THE BUSY MAN: BY MARJORIE SUTHERLAND

"The things which thou hast prepared, whose shall they be?"

The nurse drew the white woollen coverings deftly about the patient’s shoulders, then she turned out the light and started for the door. "Wait," said the voice from the bed. "Why?" asked the nurse. "I want to tell you something." "What? Are you not so comfortable?" "Yes. I feel almost well—quite well." "Oh." "You are surprised? Yes, I know. You need not try to hide it. I can speak only for a little time. I know that. Will you wait?" "There is the baby upstairs. I must go there." "Yes, I know; it was of the baby I wished to speak." "Oh," said the nurse, retreating to the open window and standing there in the darkness.

Again the voice sounded from the bed: "I want you to tell the baby upstairs and those who are to take care of him, that an old man is dying in the room below. An old man—a lover and a father, but that he is loveless now, and childless. I am in my right mind. My brain is clear now. I am perfectly calm, perfectly sane. I am not telling you a story for books—oh, never that—but I have lived here a while and I know. Tell this to those who belong to the helpless, inarticulate, unknowing creature upstairs. Tell them that somebody always pays; that no man ever loved, or hated, or struggled, or won—or lost—with higher tension than the man who is speaking now. I do not ask them to believe in any god, any mortal person, any man-made power; I do not ask them to be over-cautious, to be afraid, to be superstitiously prudent or free—only tell them that somebody always pays. I know this to be true, because I have paid."

"What do you mean?" asked the nurse.

"Listen; I have lain in this bed for five weeks. I have used my head much during that time, day and night,—hot, restless days and nights filled with agony and remorse. I shall never get up again—you know that—but if I could get up again I would be a companion to men.

"I would make me a garden, the garden which I failed to make twenty-five years ago. The garden would be after the English style. There would be a lily pond in the center, and a border of mulberry trees along the paths, with birches back of the sun-dial and basswoods next the road. There would be a honeysuckle trellis by the summer house and a bank of violets, and then tulips, sweet peas, roses and asters. I know just where each of them would be placed, but I will not go into great detail now—it—it is too late.

"Beyond the garden you would find my house. Perhaps I should have mentioned the house first. But then, it makes little difference—
the house would be there, a neat, roomy shelter, with French doors with brass knobs, and inside would be books and pictures whose every line bespoke my care and foresight. There would be a brass fireplace too, and all of the necessary things which go to make a house.

"Somebody else would look after the house—my wife. I had a wife one time and three beautiful children. I said a moment ago that I was childless, and so I am. I was so very busy when my children were growing up that I had scant time to notice them—and I—I’m making up that time now.

"If I were back in that dwelling at this moment I would take my son by the hand, lead him into the library, mine and his, and we two comrades would sit down in the presence of Shakespeare, Carlyle and Victor Hugo. We would talk together like friends about the activities of men and about the beauties of the world. When we had sat in the book room long enough we would turn one of the brass knobs of the French doors and go tramping or riding out beyond the garden and over the hills, noticing carefully as we went the voices, webs, tracks and homes of all the creatures which lived along our path. I can almost see those two going over the hill. How strange that events which never happened should seem so familiar!

"Again, I would take my daughter’s hand. We would go into the garden and take our place by the dial to watch the sun set. Others would be near the dial, too—Antigone, Queen Louise, Lorna Doone, the Lady of Shalott. But we should be the happiest of them all, because we were alive and in love with life. Think of youth without a garden—without a sun-dial or a honeysuckle vine, or a space to watch the moon rise and the sun set—think of being too busy for that!

"On a bit of paper I have said that I consign to my children the banks and bonds which I have so busily accumulated. But I have left them no memories, no rare books with marked passages, no heritage of May mornings, of comradeship, of November nights about the library fireplace, no April rambles through damp woods. My voice, the turn of my head, the gleam of my eyes will accompany them through life, but they do not know it. They do not care because they never knew me. I will keep them in opulence, a soft, cowardly opulence, all their days, which they will accept with eager greed that I never took time to avert. Do not think that I am pitying myself. I am only pitying them—strangers!—bearing my name—whom I pity from the roots of my life, because their father was such a busy man.

"I might have sat with my son within the shadow of the Parthenon, or among the sapphire hills of the Tyrol; I might have told him stories of past men, of past nations, of ancient skill and vigor and
love, but I did not—I was too busy. I did not even tell him that a lark builds its nest in the growing corn, while an oriole swings hers from the branch of an elm; a poor man could tell his son so much—a policeman or a cobbler,—and it would take only a little time.

"I never told my son that being something was worth more than having something. I never told him that a skilled craftsman was the noblest work of God. I never told him that I thought there was a God, or anything divine in beauty or harmony or labor or love.

"You, woman, I tell you this because you are the keeper of that little thing upstairs. Tell him that someone always pays, but the one who pays the greatest price is the one who is too busy."

LOVE'S INFINITY

THOUGH I have given all my love to thee,
Abundance measureless remains behind.
Freely I give, for thou shalt never find
A barrier to my soul's infinity
Of tenderness or passion. Canst thou see
The confines of immensity that bind
The star-mote’s journey and the tireless wind?
They are no farther than the marge of me.

Boundless I am as the star-dancing deep
Reflected in this bubble that is I.
Gaze till thine eyes are weary, and then sleep
Within the bosom of the mirrored sky.
Love has no limit that I need to keep,
Love has no terror that I need to fly.

Elsa Barker.