

PART XV

The Tangle And Web of Living

Chapter I

She is One of Them!

On this third day of January, in the year of the Lord of 1913, the students of Bocly were back in their old haunts on the campus, in their dormitories, and in their classrooms. They came from far and near with the memories of their experiences during the past two weeks still fresh in their minds. Some good, some not so good, and some were worse than that. But to them all, except the graduating class, the task of getting back to the old routine of attending classes, and, worse yet, of preparing for the 'mid-years' to come at the end of the month, was a serious business. The old hands walked about non-chalantly, strutting, with their noses in the air. What's one more

exam, more or less; or two, or three, or half a dozen! They have had them all, and knew the intricate ways and pathways. They march into them and out of them - just like that. Nothing to it. They know the profs and their ways and habits, and what's in their minds. Nothing to it. Nothing! They have had their vacations and had drifted back into harness without a second thought. Nothing to it. Nothing! But not so with ^{the} simmering neephyte, the freshman. He always seems to simmer and bluster and boil - especially now. He had just left the light of home and vacation, ^(was thrust?) and into the drabness of routine, and the fright of his first exams. The skies pall over ~~for~~ him. At least the first day from home. And maybe the second or even third. It's the cry of the infant in the dark of ~~the~~ night. The need of the love and protect^{ion} of some ^{one} near - a mother. The mother of all humans.

But the next day was one of these glittering January thaws. The grey bank of clouds ~~swept~~ ^{was} swept back to the western horizon; and ^{now} completely out of sight, the sun shone forth ^{in full} ~~in full~~ splendor, rolling back and melting away the blinding whiteness of the snow banks that invaded the landscape only yesterday. The white face greyed and punctured and fell, and riffled and rilled away.

Cynthia, who until now had lived in a roseate dreamworld of her own, where everything and everybody had a tinge of unreality and wonder, came suddenly to earth with the shocking reality of facing facts quite as they ^{were} ~~were~~, matter-of-factly, unglorified, ~~threatening~~ and frightening. And in that alien world she was quite alone. All the girls in her dormitory with whom she had tripped along so gaily on many occasions, with whom she had laughed and exchanged confidences, were ^{all} ~~were~~ strangers to her, as if from another world. At least not of her world. For she had crossed that bridge, that boundary that separates hers from theirs. And that bridge had crashed and she could never return to them. How she longed to be with them, and be again one of them! O, for but that one experience! How she could talk to

them and laugh with them, and marvel with them at the wonders she had seen and lived with in that fabulous city! How she would regale them with the first three or four days there when she lived in a crystal palace prised with the beautiful colors of the rainbow, a burnished blue sky above! But for that black cloud at the end-shadow! She is a fallen woman, a leper, and they are clean. They, the pure freshets in the well, while she, the rilling gutter. She had heard of fallen women, and though she had never met one of them their thoughts and reactions were a thing of wonderment to her. Not of course of the callous, hardened and brazen ones, but the ones who had stumbled on the highway of life and been cast away like she. She is one of them, of that class, and she knows their thoughts and feelings, and the agony in their soul.

She is one of them!

She is. And ^(for this?) (the) reason she could not tolerate her friends's glances. They were stares that stabbed and penetrated to her innermost self. Surely, they could read if not see her secret, her abominable secret! She doesn't want their humor, their pandering. The sly ones! What must they say and think when they are alone! She must stay away from them. In a world of her own, the darker the better, to hide her secret from prying eyes. Food, even the pleas of Foster, could not draw her out. She must hide and sink alone. The first night of her hideaway in her room - those hours of trial and tribulation of her soul, from evening until dawn! In those hours she passed through the whole range and gamut of human emotion. From the blackness of utter despair, when suicide beckoned like a warming sun, to a twinkling flash of light far into space, a star, which said that all wasn't lost, that there was hope and cheer and sunlight in the future. Above all there is a future for her, and that she only has to rise to the occasion and take it. Courage, courage, it whispered. But the latter was only a transient mood. Most of it was loaded and heavy and

pressed on her breast hard to make her breathless. Then the ironical thought, or was it cynical? What if it had happened with George? George! Why is it unthinkable? Is the emotional urge of youth past the range of George's being? Or is there a repulsing centrifugal force in him, which he can set in motion to ward off or thwart any act by him which might bear the seeds of fatal consequences? But there is an aura about George, an aura that might justify, even glorify such an act by him, and make any consequences seem trivial, or even to be desired. What is it about him? Does she still care for him? Has she ever ceased caring?

But the morning came bright brisk and crisp, and it couldn't fail to awaken new strength and hope in Cynthia. Most of her despair had gone with the night. Such is the resilience of youth. There was business at hand that must be accomplished.

What is it in the human make-up that tears of despair, no matter how deep the pain, tend to lighten the burden of one's soul? Are the tears the healing oil, the lubricating unguent of the human body that salvage the soul? Who can fathom the depths of despair of a tormented soul and yet not find at the bottom, the lowest and blackest bottom, a glimmer of hope shining up from there? The human soul is never a total eclipse in blackness. For so it is constituted. When morning came Cynthia came out of her lair with renewed strength and courage. Even defiance. Don't let your troubled thoughts shut out the daylight, even though soon the struggle ensues between light and darkness. But that's for later.

In the gloom of the chapel, sitting with Foster, she thought for the thousandth time of that obscure moment when she lay flesh pressed against flesh. How she ever permitted such a sacriligious act! Like offering strange incense to the God of love! Foster was holding her hand, but for the five minutes she had been with him she hadn't realized it, until she heard president Torbet's voice. She withdrew her hand. It was ^{ca} the subcon-

scious mechanical act her rejecting his attention and tenderness toward her.

"Cynthia..." he said in a muffled voice, but couldn't go on. She had become estranged from him since yesterday morning. She had refused to see him all afternoon, and in the evening it was the same. He was conscious of a wall ~~was~~ between them. And he was utterly helpless. His sleep had been disturbed the night before by visitations in which Cynthia was always present. She was in the nude standing on the shore of a wide and stormy lake. She was motioning to him. Her lips were moving, but no sound came. The movements of her beckoning arms and the contortion of her face plainly indicated distress. There was a fearful look in her eyes, as of a last appeal to him. Or was it scorn? He was rushing toward her, yet seemed to remain stationary. Then her form dissolved and ~~was~~ vanished. But she came back in another visitation. He recognized a familiar scene in Maine. It was the great lake Spago. He and Cynthia are on a boat, rowing. A brilliant summer's day. In the back of his mind there is the knowledge that somewhere on the same lake are George and Blanche. But he and Cynthia are alone in the whole vastness of ~~the~~ water. Suddenly a black cloud arose from nowhere, it brought wind and lightning with it. The wind blew strongly against the small boat, tossing it whichever way, but not in the direction of shore, ~~was~~. He struggled to make it go his way. Then one oar was ~~gone~~.

Suddenly there was George. An experienced boatman he was, and the score he knew. By delicate and ingenuous maneuvering he got them into his skiff. With both of them plying the oars they reached the safety of shore.

Then a third time. Now she stood immersed in water. Her fine small, firm breasts just above the water line. She was motionless, her arms dangling beside her. Her hands invisible under water. Her face was serene and calm, as if she had reached a happy decision, as if she had made the ultimate. She remained statue like, unaware of him and of her surround-

dings. He had tried to make his presence known to her but she remained ^{stone-}stone-like in her coldness. Then she bent forward, ever so gracefully, and disappeared under surface.

She was gone.

apparition

The very thought of the last ^{apparition} made him shudder; of the forebodings it carried in its shadowy substance, in its unsubstantial wings of gauze!

"Cynthia, darling, can you forgive!"

Her eyes were staring ahead of her, and her face was frigid in a gelid mould. "Say something," he said again. "Say you abhor me, but talk to me."

She turned her head to him. There was ^{the} semblance of a smile on her lips. She had never accused him of anything. What had occurred was as much her fault as his. In a way he had to do what he did. An animal compulsion. She was animal too. And that's the pity of it. She couldn't blame him for anything. If only she could. If she could hate him, that would be a measure of relief. But she could hold no feelings of hatred for long. She sat there in frozen tetany. Foster's voice would penetrate that hard crustacean exterior at such moments, and she would experience a warm feeling toward him, and would take his hand and hold it, and pat it. And then she would let it go, in a thrusting manner, as something repulsive. Now the warm feeling toward him would return. But it wasn't ~~love~~ love, only a motherly pity. He is but a child, and mischievous. She cuddled his hand in hers; "Nothing to forgive."

How she had matured and grown in the past few days! She could feel nothing but apathy, motherly pity, for him. Had she ever loved him? That must have been long ago.

Torbet's choosing Tamar and Judah for his morning text, puzzled her. Was she a harlot? No, but Tamar was clear and white before the Biblical judgment. Even worthy of her name: "Tamar actually demanded the right and privilege that was hers, namely, Judah's youngest son, Shelah. And what courage and steadfastness and nobleness of purpose she displayed in not

denouncing her father-in-law when she was brought out to be burned for being with child through prostitution, even though it was through him she had conceived. It was Judah who had pronounced the sentence of death by burning on the stake, not knowing that he had been the instrument of her conception. She merely sent back his pledges, saying: 'By the man, whose these are, am I with child. Acknowledge, I pray thee, to whom belong these, the signet, the scarf, the staff.' She would die for her father-in-law's sake, if he hadn't acknowledged his pledges, not to shame him publicly. She was a noble woman, worthy of her goodness, and her name in the Bible. But so was Judah. He didn't stand back and let his sentence be carried out over his daughter-in-law. Does he surpass her...? Well, he stood in public - and he was an elder, and respected - and admitted his shame and guilt. If there be punishment for the cardinal sin, adultery, let it be his." Then he finished his short sermon for the day: "Let not others suffer for your guilt, even unto death. Stand up and be counted even to the greatest humiliation. Let there be more Judah's in the Gate. Life would be worthier."

"Would I like Tamar die uncomplaining and unaccusing?" Cynthia reflected.

CHAPTER III

X's The Thing

This, that and the other thing. The X quantity of that other thing. That thing! Unknown in quality and quantity, but it exists. And it grows, grows! There always is a germ, a beginning. Even "nothing" has a germ, a beginning, according to George. She remembers his syllogism. There could be no "something" out of "nothing" if there had been "nothing", absolute nothing in the first place. X's the thing, but it had a known quantity and quality at its beginning, and now it 's quite well established on