**An abstract from Of human Bondage by W.S. Maugham**

The autumn passed into winter. Philip had left his address with Mrs. Foster, his uncle’s housekeeper, so that she might communicate with him, but still went once a week to the hospital on the chance of there being a letter. One evening he saw his name on an envelope in a handwriting he had hoped never to see again. It gave him a queer feeling. For a little while he could not bring himself to take it. It brought back a host of hateful memories. But at length, impatient with himself, he ripped open the envelope.

7 William Street, Fitzroy Square.

Dear Phil,

Can I see you for a minute or two as soon as possible. I am in awful trouble and don’t know what to do. It’s not money.

Yours truly,  
         Mildred.

He tore the letter into little bits and going out into the street scattered them in the darkness.

“I’ll see her damned,” he muttered.

A feeling of disgust surged up in him at the thought of seeing her again. He did not care if she was in distress, it served her right whatever it was, he thought of her with hatred, and the love he had had for her aroused his loathing. His recollections filled him with nausea, and as he walked across the Thames he drew himself aside in an instinctive withdrawal from his thought of her. He went to bed, but he could not sleep; he wondered what was the matter with her, and he could not get out of his head the fear that she was ill and hungry; she would not have written to him unless she were desperate. He was angry with himself for his weakness, but he knew that he would have no peace unless he saw her. Next morning he wrote a letter-card and posted it on his way to the shop. He made it as stiff as he could and said merely that he was sorry she was in difficulties and would come to the address she had given at seven o’clock that evening.

It was that of a shabby lodging-house in a sordid street; and when, sick at the thought of seeing her, he asked whether she was in, a wild hope seized him that she had left. It looked the sort of place people moved in and out of frequently. He had not thought of looking at the postmark on her letter and did not know how many days it had lain in the rack. The woman who answered the bell did not reply to his inquiry, but silently preceded him along the passage and knocked on a door at the back.

“Mrs. Miller, a gentleman to see you,” she called.

The door was slightly opened, and Mildred looked out suspiciously.

“Oh, it’s you,” she said. “Come in.”

He walked in and she closed the door. It was a very small bed-room, untidy as was every place she lived in; there was a pair of shoes on the floor, lying apart from one another and uncleaned; a hat was on the chest of drawers, with false curls beside it; and there was a blouse on the table. Philip looked for somewhere to put his hat. The hooks behind the door were laden with skirts, and he noticed that they were muddy at the hem.

“Sit down, won’t you?” she said. Then she gave a little awkward laugh. “I suppose you were surprised to hear from me again.”

“You’re awfully hoarse,” he answered. “Have you got a sore throat?”

“Yes, I have had for some time.”

(…)

She gave him a quick glance and turned her eyes away at once. He thought that she reddened. She dabbed her palms nervously with the handkerchief.

“You’ve not forgotten all your doctoring, have you?” She jerked the words out quite oddly.

“Not entirely.”

“Because that’s why I wanted to see you.” Her voice sank to a hoarse whisper. “I don’t know what’s the matter with me.”

“Why don’t you go to a hospital?”

“I don’t like to do that, and have all the stoodents staring at me, and I’m afraid they’d want to keep me.”

“What are you complaining of?” asked Philip coldly, with the stereotyped phrase used in the out-patients’ room.

“Well, I’ve come out in a rash, and I can’t get rid of it.”

Philip felt a twinge of horror in his heart. Sweat broke out on his forehead.

“Let me look at your throat?”

He took her over to the window and made such examination as he could. Suddenly he caught sight of her eyes. There was deadly fear in them. It was horrible to see. She was terrified. She wanted him to reassure her; she looked at him pleadingly, not daring to ask for words of comfort but with all her nerves astrung to receive them: he had none to offer her.

“I’m afraid you’re very ill indeed,” he said.

“What d’you think it is?”

When he told her she grew deathly pale, and her lips even turned, yellow. she began to cry, hopelessly, quietly at first and then with choking sobs.

“I’m awfully sorry,” he said at last. “But I had to tell you.”

“I may just as well kill myself and have done with it.”

He took no notice of the threat.

“Have you got any money?” he asked.

“Six or seven pounds.”

“You must give up this life, you know. Don’t you think you could find some work to do? I’m afraid I can’t help you much. I only get twelve bob a week.”

“What is there I can do now?” she cried impatiently.

“Damn it all, you MUST try to get something.”