

RUNNING WATER

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XII

THE HOUSE OF THE RUNNING WATER



WEEK later, on a sunlit afternoon, Sylvia and her father drove northward out of Weymouth, between the marshes and the bay. Sylvia was silent, and looked about

her with expectant eyes.

"I have been lucky, Sylvia," her father had previously said to her. "I have secured for our summer holiday the very house in which you were born. It cost me some trouble; but I was determined to get it if I could, for I had an idea that you would be pleased. However, you are not to see it until it is quite ready."

There was a prettiness and a delicacy in this thought which greatly appealed to Sylvia. He had spoken it with a smile of tenderness. Affection, surely, could alone have prompted it, and she thanked him very gratefully. They were now upon their way to take possession.

A little white house set back under a hill, and looking out across the bay from a thick cluster of trees, caught Sylvia's eye. Was that the house? she wondered. The carriage turned inland and passed the white house, and half a mile farther on turned again eastward along the road to Wareham, following the valley, which runs parallel to the sea. They ascended the long, steep hill which climbs to Osmington, until, upon their left hand, a narrow road branched off between hawthorn hedges to the downs. The road dipped to a little hollow, and in the hollow a village was set. A row of deep-thatched white cottages, with

leaded window-panes, opened upon a causeway of flagstones, which was bordered with purple phlox and raised above the level of the road. Farther on, the roof of a mill rose high among trees, and an open space showed Sylvia the black, massive wheel against the yellow wall. Then the carriage stopped at a house on the left-hand side, and Garratt Skinner got out.

"Here we are," he said.

It was a small square house of the Georgian days, built of old brick, dusky red. One entered it at the side, and the big, level windows of the living-rooms looked out upon a wide and high walled garden, where a little door under a brick archway in the wall gave a second entrance upon the road. Into this garden Sylvia wandered. If she had met with few people who matched the delicate company of her dreams, here, at all events, was a mansion where that company might fitly have gathered. Great elms and beeches bent under their load of leaves to the lawn; about the lawn flowers made a wealth of color; and away to the right of the house, twisted stems and branches, where the green of the apples was turning to red, stood evenly spaced in a great orchard. And the mill-stream, tunnelling under the road and the wall, ran swiftly between banks in the garden and the orchard, singing as it ran. There lingered, she thought, an ancient grace about this old garden, some flavor of forgotten days, as in a room scented with potpourri; and she walked the lawn in a great contentment.

The house within charmed her no less. It was a place of many corners and quaint nooks, and of a flooring so unlevel that she could hardly pass from one room

to another without taking a step up or a step down. Sylvia went about the house quietly and with a certain thoughtfulness. Here she had been born, and a mystery of her life was becoming clear to her. On this summer evening the windows were set wide in every room, and thus in every room, as she passed up and down, she heard the liquid music of running water, here faint, like a whispered melody, there pleasant, like laughter, but nowhere very loud, and everywhere quite audible. In one of these rooms she had been born. In one of these rooms her mother had slept at nights during the weeks before she was born, with that music in her ears at the moment of sleep and at the moment of waking. Sylvia understood now why she had always dreamed of running water. She wondered in which room she had been born. She tried to remember some corner of the house, some nook in its high-walled garden; and that she could not, awoke in her a strange and almost eerie feeling. She had come back to a house in which she had lived, to a scene on which her eyes had looked, to sounds which had murmured in her ears, and everything was as utterly new to her and unimagined as though now for the first time she had crossed the threshold. Yet these very surroundings to which her memory bore no testimony had assuredly modified her life, had given to her a particular possession,—this dream of running water,—and had made it a veritable element of her nature. She could not but reflect upon this new knowledge, and as she walked the garden in the darkness of the evening, she built upon it, as will be seen.

As she stepped back over the threshold into the library, where her father sat, she saw that he was holding a telegram in his hand.

"Wallie Hine comes to-morrow, my dear," he said.

Sylvia looked at her father wistfully.

"It is a pity," she said, "a great pity. It would have been pleasant if we could have been alone."

The warmth of her gladness had gone from her; she walked once more in shadows; there was in her voice a piteous appeal for affection, for love, of which she had had too little in her life,

and for which she greatly craved. She stood by the door, her lips trembling, and her dark eyes, for a wonder, glistening with tears. She had always, even to those who knew her to be a woman, something of the child in her appearance, which made a plea from her lips most difficult to refuse. Now she seemed a child on whom the world pressed heavily before her time for suffering had come, she had so motherless a look. Even Garratt Skinner moved uncomfortably in his chair; even that iron man was stirred.

"I, too, am sorry, Sylvia," he said gently; "but we will make the best of it. Between us—" and he laughed gaily, setting aside from him his momentary compassion—"we will teach poor Wallie Hine a little geography, won't we?"

Sylvia had no smile ready for a reply; but she bowed her head, and into her face and her very attitude there came an expression of patience. She turned and opened the door, and as she opened it, and stood with her back toward her father, she said in a quiet and clear voice, "Very well," and so passed up the stairs to her room.

It might, after all, merely be kindness in her father which had led him to insist on Wallie Hine's visit. So she argued, and the more persistently because she felt that the argument was thin. He could be kind. He had been thoughtful for her during the last week in the small attentions which appeal much to women. Because he saw that she loved flowers, he had engaged a new gardener for their stay; and he had shown, in one particular instance, a quite surprising thoughtfulness for a class of unhappy men with whom he could have had no concern—the convicts in Portland prison. That instance remained for a long time vividly in her mind, and at a later time she spoke of it, with consequences of a far-reaching kind. She thought then, as she thought now, only of the kindness of her father's action, and for the first week of Hine's visit that thought remained with her. She was on the alert, but nothing occurred to arouse in her a suspicion. There were no cards, little wine was drunk, and early hours were kept by the whole household. Indeed, Garratt Skinner left entirely to his daughter the task of entertaining his guest; and although

once he led them both over the great down to Dorchester and back at a pace which tired his companions out, he preferred, for the most part, to smoke his pipe in a hammock in the garden with a novel at his side. The morning after that one expedition, he limped out into the garden, rubbing the muscles of his thigh.

"You must look after Wallie, my dear," he said. "Age is beginning to find me out. And, after all, he will learn more of the tact and manners which he wants from you than from a rough man like me." It did not occur to Sylvia, who was of a natural modesty of thought, that he had any other intention in throwing them thus together than to rid himself of a guest with whom he had little in common.

But a week later she changed her mind. She was driving Wallie Hine one morning into Weymouth, and as the dog-cart turned into the road beside the bay, and she saw suddenly before her the sea sparkling into sunlight, the dark battle-ships at their firing practice, and over against her, through a shimmering haze of heat, the crouching mass of Portland, she drew in a breath of pleasure. It seemed to her that her companion gave the same sigh of enjoyment, and she turned to him with some surprise. But Walter Hine was looking at the wide beach, so black with holiday-makers that it seemed, at that distance, a great and busy ant-heap.

"That 's what I like," he said, with a chuckle of anticipation—"lots o' people. I 've knocked about too long in the thick o' things, you see, Miss Sylvia. Kept it up, I have seen it right through every night till three o'clock in the morning for months at a time. Oh, that 's the real thing!" he exclaimed "It makes you feel good."

Sylvia laughed.

"Then, if you dislike the country," she said, and perhaps rather eagerly, "why did you come to stay with us at all?"

"Oh, you know," he said, and almost he nudged her with his elbow. "I would n't have come, of course, if old Garratt had n't particularly told me that you were agreeable." Sylvia grew hot with shame. She drew away, flicked the

horse with her whip, and drove on. Had she been used, she wondered, to lure this poor, helpless youth to the sequestered village where they stayed? A chill struck through her even on that day of July. The plot had been carefully laid, if that were so: she was to be hoodwinked no less than Wallie Hine. What sinister thing was then intended? She tried to shake off the dread which encompassed her, pleading to herself that she saw perils in shadows like the merest child. But she had not yet shaken it off when Walter Hine cried out excitedly to her to stop.

"Look!" he said, and he pointed toward a hotel upon the sea-front which at that moment they were passing.

Sylvia looked, and saw obsequiously smirking upon the steps of the hotel, with his hat lifted from his shiny head, her old enemy, Captain Barstow. Fortunately, she had not stopped. She drove quickly on, just acknowledging his salute. It needed only this meeting to confirm her fears. It was not coincidence which had brought Captain Barstow on their heels to Weymouth. He had come with knowledge and a definite purpose.

"Oh, I say," protested Wallie Hine, "you might have stopped, Miss Sylvia, and let me pass the time of day with old Barstow."

Sylvia stopped the trap at once.

"I am sorry," she said. "You will find your own way home. We lunch at half past one."

Hine looked doubtfully at her and then back toward the hotel.

"I did n't mean that I wanted to leave you, Miss Sylvia," he said, "not by a long chalk."

"But you must leave me, Mr. Hine," she said, looking at him with serious eyes, "if you want to pass the time of day with your 'red-hot' friend."

There was no hint of a smile about her lips. She waited for his answer. It came, accompanied with a smile which aimed at gallantry and was merely familiar.

"Of course I stay where I am. What do you think?"

Sylvia hurried over her shopping and drove homeward. She went at once to her father, who lay in the hammock, in the shade of the trees, reading a

book. She came up from behind him across the grass, and he was not aware of her approach until she spoke.

"Father," she said, and he started up.

"Oh, Sylvia!" he said, and just for a second there was a palpable uneasiness in his manner. He had not merely started; he seemed also to have been startled. But he recovered his composure.

"You see, my dear, I have been thinking of you," he said, and he pointed to a man at work among the flower-beds. "I saw how you loved flowers,—how you liked to have the rooms bright with them,—so I hired a new gardener as a help. It is a great extravagance, Sylvia; but you are to blame, not I."

He smiled, confident of her gratitude, and had it been yesterday, he would have had it offered to him in full measure. To-day, however, all her thoughts were poisoned by suspicion. She knew it, and was distressed. She knew how much happiness so simple a forethought would naturally have brought to her. She did not, indeed, suspect any new peril in her father's action. She barely looked toward the new gardener, and certainly neglected to note whether he worked skillfully. But the fears of the morning modified her thanks. Moreover, the momentary uneasiness of her father had not escaped her notice, and she was wondering upon its cause.

"Father," she resumed, "I saw Captain Barstow in Weymouth this morning."

Though her eyes were on his face, and perhaps because her eyes were resting there with so quiet a watchfulness, she could detect no self-betrayal now. Garratt Skinner stared at her in pure astonishment. Then the astonishment gave place to annoyance.

"Barstow!" he said angrily. He lay back in the hammock, looking up to the boughs overhead, his face wrinkled and perplexed. "He has found us out and followed us, Sylvia. I would not have had it happen for worlds. Did he see you?"

"Yes."

"And I thought that here, at all events, we were safe from him! I wonder how he found us out. Bribed the caretaker in Hobart Place, I suppose."

Sylvia did not accept the suggestion. She sat down upon a chair in a disconcerting silence, and waited. Garratt Skinner crossed his arms behind his head and deliberated.

"Barstow's a deep fellow, Sylvia," he said. "I am afraid of him."

He was looking up at the boughs, but he suddenly glanced toward her, and then quietly removed one of his hands and slipped it down to the book which was lying on his lap. Sylvia took quiet note of the movement. The book had been lying shut upon his lap, with its back toward her. Garratt Skinner did not alter its position; but she saw that his hand now hid from her the title on the back. It was a big book, and had the appearance of an expensive book. She noticed the binding—a dull-green cloth. She was not familiar with the look of it, and it seemed to her that she might as well know, and as quickly as possible, what the book was and the subject with which it dealt.

Meanwhile Garratt Skinner repeated: "A deep fellow—Captain Barstow," and anxiously he debated how to cope with that deep fellow. He came at last to his conclusion. "We can't shut our doors to him, Sylvia."

Even though she had half expected just that answer, Sylvia flinched as she heard it uttered.

"I understand your feelings, my dear," he continued in tones of commiseration, "for they are mine; but we must fight the Barstows with the Barstows' weapons. It would never do for us to close our doors, he has far too tight a hold of Wallie Hine as yet. He has only to drop a hint to Wallie that we are trying to separate him from his true friends and keep him to ourselves—and just think, my dear, what a horrible set of motives a mean-minded creature like Barstow could impute to us! Let us be candid, you and I," cried Garratt Skinner, starting up as though carried away by candor. "Here am I, a poor man; here are you, my daughter, a girl with the charm and the beauty of the spring, and here's Wallie Hine, rich, weak, and susceptible. Oh, there's a story for a Barstow to embroider! But, Sylvia, he shall not so much as hint at the story. For your sake, my dear—for your sake," cried Gar-

ratt Skinner, with all the emphasis of a loving father. He wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"I was carried away by my argument," he went on in a calmer voice. Sylvia, for her part, had not been carried away at all, and no doubt her watchful composure helped him to subdue as ineffective the ardor of his tones. "Barstow has only to drop this hint to Wallie Hine, and Wallie will be off like a rabbit at the sound of a gun. And there's our chance gone of helping him to a better life. No, we must welcome Barstow; if he comes here—yes, actually welcome him, however repugnant it may be to our feelings. That's what we must do, Sylvia. He must have no suspicion that we are working against him. We must lull him to sleep. That is our only way to keep Wallie Hine with us. So that, Sylvia, must be our plan of campaign."

The luncheon bell rang as he ended his oration. He got out of the hammock quickly, as if to prevent discussion of his plan; and the book which he was carrying caught in the netting of the hammock and fell to the ground. Sylvia could read the title now. She did read it, hastily as Garratt Skinner stooped to pick it up. It was entitled, "THE ALPS IN 1864. A PRIVATE JOURNAL." She knew the book by repute, and was surprised to find it in her father's hands. She was surprised still more that he should have been to so much pains to conceal the title from her notice. After all, what could it matter? she wondered.

SYLVIA lay deep in misery that night. Her father had failed her utterly. All the high hopes with which she had set out from Chamonix had fallen, all the rare qualities with which her dreams had clothed him as in shining raiment must now be stripped from him. She was not deceived. Parminster, Barstow, Garratt Skinner—there was one "deep fellow" in that trio, but it was neither Barstow nor Parminster. It was her father. She had only to set the three faces side by side in her thoughts, to remember the differences of manner, mind, and character. Garratt Skinner was the master in the conspiracy, the other two were his mere servants. It was he who for some dark end had brought Barstow

down from London. He loomed up in her thoughts as a relentless and sinister figure, unswayed by affection, yet with the power to counterfeit it, long-sighted for evil, sparing no one, not even his daughter. She recalled their first meeting in the little house in Hobart Place; she remembered the thoughtful voice with which, as he had looked her over, he had agreed that she "might be useful." She thought of his caresses, his smile of affection, his comradeship, and she shuddered. Walter Hine's words had informed her to-day to what use her father had designed her. She was his decoy.

She lay upon her bed with her hands clenched, repeating the word in horror. His decoy! The moonlight poured through the open window, the music of the stream filled the room. She was in the house in which she had been born, a place mystically sacred to her thoughts, and she had come to it to learn that she was her father's decoy in a vulgar conspiracy to strip a weakling of his money. The stream sang beneath her windows, the very stream of which the echo had ever been rippling through her dreams. Always she had thought that it must have some particular meaning for her which would be revealed in due time. She dwelt bitterly upon her folly. There was no meaning in its light laughter.

In a while she was aware of a change. There came a grayness into the room. The moonlight had lost its white brilliancy; the night was waning. Sylvia rose from her bed and slowly, like one very tired, she began to gather together and pack into a bag such few clothes as she could carry. She had made up her mind to go, and to go silently before the house waked. Whither she was to go, and what she was to do once she had gone, she could not think. She asked herself the questions in vain, feeling very lonely and very helpless as she moved softly about the room by the light of her candle. Her friend might write to her, and she would not receive his letter. Still, she must go. Once or twice she stopped her work, and crouching down upon the bed, allowed her tears to have their way. When she had finished her preparations, she blew out her candle, and leaning upon the sill of the open window, gave her face to the cool night air.

There was a break in the eastern sky; already here and there a blackbird sang in the garden boughs, and the freshness, the quietude, swept her thoughts back to the chalet de Lognan. With a great yearning she recalled that evening and the story of the great friendship so quietly related to her in the darkness, beneath the stars. The world and the people of her dreams existed; only there was no door of entrance into that world for her. Below her the stream sang, even as the glacier stream had sung, though without its deep note of thunder. As she listened to it, certain words, spoken upon that evening, came back to her mind and gradually began to take on a particular application.

"What you know, that you must do, if by doing it you can save a life or save a soul."

That was the law—"If you can save a life or save a soul." And she *did* know. Sylvia raised herself from the window and stood in thought.

Garratt Skinner had made a great mistake that day. He had been misled by the gentleness of her ways, the sweet aspect of her face, and by a look of aloofness in her eyes, as though she lived in dreams. He had seen surely that she was innocent, and since he believed that knowledge must needs corrupt, he thought her ignorant as well. But she was not ignorant. She had detected his trickeries. She knew of the conspiracy, she knew of the place she filled in it herself, and, furthermore, she knew that as a decoy she had been doing her work. Only yesterday Walter Hine had been forced to choose between Barstow and herself, and he had let Barstow go. It was a small matter, no doubt. Still, there was a promise in it. What if she stayed, strengthened her hold on Walter Hine, and grappled with the three who were ranged against him?

Walter Hine was, of course, and could be, nothing to her. He was the mere puppet, the opportunity of obedience to the law. It was of the law that she was thinking, and of the voice of the man who had uttered it. She knew that by using her knowledge she could save a soul. She did not think at this time that she might be saving a life, too.

Quietly she undressed and slipped into

her bed. She was comforted. A smile had come upon her lips. She saw very near to her in the darkness the face of her friend. She needed sleep to equip herself for the fight, and while thinking so, she slept. The moonlight faded altogether, and left the room dark. Beneath the window the stream went singing through the lawn. After all, its message had been revealed to her in its due season.

XIII

CHAYNE PAYS A VISIT

"HULLO!" cried Captain Barstow, as he wandered round the library after luncheon, "here 's a scatter-gun."

He took the gun from a corner where it stood against the wall, opened the breech, shut it again, and turning to the open window, lifted the stock to his shoulder.

"I wonder whether I could hit anything nowadays," he said, taking careful aim at a tulip in the garden. "Any cartridges, Skinner?"

"I don't know, I am sure," Garratt Skinner replied testily. The newspapers had only this moment been brought into the room, and he did not wish to be disturbed. Sylvia had never noticed that double-barreled gun before, and she wondered whether it had been brought into the room that morning. She watched Captain Barstow bustle into the hall and back again. Finally he pounced upon an oblong card-box which lay on the top of a low book-case. He removed the lid, and pulled out a cartridge.

"Hullo!" said he, "No. 6. The very thing! I am going to take a pot at the starlings, Skinner. There are too many of them about for your fruit-trees."

"Very well," said Garratt Skinner, lazily lifting his eyes from his newspaper and looking out across the lawn. "Only take care you don't wing my new gardener."

"No fear of that," said Barstow, and, filling his pockets with cartridges, he took the gun in his hand and skipped out into the garden. In a moment a shot was heard, and Walter Hine rose from his chair and walked to the window. A second shot followed.

"Old Barstow can't shoot for nuts,"

said Hine, with a chuckle, and in his turn he stepped out into the garden. Sylvia made no attempt to hinder him, but she took his place at the window, ready to intervene. A flight of starlings passed straight and swift over Barstow's head. He fired both barrels, and not one of the birds fell. Hine spoke to him and the gun at once changed hands. At the next flight Hine fired, and one of the birds dropped. Barstow's voice was raised in jovial applause.

"That was a good egg, Wallie, a very good egg. Let me try now."

So alternately they shot as the birds darted overhead across the lawn. Sylvia waited for the moment when Barstow's aim would suddenly develop a deadly precision, but that moment did not come. If there was any betting upon this match, Hine would not be the loser. She went quietly back to a writing-desk and wrote her letters. She had no wish to rouse in her father's mind a suspicion that she had guessed his design and was setting herself to thwart it. She must work secretly, more secretly than he did himself. Meanwhile the firing continued in the garden, and, unobserved by Sylvia, Garratt Skinner began to take in it a stealthy interest. His chair was so placed that, without stirring, he could look into the garden and at the same time keep an eye on Sylvia. If she moved an elbow or raised her head, Garratt Skinner was at once reading his paper with every appearance of concentration. On the other hand, her back was turned toward him, so that she saw neither his keen gaze into the garden nor the good-tempered smile of amusement with which he turned his eyes upon his daughter.

In this way perhaps an hour passed; certainly no more. Sylvia had, in fact, almost come to the end of her letters when Garratt Skinner suddenly pushed back his chair and stood up. At the noise, as abrupt as a startled cry, Sylvia turned swiftly round. She saw that her father was gazing with a look of perplexity into the garden, and that for the moment he had forgotten her presence. She crossed the room quickly and noiselessly and standing just behind his elbow, saw what he saw. The blood flushed her throat and mounted into her cheeks; her

eyes softened; and a smile of welcome transfigured her grave face. Her friend Hilary Chayne was standing under the archway of the garden door. He had closed the door behind him, but he had not moved thereafter, and he was not looking toward the house. His attention was riveted upon the shooting-match. Sylvia gave no thought to his attitude at the moment. He had come: that was enough. And Garratt Skinner, turning about, saw the light in his daughter's face.

"You know him!" he cried roughly.

"Yes."

"He has come to see you?"

"Yes."

"You should have told me," said Garratt Skinner, angrily. "I dislike secrets." Sylvia raised her eyes and looked her father steadily in the face. But Garratt Skinner was not easily abashed; he returned her look as steadily.

"Who is he?" he continued in a voice of authority.

"Captain Hilary Chayne." It seemed for a moment that the name was vaguely familiar to Garratt Skinner, and Sylvia added: "I met him this summer in Switzerland."

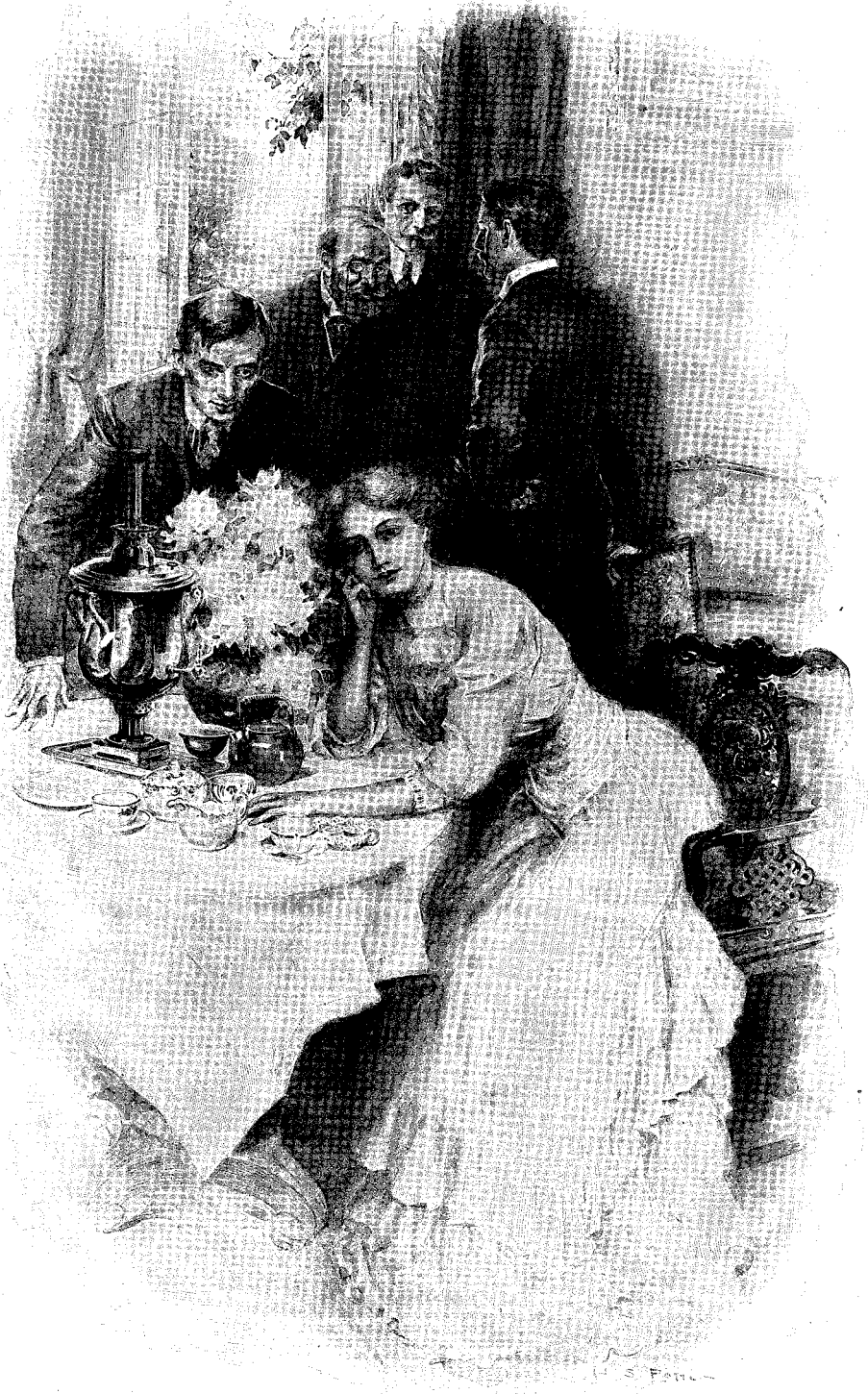
"Oh, I see," said her father, and he looked with a new interest across the garden to the door. "He is a great friend?"

"My only friend," returned Sylvia, softly; and her father stepped forward and called aloud, holding up his hand.

"Barstow! Barstow!"

Sylvia noticed then and not till then that the coming of her friend was not the only change which had taken place since she had last looked out upon the garden. The new gardener was now shooting alternately with Walter Hine, while Captain Barstow, standing a few feet behind them, recorded the hits in a little book. He looked up at the sound of Garratt Skinner's voice, and perceiving Chayne, at once put a stop to the match. Garratt Skinner turned again to his daughter, and spoke now without any anger at all. There was just a hint of reproach in his voice; but, as if to lessen the reproof, he laid his hand affectionately upon her arm.

"Any friend of yours is welcome, of course, my dear; but you might have told me that you expected him. Let us



Drawn by H. S. Potter. Half-tone plate engraved by H. C. Merrill

"SHE HAD BEEN BEHIND HIM WHILE HE HAD SPOKEN, AND
* * * HAD HEARD EVERY WORD"

have no secrets from each other in the future! Now bring him in, and we will see if we can give him a cup of tea."

He rang the bell. Sylvia did not think it worth while to argue that Chayne's coming was a surprise to her as much as to her father. She crossed the garden toward her friend; but she walked slowly and still more slowly. Her memories had flown back to the evening when they had bidden each other good-by on the little platform in front of the chalet de Lognan. Not in this way had she then planned that they should meet again, or in such company. The smile had faded from her lips, the light of gladness had gone from her eyes. Barstow and Walter Hine were moving toward the house. It mortified her exceedingly that her friend should find her among such companions. She almost wished that he had not found her out at all. And so she welcomed him with a great restraint.

"It was kind of you to come," she said. "How did you know I was here?"

"I called at your house in London. The caretaker gave me the address," he replied. He took her hand, and holding it, looked with the careful scrutiny of a lover into her face.

"You have needed those memories of your one day to fall back upon," he said regretfully; "already you have needed them. I am very sorry."

Sylvia did not deny the implication of the words that "troubles" had come. She turned to him, grateful that he should so clearly have remembered what she had said upon that day.

"Thank you," she answered gently. "My father would like to know you. I wrote to you that I had come to live with him."

"Yes."

"You were surprised?" she asked.

"No," he answered quietly. "You came to some important decision on the very top of the Aiguille d'Argentière. That I knew at the time, for I watched you. When I got your letter I understood what the decision was."

To leave Chamonix, to break completely with her life, it was just to that decision she would naturally have come just on that spot during that one sunlit hour. So much his own love of the

mountains taught him. But Sylvia was surprised at his insight; and what with that, and the proof that their day together had remained vividly in his thoughts, she caught back something of its comradeship. As they crossed the lawn to the house her embarrassment diminished. She drew comfort, besides, from the thought that whatever her friend might think of Captain Barstow and Walter Hine, her father, at all events, would impress him, even as he had impressed her. Chayne would see at once that here was a man head and shoulders above his companions, finer in quality, different in speech.

But that afternoon her humiliation was to be complete. Her father had no fancy for the intrusion of Captain Chayne into his quiet sequestered house. The flush of color on his daughter's face, the leap of light into her eyes, had warned him. He had no wish to lose his daughter. Chayne, too, might be inconveniently watchful. Garratt Skinner desired to spy upon his little plans. Consequently he set himself to play the host with an offensive geniality which was calculated to disgust a man with any taste for good manners. He spoke in a voice which Sylvia did not know, so coarse it was in quality, so boisterous and effusive; and he paraded Walter Hine and Captain Barstow with the pride of a man exhibiting his dearest friends.

"You must know 'red-hot' Barstow, Captain Chayne," he cried, slapping the little man lustily on the back—"one of the very best. You are both brethren of the sword."

Barstow sniggered obsequiously, and screwed his eyeglass into his eye.

"Delighted, I am sure. But I sheathed the sword some time ago, Captain Chayne."

"And exchanged it for the betting book," Chayne added quietly.

Barstow laughed nervously.

"Oh, you refer to our little match in the garden," he said. "We dragged the gardener into it."

"So I saw," Chayne replied. "The gardener seemed to be a remarkable shot. I think he would be a match for more than one professional."

Turning away, he saw Sylvia's eyes

fixed upon him, and on her face an expression of trouble and dismay so deep that he could have bitten off his tongue for speaking. She had been behind him while he had spoken, and though he had spoken in a low voice, she had heard every word. She bent her head over the tea-table and busied herself with the cups; but her hands shook, her face burned, she was tortured with shame. She had set herself to do battle with her father, and already, in the first skirmish, she had been defeated. Chayne's indiscreet words had laid bare to her the elaborate conspiracy. The new gardener, the gun in the corner, the cartridges which had to be looked for, Barstow's want of skill, Hine's superiority, which had led Barstow naturally to offer to back the gardener against him—all was clear to her. It was the little round game of cards all over again, and she had not possessed the wit to detect the trick. And that was not all: her friend had witnessed it and understood!

She heard her father presenting Walter Hine, and with almost intolerable pain she realized that had he wished to leave Chayne no single opportunity of misapprehension, he would have spoken just these words, and no others.

"Wallie is the grandson—and, indeed, the heir—of old Joseph Hine. You know his name, no doubt. Joseph Hine's Château Marlay, what? A warm man, Joseph Hine; I don't know a man more rich. Treats his grandson handsomely into the bargain, eh, Walter?"

Sylvia felt that her heart would break. That Garratt Skinner's admission was boldly and cunningly deliberate did not occur to her. She simply understood that here was the last necessary piece of evidence given to Captain Chayne which would convince him that he had been this afternoon the witness of a robbery and swindle.

She became aware that Chayne was standing beside her. She did not lift her face, for she feared that it would betray her. She wished, with all her heart, that he would just replace his cup upon the tray and go away without a word. He could not want to stay, he could not want to return; he had no place here. If he would go away quietly, without troubling to take leave

of her, she would be very grateful, and do justice to him for his kindness.

But though he had the mind to go, it was not without a word.

"I want you to walk with me as far as the door," he said gently.

Sylvia rose at once. Since, after all, there must be words, the sooner they were spoken the better. She followed him into the garden, making her little prayer that they might be very few and that he would leave her to fight her battle and to hide her shame alone.

They crossed the lawn without a word. He held open the garden door for her, and she passed into the lane. He followed, and closed the door behind them. In the lane a hired landau was waiting. Chayne pointed to it.

"I want you to come away with me now," he said: and since she looked at him with the air of one who does not understand, he explained, standing quietly beside her, with his eyes upon her face. And though he spoke quietly, there was in his eyes a hunger which belied his tones; and though he stood quietly, there was a tension in his attitude which betrayed the extreme suspense. "I want you to come away with me; I want you never to return. I want you to marry me."

The blood rushed into her cheeks and again fled from them, leaving her very white. Her face grew mutinous, like an angry child's, but her eyes grew hard, like a resentful woman's.

"You ask me out of pity," she said in a low voice.

"That 's not true," he cried, and with so earnest a passion that she could not but believe him. "Sylvia, I came here meaning to ask you to marry me. I ask you something more now, that is all. I ask you to come to me a little sooner, that is all. I want you to come with me now."

Sylvia leaned against the wall and covered her face with her hands.

"Please!" he said, making his appeal with a great simplicity. "For I love you, Sylvia."

She gave him no answer. She kept her face still hid, and only her heaving breast bore witness to her stress of feeling. Gently he removed her hands, and holding them in his, urged his plea.

"Ever since that day in Switzerland I have been thinking of you, Sylvia, remembering your looks, your smile, and the words you spoke. I crossed the Col Dolent the next day, and all the time I felt that there was some great thing wanting. I said to myself, 'I miss my friend.' I was wrong, Sylvia. I missed you. Something ached in me—has ached ever since. It was my heart. Come with me now!"

Sylvia had not looked at him, though she made no effort to draw her hands away, and still not looking at him, she answered in a whisper:

"I can't! I can't!"

"Why?" he asked. "Why? You are not happy here; you are no happier than you were at Chamonix. And I would try so very hard to make you happy. I can't leave you here—lonely; for you are lonely. I am lonely, too—all the more lonely because I carry about with me—you—you, as you stood in the chalet at night, looking through the open window, with the candle-light striking upward on your face, and with your reluctant smile upon your lips; you as you lay on the top of the Aiguille d'Argentiére, with the wonder of a new world in your eyes; you as you said goodbye in the sunset, and went down the winding path to the forest. If you only knew, Sylvia!"

"Yes; but I don't know," she answered, and now she looked at him. "I suppose that if I loved I should know, I should understand."

Her hands lay in his, listless and unresponsive to the pressure of his. She spoke slowly and thoughtfully, meeting his gaze with troubled eyes.

"Yet you were glad to see me when I came," he urged.

"Glad, yes. You are my friend, my one friend. I was very glad; but the gladness passed. When you asked me to come with you across the garden, I was wanting you to go away."

The words hurt him; they could not but hurt him. But she was so plainly unconscious of offence, she was so plainly trying to straighten out her own tangled position, that he could feel no anger.

"Why?" he asked; and again she frankly answered him.

"I was humbled," she replied, "and

I have had so much humiliation in my life."

The very quietude of her voice, and the wistful look upon her young, tired face, hurt him far more than her words had done.

"Sylvia," he cried, and he drew her toward him; "come with me now! My dear, there will be an end of all humiliation. We can be married, we can go down to my home on the Sussex Downs. That old house needs a mistress, Sylvia. It is very lonely." He drew a breath and smiled suddenly. "And I would like so much to show you it, to show you all the corners, the bridle-paths across the downs, the woods, and the wide view from Arundel to Chichester spires. Sylvia, come!"

Just for a moment it seemed that she leaned toward him. He put his arm about her and held her for a moment closer. But her head was lowered, not lifted up to his; and then she freed herself gently from his clasp.

She faced him with a little wrinkle of thought between her brows, and spoke with an air of wisdom which went very prettily with the childlike beauty of her face.

"You are my friend," she said—"a friend I am very grateful for; but you are not more than that to me. I am frank. You see, I am thinking now of reasons which would not trouble me if I loved you. Marriage with me would do you no good, would hurt you in your career."

"No," he protested.

"But I am thinking that it would," she replied steadily, "and I do not believe that I should give much thought to it, if I really loved you. I am thinking of something else, too,—” and she spoke more slowly, choosing her words with care,—“of a plan which before you came I had formed, of a task which before you came I had set myself to do. I am still thinking of it, still feeling that I ought to go on with it. I do not think that I should feel that if I loved. I think nothing else would count at all except that I loved. So you are still my friend, and I cannot go with you."

Chayne looked at her for a moment sadly, with a mist before his eyes.

"I leave you to much unhappiness,"

he said, "and I hate the thought of it."

"Not quite so much now as before you came," she answered. "I am proud, you know, that you asked me," and putting her troubles aside, she smiled at him bravely, as though it was he who needed comforting. "Good-by! Let me hear of you through your success."

So again they said good-by at the time of sunset. Chayne mounted into the landau and drove back along the road to Weymouth. "So that 's the end," said Sylvia. She opened the door and passed again into the garden. Through the window of the library she saw her

father and Walter Hine watching, it seemed, for her appearance. It was borne in upon her suddenly that she could not meet them or speak with them, and she ran very quickly round the house to the front door, and escaped unaccosted to her room.

In the library Hine turned to Garratt Skinner with one of his rare flashes of shrewdness.

"She did n't want to meet us," he said jealously. "Do you think she cares for him?"

"I think," replied Garratt Skinner, with a smile, "that Captain Chayne will not trouble us with his company again."

(To be continued)



THE CHILD THAT CAME

BY ELIZABETH WHITING

O CHILD my mouth has never kissed,
My body never known,
By all the joys that I have missed,
I claim you as my own.

Love called you to me from the dark,
But as your spirit heard,
Death laid his fingers cold and stark
Upon my heart that stirred.

I yearned for you with every breath,
O never had, yet lost,
While on my heart the touch of death
Struck deeper down like frost.

I watched the tides creep out and in,
The darkness wax and wane,
The years lag by, and could not win
To any rest from pain.

But as to-night I sit alone,
With only shadows near,
O child incredibly my own,
I know that you are here.

I hold you tight against the ache
Within my breast and croon
A song my mother used to make
For me about the moon.

O little child forever mine,
Yet safe from life that harms,
Not all of human and divine
Can take you from my arms!

The bitter road that I have trod
Has brought this thing to be:
I need not give you back to God
Who gave you not to me.

Come soon or late the day when earth
Shall grant its gift of rest,
The child to whom I gave not birth
Shall lie upon my breast.