

# Beth Woodburn eBook

## Beth Woodburn

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## CHAPTER I.

### *BETH AT EIGHTEEN.*

In the good old county of Norfolk, close to the shore of Lake Erie, lies the pretty village of Briarsfield. A village I call it, though in truth it has now advanced almost to the size and dignity of a town. Here, on the brow of the hill to the north of the village (rather a retired spot, one would say, for so busy a man), at the time of which my story treats, stood the residence of Dr. Woodburn.

It was a long, old-fashioned rough-cast house facing the east, with great wide windows on each side of the door and a veranda all the way across the front. The big lawn was quite uneven, and broken here and there by birch trees, spruces, and crazy clumps of rose-bushes, all in bloom. Altogether it was a sweet, home-like old place. The view to the south showed, over the village roofs on the hill-side, the blue of Lake Erie outlined against the sky, while to the north stretched the open, undulating country, so often seen in Western Ontario.

One warm June afternoon Beth, the doctor's only daughter, was lounging in an attitude more careless than graceful under a birch tree. She, her father and Mrs. Margin, the housekeeper—familiarly known as Aunt Prudence—formed the whole household. Beth was a little above the average height, a girlish figure, with a trifle of that awkwardness one sometimes meets in an immature girl of eighteen; a face, not what most people would call pretty, but still having a fair share of beauty. Her features were, perhaps, a little too strongly outlined, but the brow was fair as a lily, and from it the great mass of dark hair was drawn back in a pleasing way. But her eyes—those earnest, grey eyes—were the most impressive of all in her unusually impressive face. They were such searching eyes, as though she had stood on the brink scanning the very Infinite, and yet with a certain baffled look in them as of one who had gazed far out, but failed to pierce the gloom—a beaten, longing look. But a careless observer might have dwelt longer on the affectionate expression about her lips—a half-childish, half-womanly tenderness.

Beth was in one of her dreamy moods that afternoon. She was gazing away towards the north, her favorite view. She sometimes said it was prettier than the lake view. The hill on which their house stood sloped abruptly down, and a meadow, pink with clover, stretched far away to rise again in a smaller hill skirted with a bluish line of pines. There was a single cottage on the opposite side of the meadow, with white blinds and a row of sun-flowers along the wall; but Beth was not absorbed in the view, and gave no heed to the book beside her. She was dreaming. She had just been reading the life of George Eliot, her favorite author, and the book lay open at her picture. She had begun to love George Eliot like a personal friend; she was her ideal, her model, for Beth had some repute as a literary character in Briarsfield.



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Not a teacher in the village school but had marked her strong literary powers, and she was not at all slow to believe all the hopeful compliments paid her. From a child her stories had filled columns in the Briarsfield *Echo*, and now she was eighteen she told herself she was ready to reach out into the great literary world—a nestling longing to soar. Yes, she would be famous—Beth Woodburn, of Briarsfield. She was sure of it. She would write novels; oh, such grand novels! She would drink from the very depths of nature and human life. The stars, the daisies, sunsets, rippling waters, love and sorrow, and all the infinite chords that vibrate in the human soul—she would weave them all with warp of gold. Oh, the world would see what was in her soul! She would be the bright particular star of Canadian literature; and then wealth would flow in, too, and she would fix up the old home. Dear old “daddy” should retire and have everything he wanted: and Aunt Prudence, on sweeping days, wouldn’t mind moving “the trash,” as she called her manuscripts. Daddy wouldn’t make her go to bed at ten o’clock then; she would write all night if she choose; she would have a little room on purpose, and visitors at Briarsfield would pass by the old rough-cast house and point it out as Beth Woodburn’s home, and—well, this is enough for a sample of Beth’s daydreams. They were very exaggerated, perhaps, and a little selfish, too; but she was not a fully-developed woman yet, and the years were to bring sweeter fruit. She had, undoubtedly, the soul of genius, but genius takes years to unfold itself.

Then a soft expression crossed the face of the dreamer. She leaned back, her eyes closed and a light smile played about her lips. She was thinking of one who had encouraged her so earnestly—a tall, slender youth, with light curly hair, blue eyes and a fair, almost girlish, face—too fair and delicate for the ideal of most girls: but Beth admired its paleness and delicate features, and Clarence Mayfair had come to be often in her thoughts. She remembered quite well when the Mayfairs had moved into the neighborhood and taken possession of the fine old manor beside the lake, and she had become friends with the only daughter, Edith, at school, and then with Clarence. Clarence wrote such pretty little poems, too. This had been the foundation of their friendship, and, since their tastes and ambitions were so much alike, what if—

Her eyes grew brighter, and she almost fancied he was looking down into her face. Oh, those eyes—hush, maiden heart, be still. She smiled at the white cloud drifting westward—a little boat-shaped cloud, with two white figures in it, sailing in the summer blue. The breeze ruffled her dark hair. There fell a long shadow on the grass beside her.

“Clarence—Mr. Mayfair! I didn’t see you coming. When did you get home?”

“Last night. I stayed in Toronto till the report of our ‘exams’ came out.”



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"I see you have been successful," she replied. "Allow me to congratulate you."

"Thank you. I hear you are coming to 'Varsity this fall, Miss Woodburn. Don't you think it quite an undertaking? I'm sure I wish you joy of the hard work."

"Why, I hope you are not wearying of your course in the middle of it, Mr. Mayfair. It is only two years till you will have your B.A."

"Two years' hard work, though; and, to tell the truth, a B.A. has lost its charms for me. I long to devote my life more fully to literature. That is my first ambition, you know, and I seem to be wasting so much time."

"You can hardly call time spent that way wasted," she answered. "You will write all the better for it by and by."

Then they plunged into one of their old-time literary talks of authors and books and ambitions. Beth loved these talks. There was no one else in Briarsfield she could discuss these matters with like Clarence. She was noticing meanwhile how much paler he looked than when she saw him last, but she admired him all the more. There are some women who love a man all the more for being delicate. It gives them better opportunities to display their womanly tenderness. Beth was one of these.

"By the way, I mustn't forget my errand," Clarence exclaimed after a long chat.

He handed her a dainty little note, an invitation to tea from his sister Edith. Beth accepted with pleasure. She blushed as he pressed her hand in farewell, and their eyes met. That look and touch of his went very deep—deeper than they should have gone, perhaps; but the years will tell their tale. She watched him going down the hill-side in the afternoon sunshine, then fell to dreaming again. What if, after all, she should not always stay alone with daddy? If someone else should come—And she began to picture another study where she should not have to write alone, but there should be two desks by the broad windows looking out on the lake, and somebody should—

"Beth! Beth! come and set the tea-table. My hands is full with them cherries."

Beth's dream was a little rudely broken by Mrs. Martin's voice, but she complacently rose and went into the house.

Mrs. Martin was a small grey-haired woman, very old-fashioned; a prim, good old soul, a little sharp-tongued, a relic of bygone days of Canadian life. She had been Dr. Woodburn's housekeeper ever since Beth could remember, and they had always called her "Aunt Prudence."

"What did that gander-shanks of a Mayfair want?" asked the old lady with a funny smile, as Beth was bustling about.



“Oh, just come to bring an invitation to tea from Edith.”

Dr. Woodburn entered as soon as tea was ready. He was the ideal father one meets in books, and if there was one thing on earth Beth was proud of it was “dear daddy.” He was a fine, broad-browed man, strikingly like Beth, but with hair silvery long before its time. His eyes were like hers, too, though Beth’s face had a little shadow of gloom that did not belong to the doctor’s genial countenance.

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It was a pleasant little tea-table to which they sat down. Mrs Martin always took tea with them, and as she talked over Briarsfield gossip to the doctor, Beth, as was her custom, looked silently out of the window upon the green sloping lawn.

“Well, Beth, dear,” said Dr. Woodburn, “has Mrs. Martin told you that young Arthur Grafton is coming to spend his holidays with us?”

“Arthur Grafton! Why, no!” said Beth with pleased surprise.

“He is coming. He may drop in any day. He graduated this spring, you know. He’s a fine young man, I’m told.”

“Oh! Beth ain’t got time to think about anything but that slim young Mayfair, now-a-days,” put in Mrs. Martin. “He’s been out there with her most of the afternoon, and me with all them cherries to tend to.”

Beth saw a faint shadow cross her father’s face, but put it aside as fancy only and began to think of Arthur. He was an old play-fellow of hers. An orphan at an early age, he had spent his childhood on his uncle’s farm, just beyond the pine wood to the north of her home. Her father had always taken a deep interest in him, and when the death of his uncle and aunt left him alone in the world, Dr. Woodburn had taken him into his home for a couple of years until he had gone away to school. Arthur had written once or twice, but Beth was staying with her Aunt Margaret, near Welland, that summer, and she had seen fit, for unexplained reasons, to stop the correspondence: so the friendship had ended there. It was five years now since she had seen her old play-fellow, and she found herself wondering if he would be greatly changed.

After tea Beth took out her books, as usual, for an hour or two; then, about eight o’clock, with her tin-pail on her arm, started up the road for the milk. This was one of her childhood’s tasks that she still took pleasure in performing. She sauntered along in the sweet June twilight past the fragrant clover meadow and through the pine wood, with the fire-flies darting beneath the boughs. Some girls would have been frightened, but Beth was not timid. She loved the still sweet solitude of her evening walk. The old picket gate clicked behind her at the Birch Farm, and she went up the path with its borders of four-o’clocks. It was Arthur’s old home, where he had passed his childhood at his uncle’s—a great cheery old farm-house, with morning-glory vines clinging to the windows, and sun-flowers thrusting their great yellow faces over the kitchen wall.

The door was open, but the kitchen empty, and she surmised that Mrs. Birch had not finished milking; so Beth sat down on the rough bench beneath the crab-apple tree and began to dream of the olden days. There was the old chain swing where Arthur used to swing her, and the cherry-trees where he filled her apron. She was seven and he was ten—but such a man in her eyes, that sun-browned, dark-eyed boy. And what a hero he was to her when she fell over the



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bridge, and he rescued her! He used to get angry though sometimes. Dear, how he thrashed Sammie Jones for calling her a “little snip.” Arthur was good, though, very good. He used to sit in that very bench where she was sitting, and explain the Sunday-school lesson to her, and say such good things. Her father had told her two or three years ago of Arthur’s decision to be a missionary. He was going away off to Palestine. “I wonder how he can do it,” she thought. “He has his B.A. now, too, and he was always so clever. He must be a hero. I’m not good like that; I—I don’t think I want to be so good. Clarence isn’t as good as that. But Clarence must be good. His poetry shows it. I wonder if Arthur will like Clarence?”

Mrs. Birch, with a pail of fresh milk on each arm, interrupted her reverie.

Beth enjoyed her walk home that night. The moon had just risen, and the pale stars peeped through the patches of white cloud that to her fancy looked like the foot-prints of angels here and there on the path of the infinite. As she neared home a sound of music thrilled her. It was only an old familiar tune, but she stopped as if in a trance. The touch seemed to fill her very soul. It was so brave and yet so tender. The music ceased; some sheep were bleating in the distance, the stars were growing brighter, and she went on toward home.

She was surprised as she crossed the yard to see a tall dark-haired stranger talking to her father in the parlor. She was just passing the parlor door when he came toward her.

“Well, Beth, my old play-mate!”

“Arthur!”

They would have made a subject for an artist as they stood with clasped hands, the handsome dark-eyed man, the girl, in her white dress, her milk-pail on her arm, and her wondering grey eyes upturned to his.

“Why, Beth, you look at me as if I were a spectre.”

“But, Arthur, you’re so changed! Why, you’re a man, now!” at which he laughed a merry laugh that echoed clear to the kitchen.

Beth joined her father and Arthur in the parlor, and they talked the old days over again before they retired to rest. Beth took out her pale blue dress again before she went to sleep. Yes, she would wear that to the Mayfair’s next day, and there were white moss roses at the dining-room window that would just match. So thinking she laid it carefully away and slept her girl’s sleep that night.



## CHAPTER II.

### *A DREAM OF LIFE.*

It was late the next afternoon when Beth stood before the mirror fastening the moss roses in her belt. Arthur had gone away with her father to see a friend, and would not return till well on in the evening. Aunt Prudence gave her the customary warning about not staying late and Beth went off with a lighter heart than usual. It was a delightful day. The homes all looked so cheery, and the children were playing at the gates as she went down the street. There was one her eye dwelt on more than the rest. The pigeons were strutting on the sloping roof, the cat dozed in the window-sill, and the little fair-haired girls were swinging under the cherry-tree. Yes, marriage and home must be sweet after all. Beth had always said she never would marry. She wanted to write stories and not have other cares. But school girls change their views sometimes.

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It was only a few minutes' walk to the Mayfair residence beside the lake. Beth was familiar with the place and scarcely noticed the great old lawn, the trees almost concealing the house: that pretty fountain yonder, the tennis ground to the south, and the great blue Erie stretching far away.

Edith Mayfair came down the walk to meet her, a light-haired, winsome creature, several years older than Beth. But she looked even younger. Hers was such a child-like face! It was pretty to see the way she twined her arm about Beth. They had loved each other ever since the Mayfairs had come to Briarsfield three years ago. Mr. and Mrs. Mayfair were sitting on the veranda. Beth had always loved Mrs. Mayfair; she was such a bright girlish woman, in spite of her dignity and soft grey hair. Mr. Mayfair, too, had a calm, pleasing manner. To Beth's literary mind there was something about the Mayfair home that reminded her of a novel. They were wealthy people, at least supposed to be so, who had settled in Briarsfield to live their lives in rural contentment.

It was a pretty room of Edith's that she took Beth into—a pleasing confusion of curtains, books, music, and flowers, with a guitar lying on the coach. There was a photo on the little table that caught Beth's attention. It was Mr. Ashley, the classical master in Briarsfield High School, for Briarsfield could boast a High School. He and Edith had become very friendly, and village gossip was already linking their names. Beth looked up and saw Edith watching her with a smiling, blushing face. The next minute she threw both arms about Beth.

"Can't you guess what I was going to tell you, Beth, dear?"

"Why, Edith, are you and Mr. Ashley—"

"Yes, dear. I thought you would guess."

Beth only hugged her by way of congratulation, and Edith laughed a little hysterically. Beth was used to these emotional fits of Edith's. Then she began to question—

"When is it to be?"

"September. And you will be my bridesmaid, won't you, dear?"

Beth promised.

"Oh, Beth, I think marriage is the grandest institution God ever made."

Beth had a strange dream-like look in her eyes, and the tea-bell broke their reverie.

Mr. Ashley had dropped in for tea, and Clarence sat beside Beth, with Edith and her betrothed opposite. It was so pleasant and home-like, with the pink cluster of roses smiling in at the window.



After tea, Edith and Mr. Ashley seemed prepared for a *tete-a-tete*, in which Mrs. Mayfair was also interested; and Clarence took Beth around to the conservatory to see a night-blooming cirus. It was not out yet, and so they went for a promenade through the long grounds toward the lake. Beth never forgot that walk in all her life to come. Somehow she did not seem herself. All her ambition and struggle seemed at rest. She was a child, a careless child, and the flowers bloomed around her, and Clarence was at her side. The lake was very calm when they reached it; the stars were shining faintly, and they could see Long Point Island like a long dark line in the distant water.



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“Arthur is going to take me over to the island this week,” said Beth.

They had just reached a little cliff jutting out over the water. It was, perhaps, one of the most picturesque scenes on the shores of Lake Erie.

“Wouldn’t it be grand to be on this cliff and watch a thunderstorm coming up over the lake?” said Beth.

“You are very daring Beth—Miss Woodburn. Edith would rather hide her head under the blankets.”

“Do you know, I really love thunderstorms,” continued Beth. “It is such a nice safe feeling to lie quiet and sheltered in bed and hear the thunder crash and the storm beat outside. Somehow, I always feel more deeply that God is great and powerful, and that the world has a live ruler.” She stopped rather suddenly. Clarence never touched on religious subjects in conversation—

“Dear, what a ducking Arthur and I got in a thunderstorm one time. We were out hazel-nutting and—”

“Do you always call Mr. Grafton Arthur?” interrupted Clarence, a little impatiently.

“Oh, yes! Why, how funny it would seem to call Arthur Mr. Grafton!”

“Beth”—he grew paler and his voice almost trembled,—“Beth, do you love Arthur Grafton?”

“Love Arthur! Why, dear, no! I never thought of it. He’s just like my brother. Besides,” she continued after a pause, “Arthur is going away off somewhere to be a missionary, and I don’t think I could be happy if I married a man who wasn’t a writer.”

That was very naive of Beth. She forgot Clarence’s literary pretensions.

“Then can you love me, Beth? Don’t you see that I love you?”

There was a moment’s silence. Their eyes met in a long, earnest look. An impulse of tenderness came over her, and she threw both arms about his neck as he clasped her to his breast. The stars were shining above and the water breaking at their feet. They understood each other without words.

“Oh, Clarence, I am so happy, so very happy!”

The night air wafted the fragrance of roses about them like incense. They walked on along the shore, happy lovers, weaving their life-dreams under the soft sky of that summer night.



“I wonder if anyone else is as happy as we are, Beth!”

“Oh, Clarence, how good we ought to be! I mean to always be kinder and to try and make other people happy, too.”

“You are good, Beth. May God bless our lives.”

She had never seen Clarence so earnest and manly before. Yes, she was very much in love, she told herself.

They talked much on the way back to the house. He told her that his father was not so wealthy as many people supposed; that it would be several years before he himself could marry. But Beth’s brow was not clouded. She wanted her college course, and somehow Clarence seemed so much more manly with a few difficulties to face.

A faint sound of music greeted them as they reached the house. Edith was playing her guitar. Mrs. Mayfair met them on the veranda.



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"Why, Clarence, how late you've kept the child out," said Mrs. Mayfair with a motherly air. "I'm afraid you will catch cold, Miss Woodburn; there is such a heavy dew!"

Clarence went up to his mother and said something in a low tone. A pleased look lighted her face.

"I am so glad, dear Beth, my daughter. I shall have another daughter in place of the one I am giving away."

She drew the girl to her breast with tender affection. Beth had been motherless all her life, and the caress was sweet and soothing to her. Edith fastened her cape and kissed her fondly when she was going home. Clarence went with her, and somehow everything was so dream-like and unreal that even the old rough-cast home looked strange and shadowy in the moon-light. It was perhaps a relief that her father had not yet returned.

She was smiling and happy, but even her own little room seemed strangely unnatural that night. She stopped just inside the door and looked at it, the moonlight streaming through the open window upon her bed. Was she really the same Beth Woodburn that had rested there last night and thought about the roses. She took them out of her belt now. A sweetly solemn feeling stole over her, and she crossed over and knelt at the window, the withered roses in her hand, her face upturned to heaven. Sacred thoughts filled her mind. She had longed for love, someone to love, someone who loved her; but was she worthy, she asked herself, pure enough, good enough? She felt to-night that she was kneeling at an unseen shrine, a bride, to be decked by the holy angels in robes whiter than mortal ever saw.

Waves of sweet music aroused her. She started up as from a dream, recognizing at once the touch of the same hand that she had heard in the distance the night before, and it was coming from their own parlor window, right beneath hers! She held her breath almost as she stole out and leaned over the balustrade to peer into the parlor. Why, it was Arthur! Was it possible he could play like that? She made a striking picture as she stood there on the stairs, her great grey eyes drinking in the music: but she was relieved somehow when it ceased. It was bright, quick, inspiring; but it seemed to make her forget her new-born joy while it lasted.

## CHAPTER III.

### *WHITHER, BETH?*

Beth was lying in the hammock, watching the white clouds chase each other over the sky. Her face was quite unclouded, though the morning had not passed just as she had hoped. It was the next afternoon after she had taken tea at the Mayfair's, and Clarence



had come to see her father that morning. They had had a long talk in the study, and Beth had sat in her room anxiously pulling to pieces the roses that grew at her window. After a little while she was called down. Clarence was gone, and she thought her father did not look quite satisfied, though he smiled as she sat down beside him.



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“Beth, I am sorry you are engaged so young,” he said gently. “Are you sure you love him, Beth?”

“Oh, yes, papa, dear. You don’t understand,” and she put both arms about his neck. “I am in love, truly. Believe me, I shall be happy.”

“Clarence is delicate, too,” said her father with a grave look.

They were both silent for a few minutes.

“But, after all, he cannot marry for three or four years to come, and you must take your college course, Beth.”

They were silent again for a moment.

“Well, God bless you, Beth, my darling child.” There were tears in his eyes, and his voice was very gentle. He kissed her and went out to his office.

What a dear old father he was! Only Beth wished he had looked more hopeful and enthusiastic over the change in her life. Aunt Prudence had been told before dinner, and she had taken it in a provokingly quiet fashion that perplexed Beth. What was the matter with them all? Did they think Clarence the pale-faced boy that he looked? They were quite mistaken. Clarence was a man.

So Miss Beth reasoned, and the cloud passed off her brow, for, after all, matters were about as they were before. The morning had been rather pleasant, too. Arthur had played some of his sweet old pieces, and then asked as a return favor to see some of her writing. She had given him several copies of the *Briarsfield Echo*, and he was still reading. In spite of her thoughts of Clarence, she wondered now and again what Arthur would think of her. Would he be proud of his old play-mate? He came across the lawn at last and drew one of the chairs up beside the hammock.

“I have read them all, Beth, and I suppose I should be proud of you. You are talented—indeed, you are more than talented: you are a genius, I believe. But do you know, Beth, I do not like your writings?”

He looked at her as if it pained him to utter these words.

“They are too gloomy. There is a sentimental gloom about everything you write. I don’t know what the years since we parted have brought you, Beth, but your writings don’t seem to come from a full heart, overflowing with happiness. It seems to me that with your command of language and flowing style you might bring before your reader such sweet little homes and bright faces and sunny hearts, and that is the sweetest mission a writer has, I believe.”



Beth watched him silently. She had not expected this from Arthur. She thought he would overwhelm her with praise; and, instead, he sat there like a judge laying all her faults before her. Stern critic! Somehow he didn't seem just like the old Arthur.

"I don't like him any more," she thought. "He isn't like his old self."

But somehow she could not help respecting him as she looked at him sitting there with that great wave of dark hair brushed back from his brow, and his soulful eyes fixed on something in space. He looked a little sad, too.



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“Still, he isn’t a writer like Clarence,” she thought, “and he doesn’t know how to praise like Clarence does.”

“But Arthur,” she said, finally speaking her thoughts aloud; “you speak as though I could change my way of writing merely by resolving to. I can write only as nature allows.”

“That’s too sentimental, Beth; just like your writing. You are a little bit visionary.”

“But there are gloomy and visionary writers as well as cheerful ones. Both have their place.”

“I do not believe, Beth, that gloom has a place in this bright earth of ours. Sadness and sorrow will come, but there is sweetness in the cup as well. The clouds drift by with the hours, Beth, but the blue sky stands firm throughout all time.”

She caught sight of Clarence coming as he was speaking, and scarcely heeded his last words, but nevertheless they fastened themselves in her mind, and in after years she recalled them.

Clarence and Arthur had never met before face to face, and somehow there was something striking about the two as they did so. Arthur was only a few years older, but he looked so manly and mature beside Clarence. They smiled kindly when Beth introduced them, and she felt sure that they approved of each other. Arthur withdrew soon, and Beth wondered if he had any suspicion of the truth.

Once alone with her, Clarence drew her to his heart in true lover-like fashion.

“Oh, Clarence, don’t! People will see you.”

“Suppose they do. You are mine.”

“But you mustn’t tell it, Clarence. You won’t, will you?”

He yielded to her in a pleasant teasing fashion.

“Have you had a talk with your father, Beth?”

“Yes,” she answered seriously, “and I rather hoped he would take it differently.”

“I had hoped so, too; but, still, he doesn’t oppose us, and he will become more reconciled after a while, you know, when he sees what it is to have a son. Of course, he thinks us very young; but still I think we are more mature than many young people of our age.”



Beth's face looked changed in the last twenty-four hours. She had a more satisfied, womanly look. Perhaps that love-craving heart of hers had been too empty.

"I have been looking at the upstairs rooms at home," said Clarence. "There will have to be some alterations before our marriage."

"Why, Clarence!" she exclaimed, laughing; "you talk as though we were going off to Gretna Green to be married next week."

"Sure enough, the time is a long way off, but it's well to be looking ahead. There are two nice sunny rooms on the south side. One of them would be so nice for study and writing. It has a window looking south toward the lake, and another west. You were always fond of watching the sun set, Beth. But you must come and look at them. Let's see, to-day's Saturday. Come early next week; I shall be away over Sunday, you know."



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“Yes, you told me so last night.”

“Did I tell you of our expected guest?” he asked, after a pause. “Miss Marie de Vere, the daughter of an old friend of my mother’s. Her father was a Frenchman, an aristocrat, quite wealthy, and Marie is the only child, an orphan. My mother has asked her here for a few weeks.”

“Isn’t it a striking name?” said Beth, “Marie de Vere, pretty, too. I wonder what she will be like.”

“I hope you will like her, Beth. She makes her home in Toronto, and it would be nice if you became friends. You will be a stranger in Toronto, you know, next winter. How nice it will be to have you there while I am there, Beth. I can see you quite often then. Only I hate to have you study so hard.”

“Oh, but then it won’t hurt my brain, you know. Thoughts of you will interrupt my studies so often” she said, with a coquettish smile.

Clarence told her some amusing anecdotes of ‘Varsity life, then went away early, as he was going to leave the village for a day or two.

Beth hurried off to the kitchen to help Aunt Prudence. It was unusual for her to give any attention to housework, but a new interest in domestic affairs seemed to have aroused within her to-day.

The next day was Sunday, and somehow it seemed unusually sacred to Beth. The Woodburn household was at church quite early, and Beth sat gazing out of the window at the parsonage across the road. It was so home-like—a great square old brick, with a group of hollyhocks beside the study window.

The services that day seemed unusually sweet, particularly the Sunday-school hour. Beth’s attention wandered from the lesson once or twice, and she noticed Arthur in the opposite corner teaching a class of little girls—little tots in white dresses. He looked so pleased and self-forgetful. Beth had never seen him look like that before; and the children were open-eyed. She saw him again at the close of the Sunday-school, a little light-haired creature in his arms.

“Why, Arthur, I didn’t think you were so fond of children.”

“Oh, yes, I’m quite a grandfather, only minus the grey hair.”

It was beautiful walking home that afternoon in the light June breeze. She wondered what Clarence was doing just then. Home looked so sweet and pleasant, too, as she opened the gate, and she thought how sorry she should be to leave it to go to college in the fall.



Beth stayed in her room a little while, and then came down stairs. Arthur was alone in the parlor, sitting by the north window, and Beth sat down near. The wind had ceased, the sun was slowly sinking in the west, a flock of sheep were resting in the shadow of the elms on the distant hill-slope, and the white clouds paused in the blue as if moored by unseen hands. Who has not been moved by the peace and beauty of the closing hours of a summer Sabbath? Arthur and Beth were slow to begin conversation, for silence seemed more pleasing.



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“Arthur, when are you going out as a missionary?” asked Beth, at last.

“Not for three or four years yet.”

“Where are you going, do you know?”

“To the Jews, at Jerusalem.”

“Are you sure you will be sent just where you want to go?”

“Yes, for I am going to pay my own expenses. A bachelor uncle of mine died, leaving me an annuity.”

“Don’t you dread going, though?”

“Dread it! No, I rejoice in it!” he said, with a radiant smile. “One has so many opportunities of doing good in a work like that.”

“Do you always think of what you can do for others?”

“That is the best way to live,” he answered, a sweet smile in the depths of his dark eyes.

“But don’t you dread the loneliness?”

“I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”

“Oh, Arthur!”—she buried her face for a moment in the cushions, and then looked up at him with those searching grey eyes of hers—“you are brave; you are good; I wish I were, too.”

He looked down upon her tenderly for a moment.

“But, Beth, isn’t your life a consecrated one—one of service?”

“It is all consecrated but one thing, and I can’t consecrate that.”

“You will never be happy till you do. Beth, I am afraid you are not perfectly happy,” he said, after a pause. “You do not look to be.”

“Oh, yes, I am quite happy, very happy, and I shall be happier still by and by,” she said, thinking of Clarence. “But, Arthur, there is one thing I can’t consecrate. I am a Christian, and I do mean to be good, only I can’t consecrate my literary hopes and work.”

“Oh, why not, Beth? That is the very thing you should consecrate. That’s the widest field you have for work. But why not surrender that, too, Beth?”



“Oh, I don’t know. I couldn’t write like ‘Pansy’ does, it isn’t natural to me.”

“You don’t need to write like ‘Pansy.’ She has done splendid work, though, and I don’t believe there is a good home where she isn’t loved. But it may not be your place to be just like ‘Pansy.’”

“No; I want to be like George Eliot.”

A graver look crossed his face.

“That is right to a certain extent. George Eliot certainly had a grand intellect, but if she had only been a consecrated Christian woman how infinitely greater she might have been. With such talent as hers undoubtedly was, she could have touched earth with the very tints of heaven. Beth, don’t you see what grand possibilities are yours, with your natural gifts and the education and culture that you will have?”

“Ah, yes. Arthur, but then—I am drifting somehow. Life is bearing me another way. I feel it within me. By-and-by I hope to be famous, and perhaps wealthy, too, but I am drifting with the years.”



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“But it is not the part of noble men and women to drift like that, Beth. You will be leaving home this fall, and life is opening up to you. Do you not see there are two paths before you? Which will you choose, Beth? ‘For self?’ or ‘for Jesus?’ The one will bring you fame and wealth, perhaps, but though you smile among the adoring crowds you will not be satisfied. The other—oh, it would make you so much happier! Your books would be read at every fire-side, and Beth Woodburn would be a name to be loved. You are drifting—but whither, Beth?”

His voice was so gentle as he spoke, his smile so tender, and there was something about him so unlike any other man, she could not forget those last words.

The moon-beams falling on her pillow that night mingled with her dreams, and she and Clarence were alone together in a lovely island garden. It was so very beautiful—a grand temple of nature, its aisles carpeted with dewy grass, a star-gemmed heaven for its dome, a star-strewn sea all round! No mortal artist could have planned that mysteriously beautiful profusion of flowers—lily and violet, rose and oleander, palm-tree and passion-vine, and the olive branches and orange blossoms interlacing in the moon-light above them. Arthur was watering the tall white lilies by the water-side and all was still with a hallowed silence they dared not break. Suddenly a wild blast swept where they stood. All was desolate and bare, and Clarence was gone. In a moment the bare rocks where she had stood were overwhelmed, and she was drifting far out to sea—alone! Stars in the sky above—stars in the deep all round and the winds and the waters were still! And she was drifting—but whither?

## CHAPTER IV.

*MARIE.*

“Isn’t she pretty?”

“She’s picturesque looking.”

“Pretty? picturesque? I think she’s ugly!”

These were the varied opinions of a group of Briarsfield girls who were at the station when the evening train stopped. The object of their remarks was a slender girl whom the Mayfairs received with warmth. It was Marie de Vere—graceful, brown-eyed, with a small olive face and daintily dressed brown hair. This was the girl that Beth and Arthur were introduced to when they went to the Mayfairs to tea a few days later. Beth recalled the last evening she was there to tea. Only a few days had since passed, and yet how all was changed!

“Do you like Miss de Vere?” asked Clarence, after Beth had enjoyed a long conversation with her.



“Oh, yes! I’m just delighted with her! She has such kind eyes, and she seems to understand one so well!”

“You have fallen in love at first sight. The pleasure on your face makes up for the long time I have waited to get you alone. Only I wish you would look at me like you looked at Miss de Vere just now,” he said, trying to look dejected.

She laughed. Those little affectionate expressions always pleased her, for she wondered sometimes if Clarence could be a cold and unresponsive husband. He was not a very ardent lover, and grey-eyed, intellectual Beth Woodburn had a love-hungry heart, though few people knew it.



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“Do you know,” said Beth, “Miss de Vere has told me that there is a vacant room at her boarding-house. She is quite sure she can get it for me this winter. Isn’t she kind? I believe we shall be great friends.”

“Yes, you will enjoy her friendship. She is a clever artist and musician, you know. Edith says she lives a sort of Bohemian life in Toronto. Her rooms are littered with music and painting and literature.”

“How nice! Her face looks as if she had a story, too. There’s something sad in her eyes.”

“She struck me as being remarkably lively,” said Clarence.

“Oh, yes, but there are lively people who have secret sorrows. Look, there she is walking with Arthur toward the lake.”

Clarence smiled for a moment.

“Perhaps fate may see fit to link them together,” he said.

“Oh, no, I don’t think so! I can’t imagine it.”

“Grafton’s a fine fellow, isn’t he?”

“I’m glad you like him so well, Clarence. He’s just like my brother, you know. We had such an earnest talk Sunday night. He made me feel, oh, I don’t know how. But do you know, my life isn’t consecrated to God, Clarence; is yours?”

They were walking under the stars of the open night, and Clarence looked thoughtful for a moment, then answered unhesitatingly:

“No, Beth. I settled that long ago. I don’t think we need to be consecrated. So long as we are Christians and live fairly consistent lives, I think that suffices. Of course, with people like Arthur Grafton it is different. But as for us we are consecrated to art, you know, in the shape of writing. Let us make the utmost of our talents.”

“Yes, we are consecrated to art,” said Beth with a sigh of relief, and began talking of Marie.

Since Beth was to leave home in the fall, she did not go away during the summer, and consequently saw much of Marie during the few weeks she stayed at Briarsfield. It is strange how every life we come in contact with leaves its impress upon ourselves! It was certainly so with Marie and Beth. Marie had seen so much of the world and of human life, and Beth had always lived so quietly there in her own village, that now a restlessness took possession of her to get away far beyond the horizon of Briarsfield.



The days passed on as days will pass. Clarence was home most of the time, and he and Beth had many walks together in the twilight, and sometimes in the morning. What delightful walks they were in the cool of the early summer morning! There was one especially pretty spot where they used to rest along the country road-side. It was a little hill-top, with the ground sloping down on either side, then rising again in great forest-crowned hills. Two oak trees, side by side, shaded them as they watched the little clouds sailing over the harvest fields.

Arthur was with them a great deal of the summer, and Beth was occupied with preparations for leaving home. She used to talk to Arthur about Marie sometimes, but he disappointed her by his coldness. She fancied that he did not altogether approve of Marie.



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### CHAPTER V.

*"FOR I LOVE YOU, BETH."*

It came soon, her last Sabbath at home, and the sun was sinking in the west. Beth sat by her favorite window in the parlor. Do you remember that last Sabbath before you left home? Everything, the hills outside, the pictures on the walls, even the very furniture, looked at you in mute farewell. Beth leaned back in her rocker and looked through the open door into the kitchen with its maple floor, and the flames leaping up in the old cook-stove where the fire had been made for tea. She had always liked that stove with its cheery fire. Then she turned her eyes to the window and noted that the early September frost had browned her favorite meadow where the clover bloomed last June, and that the maples along the road where she went for the milk every evening, were now all decked in crimson and yellow.

Her father was sitting at the table reading, but when she looked around she saw his eyes were fixed upon her with a tender look. Poor father! He would miss her, she knew, though he tried not to let her see how much. Aunt Prudence, too, dear old soul, seemed sorry to have her go, but she had her own peculiar way of expressing it, namely, by getting crosser every day. She did not approve of so much "larnin'" for girls, especially when Beth was "goin' to be married to that puny Mayfair." Aunt Prudence always said her "say," as she expressed it, but she meant well and Beth understood.

Beth was not to go until Friday, and Clarence was to meet her at the station. He had been called away to the city with his father on business more than a week before. Arthur was with them to-day, but he was to leave on the early morning train to join a college mate. He was to be at Victoria University that winter and Beth expected to see him often.

They had an early supper, and the September sunset streamed through the open window on the old-fashioned china tea-set. Beth was disappointed after tea when her father's services were required immediately by a patient several miles away. Arthur and she sat down by that same old parlor window in the hush of the coming night; a few white clouds were spread like angel wings above and the early stars were shining in the west. They were silent for a while. Arthur and Beth were often silent when together, but the silence was a pleasing, not an embarrassing one.

"Are you sorry to leave home, Beth?" asked Arthur.

"Yes, I am; and would you believe it, I thought I'd be so glad to have a change, and yet it makes me sad now the time is drawing near."

They were silent again for a while.



“Arthur, do you know, I think it seems so hard for you to go away so far and be a missionary when you are so fond of home and home life.”

He smiled tenderly upon her, but she did not know the meaning of that smile then as she knew a little later.



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"It is my Father's will," he said with a sweeter, graver smile.

"Beth, do you not see how your talent could be used in the mission field?"

"He does not know I am going to marry Clarence," she thought with a smile, "and he is going to map out a life work for a maiden lady."

"No, I don't see how," she answered.

"You know there is a large proportion of the world that never read such a thing as a missionary book, and that if more such books were read, missions would be better supported. Now, if someone with bright talents were to write fascinating stories of Arabian life or life in Palestine, see how much interest would be aroused. But then you would need to live among the people and know their lives, and who would know them so well as a missionary?"

Beth smiled at his earnestness.

"Oh, no, Arthur; I couldn't do that."

His eyes filled in a moment with a sad, pleading look.

"Beth, can you refuse longer to surrender your life and your life's toil? Look, Beth," he said, pointing upward to the picture of Christ upon the wall, "can you refuse Him—can you refuse, Beth?"

"Oh, Arthur, don't," she said drooping her face.

"But I *must*, Beth! Will you enter your Father's service? Once again I ask you."

Her eyes were turned away and she answered nothing.

"Beth," he said softly, "I have a more selfish reason for urging you—for I love you, Beth. I have loved you since we were children together. Will you be my own—my wife? It is a holy service I ask you to share. Are you ready, Beth?"

Her pale face was hidden in her hands. He touched her hair reverently. Tick! tick! tick! from the old clock in the silence. Then a crimson flush, and she rose with sudden violence.

"Oh, Arthur, what *can* you mean? I thought—you seemed my brother almost—I thought you would always be that. Oh, Arthur! Arthur! how can you—how dare you talk so? I am Clarence Mayfair's promised wife."



“Clarence Mayfair’s—” The words died away on his white lips. He leaned upon the mantel-piece, and Beth stood with her grey eyes fixed. His face was so deathly white. His eyes were shaded by his hand, and his brow bore the marks of strong agony. Oh, he was wounded! Those moments were awful in their silence. The darkness deepened in the old parlor. There was a sound of voices passing in the street. The church bell broke the stillness. Softly the old calm crept over his brow, and he raised his face and looked at her with those great dark eyes—eyes of unfathomable tenderness and impenetrable fire, and she felt that her very soul stood naked before him. She trembled and sank on the couch at her side. His look was infinitely tender as he came toward her.

“I have hurt you—forgive me,” he said gently, and he laid his hand on her head so reverently for a moment. His white lips murmured something, but she only caught the last words, “God bless you—forever. Good-bye, Beth—little Beth.”



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He smiled back upon her as he left the room, but she would rather he had looked sad. That smile—she could never forget it, with its wonderful sweetness and sorrow.

She sat motionless for a while after he left the room. She felt thrilled and numbed. There are moments in life when souls stand forth from their clayey frames and touch each other, forgetful of time and space. It was one of those experiences that Beth had just passed through. She went to her room and crouched down at her window beneath the stars of that autumn night. Poor Arthur! She was so sad over it all. And he had loved her! How strange! How could it have been? Loved her since they were children, he had said. She had never thought of love coming like that. And they had played together upon that meadow out there. They had grown up together, and he had even lived in her home those few years before he went to college. No, she had never dreamed of marrying Arthur! But oh, he was wounded so! She had never seen him look like that before. And he had hoped that she would share his life and his labor. She thought how he had pictured her far away under the burning sun of Palestine, bathing his heated brow and cheering him for fresh effort. He had pictured, perhaps, a little humble home, quiet and peaceful, somewhere amid the snow-crested mountains of the East, where he would walk with her in the cool of night-fall, under the bright stars and clear sky of that distant land. Poor, mistaken Arthur! She was not fitted for such a life, she thought. They were never made for each other. Their ambitions were not the same. She had found her counterpart in Clarence, and he understood her as Arthur never could have done. Arthur was a grand, good, practical man, but there was nothing of the artist-soul in him, she thought. But she had hoped that he would always be her own and Clarence's friend. He was such a noble friend! And now her hope was crushed. She could never be the same to him again, she knew, and he had said farewell.

“Good-bye, Beth—little Beth,” he had said, and she lingered over the last two words, “little Beth.” Yes, she would be “little Beth” to him, forever now, the little Beth that he had loved and roamed with over meadow and woodland and wayside, in the sunny, bygone days.

“Good-bye, Beth—little Beth.” Poor Arthur!

## CHAPTER VI.

*'VARSITY.*

Friday morning came, the last day of September, and the train whistled sharply as it steamed around the curve from Briarsfield with Beth at one of the car-windows. It had almost choked her to say good-bye to her father at the station, and she was still straining her eyes to catch the last glimpse of home. She could see the two poplars at the gate almost last of all, as the train bore her out into the open country. She looked

through her tears at the fields and hills, the stretches of woodland and the old farm-houses, with the vines clambering over their porches, and the tomatoes ripening in the kitchen window-sills. Gradually the tears dried, for there is pleasure always in travelling through Western Ontario, particularly on the lake-side, between Hamilton and Toronto.



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Almost the first one Beth saw, as the train entered Toronto station, was Clarence, scanning the car-windows eagerly for her face. Her eyes beamed as he came toward her. She felt as if at home again. Marie had secured her room for her, and Beth looked around with a pleased air when the cab stopped on St. Mary's street. It was a row of three-storey brick houses, all alike, but a cheery, not monotonous, row, with the maples in front, and Victoria University at the end of the street. A plump, cheery landlady saw Beth to her room, and, once alone, she did just what hundreds of other girls have done in her place—sat down on that big trunk and wept, and wondered what “dear old daddy” was doing. But she soon controlled herself, and looked around the room. It was a very pretty room, with rocker and table, and a book-shelf in the corner. There was a large window, too, opening to the south, with a view of St. Michael's College and St. Basil's Church. Beth realized that this room was to be her home for the coming months, and, kneeling down, she asked that the presence of Christ might hallow it.

She was not a very close follower of Christ, but the weakest child of God never breathed a prayer unheard.

It was such a pleasant treat when Marie tapped at the door just before tea. It would be nice to have Marie there all winter. Beth looked around the tea-table at the new faces: Mrs. Owen, at one end of the table, decidedly stout; Mr. Owen, at the other end, decidedly lean. There were two sweet-faced children, a handsome, gloomy-browed lawyer, and Marie at her side.

The next day, Clarence took Beth over to 'Varsity—as Toronto University is popularly called—and she never forgot that bright autumn morning when she passed under the arch of carved stone into the University halls, those long halls thronged with students. Clarence left her in the care of a gentle fourth-year girl. Beth was taken from lecturer to lecturer until the registering was done, and then she stopped by one of the windows in the ladies' dressing-room to gaze at the beautiful autumn scenery around—the ravine, with its dark pines, and the Parliament buildings beyond. Beth was beginning to love the place.

We must not pause long over that first year that Beth spent at 'Varsity. It passed like a flash to her, the days were so constantly occupied. But her memory was being stored with scenes she never forgot. It was so refreshing on the brisk, autumn mornings to walk to lectures through the crimson and yellow leaves of Queen's Park: and, later in the year, when the snow was falling she liked to listen to the rooks cawing among the pines behind the library. Sometimes, too, she walked home alone in the weird, winter twilight from the Modern Language Club, or from a late lecture, her mind all aglow with new thoughts. Then there were the social evenings in the gymnasium, with its red, blue and white decorations, palms and promenades, and music of the orchestra, and



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hum of strange voices. It was all new to Beth; she had seen so little of the world. There was the reception the Y.W.C.A. gave to the “freshettes”—she enjoyed that, too. What kind girls they were! Beth was not slow to decide that the “Varsity maid” would make a model wife, so gentle and kindly and with such a broad, progressive mind. Still Beth made hardly any friendships worthy of the name that first year. She was peculiar in this respect. In a crowd of girls she was apt to like all, but to love none truly. When she did make friends she came upon them suddenly, by a sort of instinct, as in the case of Marie, and became so absorbed in them she forgot everyone else. This friendship with Marie was another feature of her present life that pleased her. She had dropped out of Sunday-school work. She thought city Sunday-schools chilly, and she spent many a Sunday afternoon in Marie’s room. She liked to sit there in the rocker by the grate fire, and listen to Marie talk as she reclined in the cushions, with her dark, picturesque face. They talked of love and life and books and music, and the world and its ways, for Marie was clever and thoughtful. In after years Beth looked back on those Sunday afternoons with a shadow of regret, for her feet found a sweeter, holier path. Marie prided herself on a little tinge of scepticism, but they rarely touched on that ground. The twilight shadows gathered about the old piano in the corner, and the pictures grew dimmer on the wall, and Marie would play soft love-songs on her guitar, and sometime Beth would recite one of her poems.

“Have you finished the novel you were writing last summer, Beth?” asked Marie, one day.

“No, there are just three more chapters, and I am going to leave them till holidays, next summer, so I can give them my full time and attention.”

“Tell me the story.”

Then Beth sat by the fire with a dreamy look on her face and told the plot of her story. Marie leaned forward, a bright, delighted sparkle in her dark eyes. Beth had never interested her like that before. She felt encouraged, and Marie was in raptures when she had finished.

“It’s just splendid! Oh, Beth, how clever you are; you will be famous soon. I shall be proud of your friendship.”

Beth did not enjoy as much of the company of Clarence as she had hoped during these days, though he always brought her home from church on Sunday evening. Marie was always with them. Beth never thought of leaving her, and Clarence, too, seemed to enjoy her company. Beth was pleased at this; she liked to have Clarence appreciate her friends. Then, they three often went to the musical concerts; Beth liked those



concerts so much, and Marie's face would fairly sparkle sometimes, and change with every wave of music.

"Just look! Isn't Marie's face grand?" said Clarence one night in a concert.

Beth only smiled. That night she sat in the rocker opposite her mirror and looked at her own reflection.

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“What a grave, grey-eyed face it is!” she thought. She loved music and beautiful things, and yet she wondered why her eyes never sparkled and glowed like Marie’s. She wished they had more expression. And yet Marie was not a pretty girl: no one would have thought for a moment of calling her pretty.

But what of Arthur? Beth was surprised that during all this time she had seen him but once, though she lived so near to Victoria. That once was in the University hall. She had studied late one afternoon, in the reading-room, after the other girls were gone, and it was just where the two corridors met that she came face to face with Arthur. He stopped, and inquired about her studies and her health, and his eyes rested kindly upon her for a moment; but he did not speak to her just like the old Arthur. “Good-bye, Beth—little Beth.” She recalled the words as she passed down the long, deserted hall, with its row of lights on either side.

There was another thing that touched Beth. It was when Marie left them just before the examinations in the spring; she was going to visit some friends. Sweet Marie! How she would miss her. She sat by the drawing-room window waiting to bid her good-bye. It was a bright April day, with soft clouds and a mild breeze playing through the budding trees. Marie came down looking so picturesque under her broad-brimmed hat, and lifted her veil to receive Beth’s farewell kiss. Beth watched her as she crossed the lawn to the cab. Clarence came hurrying up to clasp her hand at the gate. He looked paler, Beth thought; she hoped he would come in, but he turned without looking at her window and hurried away. Beth felt a little sad at heart; she looked at the long, empty drawing-room, and sighed faintly, then went back upstairs to her books.

And what had that winter brought to Beth? She had grown; she felt it within herself. Her mind had stretched out over the great wide world with its millions, and even over the worlds of the sky at night, and at times she had been overwhelmed at the glory of earth’s Creator. Yes, she had grown; but with her growth had come a restlessness; she felt as though something were giving way beneath her feet like an iceberg melting in mild waters. There was one particular night that this restlessness had been strong. She had been to the Modern Language Club, and listened to a lecture on Walt Whitman, by Dr. Needler. She had never read any of Whitman’s poetry before, she did not even like it. But there were phrases and sentences here and there, sometimes of Whitman’s, sometimes of Dr. Needler’s, that awakened a strange incoherent music in her soul—a new chord was struck. It was almost dark when she reached her room, at the close of a stormy winter day. She stood at her window watching the crimson and black drifts of cloud piled upon each other in the west. Strife and glory she seemed to read in that sky. She thought of Whitman’s rugged manliness, of the way he had mingled with all classes



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of men—mingled with them to do them good. And Beth's heart cried out within her, only to do something in this great, weary world—something to uplift, to ennoble men, to raise the lowly, to feed and to clothe the uncared for, to brighten the millions of homes, to lift men—she knew not where. This cry in Beth's heart was often heard after that—to be great, to do something for others. She was growing weary of the narrow boundaries of self. She would do good, but she knew not how. She heard a hungry world crying at her feet, but she had not the bread they craved. Poor, blinded bird, beating against the bars of heaven! Clarence never seemed to understand her in those moods: he had no sympathy with them. Alas, he had never known Beth Woodburn; he had understood her intellectual nature, but he had never sounded the depths of her womanly soul. He did not know she had a heart large enough to embrace the whole world, when once it was opened. Poor, weak, blinded Clarence! She was as much stronger than he, as the star is greater than the moth that flutters towards it.

### CHAPTER VII.

*ENDED.*

June was almost over, and Beth had been home a full month on that long four months' vacation that university students are privileged to enjoy. She was very ambitious when she came home that first vacation. She had conceived a fresh ideal of womanhood, a woman not only brilliantly educated and accomplished, but also a gentle queen of the home, one who thoroughly understood the work of her home. Clarence was quite pleased when she began to extol cooking as an art, and Dr. Woodburn looked through the open kitchen-door with a smile at his daughter hidden behind a clean white apron and absorbed in the mysteries of the pastry board. Aunt Prudence was a little astonished, but she never would approve of Beth's way of doing things—"didn't see the sense of a note-book and lead-pencil." But Beth knew what she was doing in that respect.

Then there were so many books that Beth intended to read in that vacation! Marie had come to the Mayfair's, too, and helped her to pass some pleasant hours. But there was something else that was holding Beth's attention. It was Saturday evening, and that story was almost finished, that story on which she had built so many hopes. She sat in her room with the great pile of written sheets before her, almost finished; but her head was weary, and she did not feel equal to writing the closing scene that night. She wanted it to be the most touching scene of all, and so it had to be rolled up for another week. Just then the door-bell rang and Mrs. Ashley was announced, our old friend Edith Mayfair, the same sweet, fair girl under another name.

They sat down by the window and had a long chat.

“Have you seen the new minister and his wife yet?” asked Edith.

“No; I heard he was going to preach to-morrow.”



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The Rev. Mr. Perth, as the new Methodist minister, was just now occupying the attention of Briarsfield.

"It's interesting to have new people come to town. I wonder if they will be very nice. Are they young?" asked Beth.

"Yes. They haven't been married so very long."

"Edith"—Beth hesitated before she finished the quietly eager enquiry—"do you still think marriage the best thing in the world?"

Edith gave her friend a warm embrace in reply. "Yes, Beth, I think it the very best thing, if God dwell in your home."

"That sounds like Arthur," said Beth.

"Do you ever hear of him. Where is he?"

"I don't know where he is," said Beth, with a half sigh.

Clarence walked home with Beth to dinner, after church, the next morning.

"How do you like the new minister?" Beth asked.

"Oh, I think he's a clever little fellow."

"So do I," said Beth. "He seems to be a man of progressive ideas. I think we shall have bright, interesting sermons."

Marie was slightly ill that Sunday, and did not come out. Clarence and Beth took a stroll in the moonlight. The world looked bright and beautiful beneath the stars, but Clarence was quieter even than usual, and Beth sighed faintly. Clarence was growing strangely quiet and unconfidential. He was certainly not a demonstrative lover. Perhaps, after all, love was not all she had dreamed. She had painted her dreamland too bright. She did not acknowledge this thought, even to her own soul; but her heart was a little hungry that summer night. Poor Beth! Before another Sabbath she was to know a greater pain than mere weariness. The flames were being kindled that were to scorch that poor heart of hers.

It was about ten o'clock the next night when she finished her novel. Somehow it gave her a grave feeling. Aunt Prudence was in bed, and Dr. Woodburn had gone out into the country to a patient, and would not return till midnight. The house was so still, and the sky and the stars so beautiful; the curtains of her open window just moved in the night air! It was all ended now—that dreamland which she had lived and loved and gave expression to on those sheets of paper. Ended! And she was sitting there with



her pen in her hand, her work finished, bending over it as a mother does over her child. She almost dreaded to resign it to a publisher, to cast it upon the world. And yet it would return to her, bringing her fame! She was sure of that. The last scene alone would make her famous. She could almost see the sweet earnest-eyed woman in her white robes at the altar; she could hear the sound of voices and the tread of feet; she was even conscious of the fragrance of the flowers. It was all so vivid to her!

Then a sudden impulse seized her. She would like so much to show it to Clarence, to talk to him, and feel his sympathy. He never retired much before midnight, and it was scarcely ten minutes' walk. She would get back before her father returned, and no one would know. Seizing her hat, she went quietly out. It was a freak, but then Beth had freaks now and then. A great black cloud drifted over the moon, and made everything quite dark. A timid girl would have been frightened, but Beth was not timid.



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She knew Clarence was likely to be in the library, and so went around to the south side. The library window was quite close to the door of the side hall, and as Beth came up the terrace, through the open window a picture met her eyes that held her spell-bound.

Clarence and Marie were sitting side by side on the sofa, a few feet from the window. Marie's dark face was drooping slightly, her cheeks flushed, and her lips just parted in a smile. There was a picture of the Crucifixion on the wall above them, and rich violet curtains hanging to one side. One of Marie's slender olive hands rested on the crimson cushions at her side, the other Clarence was stroking with a tender touch. Both were silent for a moment. Then Clarence spoke in a soft, low tone:

"Marie, I want to tell you something."

"Do you? Then tell me."

"I don't like to say it," he answered.

"Yes, do. Tell me."

"If I were not an engaged man,"—his voice seemed to tremble faintly, and his face grew paler—"I should try and win you for my wife."

Beth drew back a step, her young cheek colorless as death. No cry escaped her white lips, but her heart almost ceased its beating. It was only a moment she stood there, but it seemed like years. The dark, blushing girl, the weak, fair-haired youth in whom she had placed her trust, the pictures, the cushions, the curtains, every detail of the scene, seemed printed with fire upon her soul. She was stung. She had put her lips to the cup of bitterness, and her face looked wild and haggard as she turned away.

Only the stars above and the night wind sighing in the leaves, and a heart benumbed with pain! A tall man passed her in the shadow of the trees as she was crossing the lawn, but she paid no heed. The lights in the village homes were going out one by one as she returned up the dark, deserted street. The moon emerged from the clouds, and filled her room with a flood of unnatural light just as she entered. She threw herself upon her pillow, and a cry of pain went up from her wounded heart. She started the next instant in fear lest some one had heard. But no, there was no one near here, save that loving One who hears every moan; and Beth had not learned yet that He can lull every sufferer to rest in His bosom. The house was perfectly still, and she lay there in the darkness and silence, no line changing in the rigid marble of her face. She heard her father's step pass by in the hall; then the old clock struck out the midnight hour, and still she lay in that stupor with drops of cold perspiration on her brow.

Suddenly a change came over her. Her cheeks grew paler still, but her eyes burned. She rose and paced the room, with quick, agitated steps.

“Traitor! Traitor!” she almost hissed through her white lips. “It is *her* fault. It is *her* fault. And I called her *friend*. Friend! Treachery!”



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Then she sank upon her bed, exhausted by the outburst of passion, for it took but little of this to exhaust Beth. She was not a passionate girl. Perhaps, never in her life before had she passed through anything like passion, and she lay there now still and white, her hands folded as in death.

In the meantime something else had happened at the Mayfair dwelling. She had not noticed the tall man that passed her as she crossed the lawn in the darkness, but a moment later a dark figure paused on the terrace in the same spot where she had stood, and his attention was arrested by the same scene in the library. He paused but a moment before entering, but even his firm tread was unheard on the soft carpet, as he strode up the hall to the half-open curtains of the library. Marie's face was still drooping, but the next instant the curtains were thrown back violently, and they both paled at the sight of the stern, dark face in the door-way.

"Clarence Mayfair!" he cried in a voice of stern indignation. "Clarence Mayfair, you dare to speak words of love to that woman at your side? You! Beth Woodburn's promised husband?"

"Arthur Grafton!" exclaimed Clarence, and Marie drew back through the violet curtains.

A firm hand grasped Clarence by the shoulder, and, white with fear, he stood trembling before his accuser.

"Wretch! unworthy wretch! And you claim *her* hand! Do you know her worth?"

"In the name of heaven, Grafton, don't alarm the house!" said Clarence, in a terrified whisper. His lip trembled with emotion, and Arthur's dark eyes flashed with fire. There was a shade of pitiful scorn in them, too. After all, what a mere boy this delicate youth looked, he thought. Perhaps he was too harsh. He had only heard a sentence or two outside the window, and he might have judged too harshly.

"I know it, I know I have wronged her," said Clarence, in a choked voice; "but don't betray me!"

There was a ring of true penitence and sorrow in the voice that touched Arthur, and as he raised his face to that picture of the Crucifixion on the wall, it softened gradually.

"Well, perhaps I am severe. May God forgive you, Clarence. But it is hard for a man to see another treat the woman he—well, there, I'll say no more. Only promise me you will be true to her—more worthy of her."

"I will try, Arthur. Heaven knows I have always meant to be honorable."

"Then, good-bye, Clarence. Only you need not tell Beth you have seen me to-night," said Arthur, as he turned to leave; "I shall be out of Briarsfield before morning."



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Poor Arthur! Time had not yet healed his wound, but he was one of those brave souls who can “suffer and be still.” That night, as he was passing through Briarsfield on the late train, a desire had seized him to go back to the old place just once more, to walk up and down for a little while before the home of the woman he loved. He did not care to speak to her or to meet her face to face. She was another’s promised wife. Only to be near her home—to breathe one deep blessing upon her, and then to leave before break of day, and she would never know he had been near. He had come under cover of the darkness, and had seen her descending the great wide stairway in her white muslin dress, and going down the dark street toward the Mayfairs’. After a little while he had followed, even approached the windows of Clarence Mayfair’s home, hoping for one last look. But he had passed her in the shadow of the trees, and had only seen what filled his heart with sorrow. A meaner man would have taken advantage of the sight, and exposed his rival. But Arthur had anything but a mean soul. He believed Beth loved Clarence, as he thought a woman should love the man to whom she gives her life. He believed that God was calling him to the mission-field alone. He had only caught a few words that Clarence had said to Marie, and he fancied it may, after all, have been mere nonsense. Surely he could not have ceased to love Beth! Surely he could not be blind to her merits! Arthur saw only too truly how weak, emotional and changeable Clarence was, but it was not his place to interfere with those whom God had joined. So he argued to himself.

But the night was passing, and Beth still lay there, no tear on her cold white cheeks. The clock struck one, a knell-like sound in the night! Beth lay there, her hands folded on her breast, the prayer unuttered by her still lips—one for death. The rest were sleeping quietly in their beds. They knew nothing of her suffering. They would never know. Oh, if that silent messenger would but come now, and still her weary heart! They would come in the morning to look at her. Yes; Clarence would come, too. Perhaps he would love her just a little then. Perhaps he would think of her tenderly when he saw her with the white roses in her hands. Oh, was there a God in heaven who could look down on her sorrow to-night, and not in pity call her home? She listened for the call that would bear her far beyond this earthly strife, where all was such tangle and confusion. She listened, but she heard it not, and the darkness deepened, the moon grew pale and the stars faded away. The house was so still! The whistle of a steam-engine broke the silence, and she saw the red light as the train swept around the curve. It was bearing Arthur away, and she did not know that one who loved her had been so near! Then she saw a grey gleam in the east. Ah, no! she could not die. The day was coming again, and she would have to face them



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all. She would sit in the same place at the breakfast table. She would meet Clarence again, and Marie—oh—oh, she could not bear the thought of it! She sat up on her bedside with such a weary, anguished look in her eyes! Then she went to kneel at the open window, where her mother had taught her to kneel long years ago. Her sweet-faced, long-dead mother! When she raised her eyes again the east was all aglow with the pink and purple dawn, and the rooks were cawing in the pines across the meadow. She paced the floor for a moment or two.

“Yes, it must be done. I will do it,” she thought. “He loves her. I will not stand in the way of his happiness. No; I had rather die.”

And she took a sheet of note-paper, and wrote these simple words:

“DEAR CLARENCE,—I do not believe you love me any more. I can never be your wife. I know your secret. I know you love Marie. I have seen it often in your eyes. Be happy with her, and forget me. May you be very happy, always. Good-bye. BETH.”

She took it herself to the Mayfair home, knowing that her father would only think she had gone out for a morning walk. The smoke-wreaths were curling upward from the kitchen chimneys as she passed down the street, and Squire Mayfair looked a little surprised when she handed him her note for Clarence, and turned to walk away.

That sleepless, tearless night had told upon her, and she was not able to come down to breakfast. Her father came in, and looked at her with a professional air.

“Just what I told you, Beth. You’ve worked too hard. You need rest. That’s just what’s the matter,” he said, in a brusque voice, as he put some medicine on the table and left the room.

Rest! Yes, she could rest now. Her work was done. She looked at the sheet of manuscript that she had taken last night to show Clarence. Yes, the work was done. She had reached the end of her story—the end of her prospect of marriage. Ended her labor—ended her life-dream!

As for Clarence, he read her note without any emotion.

“Humph! I didn’t think Grafton was the fellow to make mischief so quickly. A tale-bearer! Well, it’s all for the best. I made a mistake. I do not love Beth Woodburn. I cannot understand her.”

Beth slept, and seemed much better in the afternoon, but she was still quite pale when she went into her father’s room after tea.



“Dear old daddy,” she said, putting her arms about his neck, “you were always so kind. You never refuse me anything if you can help it. I wish you would let me go away.”

“Why, certainly, Beth, dear!” he said briskly. “Isn’t that just what I’ve been telling you? Stop writing all day in that hot room up-stairs. Go off and have a frolic. Go and see your Aunt Margaret.”

And so it was settled that if Beth were well enough she should start for Welland next afternoon. She did not see Clarence during the next morning. It surprised her that he sought no explanation, and before three o’clock Briarsfield was a mere speck in the distance.



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### CHAPTER VIII.

#### *THE HEAVENLY CANAAN.*

Nearly two months later Beth returned home. Marie had broken off her visit abruptly, and Clarence had gone away. It was a rainy Saturday, and Beth sat waiting for her father to finish his rounds. Her visit had refreshed her, and she looked fairly well again. After all, she had so many bright prospects! She was young and talented. Her novel was finished. She would read it through at once, making minor corrections, and then publish it. With all youth's hopefulness, she was sure of fame and worldly success, perhaps of wealth too. She seemed to see a rich harvest-field before her as she sat listening to the rain beat on the roof that summer afternoon. But, after all, she was not happy. Somehow, life was all so hollow! So much tangle and confusion! Her young feet were weary. It was not simply that her love was unreturned. That pained her far less than she would have thought. It was that her idol was shattered. Only in the last few weeks had she begun to see Clarence Mayfair as he really was. It was a wonderfully deep insight into human nature that Beth had; but she had never applied it where Clarence was concerned before, and now that she did, what was it she saw?—a weak, wavering, fickle youth, with a good deal of fine sentiment, perhaps, but without firm, manly strength; ambitious, it was true, but never likely to fulfil his ambitions. The sight pained her. And yet this was the one she had exalted so, and had believed a soaring genius. True, his mind had fine fibre in it, but he who would soar must have strength as well as wings. Beth saw clearly just what Clarence lacked, and what can pain a woman more deeply than to know the object she has idealized is unworthy?

Beth had not told her father yet that all was at an end between her and Clarence. She dreaded telling him that, but she knew he must have learned it from the Mayfairs during her absence. She sighed as she thought of it all, and just then Dr. Woodburn came in and sat down on the couch beside her. They talked until the twilight of that rainy afternoon began to deepen. Then they were silent for a while, and Beth saw her father looking at her with a tender look in his eyes.

“Beth, my dear child, what is wrong between you and Clarence?”

She had believed she could tell him all with perfect calmness, but there was something so very gentle in his look and voice that it disarmed her, and she threw both arms about his neck, and burst into tears.

“Oh, father, dear, I could not marry him. It would not be right. He loves Marie de Vere.”

Dr. Woodburn turned away his face, tenderly stroking her hair as she leaned upon his breast. He spoke no word, but she knew what he felt.



“Oh, daddy, dear, don’t think anything about it,” she said, giving him a warm embrace as she looked up at him, smiling through her tears. “I’m not unhappy. I have so many things to think of, and I have always you, you dear old father. I love you better than anyone else on earth. I will be your own little daughter always.”



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She pressed her arms about him more tightly, and there were tears in his eyes as he stooped to kiss her brow.

Beth thought of all his tenderness that night as she lay in bed, and then slept, with the rain beating on the roof overhead.

It was a bright sunshiny Sabbath morning when she awoke. She remembered with pleasure how much she had liked Mr. Perth, the new minister, that Sunday. She had heard him before she went away. He had seemed such an energetic, wide-awake, inspiring man! Beth liked that stamp of people. She meant to be a progressive girl. She meant to labor much and to have much success.

She was quite early at church that morning, and interested herself by looking at Mrs. Perth, whom she had never seen before. She was a fair, slender, girlish creature—very youthful indeed for a married woman. She had a great mass of light hair, drawn back plainly from a serenely fair forehead. The fashion became her well, for, in fact, the most striking thing about her face was its simplicity and purity. She was certainly plain-looking, but Beth fancied her face looked like the white cup of a lily. She had such beautiful blue eyes, too, and such a sweet smile.

“I think I shall love her. I believe we shall be great friends,” thought Beth, after she had had an introduction to Mrs. Perth; and they did become fast friends.

Beth had seldom been at Sunday-school since she left home, but an impulse seized her to go this afternoon. She was quite early, and she sat down in a seat by herself to muse awhile. She gazed at the lilies about the altar and the stained-glass windows above the organ. How long it seemed to look back to that Sunday of two months ago! She shuddered slightly, and tried to change her thoughts, but she could not help going back to it. It seemed as though years had since passed. So it is always. We go about our daily tasks, and the time passes swiftly or slowly, according as our lives are active or monotonous. Then a crisis comes—an upheaval—a turn in the current. It lasts but a moment, perhaps, but when we look back, years seem to have intervened. Beth gave a half sigh, and concluded she was a little weary, as the people poured into the Bible-class. Mrs. Perth came and sat beside Beth. Is it not strange how, in this world of formality and convention, we meet someone now and again, and there is but a look, a word, a smile, and we feel that we have known them so long? There is something familiar in their face, and we seem to have walked beside them all along the way. It was just so with Beth and Mrs. Perth. Sweet May Perth! She soon learned to call her that.



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Beth was never to forget that Sunday afternoon. Mr. Perth taught the Bible-class. He was an enthusiastic man, reminding her somewhat of Arthur. They were studying, that day, the approach of the Israelites to Canaan, and as Mr. Perth grew more earnest, Beth's face wore a brighter look of interest. Soon he laid aside historical retrospect, and talked of the heavenly Canaan toward which Christ's people were journeying, a bright land shining in the sunlight of God's love, joy in abundance, joy overflowing! He looked so happy as he talked of that Divine love, changeless throughout all time, throughout all eternity—a love that never forsakes, that lulls the weary like a cradle-song, a love that satisfies even the secret longings! Oh, that woman heart of hers, how it yearned, yea, hungered for a love like that love, that could tread the earth in humiliation, bearing the cross of others' guilt, dying there at Calvary! She knew that old, old story well, but she drank it in like a little wondering child to-day. What were those things He promised to those who would tread the shining pathway? Life, peace, rest, hope, joy of earth, joy of heaven! Oh, how she longed to go with them! The tears were standing in her eyes, and her heart was beating faster. But this one thing she must do, or turn aside from the promised land of God's people. Down at the feet of Jesus she must lay her all. And what of that novel she had written? Could she carry that over into this heavenly Canaan? "The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." Hers would perish, she knew that well. Highly moral, highly refined and scholarly, but what of its doubts, its shadows, its sorrows without hope, its supernatural gloom? Beth was a master-artist in the field of gloom. She knew how to make her readers shudder, but would that story of hers bring more joy into the world? Would it sweeten life and warm human hearts? Ah, no! And yet, could she destroy it now, before its publication? Could she bear the thought of it? She loved it almost as a mother loves her child. A look of indecision crossed her face. But, just then, she seemed to hear the bells of heaven ringing forth their sweet Gospel call. The bright sunshine and the angel voices of a higher life seemed to break in on her soul. In a moment—she never knew how it was—she became willing to surrender all. It was hardly a year since she had said nay to Arthur, when he asked her to lay her life at the feet of that same Jesus of Nazareth. She refused then, and even one hour ago she would still have refused; but now she would have trudged the highways, poverty-stricken, unknown and obscure, for His dear sake. She would have gone forth, like St. Paul, to the uttermost ends of the earth, she felt she loved Him so! There were tears in her eyes, and a new joy seemed to throb in her heart. She felt so kindly to everyone about her. Was it an impulse or what? She laid her hand softly on May Perth's as she sat beside her, and May, looking into her eyes, seemed to read her heart. She held her hand with a warm, loving pressure, and they were friends from that hour.



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Even the sunlight looked more golden when Beth stepped out into it that afternoon. Everything had caught a tint from the pearly gates, for that hour had been a turning-point in her life. She had found the secret of life—the secret of putting self utterly into the background and living for others' happiness; and they who find that secret have the key to their own happiness. The old tinge of gloom in her grey eyes passed away, and, instead, there came into them the warmth and light of a new life. They seemed to reach out over the whole world with tender sympathy, like a deep, placid sea, with the sunlight gilding, its depths.

"Beth, you are growing beautiful," her father said to her one day; and there were something so reverential in his look that it touched her too deeply to make her vain.

The four weeks that remained before the first of October, when she was to return to college, passed quickly. Clarence did not return, and she heard that he had gone to England, intending to take his degree at Cambridge. The Ashleys, too, had left Briarsfield, as Mr. Ashley had secured a principalship east of Toronto. Beth heard nothing more of Marie, though she would so gladly have forgiven her now!

Beth soon became quite absorbed in her new friend, May Perth. She told her one day of her fancy that her face looked like a lily-cup. Mrs. Perth only laughed and kissed her, in her sweet, unconscious way. Beth always loved to kiss May Perth's brow; it was so calm and fair, it reminded her of the white breast of a dove.

Just three or four days before Beth was to go away, Aunt Prudence came into her room at a time when she was alone.

"Did you ever see this picture that Arthur left in his room when he went away last fall?" she asked. "I don't know whether he did it himself or not."

She placed it in the light and left the room. Beth recognized it almost instantly.

"Why, it's that poem of mine that Arthur liked best of all!" she thought.

Yes, it was the very same—the grey rocks rising one above another, the broad white shore, and the lonely cottage, with the dark storm-clouds lowering above it, and the fisherman's bride at the window, pale and anxious, her sunny hair falling about her shoulders as she peered far out across the sea—the black, storm-tossed sea—and far out among the billows the tiny speck of sail that never reached the shore. Beth was no connoisseur of art, but she knew the picture before her was intensely beautiful, even sublime. There was something in it that made her *feel*. It moved her to tears even as Arthur's music had done. No need to tell her both came from the same hand. Besides, no one else had seen that poem but Arthur. And Arthur could paint like this, and yet she had said he had not an artist soul. She sighed faintly. Poor Arthur! Perhaps, after all, she had been mistaken. And she laid the picture carefully away among her treasures.



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Her last evening at home soon came. It was a clear, chilly night, and they had a fire in the drawing-room grate. It was so cosy to sit there with her father, resting her head on his shoulders, and watching the coals glowing in the twilight.

“Beth, my child, you look so much happier lately. Are you really so happy?” he said, after they had been talking for a while.

“Oh, I think life is so very happy!” said Beth, in a buoyant tone. “And when you love Jesus it is so much sweeter, and somehow I like everyone so much and everybody is so kind. Oh, I think life is grand!”

Dr. Woodburn was a godly man, and his daughter’s words thrilled him sweetly. He brushed away a tear she did not see, and stooped to kiss the young cheek resting on his coat-sleeve. They were silent for a few moments.

“Beth, my dear,” he said in a softer tone, “Do you know, I thought that trouble last summer—over Clarence—was going to hurt you more. How is it, Beth?”

She hesitated a moment.

“I don’t believe I really loved him, father,” she said, in a quiet tone, “I thought I did. I thought it was going to break my heart that night I found out he loved Marie. But, somehow, I don’t mind. I think it is far better as it is. Oh, daddy, dear, it’s so nice I can tell you things like this. I don’t believe all girls can talk to their fathers this way. But I—I always wanted to be loved—and Clarence was different from other people in Briarsfield, you know, and I suppose I thought we were meant for each other.”

Dr. Woodburn did not answer at once.

“I don’t think you would have been happy with him, Beth,” he said, after a little. “All has been for the best. I was afraid you didn’t know what love meant when you became engaged to him. It was only a school-girl’s fancy.”

“Beth, I am going to tell you something,” he said a moment later, as he stroked her hair. “People believe that I always took a special interest in Arthur Grafton because his father saved my life when we were boys, but that was not the only reason I loved him. Years ago, down along the Ottawa river, Lawrence Grafton was pastor in the town where I had my first practice. He was a grand fellow, and we were the greatest friends. I used to take him to see my patients often. He was just the one to cheer them up. Poor fellow! Let’s see, it’s seventeen years this fall since he died. It was the first summer I was there, and Lawrence had driven out into the country with me to see a sick patient. When we were coming back, he asked me to stop with him at a farm-house, where some members of his church lived. I remember the place as if I had seen it yesterday, an old red brick building, with honeysuckle climbing about the porch and cherry-trees on

the lawn. The front door was open, and there was a flight of stairs right opposite, and while we waited for an answer to the bell a beautiful woman, tall and graceful, paused at



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the head of the stairs above us, and then came down. To my eyes she was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, Beth. She was dressed in white, and had a basket of flowers on her arm. She smiled as she came towards us. Her hair was glossy-black, parted in the middle, and falling in waves about her smooth white forehead; but her eyes were her real beauty, I never saw anything like them, Beth. They were such great, dark, tender eyes. They seemed to have worlds in them. It was not long before I loved Florence Waldon. I loved her.” His voice had a strange, deep pathos in it. “She was kind to me always, but I hardly dared to hope, and one day I saw her bidding good-bye to Lawrence. It was only a look and a hand-clasp, but it was a revelation to me. I kept silent about my love from that hour, and one evening Lawrence came to my rooms.

“‘Congratulate me, Arthur!’ he cried, in a tone that bubbled over with joy. I knew what was coming, but the merciful twilight concealed my face. ‘Congratulate me, Arthur! I am going to marry Florence Waldon next month, and you must be best man.’

“I did congratulate him from the depth of my heart, and I was best man at the wedding; and when their little son was born they named him Arthur after me. He is the Arthur Grafton you have known. But poor Lawrence! Little Arthur was only a few months old when she took sick. They called me in, and I did all I could to save her, but one night, as Lawrence and I stood by her bedside—it was a wild March night, and the wind was moaning through the shutters while she slept—suddenly she opened her eyes with a bright look.

“‘Oh, Lawrence, listen, they are singing!’ she cried, ‘it is so beautiful; I am going home—good-bye—take care of Arthur,’ and she was gone.”

Dr. Woodburn paused a moment, and his breath came faster.

“After that I came to Briarsfield and met your mother, Beth. She seemed to understand from my face that I had suffered, and after we had become friends I told her that story, that I had never told to mortal before or since till now. She was so very tender, and I saw in her face that she loved me, and by-and-by I took her to wife, and she healed over the wound with her gentle hands. She was a sweet woman, Beth. God bless her memory. But the strange part of the story is, Florence Waldon’s brother, Garth, had settled on that farm over there, the other side of the pine-wood. She had two other brothers, one a talented editor in the States, the other a successful lawyer. Garth, too, was a bright, original fellow; he had a high standard of farm life, and he lived up to it. He was a good man and a truly refined one, and when poor Lawrence died he left little Arthur—he was three years old then—to him. The dear little fellow; he looked so much like his mother. He used to come and hold you in his arms when you were in long dresses, and then, do you remember a few years later, when your own sweet mother died, how he came to comfort you and filled your lap with flowers?”



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Yes, Beth remembered it all, and the tears were running down her cheeks as she drooped her head in silence. The door-bell broke the stillness just then. Dr. Woodburn was wanted. Bidding Beth a hasty but tender good-bye, he hurried off at the call of duty. Beth sat gazing at the coal-fire in silence after her father left. Poor dear old father! What a touching story it was! He must have suffered so, and yet he had buried his sorrow and gone about his work with smiling face. Brave, heroic soul! Beth fell to picturing it all over again with that brilliant imagination of hers, until she seemed to see the tall woman, with her beautiful dark eyes and hair, coming down the stairs, just as he had seen her. She seemed to hear the March winds moan as he stepped out into the night and left the beautiful young wife, pale in death. Then she went to the window and looked out at the stars in the clear sky, and the meadow tinged with the first frost of autumn; and the pine-wood to the north, with the moon hanging like a crescent of silver above it. It was there, at that window, Arthur had asked her to be his wife. Poor Arthur! She was glad her father did not know. It would have pained him to think she had refused the son of the woman he had loved.

Beth lingered a little, gazing at the clear frosty scene before her, then rose with a firm look on her face and went up to her room. There was one thing more to be done before she left home to-morrow. She had resolved upon it. It was dark in her room, but she needed no light to recognize that roll of manuscript in her drawer. She hesitated a moment as she touched it tenderly. Must she do it? Yes, ah, yes! She could not publish that story now. Just then the picture of Arthur seemed to flash through her mind, reading it and tossing it down with that cold, silent look she had sometimes seen on his face. It was dark in the hall as she carried it down to the drawing-room grate. She crouched down on the hearth-rug before the coals, and a moment later the flames that played among the closely-written sheets lighted her face. Nothing but a blackened parchment now for all that proud dream of fame! The room grew dark again, and only the coals cracking and snapping, and the steady ticking of the old clock on the mantel piece above her head, broke the stillness. It was done. She went to the window and knelt down.

“Father, I have sacrificed it for Thee. Take this talent Thou hast given me and use it for Thy honor, for I would serve Thee alone, Father.”

She slept that night with a smile on her lips. Yes, friend, it was a hero's deed, and He who alone witnessed it hath sealed her brow with a light such as martyrs wear in heaven. As for the world, oh, that every book filled with dark doubts and drifting fears and shuddering gloom had perished, too, in those flames!

## CHAPTER IX.

*'VARSITY AGAIN.*



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In a few days Beth was settled again at Mrs. Owen's, on St. Mary's Street, and tripping to her lectures as usual. Marie was not there, of course, and Beth knew nothing of her whereabouts. In fact, there had been a complete change of boarders. The house was filled with 'Varsity girls this year, with the exception of Marie's old room, a change which Beth appreciated. One of the girls was a special friend of hers, a plump, dignified little creature whom most people called pretty. Hers was certainly a jolly face, with those rosy cheeks and laughing brown eyes, and no one could help loving Mabel Clayton. She belonged to the Students' Volunteer Movement, and as this was her last year at college, Beth thought sometimes a little sorrowfully of the following autumn when she was to leave for India.

Beth meant to have her spend a few days at Briarsfield with her next summer. But a good many things were to happen to Beth before the next summer passed. A Victoria student was occupying Marie's old room, but as he took his meals out of the house Beth never even saw him. One of the girls who saw him in the hall one day described him as "just too nice looking for anything," but Beth's interest was not aroused in the stranger.

That was a golden autumn for Beth, the happiest by far she had ever known. She was living life under that sweet plan of beginning every day afresh, and thinking of some little act of kindness to be done. Beth soon began to believe the girls of University College were the very kindest in the world; but she would have been surprised, to hear how often they remarked, "Beth Woodburn is always so kind!" There was another treat that she was enjoying this year, and that was Dr. Tracy's lectures.

"I think he is an ideal man," she remarked once to Mabel Clayton. "I'm not in love with him, but I think he's an ideal man."

Mabel was an ardent admirer of Dr. Tracy's, too, but she could not help laughing at Beth's statement.

"You are such a hero-worshipper, Beth!" she said. "You put a person up on a pedestal, and then endow him with all the virtues under the sun."

A peculiar look crossed Beth's face. She remembered one whom she had placed on the pedestal of genius, and the idol had fallen, shattered at her feet.

She was still the same emotional Beth. There were times when without any outward cause, seemingly from a mere overflow of happiness, she almost cried out, "Oh stay, happy moment, till I drink to the full my draught of joy!"

Arthur's painting hung above Beth's study table, and sometimes a shadow crossed her face as she looked at it. She missed the old friendship, and she wondered, too, that she never met him anywhere.



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Beth did not go home at Thanksgiving that year, and she almost regretted it the evening before. She was a little homesick for “daddy,” and to dispel her loneliness she shut up her books and went to bed early. Her head had scarcely touched the pillow when, hark! there was a sound of music in the drawing-room down-stairs. She rose in bed to listen, it was so like Arthur’s music. She was not at all familiar with the piece, but it thrilled her somehow. There was a succession, of sweet, mellow notes at first; then higher, higher, higher, broader, deeper, fuller, it was bearing her very soul away! Then sweeter, softer, darker, tint of gold and touch of shadow, the tears were standing in her eyes! Clearer again, and more triumphant! Her lips parted as she listened. One sweet prolonged swell, and it died away. She listened for more, but all was silent. She looked out of the window at the stars in the clear sky, and the dark shadow of St. Michael’s tower on the snow-covered college roof, then fell back among the pillows to sleep and dream.

She was walking again on the old path by the road-side at home, just as she used to go every evening for the milk. The dusk was deepening and she began to hurry, when she noticed a tall, dark figure ahead. As she drew nearer she recognized Arthur’s broad shoulders and well-set head. Then a strange, indefinable fear seized her. She did not want to overtake him, to meet him face to face. She tried to slacken her steps, but a mysterious, resistless wind seemed to bear her forward against her will. Not a leaf stirred. All was still around her, and yet that uncanny, spirit-like wind urged her on. She struggled, and although Arthur never looked back, she felt that he knew all about her struggles. At last she made one mighty effort and tore herself free. She took the path on the other side of the road. It was all quiet there, and she walked on slowly. The darkness grew thicker, and she lost sight of Arthur. Then the country became quite new to her. There were bridges every little way—old rickety bridges, that creaked beneath her step, with holes where she caught her feet, and she could hear the great wild torrents rushing below in the darkness. She grew frightened. Oh, how she wished Arthur were there! Then suddenly it grew lighter, and she saw that her path was turning, and lo! there was Arthur! A moment more and their paths would meet. He reached the spot a few steps before her, and turning, looked at her just once, but she saw in his look that he knew all that had passed in her heart. “Follow me,” he said, with a tender look; and she followed in silence where the path led between the steep, high banks, where strange flowers were clinging in the dim light. She was quite content now, not frightened any longer. Then the bank opened by their pathway, and he led her into a strange, sandy, desert-looking place. They entered a shadowy tent, and in the dim light she could see strange faces, to whom Arthur was talking.



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No one noticed her, but she did not feel slighted, for though he did not look at her, she felt that he was thinking of her. Then suddenly the strange faces vanished, and she was alone with Arthur. He came toward her with such a beautiful smile, and there was something in his hand of bright gold—the brightest gold she had ever seen. It was a golden spear with a tiny ring on one end and a mass of chain hanging to it; but lo! when she looked around her she saw it had filled the place with a beautiful mystic light, a golden halo. Then he drew her nearer, nearer to his bosom, and in a moment she felt the spear point touch her heart! An instant of pain, then it pierced her with a deep, sweet thrill. She felt it even to her finger tips. She awoke with a start, but she could almost feel that thrill even after she was awake. She could not sleep again quickly, but lay watching the stars and the moonlight growing paler on her book-case. Sleep came at length, and when she awoke again it was at the sound of Mr. Owen's jolly "Heigho! Everybody up! Everybody up!" This was a way he had of waking the children in good time for breakfast, and it had the merit of always arousing the boarders, too. Beth naturally supposed that the musician she had heard the night before had been a caller, and so made no enquiries.

The following Sunday evening Beth went to church alone. It was only three or four blocks up to the Central, and Beth was never timid. She did not look around the church much, or she would have recognized a familiar face on the east side. It was Clarence Mayfair's; he was paler than usual, and his light curly hair looked almost artificial in the gaslight. There was something sadder and more manly in his expression, and his eyes were fixed on Beth with a reverent look. How pure she was, he thought, how serene; her brow looked as though an angel-hand had smoothed it in her slumber. She seemed to breathe a benediction on everything around her; she reminded him of an image of an angel bending in prayer, that he had seen in one of the old cathedral windows across the sea. And yet, after knowing a woman like that, he had fancied he could—even fancied he did—love Marie de Vere. What folly had blinded him then, he wondered? Marie had her charms, to be sure, with those dark, bewitching eyes of hers, so kind and sympathetic, so bright and witty and entertaining. But there was something about Marie that was fleeting, something about Beth that was abiding; Marie's charms bewitched while she was present and were soon forgotten, but Beth's lingered in the memory and deepened with the years. It was well, after all, he thought, that Marie had refused his offer of marriage that morning he received Beth's note, and went to her in the heat of his passion. He was but a boy then, and yet it was only a few months ago. What was it that had changed him from boyhood to manhood so suddenly? He did not try to answer the question, but only felt conscious of the change

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within. He realized now that he had never known what it meant to love. Marie had shed her lustre on him as she passed; Beth he had never fully comprehended. He had a dim feeling that she was somehow too high for him. But would this reverence he felt for her ripen into love with the maturer years of his manhood? We never can tell the changes that time will weave in these hearts of ours. It is to be feared Clarence was not a very attentive listener throughout the service that night. At the close he waited for Beth in the moonlight outside, but she did not notice him till he was right beside her.

“Clarence!” she exclaimed, in a tone of astonishment. “Why, I thought you were in England.”

“So I was; but I am back, you see.”

“I thought you were going to take a year at Cambridge.”

“I did intend to, but I found it too expensive. Besides, I thought I wouldn’t bother finishing my course. I am doing some work along the journalistic line at present. I just came to Toronto last night, and intend to leave Tuesday or Wednesday.”

In the first moment of her surprise she had forgotten everything except that Clarence was an old friend from home; but now, as he walked beside her, it all came back like a flash—the memory of that night last summer when she had seen him last. She grew suddenly silent and embarrassed. She longed to ask him about Marie; she wondered if they were engaged, and if so where she was, but she soon controlled herself and asked him about his trip to England, about his mother, about his work, about Edith and everything else of possible or impossible interest. She was relieved, without knowing why, that it was only a few blocks to her boarding-place. He lingered a moment as he said good-night, and something in his look touched her a little. Only the stirring of old memories. She hardly knew whether she was pleased or not to meet him again; but as she entered her room in the darkness her dream seemed to flash across her memory and a tender voice said, “Follow me.”

Clarence strolled a little way into the park, pondering on the past. He had never asked Beth for an explanation of her farewell note. He naturally supposed that Arthur Grafton had gone directly to her that night and caused the rupture. He wondered if Arthur were in love with her. Then he turned suddenly and walked back by St. Mary’s Street to Yonge. The street was almost deserted; there was only one figure in sight, a tall man drawing nearer. There was No.—, where he had left Beth at the door. He had just passed a few more doors when a familiar voice startled him. It was Arthur Grafton! Clarence felt ill at ease for a moment, but Arthur’s tone was so kind it dispelled his embarrassment. They talked for a few moments, then parted; and Clarence, looking

back a moment later, saw Arthur ring the bell at Beth's boarding-place. A peculiar look, almost a sneer, crossed his face for a moment.

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“Ah, he is going in to spend the evening with his beloved,” he thought.

And Clarence resolved, then and there, not to call on Beth the following day, as he had intended.

But Arthur proceeded absently to the room Marie had formerly occupied, without the slightest idea that Beth had lived in the house with him nearly two months. It was strange, but though he had seen all the other girls in the house he had never seen Beth. He had not enquired her address the year before, not wishing to know. He wished to have nothing to do with Clarence Mayfair’s promised wife. She was nothing to him. Should he encourage the love he felt for another’s wife? No! He had loved with all the strength of that love that comes but once to any human heart, and he had suffered as only the strong and silent can suffer; but he had resolved to bury his pain, and it had given his face a sterner look. So he lay down to rest that night all unconscious that Beth was in the room just overhead; that he had heard her footsteps daily, even listened to her humming little airs to unrecognizable tunes; but the sight of Clarence Mayfair had aroused the past, and he did not sleep till late.

The following afternoon, as Beth sat studying in her room after lectures, she heard a faint tap at her door, a timid knock that in some way seemed to appeal strangely to her. She opened the door—and there stood Marie! In the first moment of her surprise Beth forgot everything that had separated them, and threw both arms about her in the old child-like way. She seated her in the rocker by the window and they talked of various things for a while, but Beth noticed, now and then, an uneasy look in her eyes.

“She has come to tell me she is going to marry Clarence, and she finds it difficult, poor girl,” thought Beth, with a heart full of sympathy.

“Beth,” said Marie at last, “I have wronged you. I have come here to ask you to forgive me.”

Beth belonged to the kind of people who are always silent in emergencies, so she only looked at her with her great tender eyes, in which there was no trace of resentment.

“I came between you and Clarence Mayfair. He never loved me. It was only a fancy. I amused and interested him, I suppose. That was all. He is true to you in the depths of his heart, Beth. It was my fault—all my fault. He never loved me. It was you he loved, but I encouraged him. It was wrong, I know.”

Something seemed to choke her for a moment.

“Will you forgive me, Beth? Can you ever forgive?”

She was leaning forward gracefully, her fur cape falling back from her shoulders and her dark eyes full of tears.



Beth threw both arms about her old friend tenderly, forgetting all the bitter thoughts she had once had.

“Oh, Marie, dear, I love you—I love you still. Of course I forgive you.”

Then Beth told her all the story of the past, and of that night when she had learned that Clarence did not love her, of her wounded vanity, her mistaken belief in the genuineness of her own love for him, and her gradual awakening to the fact that it was not love after all.



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“Then it wasn’t Mr. Grafton at all who made the trouble?” interrupted Marie.

“Mr. Grafton? Why, no! What could he have to do with it?”

“Oh, nothing. We thought, at least Clarence thought, he made the trouble.”

Beth looked mystified, but Marie only continued in a softened tone:

“I am afraid you don’t know your own heart, dear Beth. You will come together again, and all will be forgotten.”

“No, Marie, never! The past was folly. All is better as it is.”

A pained look that Beth could not fathom drifted across Marie’s brow. “You think so now, but you will change,” she said.

A knock at the door interrupted them just then, as Mrs. Owen announced a friend of Beth’s.

Marie kissed her gently.

“Good-bye, Beth,” she said in her sweet low voice, and there was a tender sadness in her dark eyes. Beth did not know its meaning at the time, but a day was coming when she would know.

Beth saw nothing more of Clarence during his few days in the city. She wondered sometimes if Marie had seen him, but though they saw each other occasionally during the rest of the winter, neither of them mentioned his name.

That week had seemed eventful in Beth’s eyes, but it was more eventful even than she thought. The following Saturday, after tea, as Beth and Mabel Clayton were going back upstairs, Beth had seated Mabel by force on the first step of the second flight to tell her some funny little story. Beth was in one of her merry moods that night. Beth was not a wit, but she had her vein of mirth, and the girls used to say she was growing livelier every day. The gas was not lighted in the hall, but Beth had left her door open and the light shone out on the head of the stairs. A moment later they started up with their arms about each other’s waist.

“Oh, Beth, I left that note-book down stairs. Wait, I’ll bring it up to you.”

Beth waited, standing in the light as her friend scampered down again. She heard the door of Marie’s old room open, and a tall man stepped into the hall, but as it was dark below she could not see his face. She wondered, though, why he stood so still, and she had a consciousness that someone was looking at her.



Arthur Grafton—for it was he—stood for a moment as if stunned. There she was—Beth Woodburn! The woman he—hush! Clarence Mayfair’s promised wife! She looked even beautiful as she stood there in the light, with a smile on her face and a pure white chrysanthemum at her throat.

“You needn’t hurry so, Mabel dear. I can wait,” she said as her friend approached.



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It was over a year since he had heard that voice, and he had tried to believe his heart was deadened to its influence; but now to-night, at the first sound, it thrilled him again with its old-time music. A moment later she closed her door and the hall was dark, and his heart began to beat faster now that he grasped the truth. He turned again to his room, filled with the soft radiance of moonlight. He leaned back in his study chair, his eyes closed; he could hear the students of St. Michael's chanting an evening hymn, and an occasional cab rattled past in the street below. He noted it as we note all little details in our moments of high excitement. Then a smile gradually lighted up his face. Oh, sweet love! For one moment it seemed to be mastering him. She was there. Hark! Was that her footstep overhead? Oh, to be near her—to touch her hand just once!

Then a stern, dark frown settled on his brow. He rose and paced the room with a sort of frenzied step. What is she to you—Clarence Mayfair's promised wife? Arthur Grafton, what is she to you? Oh, that love, deep and passionate, that comes to us but once! That heart-cry of a strong soul for the one being it has enshrined! Sometimes it is gratified and bears in after years its fruits, whether sweet or bitter; or again, it is crushed—blighted in one moment, perhaps—and we go forth as usual trying to smile, and the world never knows, never dreams. A few years pass and our hearts grow numb to the pain, and we say we have forgotten—that love can grow cold. Cold? Yes; but the cold ashes will lie there in the heart—the dust of our dead ideal! Would such a fate be Arthur's? No. There was no room in that great pulsing heart of his for anything that was cold—no room for the chill of forgetfulness. Strive as he might, he knew he could never forget. What then remained? Even in that hour a holier radiance lighted his brow. Strong to bear the burdens and sorrows of others, he had learned to cast all his care upon One who had never forsaken him—even his unrequited love. He laid it on the altar of his God, to bloom afresh, a beautiful flower transplanted by the River of Life, beyond the blight of envy and of care—beyond, yet near enough to earth to scatter its fragrance in blessings down upon the head of her whom he—loved! Dare he say that word? Yes, in a sweeter, holier sense than before, as one might love the beings of another world. His face was quite calm as he turned on the light to resume his studies, but before beginning his work he looked a little sadly around the room. Yes, he had spent pleasant hours there, but he must leave, now. It was better that the same roof should not shelter them both. He did not wish to see Beth Woodburn again; and he just remembered that a friend of his was going to vacate a room on the other side of the park. He would take it early next week.

It was a week later, one afternoon, just before tea, that Beth and Mabel Clayton were sitting in the drawing-room with Mrs. Owen.



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“Do you know any of the girls over at the college who would like to get a room, Miss Clayton?”

“No, but I might find some one.”

“Mr. Grafton has moved out of his room for some reason, I don’t know what.”

“Mr.—whom did you say?” asked Beth.

“Mr. Grafton. Did you know him? A tall, dark fellow! Goes to Victoria. Quite good-looking!”

“Why, surely, can it be Arthur Grafton! That’s just who it is! Why, how funny we never met each other coming in and out!”

“Did you know him, Beth?” asked Mabel. “I met him once or twice in the halls, but I didn’t know you knew him.”

“Yes, I have known him ever since we were children.”

“Oh, then you have heard him play,” said Mrs. Owens. “He played for us Thanksgiving eve. He’s a splendid musician.”

Beth felt just a tinge of disappointment that night as she passed the closed door of the room Arthur had occupied. She wondered why he never tried to find her. It was unkind of him to break the old friendship so coldly. It was not her fault she could not love him, she thought. She could never, never do that! In fact, she did not believe she would ever love any man.

“Some people are not made for marriage, and I think I’m one of them.” And Beth sighed faintly and fell asleep.

## CHAPTER X.

### *DEATH.*

Christmas eve, and Beth was home for her two weeks’ holidays. It was just after tea, and she and her father thought the parlor decidedly cosy, with the curtains drawn and the candles flaming among the holly over the mantel-piece. It seemed all the cosier because of the storm that raged without. The sleet was beating against the pane, and the wind came howling across the fields. Beth parted the curtains once, and peeped out at the snow-wreaths whirling and circling round.

“Dear! such a storm! I am glad you’re not out to-night, daddy.”



Beth came back to the fire-side, and passed her father a plate of fruit-cake she had made herself.

“It’s too fresh to be good, but you mustn’t find any fault. Just eat every bit of it down. Oh, Kitty, stop!”

They had been cracking walnuts on the hearth-rug, and Beth’s pet kitten was amusing itself by scattering the shells over the carpet.

Beth sat down on the footstool at her father’s feet.

“You look well after your fall’s work, Beth; hard study doesn’t seem to hurt you.”

“I believe it agrees with me, father.”

“Did you see much of Arthur while you were in Toronto, Beth? I was hoping you would bring him home for the Christmas holidays.”

“No, I never saw him once.”

“Never saw him once!”

He looked at her a little sternly.

“Beth, what is the matter between you and Arthur?”

Ding! The old door-bell sounded. Beth drooped her head, but the bell had attracted her father’s attention, and Aunt Prudence thrust her head into the parlor in her unceremonious way.



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“Doctor, that Brown fellow, by the mill, is wuss, an’ his wife’s took down, too. They think he’s dyin’.”

“Oh, daddy, I can’t let you go out into this dreadful storm. Let me go with you.”

“Nonsense, child! I must go. It’s a matter of life and death, perhaps. Help me on with my coat, daughter, please, I’ve been out in worse storms than this.”

Beth thought her father looked so brave and noble in that big otter overcoat, and his long white beard flowing down. She opened the door for him, and the hall light shone out into the snow. She shuddered as she saw him staggering in the wind and sleet, then went back into the parlor. It seemed lonely there, and she went on to the kitchen, where Aunt Prudence was elbow-deep in pastry. A kitchen is always a cheerful place at Christmas time. Beth’s fears seemed quieted, and she went back to the parlor to fix another branch of holly about a picture. Ding! Was any one else sick, she wondered, as she went to answer the bell. She opened the door, and there stood Mrs. Perth! It was really she, looking so frail and fair in her furs.

“Why, May, dear! What are you doing out in this storm?”

“Oh, I’m nearly half dead, Beth.” She tried to laugh, but the attempt was not exactly a success.

Beth took her in to the fire, removed her wraps, all matted with snow, and called to Aunt Prudence for some hot tea.

“Is your father out to-night, Beth?” asked May.

“Yes, he went away out to the Browns’. But wherever have you been?”

“I’ve been taking some Christmas things to a poor family about two miles out in the country, and I didn’t think the storm so very bad when I started; but I’m like the Irishman with his children, I’ve ’more’n I want’—of sleet, at any rate. Walter is away to-night, you know.”

“Mr. Perth away! Where?”

“Oh, he went to Simcoe. He has two weddings. They are friends of ours, and we didn’t like to refuse. But it’s mean, though,” she continued, with a sweet, affected little pout; “he’ll not get back till afternoon, and it’s Christmas, too.”

“Oh, May dear, you’ll just stay right here with us to-night, and for dinner to-morrow. Isn’t that just fine!” Beth was dancing around her in child-like glee. Mrs. Perth accepted, smiling at her pleasure; and they sat on the couch, chatting.



“Did you say Dr. Woodburn had gone to the Browns’.”

“Yes, Mrs. Brown is sick, too.”

“Oh, isn’t it dreadful? They’re so poor, too. I don’t believe they’ve a decent bed in the house.”

“Eight! There, the clock just struck. Father ought to be back. It was only a little after six when he went out.”

She looked anxiously at the drawn curtains, but the sleet beating harder and harder upon the pane was her only answer.

“There he is now!” she cried, as a step entered the hall, and she rushed to meet him.

“Oh, daddy, dear—why, father!”



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Her voice changed to wonder and fear. His overcoat was gone and he seemed a mass of ice and snow. His beard was frozen together; his breath came with a thick, husky sound, and he looked so pale and exhausted. She led him to the fire, and began removing his icy garments. She was too frightened to be of much use, but May's thoughtful self was flitting quietly around, preparing a hot drink and seeing that the bed was ready. He could not speak for a few minutes, and then it was only brokenly.

“Poor creatures! She had nothing over her but a thin quilt, and the snow blowing through the cracks; and I just took off my coat—and put it over her. I thought I could stand it.”

Beth understood it now. He had driven home, all that long way, facing the storm, after taking off his warm fur overcoat, and he was just recovering from a severe cough, too. She trembled for its effect upon him. It went to her heart to hear his husky breathing as he sat there trembling before the fire. They got him to bed soon, and Aunt Prudence tramped through the storm for Dr. Mackay, the young doctor who had started up on the other side of the town. He came at once, and looked grave after he had made a careful examination. There had been some trouble with the heart setting in, and the excitement of his adventure in the storm had aggravated it. Beth remembered his having trouble of that sort once before, and she thought she read danger in Dr. Mackay's face.

That was a long, strange night to Beth as she sat there alone by her father's bedside. He did not sleep, his breathing seemed so difficult. She had never seen him look like that before—so weak and helpless, his silvery hair falling back from his brow, his cheeks flushed, but not with health. He said nothing, but he looked at her with a pitying look sometimes. What did it all mean? Where would it end? She gave him his medicine from hour to hour. The sleet beat on the window and the heavy ticking of the clock in the intervals of the storm sounded like approaching footsteps. The wind roared, and the old shutter creaked uneasily. The husky breathing continued by her side and the hours grew longer. Oh, for the morning! What would the morrow bring? She had promised May to awaken her at three o'clock, but she looked so serene sleeping with a smile on her lips, that Beth only kissed her softly and went back to her place. Her father had fallen asleep, and it was an hour later that she heard a gentle step beside her, and May looked at her reproachfully. She went to her room and left May to watch. There was a box on her table that her father had left before he went out that evening, and then she remembered that it was Christmas morning. Christmas morning! There was a handsome leather-bound Bible and a gold watch with a tiny diamond set in the back. She had a choked feeling as she lay down, but she was so exhausted she soon slept. It was late in the morning when she awoke, and May did not tell her of her father's fainting spell. Aunt Prudence was to sit up that night. The dear old housekeeper! How kind she was, Beth thought. She had often been amused at the quaint, old-fashioned creature. But she was a kind old soul, in spite of her occasional sharp words.



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Dr. Woodburn continued about the same all the following day, saying that he slept more. The next day was Sunday, and Beth slept a little in the afternoon. When she awakened she heard Dr. Mackay going down the hall, and May came in to take her in her arms and kiss her. She sat down on the bed beside Beth, with tears in her beautiful eyes.

“Beth, your father has been such a good man. He has done so much! If God should call him home to his reward, would you—would you refuse to give him up?”

Beth laid her head on May’s shoulder, sobbing.

“Oh, May—is it—death?” she asked, in a hoarse whisper.

“I fear so, dear.”

Beth wept long, and May let her grief have its way for a while, then drew her nearer to her heart.

“If Jesus comes for him, will you say ‘no’?”

“His will be done,” she answered, when she grew calmer.

The next day lawyer Graham came and stayed with Dr. Woodburn some time, and Beth knew that all hope was past, but she wore a cheerful smile in her father’s presence during the few days that followed—bright winter days, with sunshine and deep snow. The jingle of sleigh-bells and the sound of merry voices passed in the street below as she listened to the labored breathing at her side. It was the last day of the year that he raised his hand and smoothed her hair in his old-time way.

“Beth, I am going home. You have been a good daughter—my one great joy. God bless you, my child.” He paused a moment. “You will have to teach, and I think you had better go back to college soon. You’ll not miss me so much when you’re working.”

Beth pressed back her tears as she kissed him silently, and he soon fell asleep. She went to the window and looked out on it all—the clear, cold night sky with its myriads of stars, the brightly lighted windows and the snow-covered roofs of the town on the hill-slope, and the Erie, a frozen line of ice in the distant moonlight. The town seemed unusually bright with lights, for it was the gay season of the year. And, oh, if she but dared to give vent to that sob rising in her throat! She turned to the sleeper again; a little later he opened his eyes with a bright smile.

“In the everlasting arms,” he whispered faintly, then pointed to a picture of Arthur on the table. Beth brought it to him. He looked at it tenderly, then gave it back to her. He tried to say something, and she bent over him to catch the words, but all was silent there; his



eyes were closed, his lips set in a smile. Her head sank upon his breast. "Papa!" she cried.

No answer, not even the sound of heartbeats. There was a noiseless step at her side, and she fell back, unconscious, into May's arms. When she came to again she was in her own room, and Mr. Perth was by her side. Then the sense of her loss swept over her, and he let her grief have its way for a while.

"My child," he said at last, bending over her. How those two words soothed her! He talked to her tenderly for a little while, and she looked much calmer when May came back.



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But the strain had been too much for her, and she was quite ill all the next day. She lay listening to the strange footsteps coming and going in the halls, for everyone came to take a last look at one whom all loved and honored. There was the old woman whom he had helped and encouraged, hobbling on her cane to give him a last look and blessing; there was the poor man whose children he had attended free of charge, the hand of whose dying boy he had held; there was the little ragged girl, who looked up through her tears and said, "He was good to me." Then came the saddest moment Beth had ever known, when they led her down for the last time to his side. She scarcely saw the crowded room, the flowers that were strewn everywhere.

It was all over. The last words were said, and they led her out to the carriage. The sun was low in the west that afternoon when the Perths took her to the parsonage—"home to the parsonage," as she always said after that. Aunt Prudence came to bid her good-bye before she went away to live with her married son, and Beth never realized before how much she loved the dear old creature who had watched over her from her childhood. Just once before she returned to college she went back to look at the old home, with its shutters closed and the snow-drifts on its walks. She had thought her future was to be spent there, and now where would her path be guided?

"Thou knowest, Lord," she said faintly.

## CHAPTER XI.

*LOVE.*

In the soft flush of the following spring Beth returned to the parsonage at Briarsfield. It was so nice to see the open country again after the city streets. Mr. Perth met her at the station just as the sun was setting, and there was a curious smile on his face. He was a little silent on the way home, as if he had something on his mind; but evidently it was nothing unpleasant. The parsonage seemed hidden among the apple-blossoms, and Mrs. Perth came down the walk to meet them, looking so fair and smiling, and why—she had something white in her arms! Beth bounded forward to meet her.

"Why, May, where did you—whose baby?" asked Beth, breathless and smiling.

"Who does she look like?"

The likeness to May Perth on the little one-month-old face was unmistakable.

"You naughty puss, why didn't you tell me when you wrote?"

"Been keeping it to surprise you," said Mr. Perth. "Handsome baby, isn't it? Just like her mother!"



“What are you going to call her?”

“Beth.” And May kissed her fondly as she led her in.

What a pleasant week that was! Life may be somewhat desert-like, but there is many a sweet little oasis where we can rest in the shade by the rippling water, with the flowers and the birds about us.

One afternoon Beth went out for a stroll by herself down toward the lake, and past the old Mayfair home. The family were still in Europe, and the place, she heard, was to be sold. The afternoon sunshine was beating on the closed shutters, the grass was knee-deep on the lawn and terraces, and the weeds grew tall in the flower-beds. Deserted and silent! Silent as that past she had buried in her soul. Silent as those first throbs of her child-heart that she had once fancied meant love.



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That evening she and May sat by the window watching the sunset cast its glories over the lake, a great sheet of flame, softened by a wrapping of thin purplish cloud, like some lives, struggling, fiery, triumphant, but half hidden by this hazy veil of mortality.

“Are you going to write another story, Beth?”

“Yes, I thought one out last fall. I shall write it as soon as I am rested.”

“What is it—a love story?”

“Yes, it’s natural to me to write of love; and yet—I have never been seriously in love.”

May laughed softly.

“Do you know, I am beginning to long to love truly. I want to taste the deep of life, even if it brings me pain.”

It was a momentary restlessness, and she recalled these words before long.

Mr. Perth joined them just then. He was going away for a week’s holiday on the following day.

“I suppose you have a supply for Sunday,” said Mrs. Perth.

“Yes, I have. I think he’ll be a very good one. He’s a volunteer missionary.”

“Where is he going?” asked Beth.

“I don’t know.”

“I should like to meet him,” and Beth paused before she continued, in a quiet tone, “I am going to be a missionary myself.”

“Beth!” exclaimed Mrs. Perth.

“I thought you were planning this,” said Mr. Perth.

“Thought so? How could you tell?” asked Beth.

“I saw it working in your mind. You are easily read. Where are you going?”

“I haven’t decided yet. I only just decided to go lately—one Sunday afternoon this spring. I used to hate the idea.”



Perhaps it was this little talk that made her think of Arthur again that night. Why had he never sent her one line, one word of sympathy in her sorrow? He was very unkind, when her father had loved him so. Was that what love meant?

The supply did not stay at the parsonage, and Beth did not even ask his name, as she supposed it would be unfamiliar to her. The old church seemed so home-like that Sunday. The first sacred notes echoed softly down the aisles; the choir took their places; then there was a moment's solemn hush,—and Arthur! Why, that was Arthur going up into the pulpit! She could hardly repress a cry of surprise. For the moment she forgot all her coldness and indifference, and looked at him intently. He seemed changed, somehow; he was a trifle paler, but there was a delicate fineness about him she had never seen before, particularly in his eyes, a mystery of pain and sweetness, blended and ripened into a more perfect manhood. Was it because Arthur preached that sermon she thought it so grand? No, everybody seemed touched. And this was the small boy who had gone hazel-nutting with her, who had heard her geography, and, barefoot, carried her through the brook. But that was long, long ago. They had changed since then. Before she realized it, the service was over, and the people



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were streaming through the door-way where Arthur stood shaking hands with the acquaintances of his childhood. There was a soothed, calm expression on Beth's brow, and her eyes met Arthur's as he touched her hand. May thought she seemed a trifle subdued that day, especially toward evening. Beth had a sort of feeling that night that she would have been content to sit there at the church window for all time. There was a border of white lilies about the altar, a sprinkling of early stars in the evening sky; solemn hush and sacred music within, and the cry of some stray night-bird without. There were gems of poetry in that sermon, too; little gleanings from nature here and there. Then she remembered how she had once said Arthur had not an artist-soul. Was she mistaken? Was he one of those men who bury their sentiments under the practical duties of every-day life? Perhaps so.

The next day she and May sat talking on the sofa by the window.

"Don't you think, May, I should make a mistake if I married a man who had no taste for literature and art?"

"Yes, I do. I believe in the old German proverb, 'Let like and like mate together.'"

Was that a shadow crossed Beth's face?

"But, whatever you do, Beth, don't marry a man who is all moonshine. A man may be literary in his tastes and yet not be devoted to a literary life. I think the greatest genius is sometimes silent; but, even when silent, he inspires others to climb the heights that duty forbade him to climb himself."

"You've deep thoughts in your little head, May." And Beth bent over, in lover-like fashion, to kiss the little white hand, but May had dropped into one of her light-hearted, baby moods, and playfully withdrew it.

"Don't go mooning like that, kissing my dirty little hands! One would think you had been falling in love."

Beth went for another stroll that evening. She walked past the dear old house on the hill-top. The shutters were no longer closed; last summer's flowers were blooming again by the pathway; strange children stopped their play to look at her as she passed, and there were sounds of mirth and music within. Yes, that was the old home—home no longer now! There was her own old window, the white roses drooping about it in the early dew.

"Oh, papa! papa! look down on your little Beth!" These words were in her eyes as she lifted them to the evening sky, her tears falling silently. She was following the old path



by the road-side, where she used to go for the milk every evening, when a firm step startled her.

“Arthur! Good evening. I’m so glad to see you again!”

She looked beautiful for a moment, with the tears hanging from her lashes, and the smile on her face.

“I called to see you at the parsonage, but you were just going up the street, so I thought I might be pardoned for coming too.”

They were silent for a few moments. It was so like old times to be walking there together. The early stars shone faintly; but the clouds were still pink in the west; not a leaf stirred, not a breath; no sound save a night-bird calling to its mate in the pine-wood yonder, and the bleat of lambs in the distance. Presently Arthur broke the silence with sweet, tender words of sorrow for her loss.



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“I should have written to you if I had known, but I was sick in the hospital, and I didn’t—”

“Sick in the hospital! Why, Arthur, have you been ill? What was the matter?”

“A light typhoid fever. I went to the Wesleyan College, at Montreal, after that, so I didn’t even know you had come back to college.”

“To the Wesleyan? I thought you were so attached to Victoria! Whatever made you leave it, Arthur?”

He flushed slightly, and evaded her question.

“Do you know, it was so funny, Arthur, you roomed in the very house where I boarded last fall, and I never knew a thing about it till afterward? Wasn’t it odd we didn’t meet?”

Again he made some evasive reply, and she had an odd sensation, as of something cold passing between them. He suddenly became formal, and they turned back again at the bridge where they used to sit fishing, and where Beth never caught anything (just like a girl); they always went to Arthur’s hook. The two forgot their coldness as they walked back, and Beth was disappointed that Arthur had an engagement and could not come in. They lingered a moment at the gate as he bade her good-night. A delicate thrill, a something sweet and new and strange, possessed her as he pressed her hand! Their eyes met for a moment.

“Good-bye for to-night, Beth.”

May was singing a soft lullaby as she came up the walk. Only a moment! Yet what a revelation a moment may bring to these hearts of ours! A look, a touch, and something live is throbbing within! We cannot speak it. We dare not name it. For, oh, hush, ’tis a sacred hour in a woman’s life.

Beth went straight to her room, and sat by the open window in the star-light. Some boys were singing an old Scotch ballad as they passed in the street below; the moon was rising silvery above the blue Erie; the white petals of apple-blossoms floated downward in the night air, and in it all she saw but one face—a face with great, dark, tender eyes, that soothed her with their silence. Soothed? Ah, yes! She felt like a babe to-night, cradled in the arms of something, she knew not what—something holy, eternal and calm. And *this* was love. She had craved it often—wondered how it would come to her—and it was just Arthur, after all, her childhood’s friend, Arthur—but yet how changed! He was not the same. She felt it dimly. The Arthur of her girlhood was gone. They were man and woman now. She had not known this Arthur as he was now. A veil seemed to have been suddenly drawn from his face, and she saw in him—her ideal. There were tears in her eyes as she gazed heavenward. She had thought to journey to heathen lands alone, single-handed to fight the battle, and now—“Arthur—Arthur!” she



called in a soft, sweet whisper as she drooped her smiling face. What mattered all her blind shilly-shally fancies about his nature not being poetic? There was more poetry buried in that heart of his than



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she had ever dreamed. "I can never, never marry Arthur!" she had often told herself. She laughed now as she thought of it, and it was late before she slept, for she seemed to see those eyes looking at her in the darkness—so familiar, yet so new and changed! She awoke for a moment in the grey light just before dawn, and she could see him still; her hand yet thrilled from his touch. She heard the hoarse whistle of a steamer on the lake; the rooks were cawing in the elm-tree over the roof, and she fell asleep again.

"Good-morning, Rip Van Winkle," said May, when she entered the breakfast-room.

"Why, is that clock—just look at the time! I forgot to wind my watch last night, and I hadn't the faintest idea what time it was when I got up this morning!"

"Good-bye for to-night, Beth," he had said, and he was going away to-morrow morning, so he would surely come to-day. No wonder she went about with an absent smile on her face, and did everything in the craziest possible way. It was so precious, this newly-found secret of hers! She knew her own heart now. There was no possibility of her misunderstanding herself in the future. The afternoon was wearing away, and she sat waiting and listening. Ding! No, that was only a beggar-woman at the door. Ding, again! Yes, that was Arthur! Then she grew frightened. How could she look into his eyes? He would read her secret there. He sat down before her, and a formal coldness seemed to paralyze them both.

"I have come to bid you good-bye, Miss Woodburn!"

Miss Woodburn! He had never called her that before. How cold his voice sounded in her ears!

"Are you going back to Victoria College?" she asked.

"No, to the Wesleyan. Are you going to spend your summer in Briarsfield?"

"Most of it. I am going back to Toronto for a week or two before 'Varsity opens. My friend Miss de Vere is staying with some friends there. She is ill and—"

"Do you still call her your friend?" he interrupted, with a sarcastic smile.

"Why, yes!" she answered wonderingly, never dreaming that he had witnessed that same scene in the Mayfair home.

"You are faithful, Beth," he said, looking graver. Then he talked steadily of things in which neither of them had any interest. How cold and unnatural it all was! Beth longed to give way to tears. In a few minutes he rose to go. He was going! Arthur was going! She dared not look into his face as he touched her hand coldly.

“Good-bye, Miss Woodburn. I wish you every success next winter.”



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She went back to the parlor and watched him—under the apple trees, white with blossom, through the gate, past the old church, around the corner—he was gone! The clock ticked away in the long, silent parlor; the sunshine slept on the grass outside; the butterflies were flitting from flower to flower, and laughing voices passed in the street, but her heart was strangely still. A numb, voiceless pain! What did it mean? Had Arthur changed? Once he had loved her. “God have pity!” her white lips murmured. And yet that look, that touch last night—what did it mean? What folly after all! A touch, a smile, and she had woven her fond hopes together. Foolish woman-heart, building her palace on the sands for next day’s tide to sweep away! Yet how happy she had been last night! A thrill, a throb, a dream of bliss; crushed now, all but the memory! The years might bury it all in silence, but she could never, never forget. She had laid her plans for life, sweet, unselfish plans for uplifting human lives. Strange lands, strange scenes, strange faces would surround her. She would toil and smile on others, “but oh, Arthur, Arthur—”

All through the long hours of that night she lay watching; she could not sleep. Arthur was still near, the same hills surrounding them both. The stars were shining and the hoarse whistle of the steamers rent the night. Perhaps they would never be so near again. Would they ever meet, she wondered. Perhaps not! Another year, and he would be gone far across the seas, and then, “Good-bye, Arthur! Good-bye! God be with you!”

## CHAPTER XII.

### *FAREWELL.*

Beth’s summer at Briarsfield parsonage passed quietly and sweetly. She had seemed a little sad at first, and May, with her woman’s instinct, read more of her story than she thought, but she said nothing, though she doubled her little loving attentions. The love of woman for woman is passing sweet.

But let us look at Beth as she sits in the shadow of the trees in the parsonage garden. It was late in August, and Beth was waiting for May to come out. Do you remember the first time we saw her in the shadow of the trees on the lawn at home? It is only a little over two years ago, but yet how much she has changed! You would hardly recognize the immature girl in that gentle, sweet-faced lady in her dark mourning dress. The old gloom had drifted from her brow, and in its place was sunlight, not the sunlight of one who had never known suffering, but the gentler, sweeter light of one who had triumphed over it. It was a face that would have attracted you, that would have attracted everyone, in fact, from the black-gowned college professor to the small urchin shouting in the street. To the rejoicing it said, “Let me laugh with you, for life is sweet;” to the sorrowing, “I understand, I have suffered, too. I know what you feel.” Just then her sweet eyes were raised to heaven in holy thought, “Dear heavenly Father, thou knowest



everything—how I loved him. Thy will be done. Oh, Jesus, my tender One, thou art so sweet! Thou dost understand my woman's heart and satisfy even its sweet longings. Resting in Thy sweet presence what matter life's sorrows!"



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She did not notice the lattice gate open and a slender, fair-haired man pause just inside to watch her. It was Clarence Mayfair. There was a touching expression on his face as he looked at her. Yes, she was beautiful, he thought. It was not a dream, the face that he had carried in his soul since that Sunday night last fall. Beth Woodburn was beautiful. She was a woman now. She was only a child when they played their little drama of love there in Briarsfield. The play was past now; he loved her as a man can love but one woman. And now—a shadow crossed his face—perhaps it was too late!

“Clarence!” exclaimed Beth, as he advanced, “I’m glad to see you.” And she held out her hand with an air of graceful dignity.

“You have come back to visit Briarsfield, I suppose. I was so surprised to see you,” she continued.

“Yes, I am staying at Mr. Graham’s.”

She noticed as he talked that he looked healthier, stronger and more manly. Altogether she thought him improved.

“Your father and mother are still in England, I suppose,” said she.

“Yes, they intend to stay with their relatives this winter. As for me, I shall go back to Varsity and finish my course.”

“Oh, are you going to teach?”

“Yes; there’s nothing else before me,” he answered, in a discouraged tone.

She understood. She had heard of his father’s losses, and, what grieved her still more, she had heard that Clarence was turning out a literary failure. He had talent, but he had not the fresh, original genius that this age of competition demands. Poor Clarence! She was sorry for him.

“You have been all summer in Briarsfield?” he asked.

“Yes, but I am going to Toronto to-morrow morning.”

“Yes, I know. Miss de Vere told me she had sent for you.”

“Oh, you have seen her then!”

“Yes, I saw her yesterday. Poor girl, she’ll not last long. Consumption has killed all the family.”



Beth wondered if he loved Marie, and she looked at him, with her gentle, sympathetic eyes. He caught her look and winced under it. She gazed away at the glimpse of lake between the village roofs for a moment.

“Beth, have you forgotten the past?” he asked, in a voice abrupt but gentle.

She started. She had never seen his face look so expressive. The tears rose to her eyes as she drooped her flushing face.

“No, I have not forgotten.”

“Beth, I did not love you then; I did not know what love meant—”

“Oh, don’t speak of it! It would have been a terrible mistake!”

“But, Beth, can you never forgive the past? I love you *now*—I have loved you since—”

“Oh, hush, Clarence! You *must* not speak of love!” And she buried her face in her hands and sobbed a moment, then leaned forward slightly toward him, a tender look in her eyes.

“I love another,” she said, in a low gentle voice.



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He shielded his eyes for a moment with his fair delicate hand. It was a hard moment for them both.

“I am so sorry, Clarence. I know what you feel. I am sorry we ever met.”

He looked at her with a smile on his saddened face.

“I feared it was so; but I had rather love you in vain than to win the love of any other woman. Good-bye, Beth.”

“Good-bye.”

He lingered a moment as he touched her hand in farewell.

“God bless you,” she said, softly.

He crossed the garden in the sunshine, and she sat watching the fleecy clouds and snatches of lake between the roofs. Poor Clarence! Did love mean to him what it meant to her? Ah, yes! she had seen the pain written on his brow. Poor Clarence! That night she craved a blessing upon him as she knelt beside her bed. Just then he was wandering about the weed-grown lawns of his father’s house, which looked more desolate than ever in the light of the full moon. It was to be sold the following spring, and he sighed as he walked on toward the lake-side. Right there on that little cliff he had asked Beth Woodburn to be his wife, and but for that fickle faithlessness of his, who knew what might have been? And yet it was better so—better for *her*—God bless her. And the thought of her drew him heavenward that night.

The next day Beth was on her way to Toronto to see Marie. She was in a pensive mood as she sat by the car window, gazing at the farm-lands stretching far away, and the wooded hill-sides checkered by the sunlight shining through their boughs. There is always a pleasant diversion in a few hours’ travel, and Beth found herself drawn from her thoughts by the antics of a negro family at the other end of the car. A portly colored woman presided over them; she had “leben chilen, four dead and gone to glory,” as she explained to everyone who questioned her.

It was about two o’clock when Beth reached Toronto, and the whirr of electric cars, the rattle of cabs and the mixed noises of the city street would all have been pleasantly exciting to her young nerves but for her thoughts of Marie. She wondered at her coming to the city to spend her last days, but it was quiet on Grenville Street, where she was staying with her friends, the Bartrams. Beth was, indeed, struck by the change in her friend when she entered the room. She lay there so frail and shadow-like among her pillows, her dark cheeks sunken, though flushed; but her eyes had still their old brilliancy, and there was an indefinable gentleness about her. Beth seemed almost to feel it as she stooped to kiss her. The Bartrams were very considerate, and left them



alone together as much as possible, but Marie was not in a talking mood that day. Her breath came with difficulty, and she seemed content to hold Beth's hand and smile upon her, sometimes through tears that gathered silently. Bright, sparkling Marie! They had not been wont to associate tears



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with her in the past. It was a pleasant room she had, suggestive of her taste—soft carpet and brightly-cushioned chairs, a tall mirror reflecting the lilies on the stand, and a glimpse of Queen’s Park through the open window. The next day was Sunday, and Beth sat by Marie while the others went to church. They listened quietly to the bells peal forth their morning call together, and Beth noted with pleasure that it seemed to soothe Marie as she lay with closed eyes and a half smile on her lips.

“Beth, you have been so much to me this summer. Your letters were so sweet. You are a great, grand woman, Beth.” And she stroked Beth’s hair softly with her frail, wasted hand.

“Do you remember when I used to pride myself on my unbelief?” Her breath failed her for a moment. “It is past now,” she continued, with a smile. “It was one Sunday; I had just read one of your letters, and I felt somehow that Jesus had touched me. I am ready now. It was hard, so hard at first, to give up life, but I have learned at last to say ‘His will be done.’”

Beth could not speak for the sob she had checked in her throat.

“Beth, I may not be here another Sunday. I want to talk to you, dear. You remember the old days when that trouble came between you and—and Clarence. I was a treacherous friend to you, Beth, to ever let him speak of love to me. I was a traitor to—”

“Oh, hush! Marie, darling, don’t talk so,” Beth pleaded in a sobbing tone.

“I *must* speak of it, Beth. I was treacherous to you. But when you know what I suffered —” Her breath failed again for a moment. “I *loved* him, Beth,” she whispered.

“Marie!” There was silence for a moment, broken only by Marie’s labored breathing. “I loved him, but I knew he did not love me. It was only a fancy of his. I had charmed him for the time, but I knew when I was gone his heart would go back to you—and now, Beth, I am dying slowly, I ask but one thing more. I have sent for Clarence. Let everything be forgotten now; let me see you happy together just as it was before.”

“Oh, hush, Marie! It cannot be. It can never be. You know I told you last fall that I did not love him.”

“Ah, but that is your pride, Beth; all your pride! Listen to me, Beth. If I had ten years more to live, I would give them all to see you both happy and united.”

Beth covered her face with her hands, as her tears flowed silently.



“Marie, I must tell you all,” she said, as she bent over her. “I love another: I love Arthur!”

“Arthur Grafton!” Marie exclaimed, and her breath came in quick, short gasps, and there was a pained look about her closed eyes. Beth understood she was grieved for the disappointment of the man she loved.

“And you, Beth—are you happy? Does he—Arthur, I mean—love you?” she asked, with a smile.



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“No. He loved me once, the summer before I came to college, but he is changed now. He was in Briarsfield this summer for a few days, but I saw he was changed. He was not like the same Arthur—so changed and cold.” She sat with a grave look in her grey eyes as Marie lay watching her. “Only once I thought he loved me,” she continued; “one night when he looked at me and touched my hand. But the next day he was cold again, and I knew then that he didn’t love me any more.”

Marie lay for a few moments with a very thoughtful look in her eyes, but she made no remark, and, after a while, she slept from weakness and exhaustion.

Beth went out for a few hours next morning, and found her very much weaker when she returned. Mrs. Bartram said she had tired herself writing a letter. She had a wide-awake air as if she were watching for something, and her ear seemed to catch every step on the stair-way. It was toward the close of day.

“Hark! who’s that?” she asked, starting.

“Only Mrs. Bartram. Rest, dearest,” said Beth.

But the brilliant eyes were fixed on the door, and a moment later Clarence entered the room. Marie still held Beth’s hand, but her dark eyes were fixed on Clarence with a look never to be forgotten.

“You have come at last,” she said, then fell back on her pillows exhausted, but smiling, her eyes closed.

He stood holding the frail hand she had stretched out to him, then the dark eyes opened slowly, and she gazed on him with a yearning look.

“Put your hand upon my forehead, I shall die happier,” she said, softly. “Oh, Clarence, I loved you! I loved you! It can do no harm to tell you now. Kiss me just once. In a moment I shall be with my God.”

Beth had glided from the room, and left her alone with the man she loved; but in a few minutes he called her and Mrs. Bartram to the bed-side. Marie was almost past speaking, but she stretched forth her arms to Beth and drew her young head down upon her breast. There was silence for a few minutes, broken only by Marie’s hoarse breathing.

“Jesus, my Redeemer,” her pale lips murmured faintly, then the heart-throbs beneath Beth’s ear were still; the slender hand fell helpless on the counterpane; the brilliant eyes were closed; Marie was gone!

When Beth came to look at her again she lay smiling in her white, flowing garment, a single lily in her clasped hands. Poor Marie! She had loved and suffered, and now it



was ended. Aye, but she had done more than suffer. She had refused the man she loved for his sake and for the sake of another. Her sacrifice had been in vain, but the love that sacrificed itself—was that vain? Ah, no! Sweet, brave Marie!

Her friends thought it a strange request of hers to be buried at Briarsfield, but it was granted. Her vast wealth—as she had died childless—went, by the provisions of her father’s will, to a distant cousin, but her jewels she left to Beth. The following afternoon Mr. Perth read the funeral service, and they lowered the lovely burden in the shadow of the pines at the corner of the Briarsfield church-yard. There in that quiet village she had first seen him she loved. After all her gay social life she sought its quiet at last, and the stars of that summer night looked down on her new-made grave.



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The following day Mr. Perth laid a colored envelope from a large publishing firm in Beth's lap. They had accepted her last story for a good round sum, accompanied by most flattering words of encouragement. As she read the commendatory words, she smiled at the thought of having at least one talent to use in her Master's service. Yes, Beth Woodburn of Briarsfield would be famous after all. It was no vain dream of her childhood.

Four weeks passed and Beth had finished her preparations for returning to college in the fall. In a few weeks she would be leaving May and the dear old parsonage, but she would be glad to be back at 'Varsity again. There came a day of heavy rain, and she went out on an errand of charity for May. When she returned, late in the afternoon, she heard Mr. Perth talking to someone in the study, but that was nothing unusual. The rain was just ceasing, and the sun suddenly broke through the clouds, filling all the west with glory. Beth went down into the garden to drink in the beauty. Rugged clouds stood out like hills of fire fringed with gold, and the great sea of purple and crimson overhead died away in the soft flush of the east, while the wet foliage of the trees and gardens shone like gold beneath the clouds. It was glorious! She had never seen anything like it before. Look! there were two clouds of flame parting about the sunset like a gateway into the beyond, and within all looked peaceful and golden. Somehow it made her think of Marie. Poor Marie! Why had Clarence's love for her been unreal? Why could she not have lived and they been happy together? Love and suffering! And what had love brought to her? Only pain. She thought of Arthur, too. Perhaps he was happiest of all. He seemed to have forgotten. But she—ah, she could never forget! Yet, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." And she pulled a bunch of fall flowers from the bush at her side, careless of the rain-drops that shook on her bare head as she touched the branches. She did not know that she was being observed from the study window.

"She is going to be a missionary, isn't she?" said the stranger who was talking to Mr. Perth.

"Yes; she hasn't decided her field yet, but she will make a grand one wherever she goes. She's a noble girl; I honor her."

"Yes, she is very noble," said the stranger slowly, as he looked at her. She would have recognized his voice if she had been within hearing, but she only pulled another spray of blossoms, without heeding the sound of the study door shutting and a step approaching her on the gravelled walk.

"Beth."

"Arthur! Why, I—I thought you were in Montreal!"



“So, I was. I just got there a few days ago, but I turned around and came back to-day to scold you for getting your feet wet standing there in the wet grass. I knew you didn’t know how to take care of yourself.” There was a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

“Didn’t I always take care of you when you were little?”



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“Yes, and a nice tyrant you were!” she said, laughing, when she had recovered from her surprise, “always scolding and preaching at me.”

He seemed inclined to talk lightly at first, and then grew suddenly silent as they went into the drawing-room. Beth felt as though he were regarding her with a sort of protecting air. What did it mean? What had brought him here so suddenly? She was growing embarrassed at his silence, when she suddenly plunged into conversation about Montreal, the Wesleyan College, and other topics that were farthest away from her present thought and interest.

“Beth,” said Arthur suddenly, interrupting the flow of her remarks in a gentle tone, “Beth, why did you not tell me last summer that you were going to be a missionary?”

She seemed startled for a moment, as he looked into her flushed face.

“Oh, I don’t know. I—I meant to. I meant to tell you that afternoon you came here before you went away, but I didn’t know you were going so soon, and I didn’t tell you somehow. Who told you?”

“Marie de Vere told me,” he said, gently. “She wrote to me just a few hours before she died; but I didn’t get the letter till yesterday. She left it with Clarence, and he couldn’t find me at first.”

They looked at each other a moment in silence, and there was a tender smile in his eyes. Then a sudden flush crimsoned her cheek. How much did he know? Had Marie told him that she—

“Beth, why did you not tell me before that you were free—that you were not another’s promised wife?” His voice was gentle, very gentle. Her face drooped, and her hand trembled as it lay on her black dress. He rose and bent over her, his hand resting on her shoulder. His touch thrilled her, soothed her, but she dare not raise her eyes.

“I—I—didn’t know it mattered—that; you cared,” she stammered.

“Didn’t know I cared!” he exclaimed; then, in a softer tone, “Beth, did you think I had forgotten—that I could forget? I love you, Beth. Can you ever love me enough to be my wife?”

She could not speak, but in her upturned face he read her answer, and his lips touched her brow reverently. Closer, closer to his breast he drew her. Soul open to soul, heart beating against heart! The old clock ticked in the stillness, and the crimson glow of the sunset was reflected on the parlor wall. Oh, what joy was this suddenly breaking through the clouds upon them! Beth was the first to break the silence.



“Oh, Arthur, I love you so! I love you so!” she said, twining her arms passionately about his neck, as her tears fell upon his breast. It was the long pent-up cry of her loving womanhood.

“But Arthur, why were you so cold and strange that day we parted last summer?”

“I thought you were another’s intended wife. I tried to hide my love from you.” His voice shook slightly as he answered.

One long, lingering look into each other’s eyes, and, with one thought, they knelt together beside the old couch and gave thanks to the all-loving Father who had guided their paths together.



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That night Beth lay listening as the autumn wind shook the elm-tree over the roof and drifted the clouds in dark masses across the starry sky. But the winds might rage without—aye, the storms might beat down, if they would, what did it matter? Arthur was near, and the Divine presence was bending over her with its shielding love. “Oh, God, Thou art good!” She was happy—oh, so happy! And she fell asleep with a smile on her face.

The autumn passed—such a gloriously happy autumn—and Christmas eve had come. The snow lay white and cold on the fields and hills about Briarsfield, but in the old church all was warmth and light. A group of villagers were gathered inside, most of them from curiosity, and before the altar Arthur and Beth were standing side by side. Beth looked very beautiful as she stood there in her white bridal robes. The church was still, sacredly still, but for the sound of Mr. Perth’s earnest voice; and in the rear of the crowd was one face, deadly pale, but calm. It was Clarence. How pure she looked, he thought. Pure as the lilies hanging in clusters above her head! Was she of the earth—clay, like these others about her? The very tone of her voice seemed to have caught a note from above. No, he had never been worthy of her! Weak, fickle, wave-tossed soul that he was! A look of humiliation crossed his face, then a look of hope. If he had never been worthy of her hand he would be worthy at least to have loved her in vain. He would be what she would have had him be. It was over; the last words were said; the music broke forth, and the little gold band gleamed on Beth’s fair hand as it lay on Arthur’s arm. He led her down the aisle, smiling and happy. Oh, joy! joy everlasting! joy linking earth to heaven! They rested that night in Beth’s old room at the parsonage, and as the door closed behind them they knelt together—man and wife. Sacred hour!

Out beneath the stars of that still Christmas eve was one who saw the light shine from their window as he passed and blessed them. He carried a bunch of lilies in his hand as he made his way to a long white mound in the church-yard. Poor Marie! He stooped and laid them in the snow, the pure white snow—pure as the dead whose grave it covered! pure as the vows he had heard breathed that night!

\* \* \* \* \*

Seven years have passed, and Beth sits leaning back in a rocker by the window, in the soft bright moonlight of Palestine. And what have the years brought to Beth? She is famous now. Her novels are among the most successful of the day. She has marked out a new line of work, and the dark-eyed Jewish characters in her stories have broadened the sympathies of her world of readers. But the years have brought her something besides literary fame and success in the mission-field. By her side is a little white cot, and a little rosy-cheeked boy lies asleep upon the pillow, one hand, thrown back over his dark curls—her little Arthur.



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There is a step beside her, and her husband bends over her with a loving look.

“It is seven years to-night since we were married, Beth.”

There are tears in her smiling eyes as she looks up into his face.

“And you have never regretted?” he asks.

“Oh, Arthur! How could I?” and she hides her face on his breast.

“My wife! my joy!” he whispers, as he draws her closer.

“Arthur, do you remember what a silly, silly girl I used to be when I thought you had not enough of the artist-soul to understand my nature? And here, if I hadn’t had you to criticise and encourage me, I’d never have succeeded as well as I have.”

He only kisses her for reply, and they look out over the flat-roofed city in the moonlight. Peace! peace! sweet peace! “Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.” And the stars are shining down upon them in their love. And so, dear Beth, farewell!

The evening shadows lengthen as I write, but there is another to whom we must bid farewell. It is Clarence. Father and mother are both dead, and in one of the quiet parts of Toronto he lives, unmarried, in his comfortable rooms. The years have brought him a greater measure of success than once he had hoped. The sorrow he has so bravely hidden has perhaps enabled him to touch some chord in the human hearts of his readers. At any rate, he has a good round income now. Edith’s children come often to twine their arms about his neck; but there are other children who love him, too. Down in the dark, narrow streets of the city there is many a bare, desolate home that he has cheered with warmth and comfort, many a humble fireside where the little ones listen for his step, many little hands and feet protected from the cold by his benefactions. But no matter how lowly the house, he always leaves behind some trace of his artistic nature—a picture or a bunch of flowers, something suggestive of the beautiful, the ideal. Sometimes, when the little ones playing about him lisp their childish praises, a softness fills his eyes and he thinks of one who is far away. Blessed be her footsteps! But he is not sad long. No, he is the genial, jolly bachelor, whom everybody loves, so unlike the Clarence of long ago; and so farewell, brave heart—fare thee well!