

***GRACE
LIVINGSTON
HILL***



***ACCORDING
TO THE PATTERN***

Grace Livingston Hill

According to the Pattern

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Chapter 1: A Fallen Idol

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Mrs. Claude Winthrop sat in her pretty sitting room alone under the lamplight making buttonholes. Her eyes were swimming in stringing tears that she would not for the world let fall. She felt as if a new law of attraction held them there to blind and torture her. She could not let them fall, for no more were left; they were burned up by the emotions that were raging in her soul, and if these tears were gone her eyeballs would surely scorch the lids. She was exercising strong control over her lips that longed to open in a groan that should increase until it reached a shriek that all the world could hear.

Her fingers flew with nervous haste, setting the needle in dainty stitches in the soft white dress for her baby girl. She had not supposed when she fashioned the little garment the day before and laid it aside ready for the finishing that she would think of its wearer to-night in so much agony. Ah, her baby girl, and her boy, and the older sister!

Almost the tears fell as another dart pierced her heart, but she opened her eyes the wider to hold them back and sat and sewed unwinkingly. She must not, must not cry. There was a momentous thinking to be done tonight. She had not had time to consider this awful thing since it had come upon her. Was she really sure beyond a doubt that it was so? How long ago was it that she took little Celia, happy and laughing, in the trolley to the park? How little she thought what she was going out to meet as she lifted the

child from the car and smilingly humored her fancy to follow a by-path through the woods. How the little feet had danced and the pretty prattle had babbled on like a tinkling brook that needed no response, but was content with its own music.

And then they had come to the edge of the park drive where they could look down upon the world of fashion as it swept along, all rubber-tired and silver-mounted, in its best array. She had sighed a happy little sigh as she surveyed a costly carriage surmounted by two servants in white and dark-green livery and saw the discontented faces of the over-dressed man and woman who sat as far apart as the width of the seat would allow, and appeared to endure their drive as two dumb animals might if this were a part of their daily round. What if she rode in state like that with a husband such as he? She had shuddered and been conscious of thankfulness over her home and her husband. What if Claude did stay away from home a good deal evenings! It was in the way of his business, he said, and she must be more patient. There would come a time by and by when he would have enough, so that they could live at their ease, and he need not go to the city ever any more. And into the midst of the bright dream she had conjured came little Celia's prattle:

"Mamma, see! Papa tummin'! Pitty lady!" She had looked down curiously to see who it was that reminded the child of her father, and her whole being froze within her. Her breath seemed not to come at all, and she had turned so ghastly white that the baby put up her hand and touched her cheek, saying, "Mamma, pitty mamma! Poor mamma!"

For there on the seat of a high, stylish cart drawn by shining black horses with arched necks, and just below a tall elegant woman, who was driving, sat her husband. Claude! Yes, little Celia's papa! Oh, that moment!

She forced herself to remember his face with its varying expressions as she had watched it till it was out of sight. There was no trouble in recalling it; it was burned into her soul with a red-hot iron. He had been talking to that beautiful woman as he used to talk to her when they were first engaged. That tender, adoring gaze; his eyes lovelighted. It was unmistakable! A heart-breaking revelation! There was no use trying to blind herself. There was not the slightest hope that he could come home and explain this away as a business transaction, or a plot between him and that other woman to draw her out into the world, or any of those pretty fallacies that might happen in books. It was all true, and she had known it instantly. It had been revealed to her as in a flash, the meaning of long months of neglect, supposed business trips, luncheons, and dinners at the club instead of the homecoming. She knew it. She ought to have seen it before. If she had not been so engrossed in her little world of the household she would have done so. Indeed, now that she knew it, she recognized also that she had been given warnings of it. Her husband had done his best to get her out. He had suggested and begged, but she had not been well during the first years of the two elder children, and the coming of the third had again filled her heart and mind. Her home was enough for her, always provided he was in it. It was not enough for him. She had tried to make it a happy one; but perhaps she had

been fretful and exacting sometimes, and it may be she had been in fault to allow the children to be noisy when their father was at home.

He had always been fond of society, and had been brought up to do exactly as he pleased. It was hard for him to be shut in as she was, but that was a woman's lot. At least it was the lot of the true mother who did not trust her little ones to servants. Ah, was she excusing him? That must not be. He was her husband. She loved him deeply, tenderly, bitterly; but she would not excuse him. He was at fault, of course. He should not have been riding with a wealthy woman of fashion while his own wife came to the park on the trolley and took care of her baby as he passed by. He was not a man of wealth yet, though they had hoped he would one day be; but how did he get into this set? How came he to be sitting beside that lovely lady with the haughty air who had smiled so graciously down upon him? Her soul recoiled even now as she remembered that her husband should be looking up in that way to any woman—that is, any woman but herself—oh, no! Not even that! She wanted her husband to be a man above, far above herself. She must respect him. She could not live if she could not do that. What should she do? Was there anything to do? She would die. Perhaps that was the way out of it—she would die. It would be an easy affair. No heart could bear many such mighty grips of horror as had come upon hers that afternoon. It would not take long. But the children—her three little children! Could she leave them to the world—to another woman, perhaps, who would not love them? No, not that. Not even to save them from the shame of a father who

had learned to love another woman than his wife. She reasoned this out. It seemed to her that her brain had never seen things so clearly before in all her life. Her little children were the burden of her sorrow. That all this should come upon them! A father who had disgraced them—who did not love his home! For this was certainly what it would come to be, even though he maintained all outward proprieties. She told herself that it was probable this had not been going on long. She forced herself to think back to the exact date when her husband began to stay away to dinners and to be out late evenings. How could she have been so easily satisfied in her safe, happy belief that her peace was to last forever, and go off to sleep before his return, often and often?

And then her conscience, arising from a refreshing sleep, began to take up its neglected work and accused her smartly. It was all her fault. She could see her mistakes as clearly now as if they had been roads leading off from the path she ought to have kept. She had allowed her husband to become alienated from herself. She could look back to the spot where she ought to have done something, just what she did not know. She did not even stop to question whether it had been possible in her state of health, and with their small income, which was eaten up so fast in those days by doctor's bills and little shoes. But all that was past. It could not be lived over. She had been a failure—yes, she, Miriam Hammond Winthrop—who had thought when she married that she would be the most devoted of wives, she had let her husband drift away from her, and had helped on the destruction that was coming surely and swiftly to her

little children. Was it too late? Was the past utterly irretrievable? Had he gone too far? Had he lost his love for her entirely? Was her power all gone? She used to be able to bring the lovelight into his eyes. Could she ever do it again?

Suddenly she laid down the little white garment with the needle just as she was beginning to take the next stitch and went to the mirror over the mantel to look at herself.

She turned on all the gas jets and studied her face critically. Yes, she looked older, and there were wrinkles coming here and there. It seemed to her they had come that afternoon. Her eyes looked tired too, but could she not by vigorous attention to herself make her face once more attractive to her husband? If so it was worth doing, if she might save him, even if she died in the attempt. She took both hands and smoothed her forehead, rubbed her cheeks to make them red, and forgot to notice that the tears had burned themselves up, leaving her eyes brighter than usual. She tossed her hair up a little like the handsome woman's she had seen in the park. It really was more becoming. Why had she not taken the trouble to dress it in the present style? Then she went back to her chair again and took up the work. The buttonholes that she had expected would take several evenings to finish were vanishing before her excited fingers without her knowing it. It was a relief to her to do something; and she put all her energy into it so that her hands began to ache, but she was only conscious of the awful ache in her heart and sewed on.

If there were some one to advise her! Could she do it?

Could she make a stand against the devil and try to save her Eden? Or was it more than one poor shy woman, with all

the odds of the gay world against her, could accomplish?

She longed to have her husband come home that she might throw herself at his feet and beg and plead with him for her happiness, to save their home; she longed to accuse him madly, and fling scorching words at him, and watch his face as she told him how she and his baby had seen him that afternoon; and then she longed again to throw her arms about his neck and cry upon his breast as she used to do when they were first married, and any little thing happened that she did not like. How she used to cry over trifles then! How could she, when such a world of sorrow was coming to her so soon?

She was wise enough to know that none of these longings of her heart must be carried into effect if she would win her husband. In his present attitude he would laugh at her fears! She seemed to understand that her anguish would only anger him because he would feel condemned. Her own soul knew that she could not take him back into her heart of hearts until she won him back and he came of his own accord confessing his wrong to her. But would that ever be? He was a good man at heart, she believed. He would not do wrong, not very wrong, not knowingly. Perhaps he had not learned to love any other woman, only to love society, and—to—cease to love her.

If her dear, wise mother were there! But no! She could not tell her. She must never breathe this thing to any living soul if she would hope to do anything! His honor should be hers. She would protect him from even her own condemnation so long as she could. But what to do and how to do it!

Out of the chaos of her mind there presently began to form a plan. Her breath came and went with quick gasps and her heart beat wildly as she looked the daring thing in the face and summoned her courage to meet it.

Could she perhaps meet that woman, that outrageous woman, on her own ground and vanquish her? Could she with only the few poor little stones of her wits and the sling of her love face this woman Goliath of society and challenge her? What! expect that woman, with all her native grace and beauty, her fabulous wealth, and her years of training to give way before her? A crimson spot came out on either cheek, but she swallowed hard with her hot dry throat and set her lips in firm resolve. She could but fail. She would do it.

But how? And with what? It would take money. She could not use her husband's, at least not much of it, not to win him back. There was a little, a few hundreds, a small legacy her grandmother had left to her. How pitifully small it seemed now! She cast a glance at a fashion magazine that lay upon her table. She had bought it the day before because of a valuable article on how to make over dress skirts to suit the coming season's style. How satisfied with the sweet monotony of her life had she been then! It came to her with another sharp thrust now! But that magazine said that gowns from five to seven hundred dollars were no longer remarkable things. How she had smiled but the evening before as she read it and curled her lip at the unfortunates whose lives were run into the grooves of folly that could require such extravagance. Now she wished fiercely that she might possess several that cost not merely

seven hundred but seven thousand dollars, if only she might outstrip them all and stand at the head for her husband to see.

But this was folly. She had only a little and that little must do! It had been put aside for a rainy day, or to send the children to college in case father failed. Alas! And now father had failed, but not in the way thought possible, and the money must be used to save him and them all from destruction, if indeed it would hold out. How long would it take, and how, how should she go about it?

With sudden energy she caught up the magazine and read. She had gone over it all the day before in her ride from the city where she had been shopping, and had recognized from its tone that it was familiar with a different world from hers. Now with sudden hope she read feverishly, if perchance there might be some help there for her.

Yes, there were suggestions of how to do this and that, how to plan and dress and act in the different functions of society; but of what use were they to her? How was she to begin? She was not in society and how was she to get there? She could not ask her husband. That would spoil it all. She must get there without his help.

If she only had that editor, that woman or whoever it was who answered those questions, for just a few minutes, she could find out if there was any way in which she could creep into that mystic circle where alone her battle could be fought. She had always despised people who wrote to newspapers for advice in their household troubles and now she felt a sudden sympathy for them. Actually it was now her only source of help, at least the only one of which she

knew. Her cheeks burned as the suggestion of writing persistently put itself before her. She could hear her husband's scornful laugh ringing out as he ridiculed the poor fools who wrote to papers for advice, and the presumption that attempted to administer medicine—mental, moral, and physical—to all the troubles of the earth.

But the wife's heart suddenly overflowed with gratitude toward the paper. It was trying to do good in the world, it was ready to help the helpless. Why should she be ashamed to write? No one would ever know who it was. And she need not consider herself from last night's view-point. She had come to a terrible strait. Trouble and shame had entered her life. She no longer stood upon the high pinnacle of joy in happy wifedom! Her heart was broken and her idol clay. What should she care for her former ideas of nicety? It was not for her to question the ways or the means. It was for her to snatch at the first straw that presented itself, as any sensible drowning person would do.

With firm determination she laid down the magazine and walked deliberately to her desk. Her fingers did not tremble nor the resolute look pass from her chin as she selected plain paper and envelope and wrote. The words seemed to come without need of thought. She stated the case clearly in a few words, and signed her grandmother's initials. She folded, addressed the letter, and sent her sleepy little maid to post it before the set look relaxed.

Then having done all that was in her power to do that night she went up to her room in the dark and smothering her head in the pillow so that the baby should not be disturbed she let the wild sobs have their way.

Chapter 2: A Trip Abroad

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“It is just barely possible I may have to take a flying trip to Paris,” Claude Winthrop announced casually, looking up from the newspaper which had been engrossing his attention.

It was the next morning and his wife unrefreshed from her night’s vigil was sitting quietly in her place at the breakfast table. She looked now and then at the top of her husband’s head, thinking of his face as she had seen it in the park, and trying to realize that all around her was just the same outwardly as it had been yesterday and all the days that had gone before, only she knew that it was all so different.

She made some slight reply. He had said so many times that he hoped his business would take him abroad soon, that she ceased to reproach him for desiring to go without her and the children as she had done at first. She began to feel that he would not really go after all. It had been a source of uneasiness to her many times, for she had a morbid horror of having the wide ocean separate her from the one she loved better than all on earth besides. But this morning, in the light of recent discoveries, she realized that even this trouble of the past was as nothing beside what was laid upon her now to bear.

How often it is that when we mock at a trouble, or detract from its magnitude, it comes upon us suddenly as if to taunt us and reveal its true heaviness. Miriam Winthrop

felt this with a sudden sharp pang a little later that day when she received and read a brief note from her husband brought by a messenger boy. For the moment all her more recent grief was forgotten and she was tormented by her former fears and dread.

“Dear Miriam,” he had scrawled on the back of a business envelope, “I’ve got to go at once. The firm thinks I’m the only one who can represent them in Paris just now, and if I don’t go there’ll be trouble. I’m sorry it comes with such a rush but it’s a fine thing for me. Pack my grip with what you think I need for a month. I don’t want to be bothered with much. I may not get home till late and fear I shall have to take the midnight train. Haste. Claude.”

She did not stop now to study the phraseology of the hastily worded note, nor let the coldness and baldness of the announcement enter her soul like a keen blade as it would be sure to do later when the trial began in dead earnest. She did not even give a thought to the difference between this note and those he used to write her when they were first married. It was enough to realize that he was going across that terrible ocean without her and talking about it as calmly as if he were but going downtown. Other people let their husbands go off without a murmur. There was Mrs. Forsythe, who smilingly said she intended to send her husband on a tour for six months so that she could be free from household cares and do as she pleased for a little while. But then she was Mr. Forsythe’s wife, and Claude was—and then there came that sudden sharp remembrance of yesterday and its revelation, and her sorrow entered full into her being with a realization of what it was going to mean.

Yes, perhaps she ought to be glad he was going away. But she was not—oh, she was not! It was worse a hundred-fold than it would have been if it had come two days ago. Now she was plunged into the awfulness of the black abyss that had yawned before her feet, and Claude was going from her and would not be there to help her out by any possible explanation, nor even to know of the horror in her path, for she knew in her heart that she could not and would not tell him her discovery now before he went. There would not be time, even if it were wise. No, she must bear it alone until he returned, if he ever did. Oh, that deep awful sea that must roll over her troubled heart for weeks before she could hope to begin to change things. Could she stand it? Would she live to brave it through?

A ringing baby laugh from the nursery, where Celia was drawing a wooly lamb over the floor, recalled her courage. She closed her lips in their firm lines once more and knew she would, she must!

Just one more awful thought came to her and glared at her with green, deriding, menacing eyes of possibility. That woman, could she, was she going abroad? There had been such things! Her brain reeled at the thought and with fear and wrath she put it away from her. She would never think that of Claude. No, never! She must go about making preparations for him, for there was much to be done, some mending, and where had that package of laundry been put? and, oh, the horror of having to doubt one's husband! Claude might have been injudicious, but never wicked! No! She was unworthy to be his wife when she could think such things with absolutely nothing to found them upon save a

simple everyday ride in the park. She hurried upstairs to bureau drawers and sent the nurse and the maid-of-all-work flying about on various errands and herself worked with swift, skilled fingers. But all the time the ache grew in her heart till it seemed it must break.

He did not come home to lunch. She had not expected that. She scarcely stopped herself to make a pretence of eating. So eager was she to complete the little things she had thought of to do for his comfort during the voyage before he should return that she forgot herself entirely in her present duties. The stinging tears welled up to her eyes without falling as they had done the night before, and burned themselves dry, again and again, and still she worked on feverishly, adding other little touches to the preparations she had made. He should not have cause for impatience that she had forgotten anything in his thought of her during the trip. She even put in his old cap that he was fond of wearing in traveling and which heretofore she had always struggled to secrete safely before they set out for a journey. There was a fine disregard of self in all that she did about the suit-case and a close attention to details of his liking. If he had any thought left for her at all he could not fail to note it.

She carefully placed a leather photograph case, a present from the children on last Christmas, containing all their likenesses with hers, in an inner pocket with his handkerchief, and then on second thought took it out to remove her own face and put in its place a new pose of the baby. She would not seek to remind him thus of her. He should see that she no longer put in any claims for his

affection. Just why she did this she could not explain to herself, but she felt a triumph over herself in having done it. Was it revenge or love or jealousy or all? She did not know. She sat down beside the completed work and let great drops fall on the heavy, unresponsive leather, and groaned aloud, and then got up hastily to wipe her eyes and flash them in defiance at herself in the mirror. She would not give way now. She must act her part till he was gone. Then she would weep until she could get relief enough to think and know what to do.

He came late to dinner and brought his secretary with him. During the meal they were going over certain business matters which were to be left in this young man's charge. Miriam presided over her table and supplied their needs and held her tongue, feeling in this brief time of quietness and inaction how weary she was, how every nerve quivered with pain, how her eyeballs stung, and how the little veins in her temples throbbed.

They went to the library after dinner, where there was more business. The wife went up to her nursery and hovered over her daily cares, which suddenly seemed to have lost their necessity, so much greater was her need of some word with her husband.

It was not till ten o'clock that the front door closed upon the young man of business and she heard Claude coming upstairs. Her heart leaped then. Would he possibly say something comforting to her, some word of love for her, now that he was leaving, some little regret that she could not go too? Something, perhaps, that might explain that awful sight of yesterday, and wipe this day out of existence

for her so far as its suffering had been concerned? Oh, if that might be she would never murmur again at sorrow or loneliness or anything that could come upon her, so long as she could have her husband her own.

But no, that could not be, she knew, for there was that look that she had seen her husband give to the strange woman, and even as she thought she heard him go into the bedroom.

“Miriam,” he called, without waiting for her to come to the door, “I’m going right to bed. I’m just about played out, and I’ll have to start early in the morning. Have you got everything all fixed up? All right, then I’ll turn in. Don’t let anyone disturb me. I’ve told Simmons about everything, and if any call comes from the office folks you can refer them to Simmons.”

Her low murmured “All right,” was followed by the quick closing door. She stood in the hall and heard him move about the room, and knew that she might go to him and tell him all, or get some word from him more than this before he slept to wake and rush away from her, but she would not. She heard the click of the light as he turned it out, and the silence that followed his lying down, and reflected that she might at least go and kiss him good-night, and yet she had not the power to move.

How long she stood there she did not know. It seemed to her that every action of her life since she had known her husband came and was enacted before her, that every word he had ever spoken or written to her was spoken distinctly in her ear. She felt again his power over her when he told her how he loved her, and the gladness that enwrapped her

like a garment as she knew that she loved him. It turned to a pall now as the other thoughts of yesterday trooped up, death-faced and horrid, to mock at those happier times.

She roused herself by and by to see that the house was locked for the night and the children sleeping quietly as usual. Then she made a careful toilet for the morning. It would need to be freshened a little she knew, if she could manage it, but the main points must be looked after now when her mind was clear. She must leave upon her husband a fair memory, a pleasing vision, if indeed this poor heartsick body of hers could be made to look pleasant to anyone.

She put on a more elaborate gown than she had been wont to consider proper for a morning dress, but it was her husband's favorite color. She disregarded all her former prejudices and scorned her economies. What were economies when life was at stake? She also arranged her hair in the new way, taking a long time at it and being very critical of herself. All the while this was going on she was conscious of trying to stop thinking and to absorb herself in her occupation. The color was high in her cheeks. Her night of vigil and her day of labor, followed by the disappointment that her husband had said no tender word to her, had brought a feverishness which heightened the brilliancy of her eyes. She could see that she looked young again, and drew a little hope from the fact.

But a toilet cannot last a night-time even with such precious ends at stake, and when it was finished she took a candle and stole silently into the bedroom.

She had known that this moment must come. Her heart would not let her let him go without it. She must look down upon him and remember all the past and know the present with his face in sight. She had been dreading it and putting it off ever since he had shut the door. Now she stood and looked at him as he lay sleeping.

He was handsome even in his sleep. His heavy dark hair was tossed back against the pillow and his broad forehead looked noble to her even now with all the tumult surging in her heart against him. She noted the long black lashes, the same his little children had. He looked so young as he lay asleep, and she could see their oldest child's resemblance to him as she had never seen it before. She made herself take in every feature. The pleasant curves of the lips, those lips that had said kind words, tender words of love to her, and had kissed her—and alas, could frame themselves in impatience.

She could see them now as they looked during a recent disagreement. The remembrance struck like blow across her heart. His arms were thrown out over the bed in the abandonment of weariness, and his hands seemed to appeal to her for a kindly thought. Those white hands, so symmetrical, and yet so firm and strong, how she had admired them as a girl. How proud she had always been of them as his wife. How they had helped her own hands when they first began their life together. She fain would stoop and kiss just his hand. She could not let him go without. He was tired, so tired; and she was sorry, so sorry; and he was her husband! She set the candle down softly upon the floor at a little distance and stooped, but started up at a suggestion.

Had that hand ever touched in gentle pressure the hands of other women? Did that other woman know those shapely hands, that were hers, and yet were not hers now? She bowed her head amid the draperies of the bed and almost groaned aloud. She would fain have prayed, as there was no other help at hand, but she was not a praying woman. True she had a habit of kneeling to repeat a form of words, but even that form failed her now, though she tried to find some words to voice a cry to the Unknown.

Was ever sorrow like unto hers? Were there in the world other women who suffered this sort of thing? Yes, of course there were, there must be, poor wretches; she had read of them and known of them always; poor creatures who could not keep, or never had, their husbands' love; but not such as she, and such as Claude; no, no, that could not be! This never had happened before. It could not be true! She would not believe it. There must be some mistake.

The long night passed at last, and the toilet given its final touches, though the face it was meant to set off was wan with sorrow and exhaustion. Very quietly she served the breakfast, which was a hasty meal, as there was little time. She nerved herself to be bright and unconcerned, as if the proposed journey were but a brief one for a few hours. She had been wont to grieve so deeply at thought of separation, that her husband wondered a little that she should take it so quietly, and if he had had more time to note her and less upon his mind he would have seen the abnormal state of excitement that kept her calm and smiling when her heart was so fiercely torn.

Miriam saw to it that the children were at hand at the last moment to be kissed good-bye, and then with a hasty word of some handkerchiefs she had forgotten to put in his grip she flew up the stairs and locked her door. She could not bear the hasty farewell, the careless kiss she saw was coming. She preferred that he should leave her uncaressed.

“Come, Miriam, I must go. Don’t wait for handkerchiefs. There’s no time to look. The cab is at the door. Come.”

But she did not come, and he called good-bye and went.

She watched him slam the cab door after him and drive away in the early morning light, and then the great sobs that had been so carefully choked down for hours came and shook her frame, and she hid her face in the pillows where he had slept but a little while ago and let her sorrow wave upon wave roll over her head and bury her in the awful chasms between its breakers till kindly nature claimed the worn-out body and over-wrought nerves, and wrapped her in a deep and dreamless sleep of utter weariness.

Chapter 3: An Important Letter

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The days that followed were to her like a long struggle through the darkness of some deep valley by night. When she looked back upon them they were filled with horror. Every time she slept and awoke there was the same awful realization of trouble to be instantly remembered and realized, coming with the keenness of first knowledge during the earliest waking moments, as one remembers death or dread calamity and tries to weave the unaccustomed threads of sorrow into the hitherto happy web of life and make it seem a part of the daily fabric.

She plunged into work with all her soul and body. What was to come she had yet to discover. She felt that now her course lay clear before her, she had but to get out of the way any work that might be a hindrance to the plans when they should be formed. The children's clothes were first. She had been working at them leisurely for some time, taking pleasure in designing and executing the pretty, dainty garments which should make her children into picturesque little creatures. Now she set about finishing this work with feverish eagerness and conscientiousness. She foresaw that her tender care of these little ones must be interrupted in the future. What had been her duty and her pleasure must now be neglected for a higher, more insistent duty, which could not be delayed.

She put lingering, wistful touches on her work and a world of love and pent-up mother desires. This much she