

"Mrs. Laymer, may I ask if you ever knew a Mrs. Leighton?"

Clementine Laymer's face flushed crimson as she gasped out—

"Why, yes, I—I know her very well; she and my mother were old school mates."

"Did you know her son, Lee?" Gwen was pitiless, now.

Clementine reached out her hand and took hold of a willow bough by her side, answering in a low tone—

"Yes, I knew him; but why, may I ask in turn, these questions—were they friends of yours?"

Gwen was deathly white now and every nerve quivered. The hour had come of which she had dreamed day and night. She was standing face to face with Lee's betrothed and must tell her all. She shrank from it, however; Clementine was not quite what she had expected to find, not quite what Lee had seemed to think her.

"Let us walk a little way," she said, "I have a message for you—that is, if you are the 'Clemmie' Lee Leighton loved."

Mrs. Laymer was very white and trembled visibly.

"Did you know him? Can you tell me whether he is dead?"

Seated apart from the throng on a grassy ledge, Gwen told of his death and last request, told it all in a low, constrained tone that did not escape the notice of her listener, though the latter was sobbing bitterly.

"You must come home with me to-night and see his mother," she said; then, after a moment's silence, she continued—

"Yes, Lee and I were lovers from childhood, and had he come back when the war was ended I should now, doubtless, be his wife; but I waited a year and he did not come, so I married Mr. Laymer. One can not mourn forever, you know, though I felt terribly at the time."

Gwen looked away, repeating to herself, "One can not mourn forever." She seemed likely to.

"I say, Clem, what's all this?"

The voice was masculine and abrupt. Turning, Gwen saw a portly, flashily-dressed individual.

"Why, Walter, how you startle one! I thought you were not coming. Let me introduce you to my new friend, Miss LaVere; Miss LaVere, my husband."

Instinctively Gwen shrank from the bold, admiring stare and familiar handshake. Presently the gentleman turned again to his wife.

"What the deuce have you been crying about?"

"Nothing, much. Can't a woman cry when she's tired and out of sorts without being quizzed?" She spoke impatiently and evasively, then added—

"Miss LaVere is a friend of Mrs. Leighton, and is going out to The Corners with me to-night."

Gwen gladly went back to her friend until evening, when Mrs. Laymer sought her out. Gwen let the little deception stand that she was an old friend of Mrs. Leighton.

It was still early when they reached The Corners, as the cross roads was called in the neighborhood, and Gwen asked to go alone to Mrs. Leighton's. Clementine was only too willing that she should. The gentle rap at the door was answered by a tall, delicate-looking woman with silvery hair and dark, melting eyes—Lee's eyes.

"Are you Mrs. Leighton?" the girl asked.

"I am. Come in, please."

Gwen put out her hand and the next moment had burst into tears.

"Why, my dear girl, what is it, what ails you?"

Gently the elder lady had led her companion into the house and seated her in a cosy arm-chair.

"Forgive me, Mrs. Leighton, but I have looked forward to this meeting for years, and I bring a message to you from Lee."

"Lee! Lee!" cried the mother, falling on her knees before her. "Where is he—my boy, my idol?"

Impulsively Gwen threw her arms about her neck, sobbing—

"He talked of you that last morning, and said tell you the soldier's God was with him."

For hours the two women talked on, utterly heedless of time or surroundings, and Mrs. Leighton learned Gwen's secret, but the latter knew it not.

"I suppose it was unreasonable, but I could not help feeling hurt when Clementine married so soon, and before she knew that Lee was really dead," the mother said.

"How could she?" Gwen shuddered.

The girl spent a fortnight at Lee's old home, and a feast it was to her. Lee's home, his mother, Lee's pony, Lee's room and boyish belongings—how sacred they all were to her, and how much more he seemed all her own since she had seen Clementine. The latter seemed rather to avoid the farm at "The Corners," evidently feeling ill at ease with the two women; besides rumor said that her husband was terribly jealous at the mere mention of Lee's name.

When Gwen and her father returned home they were accompanied by Mrs. Leighton; and many were the hours spent by Lee's grave by the two women who truly loved him.

Mrs. Leighton sold her Ohio home soon after, for Mr. LaVere insisted that she remain south—as his wife. It made it pleasant for Gwen, and, then, together they could tend the grave of the one they both loved.

Aunt Valeria left in high indignation, declaring that a dead Yank was had enough, but a live one was worse.

VELMA CALDWELL MELVILLE.