

Forsaking All Others

by Alice Duer Miller

Forsaking All Others, by Alice Duer Miller
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Part 1

“Not that you’ll like him,” Nell said,
“No mystery - no romance,
A fine, stern, eagle-like head,
But he simply reeks of finance, --
Started from nothing - self-made --
And rather likes you to know it,
And now collects porcelain and jade,
Or some Seventeenth Century poet.

“Married in simpler days,
A poor little wren of a being,
Who exists to pray and praise,
And spends her life agreeing,
Thin and dowdy and pale,
And getting paler and thinner-
Well, the point of this dreary tale
Is I’ve asked them both to dinner.

“I’d leave her out like a shot,
For I’m not so keen about her,
But, my dear, believe it or not,
He won’t dine out without her.
She has that terrible hold
That aging wives exert to
Replace young charms grown old-
Poor health and impeccable virtue.

“Lightly I asked them to dine,
And now I perceive the dangers,
My friends-yours and mine-
Are so terribly rude to strangers.
But you, dear girl, I can trust
To come and be brilliant and tender;
Vamp the man, if you must,
But give an impression of splendor.”

II

LEE sat before her mirror... rouged her lips,
Set dripping diamond earrings in her ears,
Polished a little at her finger tips,
Thought that she did not look her thirty years;

Thought, “Poor dear Nellie’s ill-assorted feasts!
I want to be as helpful as I can
Among that group of men and gods and beasts...
Why does she think I shall not like this man?”

She made him sound entrancing... strong and crude,
Successful, dominant...I, who for so long
Have known a somewhat pitiful servitude
To weakness, have no terror of the strong.”
Her maid held up her cloak of furry white,
And gave her money in a golden purse.
She sighed: “Not even third-rate bridge to-night,
Just third-rate conversation... which is worse.”

III

“NELLIE, I’m sorry I’m late,
Edward, I honestly am.
Just the malignance of fate
I always get caught in a jam
Whenever I’m coming to you.
“Mrs. Wayne back of you, Lee,
And Mr. Wayne.”

“How do you do.
Isn’t that cocktail for me?

IV

MENU

CAVIAR, cocktails, soup of black bean,
Shad, Moet-Chandon of 1919,
A saddle of mutton, a stuffed aubergine,
With some creme de menthe jelly of beautiful green,
Avocados and lettuce and cold galantine
And baba au rhum with a sauce grenadine,
Coffee and fruit and some excellent fine.

V

SOME women - hard, beautiful women - know a way
Of looking up at a man, so gentle and gay,
A magical child-like look that seems to say:
Let us be happy together for an hour, a day,
A night, or forever. Let us yield to the charm.

Lee looked at Wayne and put her hand on his arm,
Under the broadcloth and linen she felt his muscles like steel,
Feeling, she said to herself, as a man’s arm ought to feel.
And she glanced at her own hand there, so slim and cool
With its single cabochon emerald, like a deep green pool.
“Shall we go first,” she asked him, “or let them all go ahead? “

And so they spoke of leading... and being led.

And then she told him a story, heard she didn't know when,
Of an arctic expedition, from which two men
Had got lost and while they were off and away
They met a dog, starving like them and astray...
A clever heroic creature, who in the end
Guided them back, and they loved that dog like a friend; -
Loved him and worried about him all the way back...
What would he do when he met the head of the pack,
The leader of dogs, the old dog, cruel and stern,
Who brooked no rival. How could this new dog learn ...
Himself a leader and used to his own wild way,
How could he learn to be one of the pack and obey?
Would he not fight for mastery... hopeless...they caught their breath.
Were they not leading this friend they loved to death?

And now the crisis was on them... they saw camp now,
Two men in a fragile boat and a dog standing up in the prow.
They pushed the boat as near as they could to the bank,
And someone to help them land shoved out a plank,
The new dog leaped on the plank, and the old dog, bristling and proud
Made one step to meet him in front of the crowd,
And they looked at each other a moment, and the old dog lay on his back,
And the new dog stepped ashore... the head of the pack.
"A very interesting story. Why did you tell it to me? "
Asked Wayne, with his black eyes on her.
"Why do you think?" asked Lee.

VI

CANDLE light beams, flickers and blazes
On paneled pine walls, fashioned of old;
Pale pink roses in golden vases,
Hothouse grapes in a bowl of gold;
Crystal goblets, and plenty of them,
Flashing their points of rainbow light.
Tall, grave men servants bending above them,
Everyone talking with all his might: -

"Why didn't Archie go with Jessie? "
"My dear, she didn't want him, of course."
"Aren't things getting a trifle messy? "
"There's nothing messy about divorce."
"Algy's a sort of weak Othello."
"Poor creature. Jessie is quite a bird."
"I hear Nan's doing her room in yellow."
"Her room? I think it's her hair you heard."

"Tom never could resist a title."

“Well, I’m rather a snob myself-”
“The woman is large and rich and vital
And does not mean to be laid on the shelf.”
“Nonsense, she’s older than Tom’s own mother,
And ought to be laid on a couple of shelves.”
While Lee and Wayne just talked to each other,
Talked to each other about themselves.

VII

NELLIE and Edward left alone,
Feeling their house again their own,
Stood by the fire. “It seemed to me
The Great Man fell with a crash for Lee...”

“Nellie, the dinner was very good.”

“Darling, so glad you liked your food:
I’m afraid it’s all the fun you had,
With Mrs. Wayne...”

“No, not so bad.
I rather liked her. The old girl said
Good things; she’s got a tongue in her head.
But why the deuce need she look like that?
She isn’t old and she isn’t fat.
Wayne’s probably generous, certainly rich,
Why need she dress like a Salem witch? “

“Oh, I could talk an hour,” said Nell,
“On the psychic basis of dressing well.
It isn’t a question of pocket-books,
It isn’t a figure, it isn’t looks.
It isn’t going to first-rate places.
Believe me, the thing has a psychic basis.
It’s caring... caring a terrible lot...
Whether you’re right, or whether you’re not.
It’s being a slave, yet now and then
Snapping your fingers at gods and men.
It’s art, it’s genius, it’s using your mind...
What does the Bible say-”that kind
Comes not forth but by fasting and prayer...”
Well, that’s the answer... you’ve got to care:
And Mrs. Wayne clearly has not been caring
For twenty years about what she was wearing.”

VII

AT first the Waynes were silent driving home.

Park Avenue tilted southward mile by mile
Until a pale, golden, exotic dome
Stood like a gate across the steep defile.
Rain had been falling and the streets were black.
The traffic lights-emerald and carmine pink-
Were clearly, perfectly reflected back
As in dark mirrors or a pool of ink.
And it was doubly beautiful and gay
When green or red flashed down the polished way.

Wayne in his corner, staring at the skies,
Thought, with his air of easy self-command:
“God, what a woman! What a skin, what eyes,
Lashes a man could feel against his hand.
She lacks a leader, and she knows her lack,
For all her skill and pride... I understood,
If I could turn Time’s moving finger back
How easily I could lead her, if I would.
“Why do you tell that tale,” I asked, “to me? “
She looked at me. “Why do you think?” said she.

“If I were free... but I have led my life
With Ruth, and I am bound beyond repeal,
Bound faster to her than she knows: my wife
Is skeptical and wise, and true as steel.
I will not hurt her, as I once before
Hurt her. I have an oath in heaven; and so
I shall not see this lady any more.
Thank God I have the art of saying No.
I shall not go to see her in her flat
Or telephone or write her... that is that.”
Ruth, staring at the polished onyx street,
Thought: “Merciful God, must I again endure
This agony: must I again compete,
I who am old and tired and insecure?
And she is beautiful and white and slim,
And confident of stirring men’s desire...
I felt even as she first looked at him,
Something that flashed between the two like fire.
I always know when these wild passions start,
By something sharp and sickening at my heart.

“Honey-toned Emily, my childhood friend
Who sweetly laid her plans to take my place;
And that stenographer in Little Bend
With her mad eyes and her impassive face...
Wild midnight scenes over the telephone,
In office hours a most respectful “Sir”
And yet her heart was set on him alone,
She really loved him, and I pitied her.
We had so much in common, she and I,

She almost told me, when she said good-bye.

“But worst was Grace. Grace with her secret art...
She made him feel in some Satanic way
They were Olympians... she and he... apart,
Superior to me... to common clay.
They were spectators at a childish play,
They were all-seeing, in a world of blind...
I could have killed them both with ecstasy...
She so contemptuous and he so kind “

And suddenly his voice was at her ear,
Saying: “Did you enjoy yourself, my dear? “

IX

LEE alone in her room in the dark
Stared out over Central Park.
The rain brought out the primitive smell
Of cold wet earth. Lee thought: “Ah, well,
There is a man I certainly can
Have if I want... and he is a man;
A man who might possibly seethe and bubble,
And be a good deal of fun, and a lot of trouble.”

Part Two

I

A week had passed,
And Lee became aware
That she had had no word, no line
From Wayne, no sign,
No coffin-like box of long-stemmed flowers.
Nothing but silence, unfriendly, dumb.
Yet at first
She nursed
Faith in her magical powers,
Didn't much care,
Feeling sure he would come
At last.

But soon, she noticed, astounded,
That she was always listening. . . hearing
The telephone bell whenever it sounded,
Always hurrying, hoping, fearing. . .
Surely this time it must be - it is,
His voice I shall hear. But it never was his.

Other men came and wrote and wired,
Other men flattered her smallest whim.
More and more she desired
Only a word from him. . .

II

SHE saw him once in the street
On a fair sweet mild March day,
And her heart began to beat
Or ever her mind could say:
"It is he at last - we shall meet."

But he passed her by unaware
Of her presence. "Well, well," thought she,
"I shall not trouble nor care
For a man who cares nothing for me.
There are men enough and to spare."

Yet she wondered: "How is he able
To leave his office at noon?
Is some lovely being in pearls and sable
Waiting his coming soon
At a screened and shaded table?"

III

NELLIE, to make matters worse, would say,
Whenever they met: "I have no doubt
You see poor Jim Wayne every day,
Hopelessly hanging about."

And Lee would laugh as she answered: "He
Belongs, I fear, to that class in life
That thinks it wrong to go out to tea
Without his wedded wife."

But her faith in herself was bruised and shaken,
She who had seen so much of men;
And she thought: "Can I possibly be mistaken,
Was there nothing between us, then?"

"What is it keeps him away, I wonder?
Does he lack courage ... has he no thirst
For life? Oh, dear, it would be a blunder
For me to call him first."

And then in spite of this long debating,
She'd called his office . . . she didn't know how,
And a strange voice said, after keeping her waiting:
"Mr. Wayne's out, just now."

IV

SHE went to an auction sale,
Not that she meant to buy,
But just to feast her eye
On quiet blanc de chine statuettes. . .
Elegant ladies, tall and pale,
Porcelain bowls like a rainy sky,
Bottles in delicate cucumber greens,
Icy crystalline figurines,
Turquoise vases and lacquered screens. . .

She went with a man who came from the West
To buy for a great collector there.
He knew his subject and let her share
His knowledge.
"The Fogg Museum's best
For that particular kind of ware. . .
That is atrocious. . . that is fair. . .
(Only of course it isn't Ming)
This is the item I want. . . by far
The most beautiful, delicate, perfect thing
In the sale. . . the peachblow jar."

The bidding was instantly brisk and pleasant.
Everyone present
Bid on the jar, but it soon was plain
Out of the roomful only two
Meant business, - her friend and another man, who
From the back of the room kept bidding steadily
Raising in hundreds only too readily,
Lee, like others, turning to see
Who this mad bidder could possibly be,
Saw it was Wayne.

And when the auctioneer said "Sold
To Mr. W." (say it sadly
As if the enormous price were small)
Lee knew as well as if she'd been told
That Wayne had only been bidding madly,
Only been bidding perhaps at all
Because she was there to admire:
"That he hadn't come with a settled plan,
But had yielded himself to the spur
Of a sudden male desire
To take the peachblow jar. . . and her. . .
Away from another man.
And she thought: "He is mine once more.
He sees it is fated.
He'll be there when I get to the door. . ."
But she found that he had not waited.

V

THAT night at dinner, Ruth and Wayne alone
Talked in the somewhat uninspiring tone
Of couples married almost twenty years:

"I need not go to Boston, it appears,
This week, at least

"My dear, I am so glad;
Your cold. . ."

"I haven't got a cold." "You had
A bad one Sunday."

"No, it wasn't bad."

And Ruth, who knew him as good sailors know
The weather, knew that he had meant to go
To see those porcelains sold. "And did you bid?"
She asked him.
"Yes, unhappily, I did."
He smiled and named the price he paid, and thought

Of Lee's turned profile; and as if she caught
His vision, Ruth began to speak of Lee. . .
How she had heard that afternoon at tea
The story of that pretty Mrs. Kent
They'd met. . . well, he'd remember whom she meant.
Yes, he remembered.
Was it all perhaps
One of those harmless, half-unconscious plots
That anguished wives will fashion to discover
Whether they see another woman's lover
Across their table - at their bedroom door. .
Who knows? Assuredly Ruth's manner bore
No sign. . . she told a story. . . nothing more.

VI

"It seems that in Nineteen Seventeen,
She worked in an officers' club or canteen
Here in New York. She was under twenty,
Young and lovely, and men in plenty
Wanted to marry her. . . Tom, Dick and Harry. . . ,
But there wasn't one that she wanted to marry.

"Then one day into her canteen came
Kent, in his officer's shoulder straps.
They had met as children - had had perhaps
One of those strange ethereal wild
Love affairs that you have as a child.
She knew him at once; he was just the same
Silent, sensitive boy, athirst
For every sort of beauty and knowledge,
Unfit for fighting, and so the first
To enlist, to leave some nice little college
Where he'd been teaching. . . and what was worse. . .
Writing rather poor English verse.

"Some weeks before his regiment
Sailed for France, she married Kent.

"In the course of the next infernal spring-
As to just when and where I'm a little bit hazy -
In the course of that final German drive
The boy went through some terrible thing -
Was lost or blown up or buried alive,
And he went insane - went raving crazy -
Is utterly out of his mind to-day,
Hopeless, shut up in some remote
Asylum. Terrible scenes occur
Whenever she sees him, and yet they say
He's always calling, longing for her,

And tries when he sees her to cut her throat.

"That beautiful woman. . . that poor mad poet -
As sad a story as ever I heard."

She looked at her husband; if he was stirred
By her tale, he certainly did not show it.
"Perhaps you knew it already," said Ruth.
"No," he answered, and spoke the truth.

VII

"Dear Mr. Wayne:
Did you quite forget
You promised to come to tea some day?
I know you're busy and great, but yet
The great are the ones to do as they say.
Kings and emperors never may
Make their devoted subjects wait.
Everyone suffers too much if they
Forget an acquaintance, or break a date.
This is the price of being great. . .
Not too severe, I assume you say,
You will always find me rather late.
Very sincerely yours, L. K."

VIII

HIS answer came. . . thanks for her charming letter...
Kept at the office every afternoon. . .
But when the market got a little better. . .
He'd do himself the pleasure very soon
Of dropping in . . . And meantime he'd remain
Truly. . . a scrawl that meant James Henry Wayne.

A woman though much less quick and clever
Than Lee could see that this meant "never."

IX

AND as she read that letter, she became
The primitive huntress; neither fear nor shame
Could turn her from her purpose now. For still
She felt his love, and his cool reasoned will
Seemed to her trivial. . . a straw. . . beside
Her love that rode victorious on the tide
Of will and passion. For woman's love is clear
And primal and unquestioned, and as near

To nature as the fall of day and night,
The tides, the seasons. . . It assumes its right
To earthly consummation as a star
Its right to shine. For it is older, far
Older by long millenniums and ages
Than all such moral principles as sages
Invent to guide man through his native fog -
Such as conventions and the Decalogue.

An April day, and a salt breeze blowing
Leaving the taste of brine on the lip,
Round the Battery waters flowing
As if New York were a clipper-ship; -

A mighty freighted vessel sailing
Away to some vast and perilous dream
With a thousand mastheads flaunting, trailing
Beautiful banners of smoke and steam.

Wayne at his office window, chinking
Keys in his pocket, staring away
Over the windy harbour, thinking:
"What am I doing? Why do I stay?"

"I who have earned the right to leisure,
Why do I work like a galley slave?
Work without risk or need or pleasure. . .
What a goddam silly way to behave!

"Why am I not at this moment flying
Before this gale on a leeward reach
Or digging for buried gold, or lying
By a warm blue sea on a hot white beach?"

"Time enough when my hair is graying,
Time enough when my back is bent.
And at this an office-boy entered, saying:
"A lady to see you, Sir, - Mrs. Kent."

Part 3

I

THERE was an instant when he might have said
He could not see the lady; but instead
He nodded with a blank, impassive face,
And waited, never moving from his place
Beside the window, till a moment more
And she was there, leaning against the door
Which she had closed. She stood there, silent, staring,
Trembling with fear at her own act of daring,
But not with fear of him. Erect and slim,
White as the daytime moon, she spoke to him.

“I know,” she said, “that it was not your plan
That we should ever meet: I know a man
Assumes despotic power, assumes his voice
In cases such as ours shall have the choice...”

“But is that just, I ask... is that fair play
That you should have the right to throw away,
Crush and destroy and utterly deny
Our joint possession... or rather mine, for I
Value our friendship so much more than you
Appear to...” “No,” he said, “That is not true.”

She shook her head. “Ah, if you thought it rare,
Precious and wonderful, you would not dare
Destroy it by yourself... not even you.”

He answered: “I not only would. I do.
You speak of friendship. What a silly word,
And as dishonest as I ever heard.
Let us at least be candid, for God’s sake,
And speak the truth... what difference does it make?
It is not friendship we are speaking of,
But the first moments of a passionate love....”

“You’re wrong,” she cried, “you’re absolutely wrong.
Not everything emotional and strong
Between a man and woman needs must be
Physical love... People like you and me
Are wise enough and old enough to take
This fiery elemental thing and make
Something for every day, serene and cool...
I am not of the all-or-nothing school.”

He smiled. “We light hell-fires, and you engage
They’ll warm our palsied hands in our old age,”
At this she paused, and then she said: “Your tone

Wounds me. I live so terribly alone,
I am perhaps too eager for a friend...
But not a lover. Oh, please comprehend
I want no lovers. Think me vain or not
But I assure you I might have a lot
Of them. But friendship such as you could give -
Wisdom and strength and knowledge how to live
In this harsh world in which I draw my breath
With so much pain... it seems a sort of death
To yield so rich a promise... to forego
Such happiness..," She heard him laugh. "You know
All that is nonsense," "Nonsense?" "All but this."
And on her willing lips she felt his kiss.

II

"I HAVE a new friend," thought Lee, "I have a lover,
Made of steel and fire as a lover ought to be,
And I do not much care if all the world discover
That I adore him madly and that he loves me.

"Everything I do nowadays is pleasant,-
Talking, walking, brushing out my hair-
Oh, isn't it fine a friend, not being even present,
Can give the world a meaning, and common things an air! "

III

O, AGONY infernal
That lovers undergo!
O, secret trysts diurnal
That nobody must know.
O, vigilance eternal
The whole world for a foe.

But Lee and Wayne were clever
And all that springtime through
They met and met, and never
Were noticed so to do.
And no one whatsoever
Suspected them - or knew.

IV

LOVE in a city in spring,
Not so divine a thing
As love the poet dreams-
Meadows and brimming streams,

Yet there is much to say
For love in New York in May-
Parks set in tulip beds,
Yellows and whites and reds,
Japanese plums in flower
And that wisteria bower
Dripping its blossoms sweet
Over a rustic seat
Where tramps and nursemaids meet...

New York in early May
Breaks out in awnings gay;
Daisies and ivy trailing
From every window railing.
And at this time of year
Strange open hacks appear,
Shabby and old and low
Wherein strange couples go
Generally after dark,
Clop-clopping round the park.

And with it all, the loud,
Noisy, indifferent crowd
Offers to lovers shrewd
Infinite solitude.

V

FOUR thousand years ago a great king died,
And there were rites and hymns and long processions,
And he was buried in his pomp and pride,
With all his vast possessions.

Gold beds with lapis-lazuli inlay,
And chairs, and perfume jars of alabaster,
And many slaves were slain, lest they betray
The tomb that held their master.

Lee leant her hand upon his mummy case,
(Opened to show the gold and silver plating) ,
And as Wayne came her look was an embrace:
“Darling, I don’t mind waiting.

“I like,” she said, “to settle in my seat
A moment ere the rising of the curtain,
Waiting for something certain can be sweet...
For something almost certain.”

VI

THEY would meet for luncheon every day
At a small unknown French cafe
Half-way up town and half-way down
With a chef deserving great renown.
And Pierre the waiter would smile and say:
“Bonjour, Monsieur, dame,” and they
Would see by his smile discreet and sly
That he knew exactly the reason why
A couple so proud and rich should come
To eat each day in a squalid slum.
And nothing delighted his Gallic heart
More than to find he could play a part
And protect “ces amoureux foux d’ amour”
And guide their choice through the carte du jour.

VII

BUT most of all Lee loved the hours
When streets filled full of violet mists
And after-gloves on taller towers
Prove that the sunset still exists:
And in Wayne’s long dark car reclining
They’d cross a bridge, and bye and bye
Turn back to see the city shining
Against a pale blue, star-sewn sky.

VIII

“I KNOW,” she said, “I am a fool to weep,
I know the time will pass, however black.
Oh, Jim, if I could take a drug, and sleep
And sleep till you come back.

“Do you remember how poor Juliet said:
“Think you that we shall ever meet again?”
And what was poor weak Romeo instead
Of you... a king of men!

“Don’t be surprised to find me at the train
With pipes and garlands and a choric dance,
Telling the porters: “That is J. H. Wayne,
My one supreme romance.”

So it seemed natural to Lee to speak,
If Wayne were going away for a week.

IX

HE had been gone three days, when wearily strolling about
She stopped and sent him a wire, writing it out
With a pencil chained to a desk: "This is to say
There are over eighty thousand seconds a day,
Each one of them longer than seconds ought to be
And a personal foe of yours devotedly Lee."

X

A letter from Ruth - a letter from Lee.
Wayne took them both with his bedroom key.
Every day since he went away
Lee had written him - every day -
How kind, how tender! And yet his wife
Had always written him, all his life,
Since that first Fall day, since that first fond year
When to part was really "un peu mourir."
Ruth's letters had come in her small, black writing,
So faithful - and now so unexciting-
A long unbreakable chain whose fetters
Were formed of those little daily letters,
Leading him back to his alien youth,
And his love - his first deep love of Ruth.

Once he had waited, young and lonely,
For those daily letters to come, the only
Solace in absence, terror-smitten,
Thinking, Dear God, if she hasn't written!
When did they change? what day, what hour
Did her letters lose their magical power?
He was the same man, and she the same
Woman - and still her letters came...

A letter from Ruth - a letter from Lee.
Wayne took them both with his bedroom key.
Was it a habit - a memory
Of that deep old love that his heart once nursed?
Who knows?
He opened Ruth's letter first

XI

THE day that Wayne was coming home,
Lee flitted fleet-footed among the throng
Of suburbanites shuffling their feet along
Under the turquoise dome
With the signs of the zodiac all turned wrong.

A blue-capped official, proud and remote,
Was writing unmoved as the crowd increased
Messages brief as those fingers wrote
On the wall at Belshazzar's dreadful feast:
"Train Fifty-One is on time. Train Eleven
On time. Train Nineteen an hour late."
And then the announcement, big with fate:
"Train Fifteen on Track Forty-Seven."

And Lee's heart beat with a wild elation,
And she ran like a child in a childish game,
Pushed without pity or grace or shame
Past women and children to take her station
Where she could perfectly see
Down the dark hole where the train would be -
See Wayne as soon as he came.

The passengers came streaming out,
Some with bags and some without,
Some with babies, some with pets,
All about her was greeting,
Kissing and meeting,
Talking and lighting cigarettes.

And when she saw him coming,
His head above the stream,
No miracle so startling,
So magical could seem,
As this - that he was coming -
A real man, not a dream!

Part 4

I

WAYNE was looking near and far
After the theatre to find his car.
He had taken his wife to the play that night;

Broadway was glittering hard and bright
With every sort of electric light-
Green and scarlet and diamond-white;
And moving letters against the sky
Told you exactly the reason why
This or that was the thing to buy.
And suddenly there at his side was Nell
Vainly seeking her car as well
They talked. for a moment... of meeting again...
And how were Edward and Ruth, and then
"I wonder," said Nell, "if you ever see
My lovely friend..." "You mean," said he,
"That blue-eyed lady I once sat next.. "
"Exactly," said Nellie. "I feel so vexed
With Lee. I haven't seen her this season,
And between you and me, I know the reason."
"Do you indeed?" said Wayne."Oh, yes,"
Nell answered. "I know... at least I guess.
When a woman like that whom I've seen so much
All of a sudden drops out of touch,
Is always busy and never can
Spare you a moment, it means a MAN."

Wayne did not smile. "I am sure you are
Right," he said. "Do you go so far
In the magic art as to tell us who
The man may be?" "I certainly do,"
Said Nell. "It's that handsome young romantic
Doctor who's driving the ladies frantic,
So that they flock to be cured in shoals
And talk of nothing but sex and souls,
And self-expression, and physical passion..
Of course, no wonder the man's the fashion."

"Does Mrs. Kent flock? " "Oh, no, I meant
They've called him in to take care of Kent.
Imagine the long deep conversations,
The tears, the intimate revelations...
I wish to all ladies, lonely and sad,
Tied to a husband hopelessly mad
A handsome psychiatrist... good or bad.
Oh, there's my car," and so with a gay

Good night to Wayne she was driven away.

People will come for miles, they say,
To see a man burnt at the stake, yet none
Turned in that crowd to look at one
Standing quietly burning there,
Suffering more than a man can bear,
Consumed with hideous inner fire,
Believing his love a cheat and a liar...
Believing the moment that Nell had spoken,
For that day of all days Lee had broken
A date... at the time he had thought it queer,
And now, by God, it was perfectly clear,
Perfectly clear, no doubt whatever...
A doctor, handsome and young and clever,
With all this rotten erotic learning....

Strange indeed that no head was turning
To watch this gentleman quietly burning,
In a trance of pain he heard Ruth say:
“Well, dear, what did you think of that play? “

II

“HOW could you think such a thing? “
“Try to forgive if you can.”
“Spoiling our beautiful Spring!”
“Well, I am only a man.”

“I will forgive, if I can.”
“Jealousy made me insane.”
“I never spoke to the man.”
“I’ll never doubt you again.”

“Jealousy made you insane.”
“Lee, you have much to forgive.”
“Oh, never doubt me again.”
“Never as long as I live.”

“Jim, I have much to forgive.”
“Yes, but I’ve suffered like hell.”
“Trust me as long as you live.”
“Dearest, I love you too well.”

“Poor darling, going through hell.”
“Spoiling our beautiful Spring.”
“I also love you too well.”
“How could I think such a thing? “

III

LOVERS after a quarrel say to each other lightly:
“Dear, we are closer than ever: I love you better by far;
After the rainstorm is over, the sun shines even more brightly...”
Poor pitiful lovers, trying to hide the unsightly
Stain on the surface of love... the ineffaceable scar.

IV

THE Spring was over, and Summer far advanced,-
Lee spent many a hidden week in town,
Days long and enchanted, and nights entranced,
But one thought would not down:

“Is he content with this snatched and broken life? “
She thought, “when we might be free?
He cannot love that dowdy middle-aged wife.
Does he really love me? “

She was not burnt by jealousy sudden and hot,
But poisoned and chilled that he would not break
A meagre tie to a wife she knew he could not
Love, - yet would not forsake.

One night at her window, looking over the Park,
With his strong hand on her shoulder prest,
And a thunder-cloud rolling up out of the dark,
Rolling out of the West,

Suddenly she heard herself quoting Macbeth:
“ “To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus.” “
He answered after a pause on a long-drawn breath:
“Safety is not for us.”

V

AND from that moment Lee began - not nagging,
She was too wise for that - but she began
A secret steady pull, a silent dragging
To break the other tie that bound this man.

And she would brood, injured, remote, self-centred
At any mention that he had a wife;
And something chill and faintly hostile entered
The magic circle of this hidden life.

O lovers, those legitimately united
In holy wedlock, and less happy, those

Whose troth may never openly be plighted-
(Less happy did I say? Alas, who knows?)

But lovers all, beware, and know the strongest
Of wills may make a strong antagonist:
And that love will not always linger longest
With those who hold it in too clenched a fist.

VI

YET on the whole they were happy, as day by day
The long mysterious Summer passed away.
None guessed their secret - except far off on a shady
Lawn by the coast of Maine, a middle-aged lady
Spending a quiet Summer almost alone
In a great Victorian house of dark gray stone,
Knew as she sat and stared at the cold Maine ocean
Every event, every phase, every emotion
Of that great romance. She knew, none better,
Not by a chance or slip, or anonymous letter,
Not through gossip by any tattler carried,
But because she perfectly knew the man she had married.

VII

“Do not go home for Sunday,
Darling,” Lee’s letter said.
“How I hate Friday to Monday!
Stay with me here, instead.
Life is so short, and one day
Soon, we shall both be dead.

“The curse of love like ours
Is that we seem to be
Always cut short by powers
Stronger than you and me.
But if you stayed-what hours,
Glorious, alone and free”

VIII

RUTH in her quiet garden beside the sea
Thinking, “To-morrow at this time Jim will be
Here at my side. It’s something to be a wife -
The background dull and assured of everyday life.
He must come home, whether he wants to or not,
To me, to me... All other women must plot,
Arrange, manoeuver to see him...”

And then behind her
She heard the steps of a servant coming to find her:
A footman stood with a telegram held on a tray:
“Terribly sorry I cannot get away
This week-end. Better luck next. Love. Jim.”

She turned her head to the footman, and said to him,
“Say Mr. Wayne will not be here to-morrow.”
And the man withdrew and left her alone with her sorrow.

The sun went down behind the great blue hill;
And she sat there alone in her garden, perfectly still,
Watching the wraiths of fog blow in like smoke,
And her heart as she sat there gently and quietly broke.

IX

AN August Sunday in town,
The Park all sere and brown,
The noise of wheels died down.

Faint tepid breezes wake
Now and again, and make
Lee's slatted curtains shake.

Now and again in the street
The sound of passing feet,
And church bells, faint and sweet.

Faint bells that ought to mean
A village spire seen
Across a meadow green.

Faint bells... Wayne's early youth...
Going to church... in truth
Going to church with Ruth.

Faint bells, and Lee cries, “Oh,
How I should like to know
Why bells depress me so! “

X

BEFORE the skulls of Primitive Man,
Lee stood and thought: “Are we part of a plan
Of Nature's; or are we just a sort
Of Cosmic Coincidence - a sport
Of God - or worse, a sport of chance-

Or of Ether - Nature's great romance?

“How queer it would be, if it turned out we
Were merely eddies - Jim and me
Meaningless eddies in ether swirled
In and out of a meaningless world.
Well, if we are it's nice to think
We've had some moments upon the brink
Of dissolution - of absolute chaos
Moments of joy that well repay us.”

And she paused to note that her fellow eddy
Was fifteen minutes late already.

Waiting she wandered from floor to floor,
Every instant becoming more
Uneasy, and going back to the door,
Where Wayne ought to have been at exactly four.

She went from the skulls of Primitive Man
To the mystic temples of Yucatan,
Or studied gray elephants, vast and haughty,
But with eyes like pigs' eyes, shrewd and naughty,
Flamingoes of beautiful coral pink-
The ancestry of the missing link-
But in between she was always hurrying
Back to the doorway, wondering, worrying -
And then she saw with a horrid sinking
Of heart, it was five! And she went home thinking,
“Something has happened - he's been struck
By a ruthless, rollicking, rumbling truck,
Or crushed by a taxi, and now is lying
In some hospital ward - unknown and dying -
Or if they knew would they send in truth
For me? Oh, no, they would send for Ruth.”

And hurrying fast as the laws enable,
She found a telegram on her table,
Signed as usual, “J. H. Wayne:”

“Ruth has pneumonia alone in Maine,
Of course I am taking the very first train.
Sorry to miss you before I go.
When I know my plans, I'll let you know.”

The first emotion felt by Lee
Was pure and perfect relief that he
Was safe. And then she felt the force
Of that cruel, domestic calm “of course.”
And then undeniably into her head
Came the thought unbidden: - “If Ruth were dead - “

And standing alone: "Poor thing," she said

Part 5

I

TRAINED nurses, trained nurses everywhere-
Trained nurses by night, trained nurses by day -
In the corridors, on the stair,
Looking for towels, carrying a tray;
Saying, "you mustn't," "you must," "you may."
Smooth as to hair, stiff as to skirt,
Kind in a cool, impersonal way,-
Angels of mercy, bright-eyed, alert,
Hard young angels, sent to avert
That older angel of dark despair -
Stiff starched angels, a trifle curt -
Trained nurses, trained nurses everywhere.

II

A WHITE figure spoke from the doorway
In a tone deliberately bright:
"Would you like to see the patient
For a moment, and say goodnight?"

Shepherded in like a stranger
He stood beside her bed,
Gazed at those pale, blank eyelids
In that carven ivory head.

Took her hand and heard her
Murmur: "Is that you, Jim?"
But he knew she was very tired -
Tired even of him.

Too much spent with the struggle
Of drawing breath to afford
A brief smile - utterly weary,
And more than utterly bored.

III

NEVER before had Ruth been out of reach:
Barriers had been - but only of his making.
Now she had passed beyond the power of speech,
Quite, quite indifferent that his heart was breaking.

Here in the bedroom that he used to share
She lived day after day, averse to living,

Indifferent, unforgiving, unaware
That he had any need of her forgiving.

IV

At first Lee wrote to him every day
Tactful letters, that let him see
She knew very well he would rather be
With her - but it wasn't the thing to say.

Tactful letters at first, and then
Letters less tactful and more sincere,
Ending: "Why don't you write to me, dear?"
Write to me . . . over and over again.

But he could not answer her piteous call;
Not exactly that he forgot
Their love, but only that she had not
Any reality for him at all.

She seemed like a pleasant book he had read -
Read and enjoyed; but the printed page
Cannot compete with the heritage
Of Nature. . . the living, and Oh, the dead!

At last he sent her a brief reply:
"I cannot write - or eat or sleep
Just now. I am going through the deep
Waters. Forgive me, dear Lee. Good-bye."

V

THEN a night came
When in sleep broken
He heard his name
Suddenly spoken.
Into his dream
Horrors flocked thickly-
Was that a scream?
"Better come quickly!"

Cold was his room
And his hands shaking;
Out of the gloom
Dawn was just breaking-
Dawn cool and green
Over the ocean,
Never more seen
Without emotion

Of death - agony -
Somebody crying -
All dawns that dawn, when he
Knew Ruth was dying.

VI

WHAT can you do with a woman's things
After a woman is dead?
Not the bracelets and rings and strings
Of pearls, but the small unvalued things -
What can I do, Wayne said.

What can you do with a woman's dresses,
After a woman is dead?
Hanging limp in the cedar presses,
They are part of herself, her pretty dresses -
What can I do, Wayne said.

What can you do with a woman's shoes,
After a woman is dead?
Shoes that perhaps you helped her choose,
Poor little empty half-worn shoes-
What can I do, Wayne said.

What can you do with her brush and comb,
After a woman is dead?
What in God's name can you do with her home
And her loss and her love and her brush and comb -
What can I do, Wayne said.

VII

UP a little river
Where salmon used to play,
Not twenty miles distant
A little village lay --
Ruth's native village,
Where Wayne used to go
To see his mother's mother
Many years ago.
Here in a churchyard
With pines along the wall
And a wooden church steeple
Almost too tall,
Here in September,
On a bright clear day
Among the graves of sailors,
They laid Ruth away.

In this same churchyard,
Sitting on the stones,
He had first said he loved her
In young shaken tones.
That had been September,
But not this bright light.
Between the pine-needles
The stars shone white,-
Such a little maiden,
Such a young man-
“I love you.” - And she answered:
“I don’t see how you can.”
They had been so happy
They had not cared at all
That the place was a churchyard
With pines along the wall.

VIII

WAYNE stood bareheaded on the churchyard sward
By the open grave under the open sky:
“I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord,
He who believeth in Me shall never die.”

Beautiful, terrible service! He heard a word
Here and there, and then he would drift away
To other memories and things not heard-
Ruth’s laugh when she used to laugh, so little and gay.

“When thou with rebukes dost chasten a man from sin..”
Was it sin that had parted him from Ruth?
Was sin the secret corrosion that entered in
Like a moth fretting the garment of love in youth?

Too late, too late! He heard the parson say:
“Before I go hence and be no more seen. . .
A thousand years in thy sight is but as yesterday. . .
Too late, too late! “As grass in the morning green...”

“Was it Ruth he was leaving here in the churchyard plot-
Could it be Ruth who had gone, not saying good-bye?
“What advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?
Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die.”

How can a man help eating and drinking?
Die to-morrow! To-day, if he had his will.
How many years must he spend in thinking, thinking
Of the thing which someone has said that all men kill?

Well, he could bear what he must bear - even the sound
Of earth on a coffin falling. What must be must.
“We therefore commit her body to the ground,
Ashes to ashes, earth to earth, dust to dust.”

Prayers! Would they never be done, these killing
Rites for the dead! Ah, there was the organ's roll
From the little church, and children's voices shrilling,
Piping Ruth's favourite hymn, “Hark, hark, my soul...”

“Hark, hark, my soul! Angelic songs are swelling
O'er earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat shore;
How sweet the truth those blessed strains are telling
Of that new life where sin shall be no more!

Angels of Jesus,
Angels of light,
Singing to welcome
The pilgrims of the night.”

IX

“Dear Lee:-
I've tried so many times to write,
And now I must write, for I sail next week
For Italy - Sardinia - I might
Go on to Egypt later, and the Greek Islands.
I may be several years away.

“I loved you, Lee. I wonder if I can
Explain at all what's happened? From your wealth
You gave me freely - more than any man
Has ever had - beauty, wit, youth and health-
I loved you passionately; and now my wife
Is dead. One might expect a mild distress,
A briefly pensive mood. . . Instead, my life
Is shattered. . . is dissolved. . . is meaningless. . .
She whom of late I thought so little of
And saw so little, was, I find, the spring
Of all I did and felt - even of my love
Of you. . . What an insane, incredible thing!
But there it is.

“Dear Lee, this is the truth:
That any marriage founded on devotion
Though that devotion die, as mine for Ruth,
Is not a state, but a unique emotion,
Potent, unalterable - not romantic
Love, though romantic love is where it starts
Marriage begins only when those hot, frantic

Fires have finished welding human hearts.
It is not love, friendship, or partnership,
But this emotion-marriage, of a force
That when it once has held you in its grip
Nothing will free you wholly - not divorce,
Or death, for these destroy not it, but you,
As I am now destroyed.

“Beware, dear Lee,
Of a true marriage, if you are not true
Yourself - or you will be destroyed - like me.”