Medoline Selwyn's Work eBook

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Title: Medoline Selwyn's Work

Author: Mrs. J. J. Colter

Release Date: March 26, 2006 [EBook #18052]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

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Medoline Selwyn's Work.

By Mrs. J. J. *Colter*.

Boston:
Ira Bradley & *Co*.
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"The golden opportunity.

Is never offered twice: seize, then, the hour
When Fortune smiles and Duty points the way;
Nor shrink aside to 'scape the fear.—
Nor pause though Pleasure beckon from her bower,
But bravely bear thee onward to the goal"

CHAPTER.

MEDOLINE SELWYN'S WORK.

CHAPTER I.

Mrs. Blake.

The cars were not over-crowded, and were moving leisurely along in the soft, midsummer twilight. At first, I had felt a trifle annoyed at my carelessness in missing the Express by which I had been expected; but now I quite enjoyed going in this mixed train, since I could the better observe the country than in the swifter Express. As I drew near the end of my journey, my pulses began to quicken with nervousness, not unmixed with dread.

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Captain Green, under whose care I had been placed when I left my home for the last eight years, had concluded, no doubt very wisely, that I could travel the remaining few miles through quiet county places alone. This last one hundred and fifty miles, however, had been the most trying part of the whole journey. My English was a trifle halting; all our teachers spoke German as their mother tongue at the school, and the last two years I was the only English-born pupil. Captain Green was an old East Indian officer, like my own dead father, and very readily undertook the care of a troublesome chit of a girl across the ocean, in memory of the strong friendship subsisting between himself and my father, now long since passed to other service than that of Her Gracious Majesty. The Captain was a very silent man, and therefore not calculated to help me to a better acquaintance of any language, while he did not encourage me to make friends with my traveling companions. The journey had been therefore a very quiet one to me, but I had found it delightful. I had, like most of our species, an innate love of the sea; and the long, still hours as I sat alone gazing out over the restless waters, have left one of the pleasantest of all the pictures hanging in memory's halls.

As I did not wish to be taken, even by the chance traveling companions of a few hours, for other than an English or American girl, I resolved to speak fewest possible words to any one on the journey; and when the conductor came for my ticket, I repressed the desire to ask him to tell me when my own station would be reached, and merely shook my head at the news agents who were more troublesome, if possible, than the dust and smoke which poured in at doors and windows. Captain Green had telegraphed my guardian the hour at which I would arrive, but I got so interested watching the busy crowds on the streets from my hotel window that, for a while, I forgot that I too needed a measure of their eager haste, if I were soon to terminate this long journey over land and sea. I was beginning to fear, at last, after the cars had been in motion some hours, that I might have passed my station; so I concluded to have my question carefully written down, and the next time the conductor came near me hand it to him. I had not long to wait, and giving him the slip of paper, I murmured "Please."

He read, and then looking at me very intently said:

"Are you a foreigner?"

"Oh, no; English," I said, blushing furiously.

"Why don't you speak then, when you want anything? That's what we're here for."

I bowed my head quite proudly and said, "Will you please, then, answer my question?"

"We won't be there for an hour or more. Are you not the young lady Mrs. Flaxman is expecting?"

"I am Mr. Winthrop's ward. I do not know any Mrs. Flaxman."

“Oh, it’s all the same. She lives with him; is a cousin, or something connected with him. He is away now; left a month ago for the Pacific coast.”

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He was sitting now quite comfortably in the next seat.

“You needn’t have any more anxiety about the stopping places,” he continued, very cordially; “I will look after you, and see that you get safely home, if there’s no one there to meet you. Most likely they expected you by the morning’s Express.” Then he inquired about my luggage, examining my checks and keeping up a running stream of conversation which I seemed compelled to answer. After the rigid exclusion of my school life, where we were taught to regard all sorts of men with a measure of wholesome dread, I scarce knew whether to be proud of my courage in being able to sit there, with such outward calmness, or ashamed of my boldness. If I could only have consulted one of the teachers just for a moment it would have been such a relief; but presently the train stopped, when he left my side, his seat to be immediately occupied by an elderly woman with a huge covered basket. After considerable difficulty she got herself and basket bestowed to her satisfaction just before the cars got in motion. She moved uneasily on the seat, looking around on all sides a trifle nervously, and then in an awed whisper said to me, “Don’t the cars go all to smash sometimes?”

“Not many times,” I tried to say reassuringly.

“I wan’t never in ’em afore, and wouldn’t be now, only my son Dan’el’s wife’s took oncommon bad, and he thinks I can cure her.”

She remained quiet a while, and then somewhat reassured began to grow curious about her traveling companions.

“Have you cum fur?” she asked.

I explained that I had come a good many miles.

“All alone?”

“Only from New York.”

“Going fur?”

“To Cavendish.”

“Did you say Cavendish?”

“Yes.”

“Be you a furriner?”

“No, I am English;” I felt my color rising as I answered.

“Well, you speak sort o’ queer, but my old man was English, too, a Norfolk man, and blest if I could understand quarter he said for ever so long after we got keeping company. I used to say yes to everything I didn’t understand when we was alone, for fear he might be popping the question; but laws, I knew well enough when he did ask.”

She fell into an apparently pleasant reverie, but soon returned to the actualities of life.

“You’re not married, surely.”

I answered in the negative with fewest possible words.

“Got a young man, though, I’ll warrant; such a likely girl.”

“I do not understand what you mean,” I answered with considerable dignity, glad to let her know that her own English was not perfect.

“You must have been riz in a queer place not to know what likely is. Why, it’s good-looking; and anybody knows you’re that. But I suppose you didn’t have much eddication, they mostly don’t in England; my man didn’t know even his letters; but I have pretty good book larnin’ and so we got on all right,” she continued, with a retrospective look on her not unkindly face.

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“Who might your folks be in Cavendish?” she asked, after a few moments of welcome silence.

“I have no relatives there,” I answered, I am afraid, rather ungraciously.

“Going as governess or nurse girl to some of the aristocracy there? You don’t look as if you ever did much housework, though.”

“I am going to Mr. Winthrop’s.”

“Deu tell! Why, I lived with his mother myself, when I was a widder first.”

Then she relapsed into another eloquent pause of silence, while possibly in her dim way she was reflecting how history repeats itself. But coming back to reality again, and scanning me more closely than ever, she asked, “Are you going there to work?”

My patience was getting exhausted, and it is possible there was a trace of petulance in my voice as I said, “No, I am Mr. Winthrop’s ward.”

“Deu tell! What is that?”

“He is my guardian.”

“Why, he is a young man for that. I thought they got elderly men.”

“My father held the same relation to him.”

She was some time taking in the idea, but she said at last, “Oh, I see.”

I took a book from my satchel and began reading; but she did not long permit me to enjoy it; her next remark, however, riveted my attention.

“I wonder if your name isn’t Selwyn.”

“Yes.”

“Deary me, then I have seen your pa and ma long ago at Oaklands; that’s the Winthrop’s place.”

“Please tell me about them. I never saw them after I was ten years old. I was sent from India, and then they died.”

I spoke with a slight hesitancy, having first to translate my sentences, as I still thought, in German.

“Well, I wan’t much acquainted with ’em. Housemaids ain’t in general on friendly terms with the quality, but your ma was so kind to us servants, I’ve always remembered her. Mrs. Winthrop sot a sight by her.”

“What was that?” I asked, much mystified.

“Oh, she liked them better’n most.”

“Do you recollect their appearance?”

“Yes; your father was a soldier-like, handsome looking man, very tall and pretty stern. Your ma minded me of a flower, she was so delicate. They wan’t long married then, but my, they was fond of each other! Your father just worshipped her. I heard Mrs. Winthrop say he had a hard time to get her. Your ma’s folks didn’t want her to marry a soldier. She was an only child, and they lived in England. The Winthrops were English, too, as well as your father.”

It was my turn now to fall into a reverie at the strangeness of circumstances, thus causing me to meet this plain, old body, and learning from her incidents about my own dead parents I might otherwise never have known; besides she told it in such a realistic way that, in some mysterious fashion, like mind reading, I seemed to see it all myself through her clear eyes.

“Have you many brothers and sisters?”

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“My mother had four children; but the others died in infancy.”

“You look rugged as most young ladies.”

“Do you mean healthy?”

“Well, yes; you have a clear complexion and rosy cheeks.”

“They were extremely careful of our health at the school where I have been for the last eight years. That was the reason my father sent me there. He had heard how remarkably healthy their pupils were.”

“’Twan’t in this country, or you’d speak more nateral like.”

“No, it was in Brussels.”

“Oh, yes; in England, I suppose.”

“No, on the continent of Europe; a city in Belgium, the capital.”

“And you’ve talked a furrin tongue, then.”

“Yes, several; but the German is the only one I speak quite correctly.”

“Bless your heart, you’ll soon talk fast enough in English. Your voice is very sweet; it minds me of your ma’s. And it ’pears to me you speak better already.”

I was beaming on the good woman now.

“Will you remain long in Cavendish?” I ventured on a question or two myself.

“It’ll depend on Dan’el’s wife. He wants me to come and live with ’em, but I hain’t much hankering for darters-in-law, and I reckon we’d be better friends furder apart. However I’ll stay till she gets well; it costs so for hired girls.”

“May I come and see you?” I asked.

“Bless your dear heart, I’ll be proud to have you come.”

“Will you please tell me your name and what street you live on?”

“Oh, the streets don’t amount to much in Cavendish. My name is Betsy Blake; just inquire for Dan’el Blake on the Mill Road; he works in Belcher’s steam mill. Laws, how quick the time has gone! I thought for sure I’d be amost scart to death; and I’ve hardly once thought of getting smashed since I sot down here first; and now we’re just into Cavendish.”

I glanced through the window, and my heart throbbed joyously; for there, stretching so far away I could see no further shore, lay the beautiful ocean. No matter now what might be my home in this strange, new country. With my passion for the sea, and it so near, I could not be utterly desolate. To sit on these cliffs, reddening now in the sunset and watch the outgoing tide, sending imaginary messages on the departing waves to far-off shores, would surely, to some extent, deaden the sense of utter isolation from the world of childhood and youth. Mrs. Blake shook my hand warmly, repeating again the invitation to visit her at Daniel's, while she gathered up her huge basket and started for the door with the cars still in motion. I sat watching from the window the groups of people waiting for the incoming train as we stopped at the station. A few carriages were there, but none of them had come for Mrs. Blake. A strong limbed man, with a dejected face, relieved her of the basket and then hurried away, she rapidly following. I felt sorry for them, and was speculating what news Daniel had brought of his sick wife, quite forgetting for the time that I too had need to be astir. The conductor, however, soon reminded me of the fact as he announced briskly that a carriage was in waiting for me.

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“They will send down bye-and-bye for your luggage; it’s only a one-seated affair outside.”

I followed him to the carriage; a bright faced young fellow was holding a spirited horse; from his bearing I instantly set him down as something more than a servant.

“Here, Flaxman, is your charge,” the conductor remarked, as he assisted me into the carriage.

“Miss Selwyn, I presume,” the young man said, politely, as he disentangled one hand from the reins to grasp mine. The horse started off on a biasing canter, much to my amusement.

“You are not afraid, I hope,” my companion said, a trifle anxiously.

“Not afraid, but amused; your horse goes so oddly; but I am not accustomed to their ways.” I added, fearing my remark might give offence.

“Faery and I are very good friends, and understand each other thoroughly; but strangers usually get alarmed.”

My knowledge of quadrupeds was so limited I thought it safest to remain silent.

Presently we passed the Blakes, I longed to relieve Daniel of his heavy basket; for even he seemed to stagger beneath its weight.

“I was speaking with that woman on the train. She comes to attend her son’s wife, who is sick.”

“Oh, the Blakes, then. She won’t have much to do, Dan’s wife died to-day; poor beggar, he looks heartbroken.”

“Your wife may be dead some day; then you will know how dreadfully he feels,” I said, hotly. The flippant tone in face of such sorrow distressed me. He gave me a merry look as he said: “There are always plenty left to replace the lost ones. A wife is far easier got than a horse; one like Faery, for instance.”

I shut my mouth firmly and turned my head away to watch the white sails idly mirrored, in the still waters, I knew he was furtively watching me, and this alone held back my tears, as I thought of poor Blake’s desolate hearthstone, as well as my own heart’s loneliness in this wide continent of strangers.

“Mr. Winthrop regretted being away when you arrived, but he expected us to be kind to you; so we must not quarrel first thing.” My companion said, with entire change of tone.

“I quarrel pretty easily,” I stammered, “my temper is very abrupt.”

“Most of us have quick tempers; but, I think, you, at least, have a generous one.”

Then I recollected abrupt was not a very suitable word to couple with temper. Taken altogether, I found this drive home with Faery and her master anything but enjoyable.

CHAPTER II.

Oaklands.

Faery’s head was turned at last from the wide, dusty street into an imposing gateway, which lead through an avenue bordered thickly with evergreens mostly pine and hemlock. “These trees look a trifle hot in summer; but they are a capital protection in a winter’s storm, I assure you,” my companion said with an apologetic air.

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I could think of no suitable reply; so merely said, “yes.”

“It’s a tradition among their acquaintances that the Winthrops believe in getting the very best possible good out of everything.”

“Have they succeeded?”

“Better than the generality of folks; but they have come pretty near extinction, at least on this side the water. Mr. Winthrop is the last of his race.”

“Has he no children?”

“He is a bachelor.”

“But he may have children and a wife some day.”

“You will probably be his heir, if he does not marry, I believe he is your heir by your father’s will, in case you die without heirs.”

I laughed merrily. “He will outlive me probably. What good would his money do me if I were old, or maybe dead?”

“Your children might enjoy it.”

I wondered was it customary in this country to speculate on such remote possibilities, but said nothing. We soon reached the house, which stood on ground elevated to command a magnificent view of the sea, the distant headlands, and a wide stretch of hill and dale. The house itself reminded me more of old world buildings than any I had yet seen in America; and, on the spot, I took a fancy to it, and felt that here I could easily cultivate the home feeling, without which I should still be a wanderer on the earth. Mrs. Flaxman was standing to receive me as I ascended the granite steps that led to the main entrance. The great stone house had wings at either end while deep breaks in the heavy masonry of the walls occurred at regular intervals, and heavy pillars of granite made a massive background for this fair, slight woman as I looked at her.

“I will commit Miss Selwyn to your care, mother, while I take a little longer drive with Faery,” my companion said, graciously.

“I will accept your trust with a great deal of pleasure, Hubert,” she said, receiving me with a cordiality that warmed my heart. “You are very welcome home. At least, I hope you will feel at home here.”

“I have no other, now that I have left school,” I said, gravely.

“Young ladies do not often waste much sentiment on their boarding-school home, so I think we shall succeed in making you content here with us at Oaklands.”

“I have always been accustomed to find my own sources of content. We were left at school to amuse ourselves or not, as we willed.”

“But I hope we shall not be so indifferent to your pleasure. Mr. Winthrop is not much of a society man, but we still see a good many visitors.”

The main entrance of the house was finer than anything I had remembered to have seen, and at first I felt quite oppressed by the grandeur of my surroundings; but when Mrs. Flaxman had conducted me to my own room, its dainty furnishings and appointments made it appear to me, after the plain accommodations of the school, a perfect bower for any maiden. I went to one of the deep windows and looked out over the splendid stretch of land and sea scape spread before me. Drawing a long sigh of perfect content, I exclaimed: “I know I shall be happy here. How could I help it, with such pictures to look at?”

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“If you admire the scenery so much at first, what will your sensations be when you have grown intimate with its beauty? Nature enters into our humanity like human acquaintances.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, much mystified.

“There are some places like some people—the more we study them the more they are admired, we are continually discovering hidden beauties. But you must study nature closely, at all hours and seasons, to discover her subtle charms.”

“Won’t you teach me what you have learned?”

“If I can do so I shall be glad; but I think we must each study her for ourselves. She has no text books that I have ever seen.”

“I wonder do we all see things alike? Does that sea, now a sheet of rose and amethyst, and the sky that seems another part of the same, and the green trees, and hills, and rocks, look to you as they do to me?”

“Not yet, my child. When you have studied them as long, and have the memories of years clustering around each well-remembered spot, they may look the same to you as they now do to me; but not till then,” she added, I fancied a little sadly.

“Probably I shall enjoy this exquisite view better without the memories; they usually hold a sting.”

“That depends on the way we use life. To live as God wills, leaves no sting for after thought.”

“Not if death comes and takes our loved ones? How alone I am in the world because of him.”

“There are far sadder experiences than yours. Death is not always our worst enemy; we may have a death in life, compared with which Death itself is an angel of light.”

“Oh, what a strange, sad thing life is at the best! Is it worth being born and suffering so much for all the joy we find?”

“No, indeed, if this life were all; but it is only the faint dawn of a brighter, grander existence, more worthy the gift of a God.”

“But we must die to get to that fuller, higher life;” I said, suddenly remembering poor Blake’s dead wife.

She smiled compassionately.

“It is hard convincing you young people that even death may be a tender friend, a welcome messenger. But we won’t talk in this strain any longer, I scarce know why we drifted into it. I want your first impressions of home to be joyous, for they are apt to haunt us long after we make the discovery that they were not correct.”

“I wonder if you are not something of a philosopher? I never heard any one talk just like you.”

“Certainly not anything so formidable, and learned as that. I am only a plain little woman, with no special mission except to make those around me happy.”

“That is a very beautiful mission, and I am sure you meet with success, which is not the fate of every one with a career.”

“Ah, if you begin praising me I must leave; but first let me tell you dinner will be served at six. Mr. Winthrop is a great student, and is already, for so young a man, a very successful author; and he likes dinner late so as to have all the longer time for hard work. The evenings he takes for light reading and rest.”

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I must confess I was beginning to get afraid of my guardian. I expected to find him in manners and appearance something like our school professors, with a tendency to criticise my slender literary acquirements.

However I proceeded with my toilet quite cheerfully, and was rather glad than sorry that I had found him absent from Oaklands; but after I left my room and wandered out into the dim, spacious hall and down the long stairway, the heavy, old-fashioned splendors of the house chilled me. How could I occupy myself happily through the coming years in this great, gloomy house? I vaguely wondered, while life stretched out before my imagination, in long and tiresome perspective.

With no school duties to occupy my time, my knowledge of amusements, needlework, or any other of the softer feminine accomplishments, exceedingly limited, I was suddenly confronted with the problem how I was to fill up the days and years with any degree of satisfaction. Hitherto every thought had been strained eagerly towards this home coming. After that fancy was a blank. Now I had got here, what then? I had been a fairly industrious pupil and graduated with commendable success; but it had been a tradition at our school that once away from its confinement, text-books and the weariness of study were at an end. I went out on the lawn, and was standing, a trifle homesick for the companionship of the merry crowd of schoolmates, when a side glance revealed to me an immense garden, such as I had often seen, but not near enough to sufficiently enjoy. I soon forgot my lonely fancies as I strayed admiringly through the well kept walks, amid beds of old-fashioned sweet smelling flowers, which now-a-days are for the most part relegated to the humble cottages; but farther on I discovered the rarer plants of many climes, some of them old acquaintances, but others utter strangers, only so far as I could remember some of them from my lessons in botany. Still stretching beyond on the hill side I saw the vegetable and fruit gardens. Huge strawberry beds attracted me, the ripe fruit I found tempting; but feeling still a stranger, the old weakness that comes down to us from Mother Eve to reach forth and pluck, was restrained. “What a perfect Eden it is!” I could not help exclaiming, though no ears save the birds, and multitudinous insects existences, were within reach of my voice, and probably for the latter, any sound I could make would be as unheard by them as the music of the spheres must be to me until another body, with finer intuitions to catch such harmonies, shall be provided. Ere the dinner bell rang I found a new wonderland of beauty reaching away beyond me. To watch from early spring till winter’s icy breath destroyed them, these multiplied varieties of vegetable life gradually passing through all their beautiful changes of bud and blossom, and ripened seed or fruit would be a training in some respects, equalling that of the schools. What higher lessons in botany I might take, day by day exploring the secrets of plant life! I went back to the house in a happier mood than I had left it. At the dinner table I expressed, no doubt with amusing enthusiasm, my gladness at this garden of delight.

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“You should become a practical botanist, Miss Selwyn. But then your heart might prove too tender to tear your pets to pieces in order to find out their secrets.”

“I did not know my heart was specially tender.”

“I only judged so from your sympathy for the Blakes. Only think, mother, Miss Selwyn was prophesying the time when I should be mourning over a departed wife.”

“You must not mind Hubert, Miss Selwyn. He is a sad tease, as we all find to our sorrow. He has not had brothers or sisters since his childhood to teach him gentleness.”

“Only children are apt to be not very agreeable companions. We had some unpleasant specimens at school.”

“That is too hard on both of us, Miss Selwyn,” he said; “but I must prove to you that I, at least, am a beautiful exception to the general rule.”

For the first time I looked up at him closely, and was struck with the handsome merry face.

“With a very little effort you could make yourself very agreeable, I am sure,” I said, with all seriousness.

Even Mrs. Flaxman could not conceal her amusement at my remark.

“It is so refreshing to meet with such a frank young lady,” Hubert said, with downcast eyes. I had a suspicion he was laughing at me. Presently he glanced at me, when I found the fun in his eyes contagious, and, though at my own expense, indulged in a hearty laugh.

“I wish you would tell me when I make myself ridiculous. I do not understand boys’ natures. I scarce remember to have spoken a dozen consecutive sentences to one in my life. All our Professors were more or less gray, and they every one wore spectacles.”

“They must been an interesting lot,” Hubert said, with a lack of his usual animation. When I was longer with him I discovered that the open space in his armor was to be regarded a boy.

“But, no doubt they were all young and mischievous once. The soberest horse in Belgium frisked around its mother in its colthood, no doubt.”

“You will see plenty of poor horses in America,” Mrs. Flaxman said. “Faery is by no means a typical horse.”

“Faery’s master loves her. That makes a world of difference with the ownership of other things than horses.”

“Really, Miss Selwyn, you can moralize on every subject, I believe, with equal ease.”

“He is making fun of me again, I presume,” I said, turning to Mrs. Flaxman. “When I talk a longer time with you English-speaking people, I shall not be so open to ridicule. Some day, Mr. Hubert, I may meet you in Germany, and then I shall be able to retaliate.”

“Before that time comes you will be generous enough to return good for evil.”

“And when shall you get your punishment then?”

“Maybe never. I find a good many evil-doers get off scot free in this world.”

“But there are other worlds than this, my son,” his mother said, with such sweet seriousness that our badinage ceased for that evening.

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CHAPTER III.

Esmerelda.

The next morning I was early astir. I was eager to explore the grounds around Oaklands, as well as the beaches and caves where the waves penetrated far under the rocks at high tide. The grounds I found very extensive—in places almost like some of the old English parks which I had seen on my visits there to distant relatives during the holidays. It was pleasant to think while wandering under the trees, and over the splendid wastes of flowers, and ornamental shrubs, and trees, that in this wide, vast America no one need be defrauded of his portion of mother earth by this immense flower garden; since there was more than sufficient land for every anxious toiler. To me there was an exceeding luxury in this reflection; for often on those lovely Kentish estates where I had visited, my heart had been grieved by the extremes of wealth and squalor. Pinched-faced women and children gazing hungrily through park gates at the flowers, and fountains, and all the beauty within, while they had no homes worthy the name, and alas! no flowers or fountains to gladden their beauty hungered hearts. My friends used to smile at my saddened face as I looked in these other human faces with a pitying sense of sisterhood, that was strange to them; but they humored my desire to try and gladden these lives so limited in their happy allotments, by gifts of rare flowers and choice fruits. But I used to find the old-fashioned flowers, that the gardeners grumbled least over my plucking, were the most welcome.

At luncheon I came in, my hair sea-blown from my visit to the rocks, and my face finely burnt by the combined influence of wind and sun. I expressed to Mrs. Flaxman a desire to visit my new acquaintance on the Mill Road. I noticed a peculiar uplifting of the eyebrows as I glanced towards Hubert.

“It will be something entirely new in Mill Road experience to have a friendly call from one of our Cavendish *elite*.”

“Why, Hubert,” his mother remonstrated, “it is not an unusual thing for our friends to visit the poor and sick on the Mill Road, as well as in the other humbler districts.”

“Doubtless, but in much the same fashion as Queen Elizabeth used to visit her subjects—mere royal progresses, more bother than blessing. Miss Selwyn, I fancy, will go there in a friendly sort of way, that even Dan will appreciate.”

“Oh, thank you, Hubert; but possibly, if I quite comprehended your meaning, I should be more provoked than complimented.”

“Well, if I was one of the poor ones I would like your visits best. I would be willing to dispense with the dignity for sake of the friendliness that would recognize that I too had a common brotherhood with the highest as well as the lowest.”

“Ah, I comprehend your meaning now, and I won’t get angry with you. I think I must be a changeling, in spirit probably; there could be no mistake, I presume, in my physical identity, but my heart always claims kindred most with the lean, hungry faces.”

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“You could soon make my eyes watery, I do believe,” Hubert said, with a gentleness that surprised me.

I saw Mrs. Flaxman quietly drying her eyes and wondered why my few, simple words should touch their tear fountain.

Towards evening I started on my walk to the Mill Road. The gardener had very graciously allowed me to gather some flowers to take with me. These I had arranged with some wet mosses I found in the woods that morning; and begging a nice little basket from the housekeeper, had them very daintily arranged. When I came downstairs equipped for my walk, I found a very stylish young lady standing in the hall beside Mrs. Flaxman.

“Esmerelda will show you the way. I scarcely feel equal for such a walk this hot day, and I know you will kindly excuse me.”

“Oh certainly; it would trouble me to have you walk any distance when you look so frail.”

“I am not frail, dear; but I have got into an idle habit of taking my outings in the carriage; and so walking soon tires me.”

I turned towards the young lady, who in a very graceful, dignified way seemed to be awaiting my pleasure. I could not believe she was a servant, and felt quite shabby when I compared my own costume with hers.

When we were walking down the avenue I ventured a remark or two on the beauty of the place; but she answered me with such proud reserve I suddenly relapsed into silence which remained unbroken until we reached Mrs. Blake’s door. While I stood knocking at the front door Esmerelda slipped around to the back of the cottage where a rough, board porch served as entrance for every day occasions. Mrs. Blake met me with genuine cordiality, and then led me into a close smelling room. The floor was covered with a cheap carpet, a few common chairs, a very much worn horse-hair sofa, and a table covered with a very new, and very gay-looking cloth, comprised the furnishing, with the exception of walls decorated with cheap chromos in the most wonderful frames I ever saw,—some of them made of shells, some of leather, some of moss, and others simply covered, with bright pieces of chintz. I longed to arrange them in more orderly fashion. They were hanging crooked or too close together, not one of them in a proper way I decided, as I took a swift survey of the room. But presently my gaze was arrested, and all thought of pictures hung awry ceased; for there, in a darkened corner of the room, I traced the rigid outlines of a human figure concealed beneath a sheet.

“You brought these to put round the corpse?” Mrs. Blake questioned, suddenly bringing me back from my startled reverie.

“Yes, if you would care for them.”

She lifted them out of the basket with a tenderness that surprised me, and placed them in water; she sat looking at them intently.

“Do you admire flowers?” I asked.

“Oh, yes; but they’re useless things, I s’pose. No good once they’re wilted.”

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“But they are perfect while they last.”

“Yes, and I allus feels sorry for the poor things, when I see ’em put round a corpse and buried in the ground; may be they have more feeling than we allow for.”

She spoke so sadly, I felt my eyes moisten; but whether it was out of pity for the flowers, the poor dead woman lying opposite, or my friend Mrs. Blake, who seemed strangely subdued, I could not tell.

“She was gone when I got here,” she said, nodding her head at the corpse. “Dan’el’s terrible cut up; it minds me so of the time we lost our first baby. I had to do everything then and I’ve got to do the same now.”

“I presume she was a very good wife.”

“I don’t know. Men generally frets hardest after the uselessest ones. I s’pose it’s because they’re easy-going and good-natured; but laws, I mustn’t be hard. Mother-in-laws don’t see with their children’s eyes. I often think, in some ways, ’twould be best for one generation to die off afore the next takes their place. It’s a mercy we don’t live like they did in the first of Bible times. For poor women folk’s life ain’t much after fifty any way, specially if they’re depending on their children. Hard work, shoved in a corner, and the bite you eat begrudged you.”

“Surely you don’t speak from experience,” I gasped, quite horrified.

“Me? Oh, no. I’ve managed better’n most in my way of life. I help, instead of getting help. But I’m not thinking of myself all the time. I see other women’s hardships, and pity ’em too.”

She turned the conversation abruptly by asking:

“Would you like to see the corpse?”

I certainly wished to see almost anything on earth rather than that; but, lest I should be offending the proprieties, I followed her and stood beside the still, outstretched form. She turned down the sheet when, for an instant, my head swam; and then I shut firmly my eyes and stood until I concluded the ghastly spectacle was hidden behind the sheet. Mrs. Blake’s voice caused me to open my eyes with a start.

“Be you faint?”

I crossed the room directly, and sat down before I replied.

“Certainly not; but the sight was a painful one.”

“I know there’s a sight of difference in corpses. Perfessors of religion make the peacefullest.”

“Was she not one?”

“Well, no; and she was took so bad she hadn’t time to perfess. Beside Dan’el tells me she suffered uncommon till the very last breath, that makes her look more distressin’ than she would.”

“Is he a professor?”

“No, my family didn’t seem to lean that way. But my! they was a sight better’n some that did let on they was very good.”

“He will become a Christian now, surely.”

“Tain’t likely. One soon forgets the feelins death leaves, and then we all look for a quiet spell afore we die.” I felt as if skeleton fingers were clutching at my vitals; and altogether terrified I rose to go.

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“The funeral will be to-morrow at two o’clock; perhaps you wouldn’t mind coming?”

“If you would like me to attend, I will do so.”

“I don’t know why it is, but seems to me it would be a comfort to have you. Quality always could touch my heart better’n my own kind.”

“You may be reckoned among that class in the next world.”

She stood in the doorway, her eyes turned wistfully towards the setting sun. “I hain’t thought much about that world. I know it’s a mistake to live as I’ve done.”

I wished so much I could recommend her to a better way of life; but remembering that I too was living only for this world, I could say nothing.

Pressing her hand gently I turned to leave, when I saw Esmerelda coming out of the door after me.

The rigid form I had looked at and Mrs. Blake’s words had softened my heart; so I tried once more to chat pleasantly with my escort; but probably she had not got the same lesson as I, for she put on as many airs as before. When I met Mrs. Flaxman I inquired what Esmerelda’s position was in the household. To my astonishment she said:

“She is the chambermaid.”

“But is she a lady?”

“Every one that can dress becomingly claims that title with us; I presume Esmerelda with the rest.”

“But her mother?” I left the sentence unfinished.

“Lives on Mill Road and takes in washing.”

“Don’t you think it is wiser to keep servants in their proper place as they do in Europe? One is not in danger there of mistaking maid for mistress.”

“Ah, that is a problem for wiser heads than ours to solve. Each system has its grievances; if human nature had not suffered so severely from the original transgression I should favor the American plan.”

“But it has fallen, and requires generations of training to fit one for such assumption of dignity.”

“Even so, we come on debatable ground. Where do you find longer lines of trained generations than in those Royal families that cost you so much to support, and what do many of them amount to? How many of them would it take to make one Lincoln? He was a peasant’s son, as they reckon rank.”

“But there are not many Lincolns; and I fear we can find a good many Esmereldas.”

“She is a very good chambermaid. What fault do you find with her?”

I smiled, though utterly discomfited.

“A fault one cannot easily forgive. She impresses me with her own superiority, especially in the matter of dress.”

“Yes, our shop and servant girls are usually good artists in the matter of personal attire; but I usually find the really clever ones are the poorest dressers.”

“Is not that the case with others than they? Persons who have more enduring objects of contemplation than personal attire do not bestow enough time on how they shall robe themselves to excel in dressing artistically.”

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“I know that; but since Eve’s fig-leaf invention the matter of dress has been an absorbing one for nearly every generation.”

“In the main; but there have been beautiful exceptions all down the long stream of the ages. I met some literary women the last time I was visiting in England, and their minds seemed so far superior to their bodies, or the clothes they wore, that ever since I have been ashamed of myself when I get particularly interested in what I am to wear.”

“You are young, my child, to begin to philosophize on the matter of clothes. You have read Sartor Resartus?”

“Oh, yes, and I want to be something better than a mere biped without feathers.”

“To want is the first step toward the accomplishment. I think you will suit Mr. Winthrop after he gets to know you, if ever he does,” she added, after a pause.

CHAPTER IV.

The funeral.

The next morning I went in search of Mrs. Flaxman. I found her busy superintending, along with the housekeeper, some extensive pickling and preserving operations. I hesitated at first in making my request; I wanted her to accompany me to the funeral.

“I promised Mrs. Blake to go to her daughter’s funeral to-day, and I should so much like to have you go with me,” I said.

“If you would like my company, your liking shall be gratified, my dear.”

“But you looked tired, and it is such a hot day.”

“I shall want folk to come and get me safely planted away some day, and we can take the carriage. Thomas will be glad to go; at least he always wants to attend funerals. Such persons usually are fond of the mild excitement attendant on such gatherings.”

I went in search of Thomas, who was with coachman and gardener, having a lad to assist him in both occupations. He assured me that work was very pressing, and it would be at considerable personal sacrifice if he went. The stable boy, a red-haired, keen-faced youth standing by, gave a quizzical look, which I interpreted as meaning that Thomas wished to conceal the fact that he was very glad indeed to go to Mrs. Daniel Blake’s funeral. At the appointed hour I found myself in a carriage drawn by a pair of horses fully as handsome, but much more sedate than Faery. “Why, this is positively luxurious,” I exclaimed, leaning back in the very comfortable carriage. Mrs. Flaxman smiled serenely.

“My dear, it is a luxury you may every day enjoy. I am not inclined for carriage exercise—a walk has greater charm for me save when I am tired.”

“If you had walked all your life—only enjoying a carriage at brief intervals during the holidays, you would enjoy this drive, I am sure.”

“Your life is not a very long affair, my child. At your age, no doubt, I thought as you now do. I believe God intended that youth and age should see this world through different eyes.”

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Mrs. Flaxman, I was finding, had a way of setting me thinking about serious things, and yet the thoughts were mainly pleasant ones. She was different from any one I ever knew. I found her presence so restful. I had the impression that some time in her life she had encountered storms, but the mastery had been gained; and now she had drifted into a peaceful harbor. Looking back now over longer stretches of years and experiences than I then had, I can recall a few other persons who impressed me in a similar fashion. But they were rare and beautiful exceptions to the scores, and even hundreds of average human folk whom I have known.

After we had driven some distance, Thomas turned to inquire if we were going to the grave.

“It is a shady drive good part of the way; trees on one side and the water’s edge bordering the other. Perhaps we might as well go.”

“They’d take it very kind of you, ma’am, I am sure,” Thomas responded, although her remarks were addressed to me. Evidently he was very willing to exercise the horses, notwithstanding his press of work.

We sat in the carriage at the door of Daniel’s cottage. The house seemed full, and quite a crowd were standing outside.

“They have shown the poor thing a good deal of respect,” Mrs. Flaxman whispered to me as she glanced at the numerous assemblage.

Suddenly, on the hush that seemed to enfold everything, there broke weird, discordant singing—women’s voices sounding high and piercing, the men’s deeper and more melodious. The hymn they sang was long, and the air very plaintive, bringing tears to my eyes, and causing the strange, oppressed feeling of the preceding day to return. When the singing ceased I noticed the men removing their hats, and a moment after a stentorian voice speaking loudly. I glanced around amazed, but Mrs. Flaxman noticing my surprise, whispered, “It is prayer.”

If the singing made me nervous the prayer intensified the feeling. In the hot, midsummer air, so still the leaves scarce rippled on the trees, I could, after a few seconds, distinguish every word the man uttered. Accustomed to the decorous prayer of the German pastors our teachers had taken us to hear, this impetuous prayer to the Deity awed me. He talked with the invisible Jehovah as if they two were long tried friends, between whom there was such perfect trust; whatever the man asked the God would bestow. First there was intercession, pleading for forgiveness for past offences, and for restraining grace for future needs. Afterward he spoke of Death, the common inheritance of each of us, and the pain his entrance had caused in this home, and then followed thanksgiving that through Christ we could conquer even Death himself. I shall

never forget the triumphant ring in that man's voice as he passed on to the joy of those who, trampling on Death, have passed safely within the light of God.

"If one of the old masters had heard that man's prayer to-day, he would have set it to some grand music. It reminds me of a *Te Deum* or oratoria," I said to Mrs. Flaxman, when the benediction was pronounced. The tears were in her eyes, but her face was shining as if some inner light were irradiating it.

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“Did you ever hear so impetuous a prayer?” I asked.

She answered my question by asking another:

“Did you not like it?”

“I think it frightened me. The clergyman seemed to be talking to some one right beside him.”

“Is not all prayer that—talking, pleading with a God nigh at hand?”

I did not reply. My eyes were fastened on the crowd now issuing from the cottage door; the coffin, carried by men, came first, the people pressing hurriedly after—among them one whom I instinctively felt to be the clergyman—a thick-set man with hair turning white, and a most noble, benignant face. As the procession formed he took his place at the head; Daniel and his mother climbing into a wagon directly behind the hearse; the former looked utterly broken down, as if the light of his eyes had verily been quenched.

The procession then moved slowly along, and in a short time we turned out of the Mill Road, and into a beautiful shady street along the water’s edge. I watched the sunlight on the shimmering waters, and far across, where one of the wooded headlands looked down into the sea, the green trees made such a picture on the water that, in watching this perfect bit of landscape, I found myself forgetting the solemn occasion, and the sorrowing heart of the solitary mourner, while I planned to come there the very next day with my sketch book, and secure this gem to send to my favorite teacher as a specimen of my new surroundings. And then fancy got painting her own pictures as to what my work in this new life with its greatly altered meaning should be, and before we had reached the grave’s edge I had mapped out my ongoings for a long stretch of the future, and that in such eager, worldly fashion that I almost forgot that at the end of all this bright-hued future there lay for me, as well as for Daniel Blake’s wife, an open grave. My busy thoughts were recalled by hearing the penetrating voice of the preacher saying “dust to dust, ashes to ashes,” with the remainder of the beautiful formula used by many of the churches in planting the human germ. A glance around revealed Daniel Blake leaning in the very abandonment of grief on a tombstone at the grave’s side, and looking down into the coffin that was rapidly disappearing under the shovelfuls of clay. A keen sense of my own heartlessness in feeling so happy within touch of such woe came over me, while a vague wonder seized me, if some other careless-hearted creatures might not be planning their joys some day in presence of my breaking heart.

CHAPTER V.

A *new accomplishment learned*.

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I was rapidly attaining the comfortable home feeling at Oaklands, which makes life in castle or hut a rapture. There were so many sources of enjoyment open to me. I had a more than usual love for painting, and had for years prosecuted the art more from love than duty. My last teacher, an old German Professor, exacting and very thorough, had been as particular with my instruction as if my bread depended on my proficiency. I thanked him now in my heart when I found myself shut out from other opportunities for improvement than what, unaided, I could secure. There were special bits of landscape I loved to sketch over and over again; these I would take to Mrs. Flaxman, or Reynolds, the housekeeper, to see if they could recognize the original of my drawing; but even Samuel, the stable-boy, could name the spot at sight. His joy was unbounded, but scarcely excelled my own when I succeeded in making a water-color sketch of himself, the hair a shade or two less flame-colored than was natural, and which even Hubert pronounced a very fair likeness. Then in the large, stately drawing-room, some of whose furnishing dated back a century or more, stood a fine, grand piano. Here I studied over again my school lessons, or tried new ventures from some of the masters. What dreams I had in that dim room in the pauses of my music; peopling that place again with the vanished ones who had loved and suffered there my own dead parents among the rest, whose faces looked down at me, I thought tenderly, from the walls where their portraits hung in heavy carved frames, of a fashion a generation old. There was about my mother's face a haunting expression, as of a well known face which long afterward looked out at me one day from my own reflection in the mirror and then, to my joy, I discovered I was like her in feature and expression. In the library too, whose key Mr. Winthrop had left with Mrs. Flaxman for my use, I found an unexplored wonderland. My literature had chiefly consisted of the text book variety, and if I had possessed wider range, my time was so fully occupied with lessons I could not have availed myself of the privilege; but now, with what relish I went from shelf to shelf, dipping into a book here and another there, taking by turns poetry, history, fiction, and biography, Shakespeare and Milton had so often perplexed me in Grammar and analysis, that I left them for the most part severely alone; but there were others, fresh and new to me as a June morning, and quite as refreshing: Hubert used sometimes to join me, but we generally disagreed. I had little patience with his practical criticisms of my choicest readings, while he assured me my enthusiasm over my favorite authors was a clear waste of sentiment. Mrs. Flaxman was, in addition to all this, adding to my fund of knowledge the very useful one of needlework, and was getting me interested not only in the mysteries of plain sewing, but brought some of her carefully hoarded tapestries for me to

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imitate—beautiful Scriptural scenes that sent me to the Bible with a critical interest to see if the designs were in harmony with its spirit. Then too I used to spend happy hours exploring garden, field and forest, for Oaklands embraced a wide area, making acquaintance with the gentle Alderneys, and Jerseys, who brought us so generously their daily offering, as well as the many other meek, dumb creatures whom I was getting to care for with a quite human interest. The seashore too had its constantly renewed fascinations which drew me there, to watch its tireless ebb and flow, or the busy craft disappearing out of sight towards their many havens around the earth. Stories I had for the seashore, and others for the woodland and gardens which I carried on in long chapters, day after day, until sorrowfully I came to the end, as we must always do to everything in this world.

My heroes and heroines were all singularly busy people, carrying on their loves and intrigues amid restless activities, and living in the main to help others in the way of life rather than, like myself, living to themselves alone. Altogether I did not find a moment of my sixteen hours of working life each day any too long, and opened my eyes on each morning's light as if it were a fresh creation.

Then, in addition to all these, there were solemn, stately tea drinkings among the upper ten of Cavendish society, but usually I found them a task—the music was poor, the conversation almost wholly confined to local affairs, and the only refection of a first-class nature was the food provided. Cavendish ladies were notable housewives, and could converse eloquently on pickling, preserving, baking and the many details of domestic economy, while as regarded the fashions, I verily believe they could have enlightened Worth himself on some important particulars. I used to feel sadly out of place, and sat very often silent and constrained, thinking of my dearer, and more satisfying companionships of books, and sea, and flowers, and the fair face of nature generally, and wondering if I could ever get, like them, absorbed in such humble things, getting for instance my pickles nicely greened, and of a proper degree of crispness, and my preserves, and jellies prepared with equal perfection for diseased and fastidious palates. "Why can't they talk of their minds, and the food these must relish, and assimilate, instead of all the time being devoted to the body; how it must be fed and clothed?" I asked, with perhaps too evident contempt, of Mrs. Flaxman, one evening as we drove home under the midnight stars, after one of these entertainments.

"My child, it is natural that people should talk on subjects that most interest them. Not every one has vision clear enough to penetrate beyond the tangible and visible."

"Then, in what are the Cavendish aristocracy better than Mrs. Blake, and that class? Even she talks sometimes to me about God and the soul. She says she and Daniel think a great deal about these of late."

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“God only knows; they may be far better in His sight than any of us,” Mrs. Flaxman said, wearily.

“Not any better than you, dear friend,” I said, clasping the little, thin hand in mine.

“Yes, better, if they are doing more for others than I, sacrificing their own ease and pleasure, which, alas, I am not doing.”

“How can you say that, when you are making home, and me so happy? I want to grow to be just such a woman as you.”

“Alas, child, you must take a higher ideal than I am to pattern after, if your life is to be a success.”

“Mrs. Blake tells me of a good man living on the Mill Road, who is blind and thinks a great deal. He says none of us can tell what our lives seem like to the angels, and that many a one will get an overwhelming surprise after death; some who think they are no good in the world, mere cumberers of the ground, will find such blessed surprises as they wander through the Heavenly places.”

“That is very comforting, dear, if we could only hope to be among those meek ones.”

“He told Mrs. Blake she might be one of God’s blessed ones if she wished—that any sincere soul was welcomed by Him.”

“Surely you did not need to go to Mrs. Blake to learn that?”

I was silent, perhaps ashamed for Mrs. Flaxman to know how very dense my ignorance was respecting these mysteries of our holy religion. As the weeks went by my friendship for Mrs. Blake strengthened. I kept her little cottage brightened with the old-fashioned blossoms that she loved best. “They mind me so of when I was a child, and the whole world seemed in summer time like a great garden. We lived deep in the country, just a little strip of ground brought in from the woods, and all round our little log house was the green trees,” she said one day, the pleasant reflective look that I liked to see coming into her kind, strong face. I used to sit and listen to her homely, uncultivated speech, and wonder why I liked her so much better than my natural associates. She was so real, I could not imagine her trying to appear other than she was. Some way she seemed to take me back to elementary things, like the memories of childhood or the reading of the Book of Genesis. Then she had so changed Daniel’s cottage—newly papered, whitewashed and thoroughly cleansed with soap and water, it seemed one of the cosiest, homeliest places I ever saw. I only went in the afternoons, and her housework then was always done; but she was never idle. I used to watch her knitting stockings of all sizes with silent curiosity; but one day I asked who a tiny pair of

scarlet ones was for. “Mrs. Larkum’s baby. The poor things are in desperate trouble,” she replied.

“But do you knit for other folks?”

“Yes, fur some. Them I jest finished is fur one of the Chisties’ down the lane. Any size from one to ten fits there.”

“Are they able to pay you?” I ventured to inquire.

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“I don’t ginerally knit for folks as can pay. It’s a pity for little feet to go bare because the mother was thriftless or overworked.”

I watched the busy fingers a little sadly, comparing them with my own daintily gloved hands, that had never done anything more useful than to hold a text book, or sketch, or practice on the ivory keys, while those other hands often tired, calloused with hard usage, had been working unselfishly through the years for others.

“I wish you would teach me to knit,” I said one day, seized with a sudden inspiration.

“’Twould be a waste of your time. Folks like you don’t wear home-knit stockings.”

“Oh, yes they do. Pretty silken hose is quite the fashion; but I hire mine knitted.”

“Then what makes you want to learn?”

“Do you not think it is my duty to work for the poor, and helpless as well as yours?”

“I won’t allow but what it is; but laws! rich folk can’t pity the poor, no more’n a person that’s never been sick, or had the tooth-ache, can pity one who has.”

“The stockings would be just as warm, though, as if I knew all about their sorrows.”

“I reckon they’d feel better on some feet if they know’d your white hands knit ’em.”

“If there would be any added pleasure to the warmth of the socks then you will surely teach me.”

“I’ll be proud to do it; but child, I’m afeard you are making me think too much of you. Byem-bye when you get interested in other things, you won’t care to set in my kitchen, and listen to an old-fashioned body like me, droning away like a bee in a bottle.”

“Do you think it is necessary to trouble about something that may never come to pass? I think I shall always enjoy hearing you talk. Listening to you seems like watching the old-fashioned flowers nodding their heads in the drowsy summer air. I like the rare flowers, too, with long names and aristocratic faces; but I don’t think I shall ever like them so well as to forget the happy fancies their humble relations bring.”

“Thank you, dearie. I guess you’ll allays keep a warm place in your heart for the old-fashioned folks as well as the posies.”

“Now that we have that matter settled, suppose I begin the knitting,” I said, without any further attempt at convincing Mrs. Blake of my unalterable regard.

She got me the yarn and needles and I straightway proceeded to master another of the domestic sciences. I was soon able to turn the seam, and knit plain; but was forced to stop very often to admire my own handicraft. However, I got on so readily that she allowed I could undertake a child's sock. I wanted it to look pretty as well as to be comfortable, and not fancying Mrs. Blake's homespun yarn, I started out to the store to get some better suited to my liking.

When I returned, Mrs. Blake exclaimed at the size of my bundle, assuring me that it would supply me with work for months.

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“I’m surprised you wan’t ashamed to carry such a big parcel,” she said admiringly.

“It did not occur to me to be ashamed.”

“One never knows who they may meet though.”

“It was nothing to be ashamed of.”

“I s’pose not; but quality has such queer notions.”

“I do not wish to be quality if that is the case; I want to be a sensible woman, and a useful one,” I said, as I proceeded to wind my yarn from Mrs. Blake’s outstretched arms. In a short time I had the pleasure of seeing a pretty little sock evolving itself out of the long strand of yarn. Mrs. Blake finding me anxious to be helpful to her poor neighbors, began unfolding histories from time to time, as I sat in her tidy kitchen, that to me seemed to rise to the dignity of tragedies. Sometimes I begged to accompany her to these sorrowful homes. The patience under overwhelming sorrow that I saw at times, gave me new glimpses into the possibilities of human endurance, and my sympathies were so wrought upon, I set about trying to earn money myself to help alleviate their wants, while a new field of work stretched out before me in bewildering perspective; and sometimes I wished I too had a hundred hands, like a second Briareus, that I might manufacture garments for half-clad women and children.

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. Winthrop.

That evening, my first knitting lesson ended, on returning to Oaklands a surprise awaited me. As I was walking briskly up the avenue towards the house I met Hubert with Faery coming to bring me home.

“Mr. Winthrop has come, and is inquiring very particularly where you are in hiding, and I believe my poor mother is afraid of telling him an untruth, for she hurried me off very unceremoniously after you,” Hubert said, as he reined up Faery for a moment’s conversation.

“You need have no fears for her; she would go to the stake rather than tell a lie.”

“Or betray a friend,” Hubert said, with a meaning smile. “Remember Mr. Winthrop is very fastidious about his associates. Your friend Mrs. Blake, in his eyes, has only a bare right to exist; to presume on his friendship, or that of his ward, would be an unpardonable sin.”

“I must hasten to your mother’s relief,” I said, with a little scoffing laugh. I paid very little heed just then to Hubert’s remarks—later I found he had not greatly overstated my guardian’s exclusiveness. Wishing to gain my room and make some additions to my toilet before meeting Mr. Winthrop, I chose a side entrance, taking a circuitous path through the shrubbery, if possible to reach the house unseen.

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The door opened into a conservatory, and I had just slipped in stealthily when I found myself face to face with a gentleman whom I knew on the instant was my guardian. There was such an air of proprietorship about him, as he stood calmly surveying nature's beautiful products in leaf and bud and blossom. He glanced down at me—-possibly taking me at first for one of the maids—then looking more keenly he bowed rather distantly. I returned the salutation quite as coldly, and was making good my flight when his voice arrested my steps. "Pardon me," he said, in a finely modulated and very musical voice, "is this not Miss Selwyn?" I turned and bowing said, "My guardian, I think."

"I am glad we were able to recognize each other." I looked into his face. The smile was very winning that greeted me, otherwise I thought the face, though handsome, and unusually noble looking, was cold, and a trifle hard in expression.

"I am glad to welcome you to Oaklands, though late in being able to do so. I hope you have not found it too dull?"

"Oh no, indeed—there is so much to interest one here after city life, I am glad at each new day that comes."

He looked surprised at my remark, and instantly I bethought myself of the character for fastidiousness which Hubert had given him, and resolved to be less impulsive in expressing my feelings.

"You must make society for yourself then in other than the human element. I cannot think any one could rejoice, on waking in the morning, merely to renew intercourse with our Cavendish neighbors."

I looked up eagerly—"Then you don't care for them, either?"

"Ah, I see it is not from your own species you draw satisfaction."

"But you have not answered my question."

There was a gleam of humor swept over the face I was already finding so hard to read.

"I am not well enough versed in Cavendish society to give a just opinion—probably you have already drank more cups of tea with your friends than I have done in ten years. Let me hear your verdict."

"Our Deportment Professor assured us it was exceedingly bad form to discuss one's acquaintance—you will please excuse me."

I was already getting afraid of my guardian. But, from childhood, there was a spice of fearlessness in my composition that manifested itself even when I was most frightened.

Again I glanced into his face—he was regarding me with a peculiar intentness, as if I were some new plant brought into the conservatory from an unknown region, and he was trying to classify me. I could see no trace of warm, human interest in his gaze.

“That was a rather mutinous remark to bestow so soon upon your guardian,” he said, in the same even voice.

“I am very sorry,” I murmured, now thoroughly ashamed of myself.

“We will make a truce not again to discuss our acquaintances; but that interesting subject eliminated from conversation, there would be a dearth left with a goodly number of our species.”

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“I do not care for the tea parties here, Mr. Winthrop. I am not interested in the things they talk about.” I said, with a sudden burst of confidence.

“You have broken our compact already. A woman cannot hold to a bargain, I am informed.”

“I had not promised,” I said, proudly.

“Then I am to infer you are an exception, and would hold to your promises, no matter how binding.”

“I am the daughter of a man; possibly I may have inherited some noble, manly properties.” My temper was getting ruffled.

“Yes, Nature plays some curious freaks occasionally,” he said in a reflective way, as if we were discussing some scientific subject.

“You will please excuse me. Dinner will be announced shortly, and I must remove my wraps,” I said, very politely.

He bowed, and I gladly escaped to my own room, feeling more startled than pleased at my first interview with Mr. Winthrop.

The dinner bell rang, and I hastened down to be in my place at the table before Mr. Winthrop entered. I opened the door of the pretty breakfast parlor where dinner had been served ever since I came to Oaklands, but the room was silent and empty.

I turned, not very gladly to the great dining-room, which I had somehow fancied was only used on rare occasions. Opening the door I saw the table shining with silver and glass, while Mrs. Flaxman stood surveying the arrangements with an anxious face. “Shall we always dine here?” I asked anxiously.

“Always when Mr. Winthrop is at home; our informal dinners in the cosy breakfast-room are a thing of the past.”

“But this seems so formal and grand I shall never enjoy your delicious dishes any more, with Hubert adding to their piquancy with his sarcasms, and witticisms.”

“Oh, yes, dear, you will; one gets used to everything in this world, even to planning every day for several courses at dinner,” she said with a sigh.

“I wonder why it is necessary to go to so much trouble just for something to eat, when it’s all over in a half hour or so, and not any more nutritious than food plainly prepared?”

“The Winthrops have always maintained a well-equipped table. Our Mr. Winthrop would look amazed if we set him down to one of our informal dinners.”

“I think he would enjoy them if he once tried them,” I said, as I slipped into the place Mrs. Flaxman appointed. A few seconds after Mr. Winthrop entered, followed immediately by Hubert who was quite metamorphosed from the gay, scoffing youth into a steady-paced young man. As the dinner progressed I no doubt looked my surprise at the change; but a meaning glance at Mr. Winthrop was Hubert’s mute reply.

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While Mr. Winthrop's attention was taken up with his dinner, I took the opportunity of studying more closely this man to whom my dead father had committed so completely the interests and belongings of his only child. The scrutiny was, in some respects, not greatly reassuring. I had noticed as we stood near each other in the conservatory that he was a large man, tall, broad-shouldered and muscular. The face, though handsome, had a cold, stern look that I felt could look at me pitilessly if I incurred his displeasure. But there was also an expression of high, intellectual power; an absorbed, self-contained look that seemed to set him apart from others as one who could live independently, if necessary, of the society of his fellow men. I should like to be his friend, was my thought, as finding that Hubert was watching me, I turned my attention to my neglected dinner. Mrs. Flaxman in her gentle fashion kept the conversation from utterly flagging, although we none of us gave her much help. Unasked she gave a pleasant account of the happenings at Oaklands, the ongoings of his human and dumb dependents; how the Alderneys at her suggestion had been transferred to richer pasturage, and the consequent increase in cream; the immense crop of fruit and vegetables, so much more than they could possibly require, and would it be best to sell the overplus?

"Why not give it to the poor?" I said, eagerly.

"Would that pay, do you think?" Mr. Winthrop inquired, giving me at the same time a curiously intent look.

"The poor would thank you."

"How do you know there are any?"

"I have met a good many myself. I dare say there are others I know nothing about."

He turned a keen look at Mrs. Flaxman; I saw her face flush; probably he noticed it as well as I. Then he said, quite gravely:—

"You shall have all the surplus for your needy acquaintances; only you must superintend the distribution. I firmly believe in giving philanthropists their share of the labor."

The color flamed into my face, I could hardly repress the retort:—"Why do you spoil the grace of your gift so ungraciously?" but I left the words unsaid until he left the room, when I relieved my feelings much to Hubert's amusement, who brightened greatly once the door was closed upon him and we were alone.

"I could like that man better than any one I know if he hadn't such a beastly way of conferring favors. Once I get earning money I shall pay him every cent that I have cost him," Hubert said vindictively.

"Including Faery and the choice cigars?" his mother asked, with a sad little smile.

Hubert flushed. “What are they to one of his means?”

“But if you pay him some day it will take you so much longer to pay for them,” I said, surprised he had not remembered this.

“I can’t part with Faery. Youth is such a beggarly short affair, if one can’t have pleasure then, when will they get it?”

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“I should think it was high-priced pleasure if I had to take it on those terms.”

“You have no idea what prices men are willing to pay for what they desire. Faery even with my means would seem a mere bagatelle to most young fellows of my set.”

“I would really like to know what your means are,” his mother said, playfully.

“Principally my profession, when I get it; capital health, and a world full of work to be done by some one. I shall stand as good a chance as any one to get my share of the world’s rewards for good work accomplished.”

“Bravo, Mr. Hubert. I only wish I was a boy so I might go to work too,” I cried.

“Hush, the master will hear you. I told you he was fastidious about ladies’ deportment. Even the housemaids and cook catch the infection. I certainly pity his poor ward.”

“Please do not waste pity on me; if Mr. Winthrop is not nice, I shall go to Boston or New York and teach German in some boarding-school.”

A low, long whistle was his only reply.

“Hubert, have you forgotten yourself? Mr. Winthrop will think we have got demoralized.”

“Forgive me, mother mine, but Miss Selwyn astounded me. Fancy her working for her bread.”

“And liberty,” I said, merrily.

“You have got an instalment of that already, permission to dispense the fruit and vegetables. The work has been given as a punishment for making acquaintance with common people.”

“That will be a pleasure; see what I am already doing for some of them.” I took my forgotten knitting work from my pocket.

“I deeply regret I must so soon leave Oaklands. I really think you will make things livelier here than they have been since Mr. Winthrop was a lad. Just for one moment, mother, try to imagine his disgust when he finds his high-bred ward knitting socks for Dan Blake’s little monkeys.”

“Dan Blake has no children, Hubert,” his mother said, gravely; “and I am not going to trouble myself about what may never happen. It is not necessary for Mr. Winthrop to know how his ward spends her spare time and pocket money.”

“But he would as soon think of exchanging civilities with his own dumb animals as with those folk on the Mill Road; and, yet, right under his nose these little arrangements getting manufactured! It is carrying the war into the enemy’s camp with a vengeance.”

“Is that a specimen of your college conversation, Hubert? If so, you might better remain at Oaklands.”

“Surely, mother; you don’t expect us to talk like a sewing society or select gathering of maiden ladies,” Hubert said with some disgust. “Fancy a lot of young fellows picking and choosing their words as if they were a company of prigs.”

“If every word we utter continues to vibrate in the air until the final wreck of matter, as some scientists suppose, surely we can’t be too careful of our words, my son.”

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“If we believe all the nonsense those chaps who are continually meddling with nature’s secrets tell us, we should sit with shut lips and folded hands lest we would destroy the equilibrium of the universe, or our own destiny. There is any quantity of bosh let loose on poor, long-suffering humanity, and labeled Science.”

“That comes with bad grace from an embryo scholar. If I were you I would throw education ‘to the dogs’ and take things on trust like Thomas, or the Mill Road people,” I said, jestingly.

“I want to know for myself; and so not get cheated by every crank who airs his theories.”

“But, Hubert, to come back to the original dispute, if the atmosphere does not hold our every foolish or necessary word, they are permanently recorded in another place by a pen that never writes falsely, or misses a single sentence. How many pages have you got written there, I wonder, that if it were possible you would gladly obliterate with your heart’s blood one day.”

“Mother, you are worse than the scientists; at least more terrifying. Do you know, Miss Selwyn, when I was a little chap she had me persuaded to be a missionary to Greenland, or the South Pole. I had made up my mind to choose the very worst possible place, so as to have all the greater reward.”

“What has changed your mind?”

“Natural development, I expect. Mother is a very sweet and gentle woman, but I am sorry to say she is a crank, if there was ever one.”

“Why, Hubert, you amaze me,” I said, smiling. “I thought she was as near perfection as any one I ever knew. Excuse me expressing myself so openly,” I said, bowing to Mrs. Flaxman; “but won’t you tell me what her tendency to insanity is; for I believe cranks are a species of madmen, if I rightly understand what the word implies.”

“Over religiosity. Why, really, she used to make me long for martyrdom when I was a child.”

“I did not think a person could so soon outgrow early piety,” I said, dryly.

Hubert colored and said very little more about his mother’s early lessons after that to me; but I could see that his strange indifference respecting those subjects she held as most important of anything within reach of humanity pained her deeply.

CHAPTER VII.

Examination.

Directly Mr. Winthrop had attended to matters at once claiming his attention on his return, he began to investigate my daily avocations. I showed him the work already accomplished, so far as it could be seen—the knitting certainly excepted. My sketches in water colors and oils I brought out rather timidly for his inspection. Mrs. Flaxman had told me how severe he was in his criticisms on careless work, and possibly all through my painting the thought what he might say of what I was doing had a strong influence on the quality of my work. In some respects, no doubt, it helped me to paint

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more carefully and copy more closely from nature; but, on the other hand, imagination and freedom were restrained; and it is possible I might have better satisfied him with what I had accomplished if I had never once thought about his opinion as I worked. As I carried them into the library that bright early autumn morning, I felt a shrinking at submitting my pictures, in their imperfection, to unsympathetic eyes, much as a mother might feel at bringing a deformed child to a baby show; but I had also a measure of satisfaction, since I could prove to my guardian that I had not been idle, when I spread before him copies, more or less defective, of views from his own grounds. The servants had watched them grow under my pencil and brush with an interest almost equalling my own; and it was amusing the eagerness which even Thomas evinced to be painted into a picture, spoiling it very much, to my mind, by insisting on having on his Sunday clothes.

Mr. Winthrop glanced at them with some surprise as he saw the goodly heap; then he said: "I will only look to-day at what you have done since coming here. Mrs. Flaxman tells me you have accomplished a good expenditure of paint."

"I have only brought those, sir, I did not suppose you cared to examine my school work."

"Some other time I may do so; but do you say all these have been done since you came here?" He picked one up, not noticing apparently my reply, and recognizing the view, instantly his face brightened.

"Ah, you have shown taste in this selection; it is one of my favorite views. I am glad you prefer nature to mere copying from another's work which is like accepting other men's ideas, when one is capable of originating them of one's own." He looked at it closely and for some time in silence, then with no further word of praise he criticised it mercilessly, while he pointed out fault after fault. I could only acquiesce in the correctness of his criticisms, and only wondered I should have been so blind as to permit such glaring faults to creep into my work. Of the many scores of drawing and painting lessons I had previously taken, not any twelve of them, to say the least, had widened my knowledge of art as this hour spent with my guardian over that first picture had done. I looked at him with a provoked sort of admiration, surprised that one who knew so well how nature should be imitated, did not, himself, attempt the task, and angry both with him and myself that I was being subjected to such humiliation, while I listened to him as he convinced me the picture I thought so good was a mere daub. I was wise enough, and proud enough too, not to make any sign that I was undergoing torture, and with stoical calmness permitted him, without a single remonstrance, to examine every picture there, even the one containing Thomas in his Sunday suit, as he stood surveying with idealized face, a superb patch of cabbages.

“Fancy has run riot with you there entirely; if the gardener were surveying his sweetheart in the church choir he might have some such seraphic expression, but it is utterly thrown away on those vegetables; his face and his broadcloth coat are in perfect harmony,” Mr. Winthrop said, with even voice, as he held aloft the picture that all the other members of his household had so greatly admired.

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“You think, then, the time spent in these has been quite wasted?” I tried to say calmly.

“A genuine artist, no doubt, would say without a moment’s hesitation that the paint was thrown away. As for the time, he would probably say a young girl’s time was of little consequence in any case. I am not an artist, and do not value paint at a high figure; so I most decidedly affirm that you made an excellent use of the paint. Labor conscientiously spent in decorating a barn door is well employed. The door may not be much the better, but the person who tries to improve its appearance with painstaking care is benefited.”

“Then I may conscientiously continue decorating canvas, or at least trying to do so.”

“I should certainly desire and advise you to do so; but instead of covering so many, if you would take time and talent in elaborating one picture, I would be better pleased.”

He laid the pictures to one side. “We will continue this study more exhaustingly in the future; to-day I want to speak of other things. You have made use of my library, Mrs. Flaxman also informs me. Will you please tell me what books you have been reading?”

I went to the shelves and took down the books I had spent most time over, a good many were novels; and on these I felt certain I could pass a fairly good examination, since I had read some of them with absorbed interest; novels of all kinds were, for the most part, forbidden mental food at school, and therefore, when opportunity offered, I dipped into them with the keener avidity. But my mind was healthy enough to crave more solid food than fiction alone, and I was glad to be able to hand my guardian a volume or two of Carlyle’s Frederick, Froude’s Caesar, Motley’s Rise of the Dutch Republic, and a couple of volumes of Bancroft’s History of the United States.

“Have you read all these since you came to Oaklands?” he asked, with evident surprise.

“I skipped some of the dull passages; the ‘dry-as-dust’ parts of which I found a few even in Carlyle.”

“Could you stand an examination, think you, in each or any of them?”

“I am willing to try,” I said, seating myself on the opposite side of the table with folded hands, and possibly a martyrlike air of resignation.

“Since you are so willing we will take Froude’s Caesar to-day; let me hear you give a digest of the entire book.”

My eyes sparkled; for this was the last volume I had read, and the author had infused into my mind a strong leaven of his own hero-worship for the majestic Caesar. I was surprised at the ease with which I repeated chapter after chapter of those stirring

incidents, while with his stern, inscrutable face, my guardian turned the leaves to follow me in my rapid flight from tragedy to tragedy in those stormy times.

He laid the book down without comment, and, glancing at the remainder of the pile paused a moment, and then said: “I will defer the criticisms on these to some other day. Your memory as well as vocal organs will be fatigued.”

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I meanwhile resolved to consult those books again before the further examination should take place.

“You have practised every day on the piano in addition to your other work; may I ask how long a time you allowed yourself?”

“At least an hour, sometimes when it was wet or unpleasant out of doors I took longer time. Never more than three hours, I believe.”

“We will take an hour or two after dinner over your music, after this once a week, we will spend a short time in reviewing what you read.”

A new anxiety seized me at this promised ordeal. I fancied examinations and I had said good-bye forever when I left the school-room.

“I trust you will not think me severe if I insist on thoroughness in everything. I am wearied seeing so much good money and time wasted on young girls! With the majority of them, once they have left their teacher’s side, all their interest in further mental culture is at an end.”

“Some great writers say that our schooling is simply to train the mind to work, fitting it, so to speak, with necessary tools like a well-equipped mechanic.”

“But if the tools are never utilized, what good are they merely to lie and rust?”

“Who can affirm positively that they are never utilized? Even the shallowest boarding-school Miss may carry herself more gracefully in society than one of your usefulest women—Mrs. Blake, for instance.”

“How do you know anything about Mrs. Blake?” he asked abruptly.

“I met her on the train when I came here and she talked some time with me.”

“It is not usual for persons in your position to permit such liberties.”

“I thought in America all were reckoned equal.”

“You are not an American.”

“Shall I return then to Europe? I could always travel first-class, and so be safe from vulgar intrusion.”

“Until your majority your father decided that your home was to be here after you left school.”

“At what age do I attain my majority?” I asked eagerly.

“Are you tired of Oaklands?” His eyes were watching me intently.

“Never, until to day.” I faltered, exceedingly frightened, but forced to tell the truth.

He turned over the leaves of the Caesar for a few seconds, in silence, then he said in quite gentle tones:—

“You are tired; we will leave books for another day.”

I bowed, but dared not trust myself to speak lest I might reveal that my tears were struggling to find vent, and began gathering up my sketches. He took up a view of Oaklands over which I had lingered lovingly for a good many hours, adding what I fondly thought were perfecting touches and said:—

“I should like to keep this, if you will give it to me.”

My heart instantly grew lighter, so that I was able to say quite calmly that he was very welcome to it. This, however, was the only compliment he paid me for the work over which I had been expending so much time and effort during the past few months; but I had done the work much in the same fashion that the birds sing—from instinct.

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CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Larkum.

Hubert left for college before the time came around for the distribution of our ripened fruit, and vegetables, for which fact I was very glad. I knew the task was going to be no easy one, with Mr. Winthrop silently, and no doubt sarcastically, watching me; and Hubert's good humored raillery would in no wise lighten my cares.

Mrs. Flaxman counseled me as wisely as she knew, but Mrs. Blake was my greatest help in the matter. Mr. Winthrop had not discovered, or if he had, did not interfere with my continued friendship for that worthy woman; so in my present perplexities I came to her for advice and consolation.

She promised to notify all her poor acquaintances when they were to come for their share of our gifts; she assured me there was already considerable interest, as well as surprise, awakened by the expectation of such a gathering at Oaklands.

For several days I watched Thomas and Samuel storing away such vast quantities of fruit and vegetables, that I concluded we could safely stand siege for a good many months, but I ruefully determined there would be little remaining for me to distribute. But one bright morning, just in range with my own windows, I saw the gardener nailing up some wooden booths, and when completed, they began to pour in great basketfuls of all sorts of vegetables, and afterward in separate booths, apples, pears, and plums. I slipped out before Mr. Winthrop was astir and inquired of Thomas if these were for my Mill Road pensioners.

"Yes, ma'am, that they are; and did I ever think I'd live to see this day?"

"Why, Thomas, are you not willing to share your bountiful harvest with those who have none?"

"Indeed I am. It's that makes me so glad this morning. I had that good-for-nothing Sam up at four o'clock, helping me saw the boards to build them bins to put the garden sass in. He reckoned you'd a much sight better have been staying in them foreign parts than be giving decent folks such bother. I give him a clip on the ear that made him howl in earnest, I can tell you. I says to him, says I, 'Why, one would think you was one of the aristocracy yourself to hear you talk so indifferent like about the poor folk. There's Miss Selwyn, with full and plenty, and see how she works for them; you'd ought to be ashamed of yourself,' I says to him."

"But I hope you won't punish the poor fellow on my account again—won't you please give him a holiday soon, for getting up to work so early this morning?"

“I’ll see about it; but he gets holidays right along; he’s nothing but a plague.”

I saw poor Sam scuttling around a large apple tree quite within hearing of the gardener’s voice, and concluded he was another instance of listeners never hearing any good of themselves. I did very little work or reading that day, but watched from the shelter of my window curtains the slowly accumulating pile. Samuel, I noticed, seemed to work with unusual cheerfulness, and even the gardener himself did not empty his basket any oftener than his well-abused help. Mr. Winthrop passed once or twice, and seemed to give directions. I fancied he glanced up to my window as he stood watching them empty their baskets. At luncheon he said:—

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“Your pensioners may come this afternoon, and carry away their produce.”

“I will let them know immediately.”

“Will you go and tell them yourself?” he asked, rather sternly.

“I can do so with all safety; they are perfectly harmless.” I gave him a mutinous look, but my heart fluttered; for, in spite of myself, I was very much afraid of my guardian.

“You must not go about from house to house peddling your generosity,” he said, sarcastically.

“It is your generosity, Mr. Winthrop,” I said gravely; “besides, I do not go to their houses at all. I have only to acquaint Mrs. Blake that your gift is ready for distribution.”

“One of the servants will go to Mrs. Blake. You will need all your strength to maintain the proprieties when your ragged crowd comes.”

“Have you ever seen the Mill Road people?” I asked abruptly.

“Probably on the streets sometimes; but are they a very distinguished looking crowd, that you ask?”

“No, but they are human beings just like ourselves, created in God’s image as clearly as the President of these United States, and some of them fulfilling the end for which they were made quite as acceptably, perhaps.”

“The President would, no doubt, feel flattered to have his name so coupled.”

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Winthrop, I had forgotten your Presidents conquered the high position they fill, and are not born to it like mere puppets.”

“You will compare your humble friends with European Royalties then, I presume.”

“Oh, any one dropping into a soft nest prepared for them by others will do just as well,” I said, not very politely.

Mrs. Flaxman looked on helplessly as she sat nervously creasing her napkin; then with a sudden look of relief she said: “Shall I despatch Esmerelda to the Mill Road? They will have little enough time to get all that heap of good things carried away before night.”

Mr. Winthrop signified his willingness, and as she was leaving the room Mrs. Flaxman, by a look, summoned me to follow her. Once outside she said in her gentle way:—“I would not get arguing with Mr. Winthrop if I were you. He is a good deal older, and,

pardon me, a good deal wiser; and while he never seems to lose his own temper he very easily makes others lose theirs."

"I will try not to," I said, very humbly, for now that my temper had calmed I realized that I had been very foolish in saying what I did. I went sorrowfully to my room, and, taking my knitting work, I sat down in my easy chair where I could watch them working busily at the vegetables. But there came so many desolate, homesick fancies to keep me company, that pretty soon my eyes were so blinded with tears I could scarcely see the enlivening prospect under my windows. Ashamed of my weakness I set myself resolutely to thinking of Daniel Blake and his heavy, sad life; of the poor barefoot children, and tired mothers on the Mill Road; and of all the sadder hearts than mine should be, until the sultry, still air, and monotonous click of the knitting needles overcame my heartaches, and I went fast asleep. A knock at the door startled me. Hastily opening it, I met Esmerelda, who had come to announce the arrival of her neighbors.

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“There’s a good lot of them coming, and they look as frightened, and foolish as so many dogs that’s been caught sheep killing. I declare I pity them.”

“Where is Mr. Winthrop?” I gasped.

“Oh, you may be certain he’s not far off; it’s just death to him having so many of them poor wretches coming around his place. I can’t think why he lets them.”

“I will be there presently, Esmerelda,” I said, turning away. It was certainly not my place to allow her to stand there gossiping about her employer.

I did not wait to brush my rumpled hair or bestow more than a passing glance in the mirror, where I caught sight of a pair of wide, frightened eyes and an unusually pale face. Mr. Winthrop was waiting for me in the hall. In my excitement I still held in my hand the little sock I had been knitting. He glanced at it curiously, but made no mention of it.

“Your pensioners have come—a beggarly looking crowd.”

“Are there many?”

“Not more than a dozen. You will have to negotiate with Thomas to get your gifts carted home. Their baskets will hold only a tithe of what you have to donate.”

“May I tell him to get the horses?”

I looked up at him, I dare say, appealingly; for I felt quite overwhelmed with care. He smiled grimly.

“You may order all the servants to go to work—anything to get that crowd away.”

“Don’t you feel sorry for them, Mr. Winthrop?” I pleaded. “Just think how hard it is to be poor, and to come to you with a basket for vegetables.”

“Yes, that last must be the bitterest drop in their misery,” he said, sarcastically. We were walking slowly around to the garden, but our progress was much too swift for my courage. I would gladly have walked the entire length of Cavendish to have escaped what had now become a very difficult task. I resolved on one thing, however; not to be drawn into any further conversation with Mr. Winthrop, nor allow him to entrap me in his merciless way again.

A bend in the garden walk brought me face to face with the Mill Road people; the crowd consisted principally of women and boys; only a man or two condescending to come with their baskets; or it may be they thought the loss of a half day in the Mill would be poorly compensated by the garden stuff they would get. Mrs. Blake was there,—a

crape veil hanging sideways from her bonnet, which I took as a mark of respect for Daniel's wife. She carried no basket; and, from the compassionate look on her face, I concluded she came with the hope to lighten my task, if possible. I went directly to her, and shook her hand as cordially as if she had been one of our bluest blooded Cavendish aristocracy. I saw her cast a half frightened glance at Mr. Winthrop, but my fearless manner seemed to reassure her, as she soon regained her customary coolness of demeanor. I nodded cordially to the rest of the group who all seemed just then to be gazing at me in a very helpless

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manner. I endeavored to comport myself as the easy hostess dispensing the hospitalities of my home to a party of welcome visitors; but with Mr. Winthrop watching my every movement I found the task to do so herculean. The gardener stood watching the crowd in a helpless way, apparently as uncertain what to do first as any of them. I looked towards Mr. Winthrop; but he seemed deeply interested, judging from his attitude and expression, in tying up a branch of an overburdened pear tree; but he kept his face turned steadily towards me all the time, I could not help observing.

“What shall I do?” I whispered to Mrs. Blake.

“Tell them to come forred and fill their baskets.”

I cleared my throat, and stepping up to the gardener said: “If you will please come now, we will fill your baskets.”

At first no one moved; then a delicate, pretty looking woman, with red-rimmed eyes and a baby in her arms came timidly forward.

“What would you like best?” I asked.

“Oh, I can’t tell; they all look so good.”

“We are going to send all of this that is left around to your homes in a wagon.”

“I might take some of these,” she said, pointing longingly to the apples and pears. The baby was stretching its pinched little arms out to them, and cooing in a pitiful, suppressed way, as if it realized it and must be on its good behavior. I took the little creature in my arms; its clothes were clean, but so thin and poor, my heart ached, while I looked at them. I gave it my watch, which it carried with all speed to its mouth; but a soft, delicious pear which I picked from the very limb Mr. Winthrop had been supporting, caused it to drop the watch indifferently.

“Don’t you feel sorry for this little crumb of humanity?” I impulsively asked, forgetting too speedily my determination not to converse with him more than was really necessary.

“Did Madame Buhlman give you lessons in philanthropy along with drawing and music?”

“Oh no, indeed; but I hope God has. I don’t want my heart to be a rock like”—and then I shut my mouth and with moist eyes and flushed face turned abruptly from him.

I swallowed down my tears, but my heart was too sore to play any longer with the baby, so I slipped it back into its mother’s arms, who had got her basket filled and was ready to start for home; a neighbor’s lad had come to carry it for her, and with quite a cheerful

face she bade me good-bye. The rest of my crowd had got their baskets filled, and paused with longing eyes regarding the heaps that still remained. I made their faces grow suddenly much brighter as, with a slight elevation of voice, I said: “Thomas will carry the rest of these vegetables around for you with the horses. You will please stand at your doors, and, as he drives along, come out for it.” There was a subdued murmur of thanks, and then they started homewards. Mrs. Blake waited a few moments behind them to look around the old place where she had spent so many days, and shook hands with Thomas who remembered her very distinctly.

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“It’s odd doings for Oaklands having yon crowd come with their baskets,” he said, grimly; “the young miss be like to turn things topsy-turvey.”

“It’s high time somebody did; what kind of reckonins will folks have bime-by, of all their riches, and overplus, and so many of their own kind of flesh and blood going hungry and naked?”

“Their reckonins be none in my line. I sees to the roots and posies, that they thrive; and there my work ends.”

“Yes, posies are fed and sheltered, and little human creeturs like the widow Larkum’s there can starve for all the great folks cares. Deary me! it’s a terble onjointed sort of world; seems to me I could regilate things better myself. Well, a good afternoon, Mr. Prime.”

“Good afternoon,” Mr. Prime coldly responded. Plainly he did not enjoy Mrs. Blake’s freedom of speech. I felt my trespasses against Mr. Winthrop were already so great I could scarcely increase them by leaving Mrs. Blake abruptly, so I walked with her through the old gardens, where she had many a time, no doubt, dreamed her dreams long before my spirit got started on its long voyage through time and the eternities. I accompanied her all the way to the gate, listening sadly while she told me for the second time the sorrowful story of the widow Larkum, whose baby I had just been fondling. “Ever since her man fell on the circular saw and got killed, she’s been crying more or less. Her eyes look as if they’d been bound in turkey red; and I tell her she’ll be blind soon as well as her father; but, laws! when the tears is there, they might as well come. It’s their natur, I s’pose, to be a droppin’.”

“What is to support them?” I asked.

“I guess the parish, but my! they dread it. I believe Mr. Bowen would be the happiest man in town if the Lord would send his angels for him; he’s about the best Christian I ever sot eyes on.”

“I think I can help them. Does it cost very much to keep a family.”

“It depends on how they’re kept. A trifle would do them. She’s that savin’, the hull of ’em don’t cost much more’n a hearty man.”

“I will tell, Thomas, to leave plenty of his vegetables with her; and, in the meantime, will you please tell her that I will help to keep the wolf from her door?”

“Indeed, I will, and be glad to. I can do a little myself; so you won’t have all to do; and then she is right handy with her needle. My! I feel a burden lifted already. I couldn’t help frettin’ as well as her, though, she’s no more to me than any other body.”

“God has given you the heart that feels another’s woes. Every one don’t have that blessed gift.”

“I expect not; or if they do, it’s not minded. Seems to me the master looked none too well pleased along wi’ us bein’ there to-day.” She looked at me keenly; but I was not going to make my moan even to this true-hearted friend.

“I hope this act of kindness may leave him so happy that he will give me leave to give away all the unused stuff I see going to waste about the place,” I said, a trifle hypocritically.

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“He’s never knew what want is; and any way his heart’s not over tender naterally; but there, young women can do most anything with men folks when they’re good-lookin’ and have nice ways wi’ ’em. There’s a sight of difference wi’ girls. Some of ’em without any trouble get right into a man’s heart, and they’ll go through fire and water to please ’em; and others may be just as good-lookin’ and they have hard work to get any man to marry ’em. I’ve wondered more’n a little about it, but it’s a mystery.” She turned her kindly wrinkled face on me and said, “You’re one of them kind that can just wind a man round your finger, and I’m looking for better days at Oaklands. My! but you could do lots of good, if you got him on your side.”

“Oh, Mrs. Blake, you don’t know anything about it, but you are to be disappointed I am sure. But I can do something without any one’s help. Good-bye.”

She took my hand, holding it for some time in silence; then she said softly: “Dear; you can get into other folk’s hearts beside the men’s.”

CHAPTER IX.

An evening walk.

Thomas got his garden stuff distributed satisfactorily. “It would done your heart good to see how pleased the Larkums was over their share: I give ’em good measure, I tell you,” he informed me that evening, as I made an errand to the stables in order to interview him.

“That Mr. Bowen, her blind father, he come out too, and I’ve not got better pay for anything for years than what he give me,” Thomas continued solemnly.

“What did he give, you?” I asked.

“Well I can’t just go over his words, but it minded me of the blessing the preacher says over us before we go out of church, only this was all just for you and me.”

“You have found to-day that it is more blessed to give than to receive.”

“That Mrs. Blake wan’t far astray; but there, I wouldn’t let on to the likes of her that Mr. Winthrop might do more for them. Anyway there’s no one gives more for the poor in the parish, nor anything nigh as much; only its taxes, and one don’t get credit for them.”

“It is only for want of thought, Thomas. He has never been among the poor, to see their wants and sufferings.”

“But what makes you think, and the rest all forget?”

“I expect it is because my memory is better. I could always remember my lessons at school better than the most of the pupils.”

“Ah, Miss, there’s more than the memory. I wish there was more rich folks like you; it would be a better world for the poor.”

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His words startled me, the thought had never before occurred to me that I might be rich. I went to my room, and, with more than my usual care, dressed for dinner. Compared with Esmerelda's, my gowns were getting shabby, and old-fashioned; and I concluded if I had means of my own, it was time to treat myself charitably as well as my poor acquaintances. The dinner bell rang at last, and I went down with some trepidation to meet my guardian. My conscience confronted me with my repeated words of insubordination during the day, commanding me to apologize for my rudeness; but instinct with a stronger voice counselled silence. As we took our seats at dinner, Mrs. Flaxman, I thought, with a worried expression was furtively regarding us; but she kept silent. With a good-humored smile Mr. Winthrop turned to me, saying: "Your crowd did not fall to quarrelling over the spoil, I hope."

"I wish you could have seen how good-humored they were on leaving. I think they would have talked above their breath only they were afraid."

"You did not strike me as looking particularly formidable. Indeed, I quite pitied you; for you seemed the most frightened, nervous one in the lot."

"They were not afraid of me. Even the widow Larkum's baby cooed softly until you were out of sight."

"It must be a child of amazing intelligence."

Mrs. Flaxman, looking more anxious than ever interjected a remark, not very relevantly, about the prospect of our early winter; but Mr. Winthrop allowed her remark to fall unheeded.

"You seem particularly interested in that tender-eyed widow and her infant. Is it long since you made their acquaintance?"

"I cannot say that I am even now acquainted with her." I answered politely.

"I should judge you had a weakness for widows. Mrs. Blake seems on very cordial terms with you."

"I would take just as much interest in your widow, Mr. Winthrop, if she was poor and sorrowful. The wheel of fortune may make a revolution some day, and give me the opportunity."

He really seemed to enjoy the retort which fell uncontrollably from my lips.

"Allow me to thank you beforehand for your kind offices to that afflicted individual; though the prospect for their being required is not very good at present."

“Mrs. Fleming has sent invitations for a garden-party,” Mrs. Flaxman interposed desperately. “I think Mr. Winthrop had better permit you to go to New York for some additions to your toilet.”

“I will accompany her myself; she might get entangled with widowers on her next trip.”

“Not if they are as provoking as the unmarried,” I murmured below my breath; but he seemed to catch my meaning.

“They understand the art of pleasing your sex amazingly. I believe you would find them more fascinating than Mrs. Blake, or your new friend, the widow Larkum.”

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I felt too sorrowful to reply, and my temper had quite expended itself. I waited until he arose from the table and then followed him into the library. He looked surprised, but very politely handed me a chair. I bowed my thanks, but did not sit down; I stood opposite him with only the study table between us. I was nervous, and half afraid to ask my question, but summoning all my courage I broke the silence by saying:—"Mr. Winthrop, will you please tell me if I am rich or poor?"'

"That is a comparative question," he answered with provoking coolness. "Compared with Jay Gould or Vanderbilt, I should say your means were limited; but, on the other hand, to measure your riches with your widowed friends, most persons would allow your circumstances to be affluent."

"But have I any money left after my board and other expenses are paid?"

He smiled sarcastically. "I do not take boarders; it has never been our custom at Oaklands."

I was getting angry and retorted:—"I shall not eat any man's bread without paying for it, if he were a hundred times my guardian."

"But if you had no money wherewith to pay him; what then?"

"I have an education; with that surely I can earn my living as well as Esmerelda. My knowledge of French and German will help me to a situation, if nothing else."

"If I say you must not leave here; that I will not permit my ward to work for her living?" he questioned.

"If I resolve to be independent, and earn something beside, to help the poor, can you compel me to a life of ease and uselessness?"

"Ah, I see what is troubling you—the widows are on your mind. A gracious desire to help them has caused this mercenary fit. I am glad to inform you that there is a snug sum lying at your bankers in your name. When you come of age you will know the exact amount."

"You will pay for my board and expenses out of it," I said, rather incoherently; "and then, if there is any left, may I have it to lay out as I choose?"

"I do not care to assume the role of a hotel-keeper, so we will compromise matters. You can name whatever sum you choose for your board, and I will give it to you in quarterly instalments for your pensioners."

I was silent for a few moments, perplexed to know what answer to give. If he were to take from my own income the sum I might mention if I accepted his terms, would I not

still be a debtor to his hospitality? I spoke at last, knowing that his eyes were reading my face. “Could I not first pay you all that I really cost you, and then if there was any money left, have that to expend just as I choose?”

“I have hitherto allowed you a certain sum for pocket money. I limited the supply, because, as a school-girl, I believed too much would be an injury. Since, however, you are now a young lady grown and gifted with highly benevolent instincts, I will increase your spending money to any reasonable sum you may name.”

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“Will it be my own money?”

“Certainly; I shall not exercise the slightest supervision over the way you spend it, so long as your Mill Road friends do not get quarreling over the division of it.”

“You do not understand my meaning. Will it be the money my father left me?”

“I cannot promise it will be just the same. No doubt that has passed through scores of hands since then; in fact, it may be lying in the bottom of the sea. I did not expect you would be so exact in money matters, or I might have been more careful.”

“Mr. Winthrop, why do you so persistently misconstrue my meaning?” I said, desperately. He looked down more gently from his superior height into my troubled face, and the mocking gleam faded from his eyes.

“Why are you so scrupulously, ridiculously insistent in maintaining such perfect independence? Can you not believe I get well paid for all you cost me, if we descend to the vulgarity of dollars and cents, in having a bright, original young creature about the house with a fiery, independent, nature, ready to fight with her rich friends for the sake of her poor ones?”

“I wish we could be friendly, Mr. Winthrop,” I half sobbed, with an impulsive gesture stretching out my hands, but remembering myself, as quickly I drew them back, and without waiting for a reply fled from the room. Once in the hall I took down my hat from the rack and slipped out into the night, my pulses throbbing feverishly, and with difficulty repressing the longing to find relief in a burst of tears. The short twilight had quite faded away into starlight, but the autumn air was still warm enough to permit a stroll after nightfall. When I grew calm enough to notice whither my feet had strayed, I found myself on the Mill Road. Instinctively I felt I should not go so far from home in the darkness unattended; but I was naturally courageous as well as unconventional, and the desire was strong on me to tell Mrs. Blake my good news. I got on safely until Daniel Blake’s light was in sight, when, just before me, I heard rough voices talking and laughing. I turned and was about fleeing for home, when a similar crowd seemed to have sprung up, as if by magic, just behind me. In my terror I attempted to climb a fence, but fence-climbing was a new accomplishment, and in my ignorance and fright, I dragged myself to the top rail and then fell over in a nerveless heap on the other side. The crowd were too self-absorbed to notice the crouching figure divided from them by a slight rail fence, and went shouting on their way until stopped by the other crowd. I waited until they had got to a safe distance, when I arose and sped swiftly along over the damp grass until another fence intercepted my progress; when fortunately I remembered that just beyond this fence was a low marshy field, with deep pools of water. By some means I again got over the fence, bruising my fingers in the effort. The voices were growing fainter in the distance, and

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now with calmer pulses, I proceeded on my way to the Blakes'. But a new alarm awaited me; for I recollected Daniel would be at home now, and Tiger, his constant companion, would be somewhere in his vicinity. The dog was a huge creature, capable of tearing me to pieces in a very short time if he was so inclined. Folding my arms tightly in the skirt of my dress, I presently heard Tiger approaching, giving an occasional savage growl. I called him to me with as much simulated affection in the tones of my voice as I could command, and walked straight for the kitchen door. I put my hand on the latch, not daring to hesitate long enough to knock, when he caught my sleeve in his teeth. Half beside myself with terror, I called to Mrs. Blake, and in a second or two the door opened and Daniel was peering out curiously into my white face. The light from the lamp in his hand shone full on the dog holding my sleeve in his white, long teeth. Daniel's slow brain scarce took in the situation, but his mother, who sat where she could look directly at us, caught up the tongs and gave Tiger a blow he probably remembered to his dying day. He dropped my dress and slunk silently away into the darkness. Instantly I felt sorry for him. "Won't you call him back," I cried. "He thought he was doing his duty, and he took care not to put his teeth in my arm."

"It seems to me your heart is a leetle too tender of the brute; he might have skeered you to death," Daniel said, as he went out after his dog to see how heavy damage the tongs had inflicted.

"I should not have come here so late; it was I and not the dog who was to blame," I gasped, as I sank into Mrs. Blake's rocking-chair.

"I've wanted Daniel to put the critter away; he's been offered fifty dollars for him, but he's kind of lonesome, and refuses the offer."

Mrs. Blake was looking at me closely. I knew she was curious to know what brought me there at that unusual hour, so I hastened to explain, and asking her would she go with me to the Widow Larkum's while I told her of the help I expected to afford, and also of my mishaps on the way there.

"Not to-night, dearie. These roads ain't none too safe after night for women folks. It's a mercy you tumbled over the fence. My! what would Mr. Winthrop say if he knowed?" she questioned solemnly.

"But he will never know, if I can get back safely."

"Dan'el and me'll go with you, and take Tiger and the lantern. They're all afraid of the dog, if I haven't lamed him."

She went to the door and called Daniel. He came in presently, with Tiger limping after him.

“You give him an unmerciful blow; a leetle more and he’d never barked again.”

“Bring him in and I’ll give him a bone and rub the sore place with liniment.”

“Let me feed him,” I begged. “I want to make friends with him.”

“You’d best not put your hands on him. He don’t make free with strangers.”

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I took the bone; to my regret it was picked nearly bare, and I idly resolved Tiger should have a good solid dinner the next day, if he and I survived the mishaps of the night.

“Poor fellow! I am very, very sorry I have caused you so much pain,” I said, giving him the bone and patting his huge head fearlessly.

“Look out!” Daniel said, warningly.

“You needn’t be afeard,” his mother said. “Tiger knows quality.”

Whether he was as knowing in this respect as she asserted, he gnawed his bone and let me stroke his shaggy coat, while Mrs. Blake bathed his bruised back.

“There, he’ll be all right now in no time; and Dan’el, you get the lantern and we’ll go back to Oaklands with Miss Selwyn.”

Daniel got up wearily, and did as his mother bade. After his hard day’s work in the mill he would willingly, no doubt, have been excused escorting damsels in distress to their homes.

Mrs. Blake soon came out of her room with her bonnet and shawl on—the former one without a veil, which she excused on the ground that dew took the stiffening out of crape—“Leastways,” she added, “the kind I wear.” Tiger followed us, and more in mercy to him than the tired Daniel, I insisted on going home alone once we had got beyond the precincts of the Mill Road. I met with no further adventure, and reached my own room in safety, fondly hoping no one in the house was aware of my evening’s ramble, and one that I determined should never be repeated. My cheeks burned even after my light was extinguished, and my head throbbed on the pillow at Mr. Winthrop’s biting sarcasm if he knew the risk I had just run from bipeds and quadrupeds, with Daniel Blake, his mother and dog as body-guard past the danger of Mill Road ruffianism.

CHAPTER X.

A *helping hand*.

The following morning I went down to breakfast with some trepidation, and feeling very much like a culprit. Mrs. Flaxman came into the room first, and in her mild, incurious fashion said: “We were hunting for you last evening. Mr. Winthrop wished to see you about something.”

I did not reply, neither did she inquire where I had bestowed myself out of reach of their voices. I felt certain Mr. Winthrop’s curiosity would be more insistent, and was quite right in my conjectures. He came in as usual, just on the minute, and seating himself,

went through with the formality of grace; but before our plates were served, he turned to me and rather sternly said: “Are you in the habit of going out for solitary night rambles?”

“I never did but once,” I faltered, too proudly honest to give an evasive answer.

“That once, I presume, occurred last night?”

“Yes.”

“Strictly speaking, it wanted just five minutes to nine when you slipped stealthily into the side entrance.”

I sat, culprit-like, in silence, while his eyes were watching me closely.

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“Don’t you think two hours a long time to be loitering about the garden in the dark?”

“You must not be too hard on Medoline,” Mrs. Flaxman interposed. “It is an instinct with young folk to stray under the starlight and dream their dreams. No doubt we both have been guilty of doing it in our time.” I flashed Mrs. Flaxman a look of gratitude, and wondered at the naive way she counted Mr. Winthrop with herself, as if he too had arrived at staid middle-agehood.

“Dreaming under stars and wandering around in attendance on widows are two very different occupations,” he said, quietly, and without a break in his voice asked Mrs. Flaxman what he should help her to. I swallowed my breakfast—what little I could eat—with the feeling that possibly each succeeding mouthful might choke me; but full hearts do not usually prove fatal, even at meal time.

I arose from the table as soon as Mr. Winthrop laid down his napkin, and was hastening from the room when I heard him move back his chair; and, swift as were my movements, he was in the hall before I had reached the topmost step of the staircase.

“Just one more word, please,” I heard him say. I turned around, resolved to take the remainder of my lecture from a position where I could look down on him. He held out a parcel, saying: “Will you come and get this, or shall I carry it to you?”

I descended without replying, and held out my hand for the roll. He took hold of my hand instead. The firm, strong grasp comforted me, though I expected a severer lecture than I had ever received before in all my life. I looked up at him through tear-filled eyes when he said, in a strangely gentle voice for the circumstances:

“I saw you coming along the Mill Road last night with the Blakes and their lantern. Why were you there so late?”

“I wanted so much to tell the widow Larkum I was in a position now to help her.”

He was silent for awhile; then he said:

“I am glad you did not try to mislead me at the breakfast-table. I could not easily have forgiven such an act. Next to purity, I admire perfect truth in your sex.”

“Mr. Winthrop, you will believe me that I never went out of our own grounds after night before alone, and I never will, if I live for a hundred years.”

“Pray do not make rash promises. I only claim obedience to my wishes until you are of age. I will accept your word until that date, and shall not go in search of you along the Mill Road, or any other disreputable portion of the town again. Your mother’s daughter can be trusted.”

I tried to withdraw my hand, in order to escape with my tear-stained face to my own room, quite forgetting the parcel I had come down the stairway for.

“We start for New York this afternoon. Mrs. Flaxman accompanies us. She will be congenial society for you, having been a widow for nearly a score of years.”

“I do not care particularly for widows. It is the poor and desolate I pity.”

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“Well, here is the first instalment of widows’ money. I give it to you quarterly, purely from benevolent motives.”

“Why so?” I asked, curiously.

“If you received it all at once Mill Road would be resplendent with crape and cheap jewelry.”

“I suppose I must thank you,” I said, hotly; “but the manner of the giving takes away all the grace of the gift.”

“You express yourself a trifle obscurely, but I think I comprehend your meaning,” he said, without change of voice. If I could have seen his eyes flash, or his imperturbable calm disturbed, my own anger would have been less keen.

“May I go now?” I presently asked, quite subdued; for he had fallen into a brown study, and was still holding my hand.

“Yes, I had forgotten,” he said, turning away, and a moment after entered the library and shut the door. I went in search of Mrs. Flaxman, whom I found still in the breakfast-room, and in a rather nervous condition, busy about the china, which she rarely permitted the servant to wash.

“Shall we stay long in New York?” I asked, very cheerfully, the fifty dollars I held in my hand, and the easy way I had got off with Mr. Winthrop, making me quite elated.

“One can never tell. Mr. Winthrop is very uncertain; we may return in a day or two, or we may stay a fortnight.”

“You are not anxious to go?” I questioned, seeing her troubled face.

“Not just now, in the height of the pickling and preserving season. Reynolds has excellent judgment, but I prefer looking after such things myself.”

She looked wistfully at me while she dried her china. “May I help you, Mrs. Flaxman? It never occurred to me before that I might share your burdens. I should learn to have cares, as well as others.”

“I always like to have you with me, dear. Sometimes I try to make myself believe God has given you to me, instead of my own little Medoline.”

“Had you a daughter once?”

“Yes; and, like yourself, named after your own dear mother.”

“Oh, Mrs. Flaxman, and you never told me. Was she grown up like me?”

“She was only six years old when she died, just a month after her father; but the greater grief benumbed me so I scarce realized my second loss until months afterward.”

“Is it so terrible, then, to lose one’s husband?”

“It depends greatly on the husband.”

“The widow Larkum cries constantly after hers, but he was bread-winner, too. A hungry grief must be a double one.”

“Did Mr. Winthrop say anything further to you about being out last night?”

“A little,” I replied, with scarlet cheeks; “but he will never do so again. I shall not give him cause to reprove me.”

“That is the most lady-like course. You are no longer a little girl, or a school-girl either.”

I wiped my plates in silence, but my mortification was none the less intense. I realized then, more keenly than ever, that I must preserve the proprieties, and confine myself to the restrictions of polite society. The breezy, unconventional freedom Mrs. Flaxman had for those few months permitted me had been so keenly enjoyed. I fretted uneasily at the forms, and ceremonies of artificial life, while the aboriginal instincts, which every free heart hides away somewhere in its depths, had been permitted too full development.

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The china cleansed, and put away, I stood surveying the shining pieces that comprised our breakfast equipage, and like the tired clock in the fable, thought wearily of the many hundred times Mrs. Flaxman had washed those dishes; of the many thousand times they, or others, would go through the same operation, until Mrs. Winthrop's sands of time had all run out, and Oaklands gone to decay, or passed into other hands.

"Isn't it tiresome work washing dishes—the same yesterday, to-day and fifty years hence? I wish I had been created a man; they don't have such sameness in their work."

"Are you sure, dear? Fancy a bookkeeper's lot, or a clerk's reckoning up columns of figures so like there is not a particle of variety; not a new or thrilling idea in all their round of work from January to December, unless we except a column that won't come right. That may have a thrill in it now and then, but certainly not a joyous one. After we return from New York, if you pay attention to a clerk's work in the stores we visit, you will acknowledge a lady's household tasks delightful in comparison. The farmer's life has the most variety, and comes nearest to elementary things and nature's great throbbing vitals; but as a rule they are a dissatisfied lot, and unreasonably so, I think."

"Come to look at things generally, it's a very unsatisfactory sort of world, anyway. I think it's affairs might just as well get wound up as not. There have been plenty of one variety of beings created, I should think, to fill up lots of room in the starry spaces, and there are so many to suffer forever."

"It is hardly reverent, dear, for us to criticise God's plans. It is His world, and we are His creatures; and we may all be happy in Him here, and there be happy with Him forever. Besides, life does not seem monotonous when we are doing His will."

"But I know so few who are doing His will save you, and that poor blind Mr. Bowen. I read my Bible every day, and sometimes I get thinking over its words, and I reckon there will only be one here and there fit to enter Heaven. All our friends nearly would be terribly out of place to be suddenly transplanted to the Heavenly gardens. What could they talk about to the shining ones? The fashions, and social gossips, and fancy work and amusements would all be tabooed subjects there, I expect."

"You do not know many people yet. I thank God there are thousands longing to serve Him. I think, dear, you must have a touch of dyspepsia this morning; your thoughts are so morbid."

"Oh no, indeed; I am quite well. But shall we see any of those people you describe in New York?"

"If we stay long enough, doubtless we shall. I have a few rare friends there whose friendship often gives me the feeling of possessing unlimited riches."

“I wish I had such friends,” I exclaimed, with sudden longing. “You and the Mill Road folk are the only ones I have on this side the ocean, and the most I care much for on the other already think in another language from mine.”

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“Yours will not be a friendless life, I feel certain. I see elements in your impulsive nature that must attract those who love the true and unselfish.”

“Oh, Mrs. Flaxman, what a delicious compliment to give me, just when I was most discouraged about myself! Mr. Winthrop finds me such a nuisance, and all your pretty and elegant lady friends I know care so little for me that I can’t but believe that I am a poor specimen, although you speak so kindly.”

“You will be wise to learn the art of not thinking much about your merits. I find these the happiest lives who live most outside of self; and they are the most helpful to others.”

“But we have mainly to do with ourselves. How can we help wondering if our particular barque on the voyage of life is to be a success or not?”

“It lies with ourselves whether it is or no.”

“But persons like Mrs. Larkum and the Blakes, how can they have a successful voyage, when they are so poor and lowly?”

“You must get the thought out of your mind that being poor and humble makes any difference in God’s sight. When Christ visited our planet his position was as lowly as the Blakes; his purse as empty as the widow Larkum’s. We are such slow creatures to learn that character itself is the only greatness in God’s sight. Our ancestry and rent roll are the small dust of the balance with Him.”

“But Mr. Winthrop thinks most of those things—the ancestry and wealth.”

“We must not sit in judgment on any one’s thoughts, and we must not take any man’s gauge of character in the abstract as the correct one; only take the word of God.”

I went out into the sunshine to think over Mrs. Flaxman’s little lecture; a good deal comforted with the reflection that Mrs. Blake might have more weight in the balances of Heaven than I had thought. The garden was looking very shabby—its splendid midsummer glory had only a few flowers left to show what had been there, and these only the thick-petaled, substantial blossoms as free from perfume as the products of the vegetable garden. I grew melancholy. A premonition of my own sure coming autumn season, towards the end of life, was forecasting its cold shadow over the intervening years which made the November sunshine grow dim; and I gladly re-entered the house. I went very meekly to the library-door and tapped. Quite a long pause, and then I heard my guardian’s study door which opened into the library, shut; and a second after he stood before me. I thought he gave me a surprised glance, since it was only the second time I had come into his presence there unsummoned.

“May I take some of the money you gave me this morning to Mrs. Larkum, before I leave for New York?”

“If you have time. Usually it takes ladies some hours to prepare for a journey such as you have before you to-day.”

“I am sorry to say I am not a regulation lady. I can get ready in half an hour.”

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“That is a quality in your sex that will cover a multitude of sins.”

“I am glad you have at last found something good in me,” I said, sorrowfully.

“You must not personally apply every generalization your friends may make in their conversation.”

“Then you give me permission to go?”

“It strikes me you are rushing to the other extreme. I have never interfered with your rambles, except at unseemly hours. Mill Road at mid-day is quite safe for the most unconventional young lady in Cavendish.”

I bowed my thanks, and turning away heard the library door shut. I could fancy the expression on my guardian’s face as he returned to his books. But, as I put on my wraps, my heart grew lighter although Mr. Winthrop’s last observation made me wince. I took a crisp ten dollar bill. Surely, I reflected, that could not be a dangerous sum to entrust the widow with, considering that she had a helpless father, and half-clad children to look after. I took the kitchen on my way and begged a generous slice of meat from the cook to carry to Tiger.

“Most like they’ll have their own dinner off it first; they’ll think it a sin to give such meat to a dog,” I heard her mutter as I left the kitchen. On my way I met Emily Fleming and Belle Wallace. They laughingly inquired where I was going with my bundles; but I assured them it was an errand of mercy, and could not therefore be explained. Miss Emily’s plump features and bright black eyes took a slightly contemptuous expression as she assured us I was rapidly developing into a Sister of Charity.

“Better be that than an idler altogether like the rest of us,” the more gentle natured Belle responded.

“If you are getting into a controversy I will continue my journey,” I said, nodding them a pleasant good morning and going cheerfully on my way, thinking of Tiger’s prospective gratification, coupled with that of the widow Larkums.

Going first to the Blakes, I found Tiger stretched out on the doorstep. He wagged his tail appreciatively, but did not growl as I stroked his shaggy coat.

Examining him by daylight, I saw that he was a fine specimen of his species. Daniel explained to me afterward that he was a cross between a St. Bernard and Newfoundland—a royal ancestry, truly, for any canine, and unlike human off-shoots from the best genealogical trees, quite sure of inheriting the finest qualities of his ancestors. I went into the house, the dog limping after me. Mrs. Blake heard my voice and came in in some alarm. She looked surprised to see me sitting by the table with Tiger’s massive head in my lap, while I unrolled the meat. She also stood watching, and when the juicy

steak was revealed, her own eyes brightened as well as Tiger's. "I haven't seen such a piece of meat in many a day. It minds me so of Oaklands."

"I got it from cook for Tiger," I explained. "It is clean—perhaps you would like a few slices off it."

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“I would, indeed. Its a shame to give a brute such victuals.”

“Poor Tiger, he deserves something good, after the way he was punished on my account.” She brought a knife and plate saying: “We can share wi’ each other; I don’t want to rob even a dog of his rights.” I turned the meat over and found a bone which I cut off and gave him, and then, giving the remainder to her to put out of Tiger’s way, I stipulated that he was to have all the scraps that were left. Then I informed her of my gift from Mr. Winthrop, or rather loan, and of the sum I purposed giving Mrs. Larkum.

“Did Mr. Winthrop give you all that money for poor folks?” she asked incredulously.

“Yes.”

“Well, I’ve heard he never give anything except through the town council. I’ve heard he was uncommon free in that way. But, laws! I reckoned the first time I seen you that you’d be able afore long to wind him around your finger. Fine manners and a handsome face, with a good heart, soon thaws out a bachelor heart.”

“You were never more mistaken in your life, Mrs. Blake.”

“May be so,” she said, as if quite unconvinced.

I turned the conversation rather abruptly:—

“Will ten dollars be too much to entrust Mrs. Larkum with at once?”

“Dear heart, you might give her fifty, if you had it. She’d be jest as saving of it as—well as I’d be myself, and I call myself next door to stingy.”

“I am so glad; one likes to know the most will be made of what they give.”

“If you don’t mind, I’ll put on my shawl and go with you.”

“I was going to ask you to do so.”

“I’ll jest set on the pot for Dan’el’s dinner first. Twelve o’clock soon comes these short days.” Mrs. Blake threw a faded woolen shawl over her head, and taking a short path across the field we started for Mrs. Larkum’s, Tiger limping after us.

I thought Mrs. Blake’s snug kitchen quite a nest of comfort after I had taken a survey of the Larkum’s abode.

One roughly plastered room with two little closets at one side for bedrooms had to serve for home for five souls.

I felt a curious, smothered sensation at first, as I looked on the desolate surroundings—-the pale, sad-faced mother, the blind grandfather, and ragged children. A dull fire was smouldering in the cooking stove, and beside it sat the grandfather, the baby on his knee, vainly trying to extract consolation from its own puny fist. As I looked at him closely I saw that Mr. Bowen had an unusually fine face—not old looking, but strangely subdued, and chastened. I fancied from his countenance, at once serene and noble, that he had beautiful thoughts there in the darkness and poverty of his surroundings. Mrs. Larkum was mending a child's torn frock, her eyes as red and swollen as ever. Her face brightened, however, when we went in. Mrs. Blake assured me afterward it would be better than medicine to them

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having one of the quality sit down in their house, I took the baby from its grandfather, and soon the little one was cooing contentedly in my arms, getting its fingers and face nicely smeared with the candies I had brought it. I divided the supply with the two other little ones—the eldest going direct to his grandfather, and dividing his share with him. I noticed that the gift was thankfully received, but placed securely in his pocket; no doubt to be brought out a little later, and divided with the others. I glanced at the blind man's clothing. Clean it certainly was; in this respect corresponding with everything I saw in the house; but oh, so sadly darned, and threadbare. Still, he seemed like a gentleman, and I fancied he shrank painfully within himself as if one's presence made him ill at ease. I resolved to say very little to him on this first visit, but later on try to find the key to his heart. I contented myself with the use of my eyes, and playing with the baby, leaving the two widows to indulge in a few sighs and tears together. My own tears do not come very readily, and it makes me feel cold hearted to sit dry-eyed while other eyes are wet. As I sat quietly absorbing the spirit of the place, my eyes rested on a shelf containing the few cheap dishes that served their daily food. Instantly the desolate fancies I had a few hours before indulged came forcibly to mind. I thought what would it be to cleanse the remains of meagre repasts from these coarse cups, and plates, through days and years, with no glad hopes or joyous fancies to lighten the toil! I was growing desolate hearted myself, and concluded my widowed friend had sighed and wept long enough; so returning the little charge to its grandfather, I went to Mrs. Larkum's side, and slipped the note into her hand, at the same time saying good-bye, and motioned to Mrs. Blake to come home. She arose very reluctantly, being unwilling to miss her friend's surprise and satisfaction. I too was constrained to look at her as she unfolded the note. A flush swept over her face as she saw the number, and handing it back to me, she said:—

"You have made a mistake, and given me the wrong bill."

"Oh no, indeed. I got it on purpose for you."

"But it is ten dollars. Surely you did not mean that."

"Mrs. Blake said you would know how to lay out fifty very wisely," I said, with, a smile.

Her tears, always so convenient, began to flow afresh. Turning to her father she said with a sob, "Father, your prayers are getting answered. The Lord, I believe, will provide."

I saw him gather the baby close to his heart, and then with a gesture of self command he seemed with difficulty to restrain his own emotion. "The Lord reward the giver," he murmured in a low voice; but some way it gave me the feeling that I had suddenly received some precious gift.

“When that is gone I shall have some more for you,” I promised.

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“Oh, before all this is used up, I must try to get earning myself. But this, with all those vegetables you gave me yesterday, will give me such a start. I will buy a whole barrel of flour, it spends so much better—and get some coals laid in for winter. They are the heaviest expense.”

“Yes,” I said, impulsively, “and flannels for the children. It will be so much better than crape.”

“Crape!” she ejaculated. “I don’t need crape for my husband. I have too much mourning in my heart to put any on outside.”

I meant some day, when I felt pretty courageous, to repeat her words to Mr. Winthrop. Once outside, I found the glorious expansion of sky and horizon very grateful after the narrow limits of the little cottage. At luncheon Mr. Winthrop asked if I had paid my visit yet to Mill Road. I acknowledged, with a slight crimsoning of cheek, that I had conveyed to Mrs. Larkum a small sum of money.

“No doubt she will have a crape weeper as long as the widow Blake’s.”

“I did not think you noticed the trivialities of women’s attire so minutely.”

“I do not as a rule; but in the case of your intimate friends, it is natural I should endeavor to discover their especial charms.”

“Mrs. Larkum said she was going to lay out the money I gave her chiefly in flour and coals. I suggested flannel would be much better also to buy than crape. She said she had no need to put on mourning; she already wore it in her heart.”

“She is a very sensible woman,” my guardian replied.

Then I described, as minutely as I could and with all the pathos I could command, the grim surroundings of this poor family—the grandfather, with his serene, sightless face and strangely deep trust in Providence; the clean, but faded, worn garments they all had on—not one of them, apparently, possessed of a decent suit of clothes; and then their horror of help from the town. Mrs. Flaxman wiped her eyes sympathetically when I repeated the grateful words my gift had evoked, and said with trembling voice: “It just seems as if the Lord sent you there, Medoline.”

“Do you think the Ruler of this vast universe has leisure or inclination to turn his gaze on such trivialities? No doubt suns and systems are still being sent out completed on their limitless circles. To conceive their Creator turning from such high efforts to send Medoline with a ten dollar bill to the Larkums, to my mind borders on profanity,” Mr. Winthrop said, with evident disgust.

“The infinitely great and infinitely small alike receive His care. Perhaps it required stronger power from God to make you give me the money and then to make me willing to carry it to them, than it does to create a whole cluster of suns and planets. I think our wills limit God’s power more than anything he ever created, except Satan and his angels.”

“You are quite a full-fledged theologian, little one. I am surprised you do not engage more heartily in home mission work.”

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“I must first learn to show more patience at home.”

He did not make any reply; but as we were speeding on our way that afternoon in the cars, he came to my side and handed me a small roll of bills.

“Would you like to buy that widower friend of yours a warm suit of clothes for the winter? Mrs. Flaxman will show you a suitable furnishing establishment. Philanthropists must do all sorts of things, as you will find.”

“You are very kind after all, Mr. Winthrop. I wish I could tell you how grateful I am. Please forgive all my rude speeches—I hope I will never get provoked with you again.”

“I most certainly hope you will. A little spice adds greatly to the flavor of one’s daily food.”

He walked away; and first counting my gift, I found, to my surprise, that it amounted to fifty dollars. I opened my little velvet satchel—my traveling companion for many a weary mile—and laid it safely in one of the pockets. I had plenty of leisure that afternoon for fancy to paint all sorts of pictures. Mr. Winthrop was at the farther end of the car, with a group of friends he had met; and Mrs. Flaxman, a nervous traveler at the best, was trying to forget the discomforts of travel as she sat with her easy-chair wheeled into a sheltered corner, sleeping as much as possible. I watched the rapidly disappearing views from my windows, some of them causing pleasant thoughts, and sometimes re-touching memories so remote they seemed like experiences of another existence, which my soul had known before it came under its present limitations. There were cottages that we flew past, reminding me of the Larkum abode; these I kept wearily peopling with white, sightless faces, and hungry, sad-faced women and children.

When at last my own thoughts were beginning to consume me, Mr. Winthrop came and sat near me.

“Is a journey in the cars equal to an hour spent with your widows?” he asked.

“I have enjoyed the drive. One sees so much that is new, and is food for thought, only the mind gets wearied with such swift variety.”

He was silent for some time, then, with a complete change of topic he said,

“I have been glad to hear you practicing so industriously on the piano. Some day you may have a more appreciative audience than Mrs. Flaxman and myself.”

“It has helped to occupy my time. I do not know that much else has been accomplished.”

“That is not a very wise reason for so occupying your time.”

“One must get through it some way. In pleasant weather, getting acquainted with nature, in field and garden and by the seashore, was my favorite pastime.”

“It is an indolent way to seek the acquaintance of so profound a mistress:—merely sunning one’s self under the trees, or listening to the monotonous voice of the sea, sitting on the rocks.”

“In what better way could I discover her secrets?”

“Following in the steps of those who have made her in her varying forms a life long study, and who have embalmed their discoveries in books.”

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“But I am young yet, and I need first to discover if I have tastes for such pursuits.”

“A youthful Methusaleh might make that objection; but your years are too few to pause while making a selection.”

“At first when I came to Oaklands, I was perplexed to know how the long days and years were to be occupied.”

“Have you since then found for yourself a career?”

“I am finding an abundance of work, if I only am willing to do it.”

“You must not get so absorbed in deeds of charity that you forget the duties belonging to yourself and position. Oaklands may not always be your home, with its pastoral enjoyments. You should endeavor to fit yourself for wider and higher spheres of action.”

“In the meantime, however, my life must be got through some way. If I can help others to be happier, surely my time cannot be quite wasted; and I may the easier render my final account.”

“Ah, that’s a perplexing question—our final settlement for the deeds of this life.”

I looked my surprise at his tone of voice.

“You have not learned yet, Medoline, to doubt. Very well, never begin. It’s horrible having no sure anchor to hold by when death forces one into unknown oceans, or shipwrecks with annihilation.”

“Death never can do that, if we trust in Christ, who turned our last enemy into a blessed angel.”

“Your faith is very beautiful, and is, no doubt, sufficient for your utmost intellectual needs; and by all means hold to it as you would to your life.”

“I think it is the same that St. Paul, and Martin Luther, and John Milton, and a thousand, yes a million other noblest intellects, held firmly. Surely it will serve for me.”

“You are satisfied, then, to think with the crowd?”

“Yes, until something more reasonable is given me than God’s word and revealed religion. But, Mr. Winthrop, I am only a heard believer. I am not a Christian, really.”

“If I believed the Bible as you do, I would not risk my soul one half hour without complying with every command of the Scriptures. You who so firmly believe, and yet

live without the change of heart imperatively demanded by the Bible, are the most foolhardy beings probably in the entire universe."

"Are we any more foolish than those who dare to doubt with the same evidence that we possess?"

"Possibly not; but I think you are."

I was silent; for there came to me a sudden consciousness that Mr. Winthrop was right. I had no doubts about the great truths of our religion; and what excuse then could I offer for not accepting them to the very utmost of my human need?

CHAPTER XI.

City life.

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In the late evening the lights from the restless, crowded city began to twinkle in the distance, and shortly another living freight was borne safely within its shelter. Mr. Winthrop had met a friend who came into the car, a station or two back, and had grown so absorbed in conversation that he paid no heed to the people hurrying out into the night. Mrs. Flaxman was aroused by the commotion and glanced around uneasily, but did not like to interrupt Mr. Winthrop's eager conversation. Besides, she comforted herself with the belief that our train would probably lay in New York for the night. At last Mr. Winthrop came to escort us out. "I believe we have no time to spare. I did not notice that we had reached our terminus."

"It is no use denying the fact; men are greater talkers than women," I remarked seriously.

"Why so?" he asked, pausing with satchel suspended, awaiting my answer.

"Why, no two women on the continent would get so absorbed in each other as to forget they had reached their journey's end, and had need to be in a hurry."

"Probably not; their topics would be too trivial to claim so much attention."

I found the reply unanswerable, and hastened after Mrs. Flaxman, who was already out of sight. When we reached the door the cars were in motion.—"What shall we do?" I cried, anxiously. "I could never get off while the cars were moving." I caught a glimpse of Mrs. Flaxman's scared face as we went past.

"Leave me and go to Mrs. Flaxman. A man can jump easily, I am sure," I pleaded, finding that we were moving out of the station, and actually on the road again.

"And what will you do?" he asked very calmly.

"I have plenty of money in my pocket, and can pay my way back by the next train," I said, hurriedly.

"You would travel alone at midnight to save Mrs. Flaxman a trifling anxiety?"

"I won't be frightened, and she will be so worried there, all alone among strangers," I pleaded.

"Mrs. Flaxman knows our hotel. She will be safe when she reaches there, which will be in a few minutes now. So you need not be troubled about her. I shall not leave you," he said, decidedly.

We went back into the car, which was nearly empty; but, some way, I felt as content and safe as if we had joined Mrs. Flaxman at the hotel. Mr. Winthrop sat near, but he did not seem in a mood just then for conversation. I think he felt chagrined at his carelessness,

but I was wicked enough to enjoy it. I leaned my head back against my easy-chair and furtively watched my guardian, as he sat writing in a large blank book which he took from his pocket after awhile. I had never before had such opportunity to study, in repose, the strong, intellectual face. As I watched the varying moods of his mind, while he thought and wrote, it reminded me of cloud-swept meadows on a summer's day—the sunshine succeeding the shadow. I fancied that the mask which conceals

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the workings of the spirit life became partly transparent and luminous, and I seemed to see poetic fancy and noble thoughts weaving their wondrous webs back somewhere in the fastnesses of the soul. And then I glanced around at the other occupants of the car; and, fancy being alert, all their faces reminded me of so many masks, with the real individual sheltered behind in its own secure fastness, and all the while industriously weaving the web of life; always vigilant, ever throwing the shuttle; whether wisely or foolishly, only the resultant action could determine. But the faces grew indistinct; the steady movement back and forth of the writer's hand no longer interested me, for I was asleep. I do not know how long I had slept. My hat had slipped to the floor; my heavy coils of hair, usually difficult to keep in proper control, had unloosened by the constant motion of the car and fallen in heavy rings about my shoulders. I opened my eyes suddenly to find that my guardian had put away his writing, and was standing near, regarding me, I fancied, with a look of displeasure.

"I did not mean to fall asleep," I faltered, while I quickly coiled up my hair, and put on my hat.

"It is my fault you slept in this public place. I had forgotten about you."

I looked at him with an admiration almost amounting to awe, thinking how engrossed he must have become in his own thoughts to have forgotten me so perfectly; and then I speculated on the irony of fate in placing one so unconventional as I under the care of a man so exceedingly fastidious.

I was standing beside him. In my excitement, when awakening, I had started to my feet, but with difficulty maintained my position; for my head was dizzy with the sudden start from sound sleep, together with the unaccustomed hour for traveling. Glancing at my watch, I saw that it was past midnight. I think Mr. Winthrop noticed my weariness, for he said, rather grimly:

"It is too bad, having you out late two nights in succession."

I remembered his gift for Mr. Bowen, and was silent.

"At the next station we will be able to change cars for New York. The conductor tells me we shall only be compelled to wait a short time."

"I will rest then until we get there," I said, no doubt very wearily, for I felt not only dizzy, but slightly faint, and sank into my chair. He looked down at me, and then said, in more gentle fashion than he had ever before addressed me:

"I am very sorry, Medoline, to have caused you so much needless fatigue."

I quite forgot my weariness then. It was so comforting to know he could acknowledge regret for anything, and that his heart was not made of flint, as, unconfessed to myself, I had partly imagined.

I looked up brightly. “I do not know if I am not rather glad than sorry that we have shown ourselves such forgetful travelers. It will be something unusual to remember.”

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“That is a very kindly way to look on my forgetfulness—rather, I should say, stupidity.” He sat down then, and the short remaining distance we passed in silence.

We were both very prompt in responding to the summons given by the conductor when our station was reached. The waiting-room was well lighted and warmed, and a welcome odor of food pervaded the air. I resolved to make a little foray on my own account, to secure, if possible, a bit of luncheon; but, after seeing me comfortably seated by a hot stove, Mr. Winthrop left, only to return in a few moments with the welcome announcement that refreshments were awaiting us. I expressed my surprise that food should be in readiness at that unseasonable hour.

“Oh, I telegraphed an hour ago to have it prepared,” he replied.

“Then I was sleeping a good while,” I said, ruefully.

“An hour or two. I only wakened you in time to collect yourself for changing cars.”

“And you have not slept at all?”

“Scarcely. I do not permit myself that luxury in public.”

I was silenced, but not so far crushed as to lose my appetite. A cup of tea, such as Mrs. Flaxman never brewed for me, effectually banished sleep for the rest of the night. The journey back was tiresome, the car crowded, and the long night seemed interminable. I was wedged in beside a stout old gentleman, whose breath was disagreeably suggestive of stale brandy, while a wheezy cough disturbed him as well as myself. He looked well to do, and was inclined to be friendly; but his eyes had a peculiar expression that repelled me. Mr. Winthrop had got a seat some distance behind me. By twisting my neck uncomfortably, I could get a reassuring glimpse of his broad shoulders and handsome face. At last he came to me. I half rose, for my aged companion was making me nervous with his anxiety for my comfort.

“We will go into the next car; it may not be so crowded,” he said, taking my satchel. Fortunately we found a vacant seat; and I began to feel very safe and content with him again at my side.

“I do not think your late traveling companion could have been a widower, or you would not have been so eager to get away. The look of appeal on your face, when I got an occasional glimpse of it, was enough to melt one’s heart.”

I laughed in spite of myself. “It never occurred to me to ask, but he certainly is not a woman hater,” I said, with a flush, as I mentally recalled some of his gracious remarks. I made my replies in brief and stately dignity; or at least as much of the latter as I could command, but he was not easily repulsed. Feeling so secure and sheltered now, my thoughts went out to the unprotected of my sex cast among the evil and heartless, to

fight their way purely amid bleakness and sin. I shuddered unconsciously. Mr. Winthrop turned to me.

“Are you cold?” he asked.

“Oh, no, I was only thinking,” I stammered.

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“I would cease thinking if the thoughts were so blood-curdling. May I ask what they were?”

“I was pitying poor girls who have to make their way alone in this wicked world.”

He was silent for some time, and then said gravely: “Your instincts are very keen. That gray-haired gentleman happens to be a person I know something about, and his very presence is enough to contaminate.”

I was amazed that he so easily understood my meaning. The sun was reddening the sky, which seemed so pure and still compared with the sinful, noisy city that, for an instant, a homesick longing seized me to escape to its clear, beautiful depths. When we reached the hotel I was cold, and feeling very cheerless; but a comfortable looking maid, not half so overwhelming as our Esmerelda, conducted me to a pleasant room, and soon had a bright fire burning, and a cozy breakfast spread on a little table just in front of the grate. I was not hungry, but I took the cup of hot chocolate Mr. Winthrop had ordered, and nibbled a bit of toast; and then, drawing an easy-chair in front of the fire, soon fell into a luxurious sleep, from which I did not waken for several hours. The maid came in occasionally to replenish the fire, but her light movements did not disturb me. Afterward I found the hotel was not a public one, but a private affair, patronized mainly by a number of old families whose parents and children had come and gone for nearly half a century. The room I occupied, Mrs. Flaxman told me, was the very one my own dear mother had occupied as a bride; and hence Mr. Winthrop had secured it for me. It was the best in the house, I found later on. That evening, after I had wakened refreshed, and eager to see and hear all that was possible in this new wonderland, Mrs. Flaxman, still a little nervous after her journey and anxiety on my account, came and sat with me; and to atone for keeping me in the house, told me stories of that beautiful, far-away time when she had seen my mother in that same room in the first joy of wifehood, and described my father as the proud, happy bridegroom, gazing with more than a lover’s fondness on the beautiful girl who had left all for him, and yet in the renunciation had found no sacrifice. She described the rich silken gown with its rare, old lace, and the diamonds she wore at her first party in New York. “Mr. Winthrop has them, your mother’s diamonds and all her jewelry. In being an only child like yourself, she inherited all her own mother’s. They are all safely stored at his bankers, and I think he means to give them to you soon, or at least a part of them.”

“I did not know I had any except what I brought with me from school,” I said, with a shade of regret to be so long in ignorance of such a pleasant fact. Mrs. Flaxman smiled as she asked:

“Did you never hear your schoolmates talk of the family plate and jewelry?”

“Oh, yes; there were a few stupid ones who had very little brains to be proud of; so they used to try and make up for the lack by telling us about such things; but we reckoned a good essay writer worth a good deal more than these plate owners.”

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“There must have been great changes since I was at school. I believe the rising generation is developing a nobler ambition than their predecessors possessed.”

“I should hope so,” I said, with girlish scorn; “as if such mere accidents as birth and the ownership of plate and jewelry could give one higher rank than intellect. Why, I believe that is the scarcest thing in all the universe.”

“It does seem ridiculous,” Mrs. Flaxman said reflectively, “but it is hard escaping from the spirit of the age in which we live. It would be easy to hold such things lightly in those heroic days in Greece when Lycurgus cheapened the gold and things the masses held most precious.”

“One can have a little republic in their own soul as well as Lycurgus, and indulge unforced in high thinking. I think that would be really more creditable than if every one agreed to do so by act of senate.”

“It would be a grand thing for every one to get the dross all burned away from their nature and only have the pure gold left.”

“Don’t you think, Mrs. Flaxman, with a good many people, after the burning process, there would be so little left it would take a whole flock of them to make a decent sized individual?”

She laughed softly. “I never thought of it in that way. I am afraid now I will get to undressing my acquaintances, to try and find out how much that will be fit to take into higher existences they have in their composition.”

“Mr. Winthrop is a very uncomfortable sort of person to live with, but I think he will have more noble qualities to carry somewhere after death than the average of my acquaintances. What a pity it is for such splendid powers of mind to be lost! He has the materials in him to make a grand angel.”

Mrs. Flaxman looked up quickly.

“You cannot think it is his ultimate destiny to be lost?” she questioned.

“He doesn’t believe in the Bible. What hope can he have that we will ever get to heaven?”

“A multitude of prayers are piled between him and perdition. His mother was a saintly character, whose dying breath was a prayer for him; and there are others who have taken his case daily to the mercy seat for years.”

“I wish I had some one to pray for me,” I said rather fretfully.

“My dear, I do not know any one who has more leisure to pray for themselves than you have.”

I was surprised to hear her speak so lightly on such a solemn subject; but as I thought the matter over afterward, I could but acknowledge that she had answered me just as I deserved.

CHAPTER XII.

New acquaintances.

Mrs. Flaxman’s fears were realized. She was detained from her pickles and preserves for over a fortnight; but the days spent then in the city were an entirely new revelation of life to me. Mr. Winthrop had a circle of literary friends, who seemed determined to make his stay so pleasant that he would not be in a hurry to return to the solitude of Oaklands. When I saw his keen enjoyment of their society, and the many varied privileges he had in that brief period—musical, artistic, and literary, I was filled with surprise that he should make his home at Oaklands at all, and expressed my wonder to Mrs. Flaxman.

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“Oh, he often goes away—sometimes to Europe, and sometimes to the great American centres of thought and life; then he comes home apparently glad of its quiet and freedom from interruption. I think he uses up all the raw experiences and ideas he gets when away.”

I thought her reply over, and wondered if it was the usual habit of literary people to go out on those foraging expeditions and bring back material to be used up in weeks of solitude. We were either out among friends, at concerts, lectures, evening gatherings, or else receiving Mr. Winthrop’s particular friends at our hotel, every evening. I enjoyed those evenings at home, I think, the very best of all. We sat late, supper being served about midnight—a plain, sensible repast that, with a man of Mr. Winthrop’s means, might certainly betoken high thinking. However, the intellectual repast served to us reminded me of the feasts of the gods, or even better, in old Homeric times. There were condensed thoughts that often kept me puzzling over their meanings long after their words had died on the air. Mrs. Flaxman sat, a mostly silent listener, but in no wise showing weariness at the lateness of the hour, or mental strain imposed in following such abstract lines of thought. I too listened silently, save in reply to some direct remark, but with pained, growing thoughts, that often left me utterly weary when the little company dispersed. I would often stop listening and fall into vague, hopeless speculations as to the number of centuries that must elapse before I could overtake them. Saddest fancy of all was that my powers might be too limited even to do this. Our daylight hours were, in great measure, passed in making and receiving calls from Mrs. Flaxman’s friends, who seemed very quick to find out she was there, and in visiting the huge dressmaking and dry goods establishments which she patronized. I found it quite difficult, at times, to reconcile the fact that those we met by day were, in the main, created in the same mental likeness as those I listened to with such admiration in the evening. I used to close my eyes at times and fancy the old heathen, mythology to be true, and that the gods were actually revisiting the earth, and bringing with them the high conceptions from Olympus, I was able more clearly than ever to recognize how high were Mr. Winthrop’s ideals, so far as this world goes, of human excellence and, with deepest humiliation, remembered how far I must have come short of his lowest standards. I went to Mrs. Flaxman with this new and painful discovery, and as usual, she brought her consolation.

“Very few can hope to attain such excellence of culture and intellect as these men possess. You and I ought to be grateful to our Creator if he has given us brain power sufficient to appreciate and comprehend their words. I know it has given Mr. Winthrop deep satisfaction to see you so interested in their conversation.”

“How do you know that?” I asked, pleased at her words.

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“I look at him sometimes while you get so absorbed listening that you seem to forget everything; and I see the gratified expression of his face while he watches you. I know it would be a disappointment to him if you should develop into a fashionable, feather-headed woman.”

“Or a widow-helping philanthropist,” I said, laughing.

“Of the two, he would prefer the latter.”

“But neither would be his ideal.”

“I am not altogether certain of that; but I do know he holds in strong dislike a woman who simply exists to follow the fashions, no matter how attractive she may be.”

“I am ashamed to say I like getting new things, especially when they are becoming,” I said, a little shamefacedly.

“I am sure you would get tired of a perpetual round of new hats and frocks, and trying them on, I am not apt to be mistaken in a person.”

“But it is vastly easier to think of harmonious colors and combinations of dry goods, than it is to puzzle over those knotty subjects we listen to here in the evening, or to translate Chopin or Wagner, or the other great masters.”

“But once mastering any of these, the pleasure arising therefrom gives satisfaction to a noble cast of mind that a whole gallery of Worth’s choicest costumes could not produce.”

“Solomon said: Much study is a weariness of the flesh.”

“Solomon was an intellectual dyspeptic. But granting that it is a weariness, it is something that pays well for the weariness.”

“If all the world were to come to Mr. Winthrop’s way of thinking, it would be a sad thing for the dressmakers.”

“Not necessarily. They would still be needed, but they would do the thinking about what would best suit the style of their respective customers; and the latter would be left free of that special task, to devote their minds to their own interior furnishing.”

“Ah, you describe a second Utopia, or the golden age. A few in each generation might reach that clear, chill region of sublime thought; but the rank and file of womankind, and perhaps of mankind, would despise them as cranks.”

“But if they had something vastly better than the respect of the careless and uncultured, need they mind what these would say?”

“Possibly not; but in most women’s hearts there is an innate love of adornment, and the art they will not relegate very willingly to others.”

“I did not think you cared so much for dress.”

“You and Mr. Winthrop are putting the strongest temptations in my way, and then expect that I shall calmly turn my dazzled eyes inwards upon the unfurnished, empty spaces of my own mind.”

“You seemed to care almost too little for elegance of attire, I thought.”

“What the eyes do not see the heart never longs for. But glossy velvets, shimmering silks, with colors perfected from the tints of the rainbow; laces that are a marvel of fineness and beauty; and gems that might dazzle older heads than mine, thrown recklessly in my way, could any young creature fond of pretty things turn away from them, with the indifference of a wrinkled philosopher? I should have staid at Oaklands, and saved my money for the Mill Road folk.”

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“You must have the temptation, if you are to have the credit of overcoming it.”

“Is there not a wonderful petition left for us by One who knows all things? ‘Lead us not into temptation.’”

“I do not think this is a parallel case. God’s way with His people, ever since Eve was denied the fruit in Eden, has been to prove them by temptation. His promise that there shall, with the temptation, be a way of escape, is what we need to claim.”

“My way of escape will be to go back to Oaklands, where an occasional tea party will be the most dangerous allurement to vanity in my way.”

“But you will not always remain there. Mr. Winthrop will not be so remiss in his duty as your guardian as to bury you there. Marriage, and a judicious settlement in life, are among the probabilities of your near future.”

My cheeks crimsoned; for marriage was one of the tabooed subjects of conversation at Madame Buhlman’s. Only in the solitude of our own rooms did we dare to converse on such a topic. But no doubt we wove our romances as industriously, and dreamed our dreams of the beautiful, impossible future stretching beyond our dim horizons, as eagerly as if we had been commanded to spend a certain portion of each day in its contemplation.

Mrs. Flaxman noticed my embarrassment, and, after a few moments said:—“Perhaps the fairy prince has already claimed his own.”

I laughed lightly, but still felt ill at ease as I said: “I have never met him, and begin to doubt if he has an existence.”

“He is sure to come, soon or late; probably too soon to please me. I shall miss you sadly when you go away from us.”

I knelt beside her chair, a lump gathering in my throat, and my slow coming tears ready to drop.

“I do not know why you should miss me, but it makes me so glad to hear you say so. I have no one to really love me in the wide, wide world, that is, whose love I can claim as a right, and sometimes the thought makes me desolate.”

She sat for awhile silently stroking my hair.

“I do not think yours will be a desolate, or lonely life, Medoline. It is only the selfish who are punished in that way. The blessing of those about the perish will overtake you, making the shadowy places in your life bright.”

“But there are no perishing ones conveniently near for me to save. I am of little more use in the world than a humming bird.”

“Already some of the Mill Road folk have been comforted by you. You remember it is recorded of the Mary of Bethany; ’She hath done what she could.’ For that act of gratitude to the Master, her memory will be cherished long after the sun is cold. We do not know if somewhere all our minutest acts of unselfishness are not recorded, to be met with one day with glad surprise on our part.”

“I would rather be so remembered,” I said with eager longing, “than to be a Cleopatra or Helen of Troy.”

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“In what way is that?” Mr. Winthrop asked, as he stood looking down at me from behind Mrs. Flaxman’s chair. I sprang to my feet in consternation. “We did not hear you enter,” I faltered, very much ashamed to be found in such a childish attitude.

“I know that, since I would not have been just now admitted to your confidence.”

I wheeled him up an arm chair, and stirred the fire very industriously, hoping thereby to divert his attention. He sat down quietly. His massive head laid back against the rich, dark leather seemed to bring the features out in stronger relief; the fire light falling uncertainly on his face, but enabling me to note distinctly its expectant look. I went to the window and stood for sometime watching the passers by in the street, thinking thus to pass away the time until Mr. Winthrop should forget to further question me; but he suddenly startled me by coming towards the window where I stood, and saying:

“You have not answered my question.”

“The remark was only intended for Mrs. Flaxman’s ears, and was of no importance, any way.”

“Mrs. Flaxman then will enlighten me as to the bent of your ambition,” he said, quite too authoritatively for my liking, and turned towards her.

“Our conversation drifted to personal endeavor. We were talking of many things, when Medoline, just as you came in, expressed the wish to be helpful to others rather than to shine in cold and stately splendor.”

“Ah, yes. Cleopatra and Helen of Troy were excellent illustrations of the splendor. I am glad she is able to avail herself of her classical studies in conversation.”

I looked mutely at Mrs. Flaxman, but she was gazing intently into the burning coals, with a slight flush on her face, caused, I knew, by Mr. Winthrop’s words. A few moments after I glanced at my guardian. His eyes were closed, the lines of his face looked hard and stern. I wondered if it never softened even in sleep, or did it always wear that look that some way brought to my mind the old Vikings of the frozen north.

Mrs. Flaxman presently arose saying it was time for us to dress for the concert. Mr. Winthrop looked up to say he had secured us an escort, and would not accompany us.

“I thought you particularly admired Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony,” I exclaimed, with surprise.

“I do not think that crowd of amateurs will do much; although Bovyer gives them great praise. I would as soon hear that Larkum baby crowing as to hear such a masterpiece mangled.”

“Some passages will be well rendered, surely.”

“What matter, if one is all the time dreading a discord? I shall expect, however, a full account of the performance from you.”

“I have already heard this symphony rendered by the court musicians in Belgium. I had no heart to practice my lessons for weeks after.”

“And why not?”

“It seemed useless for me to waste time or money over an art so far beyond my powers to master.”

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His face softened, while he arose from his chair and came a few steps nearer to me.

“Only one or two human beings, so far as we know, have had musical powers equal to Beethoven. Most men are satisfied if they can perform harmoniously his creations.”

“I could never do that. I might by years of hard study get so far as to strike the correct notes, but the soul and expression would elude me, simply because I have not brain power sufficient to comprehend them. A thrush would be foolish to emulate the nightingale.”

“Yes but some one might be gladdened by its own simple note,” he said, gently.

I was silent, while his words sank comfortably in my heart.

Looking up, at last, I caught his eye.

“I will try to be satisfied with my thrush’s note, and make the best of it.”

“That is right, but make sure that you are not any better song bird than the thrush, before you rest satisfied with its simple accomplishment.”

Very earnestly and sincerely I promised him to do my best, and then followed Mrs. Flaxman from the room. Our escort proved to be Mr. Bovyer, a grave man, not so young as Mr. Winthrop, and who had a genuine passion for classic music. I fancied from his name and partiality for German composers that he must be either directly or remotely of Teutonic origin. Beethoven was his great favorite. He averred that the latter had penetrated further into the mysteries of music than any other human being. He seemed transformed while we sat listening to the great waves of harmony bewildering our senses; for, notwithstanding Mr. Winthrop’s prophecy, the concert was a success. He had a stolid face. One might take him almost for a retired, well-to-do butcher; but when the air was pulsating with delicious sounds, his face lighted up and grew positively handsome.

“I wonder how you will endure the music of the immortals, that God listens to, if you get with the saved by and bye?” I said, impulsively.

He shook his head doubtfully, but gave me at the same time a look of surprise.

“I do not ask for anything better than Beethoven,” he replied quietly.

Some way I felt saddened. The Creator was so much beyond the highest object of his creative skill, even though that is or might be one so gloriously endowed as Beethoven; it seemed strange that a thinking, intellectual being would grasp the less when he might lay hold on the greater. I glanced around on the gay, richly-dressed throng—pretty women in garments as harmonious in form and color almost as the music that was

thrilling at least some of us; some of them fair enough, I fancied, to be walking in a better world than ours; then, by some strange freak of the imagination, I fell to thinking of the poverty and sorrow, and breaking hearts all about us, until the music seemed to change to a minor chord; and away back of all other sounds I seemed to hear the sob and moan of the dying and broken-hearted.

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Perhaps some new chord had been touched in my own heart that had never before responded to human things; for in spite of myself I sat and wept with a full, aching heart. I tried to shield my face with my fan and at last regained my composure, and tried, in sly fashion, to dry my eyes with the bit of lace I called my handkerchief, and which I found a very poor substitute for the substantial lawn hitherto used. At last I regained my composure sufficiently to look up, when I found Mr. Bovyer regarding me keenly. He glanced away, but after that his manner grew sympathetic, and on our way home he said,

"I am glad to know you can understand great musical conceptions."

"I found it very, very sad. I scarce ever realized how much pain there might be in this world, as for a little while I did to-night."

"The tears were sorrowful then, and not glad?" he said, gently.

"My tears are always that. I cannot conceive a joy so great as to make me weep."

"Your heart is not fully wakened yet, some day you will understand; but be thankful you can understand a part. Not many at your age feel the master's touch so keenly." When we said good-night, he asked permission to call next day. I waited for Mrs. Flaxman to reply, and turned to her, seeing she hesitated. She smiled and I could see answered for me.

"We shall be happy to see you. Mr. Winthrop receives his friends, I believe, to-morrow evening." As we went to our rooms she said:—"Won't it be wonderful if you have captivated Mr. Bovyer's heart?—I am sure Mr. Winthrop considered him a safe escort, so far as love entanglements were concerned."

"That old man thinking of love! He looks as if he thought much more of his dinner than anything else."

"Probably he does bestow some attention on it; but he is not old, at least not more than six and thirty. Beside he is a very clever man—a musical critic and good writer; in fact, one of Mr. Winthrop's most intimate friends."

"That, I presume, speaks volumes in his favor," I said, perhaps with a touch of sarcasm in my voice.

"Yes; Mr. Winthrop is an unerring judge of character; that is, of late years."

“Well, I would nearly as soon think of marrying Daniel Blake as this Mr. Bovyer. I have never been in love, but I have an idea what it is,” I said, following Mrs. Flaxman to her room.

“But Mr. Bovyer might teach you. Did you ever read Shakespeare’s Midsummer Night’s Dream?”

“Oh, yes; and of Titania and Bottom of course, but that was only a dream—Mr. Bovyer is a very solid reality. But I must not stay here gossiping. Mr. Winthrop will be waiting for my description of the music.”

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I slipped into my own room to lay aside my wraps, still smiling over Mrs. Flaxman's childish ideas respecting Mr. Bovyer in the *role* of a lover, and also a little troubled about the wording of the report I was expected to give. His smile would be more sarcastic than ever, if I confessed my tears; and, alas, I had but little other impression to convey of the majestic harmonies than one of profound sadness. I glanced into my mirror; the picture reflected back startled me. In the handsome gown, with the same gems that had once enhanced my mother's charms, the transformation wrought was considerable; but my eyes were shining with a deep, unusual brilliancy, and a new expression caused by the influences of the evening had changed my face almost beyond my own recognition. I went down to the parlor where I found Mr. Winthrop absorbed in his book. I stood near waiting for him to look, but he remained unconscious of my presence. I went to the fireside. On the mantle I noticed, for the first time, a bust of the great master whose music had just been echoing so mournfully in my ears. I took it in my hand and went nearer the light, soon as absorbed in studying the indrawn melancholy face as was my guardian over his book. When I looked at him his book was closed, and his eyes regarding me attentively.

"Do you recognize the face?"

"Oh, yes. I wonder he looks like other men."

"Why should he look differently?"

"Because he was different. I wonder what his thoughts were when he was writing that symphony?" I held the bust off reflectively.

"Did you enjoy your evening's entertainment?"

"Yes and no,—I wish you had been there, Mr. Winthrop. Please don't ask me to describe it."

"I will get a description of how you received it then from Bovyer—he could tell me better than you. He reads faces so well, I sometimes have a fear he sees too far beneath our mask."

"I don't want to see him any more then," I said impetuously.

"Why not?"

"I do not want my soul to be scrutinized by strange eyes, any more than you do, Mr. Winthrop."

"How do you know that I object?"

"Did you not say just now you had a fear he saw too deeply into us?"

“Possibly. I was speaking in a general way—meant humanity at large, rather than my own individual self.”

“Would you care if I could see all the thoughts and secrets of your soul just at this moment, Mr. Winthrop?” I said, taking a step nearer, and looking intently into his eyes, which returned my look with one equally penetrating.

“No, Medoline. You, least of any one I know,” he said, quietly. I looked at him with surprise—perhaps a trifle grieved.

“Does that offend you?” he asked after a pause.

“It wounds me; for I am your friend.”

“I am glad of that, little one.”

“Glad that you have given me pain?” I asked, with an odd feeling as if I wanted to burst into a fit of childish weeping.

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He left his chair and came to my side.

“Why do you look so sorrowful, Medoline? I meant that it gave me pleasure that you were my friend. I did not think that you cared for me.”

“I am surprised at myself for caring so much for you when you are so hard on me. I suppose it is because you are my guardian, and I have no one else, scarcely, to love.” I was beginning to think I must either escape hastily to my room, or apply the bit of cobweb lace once more to my eyes, which, if I could judge from my feelings, would soon be saturated with my tears.

“I did not think I was hard on you,” he said, gently. “I have been afraid lest I was humoring your whims too much; but unselfishness, and thought for the poor, have been such rare traits in the characteristics of my friends, I have not had a heart hard enough to interfere with your instincts.”

Here was an entirely new revelation to me; I bethought me of Mrs. Flaxman’s remark a short time before, and repeated it to him.

“I do not think I shall ever have paternal feelings towards you, Medoline, I am not old enough for that. Tell Mrs. Flaxman, if she speaks that way again, I am not anxious for her to fasten in your heart filial affection for me.”

“But we may be just as much to each other as if you were my own father?” I pleaded.

“Quite as much,” he said, with emphasis. I forgot my tears; for some way my heart had got so strangely light and glad, tears seemed an unnecessary incumbrance; and even the thought that had been awaked by the disturbing harmonies of Beethoven’s majestic conceptions were folded peacefully away in their still depths again.

CHAPTER XIII.

Alone with his dead.

At breakfast Mr. Winthrop was more insistent in his curiosity about the concert of the previous evening. Mrs. Flaxman assured him that we were all agreeably disappointed in our evening’s entertainment.

“Mr. Bovyer was especially charmed with Medoline’s appreciation of his favorite composer. He asked permission to call on her to-day.”

He gave me a keen glance, saying: “I hope you did not grow too enthusiastic. One need not hang out a placard to prove we can comprehend the intricate and profound.”

Mrs. Flaxman answered hastily for me.

“No, indeed; she was too quiet; and only Mr. Bovyer and myself detected the tears dropping behind her fan. But Mr. Bovyer seemed gratified at the meaning he read from them.”

My face was burning; but after a few seconds’ silence I stole a glance at Mr. Winthrop. He was apparently absorbed in his breakfast, and Beethoven’s Symphonies were not mentioned in his presence until evening, when Mr. Bovyer, true to his appointment, sat chatting for two or three hours with Mr. Winthrop and his other guests. As usual, I sat a silent listener, comprehending readily a good many things

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that were said; but some of the conversation took me quite beyond my depth. I found Mr. Bovyer could grow eloquent over his favorite topics, which, from his phlegmatic appearance, surprised me. He seemed thoroughly acquainted with other subjects than music, and I noticed that even Mr. Winthrop listened to his remarks with deference. Before the evening closed Mr. Winthrop asked him for some music. He complied so readily that I fell to contrasting his unaffected manner with that of lady musicians who, as a rule, take so much coaxing to gratify their friends' desire for music, and their own vanity at the same time. I noticed Mr. Winthrop settling back into his favorite position in his arm-chair—his head thrown back and eyes closed. Mrs. Flaxman took up her fan and held it as if shielding her eyes from the light. I discovered afterward it was merely a pretext to conceal the emotion Mr. Bovyer usually awakened when she listened to his music.

His first touch on the piano arrested me, and I turned around to watch his face. I recognized the air—the opening passage from Haydn's Creation. I was soon spellbound, as were all the rest. Mrs. Flaxman laid down her fan; there were no melting passages to bring tears in this symphony, descriptive of primeval darkness, and confusion of the elements, the evil spirits hurrying away from the glad, new light into their native regions of eternal night—the thunder and storm and elemental terrors. Presently I turned to Mr. Winthrop. He was sitting erect in his chair, his eyes no longer closed in languorous enjoyment; when suddenly the measure changed to that delicious passage descriptive of the creation of birds. Mr. Bovyer's voice was a trifle too deep and powerful for the air, but it was sympathetic and rarely musical.

He ended as abruptly as he began and glided off into one of those old English glees,—-"Hail, Smiling Morn."

Presently turning around he asked: "Are you tired?"

"We have failed to take note of the flight of time; pray go on," Mr. Winthrop urged.

"What do you say, Miss Selwyn?"

"I would like if you could make Mr. Winthrop cry. If you tried very hard, you might touch his fountain of tears."

"Bravo! I will try," he exclaimed amid the general laugh. He touched the keys, and then pausing a moment, left the instrument.

"I am not in the mood to-night for such a difficult task. I may make the attempt some stormy winter's night at Oaklands. I believe I have a standing invitation there," he said, joining us around the fire.

Mr. Winthrop threw me an amazed look, but instantly recovering himself he said heartily: —“The invitation holds good during the term of our natural lives. The sooner it is accepted the more delighted we shall be.”

Mr. Bovyer bowed his thanks, and coming to my side asked if I would care to attend another concert the following evening.

“It depends on what the music is to be. I am not so sensitive as Mr. Winthrop to a few false notes now and then. The composer has more power to give me pain than the performers, I believe.”

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“I should say, then, that your comprehension of music was more subtle than his.”

“I do not pretend to compare myself with Mr. Winthrop in any way. It would be like the minnow claiming fellowship with the leviathan.”

Mr. Winthrop suggested very politely:—

“Humility is becoming until it grows abject.”

“Your guardian is an incorrigible bachelor. Ladies do not get the slightest mercy from him,” Mr. Bovyer remarked.

“I have ceased to look for any,” I said, with an evenness of voice that surprised me.

“I am glad to find myself in such good company,” Mr. Winthrop said, with a graceful bend of the head, which included each of his guests in the list of single blessed ones.

“Are you all going to be old bachelors?” I asked, forgetting myself in the surprise of the moment.

“I am not aware that we are all irrevocably committed to that terrible fate,” Mr. Bovyer said, as he united in the general smile at my expense.

“It might be more terrible for some of your wives than if you remained single. I think some persons are fore-ordained to live single.” I looked steadily in the fire lest my eyes might betray too much.

“Do you imagine those blighted lives are confined solely to one sex?” Mr. Winthrop blandly inquired.

“Oh, no; nature does not confine her oddities to one sex; but a woman can better conceal the lack of a human heart and sympathies.”

“You mean they are better actresses?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“I must tell you, gentlemen, this little ward of mine is a natural philanthropist. You would be amazed to see how she sympathizes with widows and the broken-hearted of both sexes. I have been forced to limit her charities to a certain yearly amount lest her husband may one day call me to account for her wasted means.”

“It is the most beautiful trait in womankind.” Mr. Bovyer responded, heartily, just as a passionate retort had sprung to my lips. The second’s interruption gave me time to regain my self-control; but the color flamed over brow and cheek as I rose and walked

to the farther end of the room and stood turning over the leaves of a book lying on the table. I could still hear what was said and was surprised that Mr. Winthrop turned the conversation so cleverly into other channels. It was growing late, and before long the guests retired. Mr. Bovyer, as he shook hands with me, said: "You have not answered my question yet. Will you come to the Philharmonic to-morrow evening?"

I looked to Mr. Winthrop for a reply.

"I think you must deny yourself that pleasure, as we shall probably go home to-morrow."

"So soon?" I asked with surprise.

"The time I limited myself to expired yesterday. We can return this winter, and complete any unfinished business or pleasure that you now leave undone."

"My business is finished. It happens to be a pleasure to return to Oaklands."

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I murmured my thanks to Mr. Bovyer, and withdrew the hand he was still holding.

When we were at last alone, Mrs. Flaxman drew her chair near the fire and settling back comfortably as if she were in no hurry to retire, said very seriously:—“This is unexpected—our going home to-morrow.”

“I am afraid Bovyer is about making an ass of himself. Strange what weaknesses come over strong men sometimes! He was the last I should have expected such a thing from,” Mr. Winthrop said.

“Was it fear of this that sends you home so abruptly?” Mrs. Flaxman asked, with a look of amusement.

“One reason.”

“He would be a very good *parti*; only a little too old, perhaps.”

“What are you thinking of? I shall not let that child get entangled for years.” He said, almost angrily.

“What has Mr. Bovyer done?” I inquired, a good deal mystified.

“You are too young to have everything explained. I want you to keep your child’s heart for a good many years yet.”

“What a pity young people cannot keep the child’s heart until they get some good out of life. Not begin at once with its storms and passions,” Mrs. Flaxman remarked, in a moralizing tone.

“Do you mean falling in love, Mrs. Flaxman?”

“Possibly that was what I meant, but it is to be a tabooed topic with you for some years yet, Mr. Winthrop decides.”

“You have been unusually fortunate in that respect, Mr. Winthrop. I used to think every one fell in love before they came to your age.” Mrs. Flaxman glanced at him with a pained, startled look which I did not understand. I noticed that his face though grave was unruffled; but he made me no reply.

I could not explain the reason, but I felt grieved that I had made the remark, and slipped quietly out of the room without my usual good-night.

The next day we left for home. Mr. Winthrop was not fortunate in meeting friends; so he sat beside us. I would have preferred being alone with Mrs. Flaxman, without the restraint of his society. We had not been able on that train to secure a parlor car, for

which I was very glad. There seemed more variety and wider types of humanity in the plainer car, and I liked to study the different groups and indulge in my dreams concerning them. My attention was suddenly attracted, at a station we were approaching, by a hearse and funeral procession apparently waiting for us. The cars moving along presently hid them from my view, and my attention was suddenly distracted from this melancholy spectacle by the unusual circumstance of a man coming alone into the car with an infant in his arms. The cars scarcely paused, and while I watched to see the mother following her baby the brakeman came in with an armfull of shawls, satchels, and baskets. The baby soon began to cry; when it was pitiful to watch the poor fellow's futile efforts to hush its wailings, while he tossed over the parcels apparently in search of something; but the baby's cries continued to increase in volume, and the missing article, whatever it was, refused to turn up.

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Mr. Winthrop cast a look on it that might have annihilated a much stronger specimen of humanity; but the father, as I supposed him to be, intercepted the wrathful gaze, and his face, already sorrowful looking, became more distressed than ever.

I waited impatiently for some older woman to go to his relief; but men and women alike seemed to regard the little waif with displeasure; so at last slipping swiftly out of my seat lest Mr. Winthrop might intercept me, I went straight to the poor fellow's relief.

"What is the matter with the baby?" I asked, as sympathetically as I could.

"He is hungry, and they have taken his food by mistake, I am afraid, to the baggage car."

"May I take care of him while you go for it?"

"If you only would, I would be so grateful."

I sat down and he put the bit of vocality in my arms, and then hastened after its dinner. I glanced towards Mr. Winthrop. I fancied that his face expressed volumes of shocked proprieties; so I quickly withdrew my gaze, since it was not at all comforting, and devoted myself exclusively to the poor little baby. Its clothing had got all awry, its hands were blue with cold, and the tears from its pretty, blurred eyes were running in a copious stream. I dried its face, took off its cap and cloak, and got its garments nicely straightened out, and then to complete the cure, for want of something better, gave it my long suffering watch to nibble. The little creature may have recognized the soothing effect of a woman's hands, or it may have been the bright tick, tick which it was gazing at now with pleased expression, and with its untutored tongue was already trying to imitate. What the cause was I could not say; but when the father returned, silence reigned in the car so far as his offspring was concerned. His face brightened perceptibly. "It does seem as if a baby knew a woman's touch," he said, with such a sigh of relief.

"They know when their clothes are comfortable and their hands warm."

"His mother always attended to him. He and I were only playfellows."

"Where is his mother now?" I asked, no longer able to restrain my curiosity.

"In the freight room." His eyes filled with tears.

"Was it her coffin I saw in the hearse awhile ago?"

"Yes."

“Oh I am so sorry;” and I too burst into tears. He busied himself getting a spirit lamp lighted, and soon the baby’s milk was simmering, and almost before good humor had been restored throughout the car the baby had comfortably dined, and gone off into a refreshing slumber. I made him a snug little bed out of rugs and shawls, and laid him down in blissful unconsciousness of the cold, still form, even more unconscious than he, in the adjoining freight room.

The passengers as well as Mr. Winthrop had been watching me curiously, and my sudden burst of tears had mystified them.

Once the baby was nicely settled to its nap I returned to my seat. Mrs. Flaxman eagerly asked why there was no woman to look after the baby. I saw Mr. Winthrop listening, as if interested also in the strange phenomenon of a man in attendance alone on an infant.

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“The mother is in the freight room.”

“What?” Mrs. Flaxman asked, looking a trifle alarmed.

“She is in her coffin.” My lip trembled, and with difficulty I restrained my tears once more.

“How dreadful!” she murmured, and presently I saw her wiping away her own tears.

“And you were the only one brave enough to go to him in his trouble. Medoline, I am proud of you, but ashamed of myself.”

“I couldn’t help going; he looked so distressed, and I could see he wasn’t fit to look after the baby. Men are so useless about such things,” I said, giving Mr. Winthrop a humorous glance.

“Another case of widowers,” Mr. Winthrop whispered, as he bent his head near to mine; but I saw that he too was not unmoved, and the look he bestowed upon me was equal to a caress.

“I am going to speak to that poor man myself.” Mrs. Flaxman said very energetically, after she had got her eyes dried.

She went, but very soon I saw her handkerchief in active service again. They sat chatting a long time, while all the passengers seemed to have a growing interest in their fellow traveller and his little charge. The latter wakened while Mrs. Flaxman was still lingering beside the bereaved father. It cried at first; but she soon got him so comfortable and content, that he was laughing and cooing into the wintry looking faces of his father and new nurse. I wanted to have the dear little fellow in my own arms, he had such a bright, intelligent face, and his smile was so sunny; but I could not muster courage to go and ask for him.

Mrs. Flaxman probably noticed my wistful look, for she presently returned to her own seat bringing him with her. She had scarcely left the father’s side when a white-haired, kindly-faced old gentleman at the farther end of the car got up and came stumbling along, and took a seat beside him. The poor fellow winced. He shrank, no doubt, from opening his wound afresh for another stranger to probe. But there was something so sympathetic in the old man’s face, and the hearty shake of the hand that he gave without even speaking, that I concluded he would do more good than harm. After sitting a little while in silence, I overheard him telling how he had heard of his trouble through the conductor. I had not asked him anything about his wife’s death, that seemed a grief too sacred to explain to a perfect stranger; but he had told Mrs. Flaxman all, and I sat listening with a strong desire to cry while she repeated the story to us.

“His wife died very suddenly,” she said, “and they were all strangers where they lived; but every one, he said, was so kind. He is taking his baby home to his mother. They live a little way out of Cavendish. He said he knew us; and was never so surprised at anything in his life as when a beautiful young lady, like you, traveling, too, with Mr. Winthrop, came and took his baby. Everybody was looking so crossly at the baby, he had just begun to feel as if there was no sympathy for him in all this world full of strangers; but, when you came, there was a great load taken off his heart. I mean after this to be more on the watch to help others.”

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“Why, Mrs. Flaxman, I thought that was one of your strongest characteristics.”

“Don’t ever say such a thing to me again, when if it had not been for a tender-hearted child, with the very poorest possible opinion of herself, we might have, amongst us, finished breaking that poor fellow’s heart.”

“You will make her vain if you continue praising her so much,” Mr. Winthrop remonstrated.

“She has not a natural tendency that way, and we have not helped to foster her vanity; if we have erred, it has been in the other direction.”

“Please let us cease talking personalities. Why don’t you admire and talk about this lovely boy? Wouldn’t you like to have us adopt him at Oaklands, Mr. Winthrop?”

“I expect you will not be quite satisfied until you get the position of matron in some huge asylum for widows and orphans, with a few widowers thrown in for variety.”

“I should enjoy such a position, I believe. It never occurred to me before. Only think! Gathering up little bits of motherless humanity like this, and training them into noble men and women. They would go on perpetuating my work long after my eyes were sleeping under the daisies. Why that would be next thing to the immortality most of us long for.”

“Do you really think you would like such a career?”

“Yes, really. If you would only help me to begin now, in a small way at first, and build a pretty cottage in one of the Glens around Oaklands.”

“Have you no higher ambition than to take care of children?”

“But what could be higher, at least within my reach? I am not clever enough to write books—at least not good ones, and there are too many fifth and sixth rate ones now in the market. My painting and music won’t ever amount to anything more than my book-writing could do; so what remains for me but to try and make the world the better for having lived in it? And the only way any of us can do that is to work for human beings.”

I was in such real earnest, I forgot for the time Mr. Winthrop’s possible sarcasm.

“You are not very moderate in your demands. Possibly I would be permitted to share in the posthumous honors you mention, which would be some recompense for the outlay. Of course, I would be called on to feed and clothe, as well as shelter, your motley crowd.”

“I forgot about that. Would it cost very much?”

“The expense would depend largely on the numbers you received, and it might not be safe to trust to your discretion in limiting the number. Your sympathies would be so wrought on, Oaklands would soon swarm with blear-eyed specimens of humanity, and Mrs. Flaxman and I would be compelled to seek some other shelter.”

“If I were only rich myself,” I said, with a hopeless sigh.

“You would very soon be poor,” Mrs. Flaxman interjected, turning to Mr. Winthrop. “I could scarcely restrain her from buying one of the most expensive pieces of broadcloth for her blind friend.”

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“He may never have had a genuine suit of West of England broadcloth in his life, and I wanted him to have the best. The difference in price would only amount to a few dollars; and if we were getting ourselves a satin or velvet gown we would not have hesitated a moment over the difference of five or six dollars.”

“My ward will need some severe lessons in economy before she can be entrusted with a house full of children. Paris dolls and becoming dresses for her prettiest children would soon drain the pocket.”

I said no more. My enthusiasm, viewed in the light of my guardian’s cold criticism, seemed exceedingly Utopian, and I concluded that my best plan was to do the work that came in my way cheerfully and lovingly, without sighing hopelessly after the impossible. To make the motherless little fleck of immortality happy that now nestled confidingly in my arms for a brief hour, was the work that just then lay nearest to me; and I set myself about doing it with right good will.

As we neared Cavendish, the kindly faced old gentleman started for his own seat, but paused on the way at my side, and shook my hand cordially as he said: “I want to thank you, Miss, for giving us all such a wholesome lesson. I am an old man now, and can look back over the deeds of more than three score and ten years; and I tell you there’s none gives me more real satisfaction than the acts of kindness I’ve done to others. If I were beginning the journey again, I’d set myself to do such work as that, rather than trying to pile up money that at the last I’d have to leave to some one that mightn’t thank me. I’ve a fancy, too, that the kindnesses follow us into another life. If I don’t mistake, when you get old like me, you’ll have many pleasant memories of the kind to look back upon; and then you may remember the old man’s words long after he has crumbled to dust.”

I smiled brightly up into his strong, wholesome face and would really have liked to know more about him, but like many a person we meet on the journey of life, as ships on some wide sea, signal briefly to each other and then pass out of sight, so I never saw or heard of him afterward. He stood a moment stroking the baby’s curly head, and then with a murmured “God bless the little lad,” he passed on to his own seat. I felt instinctively that all this sentiment would be exceedingly distasteful to Mr. Winthrop, and was amused at the look of relief that passed over his face when our own station was reached. As I returned the baby to his father, he grasped my hand with a pressure that pained me and said, scarce above a whisper:

“I will pass your kindness along to some other desolate one some day. It is the only recompense within my power to make you.”

“What I did has been a genuine pleasure. This little fellow has far overpaid me.”

“It was a great deal you did for me just at that bitter moment.”

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“I wish I could do more to lighten your sorrow,” I said, with tears of sympathy in my eyes as I said my final good-bye, and hastened after Mr. Winthrop, who was waiting, I knew impatiently, on the platform. I saw Samuel assisting Thomas to control the horses, who were always in awe of the snorting engine; and near them stood a lumbering express, into which the men were putting the long box that I knew contained the rigid body of the dead mother. Presently the poor husband with his baby crowing gleefully in his arms, climbed up to the seat beside the driver, and they started out on their lonely journey. Mr. Winthrop was singularly patient with me, although I kept them waiting some time while I stood watching the loaded express pass out of sight. As I leaned back in our own luxurious carriage, I tried to picture the poor fellow’s home going, and hoped that a welcome would be given that would help to lighten his burdened heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

Humble charities.

Mr. Winthrop had telegraphed Reynolds that morning that we were coming home, and when we came in sight of Oaklands, just in the dim twilight, we found the house brilliantly lighted. There was such a genial warmth and comfort when we entered the door that I exclaimed joyously:

“After all, there is no place like home.”

“Is Oaklands better than New York, do you say?” Mr. Winthrop questioned.

“This is home. To every well regulated mind that is the sweetest spot on earth.”

“Without any reservation?”

“We do not need to make any when it is such a home as Oaklands.”

“Possibly you may think very differently when you get better acquainted with the fascinations of city life.”

“One might enjoy both, don’t you think, Mr. Winthrop? The contrast would make each more delightful.”

“You must try the experiment before you will be able to give a correct decision.”

“It seems to me to-night one must be hard to please to want a better home than this, especially with an occasional change to city life. I cannot understand why I have so much more to make life beautiful than others—so many others—have.”

“Do you think, then, that your lot is a peculiarly fortunate one?”

“If I did not think so, I would be worse than those Jews who fell to murmuring on their way to Canaan. If they could have made the journey as comfortably as I am doing they would never have said a word, I believe.”

“That is quite an original way of putting it. Theologians generally are very severe on the poor Jews.”

“And you are usually pretty severe on the poor theologians,” I said laughingly, as I started for my room. On the way I met Reynolds, who seemed so glad to have us back that I kissed her on the spot.

“Bless your dear heart,” she exclaimed, “it’s like a flash of sunlight to have you bursting in on us. You remind me so much of your papa. He had just such a strong, hearty way as you.”

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“Oh, Reynolds, is that so? Why did you never tell me before that I was like him?”

“It did not occur to me to tell you. Does it please you to know it?”

“Certainly it does. It takes away the feeling that I am a changeling, which often haunts me when you tell me I am odd and unconventional,” I said, turning to Mrs. Flaxman.

“Darling, I would rather have you just as you are. If we went to make improvements, we would only spoil a bit of God’s sweetest handiwork.”

“Oh, Mrs. Flaxman, what a tremendous compliment! Mr. Winthrop would read you another lecture, if he heard you say that.”

“Some day we may need to lecture him,” she said with a smile, and then went into her own room, leaving me a trifle perplexed over her meaning.

When we joined Mr. Winthrop in the dining room we found the table laid with its usual precision and elegance for dinner. As I stood on the hearth-rug, looking around the pleasant room, the firelight glancing on the polished silver, and china, and lighting up the beautiful pictures on the walls, no wonder the cheerful home scene made me, for the time, forget the solitary mourner with his dead, out in the cold and darkness. Mrs. Flaxman presently joined me. Drawing her an easy-chair close to the cheerful blaze I knelt on the rug beside her, the easier to stroke Fleta, the pretty Angora cat, who with her rough tongue licked my hand with affectionate welcome. Presently Mr. Winthrop joined us. His presence at first unnoticed in our busy chat, I happened to turn my head and saw him calmly regarding us. “You would make a pleasant picture, kneeling there with the firelight playing in your hair,” he said, coming to my side.

“The picture would be more perfect now that you have joined us.”

“No, my presence would spoil it. A child playing with her kitten needs no other figures to complete the picture.”

“Ah, that spoils your compliment.”

“Mr. Winthrop very judiciously mixes his sweets and bitters,” Mrs. Flaxman said with a smile.

“Yes; I should be too vain if he gave me a compliment really. I wonder if he ever will do that?” I looked up into his face and saw that its expression was kindly.

“You would not wish me to spoil you. If my praising you made you vain, as you just said it would, that would be the worst unkindness.”

“I want you always to be honest with me. A very slight word of praise then will have its genuine meaning.”

“Now that we have once more settled our relations to each other, we will take our dinners. One must descend from the highest summits to the trivialities of eating and drinking.”

“I have never seen you very high up yet, Mr. Winthrop. I do not think there is a spark of sentiment in your composition.”

“Alas, that I should be so misjudged. But wait until your friend Bovyer shows you my tears.”

Mrs. Flaxman generally looked a trifle worried when Mr. Winthrop and I got into conversation. This night, when I wanted every one to be happy, I held my troublesome tongue in check, and made no further reply to my guardian’s badinage.

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When I went to my room for the night, I drew back my curtain and looked out into the darkness of a cloudy, moonless night. It chilled me, I wondered if the baby and its father, with the cold, still form of the once happy mother, had got into the light and warmth of home. I compared our bright evening together in the drawing-room, where Mr. Winthrop had sat with us reading, or rather translating as he read, some splendid passages from his favorite classical authors, a treat not often granted, but he was, I fancied, too tired to read or study in his library alone. I too had tried to add my share to the evening's entertainment; singing mostly some German home songs to an accompaniment on the piano. He had not criticised my performance, a fact very encouraging to me.

But now, as I stood looking out into the black night, I thought of their journey over the rough roads, already beginning to freeze, the baby cold and hungry, and so tired. I turned hurriedly from the window and knelt to say my prayers, a new element entering into my petitions. Forgetting the stereotyped phrases, I remembered with peculiar vividness the impetuous prayer uttered by Mr. Lathrop at Mrs. Blake's funeral, and I too tried to bring comfort to another by prayer. There was such help in the thought that God never forgets us. I so soon forgot amid the pleasures of home-coming the sorrows of another; but He watches ever. The splendors of His throne and crowns, and the adoration of the highest intelligences never so absorbing Him as to cause forgetfulness of the humblest parish pensioner, looking Heavenward for consolation. "Oh, to be more God-like, more unforgetting!" I murmured, still lingering in the attitude of prayer. I do not think in all my life, I had got so near to the Divine Heart.

The next morning an agreeable duty awaited me. First, I had the materials for Mr. Bowen's new suit, and along with these a good many lesser gifts for one and another. In the daily papers, I studied very industriously the notices of cheap sales of dry goods while in the city; and for such a novice in the art of shopping, I made some really good bargains. When I came to get my presents all unpacked I found that Thomas' services would be required if I took all at once.

I found him at last in the kitchen, superintending the preparation of some medicine for one of his horses. Making known my errand, he consented to drive me to the Mill Road; but first assured me that it would disarrange all his plans for the day. Thomas was an old bachelor, with ways very set and precise; and his hours were divided off as regularly as a college professor's.

On our way out he informed me that the widow Larkum was very ill, with the doctor in attendance.

I was surprised that his words should give me such a sinking at the heart.

"What will become of the blind father and orphaned children if she dies?"

“They will go to the poor farm. I pity them; for that Bill Day, that has charge, is a tough subject.”

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“She may not die. Doctors are very often mistaken. They do not know much more about the secrets of life and death than the rest of us.”

“I allow that’s true; for a couple of them give me up for death, a good many years ago; and a pretty fright they give me for nothing.”

“Were you afraid to die?”

“You may be sure I was. Its very unsartin work, is dying.”

“Mrs. Flaxman has lent me the lives of some very good people to read. They were not afraid to die, but looked forward to it, some of them, with delight.”

“They was the pious sort, that don’t make much reckonin’ in this life, I allow.”

“I have read the lives of both kinds of people—the good, and those who were not pious. The former seemed to be the happiest always.”

“They say Mr. Winthrop is a great man—writes fine works and things—but he’s not happy. I take more good out of Oaklands and the horses than he does. He seems to sense the flower-gardens a good deal. I often find him there early of a summer’s morning when I go to work, with a bit of paper and a pencil writing away for dear life; and he don’t seem to mind me any more’n if I was one of the vegetables.”

I smiled at Thomas’ comparison; for now that he mentioned it, he did seem something like an animated turnip.

“I dare say he has far higher pleasures than you or I ever experience. His thoughts are like a rich kingdom to him.”

“He’s had some pretty bitter thoughts, I guess. He got crossed in love once, and its sort of made him dislike wimmen folks. Maybe you’ve noticed it yourself?” Thomas gave me a searching look.

“I did not know he ever cared for a woman in his life. I thought he was above such things,” I murmured, too astonished to think of a proper reply.

“There’s very few men get up that high, I reckon; leastaways, I’ve never sot eyes on them.”

I turned a quizzical look on Thomas, which he understood—his face reddened.

“I don’t claim to be one of the high kind, but I allow Oaklands is better for me than a wife. I never sot great store by wimmen folks. They’re sort of pernicketty cattle to manage; I’d sooner take to horses; and if one happens to die, you don’t feel so cut up

like as if it was a wife. Now there's Dan Blake. Marrying's been enough sight more worryment to him than comfort. I've figgured up the pros and cons close, and them that keeps single don't age near as fast as the married ones. There's the widow Larkum, if she'd kept single, she'd have been young and blooming now. Human folks is many of them very poor witted," Thomas concluded, with fine scorn, and then he was silent.

My thoughts went off in eager surprise over that strange episode in Mr. Winthrop's life, wondering what sort of a woman it was who had power so to mar his happiness, and why she had not responded to his love, and all the fascinating story that my sense of honor prevented me from finding out from Thomas, or Mrs. Blake, or even Mrs. Flaxman. Now that I had quiet to think it over, it seemed like desecration to have the stolid, phlegmatic Thomas talk about it.

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He turned to me abruptly. "Have they never mentioned Mr. Winthrop's trouble to you?"

"No, Thomas, they have not."

"Well, that's curious; but quality has different ways from nateral folks. Well, you see, she was handsomer than any picture; looked as well as you'd think an angel could look, and better dressed than they generally seem to be; for any pictures I've seen of them they've only had a long cloth around them without cut or pattern, and their wings. I've often thought they weren't overhandy with the needle. And the day for the wedding was sot." I stopped him there.

"Would you tell me this if you knew I should repeat all you said to Mr. Winthrop?"

"I guess not; he'd turn me off without my dinner, if he knew."

"You may be sure I shall not tell him; but nevertheless it is not honest for us to be talking on such a subject."

"I see you are like the rest of them. You seemed to have such a fellow feeling for poor folks, we've concluded you were more like us than them."

"Perhaps I am, Thomas; but gentle or simple, we ought to be alike honorable. The Bible has only one code of morals for us all."

"Very few that I know pays much attention to Bible rules. But here we are at the Blakes'. I'll hitch the horse and carry in the bundles since you want them left here. Hang it, if there ain't that ugly critter of Dan's coming for us."

Thomas sprang back into the carriage, and looked a good deal alarmed as he saw me turn to meet Tiger and pat the animal's huge head.

He fawned delightedly around me, licking my gloved hand whenever he could get the chance.

"You need not be afraid, Thomas. I won't let him hurt you."

"I won't risk him. He's the crossest brute in Cavendish."

"Why, Tiger, what a character to get!"

To my surprise the dog looked up at Thomas, and uttered an angry growl.

"See, now; I believe the brute understands what I say."

“Come with me, Tiger.” I started for the house. Tiger stood a moment uncertainly, and then trotted after me. Mrs. Blake’s face was radiant when she opened the door in answer to my knock.

“You’re a thousand times welcome back; and my! but you’re needed.”

“That is encouraging news. But, Mrs. Blake, won’t you hide Tiger away somewhere? Thomas is afraid of him, and, I think, not without reason.”

“I wish’t Daniel ’d sell him; he frightens folks from the house,” she said, with much discontent, driving Tiger unceremoniously into the back porch.

Thomas soon had the bundles laid on the kitchen table, and the carriage turned homewards, while I began unrolling the prints and flannels, frocks and pinafores, for the Mill Road pensioners. Mrs. Blake watched eagerly; but at last exclaimed:

“Dear me! it must a cost you a mint of money to get all these.”

“About the price of one evening dress.”

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“I hope you got all the things, then, you needed for yourself.”

“Yes, and more, I fear, than I really needed. But Mrs. Flaxman says we owe it to our position in society to dress becomingly; but the question to my mind is, how far it is necessary to go to pay that social debt? When I see a family like the Larkums, my conscience tells me I owe them a heavier debt than society.”

“I can’t understand why some people have no conscience, and other so much. It seems to me now you have just a little too much for one of your age.”

“Please don’t you discourage me, Mrs. Blake. I meet too much everywhere else. But for you I might never have given a thought to the poor and needy.”

Mrs. Blake went to the window and stood looking out for some time in silence, while I sat with my hand on Tiger’s head, whom I had liberated after Thomas went away. I looked down into the brown eyes that were gazing up at me with dumb affection.

“Do you really like me so very much, Tiger?” I said, stooping down to gratify him with a touch of my face.

“I do believe he thinks more of you than of anybody. I’ve not seen him look so good-natured since I come here as he does now.” I fancied that I saw traces of tears on her face, and was surprised at it, for she was not the kind of woman constantly bubbling over, and rarely showed the tender side of her nature, save in kindly deeds. Again she began inspecting my goodly array of dry goods with keen interest, inquiring the prices, and passing shrewd comments on the bargains I had made.

“I’m afraid the Larkums won’t need your gifts. If they go to the poor-house, it won’t be worth while giving them anything; the town’ll provide.”

“I do not think they will go there. Mrs. Larkum will get better, after awhile.”

“It might do her good to hear you say; so would you mind coming over this morning to see her? I go in every day to see to them.”

I gathered up a large bundle of flannels and prints, for herself and children, along with the parcel containing Mr. Bowen’s cloth, while Mrs. Blake was getting ready. She came to the table, where I stood arranging my parcels.

“Are these to go to the widow’s now?” she asked.

“Yes, if we can carry all at once.”

“I’ll see to that. I’ve taken many a heavier load a good deal farther.”

“But I will share the burden with you.”

“No, it looks better for me to have my arms full than you; and, anyway, I want to do something to help them, and you too.”

I humored her fancy, only insisting on relieving her of my present for Mr. Bowen. It was the most precious package in the lot; and I feared she might drop it. When we reached the door of the Larkum cottage she halted.

“You won’t like the look of things here to-day. There’s only the neighbors to look after them; and the most of us has more’n enough to do home.”

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“If I am such a poor soldier as to be so easily frightened as that, you would be ashamed of me. When they endure it all the time, surely I may for a few minutes.”

“But you’re not used to it.”

She entered without knocking, when a scene met my gaze that fully equaled Mrs. Blake’s warning. The fire was quite out, and I could see no fuel at hand to kindle it, Mr. Bowen sat in the window trying to extract some warmth from the dull, November sunshine; the baby crying wearily in his arms, probably from cold and hunger combined; the other two children had curled themselves up in an old rug, their bright eyes watching us with eager longing, the house itself was the picture of desolation.

I shivered under my warm fur cloak, and with difficulty restrained myself from rushing from the place; but Mrs. Blake, laying down her bundle with a sigh of relief, bade Mr. Bowen good morning in her usual cheerful way; he responded with equal cheerfulness, still ignorant of my presence there. “You find us a little cold to-day,” he said, as if it were the merest accident; “but wood has given out, and the morning seems rather cool.”

I looked at him in amazement. How could he speak so calmly under the circumstances?

“How is Mrs. Larkum, to-day?”

“Pretty low, I am sorry to say. The doctor says she needs beef-tea and wine.”

“It’s easy for doctors to prescribe.”

“He thinks she might come around if she had proper nourishment. But we are in the Lord’s hands,” he added patiently.

“Yes, and I guess the Lord has sent one of His ravens to look after you. Not that Miss Selwyn looks like a raven—she’s more like a lily.”

“Is Miss Selwyn here?” he asked, turning around eagerly.

“Yes, I reached home last evening. I am sorry to find you in such trouble.”

“The Lord knows what is best for us. I want nothing but what He wills for me. If pain, and poverty come, they are His evangels, and should I dare to repine?”

“Perhaps He has seen that you are patient under severity, and He may send comfort now.”

“My Father is rich and wise, therefore I am content; for I know His kindness is without limit.”

I looked in his face. A grave, refined expression lent dignity to features already handsome, while there was a serenity one of the Old Masters might have coveted to reproduce on one of their immortal pictured faces.

“Your daughter shall have all the nourishment the doctor orders after this; and I believe she will soon be better. The Lord is more pitiful than we are,” I said, gently.

“God will reward you, my dear friend. Pardon me for calling you such; but you have indeed been a friend in adversity.”

“I am glad to be a friend of one who is the friend of God. I esteem it both an honor and privilege.”

“I pray God you may very soon hold the dearer relation to Himself of child, if you are not that already.” He turned his face to me with an eager, expectant expression.

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“No, not in the way you speak of. I am no nearer to Him than I was in childhood. It is only of late I realized the need to be reconciled to Him.”

“He answers prayer.” There was such a ring of joyful faith in his voice I felt convinced there was one praying for me who had a firm hold on God.

I turned to Mrs. Blake, who was busying herself in trying to make a fire.

“Where can we get some coals, or do they burn wood?” I asked.

“They sell the waste at the mill pretty cheap for kindlings, but the coal is far cheapest.”

“Can we get some directly?”

“Yes, with the money,” she said, grimly.

I took out my purse—alas, now far from full—when would I learn economy?

I gave her two dollars. “Will that buy enough for the present?” I asked anxiously; for I was exceedingly ignorant of household furnishings.

“Deary me, yes; it’ll last for a month or more.” I was greatly relieved. By that time a little private venture of my own might be bringing me in some money. I told Mrs. Blake to present the dry goods as soon as I was out of the house. I fancied they would have an indirect medicinal effect on the sick woman.

“I shall go home immediately and get Mrs. Reynolds to make some beef tea. She will keep Mrs. Larkum supplied, I am sure, as long as there is need, and I will either bring or send a bottle of wine directly,” I said encouragingly to Mr. Bowen, whose face under all circumstances seemed to wear the same expression of perfect peace.

“I have not language to express my gratitude, but you do not ask for thanks.” The assertion was something in the form of a question.

“I have a feeling that you will make me the debtor before long,” I murmured softly, and then took my leave. Reynolds entered very heartily into my scheme for relieving Mrs. Larkum, and Mrs. Flaxman, always eager to help others when once her attention was aroused, packed a generous hamper of wine and preserves, fresh eggs and prints of delicious Alderney butter, and fresh fruits, with more solid provisions, and sent them around by the uncomplaining Thomas, at an hour that suited his convenience. Cook also gave me a good basket full of cooked provisions; so I set out with Thomas very well provided for at least a week’s siege. I found Mrs. Blake still at the Larkums. She had been in the mean time very busy getting them made comfortable; and while so doing had taken minute stock of their ways and means. “I had no idea they was so bad off,” she assured me in whispered consultation. “There was the barrel of flour she got

with the money you give her, and not another airthly thing in the house to eat but some salt and about a peck of potatoes."

"Did Mr. Bowen know this morning there was so little?"

"Sartinly; but I believe he'd starve afore he'd let on; he kinder looks to the Lord for his pervisions, and he thinks it's a poor sort of faith to ask human beings. I think he's most too good for such a forgetting world as this is."

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“The Lord has provided abundantly to-day, Mrs. Blake.”

“I won’t allow but somebody has. Maybe the Lord put it in your heart, I can’t say for sartin. It’s a curious mixed up world, and we don’t know where men leaves off and the Lord begins; but that blind man is a Christian, and if there is such a thing as religion he’s got it and no mistake.”

As I looked around at the changed appearance of everything about me I concluded Mrs. Blake did the work of the Christian, even if she made no profession. The house had been scrubbed, the stove nicely polished, and the children’s faces shone with the combined effects of soap and water and the good cheer that was being provided.

Mr. Bowen was sitting back, as if afraid of absorbing too much of the heat, rocking the cradle and singing in a rich, low voice one of the most beautiful hymns I ever heard, the look of peace that came from some unseen source still lighting his face. With Mrs. Blake’s assistance, and with occasional exclamations of delight, on her part I unpacked the hamper and then I took a little wine and a bunch of grapes in to Mrs. Larkum. I was shocked at the change a few weeks had made in her appearance. She saw the pained look in my face and her own countenance fell.

“Mrs. Blake told me you seemed sure I would get better. Do you think now there is no hope?” she asked pitifully.

“I shall not give you up until we try the effect of these,” I said cheerfully, putting the cup that contained the wine to her lips and laying the grapes in her hand. She took a sip or two and then put the cup aside. “I have eaten so little for several days you would soon make me intoxicated with that rich wine. I never tasted any like it,” she said, with a pitiful attempt at a smile. I got out a slice of cook’s home-made bread, and toasting it before the fire, with Mrs. Blake’s help, we soon had a dainty lunch prepared for her with jelly, and a cup of tea with real cream, an unknown delicacy in her cottage, floating on the top. I carried it and watched while she ate it all. “Perhaps it may kill me,” she said, plaintively, “but I believe I am more hungry than sick. This cold cut me right down, and I had nothing to tempt my appetite.”

“I believe Miss Selwyn is one of them wonderful people what has the gift of healing. I’ve heard tell of ’em, but I never seen one,” Mrs. Blake said, regarding me at the same time very seriously.

“I shouldn’t wonder,” Mrs. Larkum responded calmly. “I made up my mind only this morning it was useless for me to expect to get round again; and I was nearly heartbroken thinking of poor father and the children going on the parish.”

“A nice new frock, and good vittels ain’t bad medsin for poor folks sometimes,” Mrs. Blake said dryly.

“That is true; but I was feeling very low and weak,” Mrs. Larkum said, apologetically.

“We all know that, and more’n yourself was afraid it might go hard with you.”

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“So we have decided that it was the food and clothes that have wrought the miracle, and not any unusual healing virtues in me,” I said, quite relieved; for the change wrought was so sudden and great, I began to feel uneasy lest I might be possessed unconsciously of some mysterious power.

Mrs. Larkum smiled gently. “I am not sure of that. I find you always make me happier whenever I see you. I seem to get a fresh hold on hope, as if there might yet be something in store for us.”

“I understand why you feel that way. I am glad it is no mere inexplicable experience.” I went into the kitchen thinking to give Mr. Bowen and the children a few of the surplus dainties.

He had ceased singing, but was sitting with uplifted face, as if in deep communion with God; his lips moved, but no sound escaped.

The eldest boy seeing me hesitate came to my side and whispered softly. “Mother says we are not to speak when grandfather looks like that—cos he’s praying.” I stood holding the child’s hand, an indescribable sensation stealing over me while I stood gazing into the rapt, sightless face.

Never before in great cathedral, or humble church, had I felt the awful presence of God as at that moment. A strange trembling seized me, and, involuntarily I turned my head away, as if I were gazing too boldly upon holy things. I was reminded of the ancient high priest of the Jewish religion who, once a year, took his life in his hand, and went into the Holy of Holies, to gaze on the Divine token.

The child, too, stood silently with bated breath, perhaps more deeply impressed than his wont at seeing my emotion. After awhile he pulled my hand gently and then motioned for me to stoop down to him. I did so.

“Grandad prays every day for you. I hear him myself.” He looked up into my face with a curious expression of importance at having such a secret to tell, and surprise that I should need his grandfather’s prayers.

A sharp knock at the door broke the spell that was holding us in such holy quiet.

Mrs. Blake hastened to open it, when a strangely familiar voice sounded on my ear.

There was a hearty ring of welcome in her voice as she bade him welcome.

“Come right in; you’ll find things better’n you might expect.”

I turned to see who was coming. A swift and kindly look of recognition in the deep, blue eyes took me back to my first experience of Cavendish; and an instant after I

recollected, with a good deal of satisfaction, that it was the Rev. Mr. Lathrop, whom I first saw at Mrs. Daniel Blake's funeral. He extended his hand with such hearty cordiality that I gave him mine in return with a good bit of my heart along with it.

"I am glad to see you here." It was not so much in the words themselves as the way he spoke them, that such welcome meaning was conveyed.

"Indeed, you may be," Mrs. Blake responded.

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I saw Mr. Bowen eagerly waiting to speak to his minister, and even the children were edging up to him with expectant faces. “He always brings us apples,” my little lad explained to me in a whisper.

With entire change of voice he turned to Mr. Bowen and said:—“How fares it with you, brother, in the darkness?”

“Well, all is well.”

In low, sympathetic tones he asked:—“He still provides songs in the night?”

“Yes, almost as sweet as if Heaven itself were stooping to hear.”

“You have learned the secret God reveals to but few of us.”

“Ah, brother, the fault is all in us, not in Him. Gracious as he is to me, all might share with me in this blessed inheritance.”

Mr. Lathrop turned to me. “Our friend here certainly has meat to eat of which very few get the full taste.”

“I did not know there could be such joy in religion. It is a revelation to me, sir.”

“Yes, we go out of our way to help others, not expecting to be repaid, and sometimes one of God’s angels meets us in human guise, and brings us a blessing compared with which our poor gift sinks into insignificance.” He spoke to me in a low-tone. Mr. Bowen could not hear; indeed he seemed never to notice conversation not addressed to him personally. I fancied that his own thoughts were more agreeable than average conversation. I stood uncertainly, longing to remain to hear more of the conversation passing between these two men, but afraid I might thereby violate some unwritten social code. I knew very little of the relation between pastor and people at that time, especially in America.

Mrs. Blake possibly read my face. She came to me and said:—“Won’t you stay to prayers? I guess most all the churches’ll listen to each other reading the Scripters and praying. I know they’d take it as a favor.” She tried to speak softly but Mrs. Blake’s voice had not been trained to fine modulations, and I felt certain Mr. Lathrop overheard her remark.

“I would like to stay if I am not intruding.”

“I guess the best of Christians never reckon folks in the way when they’re praying together, though I shouldn’t say much about them, not being one myself,” she said, dryly.

I sat down quite near to Mr. Bowen. I wanted to study his face, and as I listened in silence, the conversation between the pastor and this member of his flock was a new and beautiful revelation to me. The one seemed to help the other, while no stain of worldliness marred the even flow of their words. After awhile Mrs. Blake handed the minister a well-worn Bible. He opened it and turned the leaves thoughtfully, pausing at last at the 103d Psalm. I looked at Mr. Bowen while Mr. Lathrop was reading. His lips were softly moving as if in responsive worship, the expression of his face like a thanksgiving Psalm.

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A moment's pause in the reading while the leaves were turned, and then the lesson was chosen from the 17th of St. John's Gospel and selections from the ten last chapters of Revelation. I fancied that in the pause between his reading the minister was asking to be directed to the right passages. Every verse seemed to bring its own special consolation, and I was almost as much impressed with the look on Mr. Bowen's face at last, as by the words that fell on my ears. It reminded me of the faces the Old Masters have left us of the saints and martyrs of the early church. Perhaps they took their models from just such men as Mr. Bowen, whom God had left in the furnace until his own image was reflected in them. But my deepest emotions were stirred when, kneeling with the rest, I listened to Mr. Lathrop's prayer.

As I listened, I had no longer any doubt as to the future well-being of this family; but, when just at the close of his prayer, my name was mentioned, and the fulfillment asked for the promise given by Christ, that even a cup of cold water given in his name should be rewarded, a strange sense of awe came over me. Was it possible I had been giving direct to Christ—visiting His sick, and poor, and sorrowing, and making Him glad? My eyes filled with tears, and a deep longing took possession of my heart to know this mighty Friend who died for me, in the same real, blessed way that these men knew, and loved Him. There were few words spoken after the prayer was ended. The place seemed holy ground and, shortly after, Mr. Lathrop left, first going to the little lad who had given me his whispered confidence, and dropped a few silver coins in his chubby fist. He stood regarding the money complacently until the door had closed on the minister, and then, going to his grandfather, he showed, with great glee, his store of money.

"We will have everything now that we want, won't we, grandfather?" he questioned, placing the money in his grandfather's hands.

"We will always have what is best for us, Freddie; but you must never take the minister's money again. You should give to him, instead of taking from him."

"So I must," Freddie responded, rather sorrowfully; "but may I take his apples?"

"Well, yes; you may do that, and, some day, when you are a big boy, and earning money, you can buy him a whole barrel full."

"I might keep a few of them?" Freddie questioned, such extreme generosity overpowering his imagination.

"We will see when the time comes."

Mrs. Blake beckoned me to her side, at the further end of the room.

"I didn't give him these; I put 'em out of sight till you'd come."

“But I wanted him to get them while I was away.”

“Yes, I know; but it’ll be easier to thank you right off, when he’s surprised. My! he’d soon have been able to fly; his clothes is that ragged.”

“Yes, they are very poor; but, some way, one don’t see much but his face. I forget that he is poor and ragged when I look at him.”

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“We’re not all so blind as that. I’m going now to tell him.”

“Mr. Bowen, you’ll think it never rains but it pours. I’ve another surprise for you.”

“What is it?” He turned his face in the direction of her voice.

“Miss Selwyn got you the finest piece of cloth I’ve sot eyes on this many a day, to make you a new suit of clothes. Just feel of that, now.”

He stroked it softly for a moment, and then turned his flushed face to me. “You will bankrupt us with your generosity, Miss Selwyn. But God will pay you. He is rich and wise.”

“You are paying me, too, Mr. Bowen. Prayers are better than gold.”

He said nothing, but took up a fold of the cloth and stroked it, I thought, lovingly.

“I need no longer envy the swallows who build their nests in the eaves of the Lord’s house. How my soul will rejoice to meet once more with His people! ‘Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.’”

For a moment he seemed to forget our presence. Mrs. Blake, always practical, brought us all down to earth again by suggesting that we get the suit made as soon as possible.

“If the tailor will cut it for us, a few of us women folk will come in and make it right off, so’s he can get to meeting. Dan’el’ll be glad to come and take him there every Sunday.”

“I could lead grandfather,” little Fred stoutly asserted. “I’ve been past there lots of times.”

“Are women as good tailors as men?” I asked, doubtfully.

“I reckon not; but they’re enough sight cheaper, especially when they work for nothing. Tailors is awful dear.”

“I want the clothes to look nicely. I will pay the tailor.”

“We can make the vest and pants well enough if he cuts ’em and makes the coat. S’pose we call and see him on our way home?”

I complied with her request, and found the tailor’s establishment a very humble affair on the Mill Road. Mrs. Blake negotiated with him entirely, but he always directed his remarks to me.

“If I hadn’t a family of my own to support these hard times, I’d do it for nothing,” he assured me, over and over; “but I’ll do it for half price. My time, you know, is all the money I have, and one must look out first for their own.”

I found he was a prosy, weak-minded creature, who, although time was so precious, would have stood talking to me of its great value by the hour, if I had patience to listen. I thanked him for his offer, but assured him I would pay his usual price for the work. Mrs. Blake, however, stipulated that she and her neighbors would relieve him of all but the coat, and I could see he was not pleased with her interference. This matter settled, I hastened home, very uncertain how Mr. Winthrop would regard so much of my time being spent on the Mill Road, if he should discover I had been there twice that day. When I got home Mrs. Flaxman told me he had asked for me each time that I was there, but he did not say anything to me.

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CHAPTER XV.

A *pleasant surprise*.

“It would do you good to come to our meeting some Sunday, just to see Mr. Bowen’s face,” Mrs. Blake remarked to me one day, some time after the tailor and women folk had completed very satisfactorily their work.

“I would like to go for other reasons than that. One is to hear your minister pray once more, and also to hear him preach.”

“Can’t you come next Sunday morning?”

“Our service is at the same hour. I do not think Mr. Winthrop would like me to leave our own church. He is very particular about such things.”

“I don’t see why he should; for he don’t set much store by religion.”

“He may give me permission to come some time.”

“I wish he would come too. Our meetings are so good now. Daniel has perfessed religion.”

She spoke in such subdued fashion I looked at her in surprise, thinking she might soon follow his example. I think she was waiting for me to say something; but I felt myself so ignorant on this great subject, I knew not what to say.

“I’ve wished often of late that I’d never been born. Where I’m to go to once the breath leaves my body, is an awful thought.” She burst into a fit of bitter weeping that frightened me.

“Christ is very merciful,” I faltered, not knowing what to say.

“I’ve read that and heard it many a time; but we’ve been such a heathenish lot, I’m afraid He’s left us to ourselves.”

“If He has remembered Daniel, that should encourage you.”

“He’s not lived without thinking of Him as many years as I have.”

She sat with bowed head, quietly weeping, the picture of despair. I touched the hard, wrinkled hand that had so often generously ministered to the wants of others.

“Have you asked Christ to forgive you?”

“Asked Him?” she sobbed, “I’ve been crying day and night for weeks; but I’m only getting further away all the time.”

“Does your son, or Mr. Lathrop know?”

“I reckon they don’t. I was ashamed for any one to know; but I couldn’t help telling you.”

“I think it is because you are ashamed that Christ don’t bless you.”

“I’ve felt I ought to get up and tell them in meeting what a sinner I’ve been; but I’ve always prided myself on being as good as them that’s made a perfession, and they all know what a hard, proud wretch I am. I expect they’d say I was a hypocrite.”

“I think if you confessed to your church what you have just told me, and asked them to pray for you, God would make you His child. It seems to me any petition Mr. Lathrop and Mr. Bowen would dare to present would be received and granted.”

“It’s hard on flesh and blood,” she moaned.

I saw she was in deep distress and could not understand why she was unwilling to make the confession that might bring peace.

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“I wish I’d tended to this when I was young and my heart was easier made new. It’s next to impossible to make a crooked old tree turn and grow straight.”

“With God nothing is impossible,” I whispered encouragingly.

“Yes, the minister said that last night, and looked straight at me. Maybe he saw trouble in my face, and wanted to help me in spite of myself.” She grew calmer at last. “Now I won’t worry you any longer, and I believe I feel better for telling you. I mean to tell them to-night what a proud, stubborn wretch I’ve been, and ask them to pray for me.”

She got up and put on her shawl with a resolute air as if her mind was fully made up, no matter how hard the task might be.

“We’ll step in and see the Larkums. You’ll hardly know them now, they’re so perked up and tidy. Deary me! how far a little help goes sometimes when folks have a mind to help theirselves.”

On our way she said, with matter-of-fact calmness, at the same time setting my blood thrilling through my veins: “I want you to talk with the doctor. I just seen him going to see Mrs. Larkum, and that’s what made me hurry you off so soon from my place.”

“What do you want me to talk about?” I asked, with some surprise.

“Well, he was looking at Mr. Bowen’s eyes the other day, and he says they can cure him up in New York, so he’ll see just as well as ever.”

I stood perfectly still in the road, my surprise and gladness making me forgetful of everything. “Can this be really true?” I gasped.

“It’s a fact; he told me so himself the last time he was there, all about it. I can’t just mind all the long words, ’twould take a dictionary to follow him; but the long and the short of it is that he can go into a big hospital, mostly for such things; and there’s a great doctor there ’ll do it for nothing, provided Mr. Bowen lets a lot of students come and watch. I guess that’s the way the doctors gets their pay from poor folks; and then, if they die, they have their bodies to cut and hack into. But Mr. Bowen says they may bring all the people in the city if they want to. He don’t mind how many looks at him while they’re fixing his eyes.”

“When will he go?”

“I’m afraid that depends on you. We told the doctor so, and he asked what made a young lady like you set such store by them?”

“What reply did you give?”

“Oh, Mr. Bowen answered for us. He said ’twas because you were one of the Lord’s children or was soon going to be; and one of them rare ones we read of in books.”

“Mr. Bowen is too partial to be a correct judge, I am afraid.”

“Well, the doctor kind of thought you’d find it pretty hard to be much of a Christian at Oaklands; but Mr. Bowen said, not any harder than them folks what had their heads cut off and were burnt for their religion.”

“Not any harder,” I said, more to myself than to Mrs. Blake, but ah! how hard it might be, only God could know.

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“But we must plan about Mr. Bowen. Will it cost very, very much?”

“My, no; he’s got a good suit of clothes, and that’s the most that’s wanted. His fare from here to New York and back ’ll be the heft of the expense.”

“If that is all, he shall go to-morrow. I have more than enough money on hand for that, and a good deal of incidental expense beside.”

“I reckon he’ll pay you all back; for he was a prime book-keeper before he lost his eyesight. He’s a good scholar, too, and got a first-rate salary.”

“Then he will leave me deeper in debt than ever.”

“What for?” she asked curiously.

“Many things—his prayers most of all. Lessons of patience and faith, too, that money never could buy.”

She remained silent until we reached Mrs. Larkum’s. We found the doctor there. He was an old acquaintance. I had met him at a good many evening parties, and at a garden-party or two, where he had several times been my partner in lawn tennis, and an excellent partner I had found him, making up for any lack of skill on my part.

His greeting was exceedingly cordial, and in a blunt way he plunged right into the business in hand. “We are very glad to see you; we have some grave advice to ask.”

“I feel quite elated at making one in a medical consultation,” I said with a smile.

“I am not sure if you have not done more to restore health in this house than I. The world is too slow recognizing other healers than those embraced by the medical faculties.”

“It’s my opinion doctors knows less than one thinks of folks’ insides. They’re as apt to make mistakes about people dying or getting well as any of us. I don’t put near as much faith in ’em as the common run of folks,” Mrs. Blake said with delicious candor.

“Really, I thought you had a better opinion of us as a profession than that. If you get sick, you will of course dispense with our services.”

Mrs. Blake looked perplexed, but after a moment’s hesitation she said:

“If I was sick I’d want to see a doctor just as much as anybody. Their medicine is all right; for God made that. It’s their judgment that’s so onreliable.”

“And who is to blame for their judgment?” the doctor asked mischievously.

She hesitated, but her mother wit soon extricated her from the difficulty.

“There’s lots of folks doing what the Lord didn’t intend them to do—doctors as well as others.”

“Well done, Mrs. Blake, I will retire from the field before I am annihilated altogether.”

“You needn’t be in a hurry to go. We’d like to get this business settled first,” Mrs. Blake said, a trifle anxiously, misunderstanding the doctor’s meaning. He threw me a meaning glance, and afterward whispered,—“That woman is a diamond in the rough. Given a fair start in life, she would have found a proper sphere in almost any calling.”

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“I believe she would. She has done more for me than any other single individual.”

“She!” he asked with keen surprise.

“Yes, she wakened me from selfish ease to see the sufferings of others, and to realize my sisterhood to them.”

“Yes, but you must first have had a heart to be touched, or all the Mrs. Blakes on this planet could not have wakened it.”

“Even allowing your words to be true, does it not show power amounting very nearly to genius to be able to arouse another to a painful duty, and help them to take hold of it—I won’t say, manfully?”

“No, a better word is needed in this case. Woman’s fine sympathy and instinct are too perfect to be called after any masculine term wholly human.”

“You can pay nice compliments,” I said, laughing. He bowed his head gravely—a very fine and shapely head I noticed it was too, set well on a neck and shoulders that betokened the trained athlete.

“Now, doctor, Miss Selwyn can’t generally stay loitering very long among us Mill Roaders, and p’raps we’d better get our business done up right away. Anyway if Mr. Bowen is anything like me, he’s getting fidgetty by this time to know if he’s likely to get to them big city doctors.”

“I have grown too intimate with patience to be so easily disturbed,” he said, gently.

“You would like to get your sight?” I questioned. He spoke so calmly, the thought occurred he might have grown to love the hush of darkness. His face flushed. I never knew before or since a person of his years who colored so easily.

“Only God can know how I have longed to see the light, and the face of my fellow man; but I had no hope until Death opened my eyes.”

His voice trembled with emotion.

“What a privilege to give that man his sight,” I murmured to the doctor.

“The privilege belongs to you, I believe.”

“Oh, no indeed. I was thinking of the skill of your profession. It seems almost God-like.”

“We do our work mainly for money. In this case I am told you supply that.”

Mrs. Blake was waiting impatiently.

“What is to be done? Can Mr. Bowen go immediately?” I asked.

“To-morrow, if he is ready. I have already written to the doctor who will take charge of his case. He is famous for diseases of the eye, especially cataract, which is the trouble here.”

“He will need some one to accompany him?” I asked anxiously. “This seemed the chief difficulty now.”

“Not necessarily. The conductor is a kind-hearted fellow, and would see to him. But a friend of mine is going to-morrow, and he will not leave him until he sees him safe in the hospital.”

“Could he be ready so soon?” I turned with my question to Mrs. Blake.

“I’ve got everything ready only just to pack in a valise—fine shirts and all, we’ve sat up till after midnight making fine shirts and things, me and two other women.”

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“And you dare to say after that that it is I who must have the credit of this?” I turned a look of reproach on the doctor, as I spoke the words so low, only he could hear them.

“Am I really going to-morrow?”—Mr. Bowen asked, his face turning deathly pale,—-“possibly to come back to see all your faces? Miss Selwyn, I hope you will look to me as I have always pictured you.”

“I think she will not disappoint your expectations,” the doctor said, gallantly.

“I dunno about that. I guess he most looks to see an angel,” Mrs. Blake remarked dryly. In the ripple of laughter that followed, I turned to little Freddie who was crying softly with his face hidden in a chair.

“What is the matter, my little man?”

“Why you see, Miss Selwyn, Grandad’s going away, and they’re going to put a sharp knife in his eyes; and maybe he will die.” He burst into a louder fit of weeping. His mother drew him hastily into her bedroom and shut the door—her own face pale, and almost as sorrowful as the little lad’s.

“You must tell them there is no danger, doctor.”

I followed Mrs. Larkum into her room and found that she shared Freddie’s fears and grief.

“There is not the slightest danger to life or health in the operation,” I assured her, when her countenance began to brighten.

“You see we’ve had so much misfortune I can’t sense that father may get his sight, and we be comfortable as we used to be.”

“You must have faith in God. The darkest time has been with you ’the hour before the dawn.’ Now I will give you money for present necessities for your father. If more is required, it will be provided when necessary.” I took out my purse which, now that I was earning money of my own, I carried about with me quite recklessly, and gave her ten crisp notes that would buy her father a good many necessaries, beside his car fare. She did not try to thank me but her look was enough to assure me she appreciated my efforts for their well-being.

That evening, as I sat chatting by the dining-room fire with Mrs. Flaxman, waiting for the dinner-bell to ring, I told her of the beautiful surprise I had met that day, and how I had given them the money for him to start the following morning in search of sight.

“Why, where did you get the money? I thought you spent every cent except your weekly allowance when we were in New York.”

I hesitated, flushing rather guiltily; for this was the first real secret of my life.

“You have not been selling your jewelry, I hope,” she said, quite sternly. “Mr. Winthrop would not easily forgive such an act, after you had been entrusted with it too.”

“I have not sold anything that belonged to anyone but myself.”

She looked at me closely, and my eyes fell before her gaze. “It is not idle curiosity, believe me, Medoline, that makes me so insistent. I wish you would explain how you got the money. You are unacquainted with the habits of this country, and may have been unwittingly led into some indiscretion.”

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“What I have done is a very common thing in Europe even among the best of people.”

“Do you mean selling your cast-off garments?”

“Why, Mrs. Flaxman, you have as poor an opinion of me as Mr. Winthrop. I wonder what is the reason my friends have so little confidence in me?” I said, despairingly.

“But, dear, there is some mystery; and young ladies, outside of tragic stories, are expected to live lives of crystal clearness.”

“I will tell you, for fear you imagine I have done some terrible thing. When we were in New York, I hunted up a picture-dealer and submitted a number of my sketches, that I had hidden away in my trunk, to him, and he consented to act as my agent. For one good sized painting of Oaklands he has given me fifty dollars. Perhaps that Mr. Bovyer bought it, I have felt afraid that he did; but any way the money will do good; be the indirect means of giving sight to one of Christ’s own followers. All the afternoon, like the refrain of some beautiful melody, those words have been sounding in my ears: ’Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.’” Over my burning cheeks a few bitter tears were falling, while a mad desire seized me to leave Oaklands, and the cold, selfish life it imposed, and try in some purer air to live as conscience urged. I walked to the farthest end of the long room without waiting for Mrs. Flaxman’s reply, and stood looking out into the bright moonlit air. Far away I could see the moonbeams dimpling on the waters, making a long, shimmering pathway to the distant horizon, while in the frosty sky a few bold stars were shining, scarce dimmed by the moon’s brightness. The thought came to me that, in a few weeks, Mr. Bowen might be thrilled by just such a vision of delight. I turned abruptly to tell Mrs. Flaxman I could never go back to the old life of selfish ease, when such opportunities for helpfulness were given me, when I met her face to face. She gave me a look I will never forget.

“Medoline, can you forgive me those unjust suspicions?”

“Yes, if you won’t interfere with my picture selling,” I said joyously.

“Hush! Mr. Winthrop may hear you. I think he is coming. But you may sell all the pictures you can, only don’t speak of it now.”

Mr. Winthrop was waiting for us. As he looked at me he said:—“You seem to have more mental sunshine than your share—your face is so bright. Possibly you have been having a specially happy season with your bereaved ones.”

“With one of them I have been more than happy.”

“May I ask the name of this favored individual?”

“It is Mr. Bowen, the blind man.”

“Ah, then, you are finding the widowers most congenial. They do not dissolve into tears so readily as the widows; and there may be other fascinations. Really, I shall be compelled to forbid such intimacies.”

“He is going to New York to-morrow morning, with the expectation of having his sight restored, after being blind nearly twelve years.”

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“I presume he is very poor, else you would not take such strong interest in him.”

“He has no money. In other respects he is the richest person I ever knew.”

“Ah, he is a most remarkable individual. However, I dare say a little money will not come amiss to him, notwithstanding his wealth. You will want another quarter’s instalment.”

“Is my quarter up?” I caught Mrs. Flaxman’s warning look, and spoke rather guiltily.

“Not quite, but this is a peculiarly urgent case. Probably he is wholly dependent on your bounty.”

“Doctor Mackenzie told me that the doctor in New York won’t charge anything for removing the cataract from his eyes.”

“I see you have gone about it, in a very businesslike manner. Does MacKenzie charge for his advice?”

“Why, no, indeed; surely all men are not heartless.”

“In money matters they are, more or less; possibly widowers should be excepted.”

“It is a pity some others should not lose a wife or two. A few might require to lose half a dozen, at least.”

“That would be cruel. Think what an upsetting of one’s plans and business arrangements generally that would entail.”

“It might prove an excellent discipline. Nothing short of an earthquake, I believe, would teach some men kindliness and their brotherhood with pain.”

He received my remark with such unruffled serenity that I was angry with myself for engaging in a wordy warfare with him, when he was sure to be victorious. He sat with us for a short time after dinner, chatting so graciously that I came to the conclusion he was not, after all, so out of sympathy with my little benevolent projects as his words often implied. When he rose to go he came to me, and, taking out his pocket-book counted out fifty dollars and laid them in my hand. He paused a moment with the pocket-book still open.

“This is a special case, little one,” he said, kindly. “May I be permitted to contribute something for your friend?”

He laid another note in my hand, but I did not wait to see the amount. I started to my feet impulsively.

“Oh, Mr. Winthrop, I must confess to you. I have not been real honest. Won’t you forgive me?”

I felt the tears rush to my eyes, and my lips quivered like some frightened child’s, making me feel sadly ashamed of myself. He looked startled.

“What is it, Medoline?”

“I earned the money myself. I have been selling pictures.”

“Is that the worst offense you have to confess?” he asked, with a keen look into my upturned face.

“It is the worst just now,” I faltered.

“Very well, then, I will forgive you; but I must stipulate to see your pictures before they go to market after this, and also that you consult with me first before launching into other business enterprises. You might be tempted with something not quite so suitable for a young lady as picture-selling.”

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“You are so kind to me, Mr. Winthrop, I will tell you everything after this.”

“No rash promises, please. Before the winter is over you will be plunged into tears and distress again over some fresh exploit.”

“I won’t mind a few tears if I get your forgiveness in the end.”

He went directly to his study, leaving Mrs. Flaxman and myself to the cheerful quiet of our fireside. She turned to me saying,

“Tell me all about your blind friend, Medoline. How you first got to know him, and what he is like.”

I very gladly gave her as full a picture as I was able of the Larkums and Mr. Bowen, their poverty and his goodness included.

“You have made all these discoveries in a few months, and been doing so much for them, and here have I been living beside them for years and did not even know of their existence. What makes the difference in us, Medoline?” she exclaimed sorrowfully.

“I think God must have planned my meeting in the train with Mrs. Blake. I would not have known but for her.”

“I expect He plans many an opportunity for us to serve our generation, but we are too selfishly indolent to do the work he puts in our way.”

“When I came to Oaklands at first it seemed as if my life was completed, and I wondered how I was to occupy the days, and years stretching out so long before me. Now I believe I could find work to occupy me for a thousand years; that is, if Mr. Winthrop lived too, and continued to help me with my reading and studies,” I added, thinking how much the latter employment added to my enjoyment.

“If Mr. Bowen gets his eyesight, that will be a greatly added source of satisfaction to you,” she said, wistfully.

“Yes, I shall seem to be looking at the green fields, and flowers, and starry skies through his eyes.”

“You are as glad to have him so richly benefited through your means, as if he were rich and famous.”

“Why, much more so. Think what a change there will be in his circumstances now.”

“Medoline, I think your mother’s prayers will be answered.”

I turned around eagerly, “Was she a real Christian, Mrs. Flaxman?”

“Yes, a real one, especially after her children were born. Her great desire for them was that they might all be pure and unspotted from the world. All of them, save you, are with her in Heaven. You may have a life of peculiar temptation, but I believe you will be brought out of it among the pure in heart at last.”

“Why should my life have peculiar temptations, Mrs. Flaxman?” I asked anxiously.

“I cannot explain to you now my reasons for thinking so. Some day I may tell you.”

“I suppose it is because I am not like other girls of my age,” I said with a sigh.

“No dear, that is not the reason. I should not have spoken so unguardedly.”

“I might try to overcome the temptations if I were warned of their nature.”

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“You are a persevering child, Medoline—but still only a child in heart.”

“I am over eighteen, Mrs. Flaxman. I wonder why you and Mr. Winthrop persist in making me out a child. When will I be a woman?”

“Not till your heart gets wakened.”

“I wonder when that will be. Does it mean love and marriage, Mrs. Flaxman?”

“It means the former; the latter may not follow with you.”

“Why not? But there, I do not want to leave you and Mr. Winthrop and Oaklands. No man could tempt me from you. But what did you mean by saying that I might love and yet not marry?”

“Because you are too true to your woman’s instincts to marry any one unless it was the man you loved.”

I fell into a brown study over her words, and the conversation was not again resumed.

CHAPTER XVI.

Hope realized.

Mrs. Larkum’s recovery was slow, and it required all the nourishing food we could provide to start the springs of life working healthfully. Her mind had dwelt so long upon her bereavement, and dark outlook into the future that a naturally robust, and well-fed person might have succumbed, but when to a delicate organization had been added the most meagre fare possible to support human existence, it was no wonder nature rebelled. It was a new experience to me, and a very agreeable one, to watch the pinched faces of the children grow round and rosy, and to hear their merry laughter.

The mother waited with feverish anxiety for tidings from her father, but for several weeks no word came; at last she began to fear he might have died under the strain of the operation. Mrs. Blake began to get anxious too, while there flitted before her fancy gruesome thoughts as to what might have been done to the poor body left to the care of those heartless doctors.

“I can’t see why they take such delight in mangling dead people to see how they are put together. With all their trying they’ll never be able to make a body themselves.”

“It is in that way they have learned how to cure diseases and relieve pain,” I assured her. “We ought to be grateful to them for taking so much trouble to relieve us of our miseries.”

“I dare say we’d ought, I never thought of it that way before; in fact I’ve been rather sot ag’in doctors. Perhaps if they hadn’t cut into dead folks’ eyes, they couldn’t have done for the likes of Mr. Bowen.”

“Assuredly not; and sometimes the very greatest doctors bequeathe their own bodies to the dissecting room; especially if they die of some mysterious disease.”

“That is good of them. I’ve always reckoned doctors a pretty tight lot, who worked for their money jest the same’s the Mill hands.”

“No doubt many of them do; but some of them are almost angelic in their sympathy for the suffering, and their longing to lessen it.”

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“I believe you can see more goodness in folks than any one I know. Now when I get cross with folks when they don’t do as I think they ought, what you say comes to my mind; and before I know I get to making excuses, too. It’s done me a sight of good being with you.”

“And you have done me good,—taken me out of self, and taught me to think of others. I do not know how I should have been filling up my vacant hours but for you.”

“I wish somebody would say that much to me,” Mrs. Larkum said, sorrowfully. “I don’t think I am any use to any one.”

“With these lovely children to care for, what more can you ask than to work for them?”

“Yes, I forget charity begins at home.”

“If you hadn’t fell in with me that day in the cars, and got helping us here on the Mill Road you’d a found some other good work to do. Most young ladies like you would a turned up their noses at a plain old creature like me, skeered most out of their wits, talking so bold like as I did; but you answered me so kind like, I never thought you were anything but common folks like myself.”

“I am very thankful to God you did meet her that day. Most like I would have been dead by this time, and father and the children on the parish,” Mrs. Larkum said, with a shudder.

“Yes, I am right glad, myself,” Mrs. Blake said, very complacently.

“She might have been amusing herself visiting with the aristocracy,” Mrs. Larkum continued, “and dressing up every fine day, instead of coming among us, bringing better than sunshine with her. Dr. MacKenzie told me folks wondered at her coming among us so much; but he said he wished more of her class was like her.”

“Now I must leave you;” I said, rising suddenly. “When you begin to praise me, I shall always go away.”

“Don’t you like us to tell you how much you have helped us?” Mrs. Larkum asked wistfully. “It does me so much good to talk about you.”

“I believe helping you gives me more pleasure than anything I do; so why thank me for what I enjoy?”

“You won’t mind your own kind talking about you coming to us, and doing so much for the poor, will you?”

“Certainly not. While I am not dependent on my neighbors for my peace of mind, I will come to see you two as often as I can do anything for you.”

“I am glad to hear that; I don’t get over one of your visits for days. They brace me up to take hold of life, and do the best I can for father and the children.”

“I guess if folks does talk about you, they talked about one that was better’n any of us. I was reading the other day about the respectable ones in their days complaining how Christ eat with publicans and sinners,” Mrs. Blake said, giving me one of her strong encouraging glances.

“Thank you, Mrs. Blake; after that I can brave any criticism.”

A few days later I walked in the early afternoon to the Mill Road. Cook had prepared some special dainties for Mrs. Larkum; so with a small lunch basket on my arm I started on my errand of mercy.

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I had been standing at my easel a good part of the forenoon, and the satisfaction that comes from faithful work done, together with the assurance from Mrs. Larkum that my visits carried with them something better than sunshine, I trod swiftly over the frozen streets, quite content with life and its developments. I met Dr. MacKenzie on the way. He stopped to shake hands, and with an almost boyish eagerness, said: "Have you heard the news?"

"Not anything special. I hope you have some good news for me."

"Well, our friend Mr. Bowen has been heard from. The doctor has performed his miracle."

"Can he see as well as ever?" I cried joyously.

"I believe so."

I could not keep back the troublesome tears. "I am so glad you told me," I murmured, and then nodded my adieus rather abruptly, for I was ashamed of my emotion. It seemed perfectly fitting to me, as I walked briskly along, that Dr. MacKenzie should be the first to tell me the news; for, but for him, we should never have thought of making the experiment. That very evening I met him at a party at Mrs. Silas Markham's, when he gave me the full particulars I was too tender hearted to hear in the morning. In answer to his inquiries, the occulist had written to him some special circumstances of the case. He described Mr. Bowen's extreme patience. "Such an instance of perfect trust in God is refreshing to meet with," he wrote; "and but for this his case would probably have proved hopeless, since it was one of the worst cases we have treated successfully."

"His religion has helped him wonderfully all through his terrible affliction. I wonder will he be just as devout as ever?" I said.

"I think so. He is not made of the stuff that forgets favors received from God or man."

"I think he will have stronger reasons than mere gratitude to keep him close to the Lord," I said, thinking of the joy he had in communion with the Divine, even amid his darkness and poverty.

That same day, after leaving the doctor, I proceeded first to Mrs. Blake's to tell her the news. She threw a shawl over her head and accompanied me directly to Mrs. Larkum's. We found her sitting in a comfortable, though rather ancient easy-chair, which I had exhumed, along with a good many other useful articles, from the garret at Oaklands. The two older children we interrupted taking a lesson at their mother's knee. The primer was gladly laid aside, while the children came coyly to my side, quite certain there was a delectable bite for them somewhere in my pockets. I dismissed that care

from my mind by dividing the sweets, and then gave Mrs. Larkum her lunch. She sat enjoying the dainty food, sharing now and then a taste with the little ones, who had a keen appreciation for Oaklands' cookery. I sat watching the group, glancing now and then at Mrs. Blake's eloquent face with a good deal of satisfaction. I was anxious to break the news carefully and scarce knew how to begin, when Mrs. Larkum looked up at me eagerly and said:

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“Have you any news from father?”

“What makes you think she has news?” Mrs. Blake asked.

“I dreamed last night you brought me a letter, and I was afraid to open it, and woke up all trembling and frightened. When I saw you coming to-day, my heart stood still for a second or two.”

“Your dream is partly true, only the news is good. Dr. MacKenzie told me they have every hope that your father will see as well as ever.”

I was not prepared for the effect, my words produced. A pallor overspread her face; before Mrs. Blake could reach her she had fainted. That good woman was always ready for any emergency. She very calmly laid her down on the floor and proceeded to bring her back to consciousness. The children raised a dismal wail; but this she instantly quieted by marching them off to the bedroom.

While she applied cold water vigorously, and rubbed the nerveless hands, I asked in much alarm, seeing how long and deathlike was her swoon: “Is she really dead?”

“Bless you, no. She’s one of them high-strung women that takes everything hard. She fainted over and over when her husband was fetched home dead. I did think then she’d drop off; but joy don’t kill like trouble.”

Presently the poor creature struggled back to consciousness.

“I am afraid I have frightened you,” she said, with a feeble attempt at apology.

“Pray do not think of us. I may have been to blame in breaking the news so suddenly.”

“No, indeed; the fault was not in you; but I have had so many shocks the least thing upsets me. Dr. MacKenzie told me that my heart is not in a healthy state.”

“I should say that was the matter with your whole body. It’s a pretty rickety concern, like my old rocking-chair. Every day I’m looking for it to go to pieces under me,” Mrs. Blake remarked.

“I am not nearly so bad as that; I do not expect to fall to pieces for a good many years, now that father has got his sight. He will be able to keep us comfortable, like we used to be years ago.”

Mrs. Blake having got her patient back into the chair, administered wine and water to prevent a recurrence of the malady.

A week or two after this Esmerelda informed me one morning that there were great rejoicings in the Mill Road.

“I think they would like to see you there. I heard Mr. Bowen and some of them talking about you last night, after meeting.”

“Mr. Bowen—was he there?”

“Oh, yes; and he sees as well as anybody.”

“I will go to-day,” I said, with difficulty restraining my delight.

“Some of the people who attend Beech Street Church think you are a little above everybody in Cavendish.”

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Esmerelda spoke with great cordiality. Now that I had been to New York, and the dressmakers there had transformed me, outwardly, into a fashionable woman, I noticed that her respect had considerably increased; and, furthermore, that some of her own costumes had been made in almost exact imitation of mine. No higher compliment than this could Esmerelda have paid me; neither could I help acknowledging that she looked very graceful and lady-like in her Sunday garment, and often I fell to speculating how she would have appeared if half her life had been spent at a first-class boarding-school. A painful sensation, probably akin to jealousy, suggested that probably she would have satisfied my guardian's fastidious tastes better than I could ever do.

But I could never treat her in the same cordial way that I treated Mrs. Blake and the Larkums, and several others of her class. These instinctively made me feel that, no matter how friendly I might be, there was no danger of their trying to assert an equality, which I suppose has existed among the members of the human family since shortly after the expulsion from Eden. With Esmerelda the case was different.

That day I betook myself to the Mill Road with a good deal of expectancy. I was anxious to see the look of recognition in those once sightless, disfigured eyes, and to hear how the long-concealed delights of a visible world once more appeared. As I was walking rapidly along the street, I saw, approaching me on the Mill Road, one whom I had never noticed there before. He walked with a quick, energetic step, as if existence was a rapture and yet I saw, beneath the soft felt hat, gray hairs that betokened him a man past the prime of life. Strange to say, I did not recognize the pedestrian and was surprised to see him pause, and hold out his hand uncertainly, as if he were hardly sure of my identity.

"I think this is Miss Selwyn." Swiftly the assurance came to me that this was Mr. Bowen.

"Is it possible you should first recognize me? I did not for an instant think it was you."

"I had the conviction all along that I should know you, no matter where our first meeting might take place."

"Persons are generally disappointed in the looks of their friends after sight has been restored. You must be an exception to the general rule, or else your perceptions are keener than the average sufferers from loss of sight." I looked closely into the eyes of my companion, and saw that they were unusually fine and expressive. He turned with me, saying, with a beautiful deference:

"May I walk back with you?"

"I shall be disappointed if you do not give me a little of your time. I only heard to-day that you were at home, and have come on purpose to see you. My curiosity has been extreme to know how the world looks after your long night."

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“Nearly everything is changed, but mostly man and his works. When the bandages were finally removed, and all the other necessary restrictions, I asked to have my first glimpse of the outer world into the starry night. I do not think our language has a well deep enough to express what I felt in that first glimpse. But the human faces are sadly changed. Poverty and care, I find, are not beautifiers. My own daughter looks a stranger; only when I hear her speak. My own face surprised me most. It is changed past recognition.”

He spoke a little sadly. I could think of no comforting words. After we had walked on some time in silence, he said:

“I do not think the revelations after death will be any stranger than those of the past few weeks. My blindness and restoration to sight have, in a measure, anticipated the full return of all the faculties that death, for a brief season, takes from us.”

“Do you think any experience we have in this world touches on those mysteries of the first hours of immortal life? I cannot imagine any sensation that will be common to the two existences.”

“There is certainly one—probably very, very many. I cannot believe there will be much change in the relationship that exists between the consecrated soul and its centre of attraction. Deepened, intensified, it no doubt will be; but not radically changed.”

My thoughts instantly turned to the words the oculist had written. No wonder a man living so far within the confines of the unseen should be able to exercise almost superhuman patience under the most trying exigencies of life. When we reached the broken gate leading into the house, he paused and turned to me. He was silent for a few seconds, and then said, apparently with an effort: “I want to thank you for what you have done for me. Last night, on my way home from the house of prayer, I was hunting up the constellations that once I loved to trace and call by name, and, in some way, you were brought to mind with all that you have generously done for me; and then, and there, I tried to frame some words of gratitude by which to express what I felt. In Heaven I may be able; for only there we shall have language for our utmost stretch of thought.”

“Perhaps before we meet there, as I pray God we may do, I may have more reason for gratitude than you. Have you not told me that your daily prayer is for my salvation?”

I said good-bye hurriedly without waiting for a reply, and turned my face homeward. Gradually there was coming into my heart the hope that ere long I might come into the same wealthy place where he walked with such serenity even amid life’s sore trials.

CHAPTER XVII.

Christmas-tide.

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Christmas was rapidly approaching, and the pleasant English custom of celebrating it with good cheer, and in a festive way, Mrs. Flaxman told me, was a fixed rule at Oaklands. The dinner provided for the master's table was sufficient in quantity for every member of the household to share, down to the ruddy-haired Samuel. In addition to this, Mr. Winthrop remembered each one of his domestics when distributing his Christmas gifts. Mrs. Flaxman confided to me that Samuel was consumed with a desire to have his gift in the shape of a watch. I proceeded forthwith to gratify, if possible, this humble ambition, and first went to the different jewelers' establishments in Cavendish to see how much one would cost. On careful examination I was surprised to find a fine large watch could be got so reasonably. At the time I was as ignorant as Samuel himself of the interior mechanism of these clever contrivances to tell the hours. The day before Christmas I presented myself as was always the case, with some trepidation, before my guardian, following him into the library shortly after breakfast, even though I knew it was his busiest hour.

"I wish to consult with you about a couple of my Christmas gifts," I said directly, "if you have leisure to give me a few moments."

"I am never too busy to hear anything you may wish to say, especially anything in connection with your benevolent projects," he said, quite genially.

"Are you going to buy the stable boy a watch?"

"Certainly not anything so unnecessary for that wooden-headed youth. I doubt if he could make out the hour if he possessed one."

"Oh, yes he could. Boys are not nearly so stupid as you might imagine," I responded assuringly. "He is very anxious for one. I have been examining the jeweller's stock and can get a very nice-looking watch for five dollars. I was surprised, and think they are marvels of cheapness."

"You go entirely by looks, I see, in the matter; but that is all that bright-hued youth will require. Yes, by all means get the watch. Thereby you will add considerably to the pile of human happiness, for a short time, at all events."

"Would five dollars be too high to pay for one?" I asked doubtfully.

"If you can secure one at a lower price do so by all means," he said with apparent sincerity.

"There were some for two and a half dollars; but they looked rather large for a boy of his size."

“The less boy the more watch, I should say; but be sure and get a large chain. If the watch gets to be trying on his nerves, he can use the chain to put an end to his troubles.”

“If he needed them, there are plenty of straps and rope ends about the stable; but Samuel enjoys life too keenly to be easily disconcerted at a few trials. I was looking at the chains too. I did not know before that jewelry was so low priced.”

“Yes?” he responded, more as a question than affirmation.

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“I saw elegant watch chains at one of the stores for fifty cents. I told the clerk who I wanted them for, and he very kindly interested himself, and showed me some that he called ‘dead bargains.’”

“Go then, by all means, and secure a bargain for the boy. I will advance the money.”

“Oh, thank you, I prefer making the gift myself. I want also to get something for Thomas, and I cannot think of anything but a gun or a book. Do you know if he likes to shoot things?”

“If Thomas developed a taste for fire-arms he might take to shooting promiscuously, and life at Oaklands would no longer be so safe as at present. I should certainly advise a book.”

“But some of them say he cannot read.”

“It is high time, then, for him to learn. Thomas is a marvel of thrift, and he won’t be satisfied to have the book bring in no return. A school book would be a judicious selection.”

“I saw a book down town about horses and their diseases and treatment. Cook says, ‘Thomas dearly loves to fix up medicines for his horses.’”

“Very well. Now that matter is settled, have you any further inquiries to make about Christmas presents?”

“Not any more, thank you.”

“Then I will tell you a bit of news. I expect Mr. Bovyer here this evening. It is a great favor for him to confer on us at this season—coming to brighten our Christmas.”

“I fancied we had the prospect of a very joyous Christmas without help from abroad. To look at the pantry one might imagine we were going to entertain half of Cavendish to-morrow.”

“I noticed a wistful look on your face when you came in that the purchase of a gun and watch could not wholly account for. Tell me, what is it?”

“Mr. Winthrop, can you really read my thoughts?” I exclaimed, in genuine alarm.

“Suppose I try. You would like to have a spread for your Mill Road pensioners; possibly at the Blakes or among some of them, and thereby utilize our overplus of provisions. Have I read aright?” My face flushed hotly, for this certainly had been in my mind for days; but I had not courage to make the request.

“You do not answer my question,” he said, after awhile, seeing me stand silent.

“One cannot be punished for their thoughts, Mr. Winthrop.”

“Then this was your thought?” he questioned.

“Surely you must be angry with me for wishing to do it. I did not mention it to Mrs. Flaxman, or any one.”

“Why, not, indeed. If cook is willing to share her good things with the Mill Road people, and Mrs. Flaxman will accompany you to preserve the proprieties, I do not see anything to hinder. I will provide all the apples and confectionery your hungry crowd can consume for dessert.”

I stood in amazement, scarce knowing how to express my gratitude. A sudden desire seized me to put my arms around his neck and give him a genuine filial caress.

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“I wish you were my father, Mr. Winthrop,” I exclaimed, impulsively.

“Why so?”

“I might be able then to thank you in some comfortable fashion.”

“I understand what you mean, little one. I told you once that I was not anxious to have you regard me in a filial way.” Then turning the subject abruptly he said:

“You can make all your arrangements regardless of any reasonable expense. One may permit themselves to be a trifle generous and childish once a year. If you see any more remarkable bargains, you can secure them and have a Christmas tree. Have the goods charged to me.”

I did not attempt a reply. My heart just then was too near bubbling over to permit speech to be safe or convenient. I slipped quietly from the room. I had a comfortable feeling that my guardian could actually read my thoughts, and knew how I regarded his act and himself.

I went directly to Mrs. Flaxman. She entered cordially into my plans, but looked a good deal surprised when I told her it was Mr. Winthrop’s suggestion.

“I believe, dear, in your unselfish, impulsive way, you have taken the very wisest possible course with him. I never hoped to see this day.”

“I believe it amuses him. I have the impression that he is working me up into a book, only making me out more ridiculous than he ought. You cannot imagine how I long, and yet dread to see the book.”

“But he does not write stories; so you need not be troubled about that.”

“He can write them if he chooses, and very clever ones too, I am certain. He may be encouraging me to go on just to find out how it will all end, but I am only one in a universe full of souls; and if others, many others, get benefited, there will be far greater gain than loss.”

“That is the true, brave spirit to have, and the only kind that will bring genuine happiness.”

“Now to return to our festival. Do you think cook will be willing to share her abundance with us?”

“Go and ask her, I do not think she will disappoint you.”

I went directly to the large, cheery kitchen, a favorite haunt of mine of late. It was always so clean and homely, and cook was usually in a gracious mood and permitted me to assist in any of her culinary undertakings when I was so minded.

Among my other enterprises I had an ambition to become a practical housekeeper in case I might some day be married to a poor man, and have a family to bake and brew for with my own hands.

When I entered the kitchen I found her more than usually busy, with both Reynolds and Esmerelda pressed into the service.

“Shall we ever get all your dainties eaten? Won’t they spoil on your hands?”

“I dare say some of them will; but Christmas time we expect a little to go to waste.”

“Don’t you give away some?” I asked.

“All that’s asked for.”

“I am so glad to hear it. I want some ever so much.”

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“What’s up now?” she asked, scarcely with her accustomed deference.

“I want so much to have a little treat for my friends, if you will only help. It all depends on you.”

“Why certainly; it’s my place to cook for all the parties you choose to make. It’s not my place to dictate how the victuals is to be used.”

“You do not understand me. It is not here that I wish to entertain my friends. Mr. Winthrop has given his permission, on condition you are willing.” She was greatly mollified at this and responded heartily. “Of course I’m willing; and, bless me, there’s plenty to give a good share to them that needs it; and I guess it’s them you’re wanting to give it to.”

“Thank you very, very much. Now you must come to my Christmas tree, and see how much pleasure you have been able to confer. Without your consent nothing would have been done.”

“Yes, I’ll come and help you too, and you’ll need me,” she said, with much good humor. I did not wait long in the kitchen, so much now must be done. Alas, Christmas day was so near I could not celebrate my festival on that day; but another day might find us just as happy; and after all it would be “curdling” too much joy into one of the shortest of our days.

I put on my wraps and went immediately to confer with Mrs. Blake. I found her, like every one else, in the midst of busy preparations for Christmas.

“Dan’el got me a twelve-pound turkey and lots of other things; and he wants a regular old-fashioned Christmas, with all the Larkums here; and then I have one or two little folks I’m going to have in to please myself. Poor little creatures, with a drunken father and no mother worth speaking about.”

“Have you very much trade now?”

“Well, consid’able; but if you’re wanting me for anything I can set up later to-night.”

“Oh, no, indeed. I just wanted to consult you about something, and I will help you stone these raisins while I sit with you.”

“Dear heart, you needn’t do that; I’ll get the pudding made in plenty of time, but what kindness have you in your plans now?”

“A Christmas tree. I want you to tell me what to do, and where to have it.”

“Why, the Temperance Hall, of course, just past the mills. I guess you’ve never seen it.”

“That will be excellent. I did not know you had one here. Now, when shall we have it? To-morrow will be too soon, I am afraid.”

“Yes, and it seems a pity to have so many good things all to onct. Most everybody has a Christmas of some sort. How would Friday do.”

“Very nicely. That will be two days after Christmas. Little folks will have recovered from the effects of their feasting by that time.”

“Well, Dan’el ’ll get a tree and fix up the Hall; and tell, then, who you’ll want to invite.”

“All the children on the Mill Road may come. We will have something for each of them.”

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“I’m very glad; for there’s a few children around here that hardly knows what it is to have anything good to eat; and it’ll be something for ’em to think and talk about. They’ll not forget it, or you, for a good many years, I can tell you. If rich folks only knew how much good they might do, I think they’d not be so neglectful.”

I soon left Mrs. Blake to continue her Christmas preparations alone, feeling much relieved that Daniel was going to assume the responsibility of securing the Hall, providing the tree, and notifying my guests. I got my presents for Thomas and Samuel, and then set about the purchase of gifts for the Christmas tree. Picture-books, jack-knives, dolls, and other toys comprised my selection. These, I concluded, would give the children more pleasure than the more necessary articles which an older and wiser person would naturally have selected. I had got so absorbed in my work that I quite forgot our expected guest until I went into the dining-room, unfortunately a little late, and found them already engaged at dinner, and Mr. Bovyer with them. Mr. Winthrop explained my tardiness in such a way that I was left a little cross and uncomfortable, and took my dinner something after the fashion of a naughty child suffering from reproof. Before the evening was over, however, I had forgotten my passing dissatisfaction; for Mr. Bovyer was in one of his inspired moods when he sat at the piano.

I noticed afterward that Mrs. Flaxman’s eyes were very red; but while he was playing my attention was taken up in part with the music, and partly in furtively watching Mr. Winthrop. He seemed ill at ease, and restless; while Mr. Bovyer’s utmost efforts were powerless to move him to tears. When we had all drawn cosily around the fire, after the music was ended, I remarked with some regret, “I do not think Mr. Winthrop has any tears to shed. His eyes were as dry as a bone.”

“The night is too fine for such an effect. Wait until we have a storm,” he said, with a smile.

“Your nerves are too strong for a storm to affect them. Something very different will be required. I am afraid we must give you up.”

“Life is too smooth with him for music or anything aesthetic to ruffle the deeper springs. Wait until he has storms and whirlwinds to withstand.” Mr. Bovyer said, calmly.

“Oh I hope he will never have them, he has not patience like—some,” I added, after a pause. I was going to say Mr. Bowen.

“You must know that my ward has taken my measure very correctly. She is better than a looking-glass. Indeed I was not aware until lately that I had so many shortcomings.”

“Medicine for a mind diseased, administered by a gentle hand, cannot be hard to take.”

“The softest hand can sometimes wound the deepest.”

“Mr. Winthrop, surely I have never wounded you! I have not the power. To think so would give me pain; for, in your way, you have been kind to me—more so than I deserve,” I said, impulsively.

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“We are always trembling in the verge of tragedy,” he said lightly, and then rang for refreshments; and after that we retired.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Christmas tree.

Christmas morning dawned bright and clear, the one drawback the lack of snow. Thomas had everything in readiness, and every one in the house was looking forward to a sleigh-ride. However, all the other Christmas customs were observed. Before breakfast was the general distribution of gifts. We were all assembled at the usual breakfast hour in the dining-room, when Mrs. Flaxman rang the bell for the servants to come in. Reynolds was the first to appear. She took her seat nearest to Mr. Winthrop; then Mrs. Jones, the cook, and Thomas, Esmerelda, and Samuel came in.

Reynolds got her present first—a nice black silk dress. I saw by the pleased flush in her face that she was considerably astonished. The others, each a five-dollar bill; and for Samuel, a jack-knife that would be the envy of all his comrades. Mrs. Flaxman had something for each one of them, and then I followed. When I reached Samuel and handed him the watch from which was suspended a glittering chain, his politeness quite forsook him. “Golly, but that’s a stunner,” he ejaculated involuntarily. Suddenly remembering himself he said, very humbly: “Thank you, ma’am.” Thomas regarded his book with some apprehension; but turning over the leaves, the pictures of so many handsome horses reconciled him. After they had filed out I took my opportunity to deliver the gifts I had prepared with much care for Mr. Winthrop and Mrs. Flaxman; for the latter an idealized portrait of Hubert, in a heavy gilt frame, which I had painted from a photograph; and for Mr. Winthrop a much better picture of Oaklands than the one he already possessed.

I turned to Mr. Bovyer uncertainly, and, after a moment hesitation, said: “I have a bit of my work here for you; but it is so little worth. I am ashamed to offer it.” I handed him the folded leaves, tied with ribbons, of Longfellow’s “Reapers and the Angels,” which I had spent some time in trying to illustrate, with the hope one day of turning it into cash. He thanked me, I thought, with unnecessary fervor, considering the smallness of the gift, and stood examining my poor attempt to express the poet’s meaning by brush and pencil.

“I say, Winthrop, this is really clever for one so young.”

Mr. Winthrop took the book and turned over the leaves.

“You have reason to be proud, Medoline, that one of our severest art critics has pronounced favorably on your work. Perhaps the being remembered on Christmas morning has made him blind to its faults.”

“I find Mr. Winthrop a very healthy corrective against any flattering remarks of my other friends, I accept him as a sort of mental tonic,” I said, turning to Mr. Bovyer.

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“Our morning’s work is not yet completed,” Mr. Winthrop said. “Please excuse me a moment.” He went into the library, and returning shortly, he went first to Mrs. Flaxman and gave her a good sized parcel. I was waiting so eagerly to see her open it that I scarce thought if I, too, should be remembered; but after standing for a few seconds by the fire he came to my side and gave me a tiny box done up carelessly in a bit of paper. I opened it, when the most beautiful diamond ring I ever saw glittered a moment after on my finger.

“Oh, Mr. Winthrop, is this really and truly mine?”

“Really and truly, yes.”

In my surprise and delight I lifted the ring to my lips and kissed it.

“That is the prettiest compliment paid to a gift I ever witnessed,” Mr. Bovyer said, with a smile.

“Medoline has her own way of doing things. I find her refreshingly original.”

“That is almost better than the ring,” I murmured gratefully, looking up into his face.

“Shall we have breakfast served now?” He turned abruptly round and touched the bell. I bethought me of Mrs. Flaxman and looked just in time to see her slipping off an elegant sealskin dolman, while her eyes looked very dewy and tender.

“Mr. Winthrop, you are making this Christmas-tide positively regal with your gifts. So many of us that you have gladdened—Mill Road folks and all,” I said, not able wholly to restrain my affectionate impulses as I laid my hand lightly on his—the first time I had ever so touched him.

He folded his other hand over mine for an instant, and then we sat down to the breakfast which had just been brought in.

Mr. Winthrop and Mr. Bovyer spent the greater part of the day together alone. After breakfast they took a long horseback ride across country, only reaching home in time for luncheon, and then Mr. Winthrop had some choice additions to his library to exhibit, that kept them employed until dinner. Mrs. Flaxman smiled at the way Mr. Bovyer’s time was engrossed by my guardian, but I do not think either of us regretted it; for we had so many happy fancies of our own to dwell upon that the brief December day seemed all too short. Just before dinner I went to the kitchen to see how Samuel was getting on with his timepiece, but found that he had been away all day.

“That watch of his has been more talked about in Cooper’s Lane, where his folks live, than anything else, I’ll warrant, this day,” Thomas assured me. “He’ll be back soon. The smell of dinner always fetches him home.”

We had scarce done speaking when I heard his step at the door, and presently he came in. His watch-chain was arranged in most conspicuous fashion across his waistcoat, and caught the light very cheerfully as he stood near the lamp.

“What’s the time?” Thomas asked soberly; but Samuel was too smart to be so easily trapped.

“There’s the clock right afore your eyes.”

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“The time maybe’d be better from a bran new watch.”

I did not linger to hear more of their badinage, but the look of satisfaction on Samuel’s face found a reflection in my own heart, and I wondered in what way I could have spent a few dollars to procure a larger amount of happiness. We had quite a large dinner party that evening. Mr. Hill, our minister, was there, with his wife and grown-up daughter, and some half-dozen others of our Cavendish acquaintances. I found the hour at dinner rather heavy and tiresome. My neighbors on my right and left being—the one a regular diner-out whose conversation was mostly gustatory, and the other a youth whose ideas never seemed to rise above the part of his hair or cut of his garments. I noticed Mr. Bovyer sitting further up on the other side of the table looking quite as bored as I felt, his next neighbor being a young lady the exact counterpart in ideas and aims of the youth beside me. The dinner itself was a triumph of cook’s skill, and, as is usually the case with a dinner suitably prepared, its effect was composing. Mr. Winthrop neither drank wine nor smoked, and did not encourage these habits in his guests; so that we all left the table together and proceeded to the drawing-room. I was the last of the ladies to pass from the room, and Mr. Bovyer joined me and accompanied me into the drawing-room. I was getting interested in his conversation, when Mr. Winthrop came and urged for some music.

“It is impossible just now; I do not feel as if I could do justice even to ‘Hail Columbia.’”

“Then, Medoline, you will give us some of your German songs, and, by the time you are through, Mr. Bovyer will be in the mood to enchant us.”

“With the exception of our school examinations, I never played before so many persons in my life. I shall find it very hard,” I said, already beginning to tremble with nervousness.

“It will be an excellent opportunity to display your ring.”

My face crimsoned. Possibly I had allowed the hand that wore my diamond ring a little too much freedom; but the sparkle of the beautiful gem, that just now reminded me of a huge tear-drop, pleased me; for I was still much of a child at heart.

As we were crossing the room, I said: “It is not good taste for me to take the piano first. There are others here who should have been invited.”

“Tut, child; I never ask them. They would distract me with their noise.”

“Is that not an indirect compliment for me?” I said, looking up at him, my good humor partially restored.

“I shall be compelled to designate you the mark of interrogation—call you rogue for shortness.”

“After this morning’s experience, I shall not be able to find any name nice enough for you,” I said, gently.

“That is cruel—literally smothering me with coals of fire.”

I turned over my music with trembling fingers; for, more than all, I dreaded Mr. Bovyer. Selecting one of the simplest songs, I sat down, determined to go resolutely through with it. When I ceased, I found that Mr. Bovyer had joined us. I rose hastily. “I am so glad you have come; you will reward my obedience to Mr. Winthrop, surely?”

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“Yes—by asking for some more of that tender music of the Fatherland. My mother used to croon that song over us in childhood.”

Mr. Winthrop joined his commands; so I complied, with a German martial song; and then, rising quickly, I went to the further side of the room, and took a seat beside Mrs. Hill.

“You have got tired before the rest of us, dear.”

“I would not like to tire you. Mr. Bovyer is going to play now, and we shall none of us be in danger of weariness.”

And he did play as I had never heard him do before, filling the room with harmonies that sometimes grew painful in their excess of sweetness. Conversation ceased utterly—a compliment not usually paid to musicians, I had noticed, in Cavendish.

I glanced occasionally at Mr. Winthrop, who had taken a seat not far from where I was sitting. He sat with eyes closed, but not betraying, by a single muscle of the strong, self-contained face, that the music was affecting him in the slightest.

“This evening has given us something to remember until our dying day,” Mrs. Hill said, with a deep sigh of satisfaction, after Mr. Bovyer ceased playing. “It was exceedingly kind in Mr. Winthrop permitting us to share in the evening’s enjoyment.”

“Was it for this he invited you?” I asked, with surprise.

“That was the inducement to leave our homes on Christmas Day. But we do not need a special inducement to come to Oaklands; we always consider it a high privilege to be Mr. Winthrop’s guest.”

“Yes, he can be very charming when he chooses,” I said, unthinkingly, but very sorry for my remark directly it was uttered. “Then you were only invited here this morning, since Mr. Bovyer had only just arrived?” I asked.

“Oh, no, indeed; our invitations were received a week ago. Mr. Winthrop knew he was coming.”

All these people knew Mr. Bovyer was coming, and a gala time planned for Christmas, and I was kept in ignorance. Mr. Winthrop don’t regard me of enough importance to be intrusted with the merest trifles of everyday life, I thought, sorrowfully; but just then my eye fell on the ring, when it flashed into my gloomy heart a ray of light brighter than any sunbeam.

The two following days I was so absorbed in my Christmas tree that I paid very little attention to our guest, or anything going on about me, save what was directly connected

with the duty in hand. A list of all the names had first to be got, and then each gift properly labeled. Muslin bags, ornamented with bright-colored wools, were to be made, and filled with nuts and confectionery; and, last of all, the tree had to be dressed. Mr. Bowen and Daniel Blake entered so heartily into the spirit of the undertaking that I found my own labors greatly lessened. Thomas cheerfully gave up his most cherished plans to carry the supplies to the hall, and things generally went on very satisfactorily. Others, too, sent in hampers filled with Christmas dainties; among the rest, one from Mrs. Hill, to whom I had very fully described my undertaking. Mrs. Blake watched the heap slowly accumulating with a very preoccupied face; at last she spoke her mind freely:

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“It seems a pity to have all these things eat up, and get no good from ’em. Now, I’d like to charge a trifle, and let every one come that wants to.”

“What would be done with the money?”

“There’s plenty of ways to spend it; but if I could have a say in the matter I’d like to give it to them poor little creatures I had for dinner Christmas. The mother’s jest heart-broke. I believe you could count their bones; leastways all of them that’s next the skin. I railly thought I could not get them filled; but I did at last, and then they was stupid like, they’d been short of victuals so long.”

“Are their clothes as poor as their bodies?”

“Yes, indeed; and it does seem hard this cold weather for little children to have neither flesh nor flannels over the bones.”

“I am perfectly willing to make a small charge, if you can let it be known in time for the people to be prepared.”

“Oh, Dan’el and Mr. Bowen ’ll see to that. Put up a notice in the mill and post-office; everybody ’ll find it out.”

So it was agreed that we should make the grown up folk pay something; but I insisted the price must not exceed twenty-five cents.

I went home to luncheon on Friday, very tired, but also very enthusiastic over our tree. If I could secure Mr. Winthrop’s consent to a plain dinner, our entire domestic force could attend, and they were all eager to do so. He and Mr. Bovyer were engaged in a warm discussion over some knotty subject as they entered the dining-room, thereby compelling me to leave my question for sometime unasked. But Mr. Bovyer presently turned to me and said,

“Really, Miss Selwyn, you must think we have forgotten your existence.”

“Oh, no, indeed; but I should like you to converse on something within nearer range of my faculties for a little while.”

“We are all attention.”

I turned to Mr. Winthrop as he spoke:

“Is it really imperative that you have a regular dinner to-day? Could you not take something easily prepared, a cup of tea, for instance, and some cold meats, and the like?”

“You propose a genuine funeral repast. Is anything about to happen?”

“Our Christmas tree; and our entire household is eager to go, yourself excepted.”

“Why can’t we all go?” Mr. Bovyer suggested, with considerable eagerness.

Mr. Winthrop looked aghast.

“They would think on the Mill Road the millennium was dawning if Mr. Winthrop were to step down among them,” I said.

“Then by all means let us foster the illusion.”

“I will take the baked meats, Medoline, or a cracker and cheese—anything rather than that crowd.”

“That is ever so kind. I will come home to brew you a cup of tea myself. Ever since I was a child I have wanted to prepare a meal all alone—it will be really better than the Christmas tree; I mean more enjoyable.”

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“You have the greatest capacity for simple pleasures of any one I ever knew. We shall accept your services. Before you are through, you may find the task not so enjoyable as you think; but at the very worst we will give our help.”

“Thank you very much; but one ignoramus blundering in the kitchen will be better than three.”

Mrs. Flaxman looked greatly amused, but she very willingly gave her consent for me to come home while the guests were absorbed with their supper, and gratify my life-long yearning. The others were quite as well pleased as I; and cook permitted me to concoct, unaided, some special dishes for our repast. I laid the table myself, not accepting the slightest help from any one. My cooking ventures turned out quite successfully, and after a while my preparations were completed, so far as was possible, until the finishing touches just before dinner was served. I went and dressed myself for the evening’s entertainment. I took equal pains with my costume, as if I were going to entertain a party of friends at home, and it may be I was foolish enough to have a feeling of elation that my Mill Road friends should see me for once dressed like a real lady. The picture that my glass gave back when the pleasant task was all completed was comfortably reassuring. Mrs. Flaxman I found waiting for me, when I went downstairs. Thomas had brought out at her direction a huge, old-fashioned carriage, that in the old days they had christened “Noah’s Ark,” and into it we all crowded, even including Samuel, who had an ambition for once in his life to have a drive with the aristocracy.

When we reached the hall, we found it already crowded, although it wanted a full hour before supper was to be announced. Mr. Bowen was doorkeeper, and on the table at his side I was glad to see a goodly heap of coin. Mrs. Blake stood near, regarding the money with unconcealed satisfaction, which considerably deepened when Mrs. Flaxman stepped up and shook hands with her. Daniel seemed to be master of ceremonies, and was walking around with a mixed air of anxiety and satisfaction. The work was new to him, and he was somewhat uncertain all the time what to do next. But on the whole he managed everything with good common sense. He had the children seated directly in front of the tree, some fifty of them, he assured me. Their faces were a picture of genuine childish delight. Probably memory would hold this scene clearly pictured on some of their hearts long after I was sleeping under the daisies. Long tables were ranged down each side of the house, on which was placed the food the people had come to enjoy. We walked slowly past them, and were surprised at the judgment and good taste of the arrangements. I waited until the children’s tea was over. They were really the guests of the evening, and must be first served. Then in the bustle of getting the table in readiness for the older ones, I made my escape.

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Thomas was waiting near to drive me home, his face quite radiant at the success of our enterprise. Arrived at Oaklands, I entered with great glee into our culinary operations, and soon had the dinner prepared. When my gentlemen came into the dining-room I was sitting, hot, and a trifle anxious, at the head of the table awaiting them. My respect for the powers in the kitchen that carried on our domestic machinery with so little jar, greatly increased. We had a laughable time changing the plates for our different courses. Thomas, who was installed in Esmerelda's place at the back of my chair, was about as awkward in his new situation as I was; but at the close of our repast, Mr. Winthrop, with apparent sincerity, assured us he had not enjoyed a dinner so much since his boyhood—a compliment that fully repaid me for my worry until I had thought it well over, and saw that it was capable of several meanings. I entertained them with a lively description of the scene going on at the Temperance Hall. Mr. Bovyer declared his intention of accompanying me on my return—a resolution, I could see, that was anything but pleasing to Mr. Winthrop. I was secretly very glad, since it was possible he might make a donation to our doorkeeper. Once on the way, Thomas drove his horses as I had never seen him do before. Possibly he was afraid the supper might all be consumed. He had paid his fee, and was resolved to get his money's worth. He may have hoped that by some happy chance he might sit down with those with whom he could not expect on any other occasion to have a similar privilege. I paid particular attention to Mr. Bovyer. As we passed Mr. Bowen's table I saw him drop, in quiet fashion, a bank note upon it. Mr. Bowen hastened to make change, but Mr. Bovyer shook his head and passed on. I turned to look at Mr. Bowen, and saw his face suddenly light up so cheerfully that I concluded he had received a generous donation. I led Mr. Bovyer up where the children, growing now very curious over the Christmas Tree, were with difficulty preserving the proprieties of the occasion. He looked them over carefully, as if they were some distinct species from another planet, and then turning to me, said, "Did you say these were all poor children?"

"Their fathers are day laborers, and some of them are without that useful adjunct to childhood."

"They look rosy and happy."

"I presume they would look happy under present circumstances if their fathers were tramps. You should see the homes some of them will return to when they leave here. You would wonder at the forgetfulness of childhood."

"How did you chance to think of this merry gathering?"

"I am not sure it was chance. All our thoughts do not come in that way."

"Are the children here who are to reap the largest benefit from this affair?"

“Yes. Do you see those pale, pinched-faced girls with the pink-cotton frocks on, sitting at the end of that farthest bench, and these two boys just in front with clothes several sizes too large?”

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He stood silently regarding them for some time, and then said: "The world is strangely divided. It is one of the reasons that makes me doubt the existence of a beneficent All-Father."

"But these may get safely into the light and fullness of Heaven."

"Yes," he said, thoughtfully; "but how few of them will live up to the requirements of admittance to that perfect place?"

"The rich have as many shortcomings as the poor. Sometimes I think they have even more."

"You are very democratic."

"Is that a serious charge against me? The one perfect Being our world has seen chose poverty, and a lot among the lowly. When the world grows older, and men get wiser, possibly they will make the same choice."

"There have been solitary instances of the like along the ages—men of whom the world was not worthy—but the most of us are not such stuff as heroes are made of."

I turned to him with kindling eyes: "Wouldn't you like to be one of them, Mr. Bovyer?"

He gave me a look that some way I did not care to meet, and turned my eyes away quickly to a restless black-eyed little girl who was stretching eager hands to a pink-cheeked dollie.

"You feel the sorrows of the poor and suffering more keenly than the most of us, I fear, Miss Selwyn," he said—more to draw me into conversation than anything else.

"My sympathies are of a very easy-going, aesthetic kind. Some of your splendid music makes me cry. While I listen, I think of the hungry and broken-hearted. I seem to hear their moans in the sob and swell of the music. It was that which made Beethoven's Symphony so sad."

He did not say anything for a good while, and fell to watching the longing in the children's faces, and my heart grew very pitiful towards them. They were so near and yet so far from the objects of their desire. So I resolved while the supper table was being cleared to begin the distribution of my gifts, or rather, of Mr. Winthrop's.

I set Mr. Bovyer to work gathering the bags of confectionery, while I carried them around to the excited children, taking bench by bench in regular order, and filling the little outstretched hands, usually so empty of any such dainties. The people came crowding around to watch, while I began stripping the tree of its more enduring fruits. Mothers with tears in their eyes, as they saw their little tots growing rapturous over an unclothed

dollie, or some other toy, beautiful to the unaccustomed eyes of the poor little creatures. The tree was stripped at last, and the children absorbed in the examination of their own or each other's presents. Most of them seemed perfectly content, but a few of the little boys looked enviously at the jack-knife in a companion's hand, while casting dissatisfied glances at what had fallen to themselves.

It was time at last for the little folks to go home, and mothers soon were busy hunting up children and their wraps.

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The closing scene in the entertainment was the public announcement of the evening's receipts; and we all looked with surprised faces at each other when Mr. Bowen informed us that there was within a few cents of one hundred dollars. "Some of our guests this evening have treated us very generously; notably one gentleman in particular, who dropped a twenty-dollar bill on the table beside me," Mr. Bowen said, in conclusion. I gave Mr. Bovyer a meaning glance and also a very grateful one; but it was apparently thrown away; for not a muscle of his face moved in response to my smile. Mrs. Blake went around for a while like one in a dream. "Deary me! it'll be jest like a fortin' to 'em," she ejaculated at last; "but Miss Selwyn 'll have to take charge of it, or that mis'able Bill Sykes 'll drink it up in no time."

And then it was decided to act on Mrs. Blake's suggestion, and the money was given to me to expend on Mrs. Sykes and her children as they required,—a task soon accomplished when their need was so urgent. We went home that night very elated at the success of our venture. Cook was slightly inclined to assume a large share of the credit, and as her labor in the matter of cake and pastry making was so much greater than anything I had done, I gracefully yielded her all the credit she could desire. No doubt, in all undertakings, from the capture of a kingdom to a tea meeting, there are many among to whom the honors by right belong.

CHAPTER XIX.

Three important letters.

One evening when I returned from a long walk, Esmerelda gave me a letter directed in the most fashionable style of ladies' handwriting. I was a good deal surprised at receiving a letter through such a source, especially as Esmerelda whispered me to secrecy. I had no time to break the seal, for callers were waiting; and when they left, Mr. Winthrop summoned me to the study for a review of the week's reading. This was a custom he had some time before instituted, and I was finding it increasingly interesting. He selected my course of reading, and a very strong bill of fare I was finding it, some of the passages straining my utmost power of brain to comprehend. He had, as yet, confined me chiefly to German literature, mainly Kant and Lessing, with a dip into Schiller now and then, he said, by way of relaxation. He seemed gratified at the interest I took in his efforts to develop my intellectual powers, and sometimes he sat chatting with me, after the lesson was ended, by the firelight, until we were summoned to dinner. His mind appeared like some rich storehouse where every article has its appointed place; and while it held many a treasure from foreign sources, its own equipment was equal to the best. I could not always follow him. He gave me credit, I believe, for much greater brain power than I possessed; but what I could not comprehend made me the more eager

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to overcome the impediment of ignorance and stupidity. In these hours in his own study, where very few, save myself, were permitted to enter, he laid aside all badinage and severe criticism. I blundered sadly, at times, over the meaning of some specially difficult passages; but he helped me through with a quiet patience that amazed me. I mentioned it one day to Mrs. Flaxman, expressing my surprise that he should so patiently endure my ignorance, and stupidity.

“It is just like him. He has a world of patience with any one really trying to do good work. I think he begins to understand you better. He is prejudiced against our sex in the mass. He thinks we are more fond of pleasure than of anything else in the world; but if he once finds his mistake, his atonement is complete.”

“Why is he so prejudiced?” I asked, hoping Mrs. Flaxman would continue the story Thomas had begun.

“He has had good reason. He is not one to rashly condemn one.”

“But is it not rash to misjudge the many for the wrong doing of the single individual? It does not prove all are alike.”

“Have you ever heard anything, Medoline?” She asked anxiously.

“Merely a hint, but I have built many a story on that.”

“You must not trust servants or ignorant folks’ gossip. I hope your Mill Road friends do not talk about your guardian.”

“They scarcely mention his name. Mrs. Blake certainly expressed surprise, a long time ago, when we gave those vegetables away, that such a thing should take place at Oaklands. I would not permit any one to speak unkindly of Mr. Winthrop in my hearing,” I said, proudly.

“That is right; he is not easy to understand, but one day you will find he is true as steel.”

She left the room abruptly. I fancied she was afraid I might ask troublesome questions. Now as I sat in the study, I began to listen and dream together, wondering what sort of woman it was he could love and caress, and how she could lightly trample on his love. The tears came to my eyes as I looked and listened, picturing him the central sun of a perfect home, with wife and children enriching his heart with their love. When those deep gray eyes looked into mine, my drooping lashes tried to conceal from their searching gaze, my mutinous thoughts. Strange that this particular evening, while I sat with the half forgotten letter in my pocket, imagination was busier than ever, while I found it more than usually difficult to comprehend Lessing’s ponderous thoughts; and

the desire seized me to leave these high thinkers, on their lonely mountain heights, and, with my guardian, come down to the summer places of everyday life.

He noticed my abstraction at last, for he said abruptly:

“Are you not interested in to-day’s lesson, Medoline?”

I faltered as I met his searching eye.

“I am always interested in what you say, Mr. Winthrop; but to-day my thoughts have been wandering a good deal.”

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“Where have they been wandering to?”

My face crimsoned, but I kept silent.

“I would like to know what you were thinking about?” he said, gently.

“A young girl’s foolish fancies would seem very childish to you, after what you have been talking about.”

“Nevertheless, we like sometimes the childish and innocent. I have a fancy for it just now, Medoline.”

“Please, Mr. Winthrop, I cannot tell you all my thoughts. They are surely my own, and cannot be torn from me ruthlessly.”

“What sort of persons are you meeting now at your Mill Road Mission?”

He suddenly changed the conversation, to my intense relief.

“The very same that I have met all along, with the exception of the Sykes family—they are a new experience.”

“Were you thinking of any one you know there just now, that caused your inattention?”

“Why, certainly not, Mr. Winthrop. I do not care so very much for them as that.”

He was silent for a good while, in one of his abstracted moods; and, thinking the lesson was over for that day, I was about to leave the room. He arose, and, going to the window, stood looking out into the night—I quietly watching him, and wondering of what he was so busily thinking. Presently he turned, and, coming to the table where I was sitting, stood looking down intently at me.

“Medoline, has it ever occurred to you that you are an unusually attractive bit of womanhood?”

I drew back almost as if he had struck me a blow. He smiled.

“You are as odd as you are fascinating,” he said.

He went to his writing-desk. I watched him unlock one of the drawers and take out two envelopes. He came back and stood opposite me at the table.

“I received, a few days ago, a letter from my friend Bovyer, in which he enclosed one for you, which I was at liberty to read. Probably I should have submitted it to you earlier, but——”

He did not finish the sentence, and stood quietly while I read the letter. The hot blood was crimsoning my neck and brow, and, without raising my eyes, I pushed the letter across the table, without speaking. He handed me another. A strong impulse seized me to fly from the room, but I had not courage to execute my desire. The second letter was fully as surprising as the first. It was from another of Mr. Winthrop's friends, who had frequented our hotel in New York. I recalled his face readily, and the impression his manners and conversation had made on my mind. He had fewer years to boast than Mr. Bovyer, but more good looks. I finished his letter, and, still holding it in my hand, unconsciously fell to recalling more distinctly my half-forgotten impressions of his personality. I remembered he could say brilliant things in an off-hand way, as if he were not particularly proud of the fact. I remembered, too, that he had genuine humor, and had often convulsed me with a merriment I was ashamed to betray; but, strange to say, of all those who had haunted Mr. Winthrop's parlors in those two weeks, not one had paid me so little attention as this Maurice Graem; and now both he and Mr. Bovyer had written, asking my guardian's permission to have me as life-long companion and friend.

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“What shall it be, Medoline? You cannot say yes to both of them.”

The question startled me.

“Are you very anxious for me to leave Oaklands?” My lips quivered as I spoke.

“Why, child, that is my trouble just now. I am not willing ever to lose you—certainly not so soon as these impetuous youths desire.”

“Mr. Bovyer is not young,” I said, with a lightened heart.

“What shall I say to them, then?”

“That I do not want to leave Oaklands. I am so happy here.”

He made me no reply, but turned again to his writing-desk, and was locking the letters safely away when I left the room. Then I bethought me of the letter still unopened in my pocket, and was hastening to my room, when Mrs. Flaxman intercepted me.

“Won’t you come into my room, Medoline, just for a few minutes?”

I followed her with some reluctance; for Mrs. Flaxman’s few minutes, I imagined, might extend into a good many, if she got to talking.

“I want to show the presents Mr. Bovver has sent us from New York—one for each of us.”

She lifted the cover from a box on her stand, and handed me the most superbly-bound book I had ever seen.

“Yours is the prettiest,” she said, admiringly, as I turned over the leaves, looking at the engravings.

“Don’t you like it, dear?” she asked, surprised that I was so silent over my prize.

“Yes—if it had not come from Mr. Bovyer.”

“Why, Medoline! not like a gift coming from one so kind and true as he is?”

“I wish I had never seen him.” I threw down the book and burst into tears.

“Surely, Medoline, you have not fallen in love with him? I should be so sorry, for he is not a marrying man.”

“No, indeed,” I cried, indignantly; “but——” And then I stopped; for what right had I to tell his secret?

“Oh, Mrs. Flaxman, is it not dreadful to be young? Men are such a trouble.”

“Why, my child, what is the matter? You act so strangely I do not understand you.”

“No? Well, I cannot explain. But won’t you ask Mr. Winthrop, please, if I must keep this book?”

“Why, certainly you must keep it. It would be rude to return Mr. Bovyer’s gift.”

“But you will ask?”

“Oh, yes, if you insist; but he will only smile, and say it is one of Medoline’s oddities.”

I went to my room. But the traces of my tears must be removed, and the dinner-bell was already ringing. However, at the risk of being late, I broke the seal of my letter. I was getting terrified lest it might be another proposal of marriage from some unexpected quarter; for, I reflected, when misfortunes begin to come they generally travel in crowds; but this was not a love-letter. It read:

“Dear Miss Selwyn:—I have been informed of your kindness of heart and sympathy for all who are in distress, and therefore am emboldened to come to you for help. If you would call on me to-morrow, at 3 P. M., at Rose Cottage, Linden Lane, you would confer a lasting favor on a sorrowing sister. I am yours, very respectfully,

“Hermione Le Grande.”

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P. S.—I must ask for perfect secrecy on your part, and that no mention whatever of my name, or letter, be made at Oaklands. I trust to your honor in the matter.

H. L.

I locked the letter up in my drawer and hastened to the dinner that certainly would not be kept waiting for me. I was hoping that the question about Mr. Bovyer's book would be asked and answered in my absence; but was disappointed; for just as Mr. Winthrop arose from the table, at the close of dinner, Mrs. Flaxman mentioned the arrival of the books, and whence they came.

"It is quite profitable, chaperoning young ladies, you will find;" he said, dryly.

"But, Medoline does not wish to keep hers. She acted quite strangely about it; and insists that I must ask you, if she shall keep it."

"Mr. Bovyer would feel aggrieved if we returned his present. I think you must keep it," he said, turning to me.

"Most young ladies I have known are proud to get keepsakes from your sex."

"I hope Medoline is not going to be a regulation young lady."

"Why, Mr. Winthrop, what has caused you to change your mind? You used to condemn me for being so very unconventional."

"I have made the discovery that you have something better in its stead," he said, quietly. I looked up quickly to speak my thanks, but kept silent.

"Yes, Medoline is the only one of us that tries to do her duty by others. She has helped the poor more in the few months she has been here, than I have done in nearly twenty years."

"But she confines her benefits to the poor and bereaved solely. She seems to forget the prosperous may be heavy-hearted," Mr. Winthrop suggested with a smile.

"I do not intermeddle with that which lies beyond my skill to relieve. Any person can relieve poverty if they have money."

"Possibly you are wise to confine your helpfulness to the simpler cases of sorrow."

"I think the griefs of the rich are mostly imaginary and selfish. In this beautiful world, if we have our freedom, and health, and plenty of money, we are simply foolish to be

down-hearted; only when death takes away our dear ones; and after a time the pain he gives ceases to smart."

"You are very practical, Medoline, and look through spectacles dipped in sunshine."

"Well, I believe she is right," Mrs. Flaxman said, with an air of sudden conviction. "We are not half thankful enough for our blessings and persist in wearing the peas in our shoes for penance, when we might as well soften them like that wise-hearted Irishman. It would be a blessing if Medoline had medicine for other griefs than those poverty causes."

I saw her cast a meaning look at Mr. Winthrop, which brought the color to my cheek, and set me to soberly thinking if I might not bring him surcease from bitter thoughts, and then it occurred to me, with all this commendation was there not grave danger of my getting uplifted unduly?

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“It seems to me that you and Mr. Winthrop go to extremes in your estimate of me. First, you keep me so low in the valley of humiliation that I well nigh lose heart, and then you hoist me on a pedestal, making me grow dizzy with conceit. I suggest that we pass a law not to talk about each other at all.”

“But you cannot hope to be perfect unless wise friends point out your foibles,” Mr. Winthrop assured me.

“I have never expected to reach such a height. It would be so lonely for me, you know —no society of my own kind, save here and there a poor and humble soul,” I said, wickedly.

“Nevertheless, one should make the effort to stand on the top round of the ladder of human excellence.”

“It is a long ladder, and the climb is wearisome, and death soon interposes and ends our ambition,” I said, wearily.

“But you have such perfect assurance respecting the to-morrow of death, you must believe that excellence gained here will be so much capital to carry with you into that life; but you implicit believers very often voice your faith rather than live it,” Mr. Winthrop remarked, with a touch of his accustomed sarcasm.

“Mr. Bowen lives his quite as well as he talks it, but he is the nearest perfection of any human being I ever expect to meet.”

“That is hard on our set, Mrs. Flaxman. Medoline, it seems, has fished out of the slums a veritable saint, and handsome as he is good. If I remember right he is a widower.”

“Yes, certainly, he is the one she got the suit of clothes for when she was in New York.”

He turned to me abruptly and asked,

“How old is he?”

“I have never asked him,” I said mischievously, “but he looks older than you.”

“Medoline, what are you saying? He was a grandfather years ago.”

“And I am afraid that is an honor which Mr. Winthrop will never attain,” I tried to say sympathetically.

Mrs. Flaxman cast him a startled look; but he smiled very calmly as if the words had merely amused him.

CHAPTER XX.

Mrs. Le Grande.

I was impatient for the appointed hour to come when I was expected at Rose Cottage. I had tried to get further information from Esmerelda respecting Mrs. Le Grande; but she seemed unwilling to say much about her, leaving me more mystified than ever.

“You will know all pretty soon from her own lips, Miss, and it would cost me my place if Mr. Winthrop knew I was meddling with what didn’t concern me.”

“Mr. Winthrop is not a severe master. I think he interferes very little with our household matters.”

“But this is different; and please, Miss Selwyn, don’t let on to a soul that I gave you that letter. Mrs. Le Grande said if I didn’t take it some one else would; and it was an easy way to earn a trifle.”

“But if there is anything wrong in the matter it is the hardest way in the world to get money,” I said, perplexed at her words.

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Linden Lane lay back from Oaklands a mile or more, and led me on a road I had never traversed before, although I had often planned to take it on some of my exploring journeys. But it led away from the sea shore, and that probably was the reason I had hitherto neglected it. There was a strip of woodland belonging to the Oaklands estate through which a part of the road lay. There had been a recent fall of snow and this was still clinging heavily to the trees, especially to the spruce and hemlocks, bringing strangely to mind the muffled, mysterious figures of the Sisters of Charity and Nuns, as I used to see them gliding about the streets of the old world cities. Here and there interspersed with the evergreens were beech, and maple, and other hardwood growths, with their graceful leafless branches stretching up like dumb pleading hands toward the pitiful sky. I grew so interested seeking out specially picturesque forest growths, and glimpses into the still woodland depths under the white snow wraith which I might come again to study more closely, and put on my canvas, that I so far forgot the business of the hour as to find myself a half hour after the appointment at still some distance from Linden Lane. Shutting my eyes resolutely on the rarest bits of landscape caught now and then through a chance opening in the trees, I walked at my best speed along the drifted road. Esmerelda had described the cottage so minutely that I had no trouble in recognizing it. Once past the strip of woodland, a bend in the road brought me at once into a thick cluster of houses with a few linden trees bordering the street that had given to it its rather poetical and alliterative name. One house much more pretentious than the rest, I at once recognized to be Rose Cottage. I rang the bell and was so quickly admitted, I concluded the tidy looking little maid had been posted at the door on the lookout for me. I gave her my card and inquired for Mrs. Le Grande; a formality quite unnecessary, as she assured me she knew who I was and that the lady was already waiting for me.

“Just come this way. She has a parlor upstairs; and my! but its a stunner.”

I received the information in perplexed silence. But the little maid apparently did not look for encouragement, for she continued chattering until the door of the “stunning” apartment was closed behind her. A bright fire was burning in the grate at my left. In the swift glance with which I took in all the appointments of the room I acknowledged that the girl’s description was correct. The walls were lined with pictures which I could see were gems; rich Turkish rugs concealed the common wood floor; while on brackets and stands were ornaments of rarest design and workmanship. I had only a few moments, however, to gratify my curiosity; for a *portiere* at the farther end of the room was lifted, and a vision of female loveliness met my view such as I had never seen before. Probably the surroundings, and the unexpected appearance of this beautiful woman, heightened the effect.

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She paused and looked at me intently. Instinctively I shrank into myself. She seemed to be in some swift, clear-sighted way taking my measure, and labeling the visible marks of my personality. Then she came graciously forward, her step reminding me, in its smooth, gliding motion, of some graceful animal of the jungle that might both fascinate and slay you.

Her eyes were of that dark, velvety blue, that under strong emotion turns to purple, and when she chose could melt and appeal like a dumb creature's, whose only means of communicating their wants is through their eyes. The lashes were long and curved; her complexion delicate as a rose leaf, with a fitful color vanishing and re-appearing in the peachy cheek apparently as she willed it. Her hair, a rare tint of golden auburn was wreathed around her head in heavy coils that reminded me of the aureoles the old masters painted about the beautiful Madonna faces. Her mouth, I concluded, was the one defect in the otherwise perfect face. The teeth were natural and purely white, but long, and sharp, reminding one in a disagreeable way of the fangs of an animal of prey; the lips, a rich scarlet, were too thin, and tightly drawn for a judge of faces to admire; the chin was clear-cut and firm—a face on the whole, I decided, that might drive a man, snared by its beauty, to desperation. There was passion and power both lurking behind the pearl-tinted mask.

Her attitudes were the perfection of grace—apparently, too, of unstudied grace, which is the mark of the highest art in posing. She sat in a purple velvet easy-chair, whose trying color set off her fine complexion perfectly. Her voice was low and well modulated, but it had no sympathetic chords; and therefore I could not call it musical or pleasing. She thanked me in very exaggerated terms for having responded to her appeal.

I exclaimed, rather impulsively, in reply—

"I expected to find the author of that pathetic letter in great distress, and came, hoping to relieve; but I cannot be of any service here." I glanced around the luxuriously appointed room, and then let my eyes rest on her elaborate costume.

She smiled, "You are young, and have not yet learned that rags and poverty seldom go hand in hand with the bitterest experiences of life."

"That is the only kind of trouble I am sufficiently experienced to meddle with. For imaginary or abstract woe you should seek some older helper. I would suggest Mrs. Flaxman. She has more patience with refined mourners than I."

"Mrs. Flaxman could do me no good."

Tears stood in her eyes, making them more beautiful than ever, and quite softening my heart.

“Won’t you lay aside some of your wraps? I shall feel then as if you will not desert me at any moment. The room is warm, and they are only an incumbrance.”

I complied, and removed my hat and fur cloak, which were beginning to make me uncomfortably warm. She wheeled another easy-chair and bade me take that; my eyes, grown suddenly keen, took in the fact that the velvet covering was suited to my complexion.

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“What artistic taste you must have when you are so fastidious about harmony in colors,” I said, admiringly.

“One might as well get all the possible consolation out of things. The time for enjoying them is short, and very uncertain.”

She drew a low ottoman and sat down close to me. “I have a long, sad story to tell you, and I want to be within touch of your hand. You will perhaps be too hard on me.”

She sat, her face turned partly from me, gazing intently into the fire. Perhaps she had a natural dread of going over a chapter in her life she might wish had never been written.

Meanwhile the wonder kept growing on me why this exquisite woman should come to me for sympathy. A feeling of pride, too, began swelling my heart to think that I could be of use to others than the hungry and naked, while I thought of the surprising account I should have to give at the dinner-table that evening, of my adventure. My self-complacency was destined to a rude shock. She turned to me suddenly, and asked, “How old would you take me to be?” I looked my surprise, no doubt, but began directly to examine critically the face before me. “I want you to tell me the truth. We don’t value flattery from our own sex; at least, I do not.”

I could see no trace of time’s unwelcome tooth in that smooth, ivory skin, as unwrinkled as a baby’s face, while the rounded outlines and dimples would have graced a debutante.

“You are a long time deciding,” she said, playfully—the color coming fitfully under my scrutiny.

“I will hazard twenty, but you may be older.”

“You think not any younger than that?” The curving lashes drooped and an entirely new expression swept over the charming face.

“Now you look almost a child,” I exclaimed with surprise. “You are a mystery to me, and I won’t try to guess any more, for it is pure guess work.”

She laughed merrily. “You are greatly mistaken. I was twenty-six yesterday.” I may have looked incredulous, and she was very keen to read my thoughts.

“You do not believe me. Did you ever hear of a woman over twenty making herself out older than she was?”

“My experience is but limited.” I still believed that for some reason of her own she was deceiving me respecting her age.

“When you hear my story your surprise will be that I do not look six and thirty, instead of a decade younger.”

Her next question was more startling than the first. “How do you like Mr. Winthrop?”

I replied guardedly that I liked him very well.

“Excuse me, but that is not a correct reply. No one that cares for him at all does so in that moderate fashion. They either love or hate him.”

“Have you ever known him intimately enough to be able to say how he is liked, or deserves to be?”

She answered me by a low ripple of laughter. My perplexity was increasing, but I quite decided this Hermione Le Grange, as she called herself, had not a very sad heart to get comforted.

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“Do you find Mr. Winthrop very amiable, in fact would you call him a lady’s man?”

I paused to think carefully what answer I should give. “If he were a lady’s man, probably before this he would have taken one for a wife.”

“You have only answered half of my question,” she said so gently I could not resent it.

“My guardian is very patient and indulgent with me. If he were more so I should find it hard to leave him some day.”

“You mean when the day of marriage comes?”

“I have not thought anything of marriage yet. I mean, not seriously. Every young girl has her dreams, I suppose; but mine as yet are very vague and unreal. At twenty-one I am my own mistress. Then probably my life of ease will come to an end.”

“Ah, you have dreams of a career. From what my servants tell me I concluded you were not one of our regulation, conventional young ladies.”

My cheeks flushed; for this was a tender place for her to touch.

“Is Mr. Winthrop pleased that you are so thoughtful of the poor, and so generous in your impulses?”

“Really, Mrs. Le Grande, you would make an excellent lawyer. I do not think I have had so many personal questions since I came to America. School girls forget themselves sometimes, when they are of a very inquisitive disposition.”

She looked me fully in the eyes as she said: “You have been wonderfully patient and very circumspect. I am sure in his heart Mr. Winthrop respects you even if he is at times a trifle cavalier in his behavior.” Her eyes were still upon me with the innocent, childlike expression on her face I was beginning to understand and fear. I said very calmly: “He can be exceedingly fascinating when he chooses, and if he really cared for one, I cannot imagine anything he would hesitate to do for them, provided it was honorable. I could not conceive him stooping to a mean or unworthy action.”

“Mr. Winthrop will be flattered when I repeat your words.”

“Then you know him?”

“You will think so when you hear my story.”

CHAPTER XXI.

Mrs. Le Grande's story.

"Did you ever hear that Mr. Winthrop was within one day of being married?"

My surprise at first rendered me speechless; but at last I murmured, "No."

"Then you have never heard the tragedy of his life. You have heard that for some reason he was embittered against our sex."

"A mere hint."

"So I should judge, or the rest would also have been told. Your acquaintance have been remarkably guarded. Well, I will tell you all about it."

"I do not wish you to tell me. I think Mr. Winthrop desires I should never know the particulars of that circumstance, else Mrs. Flaxman would have told me."

"You are very sensitive about your guardian. Women cannot afford such fine sense of honor. Men do not treat us in that way. If they find we have a skeleton concealed somewhere, they will not rest until it is brought out into the glaring light, for every evil eye to gloat on."

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“Not every man. Many of them would help us to conceal what gave us pain. I believe Mr. Winthrop is one of them. Then should I listen to what he wishes buried in oblivion?”

“It may be for his happiness that you should, dear; and my story and his are, for awhile, the same.”

I had risen to put on my hat and cloak to get away from the temptation she pressed upon me; but at her last words I sank back into the chair.

“Can you be the woman he loved and was to marry?”

“Would it surprise you very much if I said Yes?”

“It would, and it would not.”

“Your words are ambiguous. I was told you were exceedingly frank and impulsive, but one cannot always believe the public verdict.”

I was silent. I recognized I had a clever woman to deal with, and for some reason she wished to use me for her own purpose, I was assured. She arose, and crossing the room disappeared through the tapestry portiere. I watched her as she moved gracefully away, her long silken robe seeming to give additional height to her already tall figure. She presently returned, bringing a richly bound album, and laid it, open, on my knee. I glanced at it, and saw my guardian’s pictured face looking at me, brighter, happier than it had ever done in reality.

“Does he look like that now?”

I studied the picture before I answered.

“His face looked nobler as I watched it last night while he was talking of some of his favorite authors. It is stronger now, though. Noble thoughts have matured the lines that were then only imperfectly formed.”

“Does he admit you to his study and converse on his favorite themes?” she asked, the childlike expression vanishing suddenly from her face.

“Yes.”

“Do you understand and enjoy what he says?”

“I do not understand all he says. I am trying to lift myself to a nearer level with him.”

“Ah, you aim to be learned. His tastes must have greatly changed, if he admires such females.” Her eyes fell, but I fancied there was a gleam in them not altogether pleasant

to behold. I remained silent, not caring to explain it was Mr. Winthrop's wish that I should continue, to some extent, the work that had occupied so many years of my life. She turned the leaf of the album, and her own face looked out at me, not any more beautiful than now, but still as perfect as a poet's dream.

"We had these taken the same day!"

She turned still another leaf and they sat together, she looking sweetly at me, but his eyes, I could fancy resting on her with a look in them I had never seen.

"He had the artist destroy the negative, but I secured this one, he fancies the flames have swallowed them all. You will have no further scruples listening to his story?"

"Yes, I have scruples. Much as I would like to hear it, I desire you to tell me nothing but what you feel certain he would be willing for me to hear. Otherwise I cannot look into his eyes without a feeling of guilt."

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“I did not think there was such a ridiculously conscientious woman on the earth. Believe me, you are formed after a very unusual pattern. But you must at least hear my story; otherwise you cannot help me.”

“I have been waiting with what patience I could command for the last hour to hear it. I must be home before nightfall, and it is now approaching sunset.”

She turned partly away, thereby giving me the better opportunity to admire the perfect contour of face and neck, with the color coming and going fitfully as she talked.

“Like you,” she said, “I was an orphan, and like you I was very rich.”

I started with surprise. She looked at me in her keen, intuitive way.

“What! did you not know you were an heiress?”

“I have never had the curiosity to ask. Mr. Winthrop will explain everything at the proper time.”

“An old-fashioned woman, truly, patterned after the immortal Sarah, who called Abraham her lord,” she said, with a soft little laugh that angered me exceedingly.

“The beginning of our destiny has been something alike—both orphans, and both rich beyond our utmost need. I too was educated on the other side of the sea, first in a quiet little English town, Weston-Super-Mer, where my grandmother lived, and afterward in Paris. If I had never gone to the latter place, I might not be sitting here compelling a scrupulous listener to hear my story.”

She was silent awhile, a half-suppressed sigh escaping her, over these bygone memories. She continued her story:

“I was quick to learn, soon acquiring the accomplishments necessary for a woman of the world to know; and, finding my guardian easy to manage, I escaped from the restraints of the school-room much earlier than is usual, and plunged into the gayeties, first of Parisian, and afterward of New York society. I became a belle from my first ball, and was soon almost wearied with conquests that caused me no effort. One evening I met Mr. Winthrop. My chaperone, the following day, gave me a detailed history of himself and fortune, and recommended me to secure him for a husband. I resolved to bring him to my feet, reserving the privilege of accepting or not, as I chose. I subsequently found, in order to meet him, it was necessary for me to forsake, occasionally, the ball-room, and to frequent, in its stead, the concert and lecture hall. By degrees I gained his notice, and the very difficulty of winning him made the task all the more congenial. Like you, I developed a fondness for literature, and, in order the more quickly to gain the desired knowledge, I consulted dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and hired private tutors to cram me with poetry, history, and information generally of art and

its manufacturers. At first I could see he was more amused than fascinated at my shallow acquirements. But gradually my personal charms, rather than mental, conquered his proud reserve, and the glance of his eye came to express

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more than mere amusement at my exhibitions of knowledge, or cold admiration for the beauty I strove more than ever to heighten. If I found him hard to conquer, the exultation when my task was achieved was correspondingly great, while I knew his judgment rebelled against giving his love to one his inferior in those things he best esteemed. But, to skip a long bit of the story, we were engaged and the marriage day set; but as our intimacy ripened, the conviction grew upon me that I should have a master as well as husband; and I made the discovery, before very long, that the greater part of our time was to be passed at Oaklands, since the solitude best suited his literary tastes. I knew very well that he would soon get absorbed in those pursuits from which I had been able to draw him for a brief time, and then I would be compelled to satisfy myself with the mild excitement of conjugal affection, housekeeping, and the insipid tea-drinkings for which Cavendish has been noted. Not very long after our engagement, I met, at a grand society ball, George Le Grande. He professed to have fallen in love with me at first sight, and his wooing had all the passionate ardor of a Southern nature; for he was born in the Sunny South, his father being a wealthy French planter. After my betrothed's somewhat Platonic love, his passionate worship was acceptable, and, as the hour of my pastoral life at Cavendish drew near, my fancy turned, irresistibly, towards the free, gay life Le Grande offered me. We had grown so intimate I confessed to him my repugnance to the mild joys awaiting me. Here I made my great mistake; for, with his brilliant imagination, he drew charming pictures of what our life might be, tied to no particular spot, but free to roam, citizens of all lands. My trousseau was nearly completed; but the choosing and trying on of fine garments did not still the mutinous thoughts seething in my brain. One evening—shall I forget it in a thousand years?—-while Mr. Winthrop was at Oaklands, overseeing some special preparations to do honor to the home-coming of his bride, I met Le Grande at a ball. He danced superbly, and he was my partner that evening in so many dances that my chaperone began to look darkly at me; while I saw many a meaning glance directed at us. But I was fancying myself more in love with my gay partner than ever, and once, in a pause of the dances, when he whispered, 'If to-night would only last forever, with you at my side, I should be content.'

"I came swiftly to the conclusion that life without George Le Grande would be tasteless, and resolved then and there to yield to his entreaties and fly from my solemn bridegroom. But my mind was wavering, and I kept putting it off until the very night before my marriage morn that was to be. We left the city by a midnight train, and after travelling until morning we stopped at a country village—really I forget the name, if I ever knew it—and were married in a little country church by a dull,

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old minister who regarded us suspiciously all the time he was performing the ceremony. I was sure he thought us a runaway couple, but that did not trouble me so much as that obscure marriage with a heavy-looking pair brought in from a cottage near at hand to witness the ceremony. I kept contrasting it with the stately ceremony that was to have taken place nearly at the same hour, in old Trinity, with the organ pealing forth the wedding march, the rush of guests and sight-seers, orange blossoms and perfumes, and all the bewildering vanities of a fashionable wedding. Before I had signed my maiden name for the last time, I began to regret my rash step, and ere the month was ended the thorns of my ill-advised sowing were springing up around me. We were neither of us so constituted as to make the best of a bad bargain, and our married life had scarce begun when we began magnifying each other's failings, and soon our brief passion had burnt itself out. Ah, me! with what regret I used to look back to this quiet town, and the stately calm of Oaklands, after one of our vulgar quarrels. I learned too soon that my husband was a gambler, and that my fortune had been a more coveted prize than myself; but fortunately, neither of us could touch anything but the interest until my eldest child should come of age. So often in my free-hearted days we had made merry over my father's ridiculous will! Now how I thanked him for his wise forethought while my husband stormed because it was so far beyond his reach! We might have lived in all my accustomed style on the interest if my husband had been just; but now, instead of sumptuous apparel I had to make the best of garments bought before my marriage, while cheap hotels took the place of my former elegant surroundings. My one passionate desire was to be free from this hated union and many a time, no doubt, I was a murderess in my heart in my longing to see him dead. At last my wish was granted. He was brought home to me one night, a pistol-shot through his heart, received in a low gambling hell. I did not trouble to inquire the particulars. He has been dead a year. I have returned to America—for, at the time of his death, we were in Europe. I have waited a decent time; and now, can you guess what has brought me to Cavendish?"

I shrank away from her when she turned towards me, a gracious smile on her face. "You are silent. Is it a hopeless errand I have come on, think you?"

"If you have come to seek Mr. Winthrop's pardon, I think it is——"

"You do not realize my influence over him. I could bend him to my will like the merest child."

I opened the album which still lay on my knee. "You must not expect to meet the same man you knew here. He has changed—matured since then—if I can judge from his face."

“His heart, I am convinced, is unchanged. He is not one to forget the one passion of his life. You have not gauged the depths of his character. Ah, me! that I should have flung such a man away!”

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I made no reply, seeing she was convinced of her power; but, with all her maddening grace and beauty, I kept the hope still that she would fail. I could fancy Mr. Winthrop trampling ruthlessly on the strongest pleading of his heart sooner than stoop to the degradation of a second time asking her to be his wife.

“You have been thinking it all out, and have decided there is no chance for me.”

“How do you know?” I asked, startled by her correct guess.

“Your face is a very open page. Be careful when you get to love a man, which as yet I do not think you have ever done, lest your secret may too easily be discovered. Men usually care very little for what costs them no trouble.”

My face flushed hotly, but I made her no reply.

“I expected you to flash back that you were never going to fall in love. It is the way with most unsophisticated young people.”

“If I should, and my love is returned, I will be faithful to any vows I may make.”

“My dear friend, you are too inexperienced to make such rash promises. You do not know what mutinous elements are slumbering in your heart.”

“God help me to have principle enough to smother them if they are there and get wakened.”

I rose to go, as night was rapidly falling.

“I can stay no longer and so far as my helping you is concerned, I have been summoned uselessly,” I said, coldly.

“No, indeed; I have heard that you were very pure minded, and see the public estimate of your character is correct. I want you to teach me to be like you, true and good.”

She looked into my eyes with such a guileless expression that, for an instant, I thought she might be tired of her old, heartless life, and long to be better. I stood looking with some perplexity into the fire, scarce knowing what to say; but, turning my eyes suddenly, I saw a mocking gleam pass over her face.

“You would find it very tame patterning after me. I would advise you to seek some higher ideal—one more worthy your superior powers.” I bowed and was turning towards the door.

“Just one moment longer—won’t you come again? I have a favor to ask of you, but the moments have slipped away so rapidly I have not had time to say all I want. Tell me, do

you not think I have sinned past all forgiveness, and should become an outcast from Oaklands and its master? Is that the old-fashioned Christianity the Bible teaches?"

"I cannot say that it is not."

"Do you not say every day 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us?'"

"Yes. But the one who has done the wrong is commanded to do his or her part also, to bring forth fruits showing their repentance."

"Am I not about to do that when I humble myself, as I shall do at the first suitable opportunity, to that proud man?"

"Are you not suing for more than that? Have you come here merely to be forgiven?"

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“You must not turn inquisitor. I have not, however, offended against you, therefore you will come to see me again. Shall we say to-morrow? I seem to feel as if Oaklands and Mr. Winthrop were brought near to me when you are present.”

“I cannot promise to come again this week, at least.”

“Shall we say next Monday then? But it seems such a long time to wait. I was not trained to patience in childhood, and I find it a difficult task, learning it now.”

“Unless something unforeseen should happen to prevent, you may look for me on Monday next.” I promised, feeling a sort of pity for her in her lonely condition.

“Just one word more. Your guardian, they tell me, does not attend church regularly.”

“Mr. Winthrop does not profess to be a religious man.”

“Could you not influence him to a better life? Have you ever asked him to accompany you to church?”

“Certainly not. He is a better judge than I as to his duty in the matter.”

“I do not think so. I fear he is drifting very far from his boyhood’s teachings. His mother was a perfect woman, so far as I have been able to learn.”

I looked my surprise; for I had not expected to hear such words from her lips.

“You must not judge me so harshly,” she said, with gentle reproach. “I hope I am not quite so bad as you think.”

“I am very glad you are interested in Mr. Winthrop, for other than selfish reasons,” I said, bluntly.

She bowed her head meekly. “You will try to influence him then in the matter of church going and other pure endeavors—won’t you?”

“I will try,” I promised, rather uncertainly.

“And begin at once.”

“Yes. I have given you the promise and usually keep my word.”

“Then good-bye until next week.”

The lamps were lighted when I passed along the oak walk that was my nearest approach home to Oaklands, and the fact that I had broken my promise to Mr. Winthrop never again to remain out alone after night filled me with alarm and self-reproach. I

succeeded in gaining the house unperceived and was in abundant time for dinner, which I feared might have been served.

CHAPTER XXII.

The changed heart.

When I entered the softly illumined dining-room, I was surprised to find Mr. Winthrop standing near the fire, and gazing into it with a preoccupied expression. Mrs. Flaxman was sitting in her favorite corner, a book lying open on her knee, her eyes fixed on Mr. Winthrop somewhat anxiously. Instinctively I felt something unusual had disturbed their serenity—the sympathetic influences about me in the air which most of us know something about, acquainted me with the fact. I was almost beside Mr. Winthrop when he began to say, “Medoline must not know”—the sentence was left unfinished, for Mrs. Flaxman seeing me said, abruptly,

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“Why, Mr. Winthrop, here is our runaway.”

He turned towards me, a startled look in his eyes. “Have you been out?” he asked, with some surprise at her remark.

“Yes,” I looked at him with a pathetic interest never felt before.

“Visiting your Mill Road pensioners?” he said, with a peculiar gesture, as if trying to rid himself of some unpleasant reflection.

“Not to-day, I do not go there every time I am out.”

“No, indeed, Medoline does not confine her kindness to those poor folk alone,” Mrs. Flaxman interposed.

“You do not seek for the sorrowful elsewhere, I hope?”

“The heavy-hearted are not confined to that locality alone, Mr. Winthrop.”

“You include those also in your ministries of mercy,” he said, with that rare smile which strongly reminded me of a bright gleam of sunshine falling on a hidden pool.

“I am not so vain as to think I can reach their case. After I have experienced the ministry of sorrow, I may touch sad hearts and comfort them.”

“You are not anxious to suffer in order to do this. Remember, misery sometimes hardens.”

“If we take our miseries to God, He can turn them into blessed evangels,” I replied softly.

“Where did you learn that secret, Medoline?”

“It was Mr. Bowen who taught me. God left him in the darkness, and then gave him songs in the night—such grand harmonies, his life became like a thanksgiving Psalm.”

“I hope you are not going to indulge in cant, Medoline. It does very well for poor beggars like them; but for the enlightened and refined it is quite out of place.”

“The very noblest specimens of humanity who have climbed to the utmost peaks of intellectual excellence thought as Mr. Bowen does; as I hope to think—God helping me, as I do think,” I said, with a strange gladness coming into my heart as if the old, hard heart had been suddenly changed and made clean for the Master’s entrance.

“Poor little girl, I wish you had something more tangible than illusions to rhapsodize over.”

My eyes filled with such happy tears as I lifted them to him, standing at his side. “If you could only trust God, believe in Him as Mr. Bowen does, you would find every other delight in life illusive, compared with the joy He would give you.”

“Child, is that your own experience?”

“Yes,” I murmured softly.

He turned and left the room abruptly. I went to Mrs. Flaxman, and, kneeling beside her, my head on her knee—a posture we both enjoyed—I anxiously asked: “Have I angered Mr. Winthrop?”

“No, dear, he was not angry, for I was watching him; but you did what I have not seen any one do to him for a good many years. You touched his heart; ‘and a little child shall lead them,’” she murmured so softly, I scarce could catch the words.

“I am not a little child, Mrs. Flaxman,” I remonstrated.

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“Your are in some ways, darling. Your mother’s prayers for her children have been answered. Those God has already taken are safe; and you are one of His little ones whose angel one day shall behold His face in joy.”

“I am glad my mother prayed for us; God is so sure to answer a mother’s prayers. I suppose it is because they are really in earnest. But did she ask anything special?”

“That you might be kept pure from the world’s pollution, and get what was really for your good. Her letters to Mrs. Winthrop were full of this: They are all preserved among Mr. Winthrop’s papers, and some day he will give them to you.”

“She was a Christian, I think, like Mr. Bowen,—one who really had a hold on God.”

“I never knew one so unspotted from the world. I too shall call her mother if I meet her in the Heavenly places; for it was she brought me to Jesus.”

“Mrs. Flaxman, is it easy to come to Him,—to be His disciple?”

“So easy, the way-faring man, though a fool, need not find it too difficult.”

“I believe Christ has said to me as He did to the Magdalene: ’Daughter, thy sins, which are many are all forgiven thee.’ Is it not grand to be His child? There is nothing in the world I want so much as to do His will.”

“You stepped out of your way, Medoline, to help others, and they have done more in return than you gave,” she said, the tears filling her eyes.

“I might not have found Christ for years, but for Mr. Bowen—perhaps never,” I added with a shudder.

The dinner bell ended our little fellowship meeting by the firelight. Mr. Winthrop came and we took our places at the table, the dinner going on in the same precise fashion as if there were no such thing as glad, or breaking hearts. There was very little conversation; and dinner ended, Mrs. Flaxman and I were left alone directly. I longed to ask what it was Mr. Winthrop decided I must not know; and the mere fact of his so wishing deterred me from asking. But I felt convinced it was in some way connected with Hermione Le Grande. Neither could I confess to Mrs. Flaxman that I had only an hour or two before heard from her own lips the terrible wrong she had done him, or her plainly expressed determination to win him back once more.

Usually an excellent sleeper, I lay that night finding sleep impossible, and counting the quarter hours as the great hall clock rang them out in the still space. I made the discovery, too, in the solemn hush of the night, when thought grows most active and intense, that notwithstanding his coldness and positive cynicism, I cherished for my guardian in the short time I had been with him an affection stronger than I had ever felt

for any one since I had lost my two intensely-beloved parents—a loss that had embittered the otherwise happy period of girlhood. I had never realized until that night how much he was to me. Pity, perhaps, for the bitter pain that had so changed

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his whole nature, may have awakened me to the fact; but still there was an inexplicable charm about him that even merry-hearted, trifling Hubert felt, and forced his unwilling regard. I shrank with sudden pain from the mere thought of seeing him married to Hermione Le Grande; but instinctively feeling that his was one of those still, changeless natures which never outgrows a master passion, and recalling her beauty and grace, I could only commit him to the sure care of the God whom he affected to believe does not take cognizance of human joys or griefs. With this there came such a sense of peace and security, that my mind grew calm; and sleep, that soothes every heartache, brought its benison. The next day I felt certain both from Mrs. Flaxman's manner and Mr. Winthrop's, that some disturbing element was in the air; and finding Mrs. Flaxman more inclined to solitude than society, after my forenoon's work was ended—for what with the reading Mr. Winthrop appointed, and the time appointed by myself for painting, the entire morning until luncheon I found quite short enough. I started for Mrs. Blake's. I found her in a very happy mood.

The revival was still progressing in the Beech Street church, and Esmerelda, from day to day, had been telling me how happy Mr. Bowen was, and how some folks liked to hear him speak and pray better than any preacher in town. Now Mrs. Blake gave me particulars that the dress-loving Esmerelda had failed to note. "Dan'el and me have been oneasy about the way we've lived ever since Margaret died," she said, after we had been chatting a while about the meetings, and Mr. Lathrop, the pastor of Beech Street church, and its late ongoings. "Dan'el especially felt as if there wa'n't any chance for him; but since Mr. Bowen has got out to the meetings, he's been a powerful help. It seemed as if he jest knew how the Lord looked on us. Night afore last I went to meeting with my mind made up to stay there until I found if there was any mercy for me. I mind how I felt as I walked along the road. The snow was deep, and the night cold, and everything seemed that desolate—my! I wished I'd never been born. I don't know what made me, but I looked right up into the sky all at onct; the stars were shining bright, and I thought if God could keep all them hanging there on nothing, year after year, he could keep me in the place He wanted for me, if I'd only agree to let Him; and right there I stood stock still in the snow and said, 'Lord, I'm a poor unlarnt creatur', but I want you to keep me where you want me, the same as you do the stars. I'll take the poorest place in earth or Heaven, if you'll only adopt me as your own.' I meant what I said, and the Lord just then and there sealed the bargain; and my! but I went on to the meeting that happy I didn't know if I was on earth or up among the holy ones, who are forever praising God. Dan'el had got much the same blessing some time ago, and when we came home he took down the Bible and prayed. The preacher tells the heads of families if they want to keep their religion they must build an altar as the patriarchs did. Religion is the same now as then."

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Mrs. Blake stopped only for want of breath.

“And are you as happy now as you were that night?”

“Everybit; and so is Dan’el. It’s something that stays with one; and the longer you have it, and the more you have, the better content you are. The night I got converted, when we come home from meeting, Dan’el sot talking more’n he usually does; for he’s a powerful still man, and, at last, he says: ’If Marget had only lived till now, she might have got the blessing too;’ and then he burst right out crying. But he’s never mentioned her sence, only last night, in meeting, he said, if we had friends in the other world that we weren’t sure were in glory, we mustn’t let that keep us sorrowful, but jest work all the harder for them that was still in the world. I didn’t think Dan’el could be so changed. I heard him try to sing this morning; but, dear, his singing is something ter’ble. He has no more ear than a cow. Maybe the Lord turns it into good singing—he looks at the heart, and perhaps it sounds better up among the angels than them great singers does that gets a forten for one night’s singing.”

“I am sure it does,” I said, emphatically. “He will make splendid music by-and-by, when he stands with the Heavenly choir.”

“I reckon he’ll most stop then to hear his own voice, for he does dote so on singing, and feels so bad that he can’t do better.”

“Singing and making melody in your hearts. You can do that now, Mrs. Blake, and with God’s help, I hope to be able to do the same.”

“What! have you been thinking of these things too, Miss Selwyn?”

“Yes. For a good while I have been struggling with a burden of sin that sometimes nearly crushed me; but it is gone now. Last night the joy of pardon came just like a flash of light into my heart.”

“Thank the Lord for that. There’s been some praying very earnest for you. They’ll be glad their prayers are answered.”

“I can never repay what some of you people out here have done for me.”

“Well, dear, you’ve done for us. The minister said, ’under God we were indebted to Mr. Bowen for this revival, and there’s already nigh unto fifty converted.’ He couldn’t have come to the meetings if you hadn’t clothed him; and now, you’ve done still more, and got him his eyesight, he’s twice as useful. ’Twould have done you good to see him in meeting the first Sunday after he come back. He’d look up at the pulpit, and then he’d look at the people; and it seemed as if he could hardly sense where he was—he was that glad and happy. The preacher said, in the evening, we’d have a praise meeting after the sermon; and sure enough we had; for when Mr. Bowen got talking about what

the Lord had done for him, and what he had been to him in sorrow and blindness, before I knew it, I was crying like a baby—me that had my eyesight, and health—and never thanked the Lord for them. When I got my eyes wiped I took a look around, and there sot Dan'el a blowing his nose, and mopping his face, as if it was a sweltering day in August; and then when I looked further, there was nothing much to be seen but pocket-handkerchiefs. That was the beginning of the revival; and if you hadn't got Mr. Bowen out to meeting, there mightn't have been any. So, after the Lord, I lay it all to you."

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“No, Mrs. Blake. I was scarcely equal in this matter to those poor souls who helped Noah build the Ark and were drowning for want of its shelter. They labored harder than I; for what I gave was more from impulse, and it was a pleasure.”

“I guess God don’t make mistakes paying folks for what they do, and maybe it’s jest as well not to have a great consait of yourself; but you’re the first one I’ve heard comparing themselves to Noah’s Ark builders.”

I turned the conversation somewhat abruptly.

“What is Mr. Bowen doing now?”

“He’s taken on in Belcher’s Mill, working at the books.”

“I suppose they are getting along nicely at Mrs. Larkum’s now.”

“Yes, indeed. She was complaining after meeting last night, she’d only seed you onct since her father got back, to have a good talk with you.”

“Shall we go there now, for a little while?”

“I’d be glad to, and she’ll be pleased to see us coming, I know.”

Mrs. Blake was very soon in readiness, we started out into the dull, cold air, scarce noticing that the wind was blowing raw and chill from the east, and the soughing wind betokening a storm. While I sat in Mrs. Larkum’s tidy room, listening to her voice, I kept contrasting her with the elegantly dressed, beautiful woman whose face and gestures I was studying the previous day. The one nurtured in the shady places of life, and inured to poverty and hardship; the other privileged with the best opportunities for culture, and high intellectual and social development; and yet with vision grown suddenly clear, I could detect a refinement of the soul, and true womanly honor in Mrs. Larkum that the other lacked. I was glad to notice that Mrs. Larkum’s tears had ceased to flow so profusely. There was an occasional moistening of the eye from sheer joy; for she too had got her experience brightened of late. She was finding it easier to trust in the Lord, and be glad in Him now that she had got a stronger arm than her own to lighten her burdens. As we talked I found they were blessed with an honest independence of spirit that proved them a better class than many who receive help.

“Father has begun to lay by money to pay you,” she announced, with evident pleasure.

“He has already paid me a thousand-fold. I never want any other recompense.”

“I do not think he will be satisfied to let that debt go unpaid. He was always so particular to owe no man anything. In our worst poverty he would never let me go in debt.”

“Then I can never repay him,” I said, sorrowfully, “for I try, like him, to be independent; but I suppose there are blessings no money can ever repay.”

“Why, every time he opens his eyes in the morning, he says his first thought is to thank the Lord, and his next is a prayer that you may get your reward.”

“His prayer has been answered,” I murmured, with tear-filled eyes.

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“Poor father was always a great man for prayer ever since I can recollect. Sometimes I used to doubt if there was anything in religion when I saw how poorly his prayers were answered; but I have since learned that the Lord does hear prayer, and that He answers in the best possible way, though when we are suffering it seems hard to wait patiently His good time.”

“But if it is hard for a little spell on earth, there’s a long while to have our wants satisfied when we get where He is in Heaven,” Mrs. Blake said, in her calm, strong way.

“Dear Miss Selwyn, Heaven seemed very close to us in our meeting last night. I thought of you, and wished so much you were with us.”

“I wish your father would pray that I might have the opportunity to come. The difficulties in the way just now seem insuperable, but with God’s help they could be removed.”

“Yes, indeed. I’ve knowed folks that was a hurt to Christians took out of the world uncommon sudden,” Mrs. Blake remarked, with a very meaning nod of her head.

“I do not want Mr. Winthrop to die,” I said, with quick alarm. “If I had to choose, I think I would rather die myself.”

“I didn’t know you liked him that well. I reckoned he was hard to please.”

“I acknowledge that he is; but then a word of praise from him is worth a great deal,” I frankly replied.

“I believe you are in the way to win his approval. A pure, unselfish life must gain the respect of every honest soul, soon or late,” Mrs. Larkum said, with gentle assurance.

There was no more said on the subject. But the thought that Mr. Bowen was praying for me made me feel more confident that everything would turn out best for me, and for those also in whom I was most interested.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The encounter at st. Mark’s.

I did not forget through the week Mrs. Le Grande’s eagerness for Mr. Winthrop to attend church, and although not permitting myself, if possible, to impute false motives to others, I concluded it was not anxiety for his spiritual well-being that prompted the desire on her part. However I resolved to ask him, and was very anxious that he should grant my request. The day dawned bright and clear, one of those hopeful days with promise of the coming summer in the clear shining of the February sun. At breakfast Mr. Winthrop spoke of the rare loveliness of the morning; the blue of the sky, soft and

tender as a mother's eye, with here and there a fleecy cloud such as painters love to put on their canvas. Away to the south, the sea was dimpling and sparkling in ten thousand broken ripples, with here and there a brave vessel sailing away over the cold, heaving waters.

Mr. Winthrop seemed in more genial mood than he had been for a week; and when he left the table I followed him to the door, where he stood gazing with eyes trained to take in intelligently the charming scene. I stood silent, entering in a very half-hearted manner into his keen enjoyment of the picture painted by God's own hand, spread out before us.

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“It is no use for a man to attempt copying that living, throbbing scene, nor yet to describe it,” he said, with an air of dissatisfaction.

“To copy would be easy, compared with creating it,” I suggested timidly.

“Yes; but when, and by whom done? That is the question that maddens one,” he answered after a long pause.

“The Bible says the same hand that was nailed to the cross on Calvary created it. ‘By whom also the worlds were made,’” I murmured.

“Ah, if we only had some evidence of that; but it is all dark, dark, on the other side of death, and on the other side of life too. Whence came we—whither do we tend? What power sent Sirius and all that galaxy of suns marching serenely through space? We, in our little planet-ship, falling into line, going like comets one day, and then vanishing; but the worlds moving on unconscious of our departure, and yet some power controls them and us. Medoline, to have my faith anchored as yours is, to a beneficent, all-powerful God, I would be willing to die this instant if I might be absorbed into Him, or be taken into his presence forever. You who can calmly accept your religion as you do the atmosphere you inhale, should live as far above earthly passions and entanglements, as those light clouds hanging in yonder vault are above the earth; nay, rather like the stars which only touch us by that law of the universe that holds the remotest stars together.”

“Have you tried any more earnestly to find the God of the Bible than you have done Boodh or Vishnu, or other man-created deities?” I asked.

He turned to me in his keen, incisive way:—“No, Medoline, I cannot say that I have—not since boyhood, at least, when my mother, who loved the God whom Israel served so indifferently, endeavored to train my rebellious will to His service.”

“You have lived all these years Godless?”

“In plain English, yes.”

“Then that great star, Sirius, you just spoke of, and all the other suns, and their systems, as well as the humblest created things, have fulfilled the purposes of their Maker’s will, save the last supreme effort of His power—man, originally made a ‘little lower than God.’ I wonder that I honor you as I do, when you deny the existence of my God and Saviour.”

He looked down at me with a gentleness at which I was surprised, and his next question did not lessen this.

“Would you be terrified if death, in some form, were suddenly to seize you, dismissing you from your present environments into the unclothed state, could you trust, to the uttermost, this mighty Being whose friendship you so confidently claim?”

I paused before replying. Certainly death just then did not seem welcome. I loved life and enjoyed it, and longed for its fuller experiences. As I studied his question, there came a fear that, since I clung with such desire to life, I could not be fitted for higher places. No doubt he saw the pained, uncertain look on my face, which his question had caused.

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“If God wished for me to leave this world,” I said, slowly, “no doubt he would give me the necessary grace and fortitude to do so patiently; but I do not want to die now, unless it is His will. I love my life, and would like to serve my generation for a good many years. There are such grand opportunities to be useful to others.”

“That is a more healthy type of piety than I would have given you credit for. I am glad you are not anxious to leave us. The Superior powers are apt to humor such fancies in the young, and remove them from this distasteful world.”

I saw that a lighter mood was taking the place of his more serious one of a few minutes before, and I hastened to make my request. “Won’t you come to church with me this bright morning, Mr. Winthrop?”

He looked at me with that clear, honest gaze that always seemed to penetrate my deepest thoughts.

“Why do you make that request? You have never asked me before.”

A guilty blush crimsoned my face, and I murmured something about wanting him to go particularly that morning, and then hastily entered the house. As I put on my bonnet and cloak for church, I made up my mind never to make a request of him again without being able to give a good, honest reason for it.

The bell of St. Mark’s began ringing as I went down the broad staircase. I paused a moment at the library door, and then went on to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Flaxman usually awaited me. I was surprised to find her sitting near the fire, a book in her hand, and no preparation made for church.

“You must go alone this morning, I fear.”

“Are you not well?”

“No, dear; I cannot even plead a headache. I might go deeper, though; for I have had a heartache of late.”

“Have you got bad news from Hubert?”

“On the contrary, I have had better news than usual from him in his last few letters; but, dear, I may have other anxieties than merely personal ones.”

“Our anxieties should send us to God’s house, and not keep us away—don’t you think?”

“Yes, in most cases. Some day I may explain all this to you, Medoline; but not now.”

“Good-bye, then,” I said, kissing the sweet, gentle face, and thinking I knew what was keeping her at home. As I passed into the hall, I saw Mr. Winthrop coming down from his own room; but I did not pause to speak, thinking he was on his way to the library. My hand was on the door, when he called me back.

“After inviting me to church, are you going without me?”

I turned and saw that he was taking his hat.

“Are you really going?”

“Yes, really. I would be rude, indeed, to slight your first invitation.”

“Do you come this morning merely because I invited you?” I asked, incredulously.

“Do you consider it courteous to inquire too minutely into the motives of your friends?”

I was silent while I stood for a few seconds regarding him closely. I wondered if he had not taken special pains with his toilet; for I had never seen him look so regally handsome before. He may have detected my admiring gaze; for he said, lightly:

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“What is wrong, that you favor me with such scrutinizing glances?”

“There is nothing wrong, Mr. Winthrop, so far as my eyes can penetrate. I trust that to clearer vision than mine what lies deeper than human gaze can pierce, is equally perfect.”

“Is it your custom, little one, to pay your male acquaintances such open compliments?”

“It was not a compliment. I only spoke the truth,” I said, quietly, as we walked side by side down the lilac-bordered footpath, the way we always went to church when we walked, as it cut off a-half mile or more. It was a charming walk in summer; but now the low bushes looked common and ungraceful, stripped of their foliage; but the ground was high, and over their tops we could see the distant hills and the sun-kissed sea. And this morning as I tripped lightly by my guardian’s side, I fancied I had never seen this quiet pathway even in its midsummer glory look so perfect.

“It is a wise plan not to tell your friends the truth always. Masculine vanity is occasionally as strongly developed as feminine,” he said after we had gone some time in silence.

“But you are not vain, Mr. Winthrop; I never saw any one so free from it,” I said, gravely.

“You are determined to overwhelm me with your flattery. We must change our conversational topics altogether.”

“First, let me ask if flattery is not half-sister to falsehood?”

“Probably they are pretty closely related; but why are you anxious to get that matter settled?”

“Because I do not want you to believe I ever tell you what is not true. I do not think I could, if I tried.”

“You reserve that privilege, then, for your other friends.”

“Oh, no; I am never tempted to be untruthful with them.”

“And are you so tempted in your relation with me?” he asked, a little sternly.

“Sometimes.”

“Why, Medoline, you astonish me. Tell me what reason you have for being so tempted?”

“You make me afraid of you; that is my only reason,” I murmured, trembling already with a touch of my natural fear of him.

“I am sorry to know that I stand in the relation of an ogre to you.”

“You do not, and I never meant to tell you that. I am afraid of you. By and bye, when I get a little older, I do not think that I shall be; but you make me tell you everything.”

“If that is the case I am surprised you have so little wrong-doing to confess. I believe you will ultimately convince me that a few of your sex have escaped the taint of their evil inheritance.”

His words caused such a thrill of delight that, remembering what a tell-tale face I had, I turned my head to watch intently the white sails of a ship far away to the left; but I presently bethought myself to inquire what our special inheritance was.

“That which Eve left her daughters—deceit.”

“But, Mr. Winthrop, we are alike descendants of hers; and the sons as often take after their mother as their father.”

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“That is not a bad hit. It never occurred to me before. Men and women, however, are different; whether created so originally we do not know. But sometimes we meet a woman combining the best qualities of both sexes; but so far as my experience goes, they are the rarest product of creative skill. I dare say there are men occasionally combining the same beautiful qualities.”

“I think Mr. Bowen does.”

“Have you ever told him as much?” Mr. Winthrop asked, with an odd smile.

“No, I have scarcely said anything to him about his goodness. I like best to let him do the talking when we are together.”

“I am getting curious to see that man.”

“Oh, Mr. Winthrop, if you would only come with me to their church. They are having wonderful meetings, and people are getting converted.”

“What church is it?”

“Beech Street, I heard the minister pray at Mrs. Blake’s funeral, and once since at the Larkums. I have longed to hear him again. I never heard anything like it in my life. It reminded me of a beautiful poem or oratorio.”

“Why, have you not gone to his church, then, to hear him?”

“I feared you might be displeased.”

We walked on some distance in silence. I stole a quick look once at his face to see if he was angry, but he seemed in one of his abstracted moods, and I reflected that by this time, he had probably forgotten my existence. But I was mistaken; for all at once he said abruptly, as he stood holding open the gate that led from the footpath into the main street. “You have been a more obedient girl than I expected any of your sex could be, especially one with your keen, impetuous nature. To reward your fidelity I will go to the Beech Street church whenever you wish.” I looked up at him, the grateful tears in my eyes, but some way my feelings had got beyond my control, and I dared not attempt to thank him. We joined the crowds on the sidewalk and after a while he said:—

“You have not thanked me, Medoline; don’t you appreciate my offer?”

I tried to speak; but my lip quivered, and I remained silent.

“You have thanked me very eloquently, little one; more so than if you had used set phrases.”

The remainder of our walk was completed mostly in silence. I scarce knew why, but my heart was as glad as if June roses and song birds had been about us as we went. I looked at some staid people,—old looking to me, though few of them were past fifty,—-and pitied them that they too were not young and glad-hearted like me. As we neared the church, the sunshine and gladness suddenly grew dim, for there, in all her perfect loveliness, Mrs. Le Grande was approaching St. Mark's from the opposite direction. Impulsively I turned to Mr. Winthrop, hoping he would not see her; for usually he was quite oblivious of the presence of those who might be on the street with him. A glance assured me that he was looking at

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her, and that her desire was gratified. He took no notice, however, of my abrupt movement, and without change of expression or voice, said: “There seems a good many strangers on their way to church this morning. Some unusual circumstance must have occurred to bring out so many curious worshippers.” I could not help smiling at the veiled irony in voice and words. Fortunately we were considerably nearer the church than Mrs. Le Grande, and without quickening our steps gained its shelter before she overtook us, although I saw she moved more quickly after she saw us. St. Mark’s was an ancient church, built in old colonial days. One could easily fancy themselves in a country church in some quiet English village, as their eyes fell on the high-backed pews, narrow, stained glass-windows, and walls covered with memorial tablets, and the other peculiarities of a church over a century old. The Winthrop pew was near the pulpit. A large square one, and commanding an excellent view of the congregation. When Mrs. Le Grande entered, she paused for a moment, apparently taking a rapid survey of the church; when her eye fell on our pew. Without paying any attention to the usher, she glided to the nearest vacant seat to ours. Directly, I was conscious that very many eyes were upon us. Opening my Bible, I read mechanically the words before me; but no more conscious of their meaning than if they had been Sanscrit. When the service began, in the withdrawal of attention to other things, I took courage to look at Mr. Winthrop. He sat facing Mrs. Le Grande, but with face as unruffled as if he were reading his morning paper. I glanced next at Mrs. Le Grande. She sat with downcast eyes, her color varying fitfully. She might have been taken for some beautiful picture of penitence. I do not know if Mr. Winthrop vouchsafed her a single look, but from her expression I judged that she thought he was watching her closely. It was a relief when the service was ended, although my conscience painfully reminded me that I would have another master opportunity for listening to the preached gospel to repent of, or else to confront some day; for I had been so nervous I had not listened intelligently to a single sentence of the sermon.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Mrs. Le Grande’s stratagem.

The congregation slowly dispersed, Mr. Winthrop pausing, as was his wont, for the crowd to move out. Although one of the busiest men I ever met, he never seemed in a hurry. Besides, he had an extreme dislike to be jostled by a hurrying crowd. When he saw the aisles getting empty he left the pew. Mrs. La Grande apparently, like ourselves, liked plenty of elbow-room; for she only left her pew a few steps in advance of us. Mr. Winthrop walked leisurely towards the door. I dropped behind, not wishing to bow to her in his presence, and not capable either of the rudeness of passing her without a friendly

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nod. My heart beat thickly as I saw him approaching nearer to her, and a moment after they were side by side. She partly turned her face toward him, an expression of contrition and appeal, making her beauty well-nigh irresistible. I gazed, fascinated; then after awhile I turned my eyes to Mr. Winthrop. I felt a sudden relief when I saw the same unconcerned expression that was habitual to him. Mrs. Le Grande looked him, for an instant, full in the face, when a swift change came over her own countenance. For the first time, probably, she realized that her power and fascination had lost their effect on him. A crimson flush of shame and anger swept over cheek and brow, as quickly followed by a deathly pallor. Mr. Winthrop, without noticing her presence, walked leisurely on. She stood perfectly still, leaning her hand, as if for support, against the back of a pew. I hastened to her side, pitying her deeply in her disappointment. She gave me a dazed look, scarce seeming to recognize me; I paused an instant and held out my hand, but she did not seem to notice it. She looked so wan and wretched I felt I must try to comfort her, though at the risk of Mr. Winthrop's displeasure.

"You are not looking well," I said compassionately. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"You would not dare, even if you were willing, with that merciless man so near," she said, faintly. I paid no attention to her remark, but asked if I might get her a glass of water.

"Yes, anything, please, to take away this deathly feeling." I drew her into a pew and forced her to lie down, crushing thereby a most elegant toilet. But I was afraid she was dying, she looked so pale; then, rushing to the vestry, I found the sexton. He looked somewhat startled at sight of me.

"Can you give me some water?—there is a lady upstairs very ill."

"That one that's such a stunner?" he said, coolly, going to a shelf near where he had water and glasses.

"I presume it is the same," I said, seizing the glass, while wondering at his indifference.

"You'd best not get too frightened, Miss Selwyn. I've heard of that one afore, and she knows what she's about."

I hastened back to my charge, leaving him to follow at his leisure. I found her on the floor, apparently unconscious. Forgetful of the dainty Paris bonnet, I began applying the water vigorously, when she opened her eyes, and said:

"That will do."

I dried her face, whisking away a few bountiful drops that were clinging to her garments. She arose directly. Several persons who had been late in leaving the church had collected around us. She glanced at them, a look of keen disappointment passing over her face. With an amazing return of vitality, she passed quickly out of the pew, saying, lightly:

“Your church was uncomfortably hot, and the air was very impure; it seems a necessity to absorb one’s religion and a vitiated atmosphere at the same time.”

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She turned to me presently, saying:

“You get very easily alarmed, Miss Selwyn. Are you always so impetuous in your deeds of mercy?”

“Oh, no, indeed. I never had such cause for alarm but once before, and that was a poor widow who was utterly overcome by some good news I was bringing her. My friends usually have sufficient nerve to endure heavy shocks,” I said, very sweetly.

Her eyes flashed, but she allowed no further sign of annoyance to escape her. When we reached the door, she turned to me and said, very cordially:

“I shall look for you to-morrow, according to promise. Forgive me for having kept you so long from your escort. I fear a scolding awaits you. Mr. Winthrop I used to find very impatient, if kept waiting.”

I left her standing on the church steps, and turned my face homeward. When I reached the street I found Mr. Winthrop had got some distance ahead; but he was walking slowly, and I soon overtook him.

“Is it your custom to remain chatting with your friends after the sermon?” he asked, carelessly.

“Oh, no; but a lady who sat near us fainted just as I was standing by her.”

“And, of course, as a sort of mother-general of the sorrowing, you stopped to comfort her?”

“Yes; but a few drops of water sufficed. She knew all the time I was in danger of spoiling her bonnet.”

“I am glad she snubbed you. You are too innocent to be matched against so perfect an actress.”

Then he changed the conversation, and Mrs. Le Grande was not mentioned again that day. I noticed, however, that he partook very sparingly of dinner; and, in the hour or two which he usually spent on the Sabbath with us in the drawing-room, he was unusually silent. I went to the library for a book, leaving him and Mrs. Flaxman alone, and returned just in time to interrupt, a second time, a conversation clearly not intended for my ears.

“Yes. She was at church this morning, looking as wickedly beautiful as ever,” he was saying, as if in answer to Mrs. Flaxman’s question.

When the church bells began ringing that evening, a strong desire seized me to claim the fulfillment of his promise to accompany me to the Beech Street Church. He may have read it in my face.

“Are you going to take me out again to-night?”

“Do you wish to go?” I asked, with girlish eagerness.

“I have told you before it is not polite to reply to a question by asking another.”

“Then I would like very much indeed to go to Mr. Lathrop’s church to-night, if you are willing.”

Mrs. Flaxman looked up from her book with amazement.

“You were never at their church before. What will those people think?”

“There must always be a first time, and probably you are aware I am not in bondage to other people’s thoughts,” he said, with calm indifference.

“Won’t you come, too, Mrs. Flaxman?” I urged.

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“With pleasure,” was the smiling response.

“What will your Dr. Hill think if he hears you have been to hear Lathrop?”

“I must endeavor to live above public opinion, as well as you.”

“I am afraid such elevation would chill you.”

“Don’t you want Mrs. Flaxman to go?”

“I have nothing to say against it, if she has courage to brave public opinion.”

“I did not think you reckoned me such a coward.”

“That shows how little we know what our intimate friends think of us; if there was a general laying bare of hearts, methinks there would be lively times for a while.”

I stood thinking his words over very seriously, and then turning to him said, gravely:—

“I would be willing for nearly all my friends to see my thoughts respecting them.”

“There would be some exceptions, then. You said nearly all, remember. The few might be the ones most anxious to know, and upon whom the restriction would bear most heavily.”

“They might not care what I thought,” I said with a hot flush; something in his look making me tremble.

“If we are to be in time for church we should leave very shortly,” he said, looking at his watch.

“And we are really going to Beech Street Church this evening?”

“Yes, really,” he said, with that genial smile I was beginning to regard like a caress.

Mrs. Flaxman and I hastened to our rooms; she nearly as well pleased as I. It seemed quite too good to be true that we three were to go in company to those meetings where men and women talked to each other, and to God, of all the great things He was doing for them. I was very speedily robed and back in the drawing-room, where Mr. Winthrop was still sitting gazing into the fire with that indrawn, abstracted expression on his face which was habitual to it in repose. I waited silently near until Mrs. Flaxman should come in and interrupt his reverie. I liked to watch his face in those rare moments, and used to speculate on what he might be thinking, and wishing my own thoughts were high and strong enough to follow his on their long upward flight.

He looked at me suddenly.

“What, if I could read your thoughts now, Medoline? From your intent look I think I was the subject of your meditations.” I smiled calmly.

“You would have been flattered, as you were this morning, perhaps. I was just wishing I was capable of going with you along those high paths where, by your face, I knew you were straying.”

“Was that what you were thinking about, and that only?”

My face crimsoned, but I looked up bravely into the honest eyes watching me.

“Must I confess even my thoughts to you, Mr. Winthrop? I have had to ask that question before?”

“Not necessarily. But I have a fancy just now to know what else you were thinking of.”

I hesitated a moment, and then said bravely: “I was looking at your face, and it occurred to me that in some faces there was the same power to thrill one’s soul that there is in splendid music, or poems that can never die.”

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“You were in a very imaginative and sentimental mood to trace such analogies. It is not wise to see so much in a common human face.”

“Do we not sometimes get glimpses of God in that way?” I asked.

“Are you always thinking such high thoughts, Medoline?”

“Oh, no, indeed. When I have nothing to inspire them, my thoughts are very commonplace. The brook cannot rise higher than its source; it needs artificial help to scale mountain tops.”

He looked at me kindly as he said: “You are not fashioned after the regulation models of the woman of to-day.”

“I think I have heard that idea expressed in varying phrases a good many times since I came to America.”

“It does not displease you?”

“It used to at first. Possibly I am getting used to it now. I see there is so much genuine unhappiness in the world, I am not going to grieve over the mild criticisms of my friends.”

“A very philosophic conclusion to come to. But does it not occur to you that other meanings than unkindly ones may be taken from these chance remarks we let fall?”

“It would please me if I could,” I said, looking at him with pleased eagerness. Mrs. Flaxman entered the room then, ready for church. My head was aching severely, and a distressing giddiness occasionally seized me; but I was so eager for this long coveted privilege, I kept silent about my feelings. Sickness and I were such strangers to each other, I scarcely understood its premonitory warnings.

CHAPTER XXV.

Beech street worshippers.

As we neared the Beech Street Church, we found a crowd of persons hurrying in the same direction. Mrs. Flaxman expressed her astonishment; since she supposed Mr. Lathrop’s flock to be small in number, and humble in its class of adherents. When we reached the door, a glance inside revealed the fact that it was already comfortably filled, and where all the approaching throng were to be bestowed was a mystery. Daniel Blake was one of the ushers. His face brightened at sight of us. Nodding respectfully to Mr. Winthrop, he led us to one of the best seats in the house. I glanced around at the large congregation, and was impressed by the solemn hush pervading the place, and

the expectant look on the faces of the worshippers. Mr. Bowen was sitting near and I wanted Mr. Winthrop to see and know him; so I took out my pencil and wrote on the leaf of my hymn book directing his attention to my friend. He looked keenly at the pale, rapt face, and then with a scarce perceptible smile turned to me.

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The church kept filling; and while yet the people were streaming in, the minister arose, and after a brief, but exceedingly solemn invocation, gave out the hymn. In an alcove just behind the preacher's stand was a cabinet organ, and some half dozen singers, male and female; but once the singing had got well under way, organ and choir were as though they were not; nearly every one in the house was singing save myself and Mr. Winthrop. I kept silent the more keenly to enjoy the heavy volume of sound which impressed me as more reverent praise than any church music I had ever heard. I turned to Mr. Winthrop. He too was looking over the dense mass of humanity with a curious intentness, as if here were some entirely new experience. When the hymn was ended there was a moment's hush after the congregation had bowed in reverent act of worship and then the preacher's voice rose in earnest pleading. I noticed it was better modulated than at Mrs. Blake's funeral, possibly the effort to make himself heard by the scattered groups on that occasion caused the difference. My eyes filled with tears, and a strange trembling seized me as the petitions grew more earnest; the prayer was short, yet so much was comprehended in it. The Scripture lesson was read in very natural, but also solemn manner, without any attempt at rhetorical display, yet bringing out the subtle meanings of the passage in a peculiarly realistic way. The sermon was delivered in much the same manner; but in every word and gesture there seemed a reserve power and dignity, while the thoughts were strong and original; and better than all, they made one wish to be purer, more unselfish, in fact Christ-like.

The place seemed pervaded by some mysterious influence never experienced by me before in any church. The sermon was ended at last; the Judgment Day was the theme; all the old horror that used haunt me in childhood, when I thought upon this awful period in my soul's future, came back to me as the preacher with a power scarce short of inspiration pictured that day. I could hear Mrs. Flaxman's subdued weeping while in every part of the house, tears and low sobs added to the solemnity of the scene. Mr. Winthrop sat with folded arms and set stern face, apparently unmoved; but the intent watchfulness of his face as he followed the preacher assured me that the sermon was making an impression. A hymn was sung when the sermon was ended, and then all who wished to remain to the after-meeting were assured of a welcome, no matter to what church they belonged, or if aliens from all.

I scarce dared lift my eyes to Mr. Winthrop lest he might be preparing to leave; but to my relief he sat calmly down along with nearly the entire congregation, and then the other meeting began first with a number of prayers, afterward with speaking by men and women all over the house. When Mr. Bowen prayed, there was a solemn hush as if the people were almost holding their breath lest some word might be missed. I

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could not wonder that men's hearts were melted by the power and tenderness of his utterances. Strange that God should hide such gifts away for years when the world was in such need of workers. Along through the meeting there were occasional snatches of song, deep, resonant melody that uplifted the heart as it welled up from glad, thankful souls. Men and women rose, for the most part with modest calmness, and told what God had done for them, and what they still expected from our Father as loving as He is rich. I listened spellbound. Some of them had a story to tell so like my own that my heart was thrilled at times. I wanted to tell what God had done for me, but before that crowded house, and worse than all, in presence of Mr. Winthrop, I found it impossible; but just at the close the minister, with a kindly thoughtfulness for which I blessed him said: "There may be some one here who loves Christ but has not courage to tell us so. If they are willing to witness for Him we extend them the privilege of doing this by merely rising to their feet."

My heart beat painfully and my head swam, but forgetful of my guardian's displeasure, and the concentrated gaze of some hundreds of eyes, I stood up. I heard a heartfelt "praise God," from the direction of Mr. Bowen's pew, and then there was a gentle rustle in every part of the house, and scores stood up, Mrs. Flaxman among the rest. The meeting closed quietly, and in the same solemn hush the people departed.

Mr. Winthrop stood, waiting for the crowd to leave, not seeing the many curious glances bent our way. Presently the minister was passing our pew; he paused uncertainly, wishing to speak, I knew from the expression of his face, but waiting for Mr. Winthrop first to make some sign of recognition. I stood near enough to reach my hand; my act speedily followed by Mrs. Flaxman; and then with rare grace and courtesy Mr. Winthrop extended his hand, saying: "I have to thank you for your very faithful sermon. I did not know the present generation of preachers dared talk so plainly to their hearers."

"Perhaps you do not go in the way of hearing them; the race of heroes is not yet extinct. Not that I reckon myself a hero," he added, with an amused smile at the slip of tongue.

"The rack and flames are not necessary to prove one a hero or martyr. I dare say many who do not choose to live for their religion would die for it if it came in their way to do so."

"Yourself among the number, I believe, Mr. Winthrop," the minister said, with a penetrating look, that Mr. Winthrop returned in kind.

"I would take it as a favor if you would dine with us some day soon, and give me an evening of your society. We might have some topics in common to discuss," Mr. Winthrop said, to the surprise of each of us, Mr. Lathrop included. "Possibly you do not

make such engagements on the Sabbath. Pardon me, I had forgotten you were a conscientious man," he said, after a short pause, seeing Mr. Lathrop hesitate.

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“It is not my usual custom, but nevertheless, I accept your invitation with pleasure.”

Mr. Bowen was waiting to speak with his minister, it may be hoping to exchange greeting with us as well. I whispered softly to Mr. Winthrop:

“Would you like to speak to Mr. Bowen?”

“If it is your desire, I will do so.”

“I would like you to speak with him very much.”

I made my way quickly to Mr. Bowen’s side. He was standing a little way down the aisle from us. The grasp of his hand and glance of his eye were like a benediction.

“I was glad to see you here,” he said, in his quiet way, which meant more than extravagant protestations from others. “There was bread for you, I think.”

“Yes, and wine; better far than human lips ever quaffed.”

“The new wine of our Father’s Kingdom,” he said, softly, with such a glad light in his eyes reminding me of some spiritual illumination the flesh could not wholly conceal.

Mr. Winthrop soon joined us, and never did I feel more grateful to my guardian than when I watched his gracious bearing towards my friend. If he had been some noted literary gentleman, he could not have been more genial and polite.

“My ward has talked so much about you that, out of pure curiosity, I came to see and hear you to-night,” he said, as they walked side by side towards the door. A faint flush passed over Mr. Bowen’s face, but he made no reply. I was much better pleased than if he had exclaimed against his own poor abilities, as some would have done, or rhapsodized over his indebtedness to me. I knew from the expression of Mr. Winthrop’s face that he was pleased with him, and on our way home, he said: “You are like a magnet, Medoline. You draw the best types of humanity to you as the lodestone does the steel.”

“You like Mr. Bowen, then?”

“I do not know him well enough yet for that; but he has genius. Da Vinci would have taken him for a model for the beloved disciple if he had lived in his day. I never saw a more spiritual face in any human being.”

“He is like the disciple whom Jesus loved in one thing—he loves the Christ best of all.”

“Was not that a wonderful meeting, Mr. Winthrop?” Mrs. Flaxman asked, after we had seated ourselves cosily by the bright fire in the drawing-room.

“I do not profess to be a judge in such matters.”

“I think a heathen would have felt some before unknown spiritual influence there to-night, if he had understood our language,” I exclaimed.

“Heathen and Christian alike are not so susceptible to spiritual influences as you, Medoline; so in harmony with the unseen and unknowable as you are getting to be.”

“Religion cannot be classed with the unknowable. God only leaves us in uncertainty when we wilfully close our eyes to his teachings.”

“You place no restrictions, then, on the benevolence of your Creator.”

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“I shall not make myself a different and narrower creed than the Bible provides.”

“Men read the Bible and formulate creeds as opposite as the poles. The pendulum of their belief takes in not merely an arc, but the entire circle.”

“I think they are wisest who leave creeds; I mean the non-essentials, to those who try to penetrate mysteries which, maybe, even the angels look upon as too sacred for them to explore, and just take what is necessary to make us Christ-like.”

“My dear child, that is taking at a single bound faith’s highest peak.”

“I suppose the way-faring man, of whom the Bible speaks, does that. God may have different patents of nobility from us. I do not mean in the mere matter of birth, but of what, even to our dim vision, is vastly higher—the intellectual dower.”

“Medoline tries very hard to assure herself that her Mill Road favorites are royalties in exile,” Mr. Winthrop said, with a smile, turning to Mrs. Flaxman.

“I cannot say if she goes quite that far, but she certainly thinks that she has found among them some diamonds of the first water, though she cannot but acknowledge they lack the polishing touches to bring out more effectually their sparkle and brilliancy.”

“I do not know if the best among them have suffered anything from the lack of the human lapidary’s skill. He often, at the best, is a mere bungler, and while he makes sure to bring out the brilliancy, laps off other finer qualities the lack of which no spark or brilliancy can compensate,” I replied, by no means convinced, and thinking all the time of Mrs. Le Grande who had certainly received plenty of polishing touches, but sadly lacked higher mental and moral qualities.

“A woman convinced against her will is of the same opinion still,” Mr. Winthrop quoted, although addressing no one in particular.

“The author’s real words are, ‘A man convinced against his will,’” I retorted.

“In this case it is a woman, and a very determined, insistent little woman she is too,” he replied.

I rose, and standing before my guardian, said, “I am not such a little woman, Mr. Winthrop, as you would make me believe. Actually I can look over Mrs. Flaxman’s head.”

“A perfect giantess, especially in defending the character of the poor and bereaved.”

“If you had studied poor, hard-working people more, and books less, you would have found some of the rarest specimens of patience, and self-forgetfulness and fortitude,

and oh, so many other beautiful characteristics, that you would long to strip off your proud ancestry and wealth, and become like them. They find it so much easier to be Christians—they are not bewildered by the pride of life and vanities that pall while they allure, and the perplexity of riches, and other ills the higher born are heir to."

"I sincerely hope you will not begin a new crusade, Medoline."

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“Why, Mr. Winthrop, what do you mean?” I asked, surprised at the sudden turn of the conversation.

“What do I mean? You have begun it already. I only stipulate that you carry this crusade no farther.”

“But I do not understand you. How then can I promise to obey your will?”

“The fashion is rapidly gaining ground for women to have some pet scheme of reform. A few of them have such ambition for publicity they take their pet scheme, and the platform, and go trailing over the land like comets. Now I do not wish you to join this motley crowd, though your heart does burn over the unacknowledged perfections of the poor.”

“Surely, Mr. Winthrop, you do not insinuate there is the remotest possibility of such a thing, that I will go to lecturing,” I said, with rising color.

“Have you not already begun the work? But I shall be very glad to have your promise that you will not seek a larger audience to listen to you than your present one.”

“Are you in earnest?”

“I am certainly in earnest when I assure you it is my desire that you will not take up lecturing, or develop into a woman with a career.”

I looked at him closely, and turning away, said, “Some day I hope to get wise enough to know when you are in earnest and when you are merely bantering me.”

“I think your faculties in that respect are rapidly developing. You discovered before I did that it was merely badinage on Mr. Winthrop’s part,” Mrs. Flaxman said, genially.

“But, Mr. Winthrop,” I said, turning to him once more, “is it right for you to judge those women so harshly who seize any honest way to get a hearing? I believe the majority of them are as much in earnest about their work as you are in any of your most cherished undertakings. Women more than men have an instinct to sacrifice themselves on the first genuine altar they meet with. One human being, especially, if he is apt to be cynical, can scarcely judge another justly.”

“Are you not a little severe on me? but possibly you are correct,” he said, with perfect good humor.

“I hope you will forgive me that unkind remark,” I pleaded. “I am afraid, after all, it is no use for me to try to be good thoroughly and wholly. I can only be so in places.”

“You must not despair yet. Much worse persons than you have developed into saints ultimately, if we can trust the calendar.”

I smiled, although discomfited. “I wish you would try to be good with me. I am sure I would find it easier.”

“Goodness too easily acquired is not apt to be of a very high quality. Better fight your own battles and gain your victories all by yourself,” he said, with a smile as he left us for his study. My head was aching so severely that I concluded to try the effect of rest and sleep, to bring back my usual freedom from pain.

CHAPTER XXVI.

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From the depths.

The next day was a wild, drifting storm. My first waking thought in the early morning was the unpleasant one that my promised visit to Mrs. Le Grande must be made during the day. When I raised my head from the pillow the pain was even more severe than on the previous evening, and a dizzy faintness seized me when I tried to rise. I was so unaccustomed to sickness I had not learned the happy art of accepting patiently its behests; so, after a few more efforts, I succeeded in dressing myself. I went to the window and, on looking out, was greatly relieved to see huge drifts piled between us and the outside world, which promised at least one day's blockade unless Thomas and Samuel worked much harder than their wont.

I put in an appearance at the breakfast table, although the sight of food was exceedingly repugnant, and made a pretence to eat what was placed before me. Mr. Winthrop very cheerfully announced that I was certainly a prisoner for that day—an announcement I received with perfect indifference—the mere thought of facing the outside world as I then felt made me shudder. Probably he was surprised that I took with such extreme calmness my temporary imprisonment; for he asked if I enjoyed being snow-bound.

"I do, to-day," I answered unthinkingly.

"You must have some special reason for such a state of mind."

I did not attempt to reply, and was glad to find that his suspicions were not aroused. After we arose from the table he stood chatting with us by the fire for some time, while Mrs. Flaxman with a little help on my part washed the china and silver, interjecting a word now and then with deep content. I could see these genial moods of my guardian gave her unbounded satisfaction; sometimes when I looked in her gentle, patient face and remembered how few real joys she had in her daily life, I used to get positively angry with him, because, as a rule, he was so chary with his smiles and gracious words. As he was leaving the room he turned to me and said:—"I would like you to come to the library after you get those important partnership duties completed."

"Do you mean our dish-washing?" I asked.

"Yes, certainly. You seem to enjoy menial work very much."

"It is woman's work, Mr. Winthrop, just as much as painting pictures or studying German metaphysics is,—a much more important work for me, if I marry a poor man and become my own maid of all work."

"Ah, indeed! you think, then, of becoming one of them. I mean one of your own favorite class. I presume you have not yet selected the happy pauper whose poverty you intend to share."

“Oh, no, I have not given the question of a husband, or settlement in life any serious thought as yet. I was only supposing a case. One never knows what may happen, and even royalties now and then are reduced to genteel beggary.”

“You are merely getting accustomed to the life, taking time by the forelock, we might say,” he said with an amused look. “Well, since you are not altogether committed to that way of living, and in case your dreams are not realized, we will continue the German metaphysics a little longer. I got in a fresh supply of books on Saturday. I would like you to come and look them over with me. You may see something you would like to take up.”

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I thanked him and promised to join him shortly.

When we were alone Mrs. Flaxman said, with a reflective air, as she stood polishing the cream jug; “I never expected to see Mr. Winthrop so nice to a woman as he is to you.”

“Why, Mrs. Flaxman, do you call him nice?” I asked in amazement.

“Yes, dear, beautifully so. He puts on a brusque outside, but it is as much to conceal his liking for you as anything, and then he does more for you than he would for any one else in the world. Now, if I had tried for a lifetime, I could not have got him out to Beech Street Church and I doubt if there is any one besides yourself could have done it. Some men, unknown to themselves, have strong paternal instincts; and it only requires the right touch to waken these instincts.”

“But he is too young to be my father; and any way he said he was not anxious for me to regard him in that way,” I remonstrated.

“He is old in heart if not in years, my child. His has been an intense and also bitter life, —the last few years at least.”

“Yes, I know,” I said unthinkingly; “but a man like Mr. Winthrop is foolish to let a woman like Mrs. Le Grande embitter his life.”

“Medoline, where did you hear of Mrs. Le Grande?” she asked sharply.

My face crimsoned guiltily, but I remained silent.

“Was it Mrs. Blake, or any of the Mill Road people told you?”

“No, indeed. I have told you before they never gossip about him.”

“Was it any of our own friends, the Carters, or Flemings? I know they are vulgarly inclined, for all they are in good society.”

“It was none of these, nor any one you have seen for a good many years, that told me what I know.”

“You must tell me, Medoline, who told you. It is the first time I have tried to force your confidence.”

“But I have promised not to tell you.”

“Had you met Mrs. Le Grande before you were with her yesterday when she fainted in church?”

My answer was a sob.

“Where had you met her, Medoline?”

“You will tell Mr. Winthrop, and he will never forgive me.”

“Then you have really been with her?”

“Yes, she sent me a letter requesting me to visit her.”

“And you went. When was this?”

“A week ago. But I did not dream she was a rich woman or had ever known Mr. Winthrop. I thought it was some one poor and in distress. I did not know it was a person suffering from heartbreak.”

“Heart-break!” she exclaimed, with such a flash of scorn, that the surprise her words created effectually dried my tears.

“She has no heart to get broken, except the organ that propels her blood—even a cat has the same.”

“She is very beautiful, and is also extremely anxious to make reparation to Mr. Winthrop for the wrong she has done him.”

“She is as heartless and selfish as she is beautiful; and if she were to be allowed the privilege of making reparation, the second offence would be worse than the original one. But we will not mention her name again. Leave her alone as she deserves.”

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“She compelled me to give my promise to go and see her again. She looks for me to-day.”

“Medoline, have you no sense of propriety? Mr. Winthrop’s ward visiting, unknown to him, the woman who wrought him such grievous wrong? Can you expect him to forgive such an act, especially when he was getting to have such confidence in your honesty and purity?”

“You will tell Mr. Winthrop?”

“I must obey him. It was his hope you would never hear the disgraceful story. His special command if you did that I must tell him directly. I promised to do so and I must fulfill that promise, but at a cost, Medoline, that I dare not think of.”

“Will you go directly then? Maybe this is my last day at Oaklands. I shall not stay here to suffer his contempt and displeasure.” I said wearily, my bodily misery dulling to some extent the mental pain; for I was growing sick rapidly. With difficulty I gained the shelter of my own room, my one haven of refuge in the wide world. Crouching by the window I watched the mad, hurrying storm outside, and wondering vaguely if nature suffered in this elemental warfare as we did in our tempests of the soul when the very foundations of hope and happiness were getting swept from our feet. In imagination I re-lived my past months at Oaklands, my intercourse with Mr. Winthrop, his gradually increasing esteem, the friendship, nay rather the comradeship that was being cemented between us over literature and art, the help he was giving me in these, and the rare life that imagination was beginning to picture that we might enjoy through coming years together.

I realized then, as never before, how happy I had been in my new home; and with a clearness that gave me pain came the consciousness how much my guardian had become to me. After to-day I might never again call Oaklands my home. If I had gone at once and confessed to Mr. Winthrop on my return that day from Linden Lane that I had met Mrs. Le Grande he could not have been reasonably angry with me; but I had concealed from him the fact, and had also promised her another interview, and now with vision grown suddenly clear I could realize how he would receive my unwilling confession, after a whole week’s silence. With aching head and heart I wondered at the cruelty of circumstance that forced the innocent to suffer with the guilty.

With my intense nature, so susceptible either to pleasure or pain, those lonely hours in my own room, that bitter day, left their trace on heart and body for long weary weeks. When at last Mrs. Flaxman came to me, her own face sad and troubled, I no longer felt the cold in my fireless room; for the blood now was rushing feverishly in my veins, and my head throbbing with intense pain. I listened to what she had to say in a dazed, half-conscious way. I heard her say something about Mr. Winthrop’s displeasure, but I was

too sick to care very much for anything, just then. I startled her at last by saying:—“I do not understand what you are saying. Please wait and tell me some other time.”

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“Sure, you have not been sitting all this time here in the cold. You should have gone where it was warm, or rung for Esmerelda to kindle your fire.”

I rose and tried to walk across the room; but staggered and would have fallen only that she supported me.

“Are you sick, Medoline?” She asked, in great alarm.

“My head aches and I am very hot,” I said uncertainly. I was unused to sickness and scarcely knew how much pain was necessary before I could truthfully say I was ill. I remember thinking the matter over with great seriousness, and wishing Mrs. Blake, with her superior knowledge of bodily ailments, was there to decide, until at last I got tired and tried to forget all about it. Then everything began to grow uncertain. I knew that I was lying in bed and the fire burning brightly in the grate, while persons were passing to and fro; but they did not look familiar. I kept wishing so much that Mrs. Blake would come with her strong, cheery presence to comfort me, and if she would give me a drink of pure cold water from one of her own clean glasses I should be content to turn my face to the wall and sleep. But after a time my one despairing thought was Mr. Winthrop’s displeasure, while hour after hour, and day after day, I tried to tell him that I did not mean to deceive him, and wanted to be just to every one alike, but he was never convinced and used to come and go with the same stern, hard look on his face that nearly broke my heart. When just at the point of utter despair, when I thought all had turned against me, Mr. Bowen or Mrs. Blake used to step up and tell me they understood it all and believed in me, then for awhile I would shut my eyes and rest, only to open them again to plead once more for forgiveness; but to plead vainly. Then I would be on the point of leaving Oaklands forever, and bidding good-bye to every one in the household save Mr. Winthrop. He always turned away sternly and refused me his hand. I was not conscious when it was day or night. It was all one perpetual twilight. I would ask if the sun would never rise again, or the moon come back with her soft shining; but no one heeded my questions. I resolved to be so patient after this in answering people’s questions when their heads were full of pain, since I knew how sad it was to go on day after day with these puzzling, wearying questions haunting one. Then there came a long, quiet time of utter forgetfulness when I passed down into the very valley of the shadow that Death casts over the nearly disembodied spirit, and here I had rest.

When at last I opened my eyes to see the old, accustomed place and faces, I was like a little child.

I lay quiet for some time wondering if it were possible for me to lift my hand. It was night, for the lamp was burning, and some one was sitting just within the shadow the lamp shade cast. I hoped it was Mrs. Blake, and lay wondering how I could find out. I tried to lift my head, but found the effort so wearying I went back into brief unconsciousness. Presently my eyes opened again; but this time there was a face

bending over my bed, so that I had no need to muster my feeble forces to attract their attention. I smiled up weakly into the face that in the dim light I failed to recognize.

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“Do you know me, dearie?” I was sure it was Mrs. Blake’s voice sounding strong and real.

“Is it Mrs. Blake?” I asked uncertainly.

“Yes, dearie, it jest is.” Then I shut my eyes, so tired I could not even think; but I heard a rustling sound, and a voice, that sounded a long way off, murmur, “Thank God!” The voice sounded familiar, but I could not recall whose it was. I tried to do so, but the effort wearied me. A spoon was put to my lips, the milk that was given to me brought back the long ago times—so long ago, I wondered if now I was an old woman; but after brief reflection I knew this could not be, since Mrs. Blake was still alive, and not much older in appearance than when I saw her last. To make sure of the matter I determined to look at her again, and opened my eyes to settle my perplexity; but this time the face looking down at me was not Mrs. Blake’s. I tried to raise my head on the pillow the better to see who it was, when the person stooped near to me and said: “You are coming back to us, Medoline.” I wondered who was calling me by that name. No one save Mr. Winthrop and Mrs. Flaxman were in the habit now of doing so; but my strength was so rapidly waning I could neither see nor hear very distinctly. After a few seconds, once more rallying all my forces, I looked up again.

“Who is it?” I whispered.

“Do you not know me, Medoline?”

“Is it,”—I paused, trembling so with excitement I could scarce articulate,—“is it Mr. Winthrop?”

“Yes, little one.”

The old caressing name he had given me long ago, surely he must have forgiven me or he would not use it now. But I was not satisfied without the assurance that we were to take up again the kindly relations of the past; and so with an effort that seemed likely to sweep me back dangerously near that shore I had so lately been skirting, I looked up and said: “I am sorry I displeased you; won’t you forgive me?” My voice was so weak I was afraid he could not catch the words I uttered; but he folded my thin, shadowy hand in his, which seemed so strong and muscular I fancied it could hold me back from the gates of Death if its owner so willed, and after a few seconds’ silence, he said, gently: “You must never think of that again, Medoline. Just rest, and come back to us. We all want you more than we can tell.”

“Then I am forgiven, and you will trust me once more,” I pleaded softly.

“Yes, Medoline, as I expect to be trusted by you,” he said, with a solemnity that made me tremble. My eyes closed in utter weariness and then I seemed to be floating,

floating over summer seas, and under such peaceful, blessed skies, I began to wonder if I was not passing out to the quiet coast bordering on the Heavenly places.

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Of one thing only was I certain—the hand that still held mine, which kept me from drifting quite away from the shores of time. I tried to cling to it, but my hand could only lie nerveless within its firm grasp. I believed if once the hold was loosened I should slip quietly out into the broader sea just beyond me. I wondered which was best—life or death,—then far down in my soul I seemed to grow strong, and could calmly say, “as God wills;” and for a long time I seemed to be passively awaiting His will. It was very strange, the thoughts I had, lying there so far within the border land; as if the faculties of mind and soul had nearly slipped the fleshly leash, and independently of their environment, boldly held counsel, and speculated on the possibilities of their immediate future.

But gradually the wheels of life began to turn more strongly. When next I opened my eyes the daylight was softly penetrating the closely drawn curtains. Mrs. Flaxman was standing near, looking worn and pale; but Mrs. Blake was also there, and loomed up before me, strong as ever—a look into her kindly face was like a tonic. When she saw me watching her she turned around, and very softly whispered to Mrs. Flaxman, who, casting a startled, anxious glance towards me, went silently from the room.

Mrs. Blake, without speaking, gave me some nourishment. After I had taken it I began to feel more like a living creature.

“Mrs. Blake,” I whispered. She stooped down to listen. “Tell me, please, how long I have lain here.”

“A good long bit, but the doctor says we mustn’t talk to you, or let you talk.”

“I am so tired thinking; won’t you sing to me?”

“My voice ain’t no great shakes; but I’ll do the very best I can for you, dearie.”

She went to the other side of the room, and seating herself in a comfortable easy-chair began in a low, crooning voice to sing one of Doctor Watts’ cradle melodies.

Probably she had learned it in childhood from her own mother, and in turn sung it again to the infant Daniel. It soothed me better than Beethoven or Wagner’s grandest compositions could have done. I lay with closed eyes, seeing in imagination the great army of mothers who had lulled their babies to sleep with those same words, and the angels hovering near with folded wings guarding the sleeping nestlings.

The voice grew indistinct, and presently sleep, more deep and refreshing than I had known for weeks, enfolded me. The doctor entered the room at last to put a stop to the music, and found Mrs. Blake tired and perspiring, but singing steadily on. Without missing a note she pointed to the bed and the peaceful sleeper. He smiled grimly and

withdrew; no doubt realizing there were other soporifics applied by nature than those weighed and measured by the apothecary.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Convalescence.

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When the curtains were withdrawn from my windows, and I was strong enough to look once more on the outer world, I found the late April sun was bringing back life and beauty to the trees and shrubbery around Oaklands. Thomas and Samuel were well on with their gardening, and already a few brave blossoms were smiling up at us from mother earth. I felt like one who had been visiting dim, mysterious shores, and had got safely back from those outlying regions. I used to lie in those quiet hours of convalescence, trying to decide what was real and what fanciful in the experiences of the last few weeks. When Mrs. Flaxman considered me strong enough to listen to consecutive conversation she gave me the particulars of my sudden attack of illness and the incidents connected therewith.

I was one of the first stricken with a virulent type of typhoid fever which, in very many cases, had proved fatal.

A want of sanitary precaution in Cavendish had caused the outbreak which caused, in loss of life, and incidental expenses, far more than the most approved drainage would do in a generation. I was amazed when the names of my fellow sufferers were mentioned; among them Mrs. Le Grande, whose recovery was still considered by the doctors exceedingly uncertain.

Mr. Winthrop, she informed me, had not sufficient confidence in the local doctors to trust me entirely to their care, and at the height of the fever had sent for one from New York. “But for that,” she continued, “I believe you would be in your grave to-day.”

“I did not think Mr. Winthrop would care very much. He is so angry with me.”

“He very soon got over his anger when he found how sick you were. At first he was nearly beside himself; for he thought it was the message I had taken to you from him that day that caused your illness. He would come to your bedside, and listen to your appeals for forgiveness with such an expression of pain on his face. Sometimes he would take your hands in his, assuring you of his forgiveness; but you never understood him. I was afraid you would die without ever knowing.”

“But I would have known all about it, once my spirit had got freed from the body; I cannot describe what glimpses I have had of other worlds than ours. It seemed so restful there; so much better than we have words to describe.”

“We are so glad you did not leave us for that place, even though it is so beautiful.”

“When this life is done, and its work all finished, I may slip away there. I think my soul saw its home and can never again be so fully content with earth.”

“Try not to think about it, Medoline, any more.”

“Why not?”

“When a person’s spirits begin to get homesick for a higher existence, usually they soon drift quietly away where they long to be.”

Another day she told me how much Mrs. Blake had done for me, nursing me with a skill and patience that drew high praise from the dignified city physician accustomed to skilled nurses. Mr. Winthrop used to come and go, watching her closely, and one day he said:—

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“No matter what happens, Mrs. Blake’s future will be attended to.”

Then I asked the question that had been troubling me ever since I had been getting better.

“Why do I never see or hear anything from Mr. Winthrop? you say he has forgiven me; but he has not so much as sent me a message, or flower since I came to myself.”

“Why, Medoline, did you not know?”

“Know what?” I asked, interrupting her, “has he gone away with Mrs. Le Grande?” I had forgotten for the moment that Mrs. Le Grande was even weaker than myself.

“Oh, no, indeed; marriage has been one of her least anxieties of late. Mr. Winthrop is in London before this: I am looking for letters now every day.”

“Has he gone to Europe?”

“Yes; I thought of course you knew; he left the very day the doctor pronounced you out of danger.”

“Did you know he thought of going?”

“No, we were greatly surprised; I cannot think why he left so abruptly.”

“Perhaps he was afraid of Mrs. Le Grande. He knows how fascinating she can be when she chooses.”

“I do not think she had anything to do with it. She was perfectly harmless when he left, in the delirium of fever, with two physicians in attendance.”

I was not convinced by Mrs. Flaxman’s words, but said no more on the subject.

My strength rapidly returned once I had got in the open air. Thomas always found it perfectly convenient now to take me for a drive, even at most unseasonable hours. His gardening was pressing heavily upon him, and no doubt it was hard for him to trust the care of flower and vegetable beds to other hands; but of the two he preferred to trust them rather than me, to strangers.

We took long drives over hill and valley—for the most part taking the road that skirted the seashore. Silently I would watch the white sails disappearing beyond the eastern horizon, wishing that I could follow them to my guardian’s side. I missed the delightful hours I used to spend in his study listening to his conversation, so different from that of any human being I ever knew. He lived so far above the range of little minds, the trivialities of everyday life, social gossip, and the like, seemed to shrink from his

presence. One always felt the touch of noble thoughts, and the longing for high endeavor where he was. I lived over again in these long, quiet drives, with the silent Thomas, those last few months, when, with my innocent child's heart, I sunned myself in his presence, unconscious of the rare charm and fascination that drew me to him.

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But as I grew stronger I turned from the past and its memories, bitter-sweet, and set myself resolutely to the duty of living my life well, independently of its secret unrest and pain. I knew that many before me, multitudes after me, would be called to endure a like discipline, and the world, no doubt, is the richer in what it holds as imperishable because of the compensation suffering brings; for if we take with a docile mind the discipline God gives, there will always be compensation. One day, when I had come back strengthened from a long drive along the seashore, a very pleasant surprise awaited me. Mrs. Flaxman had received letters from Mr. Winthrop which, to my surprise, she did not share with me. But she handed me a check for two hundred dollars, which I was to distribute among my poor friends. That money I believe helped to change the destinies of several lives: for I tried to lay it out in a way that would help some to improve their chances to make life a success.

June, with its flowers and perfumes, came at last; and in the early morning, when I used to ramble through the stretches of flowers and shrubbery, and under the trees, tremulous with bird song, I wondered how the owner of all this beauty could willingly banish himself from it. Thomas permitted me to gather flowers at will—a favor I used to the utmost, among others sending Mrs. Le Grande a daily remembrance from Oaklands, in the shape of a bouquet of the choicest blossoms.

At last I resolved to follow the flowers myself, though at the risk of the second time incurring Mr. Winthrop's displeasure; but if she were soon to die, as her attendants seemed to expect, surely here was missionary work right at my door. I found the cottage a perfect bower of roses. The garden in front was a wilderness of the choicest varieties I had ever seen, and in the windows nothing could be seen but green leaves and blossoms of every varying tint. It seemed hard to believe that the rarest rose of all was lying there, fading slowly away amid all this fragrance and beauty. I rang the bell, which was answered by the same little maid who had received me before. I asked for Mrs. Le Grande.

"She's no better, ma'am, and Missus thinks she'll never be; but, my! we dassent tell her; she's that 'fraid of death."

"Does she see strangers?"

"There's not many comes to see her, but I'll tell her you're here. Just step in here, please, and sit down for a minute."

She opened a door near by; but I thanked her and said I would wait in the garden among the roses for her answer.

She soon came for me with a smiling face, saying Mrs. Le Grande would be glad to see me, and then led the way to her room.

Mrs. Le Grande was reclining in an invalid's chair, propped up with pillows, a rich satin quilt thrown over her feet, and robed in a pink silk wrapper that matched perfectly her exquisite complexion and the roses fastened in her hair. She received me with a gaiety that, under the circumstances, astonished me, saying: "Why, how well you look! Your attack of fever could not have been so severe as mine."

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“I was very ill indeed, I cannot imagine how one could be worse and live,” I said, gravely.

“But I shall not be so strong as you for some weeks. It has left me with a troublesome cough, I shall be well when that leaves me.”

I felt constrained; uncertain what to say. Since her recovery was doubtful I shrank from encouraging her in a false hope, and I could not tell her that we all thought she must soon die. She soon noticed my constraint, and began to rally me.

“Is it on account of Mr. Winthrop’s absence you are looking so sorrowful?” she asked.

“I was not thinking of him, but of you alone.”

“That is kind, but I am not flattered. I did not think I was such a gloomy object for reflection.”

“I was only sorry to see you looking so frail, and wishing I could help you,” I said, gently.

“If you only could, I would very soon discharge those useless doctors; they are all alike, I believe; for I have tried each one of them in turn, and they none of them have done much for me.”

“I do not think there is so much difference in doctors as people imagine, if they but learn the nature of the disease, they all know the proper remedies to use.”

“That is poor consolation for me, I know if I had a good physician I would be well in a few days; but the trouble with those who have attended me is, they do not understand my case and do not administer the proper remedies.”

“Nature is an excellent healer herself. If wisely assisted, she soon works the miracle of healing, unless,—” I hesitated.

“Unless what?” she asked sharply.

“God has willed otherwise.”

“I cannot listen to such words, I am not going to die until I am old. Oh, why must we grow old and die at last? it was a cruel way to create us.”

“The other world seemed so beautiful to me when I was so sick, I scarcely wanted to come back to this.”

“Well, it seems just the reverse to me, I lie awake at night and shudder when I think of death and the grave. It makes me shudder now in the sunshine, and with you smiling down so kindly at me. Please to never mention such things to me again.”

I felt grieved; for then my task in coming here would be a vain one. Day by day as I came to see her, the hectic flush in her cheek kept deepening, and the eyes grew brighter and more sorrowful, while she grew gradually weaker.

Very soon the pretty parlor was vacated, while her bed was the only comfortable resting-place. She was anxious to have me come, and the nurse said she counted the hours between my departure and return. Her eagerness to have me read to her puzzled me at first, especially since she was indifferent as to what I read, but after a while I found that she prized my reading merely because it acted as a sedative. During the night sleep usually forsook her; but when I left she was generally sleeping peacefully. She permitted me to read the Bible as much as I chose. One day she explained the reason for her indifference in the matter:—

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“I do not wish to get interested in anything you read, for then I would keep awake to listen; but the sleep you bring me is better than all my medicine, I set nurse reading to me one day; but her voice was uncultivated, and her emphasis intolerable I should soon be well if you would read to me all the time.”

“I never heard of any one getting raised from a sick-bed by so simple a remedy.”

“You do not try to encourage me,” she said, fretfully.

I read on to her day after day until my voice grew husky, and the mere act of speaking often wearied me.

We all saw the end was rapidly approaching, but no one had the courage to tell her. She got so angry with me one day when I suggested bringing Mr. Lathrop to visit her, that I slipped quietly away to escape the storm I had raised. I used to go and return with a sense of defeat that paralyzed all hopeful enthusiasm, and fearing that Mr. Winthrop’s displeasure had probably been a second time incurred, without any corresponding gain to debit the loss.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The sound of marriage bells.

I came home one day more dispirited than usual. I had found Mrs. Le Grande weaker than ever, and yet she was clinging tenaciously to life, and had that morning dictated an order to her dress-maker in New York for a most elaborate costume. When I tried to urge her to think of something more enduring than the raiment whose fashion and beauty soon changes, she forbade me mentioning such a thing again in her presence, nor would she listen to the Scripture reading on which I always insisted as the one condition on which I would read to her at all. I knew my own words were powerless to break the crust of worldliness and selfishness that bound her heart, but I hoped God’s word might pierce it. Hubert had returned from college a few days before, and just as I entered the oak avenue from the little footpath through the wood, I met him cantering along on Faery.

“A stranger has just arrived whom you will be surprised to see,” he called to me.

“Any one I know?” I asked carelessly.

“I should say it was; and one whom you will be glad to see, if I am not mistaken.”

“Won’t you tell me who it is and so prolong my pleasure, for I am not going direct to the house. I intend taking a stroll through the garden to try and get some unhappy fancies brushed away by the blossoms.”

“Anticipation is said to exceed realization, so I will generously leave you the former,” he said, giving Faery the whip and cantering rapidly away.

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I did not find the flowers such comforters as I hoped, and soon entered the house, no doubt slightly impelled thereto by a natural curiosity as well. I glanced into the drawing-room and parlors as I passed along the hall and began to think Hubert was merely subjecting me to one of his practical jokes, as I could see no sign of visitors anywhere, and I concluded to go to the library and try for a while to forget myself and heartaches in an hour's hard reading. I found the door ajar and when I entered the room was surprised to find the curtains drawn, and the room flooded with the June sunshine. I turned to the study-table to see who might be taking such liberties in the master's absence when there, standing with his back to me stood Mr. Winthrop himself. He turned suddenly and saw me. "Ah, little one, have you come to speak to me?"

"I did not know you were here; but I am very glad to speak to you—to welcome you home," I said, giving him my hand.

"You seem like one come back to me from the dead," he said, soberly, still holding my hand.

"I am not sure if it was not you who held me back from those shining gates."

"What do you mean?"

"When you held my hand through that long night, I thought but for your firm grasp I should drift out of reach of life altogether."

"I tried to pray that night, Medoline, as I had never done before; I believe my prayers were answered."

"Then you have found that the Bible is true?" I asked, looking up eagerly into his face.

"Yes, every day more clearly."

"Then it was well worth all the weariness and pain I endured to have you say this; but have you fully forgiven me, Mr. Winthrop, and may we take up our friendship as before?"

"Must we take it up as before, Medoline? I have found I cannot be satisfied with your friendship only?"

"I do not understand you."

"You drove me away, and you have forced me to return—must I leave again? I cannot remain near you any longer with our relation to each other unchanged. I must have your love or nothing. Friendship between us, and nothing more, is out of the question. Can you not learn to love me, Medoline?"

I turned and placed both my hands in his.

“Does this mean love instead of fear? Remember you told me not long ago you were afraid of me; answer me truly, little one; do hand and heart go together?”

“If you care to have them,” I murmured softly, “but, have you forgotten Mrs. Le Grande?”

“Long ago I ceased to think of her, only as one may remember a brief surrender to an ignoble passion. The mistake I made was in measuring womanhood generally by her standard—you have taught me, my darling, that angels have not yet ceased to visit our poor earth.”

“Oh, Mr. Winthrop, you must not go to the other extreme or I shall soon disappoint you.”

“You are all I could wish, Medoline. If it were possible I would not ask any change in mind or body, my Eve—fresh from the hand of God.”

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His words frightened me; for how could I ever fulfill his expectations? He read my face.

“Are you sure, Medoline, you love me as I want to be loved by my wife? Have you gained your woman’s heart with its full capacity for love or suffering, or are you still only a child?”

“I could die for you, Mr. Winthrop, if it were for your good; I do not ask for anything better than to be near you always in time and eternity.”

“Since how long have you regarded me in this way, Medoline?”

“You remember that long night holding my hand, when I was at the worst of the fever? I saw everything clearly then. My spirit seemed to get away from the body, or very nearly so, and looked on things as it had never done before.”

“Did you wonder after that why I left you so abruptly?”

“For a long time I thought you were still at Oaklands. Every day I used to hope you might come, or send me a message.”

“You shall never be so left again till death separates us.”

“If you cared for me then, why did you leave me?” I asked timidly.

“If I cared for you then, Medoline! Why don’t you ask me when first I began to love you?”

“I did not think to ask.”

“Do you remember that day in the autumn when you had the Mill Road people here?”

“Yes.”

“You came to me, if you remember, with the widow Larkum’s baby in your arms, a very timid, and beseeching look on your face at the same time.”

I nodded in reply.

“My heart went out to you then and there, as it never did to any woman. I had been fascinated and amused with your ways before that. How I have waited and hoped since then to see you turn to me with the love-light in your eyes! Fear lest I might lose my self-restraint and speak too soon, drove me from you—fear lest some other man would win what I so passionately craved has brought me back. Darling, you have made this the happiest day of my life.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

The end.

I never saw Mrs. Le Grande again alive. The following morning I made my confession to Mr. Winthrop, and got his consent to continue my visits to the sick room, at Rose Cottage, until recovery or death should take place. My one anxiety as I walked along the field and woodland that day, was lest my face might reveal to her keen vision the gladness that thrilled all my pulses. I did not wait to ring the bell but went directly to her rooms. The parlor door was closed; when I opened it, at the farther end of the room I was startled to see a white-robed form lying on one of the sofas.

I hesitated with sudden fear, but finally summoning all my resolution I crossed the room and stood beside the clay-cold form of Mrs. Le Grande. The nurse who was in the adjoining room came to my side and after a few seconds' silence she said, gently:

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“I never felt so lonesome with any dying person as with her last night.”

“Did she know she was dying?”

“Yes, we told her. It seemed dreadful to let her go before her Maker without a prayer for mercy, but her thoughts, for all we told her, were more about this world than the next. She made her will as soon as the doctor came. We sent for him in haste, and then she told us what to put on her when we prepared her for the coffin. That’s the gown she was to have been married in. She said: ’Mr. Winthrop shall see his bride in her wedding dress, at last.’”

I looked at the rich white satin, with its exquisite trimming of lace, and the fresh gathered roses instead of orange blossoms.

“Did she say nothing about where her soul was going?” I asked, yet dreading a reply.

“After he’d got the will drawn, the doctor asked her if her business for another world was satisfactorily arranged; but she said the next world would have to wait its turn after she’d got there; she had no strength left to make any more preparations.”

I turned away, too sick at heart to listen longer, but the nurse followed me with a message from the dying woman.

“It was her special request that you and Mr. Winthrop should come to her funeral, and afterward be present at the reading of the will. I am not at liberty to explain, but I think you will regret it if you do not come. She said that was to be the sign of reconciliation between her and Mr. Winthrop.”

“I will deliver the message, and, if possible, prevail on him to come,” I promised, and then hastily left the house. When I reached home I went directly to the library where I found Mr. Winthrop. He looked surprised to see me back so soon, and then, noticing traces of tears on my face, said:

“What is wrong, little one?”

“Mrs. Le Grande died sometime during the night. The nurse told me she showed no anxiety respecting her future state.”

He was silent. At last I said: “You have forgiven her, Mr. Winthrop?”

“Forgiven her! Yes, Medoline; and if she had lived, I could never have repaid her for the lesson she taught me, and the favor she conferred on me by going away so abruptly.”

“Then you will grant her last request that we should both attend her funeral, and the reading of her will. I have an impression she has left each of us some keepsake, as a token of her repentance.”

“Don’t you think, little one, that would be a mercenary motive to take us there?”

“But I want you to grant her dying request,” I murmured, already ashamed of my argument.

“We will both go, assuredly; and in the meantime I shall see that preparations for her funeral are suitably arranged.”

“You will look upon her dead face; she left directions as to how she should be robed for the grave. She said you should see your bride in her wedding dress at last.”

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“I expect, before many weeks, to see my own precious bride. I shall be indifferent as to her dress. It will be herself I shall look at,” he said with a caress that for the time made me forget Mrs. Le Grande.

We went to the funeral, to which went also a good part of the townsfolk; for curiosity was on tip-toe. Thomas was greatly mystified when Mr. Winthrop, leaving Mrs. Flaxman at Oaklands, bade him drive us back to Linden Lane. Dr. Hill was there, and Mrs. Le Grande’s lawyer from New York, and Dr. Townshend, who had drawn her will, with the nurse and landlady, who were her witnesses. Presently the lawyer put on his spectacles, and broke the seal, and then in a hard, dry voice began to read the will. I listened with languid interest until presently Mr. Winthrop’s name was mentioned. I looked at him with keen surprise. Could it be possible Mrs. Le Grande had willed him the bulk of her fortune? His face was pale, I could see no trace of a satisfaction one might naturally expect on the face of another at such unexpected accession of wealth; rather he looked grieved and shocked. Before I had time to recover myself my own name was read off in the even, unimpassioned tones of the lawyer. She left me her jewelry, pictures, and other valuables. It seemed like one of the fairy tales of my childhood. There was something pathetic, too, in the wording of her will: “I hope they will adorn a happier woman than I have been,” as if that, too, were a legacy she bequeathed me.

The formality of reading the will ended, Mr. Winthrop asked for an immediate and private interview with the lawyer. Afterward I learned it was to see if some informality could not be discovered, rendering the will illegal, but this was impossible. He took the money as a sacred trust, expending the interest year by year on religious and benevolent objects. Into many a heathen household has it already carried the blessed light of the gospel—to many a burdened heart has it come to lighten the load of poverty and care.

The story of one memorable year of my life is told. It was the prelude to many a happier year.