MRS. FONSS

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In the graceful pleasure-gardens behind the Pope's ancient palace in Avignon stands a bench from which one can overlook the Rhone, the flowery banks of the Durance, hills and fields, and a part of the town.

One October afternoon two Danish ladies were seated on this bench, Mrs. Fonss, a widow, and her daughter Elinor.

Although they had been here several days and were already familiar with the view before them, they nevertheless sat there and marveled that this was the way the Provence looked.

And this really was the Provence! A clayey river with flakes of muddy sand, and endless shores of stone-gray gravel; pale-brown fields without a blade of grass, pale-brown slopes, pale-brown hills and dust-colored roads, and here and there near the white houses, groups of black trees, absolutely black bushes and trees. Over all this hung a whitish sky, quivering with light, which made everything still paler, still dryer and more wearily light; never a glimmer of luxuriant, satiated hues, nothing but hungry, sun-parched colors; not a sound in the air, not a scythe passing through the grass, not a wagon rattling over the roads; and the town stretching out on both sides was also as if built of silence with all the streets still as at noon time, with all the houses deaf and dumb, every shutter closed, every blind drawn, each and every one; houses that could neither see nor hear.

Mrs. Fonss viewed this lifeless monotony with a resigned smile, but it made Elinor visibly nervous; not actively nervous as in the case of annoyance, but mournful and weary, as one often becomes after many days of rain, when all one's gloomy thoughts seem to pour down upon one with the rain; or as at the idiotically consoling tick-tack of a clock, when one sits and grows incurably tired of one's self; or at watching the flowers of the wall-paper, when the same chain of worn-out dreams clanks about

against one's will in the brain and the links are joined and come apart and in a stifling endlessness are united again. It actually had a physical effect upon her, this landscape, almost causing her to faint. To-day everything seemed to have conspired with the memories of a hope which was dead and of sweet and lively dreams which had become disagreeable and nauseous; dreams which caused her to redden when she thought of them and which yet she could not forget. And what had all that to do with the region here? The blow had fallen upon her far from here amid the surroundings of her home, by the edge of a sound with changing waters, under pale green beech-trees. Yet it hovered on the lips of every pale brown hill, and every green-shuttered house stood there and held silence concerning it.

It was the old sorrow for young hearts which had touched her. She had loved a man and believed in his love for her, and suddenly he had chosen some one else. Why? For what reason? What had she done to him? Had she changed? Was she no longer the same? And all the eternal questions over again. She had not said a word about it to her mother, but her mother had understood every bit of it, and had been very concerned about her. She could have screamed at this thoughtfulness which knew and yet should not have known; her mother understood this also, and for that reason they had gone traveling.

The whole purpose of the journey was only that she might forget.

Mrs. Fonss did not need to make her daughter feel uneasy by scrutinizing her face in order to know where her thoughts were. All she had to do was to watch the nervous little hand which lay beside her and with such futile despair stroked the bars of the bench; they changed their position every moment like a fever-patient tossing from side to side in his hot bed. When she did this and looked at the hand, she also knew how life-weary the young eyes were that stared out into the distance, how pain quivered through every feature of the delicate face, how pale it was beneath its suffering, and how the blue veins showed at the temples beneath the soft skin.

She was very sorry for her little girl, and would have loved to have had her lean against her breast, and to whisper down to her all the words of comfort she could

think of, but she had the conviction that there were sorrows which could only die away in secret and which must not be expressed in loud words, not even between a mother and daughter. Otherwise some day under new circumstances, when everything is building for joy and happiness, these words may become an obstacle, something that weighs heavily and takes away freedom. The person who has spoken hears their whisper in the soul of the other, imagines them turned over and judged in the thoughts of the other.

Then, too, she was afraid of doing injury to her daughter if she made confidences too easy. She did not wish to have Elinor blush before her; she did want, however much of a relief it might be, to help her over the humiliation, which lies in opening the inmost recesses of one's soul to the gaze of another. On the contrary the more difficult it became for both, the more she was pleased, that the aristocracy of soul which she herself possessed was repeated in her young daughter in a certain healthy inflexibility.

Once upon a time—it was a time many, many years ago, when she herself had been an eighteen-year old girl, she had loved with all her soul, with every sense in her body, every living hope, every thought. It was not to be, could not be. He had had nothing to offer except his loyalty which would have involved the test of an endlessly long engagement, and there were circumstances in her home which could not wait. So she had taken the one whom they had given her, the one who was master over these circumstances. They were married, then came children: Tage, the son, who was with her in Avignon, and the daughter, who sat beside her, Everything had turned out so much better than she could have hoped for, both easier and more friendly. Eight years it lasted, then the husband died, and she mourned him with a sincere heart. She had learned to love his fine, thin-blooded nature which with a tense, egotistic, almost morbid love loved whatever belonged to it by ties of relationship or family, and cared nought for anything in all the great world outside, except for what they thought, what their opinion was—nothing else. After her husband's death she had lived chiefly for her children, but she had not devoted herself exclusively to them; she had taken part in social life, as was natural for so young and well-to-do a widow; and now her son

was twenty-one years old and she lacked not many days of forty. But she was still beautiful. There was not a gray thread in her heavy dark-blonde hair, not a wrinkle round her large, courageous eyes, and her figure was slender with well-balanced fullness. The strong, fine lines of her features were accentuated by the darker more deeply colored complexion which the years had given her; the smile of her widely sweeping lips was very sweet; an almost enigmatical youth in the dewy luminosity of her brown eyes softened and mellowed everything again. And yet she also had the round fullness of cheek, the strong-willed chin of a mature woman.

"That surely is Tage coming," said Mrs. Fonss to her daughter when she heard laughter and some Danish exclamations on the other side of the thick hedge of hornbeam.

Elinor pulled herself together.

And it was Tage, Tage and Kastager, a wholesale merchant from Copenhagen, with his sister and daughter; Mrs. Kastager lay ill at home in the hotel.

Mrs. Fonss and Elinor made room for the two ladies; the men tried for a moment to converse standing, but were lured by the low wall of stone which surrounded the spot. They sat there and said only what was absolutely necessary, for the newcomers were tired from a little railway excursion they had taken into the Provence with its blooming roses.

"Hello!" cried Tage, striking his light trousers with the flat of his hand, "look!"

They looked.

Out in the brown landscape appeared a cloud of dust, over it a mantle of dust, and between the two they caught sight of a horse. "That's the Englishman, I told you about, who came the other day," said Tage, turning toward his mother.

"Did you ever see any one ride like that?" he asked, turning toward Kastager, "he reminds me of a gaucho."

"Mazeppa?" said Kastager, questioningly.

The horseman disappeared.

Then they all rose, and set out for the hotel.

They had met the Kastagers in Belfort, and since they were pursuing the same itinerary through southern France and along the Riviera, they for the time being traveled together. Here in Avignon both families had made a halt; Kastager because his wife had developed a varicose vein, the Fonss' because Elinor obviously needed a rest.

Tage was delighted at this living together. Day by day he fell more and more incurably in love with the pretty Ida Kastager. Mrs. Fonss did not especially like this. Though Tage was very self-reliant and mature for his age, there was no reason for a hasty engagement—and there was Mr. Kastager! Ida was a splendid little girl, Mrs. Kastager was a very well-bred woman of excellent family, and Kastager himself was capable, rich, and honest, but there was a hint of the absurd about him. A smile came upon people's lips and a twinkle into their eyes when any one mentioned Mr. Kastager.

The reason for this was that he was full of fire and given to extraordinary enthusiasms; he was frankly ingenuous, boisterous, and communicative, and nowadays it requires a great deal of tact to be lavish with enthusiasm. But Mrs. Fonss could not bear the thought that Tage's father-in-law should be mentioned with a twinkle in the eye and a smile round the mouth, and for that reason she exhibited a certain coldness toward the family to the great sorrow of the enamored Tage.

On the morning of the following day Tage and his mother had gone to look at the little museum of the town. They found the gate open, but the doors to the collection locked; ringing the bell proved fruitless. The gateway, however, gave admission to the not specially large court which was surrounded by a freshly whitewashed arcade whose short squat columns had black iron bars between them.

They walked about and looked at the objects placed along the wall: Roman sepulchral monuments, pieces of sarcophagi, a headless draped figure, the dorsal

vertebra of a whale, and a series of architectural details.

On all the objects of interest there were fresh traces of the masons' brushes.

By now they had come back to their starting point.

Tage ran up the stairs to see if there might not be people somewhere in the house, and Mrs. Fonss in the meantime walked up and down the arcade.

As she was on the turn toward the gate a tall man with a bearded, tanned face, appeared at the end of the passage directly in front of her. He had a guide-book in his hand; he listened for something, and then looked forward, straight at her.

The Englishman of yesterday immediately came to her mind.

"Pardon me?" he began interrogatively, and bowed.

"I am a stranger," Mrs. Fonss replied, "nobody seems to be at home, but my son has just run upstairs to see whether...."

These words were exchanged in French.

At this moment Tage arrived. "I have been everywhere," he said, "even in the living quarters, but didn't find as much as a cat."

"I hear," said the Englishman, this time in Danish, "that I have the pleasure of being with fellow-countrymen."

He bowed again and retreated a couple of steps, as if to indicate that he had merely said this to let them know that he understood what they were saying. Suddenly he stepped closer than before with an intent, eager expression on his face, and said to Mrs. Fonss, "is it possible that you and I are old acquaintances?"

"Are you Emil Thorbrogger?" exclaimed Mrs. Fonss, and held out her hand.

He seized it. "Yes, I am he," he said gayly, "and you are she?"

His eyes almost filled with tears as he looked at her.

Mrs Fonss introduced Tage as her son.

Tage had never in his life heard mention of Thorbrogger, but that was not his thoughts; he thought only of the fact that this gaucho turned out to be a Dane; when a pause set in, and some one had to say something he could not help exclaiming, “and I who said yesterday that you reminded me of a gaucho!”

“Well,” replied Thorbrogger, “that wasn’t far from the truth; for twenty-one years I have lived in the plains of La Plata, and in those years certainly spent more time on horse-back than on foot.”

And now he had come back to Europe!

Yes, he had sold his land and his sheep and had come back to have a look around in the old world where he belonged, but to his shame he had to confess that he often found it very much of a bore to travel about merely for pleasure.

Perhaps, he was homesick for the prairies?

No, he had never had any special feeling for places and countries; he thought it was only his daily work which he missed.

In that way they went on talking for a while. At last the custodian appeared, hot and out of breath, with heads of lettuce under his arms and a bunch of scarlet tomatoes in his hand, and they were admitted into the small, stuffy collection of paintings, where they gained only the vaguest impression of the yellow thunder-clouds and black waters of old Vernet, but on the contrary told each other with considerable detail of their lives and the happenings during all the years since they had parted.

For it was he whom she had loved, at the time when she married another. In the days which now followed they were much together, and the others thinking that such old friends must have much to say to each other left them often alone. In those days both soon noticed that however much they might have changed during the course of the years, their hearts had forgotten nothing.

Perhaps it was he who first became aware of this, for all the uncertainty of youth, its sentimentality and its elegiac mood came upon him simultaneously, and he suffered under it. It seemed out of place to the mature man, that he should so

suddenly be robbed of his peace of life and the self-possession which he had acquired during the course of time, and he wanted his love to bear a different stamp, wished it to be graver, more subdued.

She did not feel herself younger, but it seemed to her as if a fountain of tears that had been obstructed and dammed had burst open again and begun to flow. There was great happiness and relief in crying, and these tears gave her a feeling of richness; it was as if she had become more precious, and everything had become more precious to her—in short it was a feeling of youth after all.

On an evening of one of these days Mrs. Fonss sat alone at home, Elinor had gone to bed early, and Tage had gone to the theater with the Kastagers. She had been sitting in the dull hotel-room and had dreamed in the half light of a couple of candles. At length her dreams had come to a stop after their incessant coming and going; she had grown tired, but with that mild and smiling weariness which wraps itself round us, when happy thoughts are falling asleep in our mind.

She could not go on sitting here, staring in front of her, the whole evening long without so much as a book. It was still over an hour before the theater let out. So she began to walk up and down the room, stood in front of the mirror, and arranged her hair.

She would go down into the reading-room, and look over the illustrated papers. At this time of the evening it was always empty there.

She threw a large black lace shawl over her head and went down.

The room was empty.

The small room, overfull with furniture, was brilliantly illuminated by half a dozen large gas-flames; it was hot and the air was almost painfully dry.

She drew the shawl down around the shoulders.

The white papers there on the table, the portfolios with their large gilt letters, the empty plush chairs, the regular squares of the carpet and the even folds of the rep curtains—all this looked dull under the strong light.

She was still dreaming, and dreaming she stood, and listened to the long-drawn singing of the gas-flames.

The heat was such as almost to make one dizzy.

To support herself she slowly reached out for a large, heavy bronze vase which stood on a bracket fixed in the wall, and grasped the flower-decorated edge.

It was comfortable to stand thus, and the bronze was gratefully cool to the touch of her hand. But as she stood thus, there came another feeling also. She began to feel a contentment in her limbs, in her body, because of the plastically beautiful position which she had assumed. She was conscious of how becoming it was to her, of the beauty which was hers at the moment, and even of the physical sensation of harmony. All this gathered in a feeling of triumph, and streamed through her like a strange festive exultation.

She felt herself so strong at this hour, and life lay before her like a great, radiant day; no longer like a day declining toward the calm, melancholy hours of dusk. It seemed to her like an open, wide-awake space of time, with hot pulses throbbing every second, with joyous light, with energy and swiftness and an infinity without and within. And she was thrilled with the fullness of life, and longed for it with the feverish eagerness with which a traveler sets out on a journey.

For a long time she stood thus, wrapped in her thoughts, forgetting everything around her. Then suddenly as if she heard the silence in the room and the long-drawn singing of the gas-flames, she let her hand drop from the vase and sat down by the table and began to turn over the leaves of a portfolio.

She heard steps, passing by the door, heard them turn back, and saw Thorbrogger enter.

They exchanged a few words but as she seemed occupied with the pictures, he also began to look at the magazines that lay in front of him. They, however, did not interest him very much for when a little later she looked up, she met his eyes which rested searchingly upon her.

He looked as if he were just about to speak, and there was a nervous, decided expression round his mouth, which told her so definitely what his words would be that she reddened.

Instinctively, as if she wished to hold back these words, she held out a picture across the table and pointed at some horsemen from the pampas, who were throwing lassoes over wild steers.

He was just about to make some jesting remark about the draftsman's naive conception of the art of throwing a lasso. It was so enticingly easy to speak of this rather than of that which he had on his mind. Resolutely, however, he pushed the picture aside, leaned a little ways across the table and said,

"I have thought a great deal about you since we met again; I have always thought a great deal about you, both long ago in Denmark and over where I was. And I have always loved you, and if it sometimes seems to me that it is only now that I really love you since we have met again, it is not true, however great my love may be, for I have always loved you, I have always loved you. And if it should happen now that you would become mine—you cannot imagine what that would mean to me, if you, who were taken from me for so many years, were to come back."

He was silent for a moment, then he rose, and came closer to her.

"Oh, do say a word! I am standing here talking blindly. I speak to you as to an interpreter, a stranger, who has to repeat what I am saying to the heart I am speaking to.. I don't know... to stand here and weigh my words... I don't know, how far or how near. I dare not put into words the adoration which fills me—or dare I?"

He let himself sink down on a chair by her side.

"Oh, if I might, if I didn't have to be afraid—is it true! Oh, God bless you, Paula."

“There is nothing now that need keep us apart any longer,” said she, with her hand in his, “whatever may happen I have the right to be happy once, to live fully in accordance with my being, my desire, and my dreams. I have never renounced. Even though happiness was not my share, I have never believed that life was nothing but grayness and duty. I knew that there are people who are happy.”

Silently he kissed her hand.

“I know,” she said sadly, “that those who will judge me least harshly will not envy me the happiness which I shall have in having your love, but they will also say that I should be satisfied.”

“But that would not be enough for me, and you have not the right to send me away.”

“No,” she said, “no.”

A little later she went upstairs to Elinor.

Elinor slept.

Mrs. Fonss sat down by her bed and looked at her pale child whose features she could only dimly distinguish under the faint yellow glow of the night lamp.

For Elinor’s sake they would have to wait. In a few days they would separate from Thorbrogger, go to Nice, and stay there by themselves. During the winter she would live only that Elinor might regain her health. But to-morrow she would tell the children what had happened and what was to be expected. However they might receive the news it was impossible for her to live with them day in, day out, and yet be almost separated from them by a secret like this. And they would need time to get used to the idea, because it would mean a separation between them, whether greater or smaller would depend on the children themselves. The arrangement of their lives in so far as it concerned her and him was to be left entirely to them. She would demand nothing. It was for them to *give*.

She heard Tage’s step in the sitting-room and went to him.

He was so radiant and at the same time so nervous that Mrs. Fonss knew something had happened, and she had an intuition of what it was.

He sought for an opening to unburden his heart and sat and talked absent-mindedly of the theater. Not until his mother went over to him and put her hand on his forehead, forcing him to look at her, was he able to tell her that he had wooed Ida Kastager and gained her “yes.”

They talked about it for a long time, but throughout Mrs. Fonss felt a coldness in whatever she said, which she could not overcome. She was afraid of being too sympathetic with Tage on account of her own emotion. Besides, in the uncertain state of her mind she was distrustful of the idea that there might be even the faintest shadow of an association between her kindness of to-night and what she was to tell to-morrow..

Tage, however, did not notice any coolness.

Mrs. Fonss did not sleep much that night; there were too many thoughts to keep her awake. She thought how strange it was that he and she should have met and that when they met they should love each other as in the old days.

It was long ago, especially for her; she was no longer, could no longer, be young. And this would show; and he would be thoughtful with her, and grow used to the fact that it was a long time since she was eighteen years old. But she felt young, she was so in many respects, and yet all the while she was conscious of her years. She saw it very clearly, in a thousand movements, in expressions and gestures, in the way in which she would respond to a hint, in the fashion in which she would smile at an answer. Ten times a day she would betray her age, because she lacked the courage to be outwardly as young as she was within.

And thoughts came and thoughts went, but through it all the same question always rose, as to what her children would say.

On the forenoon of the following day she put the answer to the test.

They were in the sitting-room.

She said that she had something important to tell them, something that would mean a great change in their lives, something that would be unexpected news to them. She asked them to listen as calmly as they could, and not to let themselves be carried away by the first impression into thoughtlessness. They must know that what she was about to tell them was definitely decided, and that nothing they might say could make her alter her decision.

“I am going to marry again,” she said, and told them of how she had loved Thorbrogger, before she had known their father; how she had become separated from him, and how they had now met again.

Elinor cried, but Tage had risen from his seat, utterly bewildered. He then went close to her, kneeled down before her, and seized her hand. Sobbing, half-stifled with emotion, he pressed it against his cheek with infinite tenderness, with an expression of helplessness in every line of his face.

“Oh, but mother, dearest mother, what have we done to you, have we not always loved you, have we not always, both when we were with you and when we were away from from you, wanted you as the best thing we possessed in the world? We have never known father except through you; it was you who taught us to love him, and if Elinor and I are so close to each other, is it not because day after day you always pointed out to each of us what was best in the other? And has it not been thus with every other person to whom we became attached, do we not owe everything to you? We owe everything to you, and we worship you, mother, if you only knew.... Oh, you cannot imagine, how much we want your love, want you beyond all bounds and limits, but there again you have taught us to restrain our love, and we never dare to come as close to your heart as we should like. And now you say that you are going to leave us entirely, and put us to one side. But that is impossible. Only one who wanted to do us the greatest harm in the world could do anything as frightful as that, and you don’t want to do us the greatest harm, you want only what is best for us—how can it then be possible? Say quickly that it is not true; say it is not true, Tage, it is not true, Elinor.”

“Tage, Tage, don’t be so distressed, and don’t make it so hard, both for yourself and us others.”

Tage rose.

“Hard,” he said, “hard, hard, oh were it nothing but that, but it is horrible—unnatural; it is enough to drive one insane, merely to think of it. Have you any idea of the things you make me think of? My mother loved by a strange man, my mother desired, held in the arms of another and holding him in hers. Nice thoughts for a son, worse than the worst insult—but it is impossible, must be impossible, must be! Are the prayers of a son to be as powerless as that! Elinor, don’t sit there and cry, come and help me beg mother to have pity on us.”

Mrs. Fonss made a restraining gesture with her hand and said: “Let Elinor alone, she is probably tired enough, and besides I have told you that nothing can be changed.”

“I wish I were dead,” said Elinor, “but, mother, everything that Tage has said is true, and it never can be right that at our age you should give us a step-father.”

“Step-father,” cried Tage, “I hope that he does not for one moment dare.... You are mad. Where he enters, we go out. There isn’t any power on earth that can force me into the slightest intimacy with that person. Mother must choose—he or we! If they go to Denmark after their marriage, then we are exiles; if they stay here, we leave.”

“And those are your intentions, Tage?” asked Mrs. Fonss.

“I don’t think you need doubt that; imagine the life. Ida and I are sitting out there on the terrace on a moonlit evening, and behind the laurel-bushes some one is whispering. Ida asks who is whispering, and I reply that it is my mother and her new husband.—No, no, I shouldn’t have said that; but you see the effect of it already, the pain it causes me, and you may be sure that it won’t help Elinor’s health either.”

Mrs. Fonss let the children go while she remained sitting here.

No, Tage was right, it had not been good for them. How far from her they had already gone in that short hour! How they looked at her, not like her children, but like

their father's! How quick they were to desert her as soon as they saw that not every motion of her heart was theirs! But she was not only Tage's and Elinor's mother alone; she was also a human being on her own account, with a life of her own and hopes of her own, quite apart from them. But she was, perhaps, not quite as young as she had believed herself to be. This had come to her in the conversation with her children. Had she not sat there, timid, in spite of her words; had she not almost felt like one who was trespassing upon the rights of youth? Were not all the exorbitant demands of youth and all its naive tyranny in everything they had said?—It is for us to love, life belongs to us, and your life it is but to exist for us.

She began to understand that there might be a satisfaction in being quite old; not that she wished it, but yet old age smiled faintly at her like a far-distant peace, coming after all the agitation of recent times, and now when the prospect of so much discord was so near. For she did not believe that her children would ever change their mind, and yet she had to discuss it with them over and over again before she gave up hope. The best thing would be for Thorbrogger to leave immediately. With his presence no longer here the children might be less irritable, and she could try to show them how eager she was to be as considerate as possible to them. In time the first bitterness would disappear, and everything... no, she did not believe, that everything would turn out well.

They agreed that Thorbrogger should leave for Denmark to arrange their affairs. For the time being they would remain here. It seemed, however, that nothing was gained by this. The children avoided her. Tage spent all his time with Ida or her father, and Elinor stayed all the time with the invalid, Mrs. Kastager. And when they happened to be actually together, the old intimacy, the old feeling of comfort, was gone. Where were the thousand subjects for conversation, and, when finally they found one, where was the interest in it? They sat there keeping up a conversation like people who for a while have enjoyed each other's company, and now must part. All the thoughts of those who are about to leave are fixed on the journey's end, and those who remain think only of settling hack into the daily life and daily routine, as soon as the strangers have left.

There was no longer any common interest in their life; all the feeling of belonging together had disappeared. They were able to talk about what they were going to do next week, next month, or even the month following, but it did not interest them as though it had to do with days out of their own lives. It was merely a time of waiting, which somehow or other had to be endured, for all three mentally asked themselves: And what then? They felt no solid foundation in their lives; there was no ground to build upon before this, which had separated them, was settled.

Every day that passed the children forgot more and more what their mother had meant to them, in the fashion in which children who believe themselves wronged will forget a thousand benefactions for the sake of one injustice.

Tage was the most sensitive of them, but also the one who was hurt most deeply, because he had loved most. He had wept through long nights because of his mother whom he could not retain in the way in which he wanted. There were times when the memory of her love almost deafened all other feelings in his heart. One day he even went to her and beseeched and implored her that she might belong to them, to them alone, and not to any other one, and the answer had been a “no.” And this “no” had made him hard and cold. At first he had been afraid of this coldness, because it was accompanied by a frightful emptiness.

The case with Elinor was different. In a strange way she had felt that it was an injustice toward her father, and she began to worship him like a fetish. Even though she but dimly remembered him, she recreated him for herself in most vivid fashion by becoming absorbed in everything she had ever heard about him. She asked Kastager about him and Tage, and every morning and night she kissed a medallion-portrait of his which belonged to her. She longed with a somewhat hysterical desire for some letters from him which she had left at home, and for things which had once belonged to him.

In proportion as the father in this way rose in her estimation, the mother sank. The fact that she had fallen in love with a man harmed her less in her daughter’s eyes; but she was no lenger the mother, the unfailing, the wisest, the supreme, most beautiful.

She was a woman like other women; not quite, but just because not quite, it was possible to criticize and judge her and to find weaknesses and faults in her. Elinor was glad that she had not confided her unhappy love to her mother; but she did not know how much it was due to her mother that she had not done so.

One day passed like another, and their life became more and more unendurable. All three felt that it was useless; instead of bringing them together, it only drove them further apart.

Mrs. Kastager had now recovered. Though she had not played an active part in anything that had happened, she knew more about the situation than any one else, because everything had been told her. One day she had a long talk with Mrs. Fonss who was glad that there was some one who would quietly listen to her plans for the future. In this conversation Mrs. Kastager suggested that the children go with her to Nice, while they sent for Thorbrogger to come to Avignon, so that they might be married. Kastager could stay on as witness.

Mrs. Fonss wavered a little while longer, for she had been unable to discover what her children's reaction would be. When they were told, they accepted it with proud silence, and when they were pressed for answer, they merely said that they would, of course, adjust themselves to whatever she decided to do.

So things turned out as Mrs. Kastager had proposed. She said good-by to the children, and they left; Thorbrogger came, and they were married.

Spain became their home; Thorbrogger chose it for the sake of sheep-farming.

Neither of them wished to return to Denmark.

And they lived happily in Spain.

She wrote several times to her children, but in their first violent anger that she had left them, they returned the letters. Later they regretted it; they were unable, however, to admit this to their mother and to write to her; for that reason all communication between them ceased. But now and then in round about ways they heard about each other's lives.

For five years Thorbrogger and his wife lived happily, but then she suddenly fell ill. It was a disease whose course ran swiftly and whose end was necessarily fatal. Her strength dwindled hourly, and one day when the grave was no longer far away she wrote to her children.

“Dear children,” she wrote, “I know that you will read this letter, for it will not reach you until after my death. Do not be afraid, there are no reproaches in these lines; would that I might make them bear enough love.

“When people love, Tage and Elinor, little Elinor, the one who loves most must always humble himself, and therefore I come to you once more, as in my thoughts I shall come to you every hour as long as I am able. One who is about to die, dear children, is very poor; I am very poor, for all this beautiful world, which for so many years has been my abundant and kindly home, is to be taken from me. My chair will stand here empty, the door will close behind me, and never again will I set my foot here. Therefore I look at everything with the prayer in my eye that it shall hold me in kind memory. Therefore I come to you and beg that you will love me with all the love which once you had for me; for remember that not to be forgotten is the only part in the living world which from now on is to be mine; just to be remembered, nothing more.

“I have never doubted your love; I knew very well that it was your great love, that caused your great anger; had you loved me less, you would have let me go more easily. And therefore I want to say to you, that should some day it happen that a man bowed down with sorrow come to your door to speak with you concerning me, to talk about me to relieve his sorrow, then remember that no one has loved me as he has, and that all the happiness which can radiate from a human heart has come from him to me. And soon in the last great hour he will hold my hand in his when the darkness comes, and his words will be the last I shall hear....

“Farewell, I say it here, but it is not the farewell which will be the last to you; it I will say as late as I dare, and all my love will be in it, and all the longings for so many, many years, and the memories of the time when you were small, and a

thousand wishes and a thousand thanks. Farewell Tage, farewell Elinor, farewell until the last farewell.

“YOUR MOTHER.”