dim moonlight that streamed through the curtain of sea fog into my window, I was waiting for his signal, and Lisbeth was sleeping in the next room with her baby on her breast and her little children near her. I thought of the abasement I had seen in the handsome girl-face a few hours before, and I thought of the child who had looked at me over his mother's shoulder in his fearless baby way.

"Roger's baby -- Roger's!"

I hid my face in my hands, stifling the low cry that burst from me. I remembered the one moment, on the night of my baby's birth, when the delirious mists had cleared away from my brain, and I had seen my husband bending over the tiny form that lay upon the white pillow.

"If my baby had lived," I said aloud, "if my baby had lived I might have been like Lisbeth."

I got up after this and walked across the floor and back again a dozen times. I was wondering what he would say when Lisbeth gave him the letter, and whether there would be a shadow of self-reproach in his memory of the past. I did not ask myself how my life was to be spent. I had a vague feeling that it could not last long, but I asked myself a hundred times how my husband would spend his. He would not mourn for me, I told myself, and some better woman might make him happy; but even in this my worst and most reckless mood, my heart cried out aloud at the thought. I had ceased pacing the floor and gone back to the window again. I had even waited in the chill moonlight an hour when the signal came, and I rose with a fierce pulsation of the heart to obey its summons. I took up my shawl from the bed and folded it around me; I went to the table where my husband's letter lay and I bent over and kissed it -- my last farewell. I caught a glimpse of my face in the glass as I did so, and saw that there was a great hollow purple ring about my eyes and a deathly pallor on my cheeks. I laid my husband's letter back and crossed the room to the door; as I laid my hand upon the key I heard a light footstep in the corridors, and as I turned the handle and stepped out I started backward with a low cry, for I stood face to face with -- Lisbeth.

We looked at each other breathlessly for an instant in dead silence -- I at her with a wild intense, unreasonable longing for some hope that might rescue me even at this late hour -- she at me with nothing in her tender, dilated eyes but pity and wonder and love. Then she broke the strange stillness in a hurried, terrified voice.

"Gervase," she said, "Gervase, what does this mean?"

I met her gaze steadily. I do not think I was in my right senses.

"I am going away," I said, and my voice sounded strange and unnatural even to myself.

Another moment and she caught me in her arms as if I had been a child, and so drew me into the room and closed the door.

Her face was white as death. She was woman enough to read at a glance how matters stood, but her purely healthful nature could not at once comprehend a recklessness so desperate.

"What do you mean?" she demanded -- "I cannot believe -- where are you going?"

I answered her as steadily as before.

"I am going away," I said, "where I do not know -- I do not even care. I am going away from England with Ralph Gwynne. I am going away with him that I may be lost to my husband forever. You think I am a wicked woman, Lisbeth, and so I am, but God has laid his hand upon me and I am under a curse."

## The Woman Who Saved Me

She gazed at me as if she believed I had gone mad indeed.

"You are going away?" she cried out -- "You! Gervase! Gervase!"

Nothing more; but the fullness of divine pity and passionate appeal in her voice, in her face, even in her clasped hands, overpowered me. I sank into a chair, holding to its arms to steady myself.

"Lisbeth," I said, feeling as though I had turned to ice, "I saw a woman upon the beach to day [sic] -- a woman with a little child in her arms -- and the child's name is Roger Leith. You cannot save me, Lisbeth -- let me go."

She caught me in her arms and held me. She thought that I was dying -- I thought I was, myself, and it was only the sudden flush of comprehension in her face that helped me to retain my consciousness.

"Who told you that the child's name was Roger Leith?" she cried out -- "Who could be so cruel as to lead you astray with that? My poor Gervase, tell me!"

I rested my face upon her bosom, panting for breath in the darkness.

"It is true," I gasped; "Ralph Gwynne was with me and he knew. One of the fishermen upon the beach told us the child's name and its mother's history."

"Listen," she said, and her voice rang out like a command, "listen to me. Some one has told you a lie. I can tell you the girl's history -- no one knows it better than I, Gervase, as no one knows better that the truth should prove to you the wrong you have done your husband. It was not through him that this girl was lost -- it was through him that she was saved. He found her in London, wandering in the streets with her child in her arms, and he saved her from despair and death. He brought her here -- back to her home -- and helped her in her wretchedness so mercifully that she prayed from him upon her knees that her child might bear his name, since it could claim no other. He has guarded her ever since: he has saved two human souls -- one for the sake of the little child who died, Gervase -- his little child and yours."

In an instant it flashed upon me that I had not waited to hear the end of the fisherman's explanation. And he would doubtless have cleared away my misery with the next word, for they must all know the story, even the roughest of them -- the story of my husband's generous deed. And then the thought that I had not been deemed worthy to hear it struck me to the heart.

"I did not dream of this," I said; "how could I? he has told me nothing. He has never loved me even well enough to trust me so far."

He has loved you always," Lisbeth said, "though you have both been wrong; he has loved you better than you have loved him, and he has been wretched through your distrust and coldness. It was his despair that made him seek me when he brought Janey to Bamborough. He knew that you had loved me, and so came to me for comfort and help. And you would go away -- you, with the past all unredeemed, and your husband's love unsought, -- you, with your little child's white soul to hold you to purity and faith! Gervase! Gervase!"

There was a moment's silence in which I crouched shuddering in my chair, my face buried in my hands! And then there came beneath the window the sound of a man's footsteps, and the sound of a man speaking in a low voice. His words might have been an echo of Lisbeth's but that the one voice was the voice of the tempter, and the other the voice of the rescuer.

"Gervase! Gervase!"

## The Woman Who Saved Me

It was Ralph Gwynne.

My strength was ebbing away fast. I could not have spoken to him if I would; but Lisbeth rose and went to the window, as calm in her womanly strength of purity as ever she had been in her calm woman's life.

"Ralph!" she said, her grave, pure-toned voice dropping upon the still night air like the voice of a spirit, "Ralph, Gervase is here — with me."

He did not reply, and not another word was uttered between them. She came back to me as his footsteps died away in the distance, and found me shivering from head to foot, yet burning with sudden fever.

"Better to have let me go, Lisbeth," I said weakly, "better to have let me go away and die, for I should have died, Lisbeth — I am dying now." And as she caught me in her arms again the dark room seemed to blaze up into sudden light and then fade out, and as the shadows closed around me I felt that the end of life had come.

.....

Weeks of interminable wanderings in some mysterious, barren land of misery, — weeks of interminable watching hideous panoramas that seemed to pass and repass and pass again, — weeks, nay, it appeared ages, of suffering through old wrongs, and loves and hates, — and weeks of waiting restlessly with frantic impatience for something which never came and never would come — for some stopping-place or shutting out of the crowding faces I did not know and was constantly scanning and striving to remember — weeks of such suffering, with now and then a blank or a dim sense of struggling consciousness, and then one day a long blank ended by my opening my eyes heavily, and dimly seeing Lisbeth bending over the bed upon which I lay.

I did not speak to her — I could not. My weakness was so great, my power over my languid limbs so utterly lost, that I gazed up at her without even trying to address her, only thinking half unconsciously of stories I had heard of people who had fallen into trances and retained the spirit of life without the power of motion. Was I in such a trance? No, for Lisbeth was speaking to me and I could hear her quite distinctly, though I could not reply.

"You must not try to speak, Gervase," she was saying — "you must not try to think, even. You are getting better and you must sleep."

I heard her first words plainly enough, but as she ended her voice seemed to die away into the distance, and as my eyes drooped she was lost to me.

This was my first awakening after the night I had fallen into her arms, and after this first awakening there were no more of the interminable wanderings, though I seldom was strong enough to open my eyes. But as I lay there with my eyes shut I grew strong enough in a day or two to listen to the hushed voices of the people who were in my room, and in the end to distinguish them one from another. I heard Lisbeth's voice often, calm and low and sweet. I heard Hugh's softened until it was like a woman's. I heard a voice I knew to be the doctor's. I heard other voices strange to me, but first of all and before all I heard my husband's. I did not hear it once or twice, or at stated intervals: day and night without an hour of absence. I felt Lisbeth's touch often: I felt Hugh's. I felt hands that were kindly and tender enough, but there was one hand that never touched me without drawing me farther from the grave and nearer to life, and this hand was my husband's.

And at length I found myself awake again, far into the night, and this time my eyes fell first upon my husband seated at my bedside, and when I made an effort to speak I found strength enough to utter a single word:

"Lisbeth."

## The Woman Who Saved Me

He brought her to my side with a gesture, and as he turned towards the light his haggard face was a wonder to me; but I had only power, when Lisbeth bent over me, to say to her one thing, in a whisper so weak that I scarcely could hear it myself.

"If I live," I said, "he must know. If --- I die, it --- cannot matter. Let him love --- me --- if he will."

The weak tears began to roll down my cheeks, and I could not stop their flow, and I saw that Lisbeth's tears were falling too.

"You will not die," she said; "you will live to retrieve the past. He knows all --- he read your letter. Roger, speak to her."

He laid his haggard face near mine upon the pillow, and the old glow of our bridal days was in his eyes.

"You shall not die," he said, "you cannot die --- you are mine --- I love you. I have followed you down to the valley of death, and brought you back, and I claim you, as God is merciful. I have loved you through all our misery, but I was not fit to understand your woman's heart. The blame was mine, not yours. God forgive me for the wrong I did your tenderness. You love me --- yes, you love me. You must love me --- you cannot help it. Do not try to speak. This shall be my first sacrifice, that I will deny myself the bliss of hearing your voice, since to speak might fatigue you. Do not try to speak, but if you love me and would give me hope, lay your hand upon my cheek."

Not a word of the wrong I had done, not a word of the misery I had wrought for him, not a word of distrust or reproach: I had come up from the grave and the gates of Heaven seemed opening to me. I tried to speak, but could not, for my soul was full and overflowing with the passion of a joy too divine for human words to express. But I found strength at last to move, and stirring a little in the very faintness of happiness, I laid my hand upon my husband's cheek, my head upon his arm, and so was clasped to his breast.

He loved me --- he had loved me always, though he had tortured himself with the belief that my love for him had died. He was unlike most men, as I was unlike most women; he could not speak in common words of what lay so deeply locked in his heart. But tortured as he was, he had hoped as I never hoped. He had come to Lisbeth for comfort because she loved me, and she had given it to him. Lisbeth knew what I did not know myself, that it was my distrust and love that was wearing my life away, and in her silent woman fashion, she watched and restrained me when I was unconscious of her power.

I did not see Ralph Gwynne again until three happy years had passed, and in passing had made my life like Lisbeth's. Then, as I stood one night in the brightly-lighted hall of our home, holding my child in my strong arms, as I greeted my husband a man passed by upon the pavement and looked in at me. As the light from the hall lamp fell upon his face I saw it was Ralph Gwynne, and that he knew me.