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More Blessed to Give

L. M. Montgomery

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The fresh spring sunshine was coming through the tall, narrow windows of the college library, casting banners of light on the floor and tables, and lighting up the sombre nook between the wall and the historical bookcase that was known as the "English corner."

There were but few students in the library, and those few seemed bent on amusing themselves rather than on studying seriously. Lectures were over and exams nearly so; there was nothing more to come except the announcement of the results.

Eleanor Dennis and Irene Cameron were together at the magazine table, talking in the low tones required in the library—not so low, however, but that the girl curled up in a chair in the English corner could hear all that was said. She had been dreamily turning over a volume of essays and listening to the rollicking chorus of a class song sung by some irrepressible girls in the grounds outside; but at the sound of a name on the other side of the historical bookcase the listless expression left her face and was replaced by one of keen interest.

"It is such a pity that Helen Lewis can't come back to college next year," Irene Cameron was saying. "She is certainly the cleverest girl in the junior class."

"She is the cleverest girl in the college," said Eleanor Dennis decidedly. "She has carried all before her this year and no doubt would do the same next year. In fact, I believe she would stand an excellent chance of graduating with 'great distinction,' and you know that no co-ed. has ever done that here yet. For the honour of the co-eds. as well as for her own sake I wish she could complete her course."

"There is no chance of her coming back after all, I suppose?" said Irene.

"None at all, I fear. I suggested something of the sort to her, but she answered quietly that it would be impossible. She said frankly that she could not afford to come, owing to business losses which her father had suffered."

"She must feel terribly disappointed."

"Yes, I am sure she does. But you would not have supposed so from her manner or from anything she said. You know she has always been a very reserved, independent girl. So I merely said that we would be very sorry if she could not come back."

"The class will be lost without her next year," said Irene. "She has always been the leader in everything. It is such a loss when a brilliant girl like that has to drop out of the ranks. Everyone was proud of her talents in an impersonal sort of way. They reflected honour on the class. That is really the only reason why I am inclined to envy those clever girls—they mean so much to their class. There are dozens of fairly bright girls, like most of us, to one girl like Helen Lewis, and so it seems a double pity that she should be the very one who is not able to go on. Do you know what

she intends to do?"

"From a remark she made I imagine she will have to go to work at once, at whatever she can get to do, I suppose. It will be hard for her, with all her ambition, but she is plucky and self-reliant. I suppose she hopes to earn enough to come back some time and complete her course; but that will be a very different thing from going straight to the end with all her class-mates."

"If it were a girl like Winifred Fair, now," said Irene rather scornfully, "it wouldn't matter. She is hopelessly dull, but she has any amount of money and so she can stay here when a girl like Helen Lewis has to go. It is horribly unfair."

"Hush," said Eleanor softly, with a little motion of her hand towards the gold-tinted bob plainly visible above the sombre volumes of Motley's *Dutch Republic*. Irene recognised it and coloured. She had forgotten that Winifred Fair was reading in the English corner, and wished she had not spoken so loudly. Winifred was certainly not clever, but she was a girl whom everybody liked. Irene was sorry for her careless words.

Winifred, however, had possibly not heard and certainly had not heeded them. Nobody knew better than herself that she was dull. For that very reason she admired the talented girls all the more earnestly, and she had a girlish admiration for Helen Lewis. It was a little sentimental, perhaps, for Winifred Fair, in spite of her three years at college, was as much a schoolgirl at heart as she had ever been. All the same, it was very warm and real, and the news that Helen could not come back to college to take her degree with honours and cast still more lustre over the class was to Winifred nothing short of a calamity.

She sat in the English corner a long time after Eleanor and Irene had gone, with her chin propped on her hand and her blue eyes filled with perplexity. Finally she, too, rose, replaced her book, and went out. In the hall she met a tall, dark-eyed girl with thoughtful brown eyes and a plain yet striking face. She smiled brightly at Winifred and the two walked together down the entrance steps and across the grounds, where the musically minded were still celebrating. It was not until they had left the grounds and turned down a quiet elm-shaded street that Winifred ventured to speak of the subject uppermost in her mind.

"Is it really true, Helen, that you are not coming back to Lakeside next year?"

"Quite true," answered Helen calmly.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" cried Winifred impulsively. "We can never get along without you, Helen. Are you sure there is no chance?"

"Not the foggiest, darling. You know my family isn't rich. It has always involved a good deal of self-sacrifice on their part to send me here, but I expected to be able

to make it up to them some day. I had a letter from mother a few days ago. Father has met with business losses and it will be quite impossible for me to come back next year. It will be necessary for me to find something to do at once. I may be able to come back some time, but that is uncertain. Just now the only thing for me to do is to make it all as easy for mother as I can. Of course, I can't deny that it is a great disappointment, but I mean to think as little about it as possible."

"Oh, Helen, if it's only a question of money, you needn't be disappointed," cried Winifred eagerly. "You know I have plenty of my own—ten times as much as I need. I'm really disgustingly rich. Let me help you, Helen. Do! I'd be so glad!"

Helen had turned crimson and then pale, but she answered very steadily: "Thank you so much, Winnie, but, of course, that's impossible. I could not borrow money not knowing when I could pay it back."

"I don't want it repaid," protested Winifred. "Oh, Helen, can't you take a gift from me after we've been such friends?"

"That would be still further out of the question," said Helen rather coldly. "I know you mean it in all kindness, dear," she added hastily, seeing the crestfallen look on Winifred's face, "and I thank you with all my heart for your offer. I simply couldn't accept such a favour from anyone."

"I wish you would let me help you, Helen," said Winifred sadly, as she turned up the street that led to her beautiful home.

Helen walked rapidly down the street to her boarding-house. Alone in her own room, the pride and courage that had sustained her before her friends almost failed, and she sat down in a chair by the window with tears in her eyes. She had been so eager, so ambitious! Her three years at Lakeside had been filled with triumphs and she had looked forward so radiantly to next year, when she had hoped to graduate with honours. Then would come the proud and happy home-going and after that the finding of a worthwhile place among the world's busy workers.

"Well, this is the end of my dreams," said Helen bitterly. "But at least mother shan't suspect how bad I feel. She is worrying so about my having to give up college. I mustn't make her more miserable."

From somewhere through the open window the sound of voices drifted up to her. At the window of the room below her own two other girls were talking. Margaret Mitchell, a senior girl, was saying in her high, clear voice: "To accept a favour gracefully is one of the hardest things to learn. Anyone can refuse. Independent people make a merit of refusing. It's only ungracious pride not to grant a friend the privilege of helping us."

Helen smiled involuntarily. Margaret was rather noted for laying down the law about everything. Then she winced a little. She wondered if her refusal of Winifred's impulsive offer could be classed under the head of "ungracious pride." Upon reflection she decided it could not. Certainly she couldn't possibly take money from Winifred Fair. No one could blame her for that. Not wishing to hear more, she shut her window and began to study half-heartedly for the last examination of the term.

The afternoon waned slowly, and at last a creamy-golden sunset began to reveal itself above the housetops. Helen did not go down to tea. Her head ached and she felt that she could not bear the gay talk and laughter of the other girls that evening. They would be talking of their plans for next year and the fun they expected to have as seniors. She would only sit among them silent and unhappy.

When it grew too dark to study she went to the window and watched the glow of sunset along the hills over the lake and the crystal glimmer of a star above the woods that crested them. She was still sitting there when somebody tapped softly at her door and Winifred Fair came in.

She came over to Helen and sat down on the low stool at her feet. Winifred's pretty face was flushed and her eyes sparkled in the dusk.

"Helen," she said, speaking more rapidly than usual, "I've come down to tell you something and ask you something. I couldn't keep from thinking about you after I left you to-day. No, don't say anything until I finish, please. I want to explain it all to you if I can, but it is so hard for me to put into words just what I feel. You are clever and perhaps you will understand. You see, dear, it's this way. I'm stupid, awfully stupid. I know I am. I know I can never do anything to make my class or my college proud of me. I'll be lucky if I just manage to scrape through; but I love Lakeside so much and I do so want to do something for it. You are brilliant, and we are all so proud of you, and it's a great thing for our class to have you in it. Don't you understand, Helen? If you would let me help you to come back next year it would seem somehow as if I, poor stupid I, were doing something for my class. It wouldn't be I who was conferring the favour at all. It would be you, and I should be so grateful and so proud.

"I felt all this to-day, but I couldn't express it then. I had to go home and think it out. Oh, don't refuse, my dear. You don't know how much it means to me. I wouldn't feel so useless, so superfluous. Nobody need ever know but you and me. My money is my own—Aunt Grace left it to me—and it seems to me that I never had any chance before to do any good with it. It is your pride that makes you refuse, Helen, and it is a selfish pride, for it takes away from me the chance of doing something for my dear old class, and I never can do anything for it in any other way.

Let me help you, Helen. Do try to understand what it means to me. You can look upon it as a loan if you will. That isn't what I care about."

Winifred leaned forward and touched Helen while she looked pleadingly up into her face. Helen did not answer at once. She was thinking earnestly. For perhaps the first time in her life she tried to put herself fairly in another girl's place and look at the matter through Winifred's eyes. She understood her friend better than the latter had dared to hope. Her own love of class and college helped her to understand. Margaret Mitchell's words came back, too. "Ungracious pride"—yes, perhaps it was. To refuse Winifred would be to wound her deeply.

"You will, won't you?" whispered Winifred.

"Well, my dear——" Helen stopped suddenly, too overcome for words. Then quickly: "Oh, thank you, thank you," she said with a little break in her voice. "It means so much to me."

"Not half as much as it means to me," said Winifred gravely. She reached over and kissed Helen's cheek. The action was spontaneous. The girls were great friends and understood each other perfectly.

When Winifred had gone Helen opened her window again. Three jolly students passed along the street below, shouting out a class ditty with all the fervour of youthful lungs. Far out over the maze of roofs the lights gleamed from the cottage at Lakeside where the senior class were holding a reception. At the window next to her own two girls were chatting gaily about the class work for next year. Helen's heart thrilled happily. She would be back again to share in it all. Her place next year would not be vacant.

"It is hard for some of us to learn to accept favours, but the lesson is worth learning," she said softly.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *More Blessed to Give* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]