

## LETTERS FROM LIFE.—No. 3.

"The wheels of the gods."

Nursing Home,  
Great Eastern Hospital.

DEAREST JEAN,—Your welcome letter was like a whiff of fresh country air, and as the thermometer (metaphorically) stands here at about 90 degs. in the shade, you can imagine how refreshing I found it. Your Colonel Joshua P. Chalker would find himself quite in his element here, and the family party, of which he spoke, largely increased. But to continue a detailed *histoire* of my experiences.

Upon entering my bedroom, after the little skirmish upon which I dwelt in my first letter (concerning which, by-the-bye, nothing more has been said), I found a fellow Pro. (Lois Carew, by name) seated on her bed, cleaning her shoes with an intensity of purpose worthy of a better cause, and as she took no further notice of my entrance, beyond rising from her seat and bowing to me with an old-world courtesy of manner suggestive of the age of possets and pot-pourri, I took out my blotter and began my letter to you.

I took surreptitious peeps at her from time to time, and presently, having given her shoes a final polish and placed them on the window-sill to dry, she turned round and addressed me thus, with the utmost gravity:—

"I hope you do not think me lacking in politeness, but I have been trying to think of something to say to you, which will convey to you a welcome, without actually saying I am glad to see you, because I am not glad; I prefer a bedroom to myself. I like to relax when I am off duty, to be perfectly natural, and that is not possible in the presence of a second person; but if you will permit me to make myself of use to you—help you in any way, *I shall* be glad. May I put your things away whilst you finish your letter?"

(Dear, honest, kind little thing, wasn't she, Jean?)

"Thank you, it is very good of you," I answer, taking a rueful look at my belongings, half unpacked, and heaped up on my bed, "but I could not trouble you, you look so tired."

"Nay, you are in error, it will please me to help you, and I am never tired," and the beautiful light of fellowship burns steadily in the depths of her eyes as she looks into mine and warms my blood as with wine.

I feel *happy* for the first moment since I entered these doors and watch her movements, agile and graceful as a bird on the wing, as she dusts out the empty drawers and lines them with snowy paper, and packs away all my things with an

exquisite neatness in the limited space, which would delight your heart; she makes no further remark until she has finished and cleared away the *debris*, so *absorbed* is she in the details of what she is doing; then she leans for some time with her elbows on the top of the drawers, her face buried in my nosegay, the delightful scents of which seem to afford her vast satisfaction.

I begin to be fascinated by the noiseless force with which she does everything, and am looking hard at her back, when she turns and faces me.

"What Ward are you ordered to?" she asks, suddenly.

"I am to go to Matthew. Is it a nice Ward?" I answer, longing to converse.

"That is a matter of taste," she replies in a quiet voice, and a gleam of light—which is not a smile—flashes into her expressive eyes (which I find later are *quite green* by daylight). "You have given offence early," she remarks dryly. "What have you done? Confess!"

I obey, with infinite relief, and graphically describe my interview with the Home Sister. She neither moves nor speaks until I cease speaking, but stands motionless, lost in thought, her chin resting on her chest, her strange eyes gleaming from betwixt half-closed lids, "You have written down all that treason in black and white," she suggests, with a *soupçon* of contempt in her voice.

"Some of it"—I begin apologetically.

"It is going to that woman"—nodding over her shoulder towards your picture.

"Yes—that is Jean—she is my sister and very true friend."

"She is quite safe, only"—and here she paused, and comes up quite close to me, and speaks very low and with concentrated force—"do not post your letters in the Hospital letter-box, and tell your sister to seal her letters. Forgive me if I pain you—I hate to shatter your faith."

This is unbearable!

I shiver and feel as if suddenly transported into the 16th century, and glance nervously towards the door, half expecting to see an emissary of the demoniacal Duke of Alva enter, followed by a string of cowed monks and a masked and bloody headsman, who obedient to horrible mute signs will seize and convey me before the pitiless council of the Inquisition! A dozen questions rise to my impetuous tongue, but my companion has turned hastily from me and is on her knees, her hands clasped at arms' length across her little bed, her head bent low. She is oblivious of my presence, and her attitude conveys to me what is meant by "wrestling in prayer."

I finish my letter, the gas dies out, I undress

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