

The Man Who Forgot

Lucy Maud Montgomery
1932

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Title: The Man Who Forgot

Date of first publication: 1932

Author: L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery (1874-1942)

Date first posted: Oct. 11, 2015

Date last updated: Oct. 11, 2015

Faded Page eBook #20151005

This ebook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

The Man Who Forgot

Lucy Maud Montgomery

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I knew them all well . . . I had been minister in Claremont for ten years when it happened. In fact, it was I who preached the fatal sermon that shut the door of the past behind Gordon Mitchell. Not that I so much as thought of Gordon Mitchell when I preached it.

If a minister preaches a sermon that hits home to some particular individual, people always suppose he meant it for that very person. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred he never thought of him. A hand-me-down cap is bound to fit somebody's head, but it doesn't follow that it was made for him.

Dr. Stirling—"Old Doc" as he was affectionately called by everybody in Claremont—and his daughter, Gertrude, were particular friends of mine. They were not the kind of people to whom a minister dare not say anything until he has said it over to himself first to make sure it is a safe thing to say. Old Doc was one of my elders and we fought continually over church problems, but that did not interfere with our friendship. By a tacit agreement we never spoke of church affairs when I went to his house. We left that for the session room.

The Stirling house was at the extreme west of Claremont. It was an old house—the doctor's father, who had been a lawyer, and his grandfather, who had been a merchant, had lived their long lives out in it before him. Moreover, it was the ugliest house, not only in Claremont, but in the whole world—there is no doubt about that. It was more like a huge red brick box than anything else, too high for its breadth, and made still higher by a bulbous glass cupola on top.

But the doctor would never have it altered; he loved it as it was. The fine old trees around it veiled its ugliness somewhat, and inside—oh, there was nothing the matter with it there.

Internally it was a house of delightful personality. And the living room was the most delightful room in it. There the doctor and Gertrude always entertained their guests. It was a spacious, beautiful, dignified, friendly old room. The chairs clamoured to be sat upon; the mirrors had so often reflected beautiful women that they lent a certain charm to every face. In that room, it seemed to me, there were always in winter warm fires, old books, comfort, safety from storm, odours of pine; and in summer, coolness and shadows and wine-hues of flowers.

And Jigglesqueak! Jigglesqueak was always there winter and summer. It seemed to me he must always have been there, though Old Doc said he was a mere pup of fourteen. He was as ugly as the house and, like the house, had a beautiful soul.

Everybody loved Jigglesqueak. The sole point Old Doc and Anthony Fairweather had in common was their love of Jigglesqueak. They both agreed that Jigglesqueak was the only dog on earth that deserved to be a dog.

Old Doc was a character in his way. Claremont people believed that he could raise the dead to life if he wanted to and only refrained because it would be crossing the purposes of the Almighty.

He had done it once, they said. I have been solemnly assured by many sane people that Dan Hewlett was dead when Old Doc brought him to. You can believe that or not as you like.

But when living people saw Old Doc's long, lean face, with its big bushy white moustache and twinkling brown eyes, at their bedside and heard him growling, "There's nothing the matter with you" . . . why, they believed it until it was true.

He was a brusque old fellow and, older and all as he was, it didn't prevent him from rapping out a good round "d——n" when occasion offered, even before the cloth. Outside of Gertrude, his work, and Jigglesqueak, the only thing he cared for was golf. Our Claremont links are good in their way, and Old Doc was the best golfer in the burg—unless it was Anthony Fairweather. Nothing made Old Doc so furious as a hint that Anthony Fairweather could rival him in golf. But then, Old Doc did not like Anthony.

And Gertrude did!

Gertrude was about twenty at this time, a tall girl so stately that at school she had always been nicknamed "The Princess." As a child she had been rather plain, but now she was beautiful—with a beauty you never tired of. Hair as black as the proverbial raven's wing, eyes as blue as eyes could be, lips as softly red as the queen of roses. She was restrained and subtle, with exquisite taste, a wonderful laugh, and a personality that shone through her beautiful flesh like a lamp through alabaster.

Naturally she had some faults. She was a shade too fond of jewels and wore too many—it was the sole flaw in her taste. Some people said she overdressed, but I never thought it. Rich as her clothes were they were always subordinate to her. Her father liked to see her beautifully gowned.

And she was impatient. It could not be said that she suffered fools gladly. Also, she was stubborn, and I think if she had lived with other women those women would have had to play second fiddle in most things. But there was no other woman except a little maid in the house—never had been, since Gertrude's mother had died at her birth. That was one time Old Doc could not bring back the dead.

He had brought Gertrude up by himself without assistance from any woman and was a little over-proud of it—and of her. Yet she justified his pride—beautiful, gracious, humorous, companionable, tolerant, loyal. If I had been a young man instead of an old bachelor minister I would have been mad about her.

All the Claremont young men were, but the only two who mattered were Anthony Fairweather and Gordon Mitchell. Only one of them mattered to Gertrude—Anthony Fairweather.

But Old Doc, who would rather have liked her to marry Gordon if marry she must, was determined she shouldn't marry Anthony.

“Because of his Italian blood,” he said.

But in my heart I always believed that it was because he wouldn't have a son-in-law who could rival him in golf.

To be sure, Old Doc had always detested Anthony. Everybody else in Claremont liked him and distrusted him, with the exception of Gordon Mitchell and myself. Gordon didn't like him and I didn't distrust him.

Captain Fairweather some twenty-two years before had married an Italian girl and brought her home to Claremont. It was before my time, but I gathered that Claremont had not taken Mrs. Fairweather to its bosom. She died when Anthony was four years old. Captain Fairweather broke his heart and followed her three years later, leaving Anthony to the care of a grim old aunt who brought him up rigorously and always believed he was just watching for a chance to do something dreadful.

If he had inherited his father's plump, rosy face and big blue eyes he would have stood a better chance. But Anthony had his handsome mother's dark eyes, smooth olive skin, and glossy, night-black hair. He “looked foreign”—old Margaret Grimes asserted it when she bathed him in the first hour of his life.

Certainly he always had a grace and fire and charm that no other Claremont boy possessed. And, from the day of his christening when he had pummelled the nose of the officiating minister, Anthony was always in the limelight by reason of some graceless exploit or other. He stole apples, he put up a placard of measles where there were none, he dropped a lump of ice down the Reverend John Arnold's neck at a church supper, he stuck pins in the other boys in Sunday School, he took an alarm clock to church, he wrote a false but truthful obituary of a prominent citizen and sent it to the Croyden papers, he put a plateful of soap instead of cheese on the table at my induction festivities, and he was accused of shutting the skunk up in the classroom.

In any other boy all this would just have been considered natural boy-devilment, but in poor Anthony it was, of course, “that Italian blood.”

Everything that was a mystery was pinned to him. But nobody except Old Doc really believed that Anthony started the fire that burned half the village down when

he was about fifteen—the fire in which he almost lost his life saving the horses in Alex Peasley’s stable.

That act won him approval in Claremont eyes, and public opinion was beginning to veer in his favour when a silly anonymous “poem” was published in the *Claremont Weekly*, making fun of all our prominent folks. Anthony was put down for the author, in spite of all his denials, and was never forgiven for it, since nobody ever forgives ridicule.

I knew he never wrote it. If he had, it wouldn’t have been such insane trash—it would have cut to the bone. For Anthony had brains, though people were loath to admit it. They couldn’t see how it was possible when he was “so fond of fiddling.”

There was one thing they couldn’t blame on his Italian blood—his gift for swimming. Captain Fairweather had been a star swimmer. Anthony swam across the Claremont river when he was eight years old and people bragged of the exploit to strangers for years in spite of Anthony’s disrepute. Swimming, golfing, and fiddling were Anthony’s hobbies, and he rode them so devotedly that he had no time to get into any serious scrapes. But people expected he would some day, and Old Doc both expected and hoped it.

Anthony and Gertrude had been playfellows in childhood, his home being across the street from hers. Once Anthony inveigled Gertrude away to the shore and they got caught in the quicksand and nearly swallowed up. That gave Old Doc his first scunner of Anthony. And when Gertrude fell off the stilts on which Anthony was teaching her to walk and hurt her back so that she was laid up for weeks, Old Doc was his enemy for life, although Gertrude always insisted that it wasn’t Anthony’s fault at all.

Her father forbade her ever playing with Anthony again, and she had nothing more to do with him until they met one night at a dance nine years later and loved each other—loved deeply, passionately, incurably. Naturally I was not at the dance, but I soon heard all about it. Old Doc himself told me.

He was furious—had forbidden Anthony the house, and had told Gertrude she was a fool. Gertrude had merely smiled and settled down to wait. She worshipped her father and wouldn’t have disobeyed or hurt him, even for Anthony. But she knew time was on her side; she knew her father would come round in due course.

She and Anthony couldn’t be married for a few years anyway. He had to get through college—he was attending the university in Croyden and coming home for weekends. Gertrude took it all with a fair degree of philosophy, except that she was horribly annoyed with Gordon Mitchell, who lived next door to the Stirlings and had long ago made up his mind to marry Gertrude. It did not discourage him at all to

know that she had an understanding with Anthony Fairweather. Gordon knew that Old Doc was on his side and he had, besides, quite a bit of confidence in his own powers of attraction.

I ought to have liked Gordon: he was the most faithful member of my adult Bible class. He had always been what is called “religiously inclined,” which shouldn’t have been a count against him in a minister’s eyes. Anthony once called him a “smug little hypocrite,” but he was nothing of the sort. He was sincere and always impressed me as being morbidly conscientious. His mother told me that once, when a boy, he had stolen a jar of marmalade from the pantry and after a week of torment had confessed to her and done penance by crawling on bare hands and knees across the thistly meadow behind their lot. She seemed rather proud of this and of some similar things.

Gordon was likable enough in a superficial way and was popular in Claremont society. He was quite good-looking, with regular features, thick fair hair parted in the middle, and small, well-kept hands of which he was said to be very vain. In boyhood he was reputed to be a “sissy” owing to the fact or belief that at seven years of age he had pieced a quilt. His mother was foolish enough to mention it with pride. But he had lived this down.

He sang fairly well—though Gertrude said his voice was “muddy,” whatever she meant by that—and was a member of the choir. His reputation was immaculate, and he took care people should know it. Besides being, as I have said, morbidly conscientious, he was abnormally sensitive to the opinions of other people. He was intelligent but had no sense of humour whatever—even Old Doc admitted that. But in every other respect Old Doc thought him a model and was exasperated because Gertrude didn’t fancy him.

Gertrude admitted that he had an immense number of points.

“But he doesn’t add up right,” she said.

“What fault can you find in him?” challenged Old Doc angrily.

“None. But he tastes flat. He has all the virtues, but the pinch of salt was left out,” said Gertrude, with her nose in the air.

Old Doc snorted and kicked a chair across the room.

“I can’t see why you don’t like him.”

“But I do like him,” asseverated Gertrude. “I like fully half the young men in Claremont. What then? I can’t marry half the young men in Claremont, can I?”

“What can you do with a girl like that?” he demanded.

“Nothing,” I said, “but let her marry Anthony.”

“Never,” said Old Doc, punishing his left hand with his right. “If you back

Anthony up, Crandall, I swear I'll leave your church and go over to the Baptists."

I kept silence thereafter, not because I was afraid of Old Doc going over to the Baptists—who wouldn't have taken him as a gift—but because I knew I would only do Anthony harm by sticking up for him.

Gordon had a good position in his uncle's store and would eventually be head man and his uncle's heir. He was kind and obliging, but I always thought he was selfish. Certainly his mother spoiled him. His father was dead and she doted on Gordon. She was not in the least like him—she was a tall, austere, reserved woman who, for some reason I never could fathom, was a tremendous favourite with Old Doc.

Anthony and Gordon had always hated each other, even long before they set their fancy on the same woman. They were enemies when they were boys. Gordon aggravated Anthony by sneering at his Italian mother one day, and Anthony took off Gordon's trousers and made him go home through Claremont in his poor little shirt-tail. Then Gordon poisoned Anthony's dog.

To be sure, he always asserted that he meant the poison for a mongrel from over the river that was always snooping around, stealing. I believed him, for I knew Gordon would never have flouted public opinion by poisoning respectable village dogs. But Anthony didn't. From that day he hated Gordon with an indescribable intensity—the Italian blood did come out there. Yet I thought Gordon's hatred the deadlier thing of the two.

I think Gordon was quite sure he would win Gertrude. He couldn't believe that any girl would remain persistently indifferent to him. Anthony had cast some bewitchment over her, but that would pass—especially when Anthony, having got through college, suddenly shot off to Montreal to attend the School of Mines. He had sold his old Strad for nine hundred dollars to get board money. Nobody in Claremont but myself—not even Gertrude, I believe—realized what selling it meant to him. He walked the floor o' nights for a week afterwards. He told me he felt as if he had sold his own flesh and blood.

I went down to the Stirlings the night after Anthony had gone away and found Old Doc nearly speechless with rage. Anthony, it seemed, had come boldly there the previous evening to say goodbye to Gertrude, and Gertrude had insisted on seeing him and seeing him alone. But this wasn't what had maddened Old Doc.

It was the fact that Anthony had deliberately and wantonly—and apparently with Gertrude's toleration—adorned with horns and a tail a photograph of Gordon Mitchell that was standing on the piano. If Anthony had actually transmogrified

Gordon into a devil Old Doc couldn't have been more worked up about it. He called Anthony all the names he could lay his tongue to—Old Doc's vocabulary of abuse was peculiarly rich—and prophesied a violent end for him.

"I hope not," I said mildly. "I shouldn't like to see your son-in-law hanged."

"Son-in-law! He'll never be a son-in-law of mine. No, thank God, I've fixed that. Gertrude has solemnly promised me that she'll never marry Anthony Fairweather without my consent. You know how likely she is to get that."

Yes, I knew. I knew quite well that after Old Doc had fumed for a year or two, while Gertrude sat tight, he would suddenly give in and tell her to marry the Old Boy if she wanted to. I suppose Old Doc sensed something of this in my face, for he roared,

"What are you chuckling inside about, Crandall? Do you think she won't keep her promise? I tell you she will."

I knew that too. Old Doc had brought Gertrude up to keep a promise. It was one of the few things he had put immense insistence upon. There was a sore spot somewhere in Old Doc—he had suffered horribly once because of someone's broken promise—I never heard the rights of the story—and he was determined that Gertrude should have it grained into her never to break a promise once given.

I knew she never would but I wasn't much worried over it. In spite of that promise I knew that Gordon Mitchell, hanging around more persistently than ever now that Anthony was gone, had just about as good a chance of marrying Gertrude Stirling as I had. Gertrude smiled and went to dances and flirted a wee bit with nice boys and wore delightful clothes and petted her father and thoroughly enjoyed herself.

And Old Doc left that bedizened photograph of Gordon on his desk and swore unholy oaths over it every day. Sometimes he raged at Gertrude because she wouldn't look on Gordon with favour.

"You forget that I've promised Anthony that I will never marry any man but him," she would say sweetly. "I have to keep that promise as well as the other. You've always told me I must never break a promise."

Old Doc would glare.

"Anthony . . . Anthony . . . the man who said he had only to ask you to get you!"

"He never said it," Gertrude would smile maddeningly. "But if he did . . . it would have been true."

This rendered Old Doc speechless.

Gordon really had very little sense about his courting. He had, of course, no chance with Gertrude, no matter what he did or didn't do, but with some women he

might have had a chance if he had kept away for a time and left them alone. Instead, he exasperated her by haunting the place and forcing his attentions upon her everywhere. She grew to hate the sight of him. Old Doc had less sense also in the matter than I should have expected of him. He had become quite chummy with Gordon and even tried to teach him to play golf. He would never have tried it if he had thought Gordon would make a golfer, but there was no danger. Gordon couldn't see anything in it.

Two years went by like this. Anthony hadn't been home. He went out with survey parties on his vacations. I don't know whether he ever wrote Gertrude. She never talked of him, and Old Doc thought she had forgotten him. I knew better.

Then a medical powwow came off in Croyden. Old Doc went to it, and Gordon Mitchell went down on the same train. It was in early spring—the frost was coming out—the rails had spread in one place—the engine jumped the track. Only one person was killed . . . Old Doc.

Gordon got to him just before he died. He hadn't been able to speak. Just smiled . . . pressed Gordon's hand . . . tried to say something . . . shut his eyes. That was all. Gertrude hadn't even a farewell word of love for her comforting.

She was heartbroken over it all. She and her father had been such chums.

"Father and I liked each other as well as loved each other," she had said to me once.

But a healthy grief heals in due time, no matter what its intensity. The day came when I heard her laugh again, though with something gained and something lost in her laughter.

I thought all would be plain sailing for her and Anthony now. She was her own mistress—a rich woman too, as Claremont standards went. But one autumn evening a year later Anthony came to me white to the lips with despair.

He told me the whole story, rushing up and down my study like a madman. Gertrude had told him she could never marry him; she had promised her father she would never marry Anthony "without his consent" and that consent could never now be obtained. Anthony had found her quite immovable. So he came to beg me to go to Gertrude and use my influence on his behalf.

I went . . . though I had a feeling that it wouldn't be any use. It was a cold, windy, autumnal evening, and I found Gertrude by the open fire in the living room, with Jigglesqueak snoring beside her. She sat in the old wing chair and looked so beautiful that I did not wonder at Anthony's madness. She was not in black. Old Doc had decreed in his will that she should not follow "the barbarous survival" of mourning. She wore a gown of golden-brown velvet, a little too old and rich for a

girl, I thought, but vastly becoming. She had a rope of dull beads about her slim white neck, and her black hair was pinned close to her head with rich pins. On the middle finger of her rather large firm white hand she wore a ring her father had always worn—a ring with some odd, flat, pale green stone in it. His wife, I believe, had given it to him on their honeymoon. It had been taken off Old Doc's dead hand.

"It's a fine evening," said Gertrude brilliantly.

"I haven't come to discuss the weather," I said.

"No," said Gertrude. "I know exactly what you have come to say. So say it and ease your conscience. But it won't make any difference."

I said it . . . and it made no difference.

"You know," I said, for a final shot, "that your father would have given in if he had lived."

Yes, she knew that.

"Then why the . . . the . . . the . . ."

"The devil," said Gertrude calmly. "That's what you want to say, you know. Your cloth wouldn't let you say it so I say it for you. Go on from there."

"The mischief," I said, because I wasn't going to let a chit like Gertrude put a thing like that over on me. If she had no respect for my cloth she should have had some for my grey hairs. "Why the mischief can't you be sensible?"

"It isn't a matter of sense at all," said Gertrude. "I promised. I shall keep that promise to my father dead as I would have kept it to him living. Don't worry me with arguments, Mr. Crandall. Do you think you can move me when Anthony couldn't?"

"No. I'm not so conceited as that," I said. "But are you going to ruin Anthony's life and your own by such Quixotic nonsense?"

"Oh, it won't ruin our lives . . . Anthony's anyway. He'll get over it in time and marry somebody else. I may get over it myself . . . but I can never marry anyone else because I promised Anthony I wouldn't."

"Likely he will release you from that promise," I said drily.

"I shall never ask him to," she said. "Now, have a cup of tea with me, Mr. Crandall, and promise me that you'll help me to become a delightful old maid. There's nothing else for me, you see."

She poured my tea beautifully. She made an art of pouring tea. Then she sat and looked into the fire while I sipped it, the lovely line of her chin and neck melting into the red-gold glow of the flames behind it. And this was the woman who talked of being an old maid!

I told Anthony I had done my best and failed. I told him he must bear it like a man.

“How can you bear unbearable things?” he flung back at me as he rushed out, leaving all the doors open. I did not see him again for ten years.

Gertrude made short work of Gordon. She told me that since her father’s death she simply detested him.

“I don’t know why. I used to like him well enough before. Now I can’t bear the sight of him. I’ve told him that I will never, under any circumstances, marry him and that he must stop plaguing my life out about it.”

Gordon stopped. That winter he flung himself into business and church work with feverish activity. In the latter I saw a great deal of him and I thought him much changed in some indefinable way. He acted like a person desperately anxious to forget something . . . drug something . . . which was understandable enough in a man who had been refused by Gertrude Stirling.

He did not go as much into society as he had formerly done, and when he did people said he was subject to spells of moodiness, when he seemed to be brooding over something that worried him desperately. I felt that I ought to be very sorry for him.

One Sunday in early spring I preached a certain sermon. I did mean it for somebody. A certain clique of people in the church, entirely unconnected with the Mitchells or the Stirlings, had been doing their best to worry my life out that winter with their spats and squabbles . . . all springing, as I knew perfectly well, from old Madam Ridgwood’s deceit and mischief-making. I meant that sermon for her; it wasn’t a hand-me-down, it was cut to fit. And everybody pinned it on to Gordon, a man whom nobody ever thought of as lying before that sermon. But I must say that they would not probably have done so if it had not been for his own behaviour.

My text was, “Deliver my soul, oh Lord, from lying lips and a deceitful tongue,” and I made my sermon pretty strong, for I was considerably annoyed over the trouble I had encountered. Gordon was not in the choir that day. He was hoarse from a bad cold and he sat with his mother in the centre of the church.

Near the end of my discourse I happened to glance at Gordon and was struck by the expression on his face. I never saw such agony on a human countenance. I was sure he must be ill. Suddenly he stood up, turned round, looked foolishly about him, and sat down again . . . or was pulled down by his mother. I finished my sermon, leaving some few things I had intended to say unsaid, and the concluding hymn was sung. I did not see Gordon or his mother again.

But that evening Mrs. Mitchell sent for me. She met me at the door and told me that Gordon had gone out of his mind. She was in a distracted state, poor woman.

But after I had seen Gordon and talked to him I knew that he was as sane as I was. He had simply forgotten everything—everything. He didn't even remember his own name. If he had just been born he couldn't have known less about his past.

Nowadays newspaper reports and popular books on neurasthenia have made us tolerably familiar with cases of this sort. But at that time, in Claremont, nobody had ever known anything like it. Most people persisted in believing that Gordon had gone insane—his grandfather, they said, had been “queer.” His mother had every great alienist she could get, and they all agreed that he was perfectly sane and rational. They were quite helpless, but they said that his memory might return just as suddenly as it had gone. Meanwhile there was nothing to do but wait. His friends and his mother persisted in believing and asserting that my sermon was responsible for it all. When anyone said this to me I retorted, testily,

“Do you mean to say that Gordon was of lying lips and a deceitful tongue?”

That always posed everyone but Mrs. Mitchell. She said,

“Gordon was so conscientious. Some little evasion that nobody else would have thought a lie would worry him . . . and then your terrible sermon . . .”

She never forgave me.

A new doctor had come to town—a young fellow who knew a good bit, though people were loath to admit that anyone knew anything but Old Doc. I used to talk Gordon's case over with him. He had some ideas about it that were so new-fangled then that I couldn't accept them at all, though I believe they are pretty well established now.

“Mitchell has forgotten because he wanted to forget,” he said.

“Nonsense,” I said. “Who would want to forget his whole past life?”

“Oh, not his whole life . . . no, just one particular, unbearable thing. And when his torture reached a certain point . . . perhaps your sermon was the last turn of the rack . . . perhaps it had nothing to do with it . . . he found relief from his agony by forgetting what was torturing him. Only,” added Dr. Mills, who was fresh enough from college to have a weakness for classical allusions, “he who drinks of Lethe must forget his good as well as his evil.”

“I don't believe my sermon had anything to do with it,” I said.

And I couldn't see how it had. It was quite possible that Gordon's suffering over Gertrude's decision was unbearable and that he wanted to forget it—but there could be no earthly connection between it and my sermon. I believed he hadn't been listening to it at all. He had been sitting there, thinking wretchedly of Gertrude who sat just across from him, looking unbelievably lovely, and he couldn't endure it any longer. Something gave way; in the pithy old vernacular, a screw got loose.

For a few weeks nothing was talked of but Gordon. Then Mary Curtis eloped and gossip switched to her. By the autumn everybody had accepted the new Gordon. He had accepted himself. After all, it was not correct to say that he had forgotten everything. He had not forgotten how to talk, read, write, behave in society, run his business. Of course he had forgotten everything and everybody connected with the business and had to get acquainted with it all over from the ground up. But he wasn't long in doing that. By spring he was going ahead full blast again, and a stranger would never have suspected that there was anything wrong with him. Only those who knew him well realized certain changes in him.

For one thing, he had forgotten all his loves and hates. In that respect his emotional life was a clean slate. He didn't love his mother . . . he, who had been so devoted to her. He didn't even like her; she knew it and it broke her heart, especially as the time went by and she realized that he never would like her. He cared nothing for any of his old friends. In a few cases he built up new friendships with some of them; to others he always remained indifferent. He had no interest in church work and wouldn't, I believe, have attended church at all if it hadn't been for public opinion which, in Claremont, was very hard on a man who flouted the church.

The greatest change in him, or what seemed so to me, was in regard to Gertrude. She had gone into limbo with everything else. I even thought he seemed rather ill at ease in her presence, but that may only have been my imagination. Anyhow, he cared nothing for her. He even tried to go with other Claremont girls, but nobody would have anything to do with him because he was "queer" and he soon gave up trying. There was a barrier between him and his kind.

I noticed one thing about him . . . I don't know whether anyone else did or not. Sometimes he would suddenly glance over his shoulder in a way I didn't like. And it made him uncomfortable to shake hands with anyone. That could be plainly seen, but I never saw him absolutely refuse to shake hands save once.

That was when Gertrude came home from a long visit in Croyden, met him at a garden party and offered him her hand. He looked . . . not at her . . . not at her hand . . . but at the big ring with the pale green stone. He turned death-white and put his hands behind him. Gertrude thought it odd, but then, one must expect poor Gordon to be odd.

This was years after the fatal sermon. Time had gone on. Everybody had given up expecting Gordon Mitchell's memory to come back . . . everybody but his mother, who nursed a feverish hope and lived on it. Plenty of newcomers didn't know he had forgotten. He was our most successful businessman and was piling up a fortune. But he was nothing like as rich as Anthony Fairweather.

Anthony had got through his School of Mines and had gone surveying up in Cobalt at a dollar and a half a day. There he found the famous Lucia silver mine—named after his mother—and became, as you might say, a millionaire overnight. Even that didn't spoil him. He kept on working hard and soon was at the top of his profession, and a recognized expert on all questions of engineering. He had a hobby for collecting violins—his collection, headed by his old Strad, which he had hunted up and bought back, was the finest in America. He had all the good luck in the world . . . except the one bit he really wanted.

Claremont people referred to him with pride as the “most distinguished of all our boys,” and served up the tales of his youthful pranks with an entirely different sauce. One would have supposed, from the way they talked, that there was some vital connection between offering soap for cheese and discovering silver mines and that they'd always known it. If Anthony had ever come home he would have been met at the station with a brass band and a torchlight procession.

But he never did come home. He never wrote to Gertrude, but now and then he sent her something rare and beautiful in the way of curios. It was always something that belonged to her—something which must have made Anthony say, the moment his eyes lighted on it, “That is Gertrude's . . . it couldn't be anybody else's.” And on every one of her birthdays came a great sheaf of crimson roses from the Croyden florist. Anthony never forgot a birthday.

Gertrude seemed to be enjoying her life. She had a good time. Travelled a bit . . . entertained a bit . . . organized and ran some good clubs and societies . . . was a Regent of the Claremont Chapter of the I.O.D.E. and President of the Women's Canadian Club and the backbone of the Hypatia Circle. Her home was a thing of beauty and the talks she and I had by her fireside, in the days of her maturity, were sometimes all that kept me sane amid the distracting problems of a minister's daily life.

“Drop in whenever you like,” Gertrude had said to me. “You'll always find a chair by the fire and a cat on the rug.”

Cats! I should say so. When Jigglesqueak had finally gone where good dogs go, lamented by all who had the privilege of knowing him, Gertrude went in for cats, being bound, so she said, to have all the prescriptive rights of old maidenhood. She wasn't really particularly fond of cats but she admired their general effect.

“Cats give atmosphere . . . charm . . . suggestion,” she averred.

She had a big blue Persian that Anthony had sent her and four inky black toms. The Persian had some high-falutin name I've forgotten, but Gertrude called all the toms “Soot”—Soot I, II, III, and IV. They used to sit about looking so uncannily

knowing, with their insolent green eyes, that their very expression would have sent Gertrude to the stake three hundred years ago. I am reasonably fond of cats, but those four black demons of Gertrude's always gave me a slightly weird sensation.

Well, there she was. I groaned inwardly when I looked at her—beautiful, desirable, a king's daughter, glorious without and within, but—I was certain of it in spite of her jokes and her philosophy—a lonely, empty-hearted, starved woman.

Ten years after Old Doc's death Anthony came home. He was home for a week, staying with his old aunt, before anyone else—unless it was Gertrude—knew of it. He said he had come to Claremont for a good rest and meant to stay a month. Most people believed and said that he had come back to warm up the cold soup with Gertrude Stirling. Myself, I thought he had too. I wished he could and I knew he couldn't.

He was a splendid-looking fellow, fit as a fiddle, strong, distinguished, and graceful. There was an air of immortal, unquenchable youth about him. Beside him Gordon Mitchell looked tubby and middle-aged. Gordon had forgotten his hate of Anthony along with everything else and was prepared to be quite cordial to him. But Anthony had forgotten nothing. He believed that Gordon had poisoned Old Doc's mind in regard to him at the very beginning and he hated him with as much intensity as ever.

"Sneaking cad!" he said bitterly to me. "If it hadn't been for him . . . but it maddens me to think of it!"

"Isn't there any chance, Anthony?" I asked, although I knew there wasn't. "Have you said anything to Gertrude?"

"Said anything! Said anything! Is there anything I haven't said? I've prayed and stormed and raged and threatened and grovelled . . . man, I've even cried! I came back . . . I had to come back . . . I thought perhaps she'd have changed her mind in those ten infernal years. She hasn't . . . she never will. Unless Old Doc comes back out of his grave to set her free she'll never marry me . . . never!"

Anthony groaned, and then said, in his old whimsical way, as if he wanted to camouflage the intensity of his feelings,

"And we would make such a darn good-looking couple, wouldn't we, Mr. Crandall?"

"I'm a bit out of patience with Gertrude," I said. "I think the whole thing is absolute nonsense."

"I won't have Gertrude abused," said Anthony. "Thank God there's one woman in the world anyhow that will keep her word. I don't blame her. It's all Gordon's

doings. He told Old Doc lies about me years ago . . . I know he did. Hound! I tell you that if Gordon Mitchell were in deadly danger of his life and I could save him by lifting a finger I wouldn't lift it!"

It was rather funny that the very next day Gordon Mitchell should fall out of his canoe in the middle of the Claremont river and that Anthony Fairweather should rescue him!

Gordon was a member of the Canoe Club, but the only wonder was he hadn't drowned himself long before. His Maker had never meant him for canoes. On this day he was right out on the middle of the river when he upset. Only three people saw it: Anthony and myself and little Stan Baird.

In Anthony went, clothes and all, as quick as a flash.

There wasn't another man in Claremont—or out of it, as I believe—who could have swum that distance to Gordon Mitchell in time. As it was he was almost too late. Gordon had gone down for the last time, but Anthony dived, got him and brought him back to the wharf. Old Captain Fairweather had taught Anthony to swim when he was a lad of five, and if his soul were hovering anywhere around that day he must have been proud of his pupil. It was a splendid piece of work, as even I, dancing around on the wharf in a senile frenzy of horror and suspense, fully understood.

Anthony sent Stan Baird for Dr. Mills and fell to work with Gordon after the most scientific fashion. I helped as best I could, and by the time the doctor got there, with a crowd of folks pelting after him, Gordon had come back to life. They got him into a cab and took him home before he could speak coherently.

"So that's that," said Anthony. "Well, I'd better go home myself and get something dry. And I think I'll start back to Montreal tomorrow. There's no chance of me getting what I came for . . . and they'll heroize me for this stunt in the usual sickening way. I can't stand it . . . especially as I'm good and sorry I didn't let the brute drown!"

That evening Mrs. Mitchell sent for me again. She met me at the door with such a transfigured face that I hardly knew her.

"Oh, Mr. Crandall, Gordon has come back!" she exclaimed. "He remembers everything. And he knows me . . . he knows I'm his mother."

She was weeping with joy as she took me up to Gordon's room. He was in bed, shouldered up on the pillows. He greeted me kindly but he looked past me.

"Haven't they come yet?" he said.

"They'll be here soon," said Mrs. Mitchell soothingly.

"They" came almost on her words—"they" were Gertrude and Anthony, both

looking puzzled. Evidently neither of them understood just why they had been thus summoned to take part in Gordon Mitchell's resurrection.

"Sit down. I have something to tell you," said Gordon. "I have Mr. Crandall here for a witness. Mother, please go out."

She went, too thankful for the old affection in his eyes and voice to resent being thus shut out. Anthony and Gertrude did not sit down. They continued standing just inside the door, where the pale lilac light of sunset fell on them through the window.

Gertrude was dressed in some rich, cream-hued stuff, with gold touches here and there and a heavy gold girdle. She looked like a brocaded moth. The years had not dimmed her beauty. Anthony as usual looked dark and royal.

They were, as Anthony had said a . . . ahem . . . an exceedingly good-looking pair of people.

Gordon began:

"I did not tell you the truth about your father's death, Gertrude. He lived a few minutes after I reached him. He said, 'I'm dying, Gordon. Give Gertrude my love and tell her she can marry whom she darn well pleases.'"

What odd thoughts come into one's mind at times. I looked at Gertrude and saw the miracle of her face, but all I really thought just then was, "Gordon has softened down Old Doc's expression a bit. Gordon wouldn't say even a second-hand damn."

"Your father," went on Gordon, "made me promise I would tell you. 'Shake hands on it,' he said, holding out his right hand with that big green stone on it. I shook . . . although even then I knew I wasn't going to tell you. Then he said, 'She's had the best golfer in town for a father; now she'll have to put up with the second-best as a husband. But when I'm dead Anthony will be the best, confound him.' Those were his last words . . . then he died.

"I didn't tell you," continued Gordon. "I couldn't. It would have been like cutting my heart out. But I lived in hell for that year . . . a hell I made for myself. I knew I ought to tell. I used to think, when at times it seemed I couldn't bear it any longer, 'Oh, if I could only forget what Old Doc said!' Then you preached that sermon"—Gordon flung me a glance—"and I knew I couldn't bear it any longer. I stood up . . . I don't know what I meant to say . . . and everything went from me. You know all about that. But today, just as I was drowning, I remembered everything . . . everything! It was like the judgment day."

Gordon shuddered.

"You'd better not talk any more just now, Gordon," I said soothingly.

"There's something else I want to confess," said Gordon pathetically. "It was I told Old Doc that Anthony said he could have Gertrude for the asking. That was a

lie. And I shut the skunk up in the classroom. I did it for a joke . . . and people made such a fuss about it I was ashamed to confess. That's all.”

He didn't ask to be forgiven, but Gertrude took his hand and pressed it before she went out with Anthony. They had the decency to hide their rapture until they got out of Gordon's sight. Gordon's eyes followed Gertrude starvingly. Yes, everything had come back, even his love for her. He groaned as she went out, hidden from him by Anthony's broad shoulders.

But his mother slipped in past them, and he turned to her and held out his hands like a child seeking for comfort. I got up and went out. Neither of them heard me go.

I thought it all over as I walked up the street. I could not be as hard on Gordon as he deserved.

[The end of *The Man Who Forgot* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]