THE ATTIC GUEST

by

ROBERT E. KNOWLES

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A NOVEL

By

ROBERT E. KNOWLES

Author of "The Web of Time,"

"St. Cuthbert's," etc.

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To
My Father

FOREWORD

THIS story, which the authoress herself entitled "The Attic Guest," would probably have never been given to the world but for an incidental visit which I paid to a certain manse. It was then and there that the following chapters, now first presented to the public, were entrusted to my hands. The hands which placed the manuscript in my own were those of a lady of much charm, modest, cultured, winsome; and no one could know her without feeling that her qualities of heart were even greater than of intellect. She was a minister's wife, as I need hardly say; and the busy years in that most mellow of all vineyards had given her face much of its own spiritual beauty, something of the deep harvest-joy shining through her eyes. Tranquil eyes were hers, chastened by many a sorrow, yet aglow with a native merriment that the stern schooling of a lifetime seemed powerless to subdue.

She asked that I would read her story; "and send it forth," said she, "if your heart approve."

Her plea for asking this service at my hands was that I had had some humble association with the world of letters. Mayhap she thought this pleased me well—and perhaps it did. I urged her to send her book forth with her own name upon it—but this she firmly refused. She shrank from the publicity it would involve, she said, as must any Southern lady. I believed her implicitly. "Especially," she went on—dwelling earnestly on this —"since my book is the frank and artless story of the most sacred things of life, of a woman's life at that. Some will smile," said she, "and some deride, and many disbelieve; but the story is the story of my inmost work and life and love. Let it see the light if you think it worthy."

I promised; and thus my promise is redeemed and my humble part is done.

ROBERT E. KNOWLES.

Galt, Ontario.

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THE ATTIC GUEST

I
THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

"THAT room in the third story is good enough for any elder," my mother was saying as I came into the library; "more than likely they'll send us a country elder anyhow, and he'll never know the difference—he'll think it's the spare room, I reckon."

I was only eighteen then, and I didn't care much where elders slept, or whether they slept at all or not. Besides, it was already nine o'clock, and I was going to a little party where "Tripping the light fantastic" was to be the order of the evening. By the way, I only found out the other day that Milton was the author of that fantastic toe phrase—and the news startled me about as much as if some one had told me Cromwell invented "Blind Man's Buff."

"Has Dinah got me buttoned right?" I asked, backing up to my Aunt Agnes. Aunt Agnes was my mother's sister. I can see her yet, her hands going up in an abstracted kind of way to correct one of Dinah's oversights; for she was still revolving the great question of the elder and the attic, the attic and the elder.

"You're all right now, honey," she said in a moment, giving me a gentle push away, her whole mind reverting to the subject of family concern.

"I'm sure," she went on in the same breath, "it's going to be an elder from the country. Mr. Furvell told me to wait after prayer-meeting last night; and he said the billeting committee sat till two in the morning trying to divide the ministers and elders as fairly as they could—and he thought we were going to get an elder from Pollocksville."

"Let us hear what Henry thinks about it," my mother suddenly interrupted, her face turned towards the door as she spoke. "Sit here, Henry," as she made room on the sofa for my uncle; "sister Agnes thinks it will be dreadful to send our delegate to the attic if he's to be a minister—but she doesn't mind a bit if he's an elder."

My uncle smiled as he took his place beside my mother. And the face that was turned in fondness upon his wife at the other side of the room had a

look of kindly drollery. For uncle was the tenderest of men, and his countenance reflected the purity and gentleness of his heart. He was a gentleman of the old school, was uncle. His great-grandfather before him had been born in our quaint little Virginian town, and the gracious culture of a century and a half had not been for nothing. The mist of years lies between me and that April evening when we discussed the approaching Presbytery that was to honour our little town by convening in our midst, pondering our approaching guests as solemnly as though they had been envoys from a royal court; but I can still see the tall athletic form, not yet bowed with age —he was less than fifty—and the careless-fitting, becoming clothes that wrapped it in sober black, and the easy dignity of his poise as he held out his hands to the fire—above all, there rises clear before me the grave and noble face, strength and gentleness blending in the mobile mouth and aquiline nose, while the large gray eyes looked out with the loving simplicity of childhood upon the little circle that was so dear to him and to which he was so dear. Yet there was latent fire in those gentle eyes; when in complete repose, they looked out like two slumbering furnaces that needed only to be blown—and any one familiar with the best type of Southern gentlemen would have descried the old Virginian looking through them, the native courage, the inborn anger against meanness, the swift resentment of a wrong, the reverence of womanhood, the pride of family, that were such salient features of the old-time patrician of the South.

"What's your say on the subject, Uncle Henry?" my mother asked again, breaking the silence. For my uncle's gaze had wandered from his wife's face and was now fixed upon the fire. It was April, as I have said, but a generous flame was leaping on the hearth. So generous, indeed, that the back window whose tiny panes looked towards the west was open; this is a form of conflicting luxuries which only Southern folks indulge in.

"I just think the other way round," Uncle Henry finally responded; "different from Agnes, I mean," his eyes smiling as they met his wife's. "I'd send him to the attic if he's a preacher; a minister wouldn't be so apt to misunderstand, because they're trained to sleep anywhere at a moment's notice—and they know what it is to have to stow their own company away in every nook and corner. Besides, it's those same preachers that make heaps o' folk sleep sitting right bolt up in church. But an elder," Uncle Henry went on reflectively, "an elder kind o' wants to make the most of it when he's visitin'—it's more of an event to him, you see; they look on going to Presbytery as a kind of rehearsal for going to heaven."

“Then they ought to be glad to get the highest place,” broke in my Aunt Agnes triumphantly, for she had a ready wit.

“Depends on how you get there,” retorted Uncle Henry after a very brief but very busy pause; he had no mind to be worsted in an argument if he could help it. “Everything depends on how it’s given to you. There’s all the difference in the world between being lifted and being hoisted—I saw a fellow tossed by a bull one day out at Cap’n Lyon’s farm; he got the highest place, all right, but he didn’t seem to relish the promotion.”

My mother, who was accustomed to act as umpire in these little contests, turned a humorous eye towards Aunt Agnes. The latter, we all knew, was fumbling frantically for some response which seemed to elude her; my mother’s pose reminded me a little of the man who had held the watch the week before, down at Jacksonville, when two gentlemen of the ring had paid their respects to each other. I knew all about how they’re counted out if they don’t show up within a certain time; yet it isn’t likely I’d have known anything about it if Mr. Furvell hadn’t warned us from the pulpit that we mustn’t read the account of the affair—he said the details were shocking. So I had to wait till Aunt Agnes was finished with the paper.

I really do not know how the argument concluded, for at this juncture a very sable face appeared suddenly at the door and a liquid voice announced: “Please, Miss Helen, Misteh Slocum’s waitin’ fo’ yeh in de parluh.”

I was ready for the intimation, for I had heard the old brass knocker muttering a minute or two before—and I was just at the age when I knew the different knocks of different gallants. And not a few of these latter were wont to lift that frowning brass face on our front door and let it fall again—the wonderful thing about it was, that the oftener they came the more gentle grew the knock—but this is the way with all knockers at all Southern homes that shelter comely maidens. And I am neither modest enough nor untruthful enough to deny that I deserved the adjective aforesaid—especially as this story may never see the light till my eyes give it back no more.

“I’m hoping he’ll be a minister,” I volunteered, as I turned a moment at the door.

“Why?” cried my mother.

“What for?” chimed my Aunt Agnes.

“Well,” I answered, “elders pray too long—I went to sleep one night at worship when that elder from Hickory was here at the Synod. And he said I was a devout worshipper, don’t you mind, when I kept kneeling after you all

got up. I don't think that was very nice for a religious man to say," I averred, tugging at a reluctant glove.

"He wouldn't think so if he saw you now—starting for a dance," suggested my Aunt Agnes. "But you look mighty sweet, honey—though I don't believe you've got enough on for a chilly night like this. Be sure you have something round you when you're coming home."

"Mr. Slocum will see to that," assured Uncle Henry, his expression interpreting his words.

"Hush," said my mother chidingly; "the child doesn't know what you mean." Every word of that evening's conversation is vivid to me yet, as it well might be; and I have often wondered why my mother held such a sanguine view of my simplicity.

I don't remember much about the succeeding frivolities of that April evening. Sometimes I catch again a few fugitive snatches of the melody that inspired the mazy throng; I remember what I wore—it served long years of umbrageous usefulness as a lamp shade after I was through with it; and I think I danced nearly every dance, no foreboding of soberer days chastening the gladness. And I forgot all about the elder question, wondering no more where he might lay his devoted head. But before Mr. Frank Slocum bade me good-night as I disappeared within the heavy oaken door of my uncle's house, he unwittingly recalled the subject.

"You're expecting a visitor to-morrow, aren't you?" he said.

"Oh, yes," I answered, suddenly remembering. "Yes, we're going to have one of the men attending the Presbytery; I think it's to be an elder—and I'm afraid it's him for the attic," I concluded. It was half-past two and I was too tired to bother about grammar.

"I wasn't thinking about the Presbytery," returned Mr. Slocum, and he smiled in the moonlight. "Somebody else is coming, isn't he?"

Whereat I hope I blushed; it was the time for that mystic operation. For I knew he referred to Charlie, dear old Charlie, who made his pious pilgrimage once a month—and I was the shrine.

"Yes, he's coming," I said, toying with the knocker as I spoke.

"You don't seem as jubilant about it as you ought to be," ventured Mr. Frank.

"You don't know how I feel," said I; "maybe I'm jubilant inside."

“Then you shouldn’t sigh,” pursued my escort.

“I didn’t know I sighed—but, even if I did, perhaps sighs are like dreams, and go by contraries,” I returned, making the best stand I could. “A maiden’s heart is an unknown sea,” I affirmed, quoting from some distant poem.

“Besides,” Frank went on, disdainful of all poetry, “if you really cared like you ought to, you wouldn’t be out so late the night before; you’d be having your beauty sleep right now, just to be lovely when he came—or, at least, to be even lovelier,” he amended; for Frank was a Southern gentleman.

“I never had it bad enough to go to bed over it,” I admitted; “but he’ll be here to-morrow—he’ll be here to-morrow,” I chanted, as ecstatically as I could. Yet I felt at the time that the words didn’t ring much; it was a little like trying to peal a chime on a row of pillows. Then, before I knew it, I yawned, yawned brazenly into the face of the brass knocker on the door.

“Exactly!” said Frank, his hand moving to his hat, “that’s just about the size of it—Miss Helen, you’re a little idiot,” and his honest eyes shone bright with their candour of affection.

“Sir!” said I, employing a splendid intonation. And I gave a little stamp on the stone step beneath me—all true Southern girls love to stamp. “Sir!” I repeated, “you forget yourself.”

“But I don’t forget *you*,” Frank retorted swiftly, his face quivering a little; “though I wish I could, a little more. And I know you don’t care anything about him, the way he thinks you do—or the way he wants you to. And God help him—and you too—if something doesn’t happen; you have either gone too far, or not far enough, Miss Helen,” he declared boldly, looking straight into my eyes in the moonlight. And I couldn’t help gazing back, for his look and his words both had a kind of fascination for me; I reckon I knew they both were true. So I didn’t get angry—only a lot of things, all connected with the past, rushed like a flood before me. But I will tell them all in another chapter. I had no mind to discuss them with Frank just then.

So I simply said “Good-night, I’m going in.” And Frank said good-night with great respect and turned to go away. I peeped through the crack just before I closed the door, and I could see that his eyes were on the pavement and his step was slow. Yet I cared nothing for that, except as it boded what might be of interest to myself.

II
JUST EIGHTEEN

As I sit and look back on it all now, I feel almost sure that a girl's real life begins at somewhere about eighteen years of age. A boy is different; his life begins at a great many different times. To start with, he has a distinct promotion at four or five—he casts off skirts forever, with contempt, and that itself is a promotion. Then he takes on the uniform of manhood, glorying in the frank two-leggedness of his kind; and in quite a real sense this marks the beginning of his manhood. Indeed, a boy has mile-posts all along the way. Top boots come next, and the first pair, clothing his knees with their red leather crown, give life a rosy splendour. This pales, of course, as does all other glory—but the day reappears in divers forms. His curls are one day amputated, falling fast, the hour of their doom still bright with an undaunted sheen—and the young Samson shakes himself gleefully in this new token of manly strength. Then comes his first game of ball, or his first venture with tools; or he is one day permitted to hold a slumbering butcher-horse while its master steps within; in return, he is allowed to drive a block or two—trifling enough, as some one smiles and says, but every boy remembers it and it marks a new stage of power. About this time he learns to swim; all the past is forgotten, the future all despised, till he becomes amphibious. Then comes his first watch—time is annihilated in the tumult of that hour; then a gun of his own—its first report is heard around the world. And so it goes on, ever onward, from one lock to another in life's long waterway. By and by the stream widens far; he must choose his profession—then his partner—then someone, and the romance seems never at an end.

But a girl's life has no such variety; skirts are her abiding portion, from swaddling clothes to shroud. And her curls, undisturbed, thicken with the years. No top boots for her, nor game of ball, nor wizardry of tools; for her nothing but the long drab way of girlhood, beginning with the nursery and ending with the same.

Till she is about eighteen. Then comes, or almost always comes, the first waterfall in the stream of time. And what a wild cataract it is, leaping with the tidal movement of her soul! And how mystically deep that spring of love which is its far-off source! And how the light of heaven plays upon it all!

I was just eighteen when this first came to me. And all my eighteen years before seem now, as I recall them, like a placid afternoon such as slips by unnoticed in the summer-time; the clock strikes the hour, I suppose, but no one hears it.

I was born in 187-. No woman is ever quite content to tell the very year, but the decade does not matter. And my mother has often told me what a lovely October day it was—my dawn was mingled with the deepening twilight, and the flowers were still abloom in the garden, and some darky children were playing in the dusty road before the door, and the soft autumn sky was now wreathed in smiles, now bathed in tears, fitting symbol of the checkered life that lay before me.

My father died when I was two and a half. My only recollection of him is an impression of his great height and strength as he once bore me on his shoulder, when I had toddled a few yards from the door to meet him. My mother tells me I often started forth on very uncertain feet, as often borne back with my arms about his neck—but there lingers with me the memory of only one such pilgrimage. Yet it is distinct and vivid, I am thankful to say, and I can see yet the low brick fence, with its cope of stone, all vine-entangled as it was; and to this day I never catch the breath of the magnolia without seeing again the full-bloomed beauty that stood close to the steps within the wall. I think I plucked a spray as I was borne past it that evening on my father's shoulder.

Both my mother and my aunt thought it strange that I have no recollection of my father as he lay in the calm majesty of death; for my mother took me with her alone into the parlour and shut the door upon us three when she took her last farewell—so she has often told me, her voice breaking as she spoke. And she says I wanted to linger after she turned to go, gazing steadfastly upon the silent face, fascinated by the master mystery of life; it seems, too, that even in her grief she noticed my disdain of the lovely flowers that ensconced the coffin, though I had the child's passion for those gratuities of God, so all-absorbing was the witchery of death. And I have been told, though none of my kinsfolk ever mentioned it—the old undertaker told me himself one day when I was playing among the shavings in his shop—how pitifully hard I fought when they began to shovel in the clay after my father had been lowered to his grave. It is one of our Southern

customs for the ladies, veiled past recognition, to follow their dead to the uttermost; and it was in the cemetery I dropped my mother's hand and began my unavailing struggle to rescue my father from suffocation and eternal night. I was borne away, probably easily beguiled, and my father was left to his long loneliness. But I remember nothing of either of these incidents, great and tragical as I thought them, and still think them to be; even yet, I never turn away from a new-filled grave without a sense of selfish cruelty—there seem such oceans of God's fresh air everywhere, yet denied to those we leave behind. And I have never been able to free myself from the pain of this bitter helplessness—that there comes a time when the best we can do for our nearest and dearest is to leave them all alone beneath the darkening sky.

Those who knew her best say that my mother was never the same again. No melancholy, or despondency, or indifference to life came to mark the change, but her soul took new depth under the influence of sorrow and her outlook was more to the eternal. There was plenty of brightness and merriment—frank laughter, too—all of her after life; but it was the play of the sunlight upon the noble gloom of ocean, stirred gently by some influence from afar.

She soon abandoned her own home, leaving it to strangers; they saw no white face on the pillow in the front room up-stairs—they gave dances in the parlour, and no recumbent form disturbed the revelry. My mother's sister was Mrs. Lundy, my Aunt Agnes; her husband was Henry Lundy, my Uncle Henry. To their home we went to live, I in unconscious glee, my mother in hope of healing. There my life was spent till I was eighteen years of age—and later; but my story begins with that particular year, which, as I have hinted, is to so many a maiden's life like the month of April to the Northern river—for then the ice breaks up and the stream moves outward to the sea.

I was eighteen when I fell in love. That is, if I fell at all—concerning which I have my doubts. For many a girl thinks she has *fallen* in love when all the time she *walked* in.

Ah me! those days are far past now; but the words I have just written gave my pen a good half hour's rest while I mused on all the meaning of them. For after a girl becomes a mother, after she has children of her own—which is about the same thing—she is far more fastidious about love, and far more solicitous that it should be genuine, than when she was choosing for herself. And she knows then, what she knew not at eighteen, that the difference between falling in love and walking into it, is just the difference between Heaven and—Hades. (What a convenient word "Hades" is! It was made, I reckon, expressly for woman's use.)

Well, I am afraid I *walked* in, the first time I got in love. Yet I feel it is a sort of blasphemy to say the *first* time—for no true girl is ever really in love but once; born, loved, died, thus stand the mountain peaks of life, and each can rise but once. So I must amend by saying that the first time I tried to be in love, and everybody else thought I really was, I got there by the pedestrian route. I rather think I honestly wanted to be in love, had almost resolved to be; and when a girl's face is once set in that direction she will see land ahead, though half an ocean lie between—or, to change the figure, she is like those silly chanticleers that crow at midnight, thinking it the dawn.

One other thing, too, I must tell in my defense. I was *pushed* in. A dearer and more devoted mother than mine no girl ever had. But this I will dare to say—and I am old enough to know—I do believe every true mother-heart has, somewhere in its great expanse, a cavity that aches, never to be filled till some one who loves her daughter comes to dwell there evermore, bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh by the great adoption of their united love. Two streams, both different—but the confluence is mighty. And then there is another cavity, farther in, its ache more poignant still—and that place is never filled, that pain never banished, till she scans some baby face, her leaping heart descrying the likeness to her own, all the lovelier because the image of the adopted mingles with it.

I am right well aware how horrified my mother would have been if any one had dared to hint that she, or any other gentlewoman, cherished the hope of some day being either mother-in-law or grandmother—or both; and I cannot help a little shudder as I write those terms myself. But the truth as I first set it down, free from those rude bald words, is not to be denied.

It was at the seaside that I first met Charlie Giddens. Mother and I met him the same evening, in the midst of a merry dance on the grand piazza. He was tall and dark, and his hair was gloriously rebellious, every way for Sunday. We both noticed that he looked at us a little long, a little earnestly, I thought—but he asked mother to dance first, and that's where his head was level.

"Don't fill your program all up, Helen," she whispered as she handed me her fan, gliding out with the tall figure, so handsome in his spotless ducks.

"Did you notice how gracefully he handed me to my seat?" mother said after he had left her; "he has the manners of a cavalier." For the old-time Southern lady puts gracefulness next to grace.

“He dances like a Dervish of the Desert,” I remarked, a little maliciously perhaps—for he had bowed and left us.

“Like a courtier, you mean,” my mother amended, her eyes still following him. “And his father’s a ship owner in Savannah, and his mother comes from one of the oldest families in South Carolina,” concluded my mother, naming the ancient house.

“That’s why you like his dancing,” I suggested; “old families all dance exquisitely—the older, the sprightlier, it seems.”

“He has such a delicate way of putting things,” pursued my mother; “he was describing his mother to me, and he said she had a lovely figure, just about my size,” surveying somewhat hopefully her rather substantial form the while. For this was a very live issue with my mother; she lived in daily horror of growing stout, and any such reassuring word was balm of Gilead to her.

But what’s the use of going on with this? This story’s main concern is not with my dancing days, and what I have written, or yet shall write, regarding them, is only a streamlet leading towards the river of my life. And my story—if it be ever finished, or however far it roam, must follow the winding current of my changeful years.

Yet this I must record, that Mr. Giddens came back that night and stood once again beneath the swinging lanterns that cast their fitful light on mother’s face and mine. And he asked for another dance—but it was not from mother. And whenever we swirled before her as we compassed the great piazza, I could see how mother’s eyes followed us approvingly, more approving than I had ever known them to be before.

And thus it all began—all that never should have been begun at all. That is what I meant when I said, a little farther back, that I was *pushed* into love—and by my own dear mother. Oh, it all seems so terrible, so cruel to me now, looking back over all the happy years, beautiful in the uncreated light of love—it is really awful to reflect how often the hands that love her most are the fateful hands to many a girlish life, pushing the poor protesting heart, so gently, yet so relentlessly, pressing it on, on to the dark abyss of a loveless union. Mr. Giddens was of gentle birth, I know; he was handsome, cultured, charming,—and he was very rich. All these shed their light about him, and my mother gloried in their radiance. Their light, I said—but it was artificial. The summer sun of love had never shined on me at all; so that while I could not but feel the effulgence of it all, yet only one room of my life was lighted, and that the hallway—the vast world within was still wrapt

in darkness. I knew all the time that I did not really love Mr. Giddens. Yet I could not see why I should not—and there the great peril lay. It was that fatal path that misled me. All the outward sign-posts pointed my way as leading towards his own—but these sign-posts were marked by human hands alone, and my mother never tired of spelling out their message.

"There's not a girl in Virginia," she said one day, "but would give her head for him. He's aristocratic, and handsome, and rich."

"And the greatest of these is rich," quoth I.

"For shame!" cried my patrician mother, "that's the least of it."

"Not at all," I retorted. "For if a girl doesn't love a man as fiercely as ____"

"As what!" exclaimed my mother, shocked.

"As devotedly as she should," I revised, "she won't get much comfort out of his blue blood—and she can't do much with his beauty—but his cash is a different matter," I affirmed; "she could get her little hands on that all right."

"Helen, you're a foolish child," said my mother gravely.

"That's what I often think myself," said I, more gravely still.

Well, that was the way it went on. I told him "yes" one night. I do not believe he heard me, but he seemed to know I yielded, for he did what he had never done before—nor ever other man beside. And thus life's greatest, holiest moment was stained to me; and the sacred altar was lighted with far different fire than that for which God meant it. I had never been kissed before—at least not that way—and even then I felt how I was cheated of my birthright, and I marvelled at the sense of shame. But that can never be recalled, so I try not to dwell upon it. Nor can it be amended, and the loss is to eternity. I have known the rapture since then, the primal bliss—but the virgin joy was tempered with the cruel thought that it had all been rehearsed before. And the bitterest feature of it all is this, that it had never been, except for her who loved me with a mother's love. But her ambition mingled with her love—and these two are enemies.

If I had been a little more in love, I reckon mother would not have tried so hard to urge me on. But I was not—I was a little less. And mother kept kneeling beside the poor little flame on the mean altar of my heart, to quote the old hymn, and she kept the bellows going pretty steadily, if haply she might make the fire burn. Or if I had been a little less in love, perhaps she

would have given over—for I was dear to her. But I was not; I admitted he was rich, and handsome, and superior—and these seemed quite enough reason to a girl's mother why there should be true affection. So I was neither a little more, nor yet a little less, in love with Charlie—and that is Hades, to use the convenient word again, when it has to do duty for the real thing. But mother kept on encouraging me, saying she knew I'd be very happy, and drawing lovely pictures of the position I would occupy and the leadership in society that would be mine; and mothers can make ashes look like bread—only they don't have to eat them through the hungry years.

III
THE BRIDGE THAT LAY BETWEEN

"Do you think we're a star chamber?" I said to my mother, as she stood at the parlour door with a cushion under either arm.

"Think you're what? Think who's what?" she queried in amazement.

"Where are you taking those cushions to?" I pursued, glancing at her burden.

"To the up-stairs sitting-room. You know uncle always takes a nap before he goes to bed." Which was true enough; uncle fancied he didn't sleep well if he neglected this preliminary canter on the sofa. That was where he was wont to try divers notes till he struck the proper key for the night's performance.

"That's where you all are going to stay this evening," I averred. "Uncle will snooze there while you and aunty play cribbage."

"Yes, of course—why?" answered my mother wonderingly. "You and Mr. Giddens will be in the parlour, won't you?"

"That's what I meant about the star chamber," I rejoined. "I think it's right foolish, the way you all take to your heels when Charlie spends an evening here. There's a plenty of room in the parlour for us all."

"There shouldn't be," my mother made reply; "I never saw the room big enough for more than two when your father and I were lovers—which we were the longest day he lived," she added, her voice softening to the romantic note.

"And did you always want to be alone?" I asked seriously; "always alone together—before you were married, I mean?"

My mother smiled, her eyes half closing in reminiscent thought. "Yes, child," she answered slowly, "alone—together; I believe those two words describe nearly all the joy of life—alone—together. Don't you know what I

mean, Helen?" and there was a deep tenderness in her voice as she dropped one of the cushions on a chair, coming close and taking me in her arms; "doesn't my dear one know the meaning of it? Oh, Helen, I want you to be so happy. And you will be, won't you—you are, aren't you, my darling? You love him, don't you, Helen?"

My face was hidden in her bosom. After a minute's silence she drew back, that she might look into my eyes. "You love him, don't you, dear?"

"Yes," I said, again seeking the shelter of her breast.

"I'm so glad, my darling," she murmured. Then she picked up the fallen cushion and went on her way up-stairs.

I stood by the piano, listlessly fingering some music sheets that lay on top of it. Suddenly the stillness was broken by my mother's voice.

"Helen," she cried; "oh, Helen."

"Yes, dear," I answered, stepping to the door.

"I forgot to tell you the news; our Presbytery guest isn't coming till to-morrow. They sent us word just this afternoon—and they're almost sure it's going to be an elder."

"Then 'it' will have to go in the attic," I rejoined, shouting the opprobrious pronoun up the stairs.

"Helen, dear," the tender voice remonstrated, "how can you speak like that—calling him 'it.' That isn't respectful, child."

"It's your word," responded I; "you said it's going to be an elder."

"But I didn't actually call him it," my mother defended. Her answer was rather long in coming; I could tell she was struggling with the verbal problem.

"Oh, well, I beg his pardon," I conceded; "anyhow he won't care what we called him, when he strikes the attic," and the argument ended in a duet of laughter.

"And, Helen," resumed my mother, by this time one or two steps down-stairs, "don't you think you'd better dress? Mr. Giddens ought to be here right soon now, shouldn't he? I think you ought to wear your pink organdy—he says he loves you in pink, you know."

"He ought to love me in buckskin," I flung back, "if he loves me at all. He ought to love me for my own sweet self undecorated—you see, mother,

how romantic you're making me. If he's really got the frenzy he won't need any pink things to infuriate him," I insisted, laying Spanish bull-fights under tribute.

"Please yourself, child," my mother responded as she disappeared, "but I know, when your father was courting me——"

"You ought to write a book on the subject, mother," I interrupted gaily; "you've evidently had it down to a science. If you'd write a book and call it 'First Principles of Courtship' or 'Love-making for Beginners' you'd help things on a lot." But by this time mother was beyond the range of conversation and my literary counsel met with no response.

I went back to the parlour. The music sheets were fumbled once again. Then I tried to read, but found it impossible to settle down. I turned once more to the piano and presently found myself softly singing a little love-verse, familiar since my childhood. I crooned it once or twice:

Still must you call me tender names
  Still gently stroke my tresses;
Still shall my happy answering heart
  Keep time to your caresses.

The words made me lonely—like a phantom song. I involuntarily smiled a little as I caught myself sighing while the piano notes died away; perhaps it was the gathering twilight that gave me such a plaintive feeling in the region of my heart.

Suddenly a voice came from above. It was Aunt Agnes this time.

"Hear that, Helen?" she sang out. "There's music in that screech, isn't there?"

"What screech?" I answered back, a little suspicious that she referred to my simple warblings. Yet I knew she could scarcely have heard.

"The locomotive," she promptly replied. "Didn't you hear that engine whistle?—that's his train, you know. I reckon you were listening for it all right."

I rose and moved to the window, grimly wondering if ever lover had so many assistants in the business. I could see the white puffs of smoke as the train steamed slowly into the distant station. The dreamy ringing of the bell floated in through the open window, mingling with the pensive sounds of evening.

And I was lonely, so lonely! I knew that Charlie had just alighted from the train, doubtless hurrying even now to his hotel. He would soon shake its dust from off his feet, I knew, and old "Rastus"—Rastus knew Charlie's orbit and kept a keen lookout for him—would bring him with fitting haste to me. My cheek reddened, then paled, as I seemed to see Charlie's eager face, his impatient arms, his ardent lips. I quivered a little, and tore two or three of the petals from a rose I had chosen from a bowlful on the table; the harmless things floated to the pavement beneath the window.

Suddenly a bird's rich full note fluttered in and fell upon my ear. I listened. And his mate responded—full and sweet and tremulous the answer came. The love-throb pulsed vibrant through it. I thought it beautiful; and I listened, enchanted, as the tender message came again and again. Soon the note grew fainter—and I think I caught a glimpse of the winged lovers as they glided close together into their bridal chamber in the deep shade of the magnolia tree. The rich blossoms hung like curtains, quivering a little where the mated pair had passed within—that fragrant retreat was holy.

Still gazing, my attention was diverted by the sound of feet upon the brick pavement that went past our house. I listened, watching. And a minute or two later, all unconscious of my presence, a youth and maiden passed beneath the window. Neither was speaking, and their steps were slow, as if they cared not where they led. Somehow they compelled my interest at once. I knew them both, though their station was quite different from mine. She collected belated accounts for a local laundry—he drove their horse, delivering from door to door. I watched them wistfully as they passed on, by and by leaning out the window to follow their career. They turned to the left and made their way out on to the bridge. And I saw him once—though the dusk was deepening—I saw him take her hand; she withdrew it quickly, but he gently recovered it a moment later, this time without resistance. And thus they went on together, far out on the lonely bridge, every step taking them farther from everybody else, but nearer to each other. The twilight hid them soon; and they were alone together in the shelter of the gathering dark.

Then was a wild tumult surging in my heart. I wondered what made it, and why the lump rose so persistently in my throat, even while I feared to know. For she was only a working girl, I thought, and he a swain who drove a beast of burden. Yet I knew that that old bridge, rickety and worn, lay between me and the Celestial. And I wondered who it was that wrote that song about the tender names and the tresses so gently to be stroked.

I went back towards the piano; for I heard the distant sound of wheels. Then I rang the bell; a servant appeared in an instant.

“Lyddie,” I said, “light the gas, please.”

“Yes, Miss Helen. I done seen a transfeh drivin’ to the fwont doah, Miss Helen,” as she returned with the taper.

“I heard it too,” said I.

IV
THE DANGER ZONE

THE stealthy dawn was just laying its gray hand on the slowly waking world as I crept the next morning into my mother's room. I was shivering a little, for our April mornings are often far from warm. Besides, I was excited—and the night had been passed in sleeplessness.

"Is that you, child?" my mother asked, starting suddenly.

"Yes, are you asleep?"

"What's the matter? Are you sick?"

"No," I answered, creeping in; "but I want to talk to you. I'm frightened."

"What frightened you?" and my mother's tone was louder—"anybody trying to break in?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that," as I cuddled closer. "But I want to talk to you—Mr. Giddens frightened me."

My mother was all awake. "Mr. Giddens, child," she exclaimed, rising a little on the bed; "how on earth could he frighten you? Tell me how," the note in her voice more imperative now.

I was silent a moment, not knowing just how to begin. Perhaps I felt a little ridiculous too.

"Tell me, Helen," my mother said presently, and quite firmly; "I'm waiting."

"Well," I began hesitatingly; "well, it's this—he wants me to get married."

My mother made an impatient poke at the bed-clothes. Then she partly rose on her elbow. Then she turned her pillow, finally laying her head back upon it.

“Helen Randall,” she broke out, and her voice, like the dawn, had a gray tinge about it, “Helen Randall, you’re a silly little goose—coming in here trembling, and waking me up and scaring me half to death, only to tell me that the man you’re engaged to wants to marry you.”

“But, mother,” I began earnestly, “it’s different—you don’t understand.”

“Nonsense, child,” she interrupted, “there isn’t anything to understand. What do folks get engaged for? What does any lover want, except to get married? And this is the great fright you got; it seems that you got engaged to a man, and then he alarms you by suggesting you get married! Let’s go to sleep,” and my mother patted the pillow with her cheek, preparing to resume the operation I had interrupted.

“But I won’t go to sleep,” persisted I. “You don’t understand—Mr. Giddens wants to marry me right off—right away soon.” My mother turned her head a little on the pillow. She was wakening fast.

“What’s that you say?” she said.

I knew she had heard me quite well, but I repeated it willingly enough. “I say he wants to get married—very soon. His family is going to Europe shortly—and it seems his father says we can spend the first part of our honeymoon on the *Sea-Nymph*, and then join them all in Europe later on. And so Charlie has quite made up his mind that——”

“What’s the *Sea-Nymph*?” interrupted my mother eagerly.

“It’s the name of the yacht—a new yacht they’ve got.”

“A yacht? A private yacht?” breathlessly asked my mother.

“Yes, a private yacht,” I answered, not much elated about it either.

“I knew a family in Norfolk once that had a private yacht,” my mother reflected, just a little reverently. “And all those rich New York people keep yachts at Newport,” she added in a kindred tone.

“That doesn’t matter much,” I said, a trifle acridly; “half of the people on them seem to be divorced, if you can believe the papers. But Charlie’s quite set on this plan of his—of theirs—and I’m distressed to death about it. I don’t want to just go right away so soon,” and my voice shook in spite of myself as I nestled a little closer to my mother.

“What did you tell him, Helen?” she asked in a whisper.

“I said no—at first.”

“And what after?”

“Nothing—that’s the worst of it.”

“Why? Why the worst of it?” pursued my mother.

“Because he thinks I will—and it frightens me.”

“Helen,” and mother’s voice was quite reproachful, “I can’t make you out at all, child. You’ve promised to marry him—and I can’t understand you. Why, when your father wanted me to marry him I couldn’t get too early a day—and we didn’t have any yacht either.”

“No, but you had father,” I interposed.

“That’s foolish,” said my mother. And I thought it was myself, although I felt my rejoinder had a meaning I couldn’t just explain.

We talked till the sun was pouring in through the eastern window; yet we determined little else than this—that mother thought I should and I was almost sure I couldn’t.

I think we all felt better in the morning. Mother and I certainly did; even Europe and a yacht didn’t impress me so formidably as in the ghostly dawn. We had shad for breakfast, fresh from its briny home; and if shad be skillfully cooked it can colour all the succeeding day. Wherefore, when we were all gathered on the porch in the glorious sunshine mother immediately became communicative. She had previously advised me that it would be better to say nothing to Uncle Henry or Aunt Agnes about the subject that engrossed us both; this of itself was almost a guarantee to me that mother would tell it all, for she generally took this means of reserving that luxury to herself. So it wasn’t very long till she had told them all about it. Before she was through, the private yacht had grown to dimensions of a man-of-war fitted up in oriental splendour—and I had been all but presented to half the crowned heads in Europe.

“And I’ve been telling Helen how foolish she is,” she concluded earnestly, looking to my aunt and uncle for confirmation of her view. “It isn’t every girl gets a chance of a honeymoon on a yacht, is it, Henry?” nodding towards me over her shoulder.

But uncle didn’t seem as agitated as he should have been. “Oh, I don’t know,” he replied drawlingly, “it depends on your position on the yacht. I suppose there’ll be women aboard, cooks and such like, that nobody’d envy very much.”

“Position!” my mother ejaculated vigorously; “I should think the wife of the owner would have position enough for anybody.”

“Yes—if she owns *him*,” replied my uncle slowly.

“Owns what?” echoed my mother. “What do you mean, Henry?”

“I mean if she owns *him*,” repeated uncle cheerfully; “if she loves him enough, you know—and if he does the same. Sooner be on an old raft—if they really *own* each other,” uncle went on quite seriously, “than the finest ship in the world—if they don’t.”

“You’re great on love,” said mother; “and that’s all right for a beginning—but there are other things besides. I think love needs a good solid foundation to build on,” as she nodded emphatically towards my uncle.

“Yachts aren’t very solid things,” retorted the latter calmly; “and Europe’s a long piece away. And if my views on love aren’t what they ought to be, blame Agnes there,” as he looked in unevasive tenderness towards his wife.

I caught the look she cast back at him; it made me think of the lonely bridge. I glanced, too, at the bloom-laden magnolia—and the thought flashed through my mind that an old raft, as uncle said, might be made heavenly enough.

“When is Mr. Giddens going to call again?” my mother suddenly enquired. “I heard him say he was going home on Monday.”

“He’s coming now,” Aunt Agnes announced in a low voice; “yonder, look—he’s just coming past the Hickey’s boat-house,” her keen eye studying the distant figure. “And who’s that with him?” she exclaimed a moment later; “why, it’s Mr. Furvell, sure as the world. I reckon he’s coming here too—some news about the elder, likely enough. I didn’t know he and Mr. Giddens were acquainted.”

“Neither they are,” said my mother. “I reckon they just happened in with each other.”

“Shouldn’t wonder if the dominie’s shadowin’ him,” uncle ventured gravely; “lookin’ for a job, you see—this’ll be worth two hundred to him at the least, won’t it, Helen?” as he looked quizzingly at me.

“At the very least,” I answered; “I’m pretty expensive—as well as dear,” which little playfulness seemed to tickle uncle immensely. He was proceeding to expound the humour to the others when mother interrupted.

“Run to the door and meet them, Helen. And bring them right out to the porch.”

“I’d rather not,” I demurred—“I’m shy.” But the knocker had already sounded and Lyddie had already started for the door. Uncle Henry immediately arose and made his way to meet our friends. A minute later we were all mingled in a kind of hand-shaking reel on the piazza.

“Mr. Giddens and I met at the wharf,” explained Mr. Furvell; “we were both taking a look at our noble river—it’s superb in the morning sunshine. So we walked up together.”

“Most happy to see you both, I’m sure,” said my Aunt Agnes cordially.

“Quite appropriate, I think, that we should hunt in couples,” continued Mr. Furvell, a significant twinkle in the minister’s eye; “we’re here in different capacities—yet they naturally go together,” he enlarged, evidently desiring to be questioned.

Everybody waited. “Miss Helen will understand,” he then went on facetiously; “you see, I’m here as a preacher, and Mr. Giddens as a worshipper,” wherewith, much pleased at the success of his little jest, Mr. Furvell led the chorus of applause himself.

“Well, if you’re as earnest about your part as I am in mine, we’ve both found our proper callings,” rejoined Mr. Giddens, making a courtly bow.

“Let’s take up the collection,” said I, blushing furiously, and not knowing what else to say.

“That’ll come later,” interjected my uncle, winking reverently at the pastor. The pastor seemed to understand right well and took it nothing amiss.

My mother’s gaze was directed in undisguised admiration upon Charlie. And very handsome he looked, I must admit, his face a little flushed by the satisfaction of his happy speech, his eyes bright and tender, his whole frame lithe and strong with abundant health. Then, besides, he had lovely clothes, even though he was disfigured by two or three blazing diamonds, two in his shirt-front, if I remember right, and one on the little finger of his left hand. But I shouldn’t complain; for I had one brilliant beauty on my own hand—and he was its devoted source.

I think Charlie must have noticed my mother’s steadfast gaze. In any case her question came very suddenly, as if to relieve embarrassment: “I hope your folks are all well at home, Mr. Giddens.”

“Oh, yes, thank you, ma’am,” he replied promptly; “they’re busy preparing for a long trip to Europe—they sail next month.”

Whereat my mother quite involuntarily threw a swift glance at me. And I believe, I’m almost sure, that Charlie’s eyes followed hers.

“Oh, Mr. Giddens,” I broke in, my burning cheeks attesting that it was high time, “you don’t know who’s coming to be our guest to-day—we’re going to have an elder.”

“What on earth’s that?” said Charlie, twirling an ebony cane about with his fingers.

“Oh, I forgot, you’re not a Presbyterian. It’s a man,” I elucidated, “a kind of an unordained minister. And he’s going to stay here while the Presbytery’s meeting.”

“Are they very solemn?” Charlie enquired; “they sound solemn. I suppose he’s about the same thing as we call a warden,” for Charlie was an Episcopalian.

“A notch higher,” ventured Mr. Furvell; “they’re in for life. I fancy an elder’s more like a bishop than anything you’ve got in your church.”

“And he’s going on the bridge deck,” I added, pointing upward through the porch roof.

“Helen means the attic,” explained my Aunt Agnes; “and it does seem too bad—but we can’t help it without turning everything upside down.”

“He’ll never notice it,” Mr. Giddens remarked assuringly. “I know in Savannah, when we have those church pow-wows, half the householders have to sleep in the bath. Is this bishop from the country?”

“I believe so,” informed Mr. Furvell. “I think the Pollocksville elder is to be your man.”

“You’ll have no end of fun with him,” Charlie predicted. “Those old Rubes are great. I hope you’ve got your bootjack handy, Mr. Lundy,” addressing my uncle; “the old chap will need it sure.”

“I’m not reckonin’ on much fun with him,” Uncle Henry answered dryly; “that’s not our custom with our guests. And I haven’t got the instrument you mention—but I’ll pull his boots off myself, if he wants any help.”

There was just the slightest flush on uncle’s cheek; hospitality was a sacred thing to him.

“Oh, by the way,” broke in Mr. Furvell, willing enough to turn the talk into another channel, “I’ve just had word that we’re going to have an outsider at the Presbytery. Dr. Paine notified me to-day that he’s bringing an intimate friend that’s visiting him for a while. I rather think he’s from Edinburgh—but I’m not sure of that. In any case, he’s a cleric—and one of our own kind. A young man, I rather think; he wants to see something of our Southern life, Dr. Paine’s letter said.”

“Where’s he going to stay?” Aunt Agnes enquired briskly. My aunt kept the census of hosts and visitors for half the town.

“Well, that’s just what I was going to speak about,” replied the minister. “You see, we’ll have to get a place extra for him—unless he can be billeted along with Dr. Paine, which I think rather unlikely. And, if you all prefer it, I could send the elder somewhere else, and give you the foreigner—just as you like, though.”

“Whatever you think best,” said Aunt Agnes, drawing her chair a little closer. Such problems were the luxuries of life to her.

I know not what impulse prompted me, but I recall, as though it all happened yesterday, the quick way I spoke up and said: “I believe we’ll take the Scotchman—I vote for the clergy.”

“You can’t,” said my mother archly smiling. “You’re not attentive enough to them when we have them here—your preference runs too distinctly along other lines.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” said I. “Anyhow, I’m for the clergy this time; I reckon it’s the Scotch flavour that catches me—and then perhaps he knew Carlyle,” for this latter had been long a favourite of mine and I had enjoyed many a good thrill—and many a good snooze—over his books.

Mother smiled. “That’s a little conceit of my daughter’s,” she said apologetically to our visitors; “she thinks she’ll write a book herself some day.” Ah me! how little she knew then that my only book would be the story of my life, or so much of it as is worth the telling. And as I write the words I wonder if any one will ever really read them—in a real book.

“No, I fear he never saw Carlyle,” informed Mr. Furvell; “he’s too young, I fancy. At least, that’s the impression I got.”

“Is he married?” Charlie suddenly broke in, holding the ebony cane out before him as if in deadly earnest.

"No, he's not—I'm quite sure of that part," the minister answered promptly; "for Dr. Paine said I mustn't have him stay where he'd be liable to catch any affection of the heart."

"Then don't send him here," cried Charlie Giddens, "for this is the danger zone." And everybody laughed but me.

"But really, speaking seriously, what do you think we'd better do about it?" pressed my Aunt Agnes, rising to adjust an awning that had got awry. Mental intensity with some women always runs to domestic observation. "I'd hate to put an Edinburgh minister in the attic," she continued thoughtfully.

"The attic hasn't anything to do with it," pronounced Uncle Henry, silent hitherto. "But I say—I say," as he looked around the company, "it's going to be the elder. I've made up my mind to that—I took a notion to this Pollocksville elder as soon as I heard of him. So we'll consider that settled, Mr. Furvell, if you please. I've got a queer kind of a notion he's going to do us all good. When does his train arrive, sir?"

"This evening at five," said Mr. Furvell. "I'll have him driven up to the house."

"Thank you, I'll meet the train myself," said my uncle.

"But, Henry," his wife expostulated, "I made an engagement for you for that very hour—Judge Burton and his wife are coming to call."

"Can't help it," said my uncle firmly; "not when there's a guest to be met. I'll have to leave them to the ladies," from which resolve my aunt knew well no argument could turn him.

It was only a few minutes before our little company broke up when Mr. Furvell rose to go. Charlie took advantage of the confusion to suggest that we two should retire to the parlour. "And you'll sing for me," he said.

Half-way along the hall he remarked merrily: "Now's your chance to begin your book, dear. Put your elder in it—and make the Edinburgh parson die of a broken heart—and put me somewhere in the introduction."

"Maybe I will," I answered a little defiantly. "You think I can't write, don't you?"

"You could do anything you like with anything—or anybody," he answered gallantly; "but don't begin your literary work till we come back from Europe," and his voice was all thrilling as he spoke, his eyes ardent as they turned on me. And his hand went out and rested lovingly on mine as I

turned the music over—for we were now at the piano—and I wondered why it was that I didn't lean forward like he did with eager outstretched arms. But I didn't. Yet he kissed me—then I said I was going to sing, as he had asked me, so it was all over in a minute.

"Sing that about the tresses," he whispered, bending over me. So I did as he bade me. And the words came softly:

"Still must you call me tender names,
Still gently stroke my tresses."

But somehow I kept thinking about the elder that was so soon to come. I know not why—it was through no will of mine—but the elder would take shape before me as about five-and-twenty years of age; and he was fair; and his accent was like to that of the Scotch Carlyle; and he had a low-crowned hat of felt—and a coat of clerical design.

V
AN ALTERNATIVE

Some things never happen more than once. And these one never can forget.

I remember exactly what I wore that evening; what it was, is of no consequence to any one but me. I have a few fragments of it yet, tatters mostly—but their colour never seems to fade.

And I can recall the errand that took me forth. It was to get some cream; for what we had didn't know when it was whipped. Such was the simple mission on which I started out, and I had a little pitcher in my hand; even then the days were almost past in which a Southern girl thought such a thing beneath her.

I hadn't gone very far when I saw Uncle Henry coming towards me. He was evidently homeward bound, returning from the train. And there was somebody with him; I could see a tall form, clothed in black, beside him—and uncle, to my surprise, was carrying a valise.

I don't know why it was, but instantly my pace slackened till I stood almost still. And once I turned and looked back towards the house; I think I held the pitcher out in front of me as if I were pointing with it. I really believe I was contemplating a retreat, but just then uncle sang out something in his cheery way; this let me know I was recognized and expected, whereat I walked calmly on to meet them.

As I came closer I kept my eyes fixed as steadfastly on uncle as though I had been looking for him all my life. I believe I bowed to him as he came up; how ridiculous it all seems now.

"Where are you off to, Helen?" he asked, glancing at the jug.

"I'm going to Humphrey's," I said, gazing into the empty pitcher; "going for cream—ours at home won't whip." Then I felt how silly this must sound to a stranger. For I knew, without being told, that this was no country elder, and that he had never heard of Pollocksville.

“Let me introduce Mr. Lord,” said my uncle, paying no further attention to my remark; “the Reverend Mr. Lord—the friend of Dr. Paine’s that Mr. Furvell told us about. He’s to be our guest. Mr. Lord, this is my niece, Miss Helen Randall.”

The stranger lifted his hat—it was a low-crowned felt—and bowed. His bow was deferential enough, but it lacked the Southern touch. Less low, less obeisant, sooner finished. And he seemed rather surprised when I extended my hand—I noticed how firm and strong was his—and he didn’t bow low again when he took it, as a Southern man would have done. Nor did he hold his hat in his hand while we spoke together; this I remarked particularly.

“My name’s not Lord, Mr. Lundy,” he said with a smile as he turned from me; “it’s Laird—not a great difference, I’ll admit. Only that’s the Scotch of it.”

“Is that so?” said my uncle interestedly. “They do sound something alike, don’t they? Perhaps I’m further wrong,” he went on smilingly; “it just occurs to me I should say Dr. Laird. Are you a doctor, sir?” enquired Uncle Henry respectfully.

The other smiled. “No,” he answered slowly, “I’m quite undecorated. You see, D.D.’s aren’t quite so—so generously distributed,” the smile widening, “on our side of the water. You’ve either got to be very brilliant—or very prosy—to get one there.”

“I’m sure you’re not one of those two,” declared my uncle.

“I’d like to know which one,” said the stranger; “however, we’ll lave it go at that, as an Irish friend of mine says. But anyhow, I’m not a doctor—very plain name mine is, Mr. Lundy; just plain Laird, Gordon Laird. Let me carry that bag,” he suddenly digressed, reaching for the valise; “it’s pretty heavy—two or three sermons there, you know.”

His offer of assistance was stoutly rejected, as any one who knew Uncle Henry could easily have foretold.

I was silent all this time. But I was busy making notes; and my pen flows easily, as if its story were of yesterday, while I record the impressions that came so fast and have remained so long. I recall how strange the Scottish voice sounded to me, not harsh and strident as I thought all Scottish voices were, but refined and cultured. The way he rolled his “r’s” and sounded his final “ings” was in decided contrast to our Southern way of slurring the one and mincing the other. Rather pleasing, too, I thought it. He was tall—taller than uncle—and his figure was of athletic build, erect and supple, as if he

had given himself freely to exercise out-of-doors. Especially noticeable were the shoulders, so broad and so well held back, giving the chest an appearance of greater expansion than it really had. But I think the face impressed me most of all. It was ruddy, as the sea-polished faces of those Scotchmen are so apt to be; a strong Scottish face it was, serious, almost stern when in repose—all Scotchmen naturally think much about Eternity—and yet the lips, thin and mobile, looked as if laughter were never far away. The mouth was really remarkable, evidently framed for public speech, although its proximity to a very resolute jaw lent it a look of Scottish fixity that really wasn't there at all, even if he was the Reverend Gordon Laird. His forehead was high—a little too narrow, I thought, to meet my view of what Carlyle would have admired—and evidently harboured much within; for I have a theory that foreheads shine if there is anything bright behind them, as cathedral windows are lightened by an altar fire. This high brow lost itself in a very comely head of hair; auburn, I must frankly state it was, but a very superior kind of auburn, the semi-ruddy wavelets having half a mind to curl after a fashion of youthful days. I verily believe they *would* have curled, had it not been for the close-buttoned vest and clerical coat he wore; these canonicals never could have kept their dignity in the neighbourhood of kinky hair. The nose was big, as all the best men's noses are. It stood out in a personal kind of way, like an independent promontory; and it had the slightest little terminal tilt—it wasn't turned up, it was aspiring.

This, I think, describes fairly well the man who was not an elder and had never heard of Pollocksville. All except the eyes, which deserve a separate paragraph. In fact, there would be no paragraphs and no chapters and no literature at all, were it not for the eyes of men—women too—and all that lies behind the eyes, all the soul of things and the passion of life and the foregleams of Eternity. Well, the eyes of the Reverend Gordon Laird were just such as the Reverend Gordon Laird had a right to have. I'm sure there is no Presbytery in Christendom, nor any bishop, nor any other human judge or authority who could as well determine just what brand of eyes would match that particular name, as could a simple maiden who had never met this certain sort of man before. And I thought the eyes and the name were a perfect match. They—the eyes, I mean—were nearer brown than anything else; the kind of eyes that could never be content to be one particular hue—they seemed to have got their blend from the sky, which, as everybody knows, selects no colour but takes toll of all. And they were frank, so frank and honest—eager, too, inquisitive, in a reverent sort of way; penetrating they seemed to be—the more penetrating because they were rather veiled—

and they looked to be in quest of truth, and love, and life. Yes, life; I think the eyes of the Reverend Gordon Laird had more of life in them than any others I have ever seen—not bright, or animated, or brilliant, or anything of that sort; but life, with all its mystery and loneliness and longing, seemed to lie deep in them, like water in a silent well.

The two men went on their way a moment later, uncle swinging the valise quite playfully to show how light it was. "I hope to see you later," said the Reverend Gordon Laird as I started on; "and perhaps I'll be introduced to that cream you're going to get," he added, in quite a non ministerial way.

"Not till it's whipped," said I, holding the pitcher in both hands.

"That's when it'll be good," replied the cleric, something of the moralist in his voice this time.

I had gone but a little way when I suddenly stopped, looked back, calculated. For an idea had come to me—and I knew a short cut home. A hasty flight through a neighbour's yard, straight under an old pine tree that George Washington was credited with planting, along a narrow alley that led to our back garden, would bring me there before those deliberate two would have arrived.

Three minutes later I was in the sitting-room, breathless almost. "It's a minister," I said, "a young minister—and he's Scotch as heather." I have often wondered since where I got this expression; but I believe I heard it from old McLaughlin. He was the only Scotchman in our whole town, and he always wore a shawl to church, and put a penny on the plate.

"Who?" said Aunt Agnes and my mother in unison. They were both in black silk, for they knew it was train time. And my aunt had donned two real tortoise-shell combs that came from Tiffany's.

"Our elder," I gasped, standing the pitcher on the mantel; "he isn't an elder at all. He's a minister—with one of those vests that fit around the throat like a sweater—the same as the Episcopalians wear—and fair hair. And I ran back to tell you not to put him in the attic," I concluded, lifting my eyes heavenward as I spoke.

"A sweater vest and fair hair!" my aunt echoed in mock gravity; "is that all he has on?"

"Not put him in the attic?" exclaimed my mother, scornful of merriment at such an hour; "why shouldn't we put him there—where would you have him put?"

“Any of the rooms,” I answered promptly; “my room.”

“Mercy, child, we’d have to get all your things out of it and turn everything upside down,” my mother returned seriously, “and they’ll be here in a few minutes. What happened to the elder?”

“I don’t know. I don’t remember. Uncle did say something about why he didn’t come—I think he’s sick, or dead, or something. But I’m not sure. And we can easily keep Mr. Laird down-stairs till we get things changed around. It wouldn’t need much—men never look into drawers and closets like women do,” I assured them.

“Mr. Laird!” echoed both my auditors almost in chorus. “Is that his name?”

“Yes,” I said, “his name’s Laird—Gordon Laird.”

“Goodness me!” exclaimed my mother, “but you’ve made good progress. I hope you didn’t call him Gordon. How old is he?”

“I don’t know,” I retorted, treating the thrust with silence, “and I don’t care—I don’t care anything about him. You know I’m not much on preachers—and anyhow, I’m going to the theatre to-night with Charlie. But I took all this trouble for your sakes,” I went on in a rather injured tone; “I didn’t suppose you’d want to coop anybody like him up at the top of the house. But I don’t care,” I concluded vehemently.

My Aunt Agnes was at the window. “They’re coming,” she announced, without turning her head. “Your Uncle Henry certainly should have sent Moses for that valise—and he certainly is tall.”

Mother by this time was at the window too. “He isn’t any taller than Mr. Giddens,” she pronounced, after a little silence.

“Well, what are you going to do about it?” I said, a trifle petulantly, for they both seemed to have forgotten I was there.

“Really I hardly know,” my aunt began reflectively; “it does seem hardly the thing to——”

“There’s no use talking about it,” my mother broke in; “it’s too late to make any change now. And anyhow, Henry wouldn’t like it, I’m sure—he’d think it wasn’t fair to the elder.”

“Sacred to the memory of the elder from Pollocksville,” chanted my aunt solemnly.

"All right," I said, reaching towards the mantel for the pitcher, "just as you like. He's not *my* guest—and I'm going for the cream."

And I reflected as I went—or if I didn't, I have often done so since—how full is life of this same proceeding. Thwarted plans and broken promises and disappointed hopes—yet all that remains for us is to take up our humdrum tasks again, to pick up our waiting pitcher and go our way through some back alley and across some homely yard—for the cream.

They were still on the porch when I got back. And Mr. Laird was swinging away in one of the big easy chairs, as much at home as if he had known us all his life. His hat was lying on the floor and his hair was hardly a bit red in the failing light. He rose as I came on to the porch.

"Did you get the cream?" he asked seriously, as if it were a matter of importance.

"Oh, yes," I said, "Lyn's thrashing away at it by this time. She's our cook, you know," I added informatively.

"I'm vastly interested in these darkies," he said as we both sat down. "We have very few of them in Edinburgh—the thermometer doesn't agree with them. They're quite a study, aren't they?" pointing as he spoke to a sable boy who was carrying a pail across the yard.

"You'll find the life here very different, won't you, sir?" my uncle remarked; "but I suppose you hear a great deal, even in Scotland, of what's called the 'Nigger problem,' don't you?"

"Yes," returned our visitor, "we're reminded of it rather startlingly sometimes—by what we see in the newspapers. But I suppose such despatches—about lynch law, I mean—are decidedly exaggerated."

Uncle's face clouded a little. "I never saw any of your papers, of course," he said; "but I should fancy 'twould be difficult to exaggerate much about some things that have happened in the South, sir."

"Then there must be some terrible scenes of brutality," rejoined Mr. Laird, looking about the circle in an evident attempt to make the conversation general.

"That depends on what you call brutality, sir," my uncle answered, his voice suddenly intense, his eyes fixed very earnestly on his guest. "We reckon here, sir—all Southern gentlemen reckon—that people who have only heard of these things, and who are not—who aren't familiar with the

situation; we reckon, sir, that they're hardly justified in pronouncing an opinion."

I think Aunt Agnes must have scented danger ahead. In any case she suddenly gave the conversation a mighty jerk in another direction. "Oh, by the way, Henry," she began, as if it had everything to do with the race question, "have you any idea what happened to the elder from Pollocksville?"

If uncle felt any surprise at the rather violent digression he concealed it remarkably well. "Yes," he answered calmly. "Mr. Furvell got word about him at the last minute. It seems he has thirteen children, and one got lost—you'd think he had enough left, wouldn't you? But he got in quite a fuss about it, and that's why he wasn't able to get away. So we'd have been left without a guest altogether if our friend hadn't happened along," and my uncle made a courtly little bow in the direction of Mr. Laird.

"Oh, I see," said the latter, evidently very interested. "I'm an alternative then. Well, I'm here anyhow—and that's the main thing."

"Oh, no, Mr. Laird, there was no alternative about it," broke in my aunt, "nothing of the sort. If our elder had come you were to go with Dr. Paine to Mrs. Keen's—and then we'd have lost you," smiling very sweetly as she spoke.

"Weel," replied Mr. Laird jocosely, " 'it's an ill wind that blaws naebody guid,' as they say in my country. If it hadn't been for that youngster straying away, I wouldn't have been here. So I'm an advocate of large families from this time on."

"So am I," said my Aunt Agnes.

"But there's a matter in connection with the elder we expected," my mother began rather timidly, "and it's something that's troubling us a little."

Mr. Laird looked as if he would like to be enlightened.

"And I may just as well tell you now," went on my mother; "it's about where we were going to put him—and that's where we have to put you."

"That's the worst of it," ejaculated my Aunt Agnes.

"You see," resumed my mother, "we thought you were going to be an elder—and we were going to put him in the attic," the dread tidings coming at last with a splash. "And we do hope you won't mind, Mr. Laird—you see if we had ever thought——"

"We won't make any apologies to our guest," my uncle now broke in, his tone indicating that he wouldn't object to being heard. "You're welcome as the flowers in May, Mr. Laird—and there's a fireplace in your room in the attic. I may be wrong, but it's always seemed to me if a fellow's got a welcome and an open fire, the attic's just as good as the parlour."

Mr. Laird looked delighted. "I'm in love with it already," he responded gleefully; "I wouldn't trade it for any room in the house. I couldn't imagine," he went on mirthfully, "what was coming. I thought it must be the dog-kennel, or a dark closet, or a wood-shed; but an attic—and a fireplace! Why, bless my heart, there's nothing in the world I love like an attic—secluded, lofty, roomy—it's the best place in the house. Let us see it now."

"Where's Moses?" said my uncle; "he'll take your valise up for you. It's plain, but it's comfortable, Mr. Laird. And if you like it, there's just one way I want you to show it."

"And what might that be?" asked our visitor.

"Don't be in any hurry about leaving," said my uncle with serious air.

"No, we'll think you don't like it if you are," chimed in my aunt.

"Where's Moses?" asked uncle again.

"I don't know where Moses is," said the Reverend Gordon Laird, his face as sober as a judge, "but one thing I do know—I've heard of Southern hospitality, and the half was never told."

Uncle bowed; Aunt Agnes smiled graciously. As for me, I had disappeared.

"What have you been up to now? You certainly did get out of the way in a hurry—you've been up to the attic yourself, haven't you, now?" for mother saw that I was flurried and out of breath when I returned.

It was a little while before I owned up. But I reckoned they'd find out sooner or later anyhow. "Well," I said at last, "yes, if you will know. I ran up and put my silver toilet set on the dresser—it helped ever so much to make things look decent. And I took up those roses from the library—they make the whole room look different."

"Those roses!" my mother echoed; "why, child, Mr. Giddens sent you those roses just this morning—they're American beauties, Helen."

"I know it," I answered calmly, "so they'll be something new—to him. Besides, there's some respect due a clergyman from Edinburgh."

VI
THE GLINT OF THE HEATHER

CHARLIE dropped in for supper that evening. I don't remember whether or not he was specially invited and it doesn't matter. He came while everybody except myself was in the last stages of preparation for the evening meal; I was in the hall as he came in.

The first thing that caught his eye—after me—was the clerical hat that hung between two of uncle's broad-rimmed grays. He put it on and made very merry over it. It was decidedly too large for him too; as soon as he noticed that, he tipped it jauntily to the back of his head—even then it looked big. The Reverend Gordon's attic was certainly the best room in his bodily edifice.

"Your elder didn't turn up?" said Charlie.

"No, he didn't come."

"And you got the clergyman?"

I nodded.

"Up-stairs right now?"

"Yes."

"In the attic?"

"That's where he is."

Charlie returned the hat to its peg. Then he took off his overcoat, disclosing a faultless evening dress, for the theatre was our objective point that night.

"What kind of a cove is this parson?" he enquired carelessly.

"He's about your age," said I.

"Nice?"

"Uncle thinks so," I answered cautiously.

“How does your mother like him—has she looked him over?”

“I really don’t know—he’s only been here an hour or two. You certainly do look nice to-night, Charlie.”

“How long is this cleric going to stay?” he pursued.

“I don’t know. I heard uncle telling him to stay as long as he could.”

“What denomination is he?”

“Belongs to the true church,” said I.

“I thought Mr. Furvell said he was Presbyterian.”

“So he is—he’s from Edinburgh. And he’s vastly interested in the darkies. They don’t grow ’em over there, it seems. He got on pretty thin ice with uncle—they were talking the nigger problem.”

“They must have been hard up for conversation,” said Mr. Giddens, with a little curl of the lip.

“But they weren’t,” I protested; “he’s a splendid talker—hush, there he’s coming now,” as I heard a footfall on the stair. “Come and meet him.”

I introduced the two men to each other. They stood talking a little in the hall—and I watched them while I listened. Charlie was in full dress, as I have said, with diamond accompaniment; Mr. Laird was in his clericals. They stood close together, chatting very pleasantly; I thought I had never seen two finer types of men, both strong and straight and tall—though Charlie wasn’t quite so tall. The Southerner had the keenest face, I thought, bright and animated, with eager, penetrating eyes, and his whole bearing was that of a high-minded and successful man of the world. They were discussing “futures” at the time, I think, suggested doubtless by preliminary remarks about the weather and the prospect of the cotton crop. I know I was surprised to observe that the Reverend Gordon Laird was by no means ignorant of the subject; strange subject, too, when you come to think of it—*futures*, which comprise a great deal more than cotton!

Perhaps Charlie had the keener face, as I have said, but there was more of insight in Mr. Laird’s. His were the more wistful eyes, as if they were looking for something not to be found on the surface. And really, of the two, the Scotchman seemed to be doing the most of the inspecting; I mean, by that, that Charlie didn’t appear to have the slightest chance to patronize him, as business men are so apt to do with clergymen. For the minister, his clerical coat and collar to the contrary notwithstanding, impressed one as having a certain order of business that was just as important as the other’s;

and he seemed to pride himself on it, too, in a reserved sort of way. In fact, I should hardly say this at all, since I don't know exactly how I could defend it—but there was an undefinable something about him that made one feel Mr. Laird reckoned his work quite as necessary to the world's good as that of any prosperous business man, even of a wealthy ship owner from Savannah.

"Have you been long in our country, sir?" Mr. Giddens took advantage of the first pause to enquire.

"No," said the other. "I'm quite a tenderfoot—it's only two weeks since I landed at New York. I came straight South to see Dr. Paine; he took a post-graduate session in Edinburgh, and I met him there. We scraped up quite a friendship—and that's how I came to visit him."

"Do you sail from New York, returning, Mr. Laird?" I ventured, thinking I ought to bear some part in the conversation.

"That's all very uncertain," he answered thoughtfully; "I've been in communication with the Colonial Committee; and it's just possible I may take work in Canada. They're sorely in need of men there, it seems."

"It's a wonderful country," pronounced Charlie; "I spent a week once between Montreal and Quebec. There's untold wealth in Canada, if it were only exploited."

"That's what I have heard," said Mr. Laird; "and I'd like to lend a hand," he added quietly, the earnestness of his eyes interpreting his words. But Charlie evidently did not understand him.

"You mean in the way of investment, sir?"

"Yes," said the Reverend Gordon Laird; "yes, I guess that's it—yes, investment."

This somewhat enigmatical conversation was terminated by the advent of the other members of the family, all quite ready for the supper that was waiting. And a decidedly animated circle it was that surrounded our well-laden board. Uncle was in fine spirits, as he ever was when he had congenial company, and the honours of his attention were pretty evenly divided between the Scotchman and the Southerner.

It was delightful to watch the interest and surprise of our clerical guest, so new and different did everything appear to him. For our dear Southland has fashions all its own, each one of them more delicious than another. Perhaps this is especially true of what we eat, and of how we go about it. We

had a coloured boy with a long feather fan whose duty it was to guard us from the flies. This amused him vastly; especially once when my aunt motioned him to look—the dusky Washington was almost asleep, leaning against the wall. And so many of our dishes seemed to strike the foreigner as the newest and most palatable things on earth. We had the savoury rock in little fish-shaped dishes—they looked all ready to swim—and sweet potatoes and corn bread and fried chicken, and hot biscuits too, and a lot of other things Scotchmen never see. It was lovely to watch Aunt Agnes' face, brightening with every recurring exclamation of surprise or pleasure from our visitor.

On the other hand he was hardly less interesting to us. A really new type is something to which a little Southern town is seldom treated—we are so fearfully native-born. And Gordon Laird (the Reverend can't be always used) seemed to bring with him the flavour of the world without. His accent was so different, as I have said; and many of his terms were so unfamiliar to us. For instance, we soon remarked that he referred to the Episcopal church as the Church of England; and once or twice he spoke of the "Kirk Session," which had to be explained; and he rarely used the term "pastor," or "preacher," as we did—it was always "minister" with him. It was most interesting, too, to hear him talk of Edinburgh, of its castle, its Holyrood, its Princes Street, its Scott's monument, its haunts of Knox and memories of Burns.

"Fo' de Lawd, Miss Helen, dat new preacher, he's got a heap o' learnin'," Lyddie said one day, "an' he knows how to let it out, dat's sho'."

That very first night, that first supper, I mean, found us all listening with great intentness to his description of much we had hardly ever heard of before. I remember he spoke of higher criticism, giving the names of two or three great Scottish scholars, and he seemed a little disappointed to find we had never heard of the latter and but little more than heard of the former. He spoke, it seemed to me, as if this higher criticism were a matter of great importance, almost as if it were troubling his own soul—but this I did not understand till long after.

The discussion ran so steadily along church lines that even Charlie, who was not very strong on matters ecclesiastical, contributed a question.

"What church does your Queen belong to, Mr. Laird?" he asked.

"To the Presbyterian," replied our guest, looking very candidly at the questioner; "when she is in Scotland, that is."

“Oh,” said Charlie, “I always thought she belonged to the State church.”

“So she does,” replied the other, “and that is the State church of Scotland.”

“Miss Helen thinks that’s fine,” broke in my uncle. “I’m sure her far-off ancestors must have been Scotch Presbyterians, Mr. Laird. She’s a regular Puritan—in theory.”

“Then you’ll be going to the service at the opening of Presbytery to-night, Miss Randall,” said Mr. Laird, turning to me.

I was silent, not knowing just what to say. Yet I felt that uncle’s statement was quite just all the time. For, ever since a child, I had had a kind of passionate devotion to the church of my fathers; yet it is only fair to add that if there was one girl in all our town who would not have been called religious, who would, in fact, have been called a gay society girl—what a poor garish definition that seems to me now!—I was that very one.

“What her uncle says about Helen reminds me of something I must tell you, Mr. Laird,” began my mother, breaking the silence that had followed his rather pointed question. “I always taught her the Shorter Catechism when she was a little girl—made her learn it, at least—and one Sunday afternoon I was following her around the yard trying to get her to answer what is Sanctification; well, she suddenly turned to me, and what do you think she said?”

“Couldn’t imagine, I’m sure,” answered Mr. Laird.

“ ‘What’s the use, mother,’ she said, ‘of teaching me all this—when perhaps I won’t marry a Presbyterian at all?’ ”

“All the more need of it then,” replied our guest amid the laugh that followed; “it won’t be wasted anyhow, whoever the lucky man may be. It’s wonderful how that catechism stays with you, when once it gets in the blood. I learned it on the hills of Scotland,” he went on, his deep eyes brightening as if the memory gave him joy, “and I hardly ever wander now in wild or lonely regions without its great words coming back to me. They go well together, I always think—they’re both lofty.”

“On the hills?” echoed Mr. Giddens, who had never lived outside the city; “did your father send you there to learn it?—pretty hard lines, I should say.”

“Oh, no,” Mr. Laird answered simply, “my work lay there. I used to take care of sheep on the hills—I was a herd laddie, as they call them in

Scotland. My father is a shepherd."

I felt, rather than saw, the consternation that came on every face.

"What did you say about your father?" my uncle asked involuntarily, looking up impulsively from his plate. Now, uncle was a gentleman, if ever one was born, but this intimation fairly swept him off his feet. "You were speaking about your father, were you not?" he amended, thinking the question more delicate in this form.

"Yes," said Mr. Laird, evidently quite unconscious of having caused a sensation. "I was saying my father is a shepherd. He takes care, along with other herds, of the gentlemen's flocks in Scotland—in Midlothian. The shepherd gets so many sheep for himself each year—that's part of his hire, you see."

"Yes, yes, I see," rejoined my uncle. "Have some more of the ice-cream, Mr. Laird. Washington, pass the ice-cream to the gentleman." It was funny, had it not been so real, to see uncle's consternation. This was something new to my patrician relative.

"Do let me help you to a little more of this chocolate cake," broke in my aunt.

"And your coffee cup is empty," added my mother. Both showed the sudden perturbation that had laid hold of uncle, for which the only outlet was this sudden freshet of hospitality.

"No, thank you," our guest answered quietly, "I've had quite enough—you Southerners would soon kill a man with kindness. Yes," he went on, resuming the interrupted theme, "the catechism goes well with the shepherd's crook; if there's any one calling in the world that's been productive of plain living and high thinking, it's the shepherd's."

"Half of that programme appeals to me," laughed Charlie Giddens, helping himself generously to the chocolate cake. "I'm afraid I'd make a poor shepherd." Charlie seemed unable to keep his eyes from Mr. Laird's face; this candour of biography was quite beyond him.

"But it's a fact," our Scotch visitor went on quite earnestly; "it's wonderful the difference there has been, as a class, between the shepherds and the ploughmen, in Scotland. The shepherds have been so much superior; their eyes were constantly lifted to the hills, you see, and the others had to keep theirs on the ground. Besides, their work developed a sense of responsibility—and it took a tender man to make a good shepherd. Oh, yes, the shepherds of Scotland have been a noble race of men."

“And your father is still living in Scotland?” enquired my mother from across the table.

“Yes,” he answered; “yes, he’s still living.”

“That’s a phase of life we haven’t been privileged to see,” my uncle remarked, concluding quite a lengthy silence; “indeed, we haven’t seen anything of your Scottish life at all. I have often thought I’d love especially to see Edinburgh.”

“I’d sooner see the shepherds on the hills,” cried I. “I’d love to see the heather—and the mists rolling back over the mountains, like I’ve read about in Scott.”

“Have you never been to the old world, Miss Helen?” our guest enquired of me.

“No, never,” I replied; “I’ve never been from under the stars and stripes.”

“But she’s contemplating a European trip, Mr. Laird,” Mr. Giddens broke in, looking very knowingly at me.

“Yes,” chimed my mother, a playful smile lurking about her mouth, “perhaps you’ll meet over there before very long.”

Mr. Laird turned and looked at me. I know my face betrayed me. But if he put two and two together he didn’t give us the result. “I hope you’ll bring your mother with you when you come,” was all he said.

“But Mrs. Randall’s a poor sailor,” quoth Charlie Giddens.

“So am I,” was my remark.

“Then you must choose a fair-weather season for your voyage,” pressed Charlie, maintaining an excellent gravity.

“But you can’t always tell,” said I. “Often the storms don’t come till you get out to sea.”

VII
THE GLORY OF THEIR STRENGTH

We went to the theatre that night, Charlie and I, as we had arranged. But one-half of us didn't enjoy it very much. The play was a light, frivolous thing, and I so defined it to Charlie before the second act was through.

"I thought you liked the gay and festive sort," he said; "I do believe this preachers' convocation is having a depressing influence on you," which remark I resented not a little; whatever my weaknesses were, I knew susceptibility to the clergy was not one of them.

"Nothing of the sort," I retorted; "but the thing isn't true to life—life was never one long cackle like that. Besides, they haven't any fire on, and it's cold—and I'm going home after the next act."

Which I did, sure enough, and took Charlie with me. Our seats were near the front; and I must confess I did enjoy our procession down the aisle. I could see the looks of admiration on every hand—of envy, too, from some maidenly and matronly eyes. Charlie was so tall and straight and handsome, and had such an original head of hair. Besides, most of our townspeople knew he was an aristocrat—our little city made a specialty of aristocracy—and absolutely all of them knew that he was rich. The darkies had a good deal to do with this, I fancy. My admirer had come from far away, from a city, too, and all the sons of Ham invest the stranger from a distance with the glory of wealth untold. But white folks aren't so very different after all; it's a very odd sort of girl that doesn't take some satisfaction out of these far-travelled pilgrims that come hundreds of miles, and stay several days at the best hotel, just to worship at her feet. A local sweetheart is all very well in his way—but the whole town doesn't know when he comes. Besides, it's so convenient for the local to pay his homage that it may mean very much or very little. But when a lover comes across a couple of states, leaving behind him a big city—and all the girls that are sorry to see him go, that's the best of it—that is something else, as we used to say in the South. It means his

temperature must be about a hundred and twenty in the shade, as I have heard Uncle Henry say many a time.

Yes, I was proud enough of Charlie as we walked the full length of the theatre that night, he keeping close behind and carrying my white opera cloak on his arm. I remember an old maid—and they are the best authority on such matters—telling me that Charlie had a very caressing way of carrying a cloak, as if it were a sacred thing. I have thought quite a little over this, and I believe there's something in it.

I cannot say I was sorry when I heard voices in the library as we came in the house. And that's a bad sign when a girl's in love. There should be no such music to a love-lorn pair as dead silence in the library when they come home through the dark. When the poet sang of voices of the night I'm sure he meant just two.

The Presbytery meeting was evidently over, for they were all home, Mr. Furvell among them. Now I should have said at the outset that Mr. Furvell, although he was our pastor and much beloved at that, was really quite a Puritan of a man. And I was sure, as soon as he shook hands with me that night, that he was concerned about my soul.

"Did you enjoy the play, Miss Helen?" he said, looking as solemnly at me as though I had spent the evening where Dives was when he asked for a drop of water to cool his tongue.

"No," said I, "it was a fool play," whereat Mr. Furvell looked a little comforted.

"We had a beautiful service at the Presbytery," he went on, his solemnity but little diluted; "the Lord was with us, Miss Helen," with an intonation that implied a monopoly. "You'd have been more profited if you had been there. Don't you think so, Mr. Laird?"

I fancy none of us learned much from our visitor's reply. Whatever it was, it was quite evasive; but I remember that he looked at me instead of his questioner—and I felt a little rising anger that my own minister should have put me in this light before a stranger. He would have found out what a frivolous heathen I was quite soon enough, I thought, without any assistance of this kind from Mr. Furvell. The conversation seemed to flag a little after this, and it wasn't very long till Charlie and I slipped off into the library. I didn't slip as cheerfully as Charlie. And he hadn't got more than well begun upon a general criticism of Mr. Laird before uncle knocked at the door—

uncle was a very cautious man—"We're going to have prayers; will you and Mr. Giddens come in to worship?"

Charlie gave a little gasp. "We're at our devotions right now ourselves," he said, so low that uncle could not hear. Then we had a swift little debate. I was for prayers, and Charlie said he believed they had brought that whole Presbytery together just to convert me. Which, I retorted, would be like training all the guns of the American navy on one little house fly.

Anyhow, we went in—even Charlie couldn't have done anything else—and the Reverend Gordon Laird had the Bible in his hand.

"Do you sing?" he suddenly enquired, looking up from the book.

"Who?" asked my Aunt Agnes, quite amazed.

"Oh! I mean, do you have singing at family worship? It's a very common custom in Scotland—they usually go together."

Of course we had never heard of such a thing. In fact, family worship in any form was one of the dainties we kept for visitors—if they were able to help themselves.

So Mr. Laird spoke a few words about their Scottish Psalmody—I had never heard the term before—and he said there were no hymns to touch them, for strength and grandeur. I consider this epoch-making, in a certain sense; for the psalms of David have been the songs in the house of my pilgrimage for long years now.

Suddenly uncle asked him to sing one for us. He seemed quite willing, and we all listened eagerly; except Charlie, who thought, I fancied, that it was a waste of precious time.

I love to sit and think again of that wonderful experience. Uncle was there, and my Aunt Agnes, and my precious mother; my promised husband, too, was of the little company. I can see again the look of expectation, surprise, and almost wonder as the young minister, with serious mien, sang us one of the psalms of his native land. He chose the eighty-ninth—I know them nearly all by number now. Our visitor's voice was not so cultured as some I have heard, but it was clear and sweet, and his ear was true,—and, best of all, his whole soul seemed to be in the great words as they rose slowly from his lips. The words are so noble that I must write them out.

"Oh! greatly blessed the people are
The joyful sound that know—
In brightness of Thy face, oh, Lord,
They ever on shall go.

"They in Thy name shall all the day
Rejoice exceedingly
And in Thy righteousness shall they
Exalted be on high."

So ran the mighty song. But I think we felt the grandeur of it most when he sang the next two lines:

"Because the glory of their strength
Doth only stand in Thee,"

which impressed me then, and still impresses me, as the most majestic union of words I ever heard in any form of religious song.

"That's wonderful!" said my mother as the psalm was finished.

"Beautiful!" contributed my uncle; "sounds like it ought to be sung by a race of giants."

"So it was," said Mr. Laird. "The martyrs have sung those words—hundreds of them. That psalm was a favourite with the Covenanters."

"The what?" interjected Mr. Giddens. "The Covenanters, did you say? Who were they?"

"The Covenanters," replied Mr. Laird. "And I consider that's the greatest name ever given to a band of men."

"Were they a religious sect?" asked Charlie.

"No, sir—they were a religious army," answered Mr. Laird. "And I've got their blood in my veins. Some of my ancestors laid down their lives for their faith—and this world never saw an aristocracy like to them." His cheeks were flushed, his whole face animated with a wonderful light—and he looked really beautiful. Never shall I forget the expression on the faces round me; they didn't know what to make of this so unfamiliar kind of man.

But Charlie was not through with the subject yet. "Well, that kind of thing may have suited them," he began again, "and there certainly is a kind of strength about it. But I don't like it as well as our church hymns," he continued, smiling.

“I didn’t think you would,” replied the minister, not smiling at all.

Then Mr. Laird took the Bible and went on with worship. He first read a bit from the Scriptures, though what part it was I cannot remember. After that he prayed. A beautiful, simple prayer—I thought it was so manly, though that’s a strange word to apply to a prayer. But he never did think, as I came to know well enough later on, that God cares to have us abase ourselves just for the sake of doing so. Strangely enough, the only one thing I definitely remember about his prayer is that he said: “Give us a good night’s rest,” and it struck me as a beautifully simple petition.

There is one feature of that evening’s worship that lingers with me very vividly. After we knelt down—his chair was a few feet from mine—Charlie crept over to the sofa where I was kneeling and bowed down beside me. It thrilled me so—perhaps not in terms of Charlie Giddens exactly—but it was the first time I ever thought of love and prayer going together. And I recall how overpoweringly it came to me that there could, surely, be nothing more sweet than this, that two who loved each other should pray together, and should feel that even death could never separate them, because their love was set in the light of the Invisible. Charlie took my hand, too, and I rather think his eyes were open—I know his face was turned to mine—but I couldn’t be sure of this, for my own were tightly closed.

I went outside the door with Charlie after he had said good-night to all but me; and I do not think the silent night ever appeared so glorious before. There was no moon, but the stars were shining calmly overhead, and a sweet stillness, fragrant with the breath of spring, was all about us. I could hear the twittering of birds in the magnolia tree, and wondered if they were the love-lorn pair I had seen taking shelter there.

I fancy I was still thinking of the great words and the great thoughts of the swelling psalm, but Charlie seemed to have forgotten all about it. He evidently didn’t want anything but me. And his voice was full of tender passion as he began and pressed his suit again—right away, he said, it must be right away. And he rang the changes a little on the yacht and Europe—I wished so much he hadn’t mentioned these, for I felt, in a kind of hungry way, that they had nothing to do with the real case. He told me how much he loved me, and how empty life would be without me at his side—but this was in between, and I felt, away down in my heart, that he wasn’t putting things in their proper places. But he put his arm about me, and kissed me, three or four times, I think. And then he tried again to make me promise—but I wouldn’t.

"When we go abroad, we'll go and see where that parson used to herd the sheep," he said, and laughed. "It's a wonder he didn't bring his collie with him, isn't it?" and I felt my cheeks burn with resentment at the jest. But I didn't let him see it—for I felt I had no right to resent it. Besides, he *had* herded sheep on the hills—he said so himself—and that was the worst of it. I thought something like that then, at least, poor fool.

"Let me see its light again," said Charlie, taking my hand and looking at my engagement ring; "it makes the whole night radiant, doesn't it?" with which he kissed it, and held it to my lips that I might do the same. I couldn't help glancing proudly at it, too, for it was a beauty—and mother said no girl of our circle had ever had one so valuable.

Then Charlie went away and I went back into the parlour. They were all there except Mr. Laird.

"Well, I took him to the attic myself," said my Aunt Agnes, "and it was right amusing to see how he went on over it. I had told Lyn to light the fire, and it really looked cozy in the dark when we went in. He said it was a room fit for a king—said he felt sorry for the elder. Oh! he was just lovely about it."

My mother's mind was engrossed with something else. "Wasn't that mortifying at the table," she began, "about his having been a shepherd, I mean—he doesn't understand our way of looking at things here, or he'd never have mentioned it. I saw Mr. Giddens fairly jump in his chair."

"I thought it was lovely," I broke in with a vehemence I could not restrain; "I don't see any disgrace in that. I think it's all the more to his credit."

"Oh! no, of course, I don't mean it's any disgrace," my mother exclaimed, "but—it's so funny. It's so different from anything we've been used to."

"You're right there," said my uncle, rising and moving towards the gas jet, for he was sleepy. "That's the truth all right—he's different enough from what we usually see. I think he's refreshing, if you ask me. But he had better go slow about expressing his views on these niggers—if he doesn't want to get into trouble. That's one thing sure."

"I wish he had told us a little more about his folks," said my Aunt Agnes, yawning, and winding up her watch. "Did you notice he didn't tell us anything about his father, except that he was a shepherd—that he *is* a

shepherd," she revised, "for he's still living. I do wonder if he's engaged," she added, placing the screen in front of the fire as she spoke.

"Of course," said I; "certainly he's engaged."

"How could you know?" queried my mother instantly.

"Well, of course, I don't—but why shouldn't he be?"

No argument could avail against this very easily, and the matter stood as before.

"Oh!" my uncle suddenly exclaimed, his hand upon the chandelier, "I forgot to give him this letter—Mr. Furvell gave it to me for him at the church; it was sent on in care of Dr. Paine. But he can get it in the morning," as he deposited it on the mantel.

I promptly crossed the room and picked it up.

"You inquisitive old maid!" said my mother in mild reproach. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" as I stood examining the missive.

"I wanted to see what the old-country stamp is like," I answered calmly, my eyes still on the envelope. Aunt Agnes was looking over my shoulder in an instant.

"It's a man's handwriting," said she.

"Oh!" I said, "yes, I reckon it is."

"And it's got Virginia spelled with two n's," she added sorrowfully.

"You don't mean to say so!" said my mother, moving over to join us.

"The more the merrier," said my uncle; "and I'm going to put out the gas, if it had a dozen. All aboard for the upper deck."

Wherewith we all moved towards the stairs. "The last I saw of your Gordon Laird," said my aunt to me as we went up together, "he was standing with his face hidden in those roses."

"Oh!" said I, "did you tell him who it was took them to his room?"

"No, never thought of it."

"I'm so glad," said I—with a little sigh.

VIII
"DEALINGS WITH THE SAMARITANS"

THERE'S something lovely about having a lovely time. Now I know that looks like a very foolish sentence when one reads it over after having written it down. So many sentences are like that; you think they're strong, beautiful, full of meaning and bright with fancy, while you're getting them out—then they appear so pale and thin when you look them over. They're like the fish that you're playing in the water: "What a whopper," you say, "I've got this time!"—but how thin and small when it lies panting on the grass.

Yet I venture to repeat, as Mr. Furvell says in his sermons, I venture to repeat: there's something lovely about having a lovely time. In this, I mean, that it can never be taken away from you. There will, you know, be cold, dark days, and bitter disappointments, and burning tears, and emptiness of heart, till you quite forget that ever you were glad. But, even so, all these can never rob you of that one hour, or day, or month of pleasure unalloyed.

Mr. Laird used to say something like this in the long happy days that followed his arrival. It had not been hard to persuade him to prolong his visit. Fortunately for us, his friend Dr. Paine was engaged to go, the very next week, to the meeting of the General Assembly at Dallas; so it was arranged Mr. Laird should tarry with us till he returned, perhaps longer—for I think it was about decided that he was to take up mission work in Canada.

When I say those days were happy, I mean in a perfectly sane and unfeverish kind of way, of course, with no thought of—of what every woman looks for in every book she reads. That is, no calm and courageous thought of it; although I shouldn't wonder if something of that, more or less diluted, lies back of all real joy. Anyhow, Mr. Laird said that very thing, and more than once, about the unloseableness of one hour or day of real happiness. Whatever has been before of pain, or whatever may be ahead of sorrow, he said, neither the one nor the other can ever make pure gladness as if it had never been. It belongs to you forever, said the Reverend Gordon Laird.

I should have known that I had no right to be so happy. For one thing, Charlie had gone back to Savannah, and I should have been miserable over that, if conscience had been half as faithful as it should have been. Then, besides, he was waiting for my decision about Europe and the yacht—and I had no claim to happiness till that was settled. And, most of all, I wasn't sure about my love for him—very far from it—and so I should have been quite wretched.

But I wasn't. I was shamefully happy. We were all happy, I think, to see our visitor so thoroughly delighted with everything about him. After all is said and done, American people take it as a compliment when old-country folks seem to like them. I don't think we ever forget, even the most democratic of us, that they have dukes and lords across the sea. And Mr. Laird did seem so perfectly happy. For one thing, the weather was delightful, and morning after morning found him and me—there was no one else to act as cicerone—walking or driving about the lovely haunts that surrounded our quiet little city. Everything was in the glory of bud and blossom; fragrance was wafted on every breeze; the wistaria and the yellow jasmine were gathered from a thousand trees. Sometimes we had picnics too, making our way on our asthmatic little launch up the winding river; sometimes we went together to the oyster market at the wharf, where he seemed to be quite enchanted with the negroes' singing. "On the other side of Jordan," I remember, was a great favourite of his, and he used to get them to sing it again and again.

Indeed, everything connected with negroes seemed to have a strange fascination for Mr. Laird. This perplexed me considerably, and mortified me not a little too. Of course, having spent all my life among them, they were a commonplace lot to me, and I regarded them with the kindly disdain which marks every Southern girl's attitude to the negro race. But Mr. Laird seemed to find a new vein in them—and, besides, he was so intensely human and so tremendously interested in all human things. But he didn't know how volcanic was the ground he walked on when he came into contact with the darkies; and I may as well go aside here to tell how this provided the only jarring note in all that memorable visit.

One day we were all on the piazza, engaged in that most delightful occupation of waiting for dinner to be announced, catching savoury whiffs the while that betokened its near approach. All of a sudden a coal-black negress came through the back gate and stood at the foot of the porch steps. Beside her stood a little curly-headed boy, about three years of age, clinging to his mother's hand. She had been asking for something at the kitchen door,

I think—they were always asking for something, those darkies. Of course we simply looked at her; I don't believe uncle quite did that—I think he pretended to be reading a newspaper. But Mr. Laird, in his impulsive way, went right down the steps and began talking to the woman. It was really aggravating to see how flattered she seemed to be by his attention. And then, to our horror—clergyman as he was and in full ministerial dress—Mr. Laird actually took that pickaninny up, and flung him onto his shoulder, pretending to be a horse or something of that sort. And the little negro dug his hands into Mr. Laird's ruddy locks, while his Anglo-Saxon steed made an exhibition of himself, galloping once or twice around the flower bed. The mother grinned with delight in a way that I knew fairly maddened uncle.

When Mr. Laird finally returned, panting, to his chair, uncle had quite a time controlling himself to speak.

"Do you know who that child is, sir?" said my uncle, keeping his voice under fine control.

"No," said Mr. Laird, innocent of everything; "no, I never saw him before—do you, Mr. Lundy?"

Uncle threw his newspaper on the floor without a word. Mr. Laird, still all unconscious, meekly stooped and picked it up. "I guess I'd better go and fix my hair before dinner," he said, running his fingers through the startled thatch.

"You'd better wash your hands, sir," said my uncle sternly, oblivious to muttered appeals from both Aunt Agnes and my mother; "I'll tell you who that child is, sir—it's a coon."

"What?" said Mr. Laird, beginning to apprehend.

"It's a coon, sir," my uncle repeated, as sternly as if he had been defining some cub of the jungle; "it's a nigger coon."

"Well?" said Mr. Laird, looking uncle very steadfastly in the eye.

"Well," echoed my uncle, "yes, well." Then he paused, but soon gathered fresh strength. "And I hardly need to tell you, I presume, sir, that it's not our custom to fondle darkey babies—they're supposed to soil white hands, sir," he declared, waxing warm.

Mr. Laird looked innocently at his own. "It hasn't injured mine any, Mr. Lundy," he said simply. "I don't quite understand what caused the—the panic," he concluded, still looking very steadfastly at uncle.

“Well, then, sir, I may as well tell you plainly that such an action as yours would be considered quite—quite improper, to say the least. We don’t take familiarities like that with negro children.”

“It’s a harmless enough looking little chap,” responded Mr. Laird, nodding towards the receding youngster. He was toddling along beside his mother, his hand in hers.

“They’re harmless enough while you keep them in their place, sir,” retorted my uncle. “But you must know that our people down here have their own way of doing that. And you don’t understand the situation, sir, you don’t understand the situation,” repeated Uncle Henry, employing the favourite formula of the South. “For instance, I heard you express surprise at something the other day. You remember when Smallwood, the rector of the Coloured Episcopal Church, called to ask Mrs. Lundy for a subscription—you seemed horrified that he went to the back door, because he was a preacher and dressed up like a bishop.”

Mr. Laird nodded.

“Well, sir, if he was the Archbishop of Canterbury—or the Pope of Rome—the back door’s the place for him—so long as that’s the colour of his skin. There isn’t a self-respecting white family in the city but would shut the front door in his face. You understand, sir?”

“I don’t think any more of them for that,” was the quiet retort of Mr. Laird.

“That may be, sir. They’ll stand your contempt, sir—but they won’t let a pack of negroes walk all over ’em,” my uncle’s gorge rising again. “And I hope to God none of our neighbours saw you on the gallop round our back yard with a negro brat astride of you. You’d be finished here, sir, if they did. Just before that wench came in here with her young ’un, I was going to tell you that I met Mr. Furvell, and he asked me to give you an invitation, for him, to preach in our church next Sunday. Well, sir, I hope it’ll stand all right—but if it got round town that you made a saddle-horse out of yourself for a nigger whelp to ride, you’d have the church to yourself, sir; I reckon a few old women might go to hear you, but you wouldn’t have enough men there to take up the collection.”

“I can’t do it, Mr. Lundy,” said the minister, with amazing quietness.

“Can’t do what?” demanded uncle.

“Can’t preach for your friend,” replied the other. “I’m engaged.”

“Engaged for what?”

“Engaged to preach.”

“Where?” said uncle, quite forgetful now of the debate. I think the same question came in the same breath from my mother and Aunt Agnes.

“In the Coloured Methodist Church—I think they call it Zion,” Mr. Laird informed us calmly. “I was there the other day at a funeral—pretty boisterous funeral it was, too—and the preacher got hold of me. They took up a collection,” Mr. Laird laughed, “and that was how they located me. I didn’t have anything but a shilling—a quarter, you call it. Well, he invited me to preach for him next Sabbath, and I agreed. So I won’t be able to oblige Mr. Furvell.”

“You agreed, sir?”

“Yes, Mr. Lundy, I agreed,” repeated the stoical Scotchman.

“Good God!” said my Uncle Henry. My uncle was not a profane man—but this was something extra.

“Don’t get excited, Henry, don’t,” began my mother; “Mr. Laird can easily change all that—he can get released from his engagement. He didn’t know we wanted him in our church.”

“I’m not excited, ma’am,” puffed my uncle; “I was never calmer in my life—but the thing’s preposterous, madam. It’s utterly absurd—it’s ridiculous.”

“Yes, yes,” broke in my Aunt Agnes, “of course, it’s the easiest thing in the world to arrange. All Mr. Laird has to do is to explain to that coloured preacher that——”

“But I can’t,” interrupted Mr. Laird; “that is, I won’t.” The word fell strangely on the ears of Southern ladies. “I gave him my promise—and that’s the end of it. I’ll preach in Zion Church—or whatever they call it—next Sabbath morning. If the Lord will,” he added, with what appeared to us all quite superfluous piety. I didn’t know then that Scotch people never take any chances.

“But you don’t realize what you’re doing, sir,” remonstrated my uncle; “you fail to realize——”

“I’m doing what no man will prevent,” broke in our visitor, and his eye was flashing like the diamond on my finger; “I’m going to preach the Gospel to them, if I get the chance.”

“That’s all right,” began my uncle, “that’s all right in its way, but——”

“What’s all right in its way?” demanded the Reverend Gordon Laird, his voice quite resounding now.

“That’s all right—that Gospel business,” explained my uncle, evidently a little at a loss. “The Gospel’s all right in its place, but——”

“Thank you,” gave back Mr. Laird, his strong Scotch lip trembling, “you’re very magnanimous, sir.”

“But you don’t know what you’re exposing yourself to,” pursued my uncle, apparently deaf to Mr. Laird’s retort. “They’ll make a fool of you in the pulpit, sir. I’ll tell you something, sir. Your sermon will be wasted. We had a man here once—a white man—an evangelist, who expected to move on anyhow. And he tried this little trick of yours—he preached to those coons in their own church one day. And I heard later how they made a fool of him. He preached about folks having to use the means. Good sermon, too, sir. But he was no sooner through than the nigger preacher got up after him—and he said he’d give them a little illustration. Then he told them a ribald yarn, sir, right in the church; said he and his ten-year-old brother were in bed once, and they heard their mother telling their father of some devilment they’d been up to; and the father said he’d go up-stairs when he had finished his supper. Well, this nigger preacher went on to say he got up to pray—but his brother—his brother believed in using the means; and so he said he wouldn’t pray, but he’d get up and put something on. That’s what he told them, sir—an indecent tale—and the white preacher had to sit and hear it,” concluded my uncle, his cheeks burning with indignation.

“I won’t give the black brother a chance to illustrate,” said Mr. Laird stolidly; “I’ll close the service when I’m through.” Then he laughed.

“You’re trifling with me, sir,” said my Uncle Henry chokingly, rising as he spoke. I saw the quick pallor come to the cheek of my Aunt Agnes; as for my mother, she was fairly trembling. As for me—well, I was terrified.

But just at this crisis a remarkable thing occurred. Mr. Laird didn’t seem to notice my uncle’s movement at all. Indeed, he was not looking in his direction, but sat gazing intently out towards the road that ran down to the river and the bridge. Involuntarily my eyes followed his, and a moment sufficed to reveal the object of his interest. For down the road towards us there crept a fragile figure, swaying unsteadily, overborne with weakness and her heavy load. This too was a negro woman, but cast in finer mould than the stalwart black who had disappeared from view. The one who had

just hove in sight, as I could see even at that distance, was a comely creature, more white than black, but yet bearing the fatal hue.

She was heavy laden, as I have implied. One arm bore a great bundle enclosed in a white sheet—laundry, doubtless—while on the other she carried a plump and complacent infant, crowing as it came, in that fine oblivion of weight which marks the procession of the heaviest babies everywhere. The young mother was pressing towards the river; a rusty skiff lay beside the bridge, in which, no doubt, she was to make her way to the negro settlement on the farther shore. She seemed ready to faint from the fatigue of her double burden, yet she pressed on with almost rapid steps, as if she must keep up till she reached the boat.

It was this that had attracted the attention of Mr. Laird, so rapt in observance that he evidently did not mark my uncle's movements. For the latter had hardly risen before our visitor sprang quickly to his feet—I can see him now, the tall black-robed figure, with high brow and auburn hair—and strode down swiftly towards the road. Another moment brought him alongside of the exhausted negress, whose white eyes could be seen wearily surveying him as he approached. Without a word he seized both burdens from her arms, the baby held high aloft as he led the way down to the boat. The mother straightened herself and followed closely, as if she had taken a new lease of life—it was not all due to the burdens she had lost, I'm sure—and the heavy baby crowed with delight at this improved style of locomotion. When, lo—*miserabile dictu!* as I learned in Virgil—this second pickaninny, with that tonsorial instinct which seems to mark the race, plunged its pudgy fingers where those of its predecessor had held high revel one brief half hour agone, squealing for very joy as it clutched the auburn mane of the Reverend Gordon Laird.

"Don't that beat the—the Dutch?" muttered my Uncle Henry from the porch, gazing at the tall and supple form, the now laughing and half boyish face, as our guest strode on towards the river, the baby and the bale like feathers in his arms. A funny smile was on uncle's face, half of contempt, half of admiration. "Those two brats both into his hair!" he murmured to himself—"and I sure enough got into his wool," as the grin deepened on his face.

He stood gazing. Then, recalling his sacred principles, he broke out anew: "Good heavens, he's going over to Slabtown with her," for our undaunted guest had by this time landed the bale in the bow of the skiff. Still holding the baby high, he took the woman's hand and helped her over the gunwale into the boat. A moment later we could see his shirt-sleeves

glistening in the sun, he himself seated in the middle of the skiff, starting to pull vigorously for the other shore.

"Let him go," said my uncle between his teeth; "he's chosen his company and he can have it. By heavens," he went on hotly, "I was never so insulted in my life. What the—the dickens kind of a man is this Scotchman anyhow?—I've seen men shot for less than this. I remember once in Texas ——"

"But, Henry," ventured my Aunt Agnes, "you shouldn't be so hard on him—he doesn't understand our——"

"Then why the devil doesn't he keep his mouth shut?" snorted my uncle; "comin' down here—like those infernal Yankees—an' tryin' to teach us how to run our niggers. I've seen men reach for their hip pockets for less'n that," declared my uncle, glaring round the circle.

"Now, now, Henry," said my mother gently, "that'll do, Henry. You're not much of an assassin—you know that. Besides, you can't help admiring his pluck, can you, now?"

"He's too —— plucky," muttered Uncle Henry, gazing at the now distant boat. Then followed a season of calm, broken only by the soft voices of my aunt and mother as they tried to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"And what do *you* say? What's your opinion of your Gordon Laird—and his nigger friends?" uncle suddenly demanded, turning on me as stern an eye as dear old uncle could ever treat me to. I had not yet spoken.

"Do you want to know?" said I, straightening up.

"That's what I asked you for—what makes you so white?"

"I don't know. But I think he's glorious—just glorious," I said, looking very straight at uncle. "And I don't care who knows it," I added. I believe I stood up as I spoke—and I could feel my eyes flashing. "And you were horrid to him," I cried, my voice trembling.

"Helen," my mother broke in reproachfully, "you forget yourself, Helen. And do you know you're taking up with a stranger, against your uncle?"

But the latter didn't seem to hear what my mother said. He was staring at me in a way that let me know the battle was won. He was a true Southerner, was uncle, and if anything in the world appealed to him, it was courage. Yet he had by no means surrendered.

“Then you can meet him when he comes back,” he said slowly in a minute, nodding towards the river; “you can meet him and say good-bye for the rest of us. You’ll make our farewells to him, you see. And tell him the world is wide—you can remember that, can’t you, Helen?”

I smiled up into uncle’s face. “I won’t say good-bye for anybody but Helen Randall,” I replied, speaking just as slowly as he had done, “but I’ll do that—if I have to. And I’ll tell him—I’ll tell him,” I repeated, gazing down the sunlit river towards the sea, “that the world isn’t so wide after all.” And I know not why, but a strange thrill swept over me from head to foot; for the day was beautiful, and the fleecy clouds were overhead, and the air was laden with the sweet breath of flowers, and God’s sunlight was on the river—and the river flowed on in silence to the sea.

Uncle Henry turned away and presently began a little pace up and down the piazza. Fragments of the storm could still be heard: “Preach the Gospel, indeed—act as assistant to a nigger. A pretty pass, when our guests turn nurse for darkey coons—the attic’s too small for him now,” as he crossed and recrossed the porch’s sounding floor.

Presently he stopped and looked out over the river. The rest of us did not need to look—we had been watching all the time. And, away at the end of the long bridge—it was one of the longest in the state, nearly a mile—we could just descry the moving figure, all in black again, of our returning guest. He was coming back afoot, leaving the skiff to its owners.

Aunt Agnes took advantage of a long silence on uncle’s part. “Well,” she said, “I guess I’ll order dinner served; we can’t wait any longer.”

“That’s what I say,” agreed my mother; “we may just as well go on—it’ll be better anyhow,” she added significantly.

“What?” said my Uncle Henry, turning round and looking at us.

“We were just saying we wouldn’t wait dinner any longer,” was the explanation, “and anyhow, ’twould be better to go on—ourselves. Considering everything, you know,” and my Aunt Agnes sighed.

Uncle stopped still and straightened himself up. “There’ll be no dinner till he comes,” he said firmly, “if it’s an hour. I hope I don’t forget what’s due to a guest,” as he looked gravely round the circle, “and especially a stranger in a strange land.” This was said with the air of a king and a very noble king at that.

“Call Lyn,” he said suddenly to me.

I did so. “Where are those niggers anyhow?” he asked impatiently as he waited for her to appear. “I reckon they’ve all been watching the procession,” jerking his thumb towards the river. “Oh, here she is,” as the sable attendant pattered onto the porch. “Lyn, make me a mint-julep—make it good.”

“Yes, sah!” said the vanishing servant.

“Lyn! Oh, Lyn,” he called again in an instant.

“Yes, sah; heah I is, sah!”

“Make two mint-juleps—and make them both good.”

IX
LOVE'S TUTORSHIP

But those were happy days, as I have said already. Neither of us knew, I fancy, whence came the silent music that was slowly gathering in our hearts. But it was there, even though it came in secret strains, neither recognizing, neither declaring. Of course, I was an engaged girl—and I was trying to live up to it. I flaunted Charlie's ring, sometimes; and I often wrote to him, sitting in the very same room with Mr. Laird the while, at my own little desk in the corner. This itself had been one of Charlie's Christmas presents. And I kept Charlie's letters in the tiny drawer in the top, but I had so often been careless about it that mother saw to it herself that it was kept securely locked; I knew where the key was secreted—on the ledge above the library door. Mother said I really ought to carry it on a little gold chain around my neck; but I had no chain—and I never could bear to have things concealed about my person. Mother never glanced at his letters, of course—but I sometimes used to show her bits of mine after I had written them, and mother would suggest a word here and there, a little tenderer than the original, and I would stick them in like plums in a pudding. Indeed—I may as well tell it—mother rewrote a part of the one in which I kind of finally renounced any immediate prospect of Europe and the yacht. She said no member of our family had ever been so gifted with the pen as I—but that I was a little astray on the facts. So she fixed my letter in a way to prevent it being very final—for she said if it was ordained that I should go even yet, it would be wrong to make it impossible. I fancied at the time that this was a little like lending omnipotence a hand—but mother was an old-time Calvinist, especially on the subject of me and Charlie, so I presumed it must be all right to have it as she said.

I don't think any of them, and mother least of all, ever fancied that Mr. Laird had the remotest connection with my engagement to Charlie. For he was a minister—and that itself would be supposed to settle it as far as I was concerned. Besides, he was a minister without a church, a kind of free lance on a holiday. Then, too, we knew he was poor; he never said so, but there are always certain signs; and he took great care of his clothes, and seemed

very cautious about money, except when he came across some one who was very poor. And I'm sure we all remembered, though we almost never spoke of it, that he had been a shepherd, and that his father was still keeping sheep on the hills of Scotland—it never seemed to embarrass him a bit to refer to this, which we all thought very strange.

Then, on the other hand, we hadn't the slightest reason—for a long time at least—to think he cared a single thing for me. Indeed, I was just a little piqued about this; one evening I took some fresh flowers to his room in the attic, and his diary was lying open on the table. I don't know why—I have no excuses to make at all—but my eye fell on the entry for the first day or two he had been with us. I only glanced at it—any girl would, I think—to see what he said about us. And I found references to uncle, and my mother, and Aunt Agnes—even to Lyn and Moses more than once—but not a single word about me. I didn't care a straw—only I had a good mind to take the violets down-stairs with me again. But I didn't.

I have always fancied I would have been a good deal more interested if I had thought he was engaged. But I soon made up my mind he wasn't, although I had declared so stoutly to the contrary. For he never seemed to want to be alone, especially in the twilight—and that's a sure sign; and he left all his letters lying around after he had written them; and when he sang, which he did very nicely, he preferred "Scots Wha' Ha'e" to "Annie Laurie"; and he was never melancholy, and never sighed—and he never asked the price of things you need for house-keeping. So all these signs convinced me thoroughly.

I have already said he didn't seem to care a thing for me. And yet—and yet! For one thing, he loved to hear me sing—and he taught me two or three of the old psalms that were in a leather-bound book he brought down-stairs one day. Then he seemed so happy when I said I thought them beautiful. And he talked with me so gently and reasonably about the darkey question that I finally came to admit he did right in preaching in that coloured church. And I wondered why he cared for what I thought at all. Besides all this, he tried to get my promise that I would take a class in the Sunday-school after he was gone—and I remember the gray kind of feeling I had inside of me when he spoke of going away. I wouldn't promise, for I was about as fit to teach a class as I was to be President of the United States—but I promised to help in the library.

By and by, though I can't tell how, we even came to speaking about Charlie. And he praised him, said he was such a clever business man, and handsome. I didn't think much of that; but one evening, when we were

sitting on the shore all alone, he said he thought an engagement was such a sacred thing—and he urged me, in a veiled kind of way, always to be true to Charlie. And it was then I began to know—any true girl would know there was something, when he talked like that.

And it was through that—that kind of conversation, I mean—that it all came about. Because, by and by, I actually told him all about my misgivings and my fears. Of course I did it all loyally enough—I always praised Charlie, and always said I knew we'd likely be so happy because he was, already—and I would try to be. And I told him one day how Charlie was still urging me to consent that it should be soon, right away soon—and any one would have thought, if they watched his expression, that he was very concerned for Charlie's interests. For a strange paleness came upon his face when he broke a silence that seemed rather long, I fancy, to both of us.

"I think you should," he said, but his voice was so strange that I wondered where all his strength had gone to.

"What makes you say that?" I replied, and I don't believe my own voice was quite natural.

"Because I think you'd be happier," he answered—"and I want you to be happy." Then, for the first time, he looked at me, and his wonderful eyes were filled with a kind of yearning such as I never saw before. So different, indeed, from the look in Charlie's eyes, though nobody surely ever yearned more earnestly than Charlie.

"I'm about as happy now," I answered, "as any girl could hope to be."

He looked at me enquiringly, and I thought the paleness was deeper than before.

"Just like I am, I mean," I hastened to enlarge, "with a lovely house, and having a lovely time—and uncle and aunt and mother all so good to me."

"It isn't the same," he said.

"The same as what?" I pressed, knowing I should not. But I remember yet the thrill of peril and pain and joy that accompanied the words.

"The same as love—real love," he answered slowly. "It isn't the same at all—the other is a new life altogether. That's what makes life holy—and beautiful," he said, his voice so low I could scarcely hear. "That's the whole of life—every bit of it," he added softly.

I answered never a word. And in a moment he went on. "Yes, that's my highest wish for you, Miss Helen—that you may find a sphere worthy of

you. For you'll forgive me, won't you, when I say you haven't found it yet? You've got a wonderful nature," he suddenly startled me with, "and you've got gifts and qualities that can be so useful, so wonderfully useful—and they can give you such deep happiness too," he went earnestly on, "if they only get a chance—if you only give them a chance; if they're developed, I mean. And nothing will ever ripen them but—but that."

"But what?" murmured I, who knew right well.

"But love," he answered gently. "No woman's life ever really ripens except through love. And—forgive me again, but I must say it—you're not getting the most out of life, living as you are now, Miss Helen."

I looked at him searchingly. "As I am now?" I echoed. "Why, what kind of life do you think I'm living?" But even as I spoke the words my own poor heart provided all the answer. I felt rising up within me a conception, not adequate or full, but quite sufficient at the time, of the hollowness and barrenness of the poor frivolous life I was living. And I knew, oh, so well, how far from the well-spring of real joy and peace were the glittering streams at which I had sipped so long.

"What do you mean?" I urged, for he had not spoken.

"Oh," he began slowly, "I guess you know. Nobody can have a nature like yours without knowing when it's not being satisfied. You have no work—no calling, I mean. And you don't have any recreation, except only pleasure—a little party here, and a picnic there, a card party yonder, and an afternoon tea somewhere else. You know what I mean—all those things—and a nature like yours can't live on confections," he added, smiling. "That's why I'll be glad—when the other happens."

"What other?" repeated I, who knew right well again.

"You know," he said; and the great eyes looked solemnly and wistfully into mine.

"Do you mean when I marry Mr. Giddens?" said I, dwelling on the words, my eyes never taken from his face.

"Yes," he said; "that's what I mean." And his own eyes never flinched, although I could see the pallor deepen on his face. And I rejoiced, though I honestly believe I scarce knew why.

"What difference would—would that make?" I asked, looking away.

"It would fill your life," he answered quietly, "fill your life to overflowing."

“But I wouldn’t give up those things even then—card-playing and dancing and everything like that. I’ve always done those things—and I love them, Mr. Laird. You don’t understand me, I’m afraid. You see, your life has been a very different one from mine, hasn’t it?”

“Wide as the poles asunder,” he answered without looking at me. “I never knew any of those things. Yes, very different,” he repeated. And he smiled.

“Your parents are very religious people, I suppose?” I ventured.

“My mother’s not living,” he said in a hushed voice. “She died when I was ten.”

“And your father?” I asked in a burst of boldness.

“Yes,” he said. We were sitting by the river at the time, and the sun was setting, and its last rays bathed the trees with amber light. His head was lying on the ground; and the dying sun shed its beauty on the wavy hair and the wonderfully modulated face. Modulated is the fitting word, for various voices spoke through the different features, yet the master note was tenderness, always so lovable in a man when it is joined to strength.

“I’d love to be religious,” I said suddenly. “I believe I would have been, too, if I’d been a man.”

He smiled. “Why would you like to be religious?” he said, picking up a pebble and throwing it far out into the river. “You’ve just said you love those other things so much.”

“Oh, yes, I know I did. But I mean what I say, just the same. I admire that sort of people,” I went on enthusiastically; “religious people, you know. Really good people—like you,” I broke out recklessly. “I knew an awfully religious girl in Richmond once. She was naturally good, no struggle for her at all. Well, she married a minister,”—I laughed as I said it—“and nearly all her friends pity her so. She and her husband live in the country, and he takes care of his own horse—he has three stations. But I never pitied her,” I declared earnestly; “I think it must be a perfectly lovely life—when your heart’s in it. She loves him to distraction—and his work too; and she visits the people, and she teaches in the Sunday-school. Besides, she has two children—and I think he preaches all his sermons at her on Saturday nights and she fixes them up. But then, of course, she’s fitted for that sort of thing—she can pray out loud,” I concluded, nodding my head towards Mr. Laird as though this were the acme of all eulogy.

“There are better kinds of prayer than that,” he answered, smiling again; “and I’m so glad you don’t pity her,” he added, turning his earnest eyes on me again.

“Why?” I could not help enquiring.

“Because I was afraid you would,” he said meaningly—“and she doesn’t need it. Where two hearts are in love with each other and their work—I wouldn’t ask any higher heaven than that.” Then he sighed; although, as I have said, he wasn’t much given to sighing.

Then came my question. For days I had been burning to ask it; yet I marvel that I was ever bold enough to form the words.

“You talk like a specialist on that subject. Were you ever in love, Mr. Laird?” I shot the words out quickly; otherwise they never would have come.

He turned with swift movement and looked at me. It seemed to me he looked me over from head to foot, though I knew he wouldn’t do anything so rude. The paleness was all gone now, I noticed, and I thought his lip trembled a little. It was a moment before he spoke.

“You’ve been very kind in giving me your confidence, haven’t you, Miss Helen?” he asked, very gravely and slowly.

I stammered out my answer. “Forgive me, Mr. Laird,” I began penitently; “I had no right to say what I did. And if I’ve told you anything about—about me and Charlie—it was only because it seemed easy to do it—because I wanted to. Because I trusted you,” I added, wishing some one would suddenly appear.

But no one did, and Mr. Laird seemed so dreadfully calm. I was waiting, intending to say something more, when he went serenely on.

“Well, I can trust you, too,” he said; “and it seems easy to tell you. And, anyhow, I don’t know why I shouldn’t. Yes, I was in love once, long ago. And I was engaged to be married,” he continued, in that same tone of reverence with which he always spoke of matters such as this. “But it’s long ago now—it was while I was in my second year in the university. And I had to give her up”—he smiled as he turned his eyes on mine—“had to give her up for another man. Her father, like mine, was a shepherd, and she was bright as a sunbeam and as pure as the dewdrop in the dell—that’s a line from an old Scotch song,” he interjected, smiling rather more broadly than I thought he should have done in mid-narrative of a tragedy like that. “But a

fellow came home from across the sea—from Australia—and he was very rich."

"Did she give you up for him?" I asked, indignation in my voice.

"Not exactly," he answered; "but it amounted to that. She wrote and asked me to release her; said she had found she loved him best."

"And you gave her up?"

"Certainly," he said, and I thought what a magnificent man he was; "yes, what else could I do? Or what else could she do?"

"Didn't you hate her?"

"No, of course not—I think she did perfectly right. Anything else would have been false to both of us. And they got married very soon after—they have three bairns now," and I wondered how he could smile such a happy kind of smile.

"And do you think," I said, "do you think any girl would be justified in changing—if she found—if she found she loved somebody else?"

"Yes," he answered slowly. "Yes, I think she would. But she has no right to find out anything of the sort—I would never find it out," he concluded firmly.

"You wouldn't?—why wouldn't you?"

"Because I shouldn't," he said; "that's why I wouldn't—if I loved, I'd love always."

"Would you have loved *her* always?" I asked, wondering at my rashness.

"Yes," he said after a pause; "yes, if she had let me. Do you know, I believe it's getting chilly—shall we go home?"

To which proposal I gave swift assent—outwardly, at least. And as we walked along I marvelled at the restraint of the strong man beside me. I knew, or felt, rather, that his heart was a molten mass of fire—I couldn't have told why, but its burning heat was just as real to me as anything could be. I knew it was aflame; but he was as reserved, and cold, and strong, and silent as though we had been talking of something that had nothing to do with human hearts at all. I hated myself for the weakness I could not conceal. And I fairly loathed that Scotch girl who married the rich Australian—and I hoped all her children had flaming red hair, like I felt sure she had.

That same night I was chatting a while with uncle before he went to bed.

“And what is your majesty going to decide about Savannah—and the royal yacht—and Europe?” he suddenly enquired, after our talk had run a little on a kindred vein.

“I’m not going,” I declared vehemently; “at least, not for a long time—I simply can’t.”

“I wouldn’t either,” he said meaningly, “if I were you—you’ll be a fool if you do.”

“Why?” demanded I.

“I reckon you know,” said uncle; “if you don’t, I won’t tell you. And I don’t blame you, honey. I think he’s a true blue sort of chap—but he’ll have to revise his views about the niggers.”

Well, the result of the whole thing was this, that I spent a good half hour posting my diary that night. I too had begun a diary by this time—and I, too, took good care whose name shouldn’t go into it. And the outcome of my half hour’s pondering was this brief entry: “Have made up my mind that I can’t marry Charlie—and I shall never, never marry the Reverend Gordon Laird.”

X
THE RIVER LEADING TO THE SEA

If there is one thing a girl loves more than another, it's being a martyr. If there is any such thing as sweet sorrow, that's where it may be found. And of all kinds of martyrdom the love kind is the sweetest. Now in all this a woman is so different from a man. A man enjoys the suffering that comes with love—if some one else does the suffering; but a woman glories in it—if some one else does the loving. And that was pretty much my case.

For I was having lots of love—from Charlie. This was all very well so far as it went; nor can it be denied that it went a considerable way. For every girl prizes a strong man's love, though she return it never so faintly. Like some preachers, she highly esteems a call—even if she has little or no thought of accepting it. But there is nothing, nothing in all the world, so troublesome as love; unless it utterly swamps you—then is the solution simple. But to have just enough to marry on, with no surplus for the years—that's dreadful. That is like launching some mighty ship when the tide is out—and it must be awful to hear the keel grating on the sand.

Yes, that's where the martyrdom comes in, to recall the noble word with which I began the chapter. And when the Judgment Day shall dawn—concerning which I have no doubt, but much misgiving—the most oft-repeated charge against our poor weak womanhood will be that we sold ourselves for nought. Some of our loveliest will be the first to learn, in that great day, how deadly was the barter of their bodies—and of so much more. I have often heard uncle say that when a horse is sold its halter always goes along—but no one ever told me that when a girl sells her body, that sale includes the soul. Reluctant, protesting, even horrified, it yet must cleave to its tenement of clay and meet the tenant's doom. And what a doom! if it be fitting destiny for those who have bartered the sanctity of life, some for bread, some for home, some for gold, some for fame, some for earthly station; and some, nobler these, for very hungriness of heart, crying out for the nameless something that shall satisfy the soul.

I hardly know just how or when I resigned myself to such a martyrdom. But I did. I decided to marry Charlie, right soon too—despite the defiant vow I had registered in my diary that night. One thing I'm sure of—and that is, that Europe and the yacht had mighty little to do with it. But whether it was because I feared Charlie might throw himself from the deck of the aforesaid yacht if I didn't marry him; or whether I felt it was a matter of honour; or whether I knew it would throw mother's life into eclipse; or whether I agreed with that semi-intelligent philosopher who once said that all life was a gamble in probabilities, or something of that sort, I cannot say. But anyhow, one midnight hour, I drew my pen through the first half of that diary vow, the part which declared I could never marry Charlie, and I left uninjured the savage promise to myself that I would never, never marry the Reverend Gordon Laird.

Besides, he had been horrid. Not in any positive sense, of course, for Mr. Laird was such a perfect gentleman. And yet he was a gentleman after a fashion I had never seen before. He was not in the least like our Southern gallants; he couldn't bow like them, nor make pretty speeches—and he wouldn't jump across the floor to pick up my hand-kerchief, though I once saw him give Dinah a hand up the back steps with a heavy block of ice that had slipped from her grasp and fallen to the bottom. And he never brought me flowers, or candies, except some wild violets he might sometimes pluck—and once he did give me some molasses taffy, of which his reverence himself partook with almost juvenile enthusiasm.

But he was scrupulously polite, and that's so hard for a girl to stand if she's interested in a man at all. And he seemed so strong, and self-possessed, that he was distant without meaning to be—the distance of a sort of superiority, all the worse because you knew he wasn't trying to make you realize it at all; and I had the intolerable feeling that his world was an altogether different one from mine, and that he was interested in things I didn't know about, yet which I felt might be just as much mine as his if I only had a chance. As it was, however, I was a good deal like a child standing knee high to some man whose face was half hidden by the telescope to his eye; if he knew you were there at all, you felt the very most he'd do would be to pat your head and ask you if you'd lost your ball.

I don't know what finally decided me. But anyhow I wrote Charlie a letter, and told him Yes. "Yes, right away," was the burden of what I said, "as soon as I can get ready." I thought at the time what a cruel term that was, "getting ready"—as if the milliner and dressmaker had any part to play in *that*. All the world I would have given to have known how to really "get

ready" in my inmost heart and life. But I wrote the letter, and sealed it, and kissed it on the outside—which I felt was the proper thing to do—and then I placed it in the Bible on my dressing-table, taking quite a pious satisfaction in the fancy. Then I sat down and cried till my eyes were sore and the Bible all stained with bitter tears. Later on, I told my mother; her joy was quite enough for two, quite too much for me.

And I told Mr. Laird too. Some will ask why, and perhaps make merry over that delicate reserve which Southern women pride themselves upon. But let them ask, and let them make merry as they will. Besides, I had already told Mr. Laird so much that it was surely natural enough for me to tell him this. Moreover, was he not a minister—and what are they for if not to be confided in?

So I told him I was going to post a letter. It was the gathering dusk, for such a letter should never sure be launched in the garish light of day. Then I told him what was in it, or, at least, told him enough to let him know; for he was remarkably "quick in the uptake," to adopt a phrase of his own countrymen; I think I referred, too, to his own counsel in the matter.

He didn't speak for a little, nor could I see his face. But when he did break the silence, it was to say he'd walk to the post-office with me; he added that the exercise would do him good, since he hadn't had much of an appetite for supper—which was, I thought, one of the shabbiest speeches he could have framed. But I let him come.

"Why not row down?" he suddenly suggested as we came to the bend in the road beside the river. Our boat-house, its door wide open, was at the water's edge. "We can land within a square of the office," he enlarged.

I should have refused, I know; for the letter to Charlie was in my hand. But I didn't. And I remember yet the sense of sweet helplessness I felt as he turned and led the way to the boat-house. It all comes back to me again. I stand once more alone, outside, while the tall form disappeared within the low-roofed house. The sound of pushing and rolling I hear again as the boat emerged slowly from its home. The rattle of oars comes back, idly rolling to and fro in the rocking skiff; the metallic chink as they were being adjusted in the iron sockets; and the lapping waves, and the soft breath of evening, and the distant noises of the drowsy town. I remember, too, that there was neither moon nor star, the sky all veiled with the gentle haze that often marks our Southern spring. He rowed; and I sat in the armchair in the stern.

"You're going too far out," I said suddenly, for we were near the middle of the river.

“I want to get a last look at the place,” he said, “and one can see better from out here. Doesn’t the town look lovely in the dusk?—see all those twinkling lights.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “it’s beautiful. Why do you say that?” I asked, trying to conceal the tremor in my voice.

“Say what?”

“What you said a moment ago—about a last look—why the last?”

“Because it is,” he answered slowly, the oars hardly moving now. “I’m going away.”

I looked down at the dimpling track my hand was making in the water.

“When?” I said; oh, so carelessly.

“To-morrow.”

“Where?” as I caught at the little throb in my voice.

“To Canada—they’ve got an opening for me there. I’m going to take a mission field.”

I made no response. But I knew for the first time, in all this life of mine, what it really meant to have a heart on fire. He was not looking, so he could not see the quick rise and fall of my bosom as I looked out through the deepening darkness towards the twinkling shore. I could see the dim outline of a few tall elms on the bank; and muffled sounds floated towards us across the darkling water. But what I remember most was the wonderful stillness that reigned without, while the first real heart-storm I had ever known raged deep within.

One hand was in the water, troubling the unconscious element; in the other I still held the letter I had written Charlie. And I leaned far out over the edge of the boat, withdrawing my gaze from the shore; but the silent river gave back nothing except murky blankness. Life had the selfsame colour to me then, poor child and changeling that I was. Suddenly I felt that his eyes were on me, though the gloom was deepening—and I trembled, actually trembled; if I had been alone with him in mid-ocean I could not have trembled more. Perhaps I glanced down the sullen river and remembered that its home was the far waiting sea.

Then he moved—and towards me. If there had been a mile between us, instead of a few paltry feet, I could not have been more conscious of his coming. For he never spoke, and I neither spoke nor stirred. In a moment he

was beside me, or at my feet, or both. And such a transformation I had never seen. His voice was low and unsteady, choking almost, and I could catch the wonderful fire of his eyes as they were fastened on me in the gloom.

"Don't," I said faintly, "please don't—let us row in—we'll miss the mail."

But he made no movement, never even glancing at one of the oars which had been lifted from its socket and slipped with a little splash into the stream. The other sulked alone in the darkly dimpling water.

"Oh! Helen," he said in an altered voice, such a voice as I had never heard before, "you know—you know all I want to say."

He had hold of my hand, the one that held the letter. And still I did not move or speak. But a swift thought flashed through my mind; it was of another day, when another man had thus laid siege to me—and I knew now what life's real passion meant. Yes, I will tell it—and they may smile who will—my whole soul leaped in silent ecstasy, and triumph, and hope. But the greatest of these was hope. I knew, at long last, what it meant to love and to be loved—and no queen ever gloried in the hour of her coronation as I silently rejoiced in mine. I forgot that he was stronger than I, and greater, and nobler; forgot all about the strength of intellect that I had felt as a gulf between us; all the difference, too, of life's aim and purpose was sunk and forgotten now. I even forgot that he was a minister at all, set apart for life to duties and sacrifices for which I had neither gift nor inclination. I only knew I loved him, and that we were alone together—and that he was at my feet.

"Helen," he began again, "I'm going away—and you'll forget all about me, won't you, Helen?"

It was sweet to hear him speak my name. And his words would mean, of course, that he wanted me to forget—but I knew what they really meant, and I held every tone sacred to my heart.

Then I said, and the words were soft as the breeze about us: "I won't."

I knew it was wrong—for Charlie's letter was still in the hand he held. But it was glorious. Oh, how I revelled in the words I spoke! They were simple and insignificant, I know,—but the wild breath of a new-born love pulsed through them, and I could see by the kindled face, though the dark was round about us, how his heart had leaped to recognize their meaning. And then his own soul poured itself out in a great gust of passion, pure and holy and resistless and triumphant; all the strength and silentness and self-control that had provoked my wonder through the days seemed now to be

turned to leaping flame as he told me—oh, so eloquently and yet so brokenly—of such a love as I had never dreamed could be offered any maiden's heart.

"Can you see that steeple there?" he said, his voice hoarse with feeling as he pointed to the distant town; "no, it's too dark—but I can see it. I see it even in my dreams. It was under its shadow I met you first, when your uncle and I were coming from the train. And I knew then, Helen—in that instant I knew, and have known ever since, that there was only one love for me—and it was you, my darling. And I knew, I knew, who put the roses in that attic room of mine—and they made the place like heaven to me ever since. And give me this, Helen—surrender it to me," he went on passionately, his fingers closing stealthily around the letter in my hand.

"I cannot," I cried, protesting, summoning what strength I might. "Oh, I cannot—that's my letter to Charlie."

His clasp relaxed a little. "I know," he said; "that's why I want it—and you cannot, you must not, send it now."

"But you told me, you told me more than once," I pleaded; "you said how true I ought to be—you know you did," and I trembled lest his own counsel should prevail.

He seemed to sink back a little—and awful silence reigned a moment. "But I didn't know," he soon began, new earnestness in his voice, "I only knew then that I loved you—and I could have given you up, I really could—but I didn't know then that you belonged to me—to me, my darling," his voice rising to the masterful with the words; "I didn't know then that God meant you for me, and that that was why He led my steps across the sea. I could have given you up—I swear I could," he cried almost fiercely, "if it had meant nothing but a wounded life for me—but when it's you—oh, when it's you, my darling, when your life would be wounded and broken too. For you love me, my own," and his voice had the tenderest strain that ever filled woman's heart with rapture; "don't you, Helen?" he went pleadingly on; "oh, say you do—or tell me, tell me, Helen, if you don't."

Then the silence of death reigned about us both, though heaven knows I tried my best to break it, but could make no sound. And then, then—with all the stealth of love and of a strong man's will—he gently drew the letter from my hand, my heart fluttering till it hurt, and without a word he tore it up, slowly, noiselessly, almost reverently, into a hundred pieces, and a moment later they fluttered through the dark out onto the bosom of the silent river.

I was like one in a dream, unspeaking still. Perhaps I had a great sense of weakness, even of wrong. But I do not think so. I only knew that life was changed to me in that wonderful hour, and that I cared nothing for the future, all that it might bring, all my unfitness for it. I only knew that I had found at last what my poor, tired, frivolous heart had been seeking in alien ways for long. And I knew that love's great lie, so desperately cherished, had retreated before Love's great Reality. And when he took me in his arms, so strong, so tight, I shut my eyes and rested there; and when he kissed me—only once—I prayed, a swift, wonderful prayer. And I knew at last that love was holy, stainless, and that God was good.

XI
A MOTHER CONFESSOR

THEY were waiting for us when we got home, wondering a little why we were so late. We told them we had been on the river, and Mr. Laird apologized for the loss of the oar; I remember uncle said it was lucky he was able to paddle his own canoe.

I went into mother's room when I went up-stairs to fix my hair—and she noticed that Charlie's ring was absent from my hand. I expected her to, for it was a source of constant joy to her. Then I told her. I shall not describe the gust that followed, except to say that what I remember best about it was mother's appeal to my sense of unfitness for the life of a minister's wife. There was a lot more—Europe and the yacht were not forgotten—about the folly of giving myself to a life of obscurity and poverty when a very different one was open to me.

"I'm sick of money," I said foolishly; "I've always had nearly everything I wanted—and I wasn't happy."

"You'll know the difference when you don't have your uncle to give you everything you want," said my mother.

"He's been the kindest man that ever was," I agreed, "but no uncle that ever lived could give a girl everything she wants. There's only one can do that," I went on, for my heart was singing—"and I've found him at last."

It was then that mother appealed to me on the ground of my unfitness for the life I had chosen. And I must admit that *did* hit me pretty hard.

"Look at our minister's wife," she said; "she's meant for it. It's true she looks half starved, and she's always dowdy, and has to make a dress do for years—but she's happy in that kind of life."

"Maybe I'll be happy too," I ventured to predict.

"How could you be?" retorted my mother. "How could you ever hope to be, when you're not fitted for that kind of work? Mrs. Furvell can lead in prayer."

“Well, I can’t,” I said—“but I can follow. And Mr. Laird says that’s better.”

“And she can take the chair at meetings—and she knows how to talk to ministers when they come—and they say she looks over her husband’s sermons, and makes suggestions.”

“My husband’s sermons won’t need any,” I made reply. And at this I blushed furiously: the word sounded like a beautiful judgment day. I knew how crimson my face and neck all grew, for I was standing in front of a pier glass at the time, my hair flowing down about my shoulders. And I wondered if I was beautiful—I hoped I was, but not for my own sake at all—I can honestly say no vanity was in my thought. Everything was different now.

“Of course,” conceded my mother, “I believe in a girl marrying for love—but you haven’t known him long enough. Now Charlie’s different; you’ve known him so long.”

“That’s just where it comes in,” said I, dimly groping for what I felt was a great point.

“What do you mean?” said mother.

“I don’t know,” I answered, which was gloriously true.

“Besides,” digressed my mother, leaving this obscure point unsettled, “what reason have you got to think you’ll ever get along agreeably with his folks?”

“I’d get along with Choctaw Indians,” quoth I, “if it would make him any happier; besides, I won’t have to—they’re all in Scotland.”

“Whose happiness do you mean?” enquired my mother, though she knew right well.

“Why, his—Mr. Laird’s, of course.”

“Are you going to call him Mr. Laird?” pursued my mother, for womanly curiosity will show itself even amid high tragedy.

“I reckon so—I don’t know,” and I laughed as I spoke; “that never occurred to me.”

“He didn’t ask you to—to call him Gordon?”

“Mercy, no—why should he?” I exclaimed aghast.

“Why shouldn’t he?” replied my mother. “I remember the night your father asked me to marry him—but then, there’s no use of that; that’s all over now. When is he going to speak to *me* about it, Helen?”

“Oh, mother,” I said, putting my arms about her neck, “you’re such a woman! I know you’re just counting the minutes till you’ll be alone with him when he’s pleading with you to give your daughter to him. That’s the next best thing to getting a proposal yourself, isn’t it, mother?”

But she was not yet ready for surrender. “It’s very easy for you, Helen,” she said seriously, “to treat it all as a trifling matter—but you don’t know what a heavy heart you’ve given me. And there’s another thing,” she went on, a little timidly, I thought: “I suppose you don’t forget that his father’s a shepherd—a man that takes care of sheep, on the hills?” she enlarged.

“No, I haven’t forgotten it,” I answered, and I felt my colour rising, “nor has he forgotten. And I wouldn’t care if his father were a chimney-sweep. Do you mean that, mother?” I demanded, my voice about as stern as she had ever heard it.

“Mean what, Helen?”

“Do you mean that that—about his father being a shepherd—should make any difference to me? When I love him?” I added, my voice shaking a little.

“No, child, no. No, of course not,” my mother hastened to reply; “only it’ll be a little awkward, I’m afraid. You’ve got to consider everything, you know.”

“That’s just what I’m doing,” I retorted quickly. “And if he’s good, and true, and noble—and he is—what difference does it make to me who his father is, or what he does? It won’t be as awkward as to be married to a man you don’t love—that’s what I *would* call awkward,” I cried, “and that’s what nearly happened me. And he—Mr. Laird—he tore the letter up and threw it into the river, thank God!” as the tears that could no longer be restrained poured forth at last.

Her tender arms tightened about me as she soothed me with some explanation of what she meant, telling me meantime that I was tired and needing rest. Nor did the interview last much longer, being fruitful of but little satisfaction on either side. Mother loved me too well to make any real unpleasantness about it; and, before we finished, she laid most of her grief to the score of Charlie’s broken heart. But she did add, rather sorrowfully, that in all probability now I would live and die without ever seeing Europe.

I believe there's no place where a girl so feels the trembling joy of love as in her own little room when first she returns to it with her lips still moist from the sacramental kiss. I have often wondered since why this is so. And I do not know. But I remember well, with quickening heart, that almost bridal hour. I did not light the gas—and I wondered at the time why I shrank from doing so—but kindled instead the candle on my dressing-table. The soft and tender light accorded better with my mood, and the flitting shadows that fell across the room seemed beautiful. When I was undressed and robed for the night, I sat long, my hair still flowing on my shoulders, before the pier glass, gazing into my own eyes for very joy. The shallow will say it was empty vanity; but it was not. It was a kind of communion time, searching, so far as I could, the mystic depths of a personality that had been so suddenly wakened to a new and holy life.

I know not how long I lingered thus, peering into the hidden future—once or twice I buried my hot face in my hands—marvelling at the ministry of love, before I put the candle out and went to bed. And then, strangely enough, there stole into my mind the verse Charlie used to love to hear me sing. I hummed it softly to myself:—

"Still must you call me tender names
Still gently stroke my tresses;
Still shall my happy answering heart
Keep time to your caresses."

But now the words seemed all on fire and I wondered why their beauty had never appeared to me before. I lilted them again and again, the image of my lover, my first real lover, before me all the time—and I wondered when, if ever, I would sing the words for him.

But all of a sudden I felt that this was frivolous. For it was beginning to be borne in upon me—scarcely thought of in the first rush of joy—what manner of man this was whose lot I was to share. I was to be a minister's wife! With a wave of cowardice I hid my face under the snowy covers as I thought of it; while visions of other days, of dances and parties and cards, and all sorts of alien things, floated before my eyes. I fought against them all with an intensity they did not deserve, really trying to lead my thoughts into higher channels. And there came into my mind—which I have always considered an intervention from a Higher Source—a line or two of a psalm I had heard Mr. Laird sing more than once. The words came back to me so readily, and I said them over and over again to myself:—

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes
From whence doth come mine aid,"

and, almost before I knew it, I had slipped out of bed and was on my knees in prayer. I must confess that I barely knew how to pray—that is, outside of a little groove along which my devotions had tripped since I was a child. But this time I really did pray—out of my own heart—though I fear it was a very broken and halting prayer, a poor sort of thing compared to those finished efforts of Mrs. Furvell to which my mother had referred. Yet I think it was sincere. I asked God to guard my love—but especially his—and to not let anything happen to spoil it; and to help me give up everything that was wrong or frivolous, and to make me some help to him in his life-work.

I was hardly snuggled up in bed again before I heard Mr. Laird coming up-stairs to the attic. I suppose he had been doing some thinking on his own account, all alone in the parlour. His room was right over mine—and that was why I had such a luxurious night. For very soon he began walking up and down the floor—I don't think he knew I was just beneath—and he kept up that lonely tramp for hours. Every step he took was music to me. Back and forward, forward and back, he walked, and I could fairly see the tall, noble form, the serious face, the deep, penetrating eyes. Once or twice he stopped, for a few minutes; and I began to fear he didn't love me as he should. But soon the firm tread began again and then I knew how really dear I was.

Dozens of times since then, when I have teased him about it, he has told me those little silences came when he threw himself on his bed and snatched a few minutes' sleep; but that he knew I was listening, so he would shake himself, dash some cold water on his face or wrap a towel about his head, and start on his beat again. But I knew better—and anyhow, he confessed to me once that nothing short of chloroform could have kept him still that night.

When we assembled at breakfast the next morning Mr. Laird didn't eat anything except one little half slice of toast—and I could see how this appealed to mother, though she maintained a sad gravity throughout.

When the meal was finished he asked mother if he might have a few minutes with her alone. And she asked him what could it possibly be about!

XII
THE WAIL OF THE LOWLY

It was "Gordon" now, always "Gordon"—though of course nobody called him that but me. For he had made yet another little addition to his visit—and he and I had improved the time. But his departure was near at hand.

And it does seem sad that what occurred had to happen just before he left. For everything had gone so beautifully. Mother, it is true, used to sigh sometimes, and once or twice expressed the hope that Charlie hadn't killed himself when he got the tidings and the ring. I had no such fears; for the brief note that came back informed me that he would say nothing till he came and saw me; which, he said, he would do as soon as some very urgent business would permit. But mother declared she knew this was only said to conceal the fact that he was prostrate in his bed.

I believe Aunt Agnes and Uncle Henry were quite composed about the whole affair—they thought so much of Gordon. And even mother was getting fond of him; she couldn't very well have helped it, he was so strong and tender and dignified and true. And I can't tell how happy it made me to see mother warming up to him; a few days before he intended to go away—and the very day of the explosion I am about to describe—I saw mother pull his hair. Just a little tug, it's true, a little playful pinch of a few of the auburn strands—but it filled my soul with joy, for I think it means more for certain kinds of women to give the hair a little pull like that than if they took the whole man into their arms. So I pretended not to see, lest my Gordon's hair should never be pulled again.

We were all pretty resigned, as I have said—especially Gordon and myself. And if Gordon had only gotten away to his Canadian field before that eventful night—or if every negro in the South had only died or been deported the day before—the whole tenor of our after lives might have been changed.

We were seated on the porch, uncle and Gordon and I. My mood, I fear, was a rather plaintive one, for I didn't know when my lover would be coming back. Uncle, however, seemed in a very jovial frame of mind; but the worst storms always come on the most placid evenings. He had just been telling Gordon that he thought I would make a pretty fair minister's wife after all.

"You know, Mr. Laird," he remarked in mock seriousness, "there's one feature of Helen's record that makes me think she's right religious after all."

"Let us have the symptoms," said Gordon, and he couldn't have looked at me more tenderly if he hadn't had a drop of Scotch blood in his whole make-up.

"Well, it's this," drawled my uncle; "I've never known Helen to miss a Sunday-school picnic since she was able to toddle—she'd go without her lessons before she'd miss one. Now don't you think that's a good sign?" and uncle indulged himself in the merriment his little joke deserved.

Gordon made some laughing response, I have forgotten what. And it was then that uncle began the fatal strain. It really seemed as if it had to be; for, ever since that other darkey outbreak, both men had been careful to steer clear of the dangerous topic.

"You'll have to look out," uncle began, "that those folks up North don't tramp on your wife's Southern corns." Gordon gave me a funny look—whether it referred to the sublime word, or the grotesque one, I couldn't tell. "For instance," uncle went on, "the first thing you know, some of them'll be expressing their opinion about slavery and airing their views on the whole question of the darkies. Now I want you to protect her from that—don't let them bring the subject up if you can help it. And, just as like as not, they'll be flaunting that Uncle Tom's Cabin nigger show under your noses. There was a company brought it down here once—but we read the riot act to them. It was 'Katy, bar the door' for them. Some of them just got off with their necks. And I want you to promise me, Helen, that you'll never look at their infernal show; they say it's all whips, and handcuffs, and bloodhounds, and all the rest of the lies that Harriet Beecher Stowe concocted. You'll promise me, won't you, Helen?"

"Don't trouble yourself about that, uncle," I answered evasively, being always a cautious maiden along certain lines; "most likely Mr. Laird doesn't know what you're talking about. Do you, Gordon?" I enquired, the change of name very sweet.

"Oh, yes," he promptly replied. "Yes, I've read the book—read it on the heathery hills, when I was quite a wee laddie."

"Did you ever read such a parcel of lies, sir?" demanded my uncle, fully expecting that there could be only one answer.

"I'm really not in a position to give an opinion," Gordon replied judiciously; "you see, I never saw slavery."

"Well, I have," uncle responded vigorously, "and the book's a bunch of lies. Of course, I suppose some brutes might mistreat their niggers. But it wasn't natural, sir—it wasn't to their interest to do so—a man wouldn't do it with his horse. And the niggers were enough sight happier then than they are now—they were perfectly contented, sir."

"That's the worst of it," said Gordon tersely.

"What say, sir? I don't know that I understand you."

"That was the saddest feature of it—that they *were* contented," repeated Gordon calmly; "that's what slavery did for them. But it seems to me, Mr. Lundy," he went on, warming a little to the argument, "it seems to me the book in question doesn't deny that most of the negroes were well used."

"It doesn't?" uncle began in a rather fiery tone; "it doesn't, doesn't it? It's the most one-sided book that was ever written—has niggers dying under the lash, and hunted with hounds, and all that sort of thing. What's that, if it isn't one-sided, sir?"

"As far as I remember, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' impressed me as decidedly fair, quite impartial," Gordon ventured, his voice very calm.

"It's a pack of Yankee lies, sir," interrupted my uncle warmly.

Gordon flushed a little. "That's hardly argument, Mr. Lundy," he replied slowly. "You remind me of what Burke said of Samuel Johnson—he said Johnson's style of argument reminded him of a highwayman; if his pistol missed fire, he knocked you down with the butt end of it."

"What's that got to do with niggers?" enquired my uncle blankly.

"Nothing—just with the argument," answered Gordon. "I said I thought 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' impressed me as impartial—and you retorted it was Yankee lies. That's like calling Euclid a liar because you dissent from his proposition, as your great Lincoln said."

"He wasn't ours—and he isn't great," retorted uncle vigorously.

"Half of that may be true," Gordon answered in the most amiable tone. "But about the book—I'll state my position. Mrs. Stowe portrays three men, if I remember right, who had to do with slaves. Shelby, St. Clair, Legree, were the names, I think. Well, one of them, Legree, is depicted as a brute—but the other two were like fathers to their slaves. Now, if that isn't fair—two to one—I don't know what is," concluded Gordon placidly, "especially as you've just admitted yourself that the brutal type was always to be found, even if the exception."

I was growing nervous by this time, and with abundant cause. It was with a sense of hearty relief I heard Aunt Agnes hurrying towards the porch; and before the argument could further go, she blew in upon the scene with tidings of an invitation she had just received for me and Gordon for that very evening. I wasn't slow to make the most of the digression, and soon the ship of domestic peace was clear of the threatening rocks.

Yet I could see, all through the early evening, that the debate had left its impress upon Gordon. It was really wonderful how a question of this kind took hold of him; anything human, especially if connected with sorrow or injustice, seemed to kindle him as nothing else could do. More than once he harked back to it within the next hour or two when he and I were alone. "It's beyond my understanding," he broke out, "how any man—especially a Christian gentleman like your uncle—can defend an institution that made one man a slave of another."

"But they were good to them," I defended.

"Yet they were in bondage," was his terse reply; "and besides, Helen, you know they often had to sell them—even when they didn't want to. I've talked to coloured women on the streets here, who told me their children were sold away from them long years ago—and they've never seen them since. And they cried," he added, his voice taking what was almost a shrill note, plaintive with sympathy. "And I don't care if they *did* keep their slaves in luxury—if they had clothed them in purple and fine linen and fanned them all day long—any institution that makes it possible for a child to be sold from his mother, it's—it's damnable," he declared passionately, "and neither God nor man could convince me to the contrary."

I was almost frightened at Gordon's vehemence—and I was powerless before his argument. A kind of chill foreboding had me in its grip, I knew not why, that his strange intensity on this so fiery theme was yet to work us ill. For, like other strangers, he had no conception of how deep, almost desperately deep, were the convictions of Southern men on the subject that

seemed so thoroughly to engross him. He harboured the romantic notion that all men were created equal, as the framers of our Constitution solemnly decreed, their slaves cringing at their feet the while. He held the quixotic view, too, that it was wrong to cheat the darkies out of their votes—I always thought he was astray on this point, and I think so yet. Gordon contended, also, that they had the same kind of feelings as white folks—but I suppose that will be a debated point while time shall last. Gordon did not know, however, how necessary it was that the darkies should be kept in their proper place; nor did he know the long purgatory our Southland had gone through in the days of reconstruction, and carpetbaggers, and negro rule, and all that sort of thing. He had no idea of the fiery zeal with which white men had to guard their supremacy, enforcing the social distinction, keeping the negro where he belonged, piously preserving the curse of Ham upon him. In a word, Gordon hadn't grasped this fundamental truth—which the world may just as well accept first as last—that, no matter how the negro race may predominate in numbers, or grow in wealth, or develop in intelligence, the white man never will be ruled by the black man. And the only way to prevent his being on top is to keep him at the bottom. So I have heard ten thousand times—and so I heartily believe.

I think Gordon and I were discussing this very matter that night as we were walking home from the little gathering of which I have made mention already. Coming along the street that skirts the river, my attention was suddenly attracted by the sound of voices from near the water's edge, negro voices evidently, and marked by tokens of excitement. I at once stopped and called Gordon's attention to it.

"They're darkies," I whispered; "what can they be doing there at this hour of the night?" For it was midnight. "And that's uncle's property," which was true enough, he being the possessor of a shed and warehouse there that stood on the river's bank.

"What indeed?" Gordon echoed. "You don't suspect anything wrong, do you?"

I made some incoherent reply, muttering something about fire, I think. For that is a constant form of dread to the Southern mind.

"I'll go over and see," said Gordon. "You come part of the way—wait there, I won't let you out of my sight," as he moved on towards the shadowy figures that could be seen moving in the darkness. A low mysterious wail broke from them at frequent intervals.

“What are you doing here?” I heard Gordon’s stern Scotch voice ring out a moment after he had left me. A sharp cry of fear broke from the two crouching forms as they turned their dusky faces up to his through the night. They were two negro women and their rolling eyes shone white in the darkness. They stood before him trembling.

“Come, speak; what are you doing here?” Gordon’s voice came sterner than before.

“Please, sah, we’s lookin’ fo’ our chil’uns,” one liquid voice wailed forth.

I was Southern born and Southern bred—and I had been taught, as carefully as any, the non-humanity of the black. Yet I do not know that I ever felt such a gush of inward tears as rushed upon my heart that moment. The scene is before me yet; the stalwart frame in clerical attire, towering above the cowed and obeisant figures of the stooping women who seemed to crave, rather than expect, some word of human sympathy, some hand of human help. Poor, despised, ignorant, their cry yet echoed with the great note of love, the throb of primal passion pulsing through it; the age-old cry of the mother calling for her child. And I felt a wave of pity surging over me, such as I had never felt before. I rushed forward to where they stood; for the time, at least, we belonged to the selfsame race—mine, too, was a woman’s heart.

Their story was soon told, for it was brief. The two children, a son of each, had been out playing together in the early evening. The last they could learn of them was to the effect that a negro man, named Simkins, had been seen talking to them. Simkins was a drunken loafer. The unhappy women had themselves discovered that a little skiff, in which Simkins had a part interest, was missing from its place—and the tracks of boyish feet in the sand could be seen where the bow of the boat had been. Doubtless Simkins had beguiled them with the prospect of a cruise—and what then?

In a moment Gordon was questioning them with eager interest, interpreting their replies with difficulty; for their dialect, unfamiliar to him at the best, was now more unintelligible by reason of their grief. While he spoke with them the women instinctively drew closer, as if confident of a friend.

“Where do you suppose he rowed them to?” he asked quickly.

The women didn’t know.

“Where does this man Simkins live?” he asked, after some further questioning.

“ ‘Way down by Pickett’s Landin’—by de long wauf,” one of the women said. “But he done started from heah, sah.”

“The long wharf,” repeated Gordon, turning to me, “where is that wharf? For that’s where he’d try to land, likely enough—and if anything’s happened, that’s where it likely occurred.”

“I know the place,” I answered, “but it’s about a mile away.”

“We’ll search this place first,” he said decisively, “and if we find no sign we’ll look there. Have you any idea where we could get a lantern?”

I thought there might possibly be one in uncle’s warehouse. A minute later Gordon was inside, having found an unlocked window. Two or three matches flared and spluttered; then a steady light, and in a moment he had reappeared with the lantern.

Up and down he strode, examining all the locality, the moaning women following at his heels.

“There isn’t a sign of anything here,” he announced as he jumped down from a little landing from which he had been flashing his lantern on the water. “I’ve got a feeling, somehow, that this man Simkins would try to land at the wharf nearest his home. Come away—we’ll go there.”

“But you’ll have to take me home first,” I interposed.

“Is it on the way?” Gordon paused long enough to ask.

“No, it’s the opposite direction.”

“Then it can’t be done,” he answered, in a tone no Southern woman is accustomed to hear; “you’ll have to come with us,” and with a word or two more which I have forgotten, but whose tone of mastery I remember well, he asked the women which road to take. If his manner had been less noble and self-forgetful I would have said he was lacking in the chivalric deference I was accustomed to receive at the hands of gentlemen. But this never seemed to enter Gordon’s mind, surrendered as it was to the business in hand. Before I knew it he was off, and I had no option but to follow.

A strange procession we must have made as we wound our way through the silent streets. In front marched Gordon, the lantern swinging to his stride, pausing now and then to enquire about a turn in the way; behind him

shuffled the crooning women, gratitude and woe mingling in their constant moan; last of all came I, keeping up as best I could.

As we moved out on the rickety wharf, to which we came at last, I heard Gordon utter an exclamation of some sort and rush forward. Then he stopped, holding the lantern low; its beams revealed the face of a negro man, lying in drunken oblivion on the wharf. With shrill intonation, rudely shaking him, the women demanded of the unconscious Simkins the whereabouts of their children. But Simkins' only response was a temporarily half-opened eye, immediately reclosed, and a groan of drunken content as he sank deeper into his bestial slumber. An empty bottle lay beside him.

Gordon turned from him with a murmur of contempt, bidding the women cease from their pitiful pleading with the unconscious man. Swinging the lantern high, its farthest beams just disclosed a little skiff floating idly near the shore. "He's upset it climbing out, as sure as death," I heard him mutter—"it has shot out from under him." Then like a flash he made his way over the side, creeping stealthily down the unsteady timbers till he was at the water's edge, the lantern still in his hand.

A cry of horror broke from his lips, echoed in unreasoning woe from the women above him. He was peering down into the water.

"They're there—in each others' arms," broke from him a moment later in a tone of ineffable sadness. "Come down and hold the lantern, Helen." He reached up his hand to me without a word; and, to the accompaniment of sounds of anguish strangely and suddenly subdued, I clambered down till I stood on the broad beam beside him. Still the strange, low chant went on above us, still the silent stars looked down. Slowly, resolutely, still gazing into the placid depths, Gordon removed his coat and vest while I held the lantern as he directed. But I kept my eyes upward to the stars. A swift plunge, a half minute's silence, and he reappeared, one of the hapless playmates in his hand. A second pilgrimage into the depths, and both were side by side upon the beam on which we stood. One by one, he bore them, climbing, and laid them together on the wharf. With loud outcry of anguish the women flung themselves upon their unresponsive dead.

They lay together, those little offshoots of an unhappy race, their own life tragedy past and done. Dripping they lay, the peace of death upon their faces, as though the relentless wave had given them kindly welcome. About eight or nine years of age, poor, ragged, despised, they had yet been seeking some scant share of pleasure—out to play—when death claimed them for his own. It was the birthday of one of them—so his mother said, while each

wailed above her own—and that was why they had been permitted to play late. Each had her simple tale of love, of admiration; each told, with alternating gusts of grief, of the goodness of her own. Each spoke of the brothers and sisters at home; each wondered what life would be without the one who was gone.

I stood, helpless. But I saw, and for the first time, that God had called Gordon to be a pastor. For he knelt beside them—I think sometimes his dripping white-clad arm rested gently on the shoulder of one or the other—and he tried to comfort them. He spoke, so low and tenderly that sometimes I could scarcely hear his voice, of many things; most of which I have forgotten. But I do remember that he said God didn't love them any less than they; and I recall yet how wonderfully he spoke of Everlasting Life. Those very words, and he couldn't have said them more grandly if it had been a Cathedral service. And I think he helped them a little, for they sometimes lifted their heads and looked at him in a dumb, grateful way. But their hearts were broken. It came over me strangely that this was the first time I had ever stood so close to death, and to sorrow—and these mourners were of the dusky race.

There was little more that we could do. Of course, Gordon roused somebody and sent for the proper persons. But finally we had to leave them alone, the women and their dead. Silently, as if he were revolving some thought in which I had no share, Gordon walked home beside me. Only one thing I can remember that he said. I think he stood still and looked at me through the dark as he said it:

"Helen, the Bible says that God made of one blood all the nations of the earth, doesn't it?"

"Yes," I agreed, wondering what was coming.

"They don't believe it down here, do they?—the white folks, I mean?"

"Maybe not," I answered hesitatingly; "at least, I reckon they don't think it's meant to be taken literally."

"Perhaps not," and his eyes glowed like fire and his voice cut like steel; "perhaps not—but He's made of one blood all the mothers of the earth, by God," the words coming out aflame with passion as if his soul were rent with bitter protest. Which indeed it was.

"What's that?" I suddenly cried, pointing in the direction of our house, from which we were not far distant now. "Oh, Gordon, quick, what's that?" as the dread sound fell upon my ear again.

For a dread sound it was indeed. I do not know that I had ever heard it before—certainly not more than once, and then when but a child—but it had the awful note that can be best described as the baying of furious and avenging men. The Southern heart, I fancy, would recognize it anywhere, just as a huntsman's child would know the far-off voice of hounds. I have heard many sounds since then, sounds that might well strike terror to the stoutest heart, but none so fraught with the savage omen of death and doom as the voice of strong and noble men when they are maddened with revengeful hate and aflame with thirst for blood.

Gordon was already hurrying. "Good heavens," I heard him murmur as we turned a sudden jog in the road, "what a furious scene! They're mad, Helen, they're mad," he cried as we hurried closer; "what on earth means this?—look, they've got a halter round the wretch's neck."

"Take me home," I said faintly, pointing towards the house, now but a few yards from us.

"What does it mean, I say?" he repeated huskily, pressing on as though he did not hear.

"It means death," I faltered; "they're going to kill him—— Oh! take me home," as I clutched his arm and staggered half fainting towards the door.

XIII
THE LYNCHING

NEEDLESS to say the household was astir. For our house had a fatal location—at least, so it proved that night—standing as it did in a quiet part of the town close to the long bridge that spanned the river. And the crowd was making for the bridge; this was to serve as a scaffold.

Uncle was not at home. He had gone forth about midnight, as my aunt told me. A few minutes later he returned, but only for a moment, to explain the cause of his absence, and to tell them not to expect him till they saw him. His eyes were bloodshot, my mother said, and his lips were dry. Yet uncle was the most peaceable of men—but this one thing seems to make savages out of the mildest of Southern gentlemen. It was the old story; this wretched negro had assaulted a woman on the street, a poor ignorant white girl who had been sitting up with a sick friend, and who thought she could slip unattended across the couple of blocks that separated her from her home. He had dragged her into an alley—but God sent somebody.

None of these infuriated men—and they comprised the flower of our population, many of them men of wealth and culture—had ever heard of the woman upon whom the black had attempted violence. But this mattered not—had she been the beauty of the city, or the belle of the South itself, their fury could not have been greater. She was white; he was black—that was enough, esteemed by them as a warrant from God Himself. For no thought of the right or wrong of their deadly zeal ever took possession of their minds. No knight of the middle ages was ever more sincere in the ardour that gave the Crusades their glory. If ever men believed they were doing God service, they were these hot-hearted men who hurried their trembling sacrifice onward to the bridge.

My aunt had put out the lights; whether to render the house less conspicuous, or to help us see the better, I do not know. For few words passed as the three white faces peered out at the wild scene before us. The moon had risen now, and we could see the faces of some of the men, though

many were in masks. A peculiar quietness seemed to come over the throng as they came closer to the bridge, once so tense that we could catch distinctly the pleading wail of the central figure, tugging desperately at the rope around his neck. Poor creature, he knew not the ways of Southern men; or perhaps he did—and yet one drowning in mid-ocean would still swim towards the shore.

We saw them drag the miserable culprit on to the bridge—then we turned away. I suppose every Southern woman would cry out in horror at the thought of following them thus far—and every one would have done the same as we. Yet now we turned, faint, from the window—that last dread scene was for other eyes than ours.

But suddenly we heard a mighty shout, marvelling what it might portend. A kind of gleeful cry it was, as if something had been discovered, or some better plan devised; which proved to be the case. For I looked again, and lo! they were bearing the wretch back from the bridge. A swift vision of mercy quickened my heart, for I took this to be a reprieve. Yet the doomed man seemed reluctant to be moved, clinging desperately to the railing of the bridge—for his hands were free. The rope about his neck tightened as they dragged him back, and when it relaxed I could hear his piteous appeals, breaking now into loud wails of anguish. They dragged him on.

In a moment all was clear. A large post, or pole, stood close beside the bridge; towards this they hauled him, new zeal seeming to animate the breast of every executioner. I saw two or three of the younger men running towards the pole. They had something in their arms. It was wood—and a hot flush came over me from head to foot.

“Oh, God,” I moaned to myself, “they’re going to burn him,” and even as I spoke they were tying the struggling man tight to the post, others piling the wood up about him.

In an instant all was ready—and I caught the gleam of a lighted match. I stood, transfixed with horror. Then I felt my aunt and my mother tugging faintly at my dress, clutching at my arm, their faces averted meantime.

“Come away; for God’s sake, come away,” they pleaded, faint and sick at heart.

I was just obeying and had already turned from the window, when I heard a shout, full of savage wrath and protest—whereat I turned and looked once more.

And my eyes fell on a scene that even yet, after all the intervening years, I cannot recall without a bounding heart. For suddenly from out the crowd there had rushed one man, tall, powerful, clothed in black, his face as savage as the others, though it was savagery of a different sort. He has told me since —though we have only spoken of it once or twice through all the years— that his own life was as nothing to him that night. He saw nothing but hundreds of bloodthirsty men, and one guilty wretch, and the first lick of flame about his feet. Out from the crowd had Gordon rushed with sudden impulse, and, when my eyes fell on him, the sticks and faggots were going this way and that, some by his feet, some by his hands outflung. Then, before the wonder-stricken men who were closest to him could interfere, he had trampled on the two or three already lighted brands, trampled them in fury deep into the ground.

Then he stood before them; he was close beside the black, whose quivering face was upturned to his in an agony of pleading. There he stood, a mighty figure of a man; at least, so he appeared to me as I gazed, petrified, at the awesome scene. And his pose was the very incarnation of defiance as he towered above them, his face aflame with indignation and courage and contempt.

Then I saw a movement in the crowd—or felt it rather—that chilled my heart with terror. I knew what would happen now, knew it, with unerring instinct—and I trembled as a fawn quivers when it hears the first low cry of distant dogs. And swiftly, silently, scorning both aunt and mother, I flew through the door on to the porch, down the steps, gliding like a shadow till I found shelter behind an ancient elm on the outskirts of the swaying crowd. I was as safe there, and as unobserved, as though I had been a hundred miles away.

It only took a minute, but Gordon had begun to speak before I got there, his quivering voice ringing like a bell through the night. The men before me were just beginning to recover from the first shock of surprise.

“Who is that —— fool?” I heard one enquire, not more than four feet ahead of me.

“I know him,” a voice answered. I recognized the informant at once—he had been to our house for supper only a few nights before. “He’s a parson that’s visiting the Lundys. A —— Scotchman,” he went on contemptuously; “his father’s a collie dog over there—takes care of sheep on the hills, he told me.”

I knew how helpless I was, but my blood was boiling. I shook my fist at the horrid creature from where I stood—I could have lynched *him*, right then and there.

"If you must kill him before he's proved guilty," came Gordon's voice, "kill him like white men, not like Indians."

A mighty roar went up at this, and the crowd swayed nearer to the central figures. A loud howl of terror came from the negro. But the immediate peril was not for him—the storm was raging now about another head than his. I think a moment later would have seen Gordon in the clutches of the mob, had it not been temporarily restrained by one of the oldest and most honoured of our citizens. I saw him lift his hand as a signal for silence; in a moment he and Gordon seemed to be carrying on an animated argument. I couldn't hear Colonel Mitford, for such was his name; but I could catch Gordon's voice.

"I've heard plenty about your Southern chivalry—would you lynch a white man if he offered the same indignity to a black woman as this wretch has done?"

The Colonel seemed to pause for a season. And really, it's not much wonder that he should—I am as Southern as any one who ever lived, but that question makes me pause even yet. Soon the Colonel broke out again, this time into quite a prolonged speech.

"It's all your rightful heritage," came back Gordon's voice, ringing high; "it's the legacy slavery has left you. You're only reaping what you sowed."

At this the clamour was renewed, the crowd pressing in again—and I half started from my hiding-place. But again the Colonel persuaded them to silence, and again he directed his remarks to Gordon. He was evidently saying something about the relation of the races.

Then came Gordon's thunderbolt: "It seems to me," he cried hotly, recklessly, "it seems to me you couldn't have much more fusion than you have already—this negro's half white himself;" which proved more, as I knew it would, than any Southern man would stand.

"Then you can take what you deserve, curse you for a nigger-lover," I heard the Colonel retort madly, his voice lost in the roar of hate, the wild outcry for vengeance that burst from the infuriated crowd. All resistance was now swept away, and a few ringleaders at the front fairly clutched at Gordon. One had him by the throat, the others pressing in upon him with wolfish fury gleaming in their eyes.

But before their purpose—what it was I know not, nor probably did they—before it could be carried out, another rushed to the grim theatre. It was my Uncle Henry, his hat gone, lost somewhere in the crowd. He leaped to where Gordon stood, and at his presence the men fell back.

"You shan't injure this man," he shouted hoarsely. "Not that I contend he doesn't deserve it—but he's my guest," the word echoing clear. "He's my guest," uncle repeated, for he knew the magic of the word; "he's a stranger amongst us—and an ignorant stranger at that. I'll take the fool home," he went on, casting at Gordon one of the most contemptuous glances I ever saw from human eyes, "and I'll deal with him myself. I'll promise you to deal with him—he's my guest. And you shall do as you please with the nigger."

I think the storm abated for a moment. Perhaps it would have subsided altogether, for stranger is a sacred name to Southern ears. But suddenly Colonel Mitford, still ashy pale with wrath, shouted to the crowd:

"He said they couldn't have more white blood in them than they've got—he said we're blended now," the words ending in a half snarl, half cry; for if there is anything under God's sky that makes Southern men drunk with fury it is just such a statement as Gordon had been rash enough to make.

Some one else shouted a confirmation of the Colonel's words, another added something Gordon had never said; and slowly, relentlessly, the crowd surged in again upon him. My uncle was rudely flung aside—I could hear his voice in protest through the storm. Then, exactly what I feared, some of the assassins, more maddened than the rest, jerked the rope from the negro's neck and flung it with a loud cry over Gordon's head. This was to the crowd what the taste of blood is to the tiger, and a fiendish yell broke from a hundred throats. It is not likely they really meant to kill him—but no one could forecast the limit of their violence.

I wouldn't have cared if there had been a million men and every man a Nero. I didn't will to do it, I didn't know I was doing it, didn't calculate what it meant at all. But I just felt I was stronger than them all, and that it was now or never. So, without word or cry, I sprang from behind that ancient elm and leaped to where Gordon stood. I could never remember that I pushed or elbowed through the crowd; I don't believe I did. There seemed to be an open path for me, and in far less time than it takes to tell I was at his side. I remember how close I was—so close that I caught the gleam of that awful negro's eyes and felt his breath upon my cheek as he panted in prospect of his doom. And in a flash I had torn that rope from Gordon's neck, flung it on the ground, stamped on it, as I turned and hurled defiance

at the crowd in one long look that I felt myself was all of fire. Then I took Gordon's hand in mine, pointing silently towards the house. He followed me, and uncle walked behind.

I don't think the slightest resistance was offered us. The only protest was from Gordon himself. He would have lingered, had he had his way. But some word of mine—I know not what—settled that mad purpose in his mind; and he walked beside me, towering still, his head more erect, his bearing more kingly, than that of any of the throng who turned scornful eyes upon him as we went.

We were almost through the crowd when something happened that almost brought the mist of unconsciousness before my eyes, my head reeling, my heart spinning like a top. A voice, instantly familiar, spoke Gordon's name, hurling an epithet of contempt and hate so malignant that he turned a moment, as if he would seek and punish his assailant. Then he smiled disdainfully, took my arm tighter in his own, and walked calmly on.

I too turned—and the face I saw was the face of Charlie Giddens. His gaze met mine, and he sought to smile; but I could see his enmity to Gordon gleaming through it all, and I hope my eyes bore themselves as my heart would wish.

When we gained our home aunt and mother received us with weeping joy. But uncle uttered never a word. Instead, he went silently about the house, drawing tight the shutters on every window that looked upon the scene we had just deserted. For he knew what was transpiring now. As he came down the stairs, I met him in the hall and flung my arms about his neck. Not a word of chiding escaped his lips—he stroked my hair, and his tenderness was the tenderness of farewell.

I told him, with trembling voice, that I had seen Mr. Giddens in the throng. This did not surprise him. "I know it," he said; "he came in on the eleven o'clock train—he heard the noise, of course, and came up. Listen," he suddenly cried, as we heard a footfall on the porch, succeeded by a gentle knock at the door, "what's that? That'll be him—go inside, child," as he walked to the door to open it.

Gordon was sitting in the corner of the room, offering speech to nobody, when Mr. Giddens came in. The latter bowed with courtly grace to my mother and my aunt, casting on me a glance that showed he still hoped—perhaps more now than ever. Then he walked straight over till he stood in front of Gordon.

“Laird,” he said, before any one could speak, “you’ve tried to ruin my happiness—and I’ve got to settle with you yet for that.” Gordon sprang to his feet. “And you’ve outraged the sentiment of this city—and you’ve disgraced this home,” the words coming out like pistol-shots, “and I want to know what you’ve got to say for yourself.”

“Nothing—to you,” said Gordon, his face looking a little terrible, his voice overflowing with contempt.

Mr. Giddens turned livid—and he made a motion backward with his hand, a motion familiar to all Southern men; it was towards his pocket. “If it weren’t my respect for the house we’re in,” he hissed through his teeth, “I’d shoot you like a dog.”

Gordon’s face was now altogether terrible. He stepped closer to the Southerner, his eyes fastened on him like balls of flame. “I’ve heard other cowards talk like that,” he said.

Then Mr. Giddens’ hand flew forward, unarmed; and he struck Gordon full in the face. We were too late—we might as well have raced with lightning. Before we could speak or move, Gordon’s mighty grip was on his throat, and he wrenched him back, back, till his head struck with a thud against the corner wall. There is something marvellous about these Scotchmen when madness seizes them. So reserved, so silent, so inscrutable, there is no race on earth so calm and none so deadly. And strength—such fearful strength! Still gripping him with grasp of iron, Gordon drew back his hand, every muscle in neck and wrist standing out like whip-cords as he gathered force for the blow.

Then suddenly his hand fell to his side; he seemed to shake himself free from his passion, as a man wakens himself from sleep; the mighty struggle showed in the quivering voice.

“I could kill you,” he said with fearful quietness; “I could kill you now—go,” as he released his antagonist, already purple.

Holding his hand to his throat, the hot blood cooled by now, Mr. Giddens staggered over towards my uncle. “Mr. Lundy,” he began thickly, “we expect you to deal with this cur—as you said you would. He’s brought disgrace on you—and he’s insulted every lady in the South by what he did to-night—and we look to you to treat him as he deserves.”

There was a queer smile about my uncle’s mouth. For nearly a minute he did not speak, did not even look towards the man who had addressed him. Then he turned slowly round.

"Mr. Giddens," he began, in a voice that sounded strange from him, "I'll deal with him. Yes, sir, I reckon I'll deal with him."

"I knew you would, Mr. Lundy," the other returned eagerly; "I knew no Southern gentleman——"

"But I'll deal with you *first*, sir," my uncle interrupted stormily; "you knew—you knew, did you? Perhaps you didn't know that no gentleman allows another man to insult his guest. And that's what you've done, sir—that's what you've done—you struck a visitor in my house, struck him in the face, sir. There's the door, sir—the street's the place for you,—go," his voice rolling like thunder now.

Mr. Giddens ventured an amiable smile, stepping a little nearer to my uncle. I think he partly held out his hand. "Mr. Lundy," he began in a conciliatory tone, "I meant no disrespect to you. This really isn't necessary, Mr. Lundy. You and I were friends before we knew this—this Scotchman—was on the earth. And it seems a pity——"

"Go," thundered my uncle, pointing to the door. Then suddenly his voice grew white with ungovernable wrath, and he whipped a shining pistol from his pocket. "Go, by heavens," he cried huskily; "I had this ready for the nigger—but you'll get it if you speak another word. Go out that door—or you'll be carried out, by God," as he advanced nearer to the already retreating man.

When we were alone and all was still again, uncle silently motioned me to follow him. Gordon had already departed in silence to his room. Uncle took me into his own apartment and shut the door behind him.

"Helen," he began gravely, "I shall speak no word to—to your friend. Not a word. You must tell him."

"Tell him what?" I asked, who had no need to ask.

"I reckon you know," my uncle answered quietly. "He can stay here no longer, of course."

"No," I assented, my voice choking.

"But he needn't leave to-night—tell him he can stay the night. But to-morrow," he concluded significantly. I nodded.

"Will you go to him—some day, I mean?" he asked after a long pause.

"Yes," I faltered, with downcast head; "yes, some day."

“And leave me, Helen?”

“Yes.”

“And your mother—and Aunt Agnes?”

“Yes,” I murmured low, the hot tears dropping from my eyes.

“I suppose you know he can never come back here any more?” he began after a little, the words coming slowly and sadly.

“Yes,” I answered; “yes, never any more.”

“You’re foolish, Helen,” and his own voice was choking as he came over and put his arm around me. “When you remember he’s a stranger; and then, your mother and I and——”

“Is that all?” I interrupted, sobbing.

“Yes,” he said slowly, “yes, that’s all.”

“Then I’ll tell him,” I said brokenly; “I’ll tell him now.”

I stole up-stairs to the attic and knocked at Gordon’s door. He opened it; then asked me if I would come in. I looked around; he had begun his simple packing. But he did not speak. Then I held out my arms—and I heard him murmur “Thank God” while he held me tight, so tight, as though he would never let me go.

I faltered out that uncle didn’t want him to go until the morning.

“It’s morning now,” he said firmly, “and I’m just ready to go,” from which resolve I was powerless to dissuade him. “I’ll stay at the hotel till to-morrow evening,” he added.

“But there’s a morning train,” I interrupted, looking up at him.

“I know—but I’m not going till the evening,” he said quietly. I knew what he meant.

Suddenly he disengaged my arms and held me out in front of him. “Helen Randall,” he said solemnly, “will you come to me?”

I buried my face again where it had been before; my tightening arms gave him answer. Then he kissed me, kissed me—only twice, I think—but he kissed me as maiden never was kissed before. And he bade me go; which I did after I had clung to him once more. And I remember how his poor face was bruised, where he had been struck the cruel blow.

I went to my room. Soon I heard him going down the stairs. I knew, from the sound of his steps, that he was carrying his valise. He saw Aunt Agnes in the hall, I believe, the only one who was there—and to her he said his last farewell. I heard the door close gently; I could catch the dying foot-falls echoing through the night.

I opened my door before I went to bed. Something was resting against it. Picking it up eagerly, I scanned it beneath the light. It was the old Scotch psalm-book from which Gordon had sometimes sung. And the page was turned over to mark one of the psalms—the forty-sixth—which he had indicated with heavy strokes. My eyes swam as I read the great lines over and over again. They seemed just meant for us:

"God is our refuge and our strength,
In straits a present aid;
Therefore although the earth remove,
We will not be afraid."

It refreshed me like a breath of mountain air to read the words; I was still murmuring them when I crept into bed. I resolved to try and learn the tune that was set to the noble psalm—Stroudwater it was called—and I wondered when I would sing it to Gordon in our own little home.

All of this, I remember, made me think that perhaps I wouldn't make such a bad minister's wife after all. I really loved the psalms. Yet I must confess, before this chapter finds its close, that a girl's heart takes a long time to change. I fear I was very weak and frivolous after all; I know I thought far more of Gordon, and of his love, than I did of religion or of the life-work that awaited me. Because, just as sleep was coming down about me, I found that my willful heart was chanting far other lines—and they seemed sweet and precious:

"Still must you call me tender names,
Still gently stroke my tresses;
Still shall my happy answering heart
Keep time to your caresses."

It was to their music I fell asleep, and I slept like a little child. But I have come to think long since that the song and the psalm were not such distant relatives after all.

XIV
GIRDING ON THE ARMOUR

THE year that followed Gordon's departure for the North was my growing year. It was the sweetest, dreariest, love-brightest, loneliest year of all my life—and it was, as I have said, my progress year. I mean, by that, it was the year which led me farthest in to the real secret of living and the real springs of life. Of course, it was a desolate twelvemonth; I never saw Gordon's face from its beginning to its close; and this was a new side of life to me, to discover that I could miss any one face so much. Nothing pleased me more than the sadness that used to settle down on me every now and then, especially in the twilight hour, when the dear absent one filled all my thought. There was a kind of royal state about my widowhood—if that sombre word can be applied to such a hopeful year—that made me feel I was set apart from all other girls, especially from those who had their happiness on tap right at their hands. Mine seemed to be fed from far-off fountains, farther up the hill; and I felt a kind of envious pity for those whose unromantic luxury it was to see their sweethearts every night. I walked by faith; but they by sight, I thought, paraphrasing a text of Scripture—which, it occurred to me, was the proper thing for a girl with such ministerial prospects as my own. But I suppose they pitied me in turn; which only goes to show what a self-rectifying world this is.

Besides, so far as my own household was concerned, I was deliciously alone. I learned, in this connection, something of the martyr's mysterious joy. If there was one thing beyond another that made me love Gordon more and more wildly every day, it was that my family hardly ever spoke his name. Excepting mother, of course; she was still my mother, if a disappointed and saddened one—and sometimes great freshets of tenderness and sympathy flowed from her heart over into mine. But uncle was so stern about it all, so consistently silent. If he had been a rejected lover himself he couldn't have handed me Gordon's daily letter more solemnly than he used to do when he came in with the mail.

These I always read alone in secret, putting them away afterwards with reverent hands—and I kept the key myself this time. And such letters as they were! I could be famous over all the world, if I chose to publish the love-letters of Gordon Laird—they were a combination of poetry and fire. Yet I had always read, and heard, that Scotchmen, even when in love, were as reserved and cold as their native mountains. Perhaps they are—but my Scotchman must have been a Vesuvius, with Eolian harp accompaniment, as the world would concede if they could once get their eyes upon his letters.

I valiantly renounced everything I thought questionable for a girl whose promised husband was a minister of the Gospel. I gave up cards, of course, though not without a pang. Sometimes I still went to card parties, but I never did anything worse than punch the score cards, which I could do quite dexterously. I never cared for the business though; if there's a mean occupation on earth, it's punching score cards while everybody else is having all the fun. I fancy I felt a good deal like those famous pugilists that drop down at last to holding a sponge, or something of that sort. I began, too, to take a faint interest in temperance; forswore claret punch forever; thought seriously, for several weeks, of giving up syllabubs; even went so far at table as to ask Aunt Agnes if she thought brandy sauce was quite the thing. Aunt said I didn't raise the question till after I had had two helpings. With regard to "the light fantastic," I never danced anything stronger than Sir Roger; used to play, sometimes, while the others waltzed—but that's deadly dry, like punching score cards, or holding a sponge when your fighting days are done.

About the brandy sauce, mother told me after that I needn't worry. Did I know how expensive brandy was, she said. And I had already told her how much salary Gordon was getting in his mission field in Canada. There is no need to mention it here—but it was mighty little. He had a country station, somewhere in the rural districts; of which, to my mind at least, Canada seemed to be almost entirely composed. For all I knew of that Dominion was from the geography we learned at school; it gave only a few paragraphs to our nearest neighbour nation—and these were clustered round a picture that would chill you to behold, the picture of a man without coat or vest, knee-deep in snow, lifting up his axe upon the trees of the forest.

Gordon's letters, of course, were full of his work and his people. And they didn't contain much that would likely attract a girl brought up as I had been. Little gatherings of people, mostly in country school-houses, deadly singing—which must have been hard on Gordon—rude companionship, humble lodgings and humbler fare, long rides and walks, scant results for all

his toil. But he seemed to love his work and his people, and never complained. Once or twice he said they were woefully conservative in their theology, and that they were sternly set against all the views of modern scholarship, even though they didn't know what they were. To tell the truth, I didn't know myself, but I felt uneasy at the term; far from religious though I was, I yet always felt that there were no doctrines worth the name except the old ones—the older the better, thought I. And when I asked Mr. Furvell about it he said he hoped Gordon wasn't a disciple of Robertson Smith, and added something darkly about a "higher critic." I didn't know exactly what this last might be—the adjective might apply to Gordon all right, I reckoned, but I didn't like the noun.

Anyhow, we were going to be married; that was the principal thing to me, and I went bravely on making preparations for the greatest event of all my life. I hadn't much to bring Gordon as a dower—practically nothing, indeed—for my mother's modest income left no margin for that, and was so bequeathed that it could not survive her. But I wanted to bring him a good true heart and a sound body—with a few lovely things to clothe it. Every girl wants that, or ought to, at least.

Of course, it was a sad feature of the case that we were not to be married at our own home. I suppose we might have been. In fact, mother told me as much, and I knew she had it straight from uncle. But I knew right well that it couldn't be a happy wedding there, with matters as they were; and, besides, it would have raked into fire the smouldering embers of that awful blaze that I have told about already. And the whole town would have been agog—not in the way, either, that every girl likes a town to be when she gets married. So it was arranged that our wedding was to take place quietly in Baltimore, at the house of a girl friend of mine whose marriage had taken her there to live. Gordon was to meet me there—though I really believe he would have preferred to beard the lions in their den—and mother was to go North and see me launched on this unknown sea.

The first time I was ever angry with Gordon was about six weeks before our wedding day. He wrote me a long letter, full of details about the humbleness of his position, and the slimness of his prospects—and the scarcity of his cash. He wanted to go ahead, of course, he said; but he thought it only fair to tell me, accustomed as I had been to a life of comparative luxury, of the great sacrifice I was making, and to give me a chance even yet, should I shrink from it, to etc., etc. I wrote him that very night and I told him I'd marry him if we had only the north side of a corn-cob to live on, which I inwardly thought was a pretty vigorous stroke and

worthy of a nimbler pen than mine. Gordon always kept that letter, he told me long after, lest the corn crop should ever fail.

It was a lovely wedding, though there were only four people besides ourselves to see it. Gordon held my hand so tight in his; and what I felt the most, and gloried in, was this—that he was so much stronger than I. My gown looked beautiful, they all said; and I cried a little—two things that are necessary, it seems to me, to any really successful wedding. I remember how Gordon cautioned me to be careful about packing my lovely dress, because, he explained, he wanted his people to see me at my best. This struck me as rather odd, considering the class of people I was to live among—I fancied a linsey-woolsey would please them as well as anything else. And I wondered when I would ever get a chance to wear the beautiful creation. But I had no idea of the surprise that was in store for me.

Mother went home by train. My husband and I started on our way by boat. It was a sweet and delicate suggestion on Gordon's part that we should go southward again for a day or two, to begin our married life under the dear familiar skies I loved so well. Wherefore we set sail that evening, exactly at seven o'clock, on the Old Bay Line, our destination to be Old Point Comfort, which we would reach the following morning.

It is really a pathetic thought that the bridal joy comes only once into a maiden's life, so quickly past and gone. It leads, no doubt—or ought to lead—into a deeper peace and a more steadfast love; but it leads, too, away from the tranquil care-free days of youth, on in to the storm and stress of life's long battle. I remember yet, with a thrill that never seems to die, the rapture of that hour as we steamed slowly out from Baltimore. There were not many passengers—none that we had ever seen before. We were alone—together. And by and by we found a place on a deserted corner of the deck, our chairs close together, our hands sometimes passionately clasping as we looked out over the darkening bay and thought in silence of the waiting years through which we were to be parted never more. By and by the rising moon clothed the bay in a robe of glory; and thus, with love and light about us, as happy as though no storm could ever disturb our lifelong way, we started on the long, long journey we were to take together.

"I've got some news for you, dear," Gordon suddenly startled me by saying.

"Do tell me quick, Gordon," said I. Only Gordon wasn't the name I used.

"Try and guess."

I thought a moment. “They’ve papered that old house,” I said, “without waiting till I came,” for Gordon had told me that the natives of his country parish had designs on the old stone manse against my arrival.

“Oh, no,” he said, laughing. “No, it’s good news—at least, I hope it may turn out to be.”

“Oh,” I exclaimed, drawing a long breath, “I’m so glad—the paper they’d choose would give me the jimjams, I know. Well, tell me.”

“We’re not going to the old stone manse at all,” he said, turning and looking radiantly at me in the moonlight. “We’re not going to Rocanville—I’ve got a call, Helen.”

“Where?” I gasped, leaning forward with my elbows on his knees, caring not who saw. “And why didn’t you tell me—— Oh, Gordon, did you feel you couldn’t trust me?” my voice trembling a little as the first pang of conjugal sorrow smote my bosom.

He laughed; then stooped and kissed me, having previously cast a swift Scotch glance about the deck. “I’d trust you with my life, my darling,” he murmured—which comforted me a good deal. “But I wasn’t exactly sure till two or three days ago—and I wanted to surprise you—and I wanted always to think that when my Helen gave herself to me, she thought she was going into the wilds for love’s sweet sake. So it will always be just as precious to me as if you had actually gone.”

“But where are we going?” I pressed eagerly, not lingering on the sweetness; “don’t keep me waiting, Gordon.”

“To Old Point Comfort,” he said with the most provoking deliberation.

“Don’t tease me, dearest,” I protested. Wonderful, isn’t it, how brides always employ the tenderest names when they are just a little bit exasperated.

And then he told me where it was we were to begin our married life. The church that had called us was named St. Andrew’s; and it was the leading church, Gordon said, in Hertford, a Canadian city that shall so be named. “At least,” he hastened to add, “it’s the richest church, has the richest class of people in it—whether that makes it the leading church or not.”

“Oh, I’m so glad,” I exclaimed breathlessly, my face aglow. “So that’s why you wanted me to be so careful of my wedding dress? Isn’t it all like a lovely fairy tale? And are we going there right away?”

"Yes—after we leave Point Comfort. I'm to be installed there a week from to-day—and there's to be a reception to us in the evening."

"Oh, lovely!" I cried; "I didn't think I'd get a chance to wear my finery at all. Do tell me all about it, Gordon," as I snuggled closer in the moonlight. The deck was gloriously deserted now.

"There isn't much to tell," he said, and I wondered why he wasn't more jubilant about it all. "They invited me to preach before them a few weeks ago. I went—never dreamed they would call me, though. But they did. And the church isn't such a very large one—but it's very fashionable; too fashionable, I fear. A minister isn't always happiest in a church like that, you know," and again I caught the note in his voice which showed he didn't regard the prospect with unmixed enthusiasm.

"But I know we'll be happy, dear," I reassured him, quite frank in my exultation; "that class of people will suit you so much better. They'll appreciate you—you'd have been wasted on those common people at that other outlandish place."

"Not wasted, dear," he answered quietly; "a man's never wasted where he does his best. But I'm glad for your sake," he went on more brightly; "I don't think I'd have gone, only I thought you'd be happier there."

"I'd be happy anywhere with you," I replied in bridal bliss. "I'd have come to you just the same if you'd been assistant minister of an Indian church at the North Pole. But I'm glad," my happy words went on, "I'm so glad we're going to be among congenial people. And I'm sure we'll have a lovely time—we'll have a lovely social life, I mean."

"I hate social life—society life, at least," Gordon suddenly broke out in a voice that quite startled me; "and if they think I'm going to be a gossipy tea-drinking parson, they'll soon find their mistake."

"But, Gordon," I remonstrated seriously, "you shouldn't look at it that way. Consider the influence you can have over them—that is, through their social life. I think the minister of rich people has the greatest chance in the world—to do them good, I mean. And I'll help you—I'll help you, dearest."

"How?" my husband enquired after a little pause.

"Well," I answered slowly; "oh, well, I like that sort of thing. I'm not much good, you know, at—at—religious work, prayer-meetings and things," I floundered on; "but I can—I can do that part, because I like it. I'll try and help you, Gordon—in that department, you know," I concluded, realizing, I fear, that it wasn't a very heroic field.

“I want my little wife to help me in all the departments,” he answered, smiling. “And you will, won’t you, dearest—you’ll love my work for its own sake, won’t you?”

Which I promised swiftly. “But I think I’ll love it more in that kind of a church,” I added frankly, “than I would at Rocanville. And of course I won’t play cards with them, or dance—or anything like that,” I affirmed piously, looking to Gordon for an approving smile; “but I suppose it won’t be any harm for me to go to those things, will it, dear?”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” he said, looking out over the shining bay; “but I want my wife to find her life-work in mine—and to help me be a truer and better minister, no matter where our field of work may be.”

All of which I promised, with the gladdest, happiest heart. And I told Gordon I wanted him to write me out a little prayer, a kind of missionary prayer, for opening meetings with, and all that sort of thing. Gordon said I was a ritualist.

Then we arose to go inside, for the night was growing chill.

“Is there any danger, Gordon,” I asked as we walked through the saloon, “any danger, do you think, that my trunks won’t get to Hertford the same day we do? They have the reception that night, you said.”

“Oh, no,” he said; “the trunks have gone on ahead already.”

“I’m so glad,” I answered; “it would be too bad to begin our work there with—with any handicap like that, you know.”

XV
"OUR LADY OF THE SNOWS"

It was evident there were plenty of rich people in St. Andrew's, as Gordon had told me. I hadn't been half an hour in the parlours of the church that evening of our reception before I was sure of that. My trunks had come to hand all right, and my wedding splendour was making what show it could, but it soon found its level among the costly gowns that were worn by many a fair dame that night. If I had wanted abundant evidence that Gordon was to be minister of a fashionable church, I had every reason to be satisfied. I had never seen so much rich religion in any one organization. Although, of course, the evening wasn't very much on the religious order. There was an opening prayer, I think, and the good brother who offered it prayed that they might all go out into the highways and byways and compel them to come in. I remember thinking most of them would have to change their clothes before they did any highway duty of that kind—and I felt sorry for the wanderers that might be introduced.

The people were very kind and cordial in their welcome. But I could see they expected me to realize what a superior sort of people they were, and what a fortunate sort of individual I was. They nearly all shook hands in the high pump-handle fashion that was almost unknown in the South; and they managed, in divers little ways, to let me know they were a very elaborate aggregation of Christian folks. I rather thought one or two of the best groomed of them looked at me as if I had no right to be so decently clothed myself.

The evening was far spent when, as my husband was talking to a lady, a very important looking man came up and shook her solemnly by the hand. "We're glad to welcome you, Mrs. Laird," he said; "I have already met your husband—and I hope you'll feel at home amongst us." Whereat Gordon got quite excited. "Oh," he broke in, "this is not my wife—here," as he beckoned to me, "this is Mrs. Laird"—and I hurried forward. I cast a swift glance at the woman he had taken for me, and my cheeks burned with indignation. She was very religious, as I learned afterwards—but she was

forty if she was a day, and dressed as if she had just come out of the ark, and wore a bonnet that might have been an heirloom in the family. However, I forgave her, being secretly thankful that it was not I. She was a stranger, I learned, from another church.

In a few minutes Mr. Ashton—for such proved to be the gentleman's name—was deep in conversation with me and Gordon.

"Yes," he went on, after some casual remarks, "your husband has fell on his feet all right." I started a little at the grammar; for Mr. Ashton was bedecked in the best of clothes, and had one or two diamonds about his person into the bargain. "We had forty-three applications when our pulpit became vacant—and it was quite a strain, picking out the man. You see, this is a very remarkable congregation," he went on in quite a wealthy tone, "and it's not every man could just suit us. But I think you'll give us exactly what we want, Mr. Laird," he added, turning to Gordon; "your style suits me exactly," and he smiled very amiably at my husband.

"I haven't anything but the Gospel, Mr. Ashton," Gordon replied, a little distantly I thought, "and I suppose that's what any of the forty-three would have given you."

"Yes, yes," replied Mr. Ashton, toying with a ponderous seal that dangled from a very elaborate chain, "the Gospel's the thing. Give me the Gospel—and the old Gospel too—none of your new-fangled ideas for me. No man could have got St. Andrew's pulpit if I'd thought he believed there was two Isaiahs. You don't believe in those new-fangled notions, of course, do you, Mr. Laird?"

Gordon flushed slightly. "I don't concern myself much with whether a truth is old or new," he answered presently, "so long as I believe it's the truth. Even if it comes from the critics, I welcome truth from them as quickly as from any other source."

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Ashton loftily, knitting his brows the while, "to a certain extent, that is. But the old doctrines are good enough for me. And—as I was saying, Mrs. Laird—we've got a very rich congregation; very rich," he repeated, drawing in his breath, "and, I hope, not without a sense of its responsibility too. Last year we had a surplus of eight hundred dollars—no regular salary to pay, you see—and on my own motion, on my own motion, we voted seventy-five of it to foreign missions. None of us felt the poorer for it, I'm sure—and I hope we'll be kept faithful to the end," he went on piously, "faithful to the end, Mr. Laird," as he turned again and smiled at Gordon.

"I'd have gone in for giving the whole thing to missions," Gordon ventured boldly.

"Very good, Mr. Laird; very good indeed, to a certain extent. But we never expect our minister to bother with the finances," he said patronizingly. "Our last minister got into trouble that way—was always preaching about the poor; talked a great deal about giving, and that sort of thing—used to preach some very worldly sermons. And our people didn't take to it, didn't take to it at all, Mrs. Laird. To be quite frank, our people want the Gospel and nothing but the Gospel—I'm that way myself; none of your financial or political sermons for me," he concluded quite significantly. "If our minister looks after his pulpit and gets up the kind of sermons we expect him to give, we'll—we'll run the finances all right, Mr. Laird." Then he dangled his glittering fob again and smiled up at Gordon; for Gordon was half a head higher than he.

"I'm afraid we're keeping you too much to ourselves, Mr. Ashton," Gordon suddenly broke in, offering me his arm and starting to move away; "the others will want to speak to you," as he smilingly withdrew, a light in his eyes that I could interpret quite well, lost though it was on our prosperous parishioner. Before we left, Gordon enquired quietly about Mr. Ashton, and we learned that he owned a huge factory and was quite the richest man in the church. One or two declared he ran the whole institution, and that whatever he said was law. I don't think this cheered Gordon very much.

The two years that followed were trying ones for me. It seemed as if I were on exhibition on every hand, and I felt nearly all the time as if I were at some kind of a public meeting. The church had no end of societies, especially women's societies, and they all expected me to be present on every occasion. I did my best but it was pretty hard. I memorized the little prayer Gordon had written out for me—and broke down in the middle of it the first time I tried to deliver it. It was like being lost at sea. And one of the ladies afterwards, whose husband was very rich—he made it out of lard—told me not to be discouraged; she said their previous minister's wife made a living show of herself, time and time again, before she got to be able to pray properly. So I stopped right there, without further exhibition.

I bravely attempted teaching a class in the Sunday-school. Things didn't go so badly for the first three Sundays, although the boys asked some questions that dreadfully embarrassed me; I told them they must think these things out for themselves. But the fourth Sunday two of them fell to fighting —over a big glass alley—and they had a quite disgraceful time. There was

bloodshed. It really quite unnerved me, as I didn't know the minute they might break out again; so in about six weeks I gave that up.

Another thing discouraged me a good deal—and that was that we were comparatively poor. Although the congregation was composed so largely of rich people, they seemed to think—and Mr. Ashton openly avowed—that nothing injured a minister's spiritual life like having too much money. So we were kept pretty safe that way. But there was one lovely thing about the salary—and that was, the manse; within which Gordon and I made our home as soon as we came to Hertford. It seemed a little small to me in comparison with uncle's big house at home; but we fixed it up till it was as sweet and cozy as any little home could be, and Gordon's delight was something to behold. He said it was like a palace to him, and I was its lovely queen. This was very melodious to me, for when Gordon said pretty things he meant them.

However, it was rather trying, after all, to be so much harder up than many of our people. Some of these seemed to love to ask me why we didn't keep horses; and whether or not we were going to Europe this summer; and how many servants we employed. They knew right well all the time that we had enough to do to keep ourselves, and that we were about as likely to go to Mars as to Europe—it comforted me a little to know I could have gone if I hadn't fallen in love with Gordon—and as for servants, we had only our red-headed Harriet; but she was first cousin to the wife of one of the richest men in the church. Their fathers were brothers, Harriet told me exultantly; but Harriet's had remained a mechanic, while Mrs. Newcroft's had become a manufacturer. Harriet generally got one afternoon in the week off; Mrs. Newcroft soon found this out, and always chose that day to call, lest Harriet should greet her as Mary Ann—which, in my opinion, she had a perfect right to do.

It was a funny aristocracy we had in Hertford—about as cheerful, and hopeful, and mushroomy an aggregation as you could find anywhere. So different from the South, it was; wealth didn't cut much of a figure with our old Southern families. But the patricians of Hertford, for the most part, had bought their way to the seats of the mighty; and nearly all the blue blood was financially blue. Some of the grand dames had been servants themselves in their early days; which was no disgrace to them, I'm sure, only it *was* amusing to see how they looked down on servants now. In fact, I often felt how discouraging must have been their arduous efforts to build up an aristocracy at all; things would have gone pretty well, had it not been for some mean old outsiders who would insist on remembering back thirty or

forty years. Those within the sacred circle generously forgot—each for the other. They let bygones be bygones, to their mutual advantage. But outsiders had cruel memories. Wherefore, just when they were getting their aristocracy nicely established, some of these inconsiderate old-timers would go rummaging in the past; and, the first thing we knew, they would stumble on an anvil, or unearth a plough, or a hod, or something of that kind—whereat the blue-blooded had to begin all over again. For the descendants of hod, or plough, or anvil, had somehow developed the greatest scorn for these honest trade-marks of other days.

Gordon never said much to me—I heard him use the term "Shanghai nobility" once, with a smile—but I knew how he despised it all. I could see his eye flash sometimes when some of them were getting off their little speeches, trying to let us know in what lofty society they moved and what superior folks they were. Indeed, it became more and more clear to me that Gordon was never meant to be the minister of a rich congregation at all. His father was a shepherd—it used to mortify the grandees of St. Andrew's dreadfully to hear him say so—and Gordon was full of the simple sincerity and manly independence that I felt sure must have marked his ancestors. And I don't think Gordon ever preached a sermon without unconsciously making them feel that he was independent of them, if ever a man was, which was the simple truth, for my husband had his warrant from far higher hands than theirs, and I don't think he knew what it was to feel the fear of man.

Wherefore it came about, and it is not to be wondered at, that Gordon found a great deal of his work among the poor. Little by little, to the dismay of many of the aristocrats, he added to the number of the lowly that made their church home in St. Andrew's. And he founded, and cherished, a mission chapel in Swan Hollow, one of the most degraded parts of the city. I really believe the rich were jealous of the poor, for Gordon seemed to love them best and to be happiest when he was among them. But the poor people worshipped him for it—and I believe I did too.

Oh, how I envied him! For he seemed to have a source of happiness of which I knew nothing. I can remember, when my days were full of teas, and at-homes, and all sorts of social functions, how much more full and satisfying his life seemed to be than mine. Sometimes I would get Harriet to make a little jelly, or some delicacy of that sort, for the poor sick folks he used to tell me about; but Gordon gave them his heart, his life, his love—and that made all his work a perpetual joy to him. This was the deep spring from which he drank—and I had no part in it at all. I used to punch the score cards at evening parties, and sometimes I played for the dancers as before—

thus did my poor hungry heart nibble at the phantom crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. But both my heart and I were starving.

It strikes me as wonderful, now that I sit and look back upon it all, how inevitably, and by what different paths, and under what varying influences I came closer to Gordon's side.

XVI
A KNIGHTLY GUEST

"Do you suppose we could afford a carriage for the Ashtons' dinner?" I asked Gordon one evening, the evening before the function in question.

Gordon hesitated. "I'm afraid not, my dear," he said; "surely it isn't very far to walk."

"Everybody else will have one," I remonstrated, a little ruefully.

"Well," he answered cheerfully, "most of them can afford it better than we can. And those who can't," as he smiled, rather disdainfully I thought, "a good many of those who can't, will have one just the same—even if they daren't look the butcher and the baker in the face. There are a good many like that in Hertford, you know—in St. Andrew's Church, for that matter, I'm afraid," he added. "But a minister couldn't afford that any better than the other," he concluded, reaching for the elaborate invitation I held in my hand the while.

"Gordon," I said suddenly, and I fear my face showed what prompted the question, "have you ever thought what a good time we'd have had, if you had been something else—if you had been a doctor, I mean, or a politician, or something of that sort? Or a lawyer," I added; "yes, a lawyer—what a stunning lawyer you'd have made, Gordon. You'd be getting five times your present income, if you'd been a lawyer."

"Nonsense," he said, in his rather blunt Scotch way.

"It's nothing of the sort," I answered. "You know as well as I do there are a dozen lawyers in Hertford who could buy and sell you over and over again, so far as money is concerned—and they haven't got half the brains you have—aren't in the same class with you as public speakers. And yet here you are, the minister of a lot of fashionable people and——"

"We have a good many now that aren't fashionable, thank heaven," he interrupted, as if he were quite proud of it; "you'd be surprised, Helen, if

you only knew how many poor people have connected with St. Andrew's since I came. But that doesn't please you much, does it, dear?" a shadow coming over the eager face.

"Why?" I asked. Yet I knew the meaning and the truth of his words.

"You don't love the poor people," he answered, his words coming slow, as if with pain; his eyes pleadingly fixed on mine.

"What makes you say that, Gordon?" and my voice shook a little.

"Because I see it every day, dear. You don't care for that part of my work at all," and his voice was inexpressibly sad. "I know what you mean by what you've just said—about wishing I had been a lawyer."

"I didn't say I wished it—you know I didn't," I corrected vigorously.

"But that's what you meant. I know it—I've known it long. Oh, my darling," he suddenly broke out, like one owning at last to a long-hidden pain, "do you think I've been blind to it all? Do you think I haven't seen the noble efforts my brave little wife has made to be interested in my work—and all her disappointment that we're poor and humble—and her longing for the things that I can never give her. And yet you've been so lovely and unselfish about it all, my dear one, trying to hide it from me," and I could feel my cheeks burn with shame at the words. One of his arms was partly round my neck, his hand toying with my hair; and he drew me close and held me tight. The shelter was wondrous sweet.

"Oh, Gordon," I said, the tears coming as I spoke, "don't talk to me like that; please don't—you know I was so young. And I never had any experience like this—I was brought up so differently. And I do want to be happy—so much, I want to be happy. And you, dear, I want you to be happy too."

"And so I am," he exclaimed passionately—"except that I'm lonely; I'm so lonely, Helen. Oh, if you only loved the things I love, the poor, the sick, the sorrowing—if you only loved them all, and loved to help them—I wouldn't trade places with the richest and the grandest of them all."

"Oh, Gordon," I sobbed, "how could you say it?—you mean you'd trade now! And I've tried so hard."

He soothed me, caressing and comforting as though I were a child. "It's been hard for you, my darling," he murmured in my ear; "and you don't know all you've been to me—you really don't."

"It was only because I thought you were so clever," I sobbed out like a baby; "and I thought you weren't—weren't getting your reward."

"Oh, child, you don't know what rich rewards there are," he said dreamily; "what rich rewards—if men only knew where to look for them."

I lay a long time in his arms, the imposing invitation unheeded on the floor. And I longed—I believe I prayed in a faint kind of way—that I might yet know something of the secret joy that made up my husband's hire. Yet I was almost in despair; for the image of all that others did, and all they had, and the vision of what might also have been ours, kept recurring to my mind. I thought our life was pretty gray, its limits hard and stern, and I may as well be candid enough to say so. But I think I would have followed Gordon anywhere—if I could only have found the way. My gropings for it must have been pathetic.

"I'll give up the Ashtons' dinner," I said heroically at last, looking up at Gordon through my tears. I knew he would kiss me—and he did.

"But you shan't," he said firmly. "You'll go—and so will I. That's the one little triumph I'll never give up; I'm always so proud of my wife at times like that—we can beat them on their own ground." Then he stooped down and recovered the gleaming-edged cardboard from the floor.

This invitation was our passport to what was evidently to be a very swell dinner at the Ashtons'. They had a lion in the house—a mighty guest, I mean by that. He was a Sir; not only a Sir, but a Baronet; which, it seems, is a loftier brand, a repeating kind of Sir. His full name was Sir Austin Beachcroft, and he was a British brewer. His appearance gave abundant indication that he was one of his own best customers. Mr. Ashton, it seems, had met him while crossing the Atlantic, and the Baronet was graciously stopping off for a visit of a day or two on his way to the Rockies to hunt grizzlies. He arrived on a Saturday night; and it was impressive to see the solemn hush that came over the congregation in St. Andrew's when the Ashtons led their Baronet down the aisle the next morning. Mr. Ashton came first, and there was a look on his face that showed his doubt as to whether or not he was a mortal man. They came late, of course, but I attribute that to Mrs. Ashton—for that is a womanly wile. I caught a glimpse of her face as she passed—it bore a look of thankfulness, almost of heavenly bliss, as if she were now ready to depart in peace. In an adjoining pew I could see Harriet's cousin; vainly she strove to join the swelling psalm, gazing at the procession as though she considered the ways of Providence unjust.

The Baronet, throughout the service, bore himself as piously as though he had never heard of beer. Yet it was evident enough that he never for one moment forgot that he was a creation of his Sovereign. When the hymns were being sung, he looked abstractedly in front of him, as though they were addressed to him; at sudden intervals he would break in and sing about half a line, just to show that he was human like ourselves. Every now and then, while the sermon was in progress, he would cast a swift glance around to make sure that everybody was looking at him; finding that they were, a little jerk and a stare heavenward evinced the slight irritation that rank or genius is supposed to feel in being thus remarked. Once or twice he snapped his watch when Gordon didn't stop just when he might have done. This set me against him at once, for the sermon was a beautiful one; besides, I knew what ailed the Baronet—he wasn't accustomed to go so long without a sample of his wares. When the collection was taken up, he was human enough; even Mr. Ashton started a little at the size of his deposit; for he gave after the fashion of his fathers, which, as Gordon afterwards told me, was formed in the copper age.

Well, the very next night came the dinner; to which Gordon and I sallied forth. It does make a woman wince a little when she finds herself coming on foot to a gate quite surrounded by the carriages of her fellow guests. Harriet's cousin, I remember, alighted from her equipage just as I arrived, and we went in together; it was but poor comfort to reflect that my servant called her Mary Ann.

"You're the belle of the ball," Gordon whispered to me as we came down the stairs a few minutes later; "I'll bet a sovereign the Baronet will write home about you before he goes to bed."

"Don't be surprised," I answered gaily, "if I take to the woods as soon as I meet him—you know, I never saw a real two-legged lordling before."

We were duly presented, the Baronet staring at us as though we were so many pretty fawns reclaimed by civilization from the wilds. Harriet's cousin was as red in the face as a turkey-cock, and her attitude was one of reverence itself. Mr. Ashton stood apart in a state of semi-unconscious bliss, looking like a kind of glorified Barnum. His wife was torn between feverish glances towards the glittering table that could be seen in the distance and longing looks fixed upon the Baronet. She was wondering how she might properly surrender herself to be borne in to dinner.

In due time, however, we were all seated, my escort proving the wealthy husband of the woman who had comforted me about my prayer—he was the

magnate who had made his money out of lard. My first remark to him, after we were seated, disclosed my ignorance of the proper pronunciation of his name. I suppose I was nervous. He corrected me, adding in fine original vein: “But call me what you like, as long as you don’t call me too late for dinner,” spreading his napkin over an expanse that indicated his counsel was probably serious enough.

At this juncture Mr. Ashton asked Gordon to say grace; and the tone of his request showed how highly honoured he considered both the Almighty and his minister to be by the observance. This finished, there followed that peculiar silence which so often wraps a self-conscious company, all of whom are bent on conducting themselves with unusual propriety.

But the Baronet was soon in midstream, his spirits rising higher and higher as he remarked the deference with which his every word was greeted. “Yes,” he was saying when I first caught the drift of his talk, “I had a great time in New York—was fairly beset with their reporters, though, all wanting interviews. They’re a great lot, those New Yorkers,” he went grandly on, “nearly all of them either colonels or millionaires—any one who isn’t one or the other is sure to be a judge. Greatest conglomeration of newly rich I ever saw in my life—but it’s wonderful how they worship what they haven’t got. A lot of humbugs,” he added scornfully, “pretending to despise titles the way they do—and yet they fairly worship them. The Duke of Marlborough happened to be in New York the same time as me; and, really, there didn’t seem to be anything else in the papers except our movements—we simply couldn’t sneeze, without it being in the papers. Oh, they’re very young yet,” he added patronizingly, “they’re very young indeed.”

“Mrs. Laird’s a Yankee, Sir Austin,” one of the lady guests ventured timidly, designating me by a sideward glance. I dare say I wasn’t hard to identify, for I know my cheeks were blazing and my eyes flashing. It’s wonderful how much dearer your country grows when you’re in exile.

The Baronet adjusted his monocle and looked at me with some interest across the table. “Well,” he began with a very condescending smile, “there are some nice Yankees, you know—for instance,” nodding at me as he spoke.

“I’m not a Yankee,” I broke in with vehemence; “I’m no more a Yankee than you are, sir.” I forgot all about the handle to his name.

“Were you addressing Sir Austin?” Mr. Ashton interrupted, meaning reproof; he was so horror-stricken that he had brought his erstwhile busy jaws to a sudden standstill.

“I was addressing anybody who calls me a Yankee,” I retorted, controlling a voice that would shake in spite of me.

“Oh, Mrs. Laird,” the informant of a moment ago interjected, “I always understood you were an American.”

“I suppose I am,” I returned, commanding a smile by this time—“but that’s a very different being from a Yankee. And I don’t know whether I am or not,” I went on with a quite ardent heart; “because I’m a Southerner—my father was a Confederate soldier,” I broke out, regardless of the canons of good taste, “and he was wounded twice at Gettysburg, so he was.”

“Did he recover?” the Baronet enquired, in a tone that was meant to be sympathetic.

I stared at the man. “Did he recover?” I echoed; “how long do you think it is since Gettysburg was fought, Sir Austin?”

I verily believe the title was music to the man. In any case, he mellowed perceptibly. “It was a foolish question—from any one who has ever seen you,” he admitted; “and they were a brave lot of men, even if they did get beaten,” he continued cordially enough; “they put up a great fight, did those rebels, Mrs.—er?” as he paused for my name.

This was too much. “They weren’t rebels,” I flung back; “nobody has a right to call them rebels—they were soldiers fighting for their country—and they weren’t beaten, they were starved,” I added; and I wouldn’t have cared if he had been the proudest duke in England.

The lordlet adjusted his monocle afresh and took a wondering look at me. I do not know what reply, if any, he was about to make; for just then came an interruption fraught with more of consequence than would have appeared likely on the surface.

“Mr. Laird’s wanted, sir,” announced a servant. Wherewith Gordon excused himself for a moment and hurried out to the hall.

“I’ll have to ask you to let me run away, Mr. Ashton,” he said, returning after a brief absence, “I’m afraid I’ll have to go.”

“What!” exclaimed our host incredulously; “have to go!—the dinner’s only just begun, sir.”

“I’m very sorry,” replied my husband, “but I’ve been sent for—somebody wants me, and I must go,” with which he turned back into the hall, for Mr. Ashton had already risen from his chair. He was still protesting

as he followed him out; the talk around the table began again, but I could still catch the conversation in the hall.

"You can't possibly get away; I was counting on you, as you know, to propose the health of Sir Austin. I'll send word that you'll come the first thing in the morning—whoever it is that wants you."

I couldn't catch the response; but I knew right well what line it would take.

"No, I don't think they belong to St. Andrew's," I heard Gordon a moment later; "not as far as I know, at least. They're very poor, I should fancy, from the quarter they live in."

"Then it seems to me you're under no obligation to go," I could just hear Mr. Ashton saying, in a tone that chilled me; "you'll find it quite enough, I imagine, to look after your own people. What's the matter anyway?"

"I don't know," said Gordon, "but the messenger said they wanted me right away—it's a matter of duty, Mr. Ashton."

Just with this Mr. Ashton drew the door shut behind him. I did not wait to analyze the impulse that suddenly seized me, but hastily arose, with a word of apology to my hostess, and slipped swiftly out into the hall. I do not think either of the men noticed me.

"Well, all I've got to say is this," Mr. Ashton was exclaiming, "that I consider it a slight to my guest—a downright slight, sir; an insult, I might almost say, to Sir Austin Beachcroft. And I know he'll have his own opinion of it, sir—and you can explain to him yourself—I'll make no apologies for you, mind."

Gordon replied just the way I would have expected him to: "I don't care a rap for all the Sir Austins in the kingdom," he said, moving on up the stairs to get his coat; "it's probable some one's dying—and wants me."

Mr. Ashton followed a step or two up the stair. "I suppose I may take that to mean," his voice now thick with anger, "that you don't care a rap for me either; nor for anybody else of the people that—that hire you—and pay you, Mr. Laird," the words coming hot and hissing, his flaming face turned up towards Gordon at the top of the stairs.

I could see Gordon's eyes flash from where he stood. "If you think I'm your hired servant, Mr. Ashton—or anybody else's, when my duty's concerned—you'll find out your mistake. We needn't carry this discussion any further," as he turned and went into the dressing-room.

“I’ll carry it further, sir,” Mr. Ashton half shouted in a tone so loud I feared his knightly guest would hear; “I’ll carry it till I teach you which side your bread’s buttered on—I’ll see you from the pulpit to the door. It was me that got you here—and I’ll get you out, sir, I’ll get you out,” he flung as a parting threat, turning to make his way back to the dining-room.

My course was clear. I passed our angry host without a word as I climbed the stair; the most ardent days of love and courtship had never found my heart so hungry for the man I loved as it was that moment.

“You must not come,” said Gordon, as I swept into the room where he was. “What made you leave, dear—please go back. Things are bad enough as they are.”

But I sealed his lips with my burning own and held him one moment in my arms before I turned to make ready for departure. I could see his face brighten with a wonderful light, and I had my reward in the pride and fondness with which his eyes rested on me.

Nobody intercepted, nor did any speak to us, as we made our way out to the street. The night was dark, a few heavy rain-drops beating in our faces.

“Where are you going now?” Gordon asked me as we moved away from the gate.

“I don’t know,” said I—“only I’m going with you.”

“My darling!” was all he said.

“I’m afraid there’s going to be a storm,” I predicted, looking up at the ill-omened sky after we had walked a little way in silence.

“The storm is past,” he said, his arm stealing about me in the dark; “the night is growing beautiful to me—oh, my wife, my darling!”

XVII
MY ORDINATION

We had walked for perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes before we came near our destination, the character of the neighbourhood gradually indicating that the spot we were seeking was near at hand. One or two enquiries sufficed to locate the house, a tumble-down old cottage that stood in a little from the street.

"Be you the minister?" asked a woman's voice, as she opened the door in answer to our knock, shading the lamp with her hand; "be you Mr. Laird?"

"Yes," said Gordon, "I came as soon as I got your message; and what can I do for you?" Although I think he surmised why she had sent for him; there is that in a mother's face and voice which only one kind of sorrow gives. Besides, he had seen a light burning dimly in the little room at the end of the house.

"It's our Jennie," the woman said, standing transfixed a moment as the light of the lamp fell on me. For I was still in my dinner dress; and I was holding the train up in my hand, and there were flowers in my hair. Neither of us, I imagine, had thought of this.

"This is my wife," said Gordon; and I never heard him say it with more tenderness or pride—nor had it ever sounded sweeter.

The sad and tired face, still wondering, gave me a faint smile of welcome as we passed within the door.

"You can stay in the room," she said, leading the way into what I supposed they might call the parlour. At least, there was a table in it, and one or two chromos on the wall; but I noticed a dishevelled couch in the corner, evidently for some tired watcher.

"Jennie's been wantin' ye for long," the woman said to Gordon as she set the lamp on the table; "but she's worse the night, an' me an' Martha got afraid. Besides, she was askin' for ye; she went to the Bethany Sunday-

school, sir, and she often saw you when you was there"—this was Gordon's mission school—"you put your hand on her head once, at the festival, I think, an' poor Jennie never forgot it, she was that pleased. But I'm feared she'll never be back there again, sir," the woman's voice quivering as she turned her face away.

"What's the matter with your daughter?" I asked, for my whole heart went out to the woman in her grief.

"Well, ma'am, we don't hardly know. But it began with a cruel bad cough more'n six months ago—an' it keeps always gettin' a little worse. She got it at the factory—her and Martha both worked in the knittin' factory, an' the air was so bad, and the hours was so long; but she just had to keep workin' on, ma'am, 'cause their father's dead, and there's two younger than them. I earn a little now an' again, goin' out washin'—but it was really Jennie and Martha that kep' the home goin'," the woman concluded, heaving a weary sigh.

"What factory was your daughter in?" I asked.

"Oh, in Mr. Ashton's—Ashton & Quirk," the woman answered, "an' they don't seem to care anythin' for the hands—excep' gettin' the work out o' them," she added, with another sigh; "Jennie wanted to stop and rest, first along, when she wasn't feelin' good—but they said another girl would get her job if she stopped. So she had to go on as long as she could. I guess we'll go in now, sir; we won't be long, ma'am," as she led Gordon from the room.

As I sat alone I could hear the dull hacking cough at frequent intervals, sometimes with sounds of struggle and of choking. Then would come a stillness, broken by the low sound of voices; and soon I could catch Gordon's rich tones in prayer. I could not hear the words, but a nameless power seemed to accompany the sound; I knew that his very heart and life were being given to the holy task.

A few minutes later Gordon came softly into the room where I was waiting. "Come on in," he said; "come on in and see Jennie. I'm sure it would do her good."

I hesitated. "Is she dying?" I asked.

Gordon nodded. "It's consumption," he said.

"Oh, Gordon, don't ask me to go. I'm so frightened of death; and I couldn't help her any—I couldn't say a word," for if I ever felt my

helplessness, it was then. “I’m afraid I would only be in the way,” I supplemented, not without much sincerity.

“A loving heart’s never in the way,” my husband answered in the lowest tone. His face, radiant a moment before from its sacred duty, was now shadowed with sorrow; his eyes gave me a final glance of loneliness and longing as he turned to go back to the dying bed.

“Oh, Gordon, wait,” I cried faintly, sudden resolve gathering in my heart. “Wait, darling, and I’ll go,” with which I hurried to his side. My reward was in his eyes. I could see them, even in the darkened hall through which we passed into the room of death.

Such a humble room it was, bare and unadorned. The bed stood in the corner, and even my untutored eyes saw at a glance that life’s race was nearly run for her who lay upon it. Large, dark eyes looked out at me from the wasted face, wistful in death’s mysterious appeal. Poor Jennie! she little knew how great was the ministry yet remaining to her.

For, as in a moment, the repulsion and the fear all left my heart, filling fast with a pity and a longing I could neither understand nor control. It must have been God’s prompting, and nothing else. I saw nothing but the dying face. The mother was there; and Martha, her cheeks wet with tears; the younger pair, too, were standing near the bed. But I seemed to behold none of them—not even Gordon.

For I moved instinctively towards the bed, my gaze fixed on the dying girl. Her eyes seemed to call me; the lure of the eternal was within them, and I marvelled, little of spiritual insight though I had, at the deep tranquillity that lay far within. She smiled as she saw me coming closer, and I sat down on the bed beside her.

I could not but notice that her eyes rested on my face in eager wonder; she seemed to love to look, so constant was her gaze. And it was evident—so eternal is the womanly—that she was attracted by what I wore; my lovely gown, the lace upon its bosom, the diamond pendant with its chain about my neck, the rich flowers in my hair—all made their appeal to the dying eyes.

“Oh, it was lovely!” she murmured, after we had spoken a word or two.

“What was, dear?” I answered, for I had no idea.

“What he said—what your husband told me. He made it so easy—and so beautiful. I’m not afraid to die—not now, ma’am.”

I marvelled as I beheld the strange serenity that seemed to wrap her like a garment. “Oh,” she went on faintly, “it must be lovely to be able to do that; to be able to tell people, when they’re dying, about the Saviour—and about heaven. Do you do it too, ma’am?”

I shrank before the pervading eyes, for they seemed to look through and through the soul with the penetrating power that death imparts. “No,” I said tremblingly, “no, I don’t believe I ever did.”

“But you will, won’t you?” she went on calmly; “he’ll tell you how—and you’ll tell it too. Oh, it comforts so—I believe it because he does,” her eyes turning now in reverence to Gordon’s face.

“Yes, dear, yes, I’ll try,” I faltered, and the eager eyes looked content. Something prompted me to put my hands to my hair, though I had forgotten the flowers were there. “Would you like them, Jennie?” as I placed them in the wasted hand. I had no need to ask, so grateful was the light that kindled the wan face.

“These comfort too,” she murmured. Then suddenly: “Can you sing?—I love when people sing to me, if I love them.”

“Not very well, Jennie,” I answered, for I knew I could not trust my voice.

“Please do,” she pleaded; “just some little song.”

I turned to Gordon; he was standing above me. “Let us try,” he said; “suppose we sing ‘Forever with the Lord’?”

I consented. But a quick impulse came to me and I whispered to him: “One of your psalms, Gordon—that lovely one about the Valley.”

I saw how glad he was. “You must sing it too,” he said; and then, in tones of more than womanly gentleness, he began the noble strain.

“Yea though I walk in death’s dark vale
Yet will I fear none ill,
For Thou art with me and Thy rod
And staff me comfort still.”

I didn’t know then, and hardly know exactly yet, what those two last lines really mean; but no one could fail to see their power. They have been often tested when life’s lamp was burning low; and the far-off music of Immortality, whatever be the meaning of the words, echoes through them. Jennie’s face was beautiful to see.

I had never had hour like to this. I can remember yet how, once or twice, the thought of all the revelry I had left behind floated before my eyes; the lights, the flowers, the richly appointed table, the sumptuous dinner, the circle of exalted guests in glorious array, the speech and the echoing song—but they all seemed to me now as the dust beneath my feet. Pale and tawdry, garish, did it all appear in contrast with the high reality of the scene that had succeeded it. It must have been God's miracle to my soul. I know not. But I speak only the simple truth when I say that what was about me now, the humble home, the squalid room, the dimly burning lamp, the wail of the broken-hearted, the pale light of death upon one wasted face; these stood before me as life, very life—and the other had receded into the phantom shadows of unreality and death. I felt as if I had found myself at last; I knew I had found my husband, long sundered by the cruel shadow my own foolish heart had cast; and I dimly hoped that the dear Father of us all had found us both.

An hour or two later Gordon beckoned me out into the little hall. "I guess we'll have to go now," he said; "it's almost midnight—and you'll be tired out."

"Don't," I said earnestly, "don't make me go, Gordon. How can we leave here?—she's dying. Do you think we'll ever see her again?"

Gordon's look of love was beautiful. "No," he said, "never again, here—and we'll wait, my darling," the words coming low and passionate. "Look," as he cast his eyes within the door, "she wants you—she's motioning for you."

Which was true enough, and in a moment I was bending over the dying form.

"You'll comfort mother, and Martha, won't you—and the children—when I'm gone? Poor Martha, she'll have it all to do now," the words coming faint and pitiful; "all the work, I mean—she works so hard. And she has to go to the factory, even after she sits up all night."

"I'll do all I can, dear," I promised, trying to speak calmly, though the tears were running down my cheeks. "I'll come and see them as often as I can."

"Call them all," she said, rousing herself.

I had not far to call. In a moment they were all about the bed. Then the emaciated arms stole out and laid hold of a rusty napkin, or towel, that lay

upon the bed beside her. Slowly she unfolded it, producing its contents one by one.

"This is for you, Ernie," as she handed the little brother a many-coloured flashing tie; "I saved up to get it for you for Christmas—but then I knew I'd have to get it sooner. And I made this for you, Chrissie," as the thin hands held out a little pin-cushion to the younger sister. "And I want you to have my little locket for a keepsake, Martha; it's nearly new. And this is for you, mother," as the sobbing woman bent above her child; "it's my Sunday-school Bible—and it has the tickets I was saving for a prize; I can't ever use them now. And the book-marker that's in it is for you," as her eyes turned to Gordon; "I worked it for you myself, and I was going to give it to you the first Sunday you came down."

She sank back, exhausted. One by one they turned away, each bearing the precious treasure. Gordon held his book-marker out before him like a sacred thing, and I could see his breast heaving as his arm went round one of the children. My own eyes were streaming, for I had never witnessed scene so holy; the last will and testament of prince or magnate had never majesty like this.

Suddenly Jennie motioned me down beside her again. "I didn't have anything for you," she murmured in pitiful explanation, "because I didn't know you were coming. So I just give you my—my love," she faltered low, "and I want to tell you how much you've helped me—to die. And you'll often do it, won't you?" she went on, reverting to the request that must surely have been prompted by none but God Himself, every word burning its way to my inmost heart.

"Yes," I sobbed, "oh, yes, I will, if God will help me—but I can do so little."

"No," she whispered back, "no—so much. You don't know how much it helps, for a poor girl like me just to, just to see somebody that's—that's sweet and lovely," she said timidly—"and that wears pretty clothes. Just to see somebody that loves you, even if they didn't speak a word—that helps a lot."

I gently hushed the words. The little circle gathered around the bed again. The hours went slowly by.

Suddenly her eyes opened wide. "Sing that again," she murmured, struggling now for breath; "that about—about the vale. It's dark."

Gordon looked into my eyes; his hand touched mine. Then, in a tone that was part of tenderness and all of triumph, he began, my trembling voice blending with his own:

"Yea though I walk through death's dark vale
Yet will I fear none ill"

and just as we finished the Shepherd Psalm the wasted face lighted up with pallid beauty, the raptured eyes looked their last farewell, and the tired toiler passed into the rest of God.

It was a very solemn joy that wrapped our hearts as Gordon and I walked home together through the slowly breaking dawn. I knew that our life-song had begun at last, and my heart was filled with reverent ecstasy.

"Take me, Gordon," I said, as we entered and closed the door behind us. "Take me," the tears now flowing fast, "and never, never let me go."

"You're mine," was all his answer as his arms closed about me. "God gave me you, my darling."

XVIII
THE DAYSPRING FROM ON HIGH

It matters not how parched and bare the plain of life may be, one living spring of joy can enrich and beautify it all. One master gladness can make the heart strong against all the ills of life; it matters not how fierce and angry be the winds, if the heart have shelter. If God be for us who can be against us?

Gordon and I had certainly had our share of the ills of life; and the winds of trouble had found us out. Of course, it doesn't seem so hard to bear, now that it's past; but I reckon few young married couples ever encountered more head wind or sailed more troubled seas. I know everybody thinks their own troubles are the worst; if we could trade with other people for a week, we'd probably be glad to trade back when the time was up. Yet it cannot be denied, so far as we were concerned, that we had a good deal to sadden us.

To begin with, we were far from home and kindred. Gordon's relatives—he seldom spoke of any but his father—were far across the sea. Mine were a thousand miles away, in the sunny Southland, separated from me now by the unhappy storm that had gathered about my husband's head. We never spoke of going home; for Gordon, I knew, would not consider it, and I would not go without him.

Then, too, there was little now to take me there. My mother had passed away. It was a couple of years after we came to Canada that the end had come. Suddenly stricken with the hand of death while summering in the remote mountains of Western Virginia, the dear spirit had found its rest. I could not be notified till it was too late to go, even for the last sad offices; so I went not at all. The heavenly tenderness of my husband through all those days of sorrow lingers with me as a precious memory. Uncle Henry and Aunt Agnes wrote me once or twice, and always sympathetically enough. But it was evident that they recognized through it all how wide was the gulf that divided me from the days and scenes of girlhood. And they sent their "respects" to Gordon, which is about the politest form of epitaph that can be graven on the tomb of friendship.

It was in the very midst of this parched and dreary plain (to quote the words with which I began the chapter) that a spring of living joy suddenly flung forth its waters; amid the troublous winds, our hearts found the dearest of all earthly havens.

It seems hard to realize it now—but I don't believe Gordon and I were unhappy before baby came. Unhappy, I mean, because there wasn't any. I don't think we ever felt that life was poor and skimped and silent; I don't believe we looked and longed at all. No, we didn't—and that's the strangest part of it. The troubles that people with children had—the imprisonment by day—and the marches by night—and the plaintive serenades of the early dawn; the care and responsibility and disappointment, and often heart-break, of later years—these were so frequently mentioned between us that I fear we came to indulge a kind of blasphemous complacency because we were immune. Then, too, we sometimes whispered the old sophistry that we had each other, in devotion undivided with another—which is nothing but a honeyed perjury.

Anyhow I know this, that in those pre-parental days I would ask people whom I had just met—and with no misgivings—as to whether or not they had any children. But I never dared to do it after the new love-birds began singing in my mother-heart. It seemed cruel, lest they should be compelled with shame to acknowledge they had none; even in my most inconsiderate years I would never ask a homely spinster if her dance card were full—if I may pluck an illustration from the giddy days of old.

It was with trembling joy that we drew near, never so near together, to this great gladness of our lives. Then came *my* great darkness; then the holy dawn. I swiftly forgot all about the darkness—for joy that a man was born into the world.

Gordon was beside me when I realized it all, showering little timid words of endearment down upon me as though he feared I were hardly able to stand them. His lip was quivering when I looked up; and I saw his glance turn from me to something that lay beside me on a pillow. A low gurgling kind of sound came from the little bundle on the top of it.

"Isn't that sweet?" I murmured—for I knew—my eyes fallen shut again. Gordon looked at me with overflowing eyes—then he turned and went softly out of the room.

I was faint and weak when he came back; but I held his hand, lest he should go away again.

“Say a little prayer for the baby,” I whispered; “say it out loud,” and Gordon knelt low beside the bed and prayed. But I noticed that all his prayer was for me, that I might be given back to him—and I told him, before he had time to get up, that he had forgotten about the baby. So he prayed again, for us both this time; and I don’t think I ever before felt what a true priest of God was this man of mine, and I rejoiced that the new life which lay beside me was breath of his breath and soul of his soul. And I think we both forgot, in those blessed days, all the sorrows of the past, the turmoil of the present, the portent of the future.

What a new world it all turned out to me! A new heaven, indeed; and a new earth—which was more to us just then—as the Bible says. Everything was wonderful. I can remember yet the foolish delight with which one day I counted all the baby’s toes—and found he had exactly ten. I knew, of course, that this had happened often enough before, but still it struck me as beautiful that they should have come out so even; a miscalculation, considering how many have to be outfitted for the journey, would have seemed pardonable in anybody’s baby but my own. And I had never known before how intelligent a baby could be in its very early dawn. For instance, mine had a strange habit of lifting his little hand high above his head, then slowly letting it drop.

“I can’t make out what that gesture means,” his father (those words were a new strain of music) said to me one day as we bended over the babe together; “you don’t suppose he sees that fly, do you?” referring to a winged intruder that was hovering, like ourselves, above our treasure.

“Oh, no,” I answered; then suddenly, “Gordon, do you know, I believe I can tell what baby’s trying to do. He’s trying to pronounce the benediction, just as sure as anything. That’s you in him, Gordon; he’s going to be a minister.”

“I believe that’s just what he’s doing,” said Gordon, enchanted; “look—there he’s doing it again.”

“He does it just like you, Gordon,” I repeated. “Nobody need ever tell me there’s nothing in heredity. Isn’t it wonderful?”

“It’s mysterious,” said Gordon, fascinated as he watched the little cleric; “we’ll have to call him some name suitable for a minister.”

“We’ll call him Gordon,” I said decisively—“that’s a good Presbyterian name. I called him that this morning, all alone, and he looked up and cooed like as if he understood.”

“We’ll call him Harold, for your father, if you like,” my husband proposed magnanimously.

“No, no,” I said, “his name shall be Gordon. But we’ll call it—I mean—we’ll give mother’s name to her—if he ever has a little sister.”

“Mercy!” said Gordon, drawing his breath in fast.

“I always think just one’s so lonely,” I explained, my eyes fastened on the isolated posterity beside me. “I was just one—the only one in our family, you know.”

“The only one in the world—for me,” said Gordon, and he kissed me. “Look, your son’s trying to sneeze: isn’t it wonderful how soon they pick things up?”

“*Our* son, dear,” I corrected reproachfully, after I had helped baby through.

Gordon laughed. “We’re a pair of idiots,” he said. “We’ll have to straighten up, Helen, or we’ll spoil the youngster. I can see you’re going to idolize him already.”

“Love never spoiled anybody,” I protested, “and it won’t spoil him either.”

“No,” conceded Gordon, “but he mustn’t be indulged too much. I believe in making them obey—and not giving in to them; that old adage about sparing the rod, you know.”

“He shan’t ever be touched,” I exclaimed; “nobody shall ever lay a finger on my baby.”

“*Our* baby,” corrected Gordon, smiling.

“But about what you said about the rod,” I resumed. “You don’t surely mean——”

“Don’t let us get excited, dear,” and Gordon smiled down at me; “but of course children, and especially boys, must be taught to obey. That’s one of the great advantages of a public school.”

“He shan’t ever go to a public school,” I declared warmly. “No child of mine will ever be sent with a lot of common children—in one of those big schools.”

“What will you do with them?” said Gordon, intensely interested.

“I’ll teach them myself,” said I. “I’ll teach them together; I’ll keep them together all the time. There’s no influence on a boy like his little sister.”

By this time Gordon was just as absorbed in them both as I was. “You can train the girl the way you like,” he said, stroking my hair while he spoke; “that’s a mother’s privilege—but I’ll have to take a hand with the boy. And I’m a firm believer in punishing them, when they need punishment.”

“Gordon,” I pleaded, as my eyes filled with tears, “do you mean to say you’d whip him?”

“Yes,” said Gordon, very solemn; “yes, if he needs it.”

“Oh, Gordon,” I cried, for it was all very real to me, “you’ll make him afraid of you; he’ll learn to dislike you, Gordon—and that would break my heart,” the words quivering as they came.

“There, there, dear,” he said, gently caressing me, “don’t let us say any more about it—perhaps I won’t have to whip him much. All I mean is, that I don’t believe in children getting their own way; we mustn’t indulge him, I mean. And you know, dear,” this coming with a very winning smile, “you know, I’m older—and I’ve had more experience than you, dear.”

“No, you haven’t, Gordon,” I cried triumphantly; “you shouldn’t say that. I’ve had just as many as you, Gordon—and I know them better; I’ve studied him more, right here with him all the time.”

But just then our solitary descendant broke out with an imperious cry that indicated he wanted something. Gordon leaped to duty. “It’s his bottle,” he exclaimed excitedly, beginning a wild search on the table, under the pillow, beneath the bed, the quest continued in the bathroom and an adjoining chamber. “Yes, yes, baby,” he kept saying as he searched; “yes, father’ll get him his ’ittle bottle; he’s hungy, is he, the tootsy wootsy? Yes, father’ll bing it in a minute.” The much desired article was finally discovered in the cradle beside the bed; and Gordon, in full canonicals, knelt lowly on the floor as he pacified the clamorous lips.

“I thought you didn’t believe in giving them their own way?” said I.

“He’s too little to know the difference yet,” said the bending one, his back to me as he adjusted the mechanism anew.

“Oh, Gordon,” I said, “you’re very young, as a father—very young.”

XIX
THE TAINT OF HERESY

Our son was growing into a goodly lad (everything happened either before or after baby was born) when it first actually broke on me that Gordon's Doctorate had been a dear-bought prize. For Gordon was now a Doctor of Divinity—and he had won it by examination, too, long years of severe study and wide reading having gone before.

I didn't begrudge the time, and the seclusion, this had implied; but I just hated the whole thing when I found out how it had affected Gordon's views. I never did believe much in ministers being such terrible students as many of them are; I verily believe as many preachers are spoiled by books as are helped by them, for they often grow less human while they're growing more profound. The Bible and the daily paper—truth and human life—some great preacher pronounced his two main books, and I'm inclined to agree with him. Gordon gave me one of his deep books to read once—Harnack, I think, was the name of the man who wrote it—and I went to sleep over it for my husband's sake but not for Mr. Harnack's. Gordon may call that kind of theology new, I thought, but it's not interesting.

The whole thing—about Gordon's views, I mean—came out this way. Of course I fancy a good many already suspected he was rather modern in his creed; especially Mr. Ashton, who became more orthodox every time he cut the wages of the poor girls in his factory. But I never knew, nor any one else, how far Gordon had drifted from the old moorings, till a certain evangelist came to hold a mission in Hertford. He was a converted prize-fighter—changed from a pounder into an ex-pounder, so to speak—and he loved to give us a whiff of his malodorous past every time he got a chance; I reckon he fancied any one who had had such a violent attack of sin was immune for the rest of his days. I went to hear him several times; but one night he said if he had to choose between a pack of cards in his house or a rattlesnake turned loose among his children, he'd take the snake. I knew then he was either a fool or a liar, one—and I had no mind to listen to either—so I never went near him again.

However, Gordon was presiding one night when this man was preaching; and the evangelist suddenly broke out with the statement that the most moral, or the most philanthropic, man in the whole world would get as hot a place in hell as the worst murderer or thief, if he didn't believe what he ought to believe.

"Isn't that so, Dr. Laird?" he said, turning to my husband.

"No," said Gordon, "it's not."

Well, as you may understand, there was something pretty to pay. The evangelist nearly fainted on the spot; as soon as he came to himself he asked them all to join in prayer—and he prayed that Gordon might be converted that very night. Gordon! whose shoe's latchet he was not worthy to unloose.

"You've denied your Master, sir," Mr. Ashton accused Gordon afterwards, having waited for him at the door; "you've repudiated the great doctrine of salvation—in the presence of a thousand people, sir."

Gordon motioned him aside. When he told me all about it afterwards, he avowed himself ashamed of the degree of temper he had shown, but I said I'd have been ashamed of him if he hadn't.

"What's this you accuse me of?" demanded Gordon.

"You aren't fit to be a minister," affirmed Mr. Ashton hotly; "I'm ashamed of you as the pastor of St. Andrew's, sir."

"Why?" pursued Gordon.

"Because our church, sir, our church has always been noted for its orthodoxy. We've always held to the simple Gospel—and you've gone back on it, sir. I knew it was coming; I could tell it by the things you preached about."

"What things?" although Gordon knew right well.

"Well, take last Sunday for instance; you preached on the duty of employers of labour—a lot of stuff about fresh air, and short hours, and taking care of sick hands—a lot of unspiritual stuff like that. When I go to church, sir, I want the Gospel, the simple Gospel—and nothing but the Gospel. Mr. Seybold's the same way; he says he's disgusted with many of your sermons, about worldly things. You stick to the Gospel, sir, and worldly things will take care of themselves," concluded Mr. Ashton, wagging his pious head.

"You mean Seybold the brewer, don't you?" enquired Gordon.

“Yes,” said Mr. Ashton; “and he’s one of the richest men in our church, as you know yourself.”

“I don’t know anything about it,” was Gordon’s curt reply; “but I don’t wonder at his zeal for the Gospel—or yours either. I don’t know any men that have more need to make their calling and election sure. He’s a vampire, sir—and so are you.”

“A what?” roared Mr. Ashton. “I’m a what?” He did not know what a vampire was, of course; but there was something in Gordon’s voice and eye that made the word tell its meaning. Gordon would have withered him just the same if he had called him a rectangular hypotenuse.

“A vampire, I said,” Gordon hurled back at him; “both of you live on the defenseless and the poor. It’s sickening,” and Gordon’s voice rang higher, “to hear you, or him, prating about the Gospel, while he makes his wealth out of human misery—and you, you oppress the poor—you grind their faces, and you know it. You take your blood money from poor girls that have to toil in that sweat-box of yours—and you don’t care whether they live or die, so long as they serve your selfish ends. I have visited more than one dying girl that got her death in your employ—as Jennie McMillan did—and you prance your horses past the door when they’re dying, and even after the crape is on it, and you never stop to ask for them; and then you come prattling to me about not preaching the Gospel!”

Gordon paused; out of breath, I reckon. By this time quite a number of the crowd had eddied back, listening attentively, you may be sure, to this candid conversation. One or two of them gave me a detailed account later on.

“I appeal,” blustered Mr. Ashton, “I appeal to those who know me. I spoke to you as an officer of St. Andrew’s. I have been a faithful supporter of the church—and I’ve always paid my debts,” he blurted out irrelevantly, hard put to it to make defense.

“Ye ha’ena’,” a squeaking voice came suddenly from the bystanders.

Mr. Ashton turned sharply round. “I haven’t?—where’s the man that dares to say I haven’t?” he hectored, searching the group for the interrupter.

“I’m the mon,” came quietly from the lips of a little old Scotchman as he moved slowly to the front; “ye didna’ pay oor Jock what ye owed him. He took the consumption workin’ for ye,” the squeaky voice went on, “an’ when he lay deein’, ye never lookit near him; an’ the day o’ his funeral, ye drove by the hoose wi’oot lookin’ at us. An’ he was a foreman till ye for

mair nor twenty year," the plaintive indictment proceeded—"an' ye owed him a wee bit mark o' respec' like that. An' ye never paid it—but it's ower late noo." Then the little man slipped back among the bystanders; Mr. Ashton followed him, loudly protesting that the dead servant had got his wages regularly, the second Tuesday of every month.

Gordon took advantage of the diversion to move away; and the story, substantially as I have told it, was given to me on his arrival home.

I did not question him closely about the original cause of the discussion—about his theological views, I mean; but it started an uneasiness that grew upon me day by day. And a few weeks later I learned something more that did not reassure me much.

I was sitting with Harold—we had named our son Gordon Harold; but the latter half was what we called him, to avoid confusion—one evening in the study; two ministers, visitors to some church gathering and guests of ours, were talking on the piazza. By and by Harold grew silent, and so did I; which, I suppose, led the two brethren to think I had disappeared. And they talked freely.

"It's too bad," one of them said, whereat I sat up and listened, "that Laird's gone that way. He can't hold those views, and his pulpit, at the same time."

"Have you any idea what his views really are?" the other asked.

"They're anything but sound," his friend replied, "and that's the plain English of it. Any man who holds them has no right to be in the ministry." My blood began to sizzle. I knew this reverend brother—a comfortable pastor of a comfortable congregation, who spent most of his time simply trying to be "sound," to use his own word; saving doctrines and losing men, as I heard Gordon say once in a sermon.

"What are they?" persisted the other.

"Well," began the first, "I don't believe he's very sound on the miracles. And then, he contends we're all divine—doesn't deny the divinity of our Lord, however. But I think he often closes his prayer without saying 'for Christ's sake'; at least, so I've heard."

"Perhaps he means it just the same," suggested his companion.

"Then he ought to say it—a prayer that hasn't that doesn't go higher than the roof, in my opinion. And I believe he contends no man can explain the Atonement—from an intellectual standpoint, that is. He told me as much—I

told him I could explain it all right. He replied that he interpreted it more by his heart than his reason. And that's dangerous ground, Mr. Forest, very dangerous ground."

"Is that all?" the other enquired, evidently not overcome by the arraignment.

"No, it's not. They say he believes prayer has no power to influence the course of events—regards it only as a kind of pious communion; doesn't believe in praying for anything in particular, I'm told. And he has his doubts as to who wrote the Hebrews. I told him it was Paul—but he still seemed to have doubts. And he thinks the Confession of Faith is too long and too intricate. That's dangerous too—it's the thin end of the wedge, Mr. Forest, the thin end of the wedge," and from where I sat I could hear the censor shut his lips.

"He's a mighty devoted minister, anyway," the other interposed; "I've had long talks with him myself. And there's only one thing troubles me—I'm afraid, I really am, that he clings too much to a merely ethical Christ. He's tinged with that, I'm sure; glories in Him as a Teacher, and Healer of mankind, and all that sort of thing. Laird's a great healer himself, you know—he's a marvel with the sick, and the sorrowing, and the poor. But I'm afraid he's drifting—he began with Drummond, and ended with Harnack." I recognized the soporific name.

"Oh, yes, there's another thing," resumed the orthodox one; "Laird has doubts as to whether or not sorrow comes from God. Affliction, you know; bereavement, suffering, the death of little children—everything like that. He's inclined, I'm afraid, to attribute it to another source—doesn't seem to be clear that it's God's will for us to suffer," and I could hear the comfortable one settling back in the softly-cushioned chair. "Now, that never troubles me at all—I always feel certain our sorest sorrows come from God; was just saying so yesterday to a woman whose little boy was drowned. He was her only child."

"Did you ever lose a child?" the other minister asked quietly.

"Oh, no, I've never had any trouble of that kind, thank God. Ours are all well and strong. By the way, Forest, our train goes in a little over an hour. I suppose we'll have dinner before we go—it's tea here, I believe, in the evening. Doesn't suit me altogether, either—I've had a new kind of life since I began taking dinner in the evening," as he rose from his chair and began to move restlessly about.

I glided away noiselessly like one in a dream. My heart was leaden, and I thought it was all for love of Gordon and dread of what might thus befall him. My principal thought, as I remember, was of his relation to his work—and his position—and his future. Yet I know now that what gave me the deepest pain was a trembling fear lest those things should slip from *me*—as from him—the things I reckoned the foundation stones of the life that was so happy now. Without knowing it, ever since that night I saw Jennie die, the secret between my heart and Christ had been growing more rich and full. I esteemed Him the meeting place whereon Gordon and I had found each other; and I feared, though I could not have put it into words, that distance from Him would mean distance from each other. Perhaps it was wrong; perhaps these two passions of my heart should have been reverently kept separate—but they were blended and intertwined in a union that was altogether holy.

I kissed Harold gently as I bended over his bed and tucked him in an hour later; he stirred in his sleep as my hot tears fell upon his face. Then I knelt beside him—I remembered how my mother used thus to kneel by me—and I prayed, pleadingly, in the new-found way that had grown so dear. My pleading was all for Gordon, passionate in its intercession, as though he were drifting out to sea, and God alone could bring him back.

I was hardly risen from my knees when Gordon came home. He came at once to where I was; and he smiled in that happy way he had, whenever he saw me bending over Harold. It always seemed to delight him so.

"You're an idolater, Helen, aren't you?" he said.

I clung to him in a very spasm of fondness, as if he were slipping from me. My heart cried out in a wild, hungry way, though my lips were still. I wanted to call him back, back to the shelter where our life's happiness began.

"And I don't blame you, dear," he went musingly on as he looked down on the rosy face; "life is all preface till you have children, isn't it?—the real volume comes after that."

"I could die for him," I said. (This was with a purpose. I was trying, for the first time, a lesson in theology. It struck me with a kind of amusing pain, my poor attempt to teach Gordon—Gordon so learned, so clever.)

"So could I," he murmured.

"It makes me understand how—how One died for us all," I faltered, coming to my point with desperate directness. How the angels must have

smiled if they heard my first attempt at preaching! “It helps me understand how love and suffering must go together—God can’t help it any more than we. If I were a preacher, Gordon, I’d preach that all the time.”

He turned and looked at me in amazement. Then his arms went round me tight. “Darling,” he said gently, “you’re a lovely missionary—and I’m a heathen; I’m an idolater—like you—only you’re my idol.”

“But you believe that, don’t you, Gordon?” I urged, “that—what I said? You do, don’t you, Gordon?”

His eyes studied my face, and so gravely, for a moment.

“Is my wife growing alarmed about me too?” he said, half seriously; “don’t be uneasy, darling—your husband’s sound, all right. Only I still plead guilty to idolatry—kiss me, so I’ll know you’re human,” he concluded, laughing.

I kissed him, and more than once. But my heart ached on.

XX
HAROLD'S SISTER—AND ANOTHER

THE next saddest thing to having no children is having only one. Parental sorrows are to be classified as follows. First, and greatest, if you haven't any; second, if you have only one. For there is no loneliness like the forlornness of a solitary bairn, to use a term of which Gordon was very fond; born to play, yet having none to play with; in need of chastening, yet denied the discipline of other children; hungry for fellowship, yet starving among its seniors. There is no desert so waste and weary as the Sahara that surrounds a solitary child.

Life has few moments of surpassing thrill and wonder. Yet there are some; and the loveliest thing about it all is this, that wealth cannot buy them, nor genius create them, nor rank command them. The impartialness of God is beautiful. A few of the superfluities do seem to be a little unevenly distributed—but the great holy luxuries of life are as freely vouchsafed the peasant as the king. The glory and the beauty of life itself; the shelter of a mother's arms and the deeper shelter of her heart; the first dismantling kiss of love; the earliest glimpse of your first-born's face—these are for the ploughman as well as the poet or the prince.

And there is another moment when life's so often tawny tide glows with the very light of heaven. It came to me and Gordon the day he led little Harold in, to look upon his sister's face. Ah, me! the tears start even yet when I recall the sacred scene. I was lying there, so weak, so happy. The slumbering babe lay beside me, gurgling now and then those mysterious sounds that a mother's heart translates so readily. I heard them coming—Harold and his father—the strong tread mingling musically with the patter of the little feet. Up the stairs they came, hand in hand along the hall, little Harold puffing with excitement, for he knew something wonderful was to be revealed. I raised my head and saw them as they entered the room.

Oh, my son, my son! why did I not value more those days of the dear childish face, as I saw it then? Why did I not realize that the sterner days were coming when those sweet features were to be buffeted by sorrow and

assailed by sin? I see him now, the little torn straw hat above the neglected locks—for children *will* run to seed when the mother is withdrawn—the plump, ruddy cheeks, all stained from the sand pile on the lawn, the dampness on the little forehead, the besmirched but becoming frock; and the eyes, wonderful eyes, so sober, so inquisitive, searching curiously for the unknown, breaking into shy laughter as they fell on me; the pudgy hand, quickly withdrawn from his father's; then the little frame, one half-bare leg dangling in the air, lifted high as Gordon held him up. I feel again the tremble in my fingers as I pulled back the shawl from about his sister's head, and see again the long look of wonder as my son gazed down upon the baby's face; I see the tiny throat swallow once or twice as his emotion gathered, and think of the vast realm in his heart that even his father and I cannot explore. Once again I see the refusing nod—his golden curls shaken the while—when I tell him to kiss his baby sister; his brooding eyes turned to mine, the outstretched arms, the rosy lips coming down to mine to be kissed; and I catch the mist in Gordon's eyes, my own swimming with tender joy, even as they are overflowing now so that I can hardly see to write.

The years flew swiftly by, unmarked by incident of note, but full of simple joy. Harold was well on his way in school—clever, like his father—and his sister had left the days of babyhood behind, when a new influence came into our quiet lives, a new Life into our little circle.

It was our daughter's birthday night, and Gordon had asked some friends to dinner. For, as I should have said before, he was simply crazy about Dorothy, which was the name we had bestowed upon our daughter—it had been my mother's. Nobody need tell me that a father's master passion is anything else than his first-born girl. Lots of men dissemble, I know, and profess to hold all their children in equal affection—but it's simply moonshine. If I'm a specialist in anything, it's children; and I have satisfied myself over and over again that a father, nineteen times out of twenty, is the bondsman of his eldest daughter. Dorothy looked like me; and I have a theory, which some cleverer brain will have to work out, that Gordon got her kind of mixed up with his sweetheart feelings, and loved the me that was in her, and the her that was in me. Anyhow, he was simply crazy about her, as I have said—and for years I thought it quite unfair how he made Harold play second fiddle for Her Majesty the Baby. And yet, strange though it sound, Harold was his very life—but we shall hear of this before my tale is told.

Well, as I have reported, Gordon must have a dinner party. It was to be in honour of Dorothy's original arrival, he said. So we invited some of the very nicest people in the church, some of the most clever and refined, and some of the unspoiled rich. (I believe the grand folks of St. Andrew's were coming to think more of Gordon every day.) And I got up the loveliest little dinner, with Harriet's aid of course, for she was as proud of Dorothy as we were ourselves.

The dinner was just in mid-career, and everything was going splendidly, when all of a sudden Harriet came to the dining-room door and beckoned to me. I could see by her face that it was something important.

"There's an old man here," she said as the door closed behind us, "and I thought I ought to call you—he says he's related."

"Related!" I echoed, "related to whom?"

"To Dr. Laird, ma'am," Harriet answered.

I knew there must be some mistake, since Gordon's relatives were all across the sea; besides, he had hardly any that I knew of, except his father.

I hurried out to the kitchen. As I entered, I saw the figure of a man well advanced in years; tall he was above the ordinary, but evidently stooped with toil. He rose from his chair as I approached, and bowed with a kind of native grace. Then he turned his face to mine and looked me over with one of the steadiest pairs of eyes that ever belonged to mortal. They were deeply set, keen and bright; high cheek bones on either side; ruddy complexion, significant of health; great wavy folds of snowy hair fell almost to his shoulders, those shoulders wrapped in a kind of grayish plaid; flowing beard, white as the locks above. His nose was prominent and strong, the mouth delicate, and firmly set, as though he had a mind of his own and knew how to use it. His clothes were coarse and plain, such as I fancied were worn by the peasants overseas; homespun stuff, I saw; and a flannel shirt, partly open, disclosed a sun-burnt throat. He came forward and held out his hand, which I noticed was hard and rough, its clasp firm and strong; the other hand held a long staff, crooked at the top; a bundle, wrapped in a kind of shawl, lay at his feet.

"Is this the guidwife o' the hoose?" he asked, in a strong Scottish voice; "micht ye be Gordon's wife?"

I acknowledged that I was, my tone indicating that I wouldn't mind knowing who *he* was.

"I'm his faither," he said simply; "this'll be a graun' surprise to Gordon. Is he ben the hoose?" indicating the dining-room by a nod of his head.

"Yes," I said—"I'll call him out," my eyes fixed in a kind of fascination on the face and form before me. This was a new type to me; unfamiliar enough, but decidedly picturesque withal.

"I wunner will he ken me?" the old man said, a twinkle in his eye. "It's mony a lang day sin' he gaed awa'. But he'll mebbe be busy? Is there some o' his congregation wi' him?" for he heard the sound of voices.

"Oh, no," I said, "he can come all right—we're just having dinner."

"Mercy on us!" cried the stranger, "but ye're late wi' yir dinner; ha'e ye no' had onythin' sin' breakfast?"

I smiled, turning towards the door to call my husband. But he had evidently heard our voices, or something else had prompted him to come out, for he was already on his way to the kitchen. I stood silent, and his eyes turned upon the stranger. They rested there, it seemed to me, a good half minute before a sound escaped his lips. Then with a loud cry he leaped forward, holding out his arms. The hunger on the older face was pitiful to see. Sometimes clasping Gordon tight to his bosom, sometimes holding him back a little to look upon his face, the father heart seemed unable to drink its fill.

"Where did you come from, father?" Gordon asked, when speech at length returned.

"I cam' frae Scotland—where else?" his father answered, "richt frae the hills. An' I didna' let ye ken—I thocht 'twad be a bonnie surprise to ye. I landed at Montreal last nicht, an' then I cam' richt on. Whaur's the bairns?"

"They're inside," said Gordon; "you'll see them in a minute." Then followed a few minutes of swift questioning and answering. "But come on in with us now," Gordon suddenly broke in, taking his father's arm as he spoke, "come, till I introduce you to my friends—come, Helen."

I slipped behind the older man; and then, in Indian file, Gordon leading, we returned to our wondering guests. A fine procession, too, we must have made; Gordon in his spotless evening dress, I in my very finest—and between us, tall and stooped, his white locks shaking as he walked, his eagle eye fixing itself half defiantly and half appealingly upon the upturned faces, stood Gordon's father in his homespun, the Scotch shawl still about his shoulders, the huge safety-pin that held it gleaming in the brilliant light.

Gordon introduced him to every guest: “My father,” he said to each, and no one could fail to see the radiance on his face. Then the old man was given a seat at Gordon’s right, the arrears of dinner were brought quickly in, and in a moment our new visitor was the centre of attraction. Before taking his seat he stooped and kissed both the children, looking at them earnestly, then at their father. “The laddie’s like yir mither, Gordon,” he said, his voice trembling a little; “aye, he’s got Elsie’s mouth,” wherewith he kissed him again, the lad looking up in wonder. “The wee lassie favours yirsel’, Mrs. Laird.”

“My name’s Helen,” I said quietly.

The strong face glowed with pleasure; and I could see what joy my amendment had given Gordon. “The wee girl has yir ain bonnie face, Helen,” he corrected, hesitating a little before he spoke my name.

It’s wonderful what homing instincts children have! For a few minutes later little Dorothy, usually so shy, slipped out of her chair and stole over beside her grandfather, looking wistfully up into his face. He took her on his knee, stroking her head with beautiful tenderness.

His plate of soup was now before him, but still Grandfather Laird did not begin. Finally, in some perplexity, he turned to Gordon. “I’ll tak’ a wee drappie speerits, Gordon, if you please; I maistly tak’s juist what ye’d notice afore supper—forbye, I’m tired.”

Gordon flushed, hesitating. “We haven’t such a thing about the house, father—we really never keep it,” he began in some embarrassment. “It isn’t much of a custom out here, father.”

The old man sighed as he took up the snow-white napkin beside his plate, pushing it a little farther away lest it should get soiled. “I’m dootin’ this country’s no’ juist what it’s thocht to be. The first mon I clappit my eye on in Montreal, he was a beggar, wi’ a cup—an’ I thocht everybody had plenty siller in Canady. An’ noo it seems ye ha’ena’ a drappie aboot the hoose. Weel, it’s nae matter; I can dae wantin’ it. But I’ll no’ begin wi’oot the blessin’,” he added gravely. “Wull ye say it, Gordon?” nodding to his reverend son.

“No, father—you say it yourself,” replied Gordon, bowing his head, in which he was speedily followed by all of us.

Then the old man, his hands outstretched, began a prayer of prodigious length. Adoration, confession, thanksgiving followed in regular order, the

whole enriched with many a Scriptural quotation. I could not see the faces of our guests, but I knew right well how mystified they must be.

A little shy at first, dispensing diffident glances around the company as they tried to engage him in conversation, the patriarch soon began to feel with what cordiality we all regarded him. Wherewith he grew more and more communicative, this being evidently the occasion of his life; besides, and naturally enough, his heart was full to overflowing.

"It's hard to tak' it in, laddie," he said once or twice, laying down his knife and fork and turning full round to gaze at Gordon; "to think we're baith in Ameriky, and me in yir ain hoose—an' you sittin' wi' yin o' thae claw-hammer jackets on ye, like the gentry wear. It seems but the ither day ye were a wee bare-leggit laddie, helpin' yir faither mind the sheep. Ye was as gleg as a collie dog. I didna' think then, laddie, ye'd ever wag yir heid in a pulpit—but the ways o' Providence is wunnerfu'," as the honest eyes shone with pride and joy.

I saw one of our minor guests titter a little at this. She looked at Gordon rather as if she were sorry for him; fancied, no doubt, that he would be in sore straits of embarrassment to have his peasant father thus presented. But I never was prouder of my husband than I was that night. I actually felt my eyes grow dim more than once as I remarked the deference with which Gordon treated his father, so different though he was from what anybody would have expected. He seemed to delight to honour him; and while I suppose it was only natural for him to notice how far from cultured he was —reckoning from our standards—yet I know he reverenced him in his inmost heart for the unaffected goodness that none could fail to recognize.

Somebody, taking advantage of a momentary pause, asked the old man about his voyage.

"Oh," he began enthusiastically, and I knew by his tone that he was off; "oh, we had a graun' time a'thegither. I cam' i' the second cabin, nae doot," he went on without a particle of confusion, "for it didna' cost as muckle as the ither way; but there was a graun' lot o' passengers. We didna' ha'e ower muckle to eat, nae doot—but they gied us porridge morn an' nicht, sae we was fine. An' there was twa ministers wi' us," he went on, warming to his theme, "an' they preachit till us on the Sabbath day. It's wunnerfu', the difference there is in ministers. Yin o' them preachit in the mornin', an' the ither at nicht; the yin i' the mornin' was a puir feckless body; his sermon was a' aboot flowers, an' birds—an' the rainbow," this last coming out contemptuously; "he said a' thae things brocht us nearer God—did ye ever

hear sic' haverin'? An' he said they a' taught us aboot th' Almichty—an' them as loved them wud be saved! I thocht mysel' wae, to ha'e to sit an' listen till him. But the ither mon—wha preachit till us at nicht—he had the root o' the matter in him, I tell ye. He preachit aboot sinners bein' turned intil hell—I ha'e the heids and pertikklers," he suddenly exclaimed, diving into a pocket for the same. "Here's his pints; first, naebody kens God wha doesna' ken the doctrines; second, thae wha doesna' ken will be lost," the gray beard shaking solemnly as he rolled out the truth; "third, them wha's lost is lost to a' eternity. Oh, it was a graun' discoorse, I'm tellin' ye. It was unco' refreshin', after the baby broth we got i' the mornin'. I pit tuppence in the plate—but I didna' gie a farthin' in the mornin'. Are thae folk a' Presbyterians, Gordon?" he concluded by enquiring, nodding towards the assembled visitors.

"Mostly all, father," was Gordon's answer; "in fact, I believe they all are."

"Div ye teach them the Catechism, when ye're visitin'?" the old man pursued.

"Not very much, I'm afraid," answered Gordon, laughing; "you won't find things just the same here, father, as they are in old Scotland—not in that line, at least."

The old man's face clouded. "Thae things shouldna' change," he said solemnly; "sin doesna' change—and the truth o' God's aye the same, my son," as he looked down at the table. "I'm dootin' they're ower anxious aboot makin' money. They tell me maist everybody's rich in Canady—but I saw twa beggars in Montreal," he recalled a little ruefully. Then suddenly:

"I ha'e a wee pickle siller wi' me mysel', Gordon," the Scotch instinct showing in his voice; "only it's nae sae little!"

At this juncture my husband made heroic efforts to change the subject; but the old Scotchman was as intense about this as about graver matters. "Aye, I ha'e upwards o' a hunnerd pounds," he said impressively, glancing shyly at the company; "ye mind yir mither's Aunt Kirsty?—or mebbe ye never saw her? Weel, onyway, she died. An' she was lang aboot it, I tell ye, for she was ninety-four. Sae it was better for her to gang—better for us baith—an' she willed her wee bit belongings tae me—an' I sold them afore I left. An' yir faither was the prood mon at the funeral, Gordon—I was the chief mourner," he explained impressively; "I was the only yin there that was related to the corpse—and I walked ahint the bearers till the graveyard. A' the folk said I carried mysel' like a minister; the undertaker, he was an awfu'

solemn mon—but I was solemner nor him; an' I kenned a' the time, mind ye, that I was the heir. That's hoo I got the siller to pay my way to Canady. But I ha'e a hunnerd pounds left, Gordon—an' I'm gaein' to invest it, after I look aboot a wee bit. Investments is awfu' profitable here, they tell me. It'll mak' a cozy pickle o' siller for me, wull it no', Gordon?"

"Don't count too much on it, father," Gordon answered; "money isn't just as universal here as you old-country people think." But the old man seemed reluctant to be convinced of this.

A little later in the evening we had some music. Most of the songs, I fear, were of the rather æsthetic type; and I fancied they appealed but little to our venerable friend. He sat quietly in a corner of the parlour, as if lost in thought. Every now and then his eyes would rove to Gordon's face, glowing with pride and affection. As for me, I knew not when I had been so fascinated. I simply sat and watched him, hardly knowing just what it was that held me so. Partly the picturesqueness of this rugged type, I suppose, and partly a dawning recognition of the sterling worth behind the stern exterior; genuineness was written all over him. Then I think I was beginning to love him for my husband's sake—I remember how the thought flashed on me that I never would have had Gordon but for him.

Suddenly, availing himself of a temporary lull, the old man cleared his throat: "I'll gie ye a sang mysel'," he offered; "nane o' yir highfalutin kind—but a guid auld yin o' Bobbie Burns. It minds me o' yir mither, Gordon," as he cleared his throat again with mighty din, preparatory to performance.

"I'll try and play for you if you tell me what it is, Mr. Laird," volunteered one of the ladies, moving towards the piano. I had seen grandfather eyeing her askance a little while before; indeed, I myself thought her evening dress was rather overdone about the shoulders—underdone, perhaps, would be a better word.

"No, no," replied the old man, with a disdainful wave of his hand, "yon clatter wud only throw me aff the tune. I'll sing the way the Almichty meant," with which he broke into a strong, clear baritone that would really have commanded attention in any company. More inspiring still, the whole soul of the man seemed to fuse with the touching words:

> "My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream;
> Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream."

The applause that greeted the performance seemed to please the old man well. From many standpoints this was evidently the night of his life, and

soon his enthusiasm knew no bounds. Not more than half an hour after, this first ovation still lingering gratefully in the performer's mind, one or two of the guests suggested that he favour us with another Scotch song, a proposal that soon grew into a general demand.

"I canna'," declined the old man, "I canna' juist the noo. But I'll tell ye what I'll dae wi' ye. I'll gie ye the Hielan' fling—that's fair graun', an' ye'll no' hae it in Canady. Gordon, gie me the bootjack, like a guid laddie—my shoon's ower heavy for dancin'—they're the lang-toppit kind."

"We've nothing of the sort, father," Gordon explained reluctantly.

"Ah, weel," he answered cheerfully, "ye'll dae fine yirsel'. Staun' aroon' wi' yir back till me—and let yon mon pit his back till ye," indicating an immaculate professor of burly form; who, apprehending, presented himself for Gordon's grasp, the latter in turn taking the already extended foot between his legs and gripping the boot tightly with his hands. Gordon's sire then lifted up the free foot upon his son, pushing mightily, and making a noise the while such as I have heard men employ when raising telegraph poles. A moment later Gordon and the professor were in a heap on the floor, a long boot with a red top between them. The second similarly removed, the old man moved solemnly out to the middle of the floor, called for a couple of walking sticks, laid them crosswise; then broke into the most fantastic dance, leaping to and fro above the imaginary swords, sometimes crouching low, sometimes springing high in air, sometimes whirling like a Dervish with outflowing arms, the whole enriched by an occasional savage yell that was first the terror, afterwards the delight, of one or two of the ladies. But all were entranced, and none more so than the performer himself.

Shortly after the excitement had subsided the guests began to make their farewells. But this struck the venerable Scotchman as quite irregular. "Hoots!" he cried, when one or two had proffered me their hands, "ye canna' gang till we've had worship; Gordon wadna' like it. Wha ever heard tell o' freens leavin' the manse wi'oot a word o' prayer? Gordon, tak' the Buik"; and his son, an amused smile playing about his lips, proceeded promptly to do as he was told.

"Are ye no' gaein' to sing?" the old man suddenly broke out, for Gordon was just starting to read.

"We don't usually, father; it's not customary here," was the answer.

"It's a sair custom," rejoined his father, "neglectin' to sing the praise o' Almichty God. But, onyway, we'll ha'e a psalm—I'll raise the tune mysel'," which purpose he carried into effect as soon as a selection had been made.

“We’ll tak’ the eighty-ninth,” he said presently; and as he launched the mighty strain I recognized the very words that had given me my first introduction to the psalms, that far-gone night in uncle’s house:

“Oh, greatly blessed the people are
The joyful sound that know,”

he began, singing onward to the end. Gordon and I alone could join with him, but our leader seemed not to care. His whole heart and mind were absorbed in the great song of his fatherland, and he sang it as only an exile can. Face and voice and soul all seemed to bear witness to the truth of the noble verse which brought the psalm to an end. He looked like one of the old battling Covenanters themselves, his eyes closed, his head thrown back, one hand gently keeping time as he rolled out the crowning stanza:

“For God is our defense and He
To us doth safety bring;
The Holy One of Israel
Is our Almighty King.”

Silence fell. Then Gordon moved over under the light and began to read the Scriptures. The passage he chose was that sublime chapter from Isaiah; and there were few could interpret through the voice as Gordon could. The old man sat, his eyes shaded by his hand, listening reverently. By and by Gordon came to the words: “My servant shall deal prudently . . . he shall be exalted and extolled . . . his visage was so marred more than any man and his form more than the sons of men.”

“Expound yon,” came as a sudden interruption.

Gordon looked up from the book. “What’s that, father? Do what?”

“Expound the Word,” his father repeated solemnly; “the minister should aye expound the passage. Tell the folk wha the prophet means.”

Gordon turned a puzzled look on the page.

“Yon aboot the servant,” his father explained; “the Suffering Servant, ye ken—Him wha’s face was marred wi’ cruel men. Ye ken wha the prophet’s referrin’ to, my son?”

Gordon understood. “I see what you mean,” he answered slowly; “but I don’t know that I’m quite clear about that myself. The best scholarship seems in doubt as to whether——”

But the old man was all on fire now. “I dinna’ ken naethin’ aboot yir scholars,” he broke in vehemently, “an’ I dinna’ care. But yon bit refers to the Man o’ Sorrows—ye ken that fine, div ye no’?—it’s Christ the prophet means—an’ Him sufferin’ for sin. Gordon, expound the Word,” and there was a stern grandeur about the pose and the voice of this champion of the truth that would have done credit to the ancient prophet himself.

“I cannot,” said Gordon, his lips quite white; “not as you understand it, father—it isn’t clear to me.”

“Then close the Buik,” said the old man sternly; “if it’s no’ the savour of life unto life, it’ll be the savour o’ death unto death.”

And Gordon did. “You’ll lead us in prayer, father,” he said, his voice so low we could hardly hear.

His father seemed to hesitate a moment, looking timidly around upon the strangers. Then he slowly sank on his knees beside the chair, one hand resting on Dorothy’s golden curls; and in a moment the Presence seemed about us. It was a wonderful prayer, and came as if out-breathed beneath the very shadow of the Cross.

Our guests took their leave in silence. After the children were tucked away I waited long up-stairs for Gordon; but I fell asleep at last, the sound of earnest voices still floating upward from the study. I knew it was a collision of the old school and the new—and I prayed on the father’s side.

XXI
"LOVE'S OLD SWEET SONG"

THERE could be but one end to this. Whether Gordon was right or wrong, he was not at one with the standards of his church. I really believe, although I shrink from saying it, that his idea of *saving* men came more and more to be confused with the process of simply *helping* them. This sprang partly, of course, from his nobility of nature, from his large and loving heart—but it was wrong. Gordon, I think, believed in relieving men, then reforming them, both of which were to spell regeneration. And then, besides, he seemed to have adopted some theory about law, and the laws of nature—he knew more about evolution than any other man since Darwin—that had turned the once sweet luxury of prayer, real prayer, into nothing more than a sort of religious exercise. I don't believe he thought prayers that actually asked for things were of any use at all.

I suppose, too, although I never could find out much about this, that Gordon didn't just regard the Scriptures in the same way his brother ministers did; yet I knew he reverenced the Bible and simply lived among its teachings.

But there could, as I have said, be only one end to all of this—so far, I mean, as Gordon's relation to St. Andrew's was concerned. I felt from the beginning that it would be but a matter of time till he must forsake the pulpit he loved so well. There were two influences that contributed powerfully to this: the one was Gordon's honour—the other, Gordon's father. My husband had a fastidious conscience—and a faithful sire.

Grandfather had been with us long—I cannot say exactly how long—before matters actually came to a crisis. But I think he felt from the beginning, with the keen instinct of his kind, that Gordon's official ministry was at an end. One night, sitting in an adjoining room, I overheard the most of a long conversation between the father and the son. The burden of it did not greatly surprise me; grandfather had given me his mind on the matter

before, or implied it anyhow, and more than once. But I knew that night that the crisis was at hand.

"Ye canna' dae onythin' else," the old man repeated once or twice; "when a minister gi'es up the fundamentals, it's no' richt for him to keep his kirk. A preacher wi'oot a gospel!—he's a sair objec'," the Scotch voice concluded pitifully.

I could catch the tone of almost bitter remonstrance in Gordon's answer. "Without a gospel, father!" he cried reproachfully; "surely you don't accuse me of that—surely you're going too far."

"Ye dinna' believe Christ died for sinners," the older man said sternly; "an' ony minister wha doesna' believe that—he's wi'oot a gospel, my son."

"You don't understand me, father," Gordon remonstrated earnestly; "you state the thing too severely—perhaps I don't just believe it in the way you do, but——"

"There's only the yin way to believe yon," interrupted his father; "you an' me's the same kind o' sinners, my son—an' we need the same kind o' a Saviour. Forbye, ye think we're a' divine, I'm dootin'; that's what they say aboot ye, onyway—an' I'm thinkin' I've gathered it from yir sermons mair nor once."

"Not exactly, father," I heard Gordon answer. "What I do teach is, that every man has the divine within him; and if we but appeal——"

"I dinna' ken what ye've got inside o' ye," broke in the champion of truth, "but I'm sick an' tired o' all inside o' *me*—naethin' but sin an' misery—naethin' but filthy rags," he added, careless of the unseemly metaphor. "An' there's mair—ye dinna' believe there's ony use in prayer; nae guid ava', forbye juist ha'ein' fellowship wi' God. An' ye dinna' believe there's ony use in prayin' for the things we want—ye dinna' think it maks ony difference; ye're feart o' the laws of natur'—ye think God's a servant in His ain hoose, like as if He couldna' dae onythin' He wants to dae."

"But I do believe in prayer, father—of course I do. Perhaps I don't just believe that it alters or affects the outward course of things; but at the same time——"

"Then ye maun settle it wi' the Word of God," the old man answered solemnly; "it aye bids us to ask for what we want; an' it tells us God's oor Heavenly Faither—an' what for wud He no' dae things for us, Him, wi' all power in His hands. Oh, my son, my son, ye'll change yir mind some day, I'm dootin', when yir sair heart's callin' oot for the love o' the livin' God."

And thus the sorrowful dialogue made its way.

I think it was the very next day Gordon told me he had resigned St. Andrew's. He told me his reason, too; which I knew already. My heart leaped towards the children, I remember, but I scarce knew why; tenderly, passionately, pityingly, my heart went out to my children, to whom I knew it would mean the most.

"Where will we go to live?" was one of the first questions I asked. For I did not seek, then, to turn Gordon from his purpose. I knew too well how impossible that would be; besides, I felt no honourable course was open to him but the one he had already chosen.

Gordon's face was very grave as he began to tell me of the only opening he saw before him.

"But you'll get another call, Gordon—and another church, won't you?" I asked, dimly fearing.

"No, no other call—and no other church," he answered firmly; "at least, no regular church, Helen;" with which he explained to me how the very reasons that prompted him to renounce St. Andrew's must hold him back from any similar position. "But I'll have a field of work just the same—of usefulness, too, please God," he added, in the lowest voice. "I can labour there without being responsible to any one but Him."

Then he told me all about the plan he had in view. He would take the little mission in Swan Hollow; this was the sunken part of the city in which he had so long carried on the work that had received so much of his care and love—the same to which Jennie McMillan had belonged, to whom I owed the happiness of all the years between.

"We've got a little church there," he said, a note of pride mingling with the sadness of his voice, "and it doesn't belong to anybody but ourselves. The people built it—and I helped them. It's just possible the Presbytery may try to interfere with me—but I don't think so. That's where I'm going to preach now, Helen; and I'll preach the truth as I believe it."

"But, Gordon," I remonstrated, "won't it be the same truth that you've preached in St. Andrew's?"

He did not answer immediately. And his face was clouded when his words came at length. "It won't be the same as St. Andrew's expects to hear—and wants to hear," he said; "they demand the old orthodox truths in the old orthodox way—and then they're through with them," he added a little bitterly; "till the next Sunday, at least."

“But aren’t those the same truths your father believes?” I pressed, feeling the strength of my reply.

“Yes,” he answered, “but my father believes them in his inmost heart—and he lives them.”

“And don’t you believe them in your inmost heart, Gordon?” I cried eagerly—“the way your father does?”

“No,” he answered gravely, after a long pause, his face very white; “no, I don’t believe them as my father does.”

“Oh, Gordon,” I pleaded with sudden entreaty, “come back—come back, my darling. You’re drifting; oh, Gordon, you’re drifting away from God—and me,” for my soul’s loneliness was about me like a mist.

“Don’t,” he said huskily, holding out his arms to me, “for God’s sake don’t make it any harder for me. No man can drift far if he tries to do good in his Master’s name—and I intend, I honestly purpose, to give my life to those poor people at the mission. If any man will do His will, we’re told, he shall know the doctrine. I’m going to try to do His will, Helen—and I want you close beside me, together, doing our life-work hand in hand. Then we can’t be anything but happy, my darling,” and his words rang with the note of life and courage.

I loved the people of the mission; and I loved the work. But the import of it all rose before me for a moment like a sullen cloud; the squalor of the homes; the ignorance of the people, loving and grateful though they were; the poverty on every hand; the obscurity of the position that must be ours; the pitiful support that we could hope to receive. And our cozy manse seemed to grow and dance before my eyes, clothed suddenly with palatial beauty. I could see little Dorothy, the big sunbonnet shading the dimpled face, as she picked dandelions on the lawn; and Harold, the treasure of my heart, as he swung into the hall and flung his school-bag on the table, calling aloud the while for mother. It is humiliating to write it down; but I think the question of our living, too, of simple bread and butter, actually presented itself to my saddened and bewildered mind.

I suppose it was weak and selfish of me—though I cared not for myself—when I flung myself into Gordon’s arms and besought him as I did.

“Oh, Gordon,” I pleaded amid my tears; “don’t, dearest, for the children’s sakes. It isn’t too late yet, Gordon—have you thought of what this means?—we’ll likely have to take Harold out of school.”

He caressed me, trying to soothe me as he might a child. “I know what it means, Helen,” he answered; “I’ve thought of all that. It breaks my heart to think of what it will bring to you—but I am helpless, dear, I’m helpless.”

“Not me,” I sobbed, “not me, Gordon; I’d go with you to the depths of Africa. But the children, Gordon—think of them. We’re old,” I cried—and I really believed it—“we’re old, and our life is nearly done; but Harold and Dorothy are so young, and theirs is all before them. And don’t—oh, Gordon, don’t—for our children’s sakes.”

“What can I do, my child?” he murmured. “What else can I do?”

“Why, Gordon—do what I do. Oh, Gordon, all you need to do is to believe those things—the things I do, and the things your father does—and preach them, like you used to at the first. And then we won’t need to go away at all. I believe the people really love you more now than they did years ago—and they’ll keep on loving you—and then we won’t have to, have to give up all this,” I concluded, my tear-dim eyes looking wistfully up into his tired face.

He shook his head. “I must follow what light I have,” he said.

“But, Gordon,” I went on, still hoping against hope, “I’m sure it would come all right. We’ll study those things out together, dear—and I’ll help you. I’ve learned a lot about them, ever since that night—that night, you remember, when Jennie died. And I’ll try and explain everything,” I pleaded pitifully, the pathos of it all coming over me as I looked up at the strong and intellectual face, “and we’ll both go on together—in the old paths—and I’ll try so hard to help you, dear. Then we won’t have to go away at all—or give up our house—and it’s all so dark ahead of us, for the children, I mean.”

“I can’t sell my soul for bread, Helen,” he answered solemnly; “and I know as well as you what it all means. My father’s heart is nearly broken now.”

“And, Gordon,” I whispered, still pressing my poor plea, “there’s another thing we’ll do,” as I drew his face down beside my lips.

“What, dearest?”

“We’ll—we’ll pray together, Gordon; every day,” I faltered, “every day, that God will make us believe the right things. And He will—I know He will.”

“I’ve prayed that for long,” he murmured low. “Oh, my darling, I love you so,” and his lips pressed themselves to mine with a reverence and a

passion I had never felt before.

Let me write it down, for the comfort of every troubled heart, that the holiest hours in all life's retrospect are those that are clothed in sorrow. The years have fled; yet the years are with me still. And when one sits in the gloaming (as I sit now) and looks back at all the distant days, the lure that casts its spell upon the heart comes not from the radiant hour of mirth or ecstasy; nor from the period of glad prosperity; nor from the season of echoing mirth and laughter. Not there does Memory ask leave to linger. But it hovers long, in sweet and heartful reverie, about some hour of tender grief, some season of blessed pain—blessed always, tender evermore, because it has been glorified by love, robbed of all its bitterness by the loyalty of some dear heart that came closer and closer to your own amid the darkness.

The home of early married life is the heart's earthly home forever. I knew that now; and memory bathes the soul in tears as I recall our last night beneath the roof of that St. Andrew's manse. Everything was packed and ready. The new house, the tiny, shabby house that was next day to become our home, was waiting for our advent. The rude but loving hands of some of the helpers at the mission had joined with ours to make it ready. And for our living there, they were providing us with a little salary; pitifully small—but our children would have clothes and bread.

My heart was like to break; but we spent that last evening in unconquerable brightness. I know I was no less cheerful than Gordon—and ever and anon I wondered if his heart were as sad as mine. The most pitiful feature of it all was Dorothy's unconscious glee—moving was such great fun, she thought. Harold was old enough to catch the contagion of our pain—for pain will show through the best veneer that courage can provide.

Both the children, and their grandfather too, were in bed and sound asleep when Gordon and I went up-stairs together about ten o'clock. We went into the children's room, for they were still unparted, the little bed nestling close to the big one; and we stood long above the slumbering forms, our eyes swimming as we looked.

"I wonder if it's really so," I heard Gordon murmur.

"What, darling?" I said.

"That God pities us—like we pity them," the sentence finished in a broken voice. "It solves all life's problems—if that's really so."

I could make no answer. But I bowed and kissed Harold's lovely brow; then Dorothy's.

"Come with me, Gordon," I said gently, after we had stood a while in silence, starting to move across the hall.

He followed me into our own room. "This is harder than all the rest," I said brokenly; "this is the dearest and sacredest room in the world to me. Oh, Gordon," and I was sobbing now, "surely they'll let me—whoever comes here after us—surely they'll let me come sometimes and see it, won't they, Gordon?"

His arms were so strong, his voice so tender. "Why, dearest, why? What makes this room so sacred to you?"

"Oh, don't you know?" and the words could hardly come for sobbing; "this is where they were born, Gordon—where they both were born. It was right there I lay when I first saw Harold's face. Oh, Gordon, I can't—I don't know how to give it up."

His eyes were full of pity and his voice was quivering. "Yes," he said, "yes, it's holy—but we have the children left, my darling," and he began to lead me gently from the room. Nor did he stop till we were standing where we had stood before, looking down on the unconscious forms.

"I'm going down to the study for a while," he said a little later; "I won't be long," as he began to descend the stairs, his footsteps echoing through the dismantled house.

I went back to my room, weeping, and sat down upon one of the trunks that stood about. Suddenly an impulse came to me—I think it must have been from heaven—and I sprang to my feet, burrowing eagerly towards the bottom of the trunk.

Ten minutes later I stole down the stairs. I was arrayed in my wedding gown. The years may have chafed it some, but they had not availed against its beauty and its richness. The pearl trimming—and those other radiant things that have no name—shone triumphant in the light. And I had about my neck, and on my bosom, some precious lace that I had removed long years before. The hall was almost empty—little there but our piano, that had been dragged out and left close beside the door. There was a mirror, too, still undisturbed upon the wall; and I paused before it just as I had done that golden day in Baltimore when Gordon was waiting to take me as his own forever. My eyes rested lovingly on the sweet and stainless vesture—it still fitted me like a glove, thank heaven—and then wandered to the face above.

Long, long I gazed into the answering eyes, the past lying deep within them like water in some amber spring. The face was older, of course, and the signs of toil and care were on it; but the golden glow of love, I felt, clothed it with a peace—and a beauty too—which it never knew on that far-off wedding day. Poverty and hardship, I knew, were waiting at the gate; obscurity and struggle were to be our portion. But my husband was sitting in the room just beyond the door; my children—oh, the wealth and sweetness of the word!—my children's breathing I could almost hear; the years were past and gone, from whose hands I had received them all—and in that hour my wedding robes glistened with a holier light than time can cast, and the bridal bliss sprang like a fountain in my heart.

"Why so long?" Gordon suddenly sang out; "come in."

"I'm coming, dear," I said, and I felt the blitheness of my voice as it echoed through the hall. Very softly I stepped in and stood before him as he sat beside the dying fire.

His eyes devoured me with love; they roamed mostly about my dress—which was exactly what I wanted. I think he glanced once or twice about the room, its denuded bareness contrasting strangely with the rich robe I wore. Then he rose and took me into his arms—far, deep in—as into a mighty refuge. "You never looked so sweet, my darling—the years haven't touched it," was all he said. But he kissed my hair, my neck, my lips.

It was nearly an hour later when we arose to go up-stairs, and I was still in all my glory as we moved out, Gordon's arm still about me, into the echoing hall.

"Sing something," he suddenly requested as we passed the piano. It stood in sullen silence, as if it knew this to be a move for the worse.

My hands roved over the keys for a little; it was hard to know what would suit the hour.

But some breath of other days was wafted in upon me; and I felt my heart leap beneath the wedding lace upon my bosom as the song gushed into my mind again.

The light was dim, the house disrobed, the piano out of tune. But I can still see the rapture in Gordon's face as mine turned up to meet it while the words came one by one:

“Still must you call me tender names
Still gently stroke my tresses;
Still shall my happy answering heart
Keep time to your caresses.”

XXII
WHEN JOY AND SORROW MEET

"No, I'm never going back again," and the stamp of determination was on Harold's face as he spoke the words; "I'm never going back to school any more." He was gravely adjusting his books in the well-worn bag as he spoke, giving each one a final pat as if in last farewell. "I've been there too long," as he looked up at his father and me.

The room was small, the furniture shabby and worn now; for some years had passed since we came to live in the little house that still preserved to us an unbroken circle. We were all seated around the table in the dining-room —which was our only living-room—and Gordon had been telling Dorothy some wonderful story of red Indians when Harold's avowal had suddenly transfixed us all.

It is wonderful how a sudden wave of emotion gives prominence, in the memory, to everything connected with it. I could draw, even now, as accurate a picture of all the surroundings as though the event were but of yesterday. The room was small, as already described; but so was the house, for that matter. Yet there was something sweet and lovely, to me at least, about this tiny room that night—for my loved ones were all within it. I was sewing at the time, mending, of which there seemed to be no end; but every now and then my eyes would refresh themselves upon the little group. Gordon was still, despite the years, by far the handsomest of them all. The tokens of toil and care were not to be denied, but a deeper calm and sweetness could be seen upon the noble face as he bended over the golden locks of our little daughter. And very winsome was little Dorothy, laughing up into her father's eyes, reading there, as children are not slow to do, the signs of a consuming love. Grandfather Laird was dozing in the big armchair in the corner, his hand still resting on his shepherd's staff; dear old grandfather, whose race was nearly run, the strong Scottish face stamped more and more with the simple grandeur of his nature as he came nearer to the eternal verities on which his mind had dwelt so long.

I think my heart had gone out increasingly to grandfather as the years went by. Denied my own immediate circle in my girlhood's home, my affections had struck deep root amid all that Gordon loved. Perhaps I ought to say here that Gordon more than once had wanted me to go South again—and he would even have accompanied me. But I always felt it was too late, after my mother had entered into rest—besides, there always yawned before me the gulf that still lay between my uncle and my husband.

In addition to all this, to tell the honest truth, I don't know how we could have devised ways and means, even if I had been willing to visit my dear Southland again. For nobody will ever know the bitterness of the struggle that we entered upon with our departure from St. Andrew's. The pinching and paring and piteous penury that came with our change of lot lingers with me yet as a troubled dream. Yet I want to say, in case this story should ever see the light and anybody recognize its hero, that I never heard a word of complaint from Gordon's lips. If I loved him before I almost worshipped him now. With utter abandonment of devotion he gave himself to the struggling and sinful people of the needy quarter in which we made our home and among whom we found our work. All his buoyant vigour, his splendid intellect, his glorious heart, were given unreservedly to his lowly toil.

And I think I can say, with all regard to modesty, that I honestly tried to help him. His people grew as dear to me, I verily believe, as they were to him. Of course, my work was largely in our humble home, which I tried to make as bright and comfortable for Gordon as I could. The children, too, filled my life with busy joy—but I gave every hour I could spare, and all the strength I could command, to help Gordon in his noble drudgery.

I hardly know what I would have done, through all those trying days, if it had not been for grandfather. For one thing, his influence over Harold, now in the perilous paths of youth, filled my heart with thankful gladness. His devotion to his grandson became the passion of his life; he seemed unhappy if Harold was out of his sight, and the boy's future was his absorbing thought.

Then, besides, grandfather's life was so full of Christian peace; and his faith, in spite of the awful disappointment that Gordon's course had brought him, remained true and tranquil through it all. I really think he was the best Christian I ever knew. And how he comforted me, no one will ever know till all such secrets be revealed. For ours was a common sorrow. Soon it became evident to us both that Gordon, nobly devoted though he was, was turning more and more from the old truths that his father held so dear. Nor were

they, I think, less precious to myself; the deeper the darkness grew, and the more Gordon seemed to turn from the truths that had blessed my life, the more my troubled heart seemed to find its refuge in the great realities of a Divine Saviour, and an atoning Lord, and a Heavenly Father who answers prayer; and I always found grandfather's sorrowing spirit seeking the same solace as my own.

I see them all again as they sat that night about the table; the quick motion of Gordon's head is vivid to me now, as he turned from the clamorous Dorothy and gave all his attention to his son.

"I've been at school too long," Harold repeated firmly, "and now I'm going to do something—to earn my own living."

"What makes you say that, my son?" Gordon asked, the pallor on his face betraying his emotion.

"Because I've found out all about it," Harold replied confidently; "surely you don't think I'm such a stupid as not to see all it has meant to you and mother—all the sacrifice, I mean—and all the struggle you've had to keep me going—and all the things you've had to give up. I know how poor we are," he went on passionately, "and I should have stopped long ago, and tried to help instead of being a burden to you." Then he quoted one or two of his proofs, which simple womanly pride forbids me to record; but they were true enough, and it nearly broke my heart to see the sadness on Gordon's face. For there was almost nothing he could say, and his poor remonstrances were of no avail.

"Look at mother," Harold broke out vehemently; "look at mother's dress. It's the same one she's had for years—and it's mended," he added in fiery sadness, "and it's the only one she has in the world except just one for Sundays—and it's shabby, too. And that's all for me, for me and Dorothy—but especially for me—and I'm not going to stand it any longer. Besides, I've got a place—and I'm going to begin on Monday. I'm going away to Carletonville. But I'll be home for Christmas," the fiery tone melting into tenderness as he rose from his seat and came over beside me.

For he had caught the expression of my face. Ah me! there are few moments in a woman's life like to that which announces the outgoing of her child from her home, how humble soever that home may be. Especially if the outgoing one be her first-born son! It was as if a knife had gone through my heart.

“But, what are you going to do, my boy?—what kind of work, I mean?” I asked in a trembling voice, the garment I was mending falling unheeded to the floor.

“It’s a bank,” he answered proudly; “Mr. Duncan got me in. I didn’t say anything to anybody till I got it settled. But I wrote the application myself—and they said it was the best letter they ever got from an applicant,” a slight flush of pride on the boyish face. “And Mr. Duncan says there’s other work I can get to do—at nights—and I’ll be able to support myself from the start,” his breath coming fast with growing excitement as he turned his eyes first on his father and then on me.

“You shan’t,” I cried, with sudden fear, as it broke on me that he was actually going away. Our poverty was as nothing then. “Oh, Harold, you mustn’t—I cannot let you go,” and I clung to him as though he were going away that selfsame hour.

Gordon seemed unable to speak, sitting still and staring at the boy. Harold’s cheeks were glowing and his eyes were sparkling; his arm was still about me.

Suddenly my husband found a voice, breaking out into a torrent of remonstrance. Really, it was quite unlike him to grow so agitated—but Gordon’s whole life was in his children. “If your mother and I can stand it, there’s no reason why you should object,” he pleaded, after many other arguments had been pressed in vain. But Harold was immovable; his word had been passed, he said, and he would not recede from it.

“Let the laddie gang,” came suddenly from grandfather’s chair in the corner. I think we had forgotten he was there. “It’s the auld way o’ the world—the bairnies must leave the nest some time,” he added, his own voice shaking. “An’ his faither’s God wull ha’e him in His guid an’ holy keeping—the Almichty’ll find the path for him. Come here, my laddie,” and he held out his arms. Harold came over, wondering; the patriarch laid his hands in blessing on his head, and then committed him to God in words of such beauty as I think I never heard before.

But Gordon protested long and earnestly. “Anything but the bank,” he said at last; “I cannot bear, my son, to think of you in a bank.”

“That’s what I think,” I cried, eagerly seconding; “they make them work so hard—and it’s all indoors—and Harold’s not overly strong,” I pleaded, careless of the splendid form that stood beside grandfather’s chair.

“That has nothing to do with it,” Gordon interrupted in his abrupt way; “it’s not of that I’m thinking at all. It’s the peril of the thing, my son—the danger, the temptations—just to think of the money that passes through a lad’s hands when he’s put into a bank. And that’s how so many of them are ruined—for time and eternity,” he added solemnly.

“Oh, Gordon,” I cried in protest, “you don’t mean stealing, Gordon, stealing money—you don’t mean that?”

“That’s exactly what I mean,” said Gordon, untrained to subterfuge. “I mean the peril of handling so much money.”

Whereat I fell into a storm of dissent, half in excitement, half in anger, as though my son had been accused already. I fear I spoke words harsh and unreasonable, but my defense must be that I was all unstrung with sudden grief and fear. Till by and by I was as violent in my demand for his father’s consent as I had been in denial of my own, so strange are the cross-currents that trouble a woman’s heart.

But we might as well have all been silent, so far as any effect on Harold was concerned. He had promised and he was going—and that was the end of it. So the outcome of the whole matter was a kind of tacit agreement, before we parted for the night, that Harold was to have his way.

When Gordon and I were in our own room, the door tightly shut, I pleaded with him to accept a plan that my poor bewildered mind had conjured up. “Let me write to uncle,” was the burden of my cry; “if our boy is leaving us because we’re not able to support him, uncle could change all that; he could at least undertake to complete his education—and I know he will, I know he will.”

But Gordon’s face was like marble. In the last appeal a Scotchman is always Scotch—and I knew Gordon was thinking of that last night when he had been all but turned from uncle’s door. “Not while we have a crust to eat or a hand to toil,” he said, in a tone so low and resolute that I actually feared to press my argument with another word; “no child of mine shall be dependent on his father’s enemy;” which language smote me to the heart—nor do I think Gordon would have uttered it in a calmer mood.

Before we put out the light, his face still white and drawn, he took me by the hand and led me towards the bed. We knelt and prayed together—but my heart was bleeding. And anyhow—it is hard to write it down—Gordon and I didn’t seem so close together now, when we prayed, as we once had been. I had the phantom feeling that we prayed apart. He had beckoned me, years

before, in to faith's Holy Place where the Divine Saviour waited for us both; I had faltered in, groping for the way, bringing a broken and contrite heart—and I had found my husband gone.

It was the deep dark before the dawn when I slipped noiselessly into Harold's room—and I prayed beside his bed. I loved to hear him breathing; and I wondered if God could hear *me*—my soul, I mean, half panting in its loneliness.

XXIII
"THE VOICE OF RACHEL"

WHEN I began this chapter it was with the purpose of telling about grandfather's home-going. But not to his beloved Scotland, of whose heathery hills he seemed to think more fondly and speak more longingly as the years went by. It never lost its charm for us, this loving talk of the old Scotch shepherd about the far-off hills and valleys of his native land; even I, who had never been near them at all, came to be quite familiar with those sunlit slopes, their glistening heather, their babbling springs, their bleating flocks that roamed from base to brow. No, not to Bonnie Scotland—as he fondly called it—but to a fairer clime, did the weary shepherd turn his face at last.

But before I come to this I must tell of something else; something I would to God might be left unrecorded, for my pen is aching while I write. But this other—what I am about to tell—had its own part, I think, in starting dear old grandfather on the long journey from which he will return no more. For it is about Harold, who was grandfather's idol, as I have already said.

Our son had gone away, grief and hope mingling with the last farewell. That memory is with me yet. Indeed, I never rise early now, around five or six, without the feeling that some one dear to me is going far away. I remember the sweet calm of the early dawn, the first glad notes of the singing birds, careless of human tears, the sparkle of the dew upon the little lilac bush before the door, as we went past it with Harold's trunk. What a hard time I had to press into Harold's hand the poor little dollar I had saved from our scanty means as my own special gift—how pathetic it was to see the care with which he tucked it away in a painfully capacious pocketbook that grandfather had given him; how lonely it looked in the infinite space around it! And I remember how poor old grandfather noticed it, and how he be-wailed himself that he had not kept till then the hundred pounds he had brought with him from Scotland. But this, his only wealth, had been "invested," as he had told us over and over again for months after the

investment had been made. Poor grandfather! we had heard nothing for long of the speculation that had looked so rosy to him then.

And I remember, most vividly of all, what a time I had trying to comfort Gordon when he came back from the station. After all, perhaps I must admit that a father loves his son quite as much as his first-born girl. And it seemed strange that I had to be the strong one, but so it was. When evening came, and we had family prayers, Gordon's pleading didn't comfort me at all. But I had learned long before this that the new view of prayer refuses to concede that anything can change "the course of nature"—I hate that phrase—and teaches that it is only communion, pious meditation, and not supposed to be used for asking for what you want. So Gordon had gradually given up asking for particular things, though heaven knows there was enough to ask. Higher critics are the highway robbers of the soul.

Well, everything went along smoothly enough for nearly a year. Harold wrote twice a week, and seemed delighted with his work. He expected soon to be promoted, one of his last letters said; and Gordon told me that a general manager gets twenty thousand a year—that is, after he gets the position, of course. I used to think Harold was having a pretty lively time—socially, I mean—and he seemed to spend a good deal on clothes. But he did copying, and other things, out of hours, and made almost enough to pay his way. And we knew he was asked out a great deal, as bank clerks always are—and that's enough to turn any young fellow's head. Society seems to do its very best to ruin such youths as turn their footsteps towards a bank; Gordon said himself that most of these clerks do more credit to their tailor than their schoolmaster. As for me, if I had fifty sons not one of them would ever go into that profession with my consent—unless he began as general manager, with twenty thousand a year.

By and by Harold began to get interested in sports—mostly lacrosse, I think—and that was the portal to our Gethsemane. I shall not dwell upon the sad and bitter story. But one day a letter came from Carletonville; the envelope bore the bank's name, but the address was not in Harold's hand.

"It's about his promotion, Gordon," I said exultantly; "it's about Harold—he's been raised at last. You open it."

Gordon was radiant. "No, Helen," he said unselfishly; "he owes it more to you than me—open it yourself. He gets his financial ability from his mother," and he leaned forward to hear me read the news.

I opened it so carefully; for I meant to preserve it always—till he was general manager, at least. My eye ran swiftly over the contents and I fell

with a loud outcry into Gordon's arms.

I scarcely need to tell the story further. The letter was not unkind—I remember remarking that, in a numb, mechanical way, in the midst of all the agony. There was even a little stern note of sympathy in it, as the authorities outlined the piteous tragedy. I suppose they knew we had human hearts. It was the old story; debt, then betting, then petty irregularities in the hope that the deficit would soon be overtaken. Then a little more; then a false signature—I cannot write the other word; then more—and the man who wrote us used the term embezzlement. That was when I fainted in Gordon's arms.

All that night I lay awake, alone. Gordon had left by the first train to go to Harold. I pleaded with him to bring our boy home with him. And I shall remember to all eternity how white his lips were when he said he would—*if he could*. I knew what he meant; and I fell to trembling so that I could hardly say good-bye. Then I went to bed and lay all night staring wildly into the dark. And that night, for the first time in all my married life, I cursed poverty—out loud I cursed it with bitter emphasis—the poverty that made us so helpless now. For I fancied, poor thing, that all would be well if the money could only be replaced. I cared nothing for the tokens of poverty that were all about me, the poor and ill-furnished house, the scanty wardrobe, the meagre larder—these were but trifles to me then. But I thought bitterly of the people I knew in Hertford who had plenty of money, once friends of ours, but lost to us now; and I silently impeached the poor people of our mission, as if they were somehow responsible for it all. I blamed Gordon, too—it was all due to his wandering from the beaten path—and I breathed out threatenings and slaughter against every German theologian that ever lived.

It was a couple of hours before the dawn when my heart suddenly fell to beating wildly—some one was gently trying the front door, the knob slowly moving back and forward. I listened, trembling; a moment later all was still. Then I heard steps moving round on the walk beneath my room; I rose and crept to the open window, finally summoning strength to call out a timid challenge.

"Mother, it's me—it's Harold, mother," came a subdued voice from below.

I almost fainted for very joy. I was never so happy before in all my life; an intoxicating sense of gladness, rioting like a flood, rushed over me as I turned and flew down-stairs to the door. A moment later my arms were

about my son as I led him, sometimes laughing, sometimes crying, back to my room. I remember how tight I closed the door behind us, as if we were to be shut in together forevermore. And then he crept into bed beside me, just as he had done in the dear old days when he was a little fellow; and I lay with my cheek close to his, my arms about him, no word of reproach, even of enquiry coming from my lips. A strange unreasoning joy it was that possessed me—I might have known it could not last—and I called him by all the old tender boyish names while my hands roamed among his hair, sometimes descending to trace the features of his face, just to make sure that he was there. I remember how, more than once, there flitted before me a vision of the far-off days when he had lain a babe beside me, nourished at my breast—at which I held him closer than before, my bosom aching with its load of love.

He told me all about it; about the tragedy; and I listened like one dead. I know now what they feel who stand before the Great White Throne, awaiting the word of destiny. Harold's voice grew lower as his speech went on, and as it grew nearer to the dawn. He seemed to fear the return of morning. And slowly, with ghostly outline, it was made clear to me that he could not linger—that he was not my own at all. They were likely in quest of him even now, cruel men, scornful of a mother's love; perhaps already hurrying towards his father's house. My arms were strong, I knew, infinitely strong—and they closed about him again in a passion of possession. Yet I knew how weak and powerless they would be if that other arm, the law's mighty arm, should be outstretched upon him.

So I bade him go. First with gentle entreaty, then with insistent urgency, then with vehemence of command, I thrust him from my crying heart. I arose, groping for some garments that might help the disguise he would surely need—with feeble cunning I refused to light a lamp—searching for this and that to serve our piteous purpose. With what difficulty, I remember, did I find one of Gordon's old hats, dusting it carefully, and changing its shape from one form to another to make it look more natural on Harold's head.

Soon we were at the door. The dawn was glimmering. "Go, my darling," I said hoarsely, "there will be few about when you catch the morning train. Come to me once again—put your arms around me, tight—kiss me, my son."

But he did not move, looking down shame-facedly at the ground. Again I besought him to be gone.

"How can I?" he said abruptly at last, the words like to choke him; "I have no money, mother."

This smote me like a blow. But suddenly and with a little cry of joy—such strange eddies are there in the stream of sorrow—I remembered a few dollars I had sorely saved for the purchase of the new gown I needed so. I sprang back into the house and reappeared in a moment with the scanty savings—I caught the rumble of distant wheels and knew the world would be soon astir. Harold's face fell as he glanced at the money I thrust so triumphantly into his hand; it was not enough—I might have known it could not be enough.

We stood together, bowed with disappointment. Suddenly the rumbling wheels came nearer, till, as they hove in sight around a corner, I saw it was the milkman's wagon. A quick inspiration came to me as I bade Harold slip back into the house. The milkman's ruddy face showed its surprise as his eyes fell on me, for he was accustomed to leave his wares at the back door and go upon his way. I greeted him as calmly as I could; and then, not without shame, I boldly asked him if he could lend me a little money. "A friend of mine is going away," I said, "on the morning train—and he doesn't happen to have quite enough."

The honest swain, nothing doubting, fumbled in his pockets, finally producing a good deal more than my poor savings had amounted to. I took the money from him, my heart beating wildly at the sudden deliverance. Then I went in to Harold and put it in his hand. It hurt me, beyond words to tell, to see the confusion and pain with which the poor lad took the money, though it was from his mother. Then his eyes suddenly filled with tears. "Can't I say good-bye to Dorothy?" he said brokenly; "I want to say good-bye to Dorothy."

The tenderness of his tone almost overcame me. I put my arm about him and we went up-stairs together, quickly, for the time was passing. We could hear grandfather's heavy breathing as we passed his door; Harold looked in wistfully, but I shook my head. Dorothy was sound asleep, her golden curls dishevelled on the pillow, her lips slightly parted, a much worn doll emerging from beneath one arm. My eyes only glanced at her, then turned to Harold's face, silently filling as I saw the evidences of his grief. He stood a moment above the bed, then stooped and kissed the rosy face; she stirred, smiling in her sleep, her hand unconsciously moving towards her doll. He kissed her again, unwisely—and the blue eyes opened wide.

“Harold,” she murmured sleepily, “dear Harold—I knew you’d come home—I dreamed you were never going away any more.”

The boy’s lips were quivering, and we turned softly towards the door. But Dorothy, still only half awake, uttered a plaintive protest. “Don’t go away, Harold,” she mumbled, “get into your bed, Harold—your own beds,” one half-opened eye indicating an unused couch beside her. “Say your prayers and then come—kneel down there, Harold,” drawing the battered doll away from the side of the bed.

He looked at me. I motioned; and we knelt together, Harold’s hand close beside the vagrant curls. His voice was faint and faltering:

“Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake
I pray the Lord my soul to take.”

He paused, preparing to arise. “Say the rest,” Dorothy murmured, “say it all, Harold.”

Again he looked at me. Then his face sank between his hands and once more the broken voice went on: “God bless father, and mother, and Dorothy —and bless Harold and make him a good boy, for Christ’s sake. Amen.”

The little monitor seemed satisfied, slipping back again into the stream of slumber. Harold and I went gently down the stairs. I spoke no word but held him to my bosom, aching still, with such a fierce flame of longing as I had never known before. I opened the door; even then I paused to adjust the hat, so large and serious looking, on his head. He passed out, his face averted, and started running on his way—on, on, away from home, away from his mother’s empty arms.

I went back to the room where his sister lay. Long I stood above the vacant bed, wondering bitterly why I had not gloried more in those old golden days when two dear tiny heads lay upon the pillows there. A few minutes after I heard the whistling of a train; I sank beside the empty bed and tried to pray—but my lips, I know not why, could frame no words except the words of Harold’s prayer.

XXIV
"COME, ETTRICK, YARROW, COME"

It was two long days before Gordon returned to me. He knew the worst, of course, but had lingered at Carletonville in the hope that he might get some trace of Harold. A telegram to me, and another from me to him, told enough to send him home at once. Poor Dorothy's eyes looked wonderingly upon us as her father held me in his arms so long and so silently after he came in the door. Grandfather turned his troubled face away, pretending to gaze out of the window.

"You look so old, Gordon," I said unguardedly, as I drew back to look once more on the haggard face.

"I *am* old, my darling," was all his answer, as he drew me to him again.

I forget what we talked about that evening—it was a dreadsome hour. And I actually feared for Gordon. He seemed half crushed, and half defiant, sometimes breaking out into a flood of grief, sometimes sitting long in stony silence. I felt guilty in the thought that I was more composed than he; once or twice I caught myself admitting that my faith was stronger than his—but I dismissed the comparison as pharisaical. Yet that was my chief concern for my husband—I feared for the influence this sorrow would have on his secret life. I knew then, oh! how well I knew, that only one anchor could hold amid a storm like this. And the very ones who had taught me this were God and Gordon.

The gloaming was just deepening into dark when I came back to the study after telling Dorothy good-night; grandfather's chair was close beside Gordon's, the white head visible through the gloom.

"Noo's the time to use yir faith," the old man was saying softly; "naebody needs a licht till the mirk gathers roun' aboot them. An' there's ae thing, there's ae thing, my son, ye maun aye keep sayin' to yirsel': the laddie's juist as dear to God as he is to you an' Helen—if ye love him, it's because God loves us a'," and the quivering voice fell on my harrowed heart like music from some steeple far aloft. "Aye,' " he went on as if to himself,

“Harold canna’ wanner ayont the Faither’s care—an’ we can aye follow him wi’ prayer.

“Rax Gordon the Buik, lassie,” he suddenly said, after we had sat a while in silence.

I did as I was bidden and Gordon received it without a word. It seemed to me, though perhaps it was only fancy, as he held it a moment, then opened it slowly and began turning the pages over, that there was a reverent eagerness about it such as had long been wanting. I wondered, fearfully, if this new ministry were already working its blessed way. And he passed Hosea by, though he had been reading for some time from that section of the Scriptures; he had some books on those old writers that he was delving into, and he always read at family worship from the parts he was studying for himself—there was so much of this that I had really grown weary of the prophets, shameful though it may be to confess it. Gordon still turned the leaves, nor stopped till he came to the fourteenth of St. John: “Let not your heart be troubled,” which he read with a trembling voice that interpreted it beyond all the power of German scholarship. It was like a great anthem to my soul that night, and I think I gloried as much in Gordon’s voice as in the wonderful words.

When we knelt to pray I slipped over to Gordon’s chair, and we bowed together, his hand tight clasped in mine. I prayed for Gordon all the time we were bended thus, my heart full of a kind of thankful joy that mingled strangely with the passion of loss and loneliness already there. The prayer was beautiful; and just before its close Gordon stopped, tried again, then faltered out with a kind of sob:

“And, oh, God, give us back our son—bring him back to us, oh, Father of us all.” My heart leaped for joy, like one whose long night was almost past.

No word was spoken as grandfather and I slipped out a few minutes later; I went with him to his room, to see that everything was ready. “The guid Shepherd’ll bring the wannerin’ lamb hame yet,” he said as I turned to go, the strong features struggling with emotion; “He’ll bring them baith back—back till Himsel’—did ye no’ tak’ notice o’ Gordon’s prayer? He’s comin’ hame, thank God, he’s comin’ hame,” and the old man’s voice was touched with heavenly hope.

The next morning, grandfather was astir with the birds. The day was bright; and the weather—so long his daily care—was still a specialty of grandfather's. Indeed, he seemed to live more and more in the past, the farther it receded. For days he would talk of little else but the far-off Scottish hills, and the glint of the sun through the clouds upon the heather, and the solemn responsibilities of the lambing season, and the sagacity of his sheep-dogs, all of whose names he remembered. How often, especially, would he tell us of "Ettrick" and "Yarrow," two of his choicest collies, named for his native streams. "This wad be a graun' day for the sheep," or "there'll be mony a lammie i' the plaid-neuk the day," were frequent opinions of his when sunshine or storm provoked them.

Poor dear grandfather! Far though he was from his beloved Scotland, it was beautiful to see how deep and tranquil was the happiness of his heart. He knew, of course, how sore was our own poverty, and I think it chafed him sorely that he could not help. When he first came out to the Western world, and to his only child, I really believe he thought the hundred pounds he brought with him would make him well-to-do for life. His idea was that all investments, in this new land, break into golden harvest. So he had duly invested his hundred pounds—some eloquent agent had led him on—in some sort of mining stocks. Old-country people are so prone to think that the earth, on this new continent, and the waters under the earth, and the mountains on top of it, all turn to gold if you touch them. Well, he invested his hundred sovereigns, and that was the end of grandfather's financial career—but have I not told all about this already?

Yet he was happy in his children—for so he regarded us both—and in his children's children. But that morning, the morning after Gordon came home, he seemed collapsed with sorrow. Perhaps it was the reaction—I do not know—but it was evident, anyhow, with what absorbing love grandfather's heart had gone out to the now departed Harold. His face was thin and worn, as if he had been ill; his voice was husky and his step was slow. All through breakfast he never broke the silence except to speak of Harold, and it was pathetic to hear the various suggestions the loving heart conjured up as to the best way to get him back. He knew little about law, dear grandfather, except the law of love. Finally Gordon told him, perhaps too candidly, that Harold was doubtless by this time from under his country's flag, and that there was no absolution unless the money were refunded—not even then, he added, except by the grace of those whom he had wronged.

“He’ll write to us onyway, will he no’?” grandfather asked plaintively at last.

“Oh, yes,” I said quite confidently; “oh, yes, he’ll write.”

But Gordon seemed anxious to prepare me for possible disappointment. “He likely will, if he’s getting on well,” he said slowly, fearfully; “if he succeeds, wherever he is, I mean. If he doesn’t, I’m—I’m afraid.”

I dissented warmly from this. Harold loved his mother, I affirmed. And then I remember how Gordon said something about the change in a boy’s whole nature that an experience of this kind is liable to bring about; a word or two about the moral sensibilities being blunted, or something of that sort. Whereat I flared up in warm remonstrance, breaking into eulogy of my son. It was not till afterwards that I realized how all my thought of Harold, when he came home that night, and when he went away, was always of his misfortune and never of his sin—almost as if he had been pitifully wronged. But I suppose that is the way of every woman’s heart, and I cannot but think it is partly God’s way too.

Early in the forenoon grandfather disappeared, sending word by a messenger that he had availed himself of an opportunity to go into the country. It was evening when he returned, but I never saw a man more changed. His face was aglow with strange enthusiasm and the signs of healing were upon him.

“I juist couldna’ help it,” he said apologetically as he entered, his shepherd’s crook in his hand. “I was fair longin’ to see the sheep, an’ the hills, yince mair—my heart was sair for them. An’ I got a chance wi’ a mon that was gaein’ oot—he was settin’ up some kind o’ machinnery. An’ I had a graun’ day on the hills,” he went on delightedly; “it was fair graun’. There was a laddie mindin’ some sheep—he was a fine laddie; he minded me o’ Harold—and I helpit him a’ the day. There wasna’ ony heather, nae doot—but the hills were bonnie—and the laddie had a collie dog or twa that minded me o’ hame. An’ I carried yin puir wee lammie in my arms—it was ailin’—and I lilted the auld psalms yince mair aneath God’s blue sky; it was maist as guid as hame,” and the aged voice was all aglow with gladness.

“You had a lovely day for it, grandfather,” I said, smiling.

“Aye,” he answered, “it was a bonnie day—an’ aboot yin or twa o’clock there cam’ a wee bit rain—a Scotch mist, ye ken, and it minded me o’ hame—oh, it’s been a graun’ day the day. But I canna’ think what it was gied me sic’ a longin’ for the hills—it was fair fearsome—it’s no’ a’thegither canny,

I'm dootin','' and the old man shook his head in an eerie kind of way, so characteristic of his race. "I'm gaein' to bed," he said, moving already towards the stair; "I'm fair din oot.

"What's yon black thing hangin' there?" he suddenly demanded, the keen eyes resting on the door at the back of the hall.

I paid little or no attention to the question, deeming it unimportant; we went on talking for a few minutes.

"Lassie," he suddenly broke out again, "run, lassie, an' see what's yon black thing hangin' on the door."

Dorothy went as directed. "It's mamma's rain coat," she said a moment later, returning with it in her hand.

"Aye," said the old man, apparently relieved, "aye, it's naethin' but a cloak—but it fashed me to look at it; I thocht it lookit like—like yin o' thae crape things," he added with an embarrassed little laugh. This gave me a queer creepy feeling at the time, but I thought little more about it then; it came back to us later on, however.

Grandfather went to bed immediately, and Gordon and I were not long behind him. It was about one o'clock, I think, or perhaps a little later, when I was wakened from my sleep by a strange sound, half groan, half cry. I went out at once into the hall and soon traced the sign of distress to grandfather's room. The old man was raised up in the bed, partly sitting; and the light I quickly kindled told the story in a flash as I glanced at the ashen face.

"It's my heart," he said huskily; "it's yin o' thae spells like I had lang syne. It winna' be lang, I'm dootin'."

I was terrified, for I thought I could descry the stamp of death already. There was a majestic calm, an unwonted stillness, upon the old man's face. I called Gordon at once; he evidently shared my fear, for he rushed away for a doctor. It was but a few minutes before he returned with the physician. The latter was not long in telling us the truth.

"It's simply a total collapse," he whispered to Gordon and me as we followed him out into the hall. "He can hardly live till the morning; yes, it's his heart—a case of syncope. Don't be alarmed if he grows delirious, or semi-delirious—they often do, just from sheer weakness. That roaming about the country, to-day, that you spoke of—and the excitement of it—have probably been too much for him."

"Shall we tell him?" asked Gordon, pale and trembling.

“Perhaps it would be just as well. Has he everything in order?—his will, I mean, and everything like that, you know?”

“That isn’t important,” said Gordon; “father had little to will—yet I think he ought to be told. But I cannot—I couldn’t do it. Will you?”

The doctor nodded and turned slowly towards the room. We did not hear what he said, but a moment later grandfather faintly called for Gordon. We both went into the chamber of death.

“Rax me my wallet—you’ll find it in the kist,” said the old man, pointing towards a trunk in the corner of the room.

Gordon handed him a large leather case which a brief search revealed. The shaking hand fumbled a moment or two before it withdrew a somewhat bulky document. “This is what they gi’ed me for my hunnerd pounds,” he said, a half-shamed smile coming over the strong features. “They ca’ed them stocks,” he added, “stocks in a mine, ye ken. I got the shares for saxpence each—an’ they said they was awfu’ valuable—and I tuk a’ they’d gie me for a hunnerd pounds.” Then he named a certain mine in Northern Ontario, and I thought I saw the faintest smile on Gordon’s face. He took the paper from his father’s hand and laid it on the table.

“I made the shares ower to Helen, lang syne,” the old man said humbly; “gin they turn oot to be worth onythin’, they’re for her. I didna’ ken when I micht be ta’en awa’—an’ it’s aye weel to be ready.”

I faltered some poor words of thanks which the sinking man did not seem to hear. A new, strange light came into his eyes as we waited beside his bed. The doctor had withdrawn now, powerless to do more.

“Gang an’ fetch the plaidie,” he suddenly directed, “the yin I used to wear at hame; an’ pit it aboot my shoulders—the nicht’s growin’ cauld. An’ I canna’ find the sheep,” he suddenly cried, half starting in his bed; “I hear them bleatin’ on the hills—but I canna’ find them a’.”

Then his eyes, large and luminous with the light of the unseen, revolved slowly till they fixed themselves on Gordon. “Kneel doon, laddie,” he said gently, yet with the majesty of a prophet, “kneel doon beside me.”

Gordon knelt low by the bed; one trembling hand, outstretched, was laid upon his head. The dying eyes looked far beyond into the Unknown. “Gordon,” he said, almost in a whisper, “I see yir mither—she’s wi’ us noo.” I actually started and looked up, following the lifted gaze. “An’ she’s lookin’ doon at ye, my son—an’ the love is fair shinin’ frae her een. It was her that made ye a minister, my laddie. When ye was a wee bit bairn, me and her

gi'ed ye up to God; an' mony a night, when ye didna' ken, she bendit by yir bed an' pleaded wi' God to mak' ye a minister—a minister, my laddie, o' the Everlastin' Gospel. Div ye hear me, Gordon?"

"Yes, father, yes," and Gordon was sobbing now; "yes, I hear, father."

"An' she wants ye to keep the troth, my son. I'm gaein' to her noo—an' I'll tell her ye'll be a guid minister, Gordon, a guid minister o' the New Testament, leadin' puir sinners to the Cross. Wull ye no' bid me tell her that, my laddie?" and the dying lips paused for answer.

"Yes," faltered the broken man beside the bed, "yes, father, tell mother that."

The light of peace stole across the aged face. "I'm ready to gang noo," the gentle voice went on, "an' yir mither's beckonin'. I'm comin', mither; I'll be wi' ye soon. An' Gordon's comin' tae—an' Helen—an' they'll bring baith the bairns wi' them." Then his eyes turned slowly upon Gordon. "I'm ready to gang noo in peace," he said faintly—"but there's yin puir lammie," a troubled expression looking out from the dying eyes, "there's yin puir lammie that I canna' find. Oh, my son," the voice rising again and the prophet-like eyes fastened upon Gordon, "tak' guid care o' the sheep—it's an awesome thing to be an unfaithfu' shepherd; tak' care o' the sheep, my laddie—an' where's Harold? Is the bairn no' hame the nicht?"

Then swift delirium seemed to seize him, and he rose violently where he lay, the last eddy of life swirling in the sullen stream of death. "I canna' find the lamb that's wannered," he cried, in a voice that startled us; "I canna' find it, an' the mirk is fallin'. Ettrick, come!—ho! Yarrow. Where are ye, Yarrow? Find it, my bonnie—find it and bring it hame." Then suddenly the dying lips pressed themselves together and a faint whistle floated out on the midnight air.

I seized Gordon by the shoulder. "Hush," said my husband, his face like death itself; "hush—he's calling his dogs."

"They're breakin'," he cried despairingly; "the sheep's scatterin'—they're gaein' to wanner—where's my crook? Gordon, bide ye here, my laddie, till yir faither turns them back. Come, Ettrick—Yarrow, come!" and again the dread whistle floated from his lips.

We tried to compose him, speaking tender words. Slowly the look of peace stole back upon the old man's face. He lay with eyes almost closed. "They're a' hame noo," he murmured gently; "aye, they're a' safe in the

fold, my laddie, an' they'll gang oot nae mair till the mirk is by—we can rest noo till the mornin','' as he lay back in calm content.

Suddenly the dying eyes were lifted to his son. "Lilt me a psalm," he murmured; "we'll sing afore we gang to sleep; but dinna' wake yir mither—yir mither's restin'."

"What shall I sing, father?" Gordon asked in an awesome voice.

"A psalm, my—laddie," the words coming faint and slow; "ye ken the yin I'm needin'—there's only yin psalm for a shepherd."

Gordon looked at me. One hand was in his father's; the other was outstretched to me, and I knelt beside him. Then with trembling voice, my clearer note mingling with Gordon's quivering bass, we sang together:

"The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want—
He makes me down to lie,"

and just as we were midway in the majestic strain

"Yea though I walk through death's dark vale
Yet will I fear none ill"

the old shepherd passed through the valley with his Lord.

XXV
A SELECT CONGREGATION

GRANDFATHER was right. The Good Shepherd had brought Gordon back. I am quite at a loss to tell just how the change came about, or what its actual evidences were—but the great ministry in accomplishing it was the ministry of sorrow. Sorrow and love—that ever undivided pair—seemed to have conspired for their perfect work. It began, I think, with the crushing weight that fell upon our hearts in the loss of Harold and in all the shame and anguish connected with it. That was God's way, I have always thought, of teaching Gordon how much a father's heart can suffer—and the inevitable outcome of that is the Cross itself if God our Father be. How could His love escape love's inevitable pain, any more than ours? Then, besides, grandfather's home-going had been a second ordination for Gordon, and the ministry that followed was new and beautiful. So was mine, if I may designate my poor service by such a lofty word; for now I knew beyond a peradventure that God hears and answers prayer. I verily believe grandfather and I prayed him back between us.

The very day after Gordon's father entered into rest I was sitting in the gloaming, thinking of the life that had gone from us; one never knows how dear is an aged life, till the silver-haired presence is withdrawn. And I heard something that started my heart singing heavenward with gratitude.

Gordon and Dorothy were at the piano, on which our daughter now loved to show her new-found skill. And softly on the evening air there floated out to me the strains of the hymn he had asked her to play. Surely there is no music, this side of heaven, so sweet as that which a man's strong voice and a girl's fluttering note combine to make.

"We'll sing it again," I heard Gordon saying; "every word is golden, Dorothy. Come now:

‘Jesus loves me, He who died
Heaven’s gate to open wide;
He will wash away my sin
Let His little child come in.’ ”

and then followed some words of Gordon’s which I could hardly catch. But I heard enough to know that he was teaching our little girl the great and blessed doctrine which he himself had learned by his mother’s knee. How I gloried in this new theology, asserting once again its holy spell upon my husband’s heart, no human tongue can tell.

The months went by. And if ever a man was happy in his work, that man was Gordon Laird. In his *work*, I say—for our home lay still under the shadow of its great and bitter sorrow. After one or two unsatisfactory letters, followed by a final one of despairing note, no word had come from Harold. This was what Gordon had feared. Those months stand out before me now, each one almost separate in its pain, like sombre mountain peaks robed in cloud. I know all about the anguish of those who roam some desert waste searching for a spring, or with parched lips upturned to the unsoftening skies. The slowly dying hope, the burning fever whenever I heard the postman’s knock, the sickening disappointment, all surge again like a turgid flood about me when I allow my mind to dwell on those days of silence.

Yet if I suffered I believe Gordon, in a deep, silent way, suffered even more. My heart ached more for him than for myself. I almost came to change my mind as to which of the children had first place in Gordon’s heart—it seemed to cry out now for Harold as for nothing else on earth. Although, and I write it gladly for the comfort of some like stricken soul, all this worked its gracious ministry upon his troubled life. Embattled long as his spirit had been with inward misgiving and silent doubt, this last dark mystery would have wrought sore havoc, I cannot but believe, had it not been so terrible. Its very fierceness of attack drove him in upon the Lord whom he had found afresh; and his soul found its comfort in simplicity of faith and childlike urgency of prayer. The songs we shall sing in the Yonderland shall give their chiefest praise for the burdens that were too heavy to be borne alone.

I have spoken of Gordon’s urgency of prayer. It was he, not I, who suggested that we should have a set time, every morning, when we should pray for nothing else but this—that Harold might be brought back to us. And

it was Gordon, not I, who led Dorothy to include in her evening prayer the plea that God would bring her brother home.

Yes, I think sometimes that the great Father led my husband into the wilderness for this very purpose, to make him a minister after His own heart. I said to him once, just about the time we first began to realize we weren't going to hear from Harold:

"All this won't affect your life-work, will it, Gordon—your preaching, I mean?" for it was only natural, after all that had transpired, that I should have some secret misgivings.

His answer lingers with me like a chime of bells, though it came in tones subdued and low: "No," he said; "no—I'm going to preach now to broken hearts."

"Then you'll never lack a congregation, my darling," was the response I made; and I have always thought it was given me in that hour what to speak.

XXVI
THE NEWS A BROKER BROUGHT

Nor did the congregation fail to come. Gordon had wonderful powers, as everybody must know by this time—he had always had them—and now he had a wonderful message. His heart, and not his brain, was now the source of his splendid sermons; a wounded heart at that—and it is from the crushed and broken flower that the sweetest perfume breathes. So it was no wonder that his humble pulpit became like a golden fount to parched and thirsty souls; and the pathway trodden by the throng that pressed about it became ever more deep and wide.

People came to Gordon's little church from every part of Hertford. I did not wonder at this, for rich and poor alike will crowd about a spring; but little by little it became evident that not a few of our worshippers were from Gordon's old congregation in St. Andrew's. It's wonderful how everybody loves a hero—especially if the hero doesn't know he's one. I was the first to notice this; or, at least, the first to say anything about it. Gordon gave no sign of exultation, but I knew it filled his heart to overflowing. Strangely enough, one of those who by and by were most regular in attendance was Mr. Ashton himself, his first appearance almost striking Gordon dumb. But I always thought he really began to esteem my husband that night Gordon dealt so faithfully with him. Besides, he had lost his own son—by the more kindly way of death—and I attributed it partly, too, to that. It matters not.

This feature of our congregation—the attendance of St. Andrew's folk, I mean—became so pronounced at last that it began to be rumoured about the city that many of them would like to call their old minister back again, if he would return to their denomination. I spoke of it once to Gordon—my heart could not conceal its eagerness—but he received it after such a fashion that I mentioned it no more. Not then, at least. But I'm afraid I hoped and longed; for I was born a woman, and pride died hard within me.

Our means were still as meagre, our struggle as sore as ever. Besides—and how pitiful was the effort—we were trying in a poor helpless way to save a little for the payment of Harold's debt; we tried to set aside just so

much as his schooling would have cost, if he had never left us. Every penny thus laid away had our hearts' blood upon it; and was, I doubt not, precious in His sight who gave those two mites their fame.

Things were at their very darkest along this line about four or five months after Harold went away. And it was just then something happened that showed conclusively which way the ruling passion of Gordon's heart was turned.

I was almost weeping over my accounts that night. These I kept in a ridiculously large scribbling book, marking down the smallest item of expenditure; for Gordon entrusted our finances to my hands, if so elaborate a term may be devoted to so scanty an exchequer. Generally I brought the account out pretty even at the close of every week—"sundries" were a great help towards this happy end. But this particular night everything seemed all "through other," to quote a favourite phrase of grandfather's. Nothing was clear except that there was a deficit—and that was dreadfully evident; but even the all-adjusting sundries could not show just how or whence it came.

So there we sat, I with the big scribbling book before me, a freshly sharpened pencil in my hand, a cloud of perplexity on my brow, gazing, a little moistly I'm afraid, at the plaintive statement of receipts and expenditure.

"Never mind, Helen," Gordon said, "you've done the best you can—and I know you've made every dollar go as far as any woman in the world could do. Don't bother any more about it—charge that deficit up to profit and loss and call it square."

"But it's nothing to laugh about," I answered gloomily; "we're going behind, Gordon—just as sure as anything, we're going behind."

"Only financially," he said lightly; "we're going ahead other ways, my dear."

"But that's a lot," I protested.

"It doesn't seem much to me," Gordon replied, the lightness all vanished now.

"What do you mean?" I said, looking up a little testily, I fear.

"Oh, only this; when anybody has a sorrow so much greater—like ours—financial troubles don't amount to much. I want Harold—oh, Helen, I want our boy back again," with which he broke out, strong man though he

was, into such a storm of crying as would have done credit to the tearfullest of women.

This puzzled, almost alarmed, me. Indeed, I was beginning to fear, and not without more reasons than one, that the long tension of grief and disappointment were proving too much for Gordon's intense and sensitive nature. I looked at him a moment as he sat before me with his head bowed in his hands; then I did what I believe was the very wisest thing—I comforted him for a little as best I could in my woman's way, though my heart was just as heavy as his own; then I said we really must go on with our accounts. And in a minute or two we were both bended once again above the big scribbling book, going into every item as carefully as though we were auditing the books of the Bank of England.

Suddenly, just as I was declaring that the butcher must have sent that same bill twice, a ring came to the door. I was glad. Gordon answered the summons, as he always did at night. And, to my amazement, our visitor turned out to be a Mr. Bradwin, one of the well-known brokers of Hertford, and a prominent member of our old congregation in St. Andrew's.

"Excuse my calling at this time of night, Dr. Laird," he apologized, after he was seated and a few words of greeting had passed between us; "but the fact is I've just received some news that I think you'll find decidedly interesting"—I cannot be positive, but I really think he glanced about the shabbily furnished room as he spoke—"and I couldn't wait till to-morrow to tell you."

"I hope it's good news, Mr. Bradwin," said Gordon, a very faint smile playing on his face.

My impulsive nature got the better of my judgment. "Is it about St. Andrew's, Mr. Bradwin?" I asked in an eager voice, my eyes leaping from his face to Gordon's.

"No, it isn't," replied our caller, and my eyes fell. "But it's good news for all that—decidedly good news, I should say. It's about something a little more important—to you, at least; something that has more to do with your happiness, I fancy."

Gordon sprang to his feet and his voice rang out like a pistol-shot: "It's about Harold, sir—it's about our boy!" He was standing in front of Mr. Bradwin now, his cheeks like snow, his eyes like fire. It was almost awful to see him. "Thank God," he cried, his voice half a laugh and half a cry; "you've heard where he is, haven't you?—and you've come to tell us. Why

didn't we think of it before, Helen?—we might have known that was the news that couldn't wait. Tell me, sir—tell us both," and in his eagerness he bent over and took the astonished man by the shoulders.

A moment later his withdrawn hands were clasped upon his eyes with a gesture of inexpressible grief and he was groping his way to a chair. No word had been uttered; but the denial spoke from Mr. Bradwin's face, or else he shook his head in disavowal—I could not see, but I knew that the hope glowing a moment since in Gordon's heart was in ashes now. Our visitor's news was not of Harold.

"I'm so sorry," Mr. Bradwin began confusedly; "I forgot all about that—about your son; and I really almost hate now to tell you what I was so anxious to tell a little while ago. But it's good news, at any rate—even if it's not the best." Having said this he paused, looking from one to the other of his auditors.

"What is it, Mr. Bradwin?" I asked, not a little curious.

"It's about some stocks—some shares," replied the broker, feeling a little more at ease with the familiar words; "such assets—stocks, I mean, especially mining stocks—are always springing little surprises on the people that hold them. Both ways, Mrs. Laird, you know—both good and bad," as he smiled, a little artificially I thought, at me. "But in this case I'm glad to be able to say the surprise is a pleasant one—a decidedly pleasant one, Mrs. Laird; indeed, uncommonly so, I should say. Quite beyond the ordinary, as I think you'll agree."

I stammered out something about my ignorance of all such matters. Gordon said nothing, for interest was now dead within him.

"You are aware, of course," Mr. Bradwin resumed, "you're aware, Mrs. Laird, that the shares are in your name?—they were transferred to you by Mr. Laird, your husband's father, before his death."

"Oh," I exclaimed, beginning to remember; "you mean those papers grandfather gave us?"

"Precisely, madam—at least, I presume we're thinking of the same thing. Your father-in-law invested five hundred dollars, a hundred pounds rather, in the mine—and they've just struck a fine vein of silver—the richest yet discovered in New Ontario, there's no doubt of that. The old gentleman got his shares for a song—about ten cents each, I believe—and now they've jumped to an almost fabulous price. So the profit is tremendous," as Mr. Bradwin drew his chair close up to mine, all embarrassment vanished now.

"How much are they worth?" I asked with feminine precipitancy.

Mr. Bradwin drew a pencil from his pocket and reached over to the table for a piece of paper. It did seem funny that the scrap he picked up and began to cover with figures was that wretched butcher's bill that had been giving Gordon and me so much trouble a few minutes before.

"Surely I've made a mistake," he said after a little silence; "it seems an incredibly large amount. No, that must be it," drawing in his breath in an awe-stricken kind of way after he had revised his reckoning at least three times; "yes, your shares are worth that, at the very lowest computation," and he handed the greasy butcher's bill, transfigured and glorified now, over to my shaking hand. "I'm commissioned to offer you that much, madam, for every share you hold."

I don't think I heard him. My first move was to Gordon's desk in the corner, a great womanlike fear seizing me lest the precious papers had been lost, or that they might reveal something to disturb this fairy dream. I fumbled in one of the drawers; they were there; I drew them forth. Yes, it was just as the broker had assured me. The number of shares was so plain that he who ran might read.

"Hold on to those certificates, Mrs. Laird," I think I heard Mr. Bradwin say; "there's a heap of happiness in them." But I paid no attention to his words as I moved over, my eyes so cloudy I could hardly see, to where my husband still sat in silence. I cared nothing that a stranger was looking on, thought of nothing, remembered nothing but the long years of bitter poverty and secret struggle through which poor Gordon had carried on his work so bravely. I threw myself into his arms, my whole frame shaken with the emotion that would not be repressed; I clasped him about the neck, the precious documents crushed in my fevered grasp as I drew the yielding head gently down upon my bosom, faltering out as best I could the tidings that our poverty was ended and our days of darkness past and gone. And I told him how I loved him for all the splendid courage and silent self-denial that he would never need to practice more.

"I'd advise you not to sell outright, madam—that's my advice to you as a friend," the broker's voice announced in a monotone. I looked up a moment—the man's back was turned; (wherefore I have thought more kindly of brokers ever since). "Your best way will be to sell a certain amount —and retain an interest; an interest, Mrs. Laird. They're going ahead to develop the mine—and then you're sure of both, Mrs. Laird. And I—I congratulate you, madam."

I fear my response was very scant, if indeed any came at all. At any rate, Mr. Bradwin withdrew a minute or two later, announcing his purpose to return the following day.

But it could not have been more than a minute or two after his departure when we heard the footfall of some one ascending the steps to the door. "He must be coming back," I said; "I suppose he's forgotten something."

"I don't think it's a man's step," said Gordon; "it's a boy, if I'm not mistaken."

His surmise was correct. A boy it was, and a very agitated and urgent boy at that. He was ragged too.

"I want you to come with me," the lad broke out as soon as he was admitted, fixing his earnest gaze on Gordon. "I was at Bethany Sunday-school last Sunday—and I know you—and I want you to come home with me quick," twirling his battered hat in his hand as he spoke.

"What's your name, my boy?" asked Gordon, moving over to him.

"It's Tim—Tim Rayfield—an' we live on Finner's Flats," naming the most notorious section of the city, part of it bordering on Gordon's parish.

"Do you always attend Bethany, Tim?" asked Gordon, smiling down at the desperately earnest face.

"No, sir, wasn't there only once," answered the boy; "but I learned a lot—an' won't you come, sir? There ain't no time to lose. My father's dyin', sir—an' I want you to get him in."

"What?" and Gordon's face was full of amazement; "in where?—where do you want me to get your father in?—you mean the hospital, do you, my boy?"

"No, sir—into heaven. That's what the teacher said about it last Sunday—about when folks was dyin'—an' how they get 'em in. An' dad, he's dyin'—an' I want you to get him in."

The face of the poor ignorant child was aglow with its eagerness of hope and fear. The signs of poverty and neglect were everywhere about him, and the ill-nourished frame told how severe had life's struggle been to him. But the glint of the Eternal was on the grimy face, upturned to Gordon in wistful entreaty. His plea was the plea of love, his prayer the prayer of faith; and the scene could not have been more holy if some white-robed priest had been interceding before the Throne.

Gordon’s arms went out impulsively towards the lad; I believe he put them a moment about his neck.

“Yes, my boy,” he said in an unsteady voice; “yes, I’ll go. And we’ll get your father in—yes, please God, we’ll get him in.”

They went out together into the darkness, the boy leading the way with such haste as stirs the feet of those who race with death. And I was left alone, the little table still littered with the relics of our financial conference. The stainful butcher’s bill lay on top of all—and the magic document, with its story of our shares, was still held tightly in my hand.

I did not open it again; but I sat long looking at it—and it struck me even then how helpless it was to aid in the real tragedies of life.

XXVII
WHERE GUS CAST ANCHOR

I HAVE asked Gordon to write down for me his experiences of that night. Two considerations led me to this course: first, because the incident had so much to do with his own soul's life, his faith, his future ministry; second, because Gordon was so much more able than I, when one of life's great events was concerned, to tell it as it should be told.

When I asked him to undertake this duty—to write out the story of that midnight errand—I practically had to tell him I was putting our life experience, or a large portion of it, down in black and white. But I don't think Gordon ever suspected it was meant for other eyes than those of our own immediate dear ones—and one of the great moments of my life will be when my husband sees this book, if, indeed, it shall ever deserve a name so great.

Here is Gordon's story of that night, just as he wrote it out himself—I told him my story began with a foreword, so he said he'd have one too.

Foreword:

> I am writing this, so personal though it seem, because Helen wants it. If it hadn't been for the children's mother, their father never could have told what he is now about to write. Some time, perhaps long after my poor day's work is done, they may read this page from the volume of their father's life. May the same grace enrich, the same truth ennoble their youthful lives: "The angel that redeemed me from all evil bless" them both, as a father's lips prayed long ago.

When little Tim Rayfield told me he wanted me to "get his father in," I knew one of the crucial moments of my life had come. Indeed, I felt the hour was almost as critical for me as for Tim's dying father. Why, I need not

state at length. But perhaps I ought to say this much, that I felt a new sense of power as I pressed on through the night with Tim's grimy hand in mine. I use the word "new" advisedly—for I must tell, no matter whose eye may yet read the confession, that, for some years before, I had shrunk from such scenes as these in helplessness and despair; I had lost the joy of *the miraculous* in my ministry; I can honestly say that I always tried to be faithful to every duty, but little by little the glory and the power of a Supernatural Gospel had slipped away from me.

I have seen people smile when I use the word "supernatural" as the only fitting term to characterize a gospel. But such as smile have very smiling lives. The word—and all that is behind the word—has a very different meaning when laughter is banished from the lips, when the voice of joy is hushed, when some fateful sorrow falls and we can only stumble on through the encircling gloom. Such an hour came to me, filled with a bitterness worse than death; it was then I found my Lord anew. When the billows overswept and whelmed me I learned to pray; when the shadows closed in about me I descried the Divine Friend among them; when I lost my boy, and my father-heart was broken, I learned of One who gave His own Son, His well-beloved Son.

Let me revise my words. It was not I who "found my Lord"; but He found me—He and Helen—and they sought me hand in hand.

"That's the room," said Tim, panting from his haste, for the little fellow had led me at great speed; "there, d'ye see that light in the window—that up-stairs window?"

I saw, and in a moment we were climbing a decrepit stair. Groping our way along an unlighted passage, my guide, still clinging to my hand, turned sharply into the squalid home. It consisted evidently of two rooms, the inner of which contained the couch whereon lay Tim's sinking father.

The boy never stopped till he had led me to the very edge of the bed. A few tattered covers wrapped the form of the dying man. His face, already conforming to the stamp of death, told the story of a lifetime's sin. Nobody could look upon it without reading there the tokens of a life of passion and excess. The heavy eyes looked up sullenly into my face as I stood above him.

"It's the preacher, Gus—don't," pleaded a woman who bent above him; for his lips were framing some word she evidently feared my ears would catch. "Don't, Gus—he's goin' to help you if he can; Tim fetched him—he's the preacher from the Hollow, an' Tim seen him last Sunday."

The man's set features seemed to relax a little as I took his hand. I hesitated as to how I should best begin—but he opened the way himself.

"I'm all ready for sea, boss," he broke out with a gasping laugh; "last voyage, looks like—an' nobody don't know the port. But I've got my papers, Cap'n—I've got my papers, an' I'll have to sail."

"Don't mind him, sir," his wife said in a hushed voice; "he's an old sailor, you see—only two years since he quit the sea and come here to live. He got his left foot hurt—an' that's what's killin' him now—he's got gangarene, sir."

"Goin' to be a dirty night, boss, by the looks o' things," the dying tar broke in with pitiful bravado; "the wind's risin', ain't it—better shorten sail, eh?" I put my face close to his. "Do you want a pilot, my friend?" I asked him low.

"Don't call me that," he retorted gruffly; "call me mate—I was mate on the *Dolphin* when that dam crowbar fell on my foot."

"Don't you want a pilot, mate?" I asked again.

"Where to take me?" looking far through the window into the dark.

"To the harbour," I answered softly.

"I don't know where it is."

"He knows."

"Say," and the eyes were now fixed very intently on me; "I'm goin' to ask ye a question. An' I want an answer straight—no tackin' or manœuvrin'—d'ye think I'm dyin', Cap'n?"

"Yes," I answered; "yes, you're dying, sir."

"Then get him in," broke out poor Tim with a piteous wail as he presented himself in front of me and looked up into my face; "please get him in quick, afore he dies—that's what I fetched you for, sir—oh, please get him in."

I had seen the day when I almost feared to be alone with a dying man. What I had to say, in those days, could be as well said to others as to him. But now, as Tim besought me, and as his father looked up with eyes in which a yearning hope was already to be seen, I felt that no others must be near while I sought to help his soul. So I asked Tim and his mother if they would withdraw to the adjoining room—they should be called, I said, if the summons came apace.

Then I closed the door—for this hour had more than bridal holiness—and I gave myself in love to the dying soul. The mock heroism, the banter, fell off from him like a garment, for I think he saw I believed in God. I need not tell, must not reveal, all he disclosed to me from the dark storehouse of a wasted past. But I met him, and his crimson sins, and his accusing conscience—I met them all, and at every turn, with the Cross of the Lord Jesus and with the all-atoning grace of God. How I gloried in that hour in the great evangel! And how there rolled about me, with tides ample like the ocean's, the thought of the magnitude and infinitude of the love of Christ! And how—oh, blessed memory to my long beleaguered soul—I witnessed the ancient miracle with joy, marvelling anew at the greatness and glory of the Gospel, scorning with high contempt all that would raise its feeble hand against such power as may be seen wherever a sinful soul meets with the pardoning Lord!

Over and over again I read to him from the third of John: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son," its richness growing on my own soul as well as his.

"Let me see that," said the dying mate; "I want to look at it—every cap'n reads the log himself."

I gave him the book and held the lamp above him.

"Ye haven't got another of them, have ye, sir?" he asked wistfully.

"Of what?" said I.

"Of this here book—I want to read it when you're gone; or Tim—Tim could read it to me."

I told him, of course, that I would leave the book.

"Turn down the page—mark the place," he said, handing me the volume. "I'm afeared I'd soon be driftin' again if we lost it."

"I'll mark some other passages too," I suggested, "some almost equally beautiful."

"That there one's enough," he said, sinking back faintly on his pillow.

I sang him a hymn, the one that dying men should always hear; and then I had a little prayer with him. His hands were folded and his eyes were closed. When I rose from my knees he whispered something that I shall treasure while memory lasts. But it needed only a glance to see that the end was near. I opened the door to call his wife and child back to him.

“Did you get him in, sir—did you get my father in?” were the first words that greeted me as little Tim’s eyes leaped to mine.

“Yes, my boy—yes, please God, your father will get in,” though I could hardly speak for the tears that choked me, so full of elemental power was the pleading of the child.

“Come, Nancy,” and the old tar’s voice was very tender; “come close up beside me. My foot ain’t hurtin’, Nancy—an’ my heart ain’t hurtin’—nothin’s hurtin’ any more. I’ve cast anchor.”

“What d’ye say, Gus?” his wife asked in a wondering voice.

“I’ve cast anchor—where the preacher read. You’ll leave the book, sir?” his voice swelling for a moment—“an’ you’re sure ye marked the place?”

“Yes,” I said, “I’ll leave it—and it’s marked.”

“Call me mate,” the strange impulse prompting him again.

“I marked it, mate—and I turned down the page.”

“Then sing me that again—that bit about the gale.”

“What gale, mate?”

“That gale—the gale of life—that’s how it went before.”

I knew now what he meant. Nancy’s face was in her hands and little Tim’s eyes were fixed lovingly on me as I began. When I came to the lines:

“Hide me, oh my Saviour hide
Till the storm of life is past”

the dying man suddenly interrupted: “That’ll do,” he said, his voice barely audible, “that’s the bit—that’s enough—that, an’ the place ye marked.”

We were soon all standing by his bed. The struggle was quickly over. Suddenly his face assumed an expression of peace so deep that I thought the harbour had been really won. But his eyes opened wide and both hands went feebly out; Nancy took one in hers, the other clasped by little Tim.

“The anchor holds,” he murmured; “Nancy, the anchor holds.”

A moment later his wife turned from the bed, her apron to her face, groping her way with bitter outcry towards the adjoining room. Tim followed; and through the open door I could hear the boy’s shaking voice:

“Don’t cry, mammy; oh, mammy, don’t cry so hard. Dad got in, mother—the preacher got him in.”

I sat up till Gordon got home that night, for I had much to discuss with him. The precious document, with its wizard tidings of mining shares, was still before me as he entered; and I broke out with some word about what Mr. Bradwin had said. But when I looked up and saw the far-off look of peace on Gordon's face, I knew it was sprung from some other source than this.

"You seem so happy, Gordon," I said; "what makes it?"

He told me; but when he spoke about that last scene—he has called it the anchor scene ever since—his voice faltered so he could hardly go on.

"We'll put these away to-night," I said, picking up the papers. "But what do you intend to do with—with the money, Gordon?"

"I hadn't thought of it," he answered calmly. Then, after a pause; "but I think we'll enlarge the chapel. It needs it, you know—and this seems like a glorious chance to do it."

I wonder if my face showed my dissent. At any rate, I took the mighty charter and restored it to the desk. "There's one thing we'll do first, Gordon," I said in a voice that implied finality, "and you won't dispute it, either."

"What is it, Helen?" his words full of wonder.

"We'll pay that—that debt of Harold's," I said, my face averted as I leaned over the desk.

He was silent for long. "Yes, Helen," he answered quietly at length; "yes, we'll do that first—that's as holy as the other. Oh, Harold, my son, my son—I wonder where Harold is to-night," the words ringing with a nameless pain.

XXVIII
"TO OLD POINT COMFORT, DEAR"

I SHALL begin this chapter, perhaps the closing chapter of my artless story, with the simple statement that we were back again in St. Andrew's Church. This restoration was effected about seven months after the incident with which the last chapter had its close. How it came about, or why, I shall not pause to tell. But there was a vacancy there—in St. Andrew's, that is—and the thought of nearly the whole congregation had gradually turned towards Gordon. He had proved his worth, had fought a fight so stern and long, and had come out of it with a faith so clear and a power so manifest, that it was only natural they should covet his ministry again.

He returned gladly enough, pride and gratitude mingling in his heart; and the Presbytery seemed rejoiced to welcome him within their fold again. He still retained Swan Hollow—this he insisted upon—as a kind of associate charge. They gave him an assistant, and Gordon selected a young minister fresh from Edinboro', for Scotchmen are the most clannish of all living things—and they worked the two places together, taking the morning and evening services alternately.

Going back to the church was gladsome enough to me. But it was the veriest trifle compared with our return to the dear old manse, where our children had been born. What memories thronged about us when the nightfall found us once again beneath the roof of St. Andrew's Manse! A few were there to welcome us; we tried to make merry with them—but my heart ached till they should be gone. And then, hand in hand as in other days, Gordon and I went up-stairs to the little room where our treasures used to lie. Only one was there that night, our lovely Dorothy, and she lay in slumbering beauty where she used to sleep before. The other bed was beside hers as in the days of yore—I had directed that it should be so—but it was empty.

Poor Gordon! All the joy, the triumph even, of his return to the scene of our former life was lost in sorrow because that bed was empty.

"I'd sooner be in the poorest hovel, Helen," he said as he stood beside the unused couch, "if Harold were only back—Harold and Dorothy. Our cup of happiness would be full, wouldn't it, dear, if both were only here?"

"But he'll come back some day," I tried to assure him; "that's why I have his bed all ready—everything has always come right, Gordon, even if it did come late."

"If we only knew where he is," Gordon went on, not seeming to hear; "but it looks as if we'd never learn. Do you know," and the strong voice was choked with tears again, "do you know, Helen, what I wonder every night before I go to sleep?"

"No, what is it, Gordon?"

"I always wonder if he's cold—or hungry. But especially if he's cold. Oh, surely there's nothing so sweet to a father as tucking his children up at night—so they won't be cold. After we left here, the home we went to was so little, and so hard to heat—but don't you remember how we used to go in and tuck them up, so warm and cozy?"

I tried my best to comfort him, though my heart had its own load to carry. For the dark mystery still hung about us; we had heard never a word from Harold. His debt was paid—as has been told, or implied, already—and nothing really stood in the way of his coming back except that we did not know where to find him. And every effort to discern his whereabouts had ended in utter failure. But we still kept the little tryst, still kept praying on, still hoping and trusting that the Great Father would staunch the wound which no human hand could heal.

The summer passed and still no tidings came. Then I began to fear seriously for Gordon. The very splendour of his make-up was his peril; it is ever so with natures such as his. And his sorrow seemed to find expression in an ever more passionate devotion to his work, a devotion that was making him the idol of his people, even if it brought him daily nearer to collapse.

Which came at last. It was one Sabbath in early November, and Gordon had preached that morning from the text, "I will arise and go unto my father." I suppose it was the tragedy whose home was his own broken heart that inspired him; in any case, he poured his soul out that day with a passion and pathos such as none could have imagined who did not feel the torrent of his power. He seemed to interpret the very heart of a lonely and imploring God.

But what the effort took out of him nobody saw but me. That he was utterly exhausted was evident as he walked home after church, but I thought little of it; yet, even then, I noticed a strange incoherency in his speech, and a tremulousness about his voice, that boded ill. The collapse came during the afternoon; by eventide he was not my Gordon any more, his mind wandering far, voicing itself in strange plaint and heart-breaking appeal, the name of his absent Harold sounding through it all in pitiful refrain.

I don't think the physician I called in haste that day knew anything about the skeleton closet in our home—it is wonderful how soon people forget, even those who know you best—but he located the hidden wound with wonderful acuteness. "It's an utter collapse," he said; "what might be called a severe form of nervous breakdown—it generally occurs with people of strong emotional temperament. Has your husband had any great shock?—or has he been carrying any specially heavy burden, probably for months?"

I told him as much as I thought was necessary.

"Just what I surmised," he said; "he's suffering from what the German physicians call 'the sad heart'—and all this derangement is due to the sympathy between the brain and the nerves. Highly-strung organism, you see—intense emotional nature, that's evident; all this disturbance is a result of tension—the strain was simply too much for him. But he'll recover all right—only it will take time, time and rest."

A consultation followed soon; and the result of it all was that Gordon was to be removed to other scenes just as early as he would be able to travel. I watched by him night and day, and soon the first storm of emotion was succeeded by a deep and silent calm that I found almost harder to be borne than the other. He would sit by the hour poring over Harold's old school books, or gazing at some boyish photographs of the wanderer, or holding his cricket bat or butterfly net lovingly in his hands. Sometimes he spoke of him, but not often. When I told him we were going away for a little holiday he consented readily enough.

"Where shall we go, Gordon?" I asked him, with but little hope that he would choose.

"We'll go to Old Point Comfort," he answered unhesitatingly; "that's where we went before."

I had to turn away. For there came before me, with a flash of memory, the days to which I knew my husband's words referred. Old Point Comfort, of dear and blessed memory!—thither had we turned our steps the night of

our wedding day, going forth by the moonlit bay on our love-bright journey, the future years, with all the thorny paths that awaited us, veiled in the mist of happiness that arose from our singing hearts. Ah me! I could see again the unseamed face, the hair untouched by time, the swimming eyes of love, when my lover was still young and joyous, unworn with toil and care.

"That's where we'll go," I answered; "we'll go to Old Point, Gordon."

The arrangements for our journey were soon complete. I do not think, even were it possible, that I would willingly forego all the discipline—and the blessing—that our years of poverty had brought me but now I blessed the providence that had made it possible for me to take Gordon away like this. Money was not lacking now—thanks to grandfather and that blessed mine—and I joyed over it as men rejoice in harvest or as robbers that divide the spoil.

The evening before the very day we were to start, something occurred which wrung my heart as nothing, not even the loss of Harold, had ever done before. I had been compelled to leave Gordon for a little while, some detail of preparation demanding my attention. Returning to the study, our usual resort, I found it empty; and my heart chilled with fear.

"Come, Helen," I suddenly heard Gordon's voice crying from without; "oh, Helen, come, come quick." There was a strange note of excitement, even of rapture, in the voice that called me.

Hatless, coatless, I rushed out into the frosty night. And just across the way, in a large adjoining yard, I could see Gordon hurrying fast toward a little pond in the distance. Sometimes he looked back and called me, then hurried on again, the strange exultation still sounding in his voice. When I overtook him, he was clasping in his arms a wondering boy, a solitary skater on the frozen pond.

"It's our boy, mother—oh, Helen, he's come at last. It's Harold, mother"—and I noticed in the failing light that the lad was actually about Harold's size and form. "I knew you'd come back, Harold," he cried as he held the youth to his bosom; "oh, my son, I knew you'd come—but what made you stay away so long? And are you cold, Harold?—I've been so afraid you might be cold." Then he held the startled boy out before him, his eyes lingering with pitiful intentness on the face he held upturned to his own. "You've grown some," he said fondly, "but you're my own Harold yet—come, come on home now with me and mother. Your bed's all ready for you, Harold; and Dorothy will be so glad—she's lonely, she's lonely for you, Harold."

I stood transfixed and mute with grief. Then the lad made some reply, I know not what. But he broke the awful silence with a word—and Gordon's hands fell to his side like lead. He stood a moment under the trembling stars, then stooped and gazed long into the face that had filled his soul with fleeting rapture. Slowly he turned, looked a moment upward at the wintry sky, then silently moved towards me.

"It isn't Harold," he said after a long pause, his eyes searching my face with unutterable yearning; "it's somebody else's boy—let us go home again," as we started back hand in hand. The clock in an adjoining steeple struck the hour as we went our way; and its knell is with me yet.

The next day saw us off upon our southward journey, Dorothy and Gordon and I. The doctor had filled me with high hope; the change of air, and especially of scene, he said, were almost sure to do great things for my dear one. And the very features that alarmed me most were those by which he seemed to be reassured. The very acuteness of the malady, he said, was its most hopeful sign. I have often thought of this since and applied it to many things other than bodily infirmities; the acute is the transient, let all sufferers bear in mind, and all who think life's battle hard.

We arrived at Old Point in the morning, and the balmy air and genial skies seemed to help Gordon from the first. Oh, sweet Southern air and sweeter Southern skies! how unspeakably dear to me I knew not till I thus returned after all the maze of years. It was so delicious to hear again the soft Southern accent, to catch the liquid voices of the negroes, to breathe in the fragrance of the flowers that bloom in our dear Southland even in November.

I remembered—what woman would forget?—the very room that had been ours when we were there in that same hotel on our bridal tour so long ago, the dearest little room, with a tiny balcony that looked out upon the ocean. And I arranged that we should have it now—I would take no other. Not a word did I say to Gordon. But the first night we were there, after Dorothy had been safely stored away, I was sitting beside him, looking out over the moonlit harbour. The night was hushed, the ocean calm; voices of darkey stevedores floated softly up to us as they moved hither and thither with their creaking wheelbarrows on the wharf.

Suddenly Gordon turned his face full on mine in the moonlight. "Helen," he began huskily, "do you know what room this is, Helen?"

I yielded to his arms as he slowly drew me within their shelter; “it’s where we were before—when you were my bride, my lovely, lovely bride,” he said softly; “did you know it, Helen?”

I nodded, smiling up to his bending face. “Yes, I knew it, darling,” I said; “that’s why I chose it, Gordon.”

I know not why it was—I suppose no one could explain it—but the dawn came to us, and the darkness rolled away, in that blessed hour. Tears came at last to Gordon; slowly at first; then in copious flow; then in a gush of feeling that wrung his whole form till it shook and sobbed like the frame of a little child. Passionately he held me, his kisses falling on my lips while he murmured such words of love as the days of courtship had never heard.

“It was like this before,” he cried, pointing to the radiant sea; “the moon shone on it, just like this. And we were so happy then, darling—we didn’t know of the long years, with their care and sorrow, that stretched before us. And you’ve been so good, Helen, so true and faithful—and so brave; whatever I’ve done, or been, I owe to you, my darling,” and through all the gust of passion his voice had a naturalness, his eye a new-found calm, that told me the long dark night was past.

“We were so happy then, weren’t we, dear?” he said again after a little stillness.

“I’m happier now,” I answered, nestling in.

“Why?” he exclaimed. Then, suddenly discerning: “I know why—it’s because we have the children now. Isn’t that why, Helen—isn’t it Dorothy and Harold?”

I told him Yes; and the fancy, if it can so be called, seemed to help and comfort him. “Yes,” he said musingly, “it’s wonderful, isn’t it, how we could have been happy then at all—when we didn’t have them. But God gave them to us, didn’t He, Helen?”

“Yes,” I murmured, my face hidden; “yes, God gave them.”

“And they’re still His to give,” he went on, a great peace in his voice such as it thrilled my soul to feel; “they’re still His to give. And I know—I’m almost sure—that He’ll give us Harold back again. Something tells me that it’s coming near; I knew it when I looked out on the water—when the dark fled before the light that flooded it. Don’t you think so, my darling?”

I forget just what my answer was; but we sat long, soothing and comforting each other, drinking deep from Memory’s spring. By and by

Gordon fell asleep with his head resting on my arm, the moonlight still playing on the pure and lovely features as we sat by the open window. I brooded above him, thanking God for the change I could see upon the care-worn face. The tide had turned, the reaction had come at last, the strife of battle seemed spent and gone. All night long he slept the sleep of a little child; the morning found him bright and tranquil, and his first waking word was to say that he was well.

For a couple of weeks, or perhaps a little longer we lingered on in our quiet retreat, every hour blissful with its evidence of returning strength. Gordon spoke often of Harold, but always now with a sweet trustfulness that was beautiful to see; I really believe God made him well by touching his spirit with the calm of a childlike faith. It was a miracle, I have never ceased to think, let the critics say what they will. And as his strength came back his heart began to turn wistfully towards his work; I really don't believe any one ever knew how much he loved St. Andrew's, and had loved it all through the years.

I protested against his returning, but in vain. So it was all arranged that we were to start home on the following Monday. The evening before, Gordon preached for a clergyman whose acquaintance he had formed, the minister of a little Methodist church not far away. I was there, of course; and the sermon was one of the noblest I ever heard Gordon give. It was from the words: "Casting all your care upon Him," and I know every listener felt that the message was heaven-born.

After the service was finished I was going down the aisle alone, when suddenly I heard some one pronounce my name.

"Miss Helen!" said the voice, and bygone years rolled back upon me at the tone.

I swung around, wildly excited. It was a voice from home. "Mr. Slocum!" I cried, so loud that everybody stood still and looked at me; "Frank Slocum!—Oh, Frank!" and I stood gasping in the aisle. It was one of the friends of my early girlhood—the same who had been my escort to the ball that far departed night when we had first discussed the Presbytery, and the attic guest it was to bring us.

"I wa'n't right sure," he began, rosy as the dawn; "but some one told me the preacher was Mr. Laird—then I knew you were Mrs. Laird."

"Oh, Frank!" I cried, "please call me Helen," for the music of it was refreshing; "come away—come, and go home with me and Gordon."

I believe Gordon enjoyed that evening with Frank quite as much as I, which is saying a good deal. He said afterwards that I reminded him of a child running hither and thither through a flower-strewn glade, plucking whatever her hands could reach. Thus did I gather news from Frank. My questions rained in on him from every point of the compass, leaping from one subject to another like a peewee on the shore. (That's a kind of witches' dance in metaphors, I know, but they all mean the same thing anyhow.) I cross-questioned Frank about everything and everybody, while Gordon sat listening with an amused expression on his face. Particularly did I put him through his facings about my old school-girl friends. The first question, without exception, was as to how many children they had—till this became so chronic that Frank would begin with this himself, not waiting to be asked. It saddened me some to learn that several of them had twice as many as I. One old friend, Sadie Henderson, had exactly three times as many—but two of them came at once, so that they didn't really count. Others, moreover, had none at all, which brought Gordon and me pretty well up on the average.

Frank had little to say about Uncle Henry and Aunt Agnes except that they were getting older, which I would have surmised myself. Besides, Frank had a sensitive nature; and I suppose he remembered the stormy scene when Gordon left my uncle's house. I fancied, in a woman's instinctive way, that there was something he wanted to say to me alone. And I was right enough. For when I walked with him as far as the hotel piazza, while we were gazing out over the shimmering sea Frank told me something that proved to be a word of destiny.

"You all are going back by New York, you said?" he began, looking up significantly. The idiom sounded sweet—*you all*—how long since I had heard that brace of words before!

"Yes," I answered; "why?"

"Well, I'll tell you something interesting; I didn't care to say it before your husband, for fear it might affect his plans—I know how matters stand between him and your uncle, you know—but I think you ought to be told. Your uncle's in New York."

"What?" I gasped, and I felt the colour leave my cheek; "uncle's what?—he's where?"

"He's in New York," Frank repeated calmly. "I've just come from there—we were staying at the same hotel."

"And Aunt Agnes?" I asked swiftly, my eyes fixed on him in the gloom.

“No, Mrs. Lundy’s at home—your uncle went up on some business, I believe. Mighty successful too, as far as I could judge,” Frank added.

I cared nothing for this. “What hotel, Frank?” I demanded eagerly; “tell me the hotel.”

“The St. Denis—opposite Grace Church, you know.”

Little more was said and I soon bade Frank farewell. Then I walked slowly back to Gordon, trying to compose myself, struggling to subject my impulse to my judgment. But it was of no use. My heart was the heart of childhood once again; all I knew was this, that a few hours would bring us to New York, that we had intended going there anyhow—and that my uncle was within reach of one who had never ceased to love him.

I paused a moment before I opened the door and went in where Gordon was still sitting, gazing out on the ever fascinating scene.

“Well, dear, did you pump him dry?” he asked jauntily as I entered.

“Oh, Gordon,” and now I was on his knee (woman’s throne of power) with his face between my hands; “oh, Gordon, don’t say No. Don’t, Gordon—won’t you do this for me, this, that I’m going to ask?”

Soon I had poured out the whole story to him. I noticed his brow darken a little at first, and the quivering lip told how much I had asked of him.

But Gordon was all gold through and through; he always was, my Gordon was, from that first hour when my eyes fell upon his face till now; and the love of this later day, although I suppose folks call us old, exceeds that early ardour as the noontide mocks the dawn.

“Yes, my wife,” he said, stroking my hair and looking with almost pitying fondness on my face; “yes, brave heart and true—you were his before you were mine. And we’ll go, Helen—we’ll both go.”

XXIX
THE HOUR OF HEALING

THE mighty city seemed hushed as I made my way along the corridor of the old hotel. But I suppose the hush was from my heart.

"You'll wait here, will you, ma'am?" and the bell-boy opened the door of the retired little parlour as he spoke. "I'll bring Mr. Lundy in a minute. Yes, I think he's in, ma'am; his room's on this floor. Don't you want me to take him your card?"

"No," I answered; "just tell him a lady wants to see him here—an old friend of his."

The boy disappeared along the shadowy hall. I had but a few minutes to wait. "This here's the door, sir," I heard the boy direct; and then I could catch the shuffling step, not yet forgotten, as a tall and bended form came slowly into the room. Keen and curious was the glance that came from the enquiring eyes, swiftly searching amid the failing light.

I knew him. Only a glance I had, but it was enough to revive the memories of girlhood, to carry me back over all the waste of years, to recall with lightning speed the love and laughter of the days that were no more. My heart leaped within me as I saw the change that time had made. Uncle was an old man now, and the years had bowed the erect and stalwart frame; snowy white was the hair that had been but streaked with gray when I saw it last; more serious than of old, but flashing the same kindling light, the same lofty pride, were the kindly eyes whose glow no years could quench or dim.

"Oh, uncle!" I sobbed, the storm breaking as in a moment; "oh, uncle! Uncle dear, it's me—it's your little girl—it's Helen."

He had started back as I moved towards him. But my voice arrested him, that wondrous feature that changes not with changing years. A moment he stood, as though he had heard the trump of doom itself. Then, like an aspen, from head to foot he trembled—and the fear flashed through my mind that I had acted with cruel haste.

But the great cry which broke from him—no articulate word—rang with such fullness of joy and strength as to dispel my every fear. A moment later I was in his arms. He bore me to the window, those arms as strong as in other days, smoothing back my hair as he leaned over and peered into my face.

"Oh, God!" the words coming like a prayer; "it's Helen—she's come back. But it's been so long—and your hair's getting gray, Helen—and you look older than when you went away."

I smiled, gazing up at him in sweet content. "Count the years, uncle."

"The years!" he broke out with the old fiery intenseness; "count the years—haven't I counted them?—and the days, and the hours—waiting, always waiting. Oh, Helen, it's been long—it's been so long. But what could I do?—what could any gentleman have done, when I passed my word that —— If your husband——"

I laid my finger on his lips; then leaned up and kissed them. And our speech flowed back, half of it almost incoherent, into the sweeter channels that laved the happy past in which we were both content to dwell. Much of it was of my mother, my sainted mother, for whom life's conflict had so long been over—and uncle's tears were mingled with my own.

"There's only one thing I reproach you for now, Helen," the gentle voice began, when the dusk had deepened into dark; "one thing you should have done—and that would have made our happiness complete."

"What's that, uncle?" I asked, greatly wondering.

"You should have brought Gordon with you—the only difference there was, was with him, you know. Surely he doesn't think I'm one of those old vipers that carries things till death?" his voice less steady than before.

"He's here," I said softly; "he's down-stairs."

Uncle sprang to his feet as if the years had withheld their enfeebling hand. "Bring him up—send for him at once," he ordered, as though commanding a regiment of soldiers. "Ring the bell—where's that boy?—are the servants all asleep? These rascally dogs they've got in the North—I wouldn't give Moses or any good nigger for a bushel of them. And are your children—is the little girl with him now?"

His question cut me like a knife. For I had kept back part of our life's story, the bitter part, when uncle had enquired about our children. We only

brought one of them, I had said—but hoped he might see Harold later on. Which was true enough, so true, alas!

"I don't need you," uncle said abruptly as a servant's head appeared at the door. "I'll go to him," he announced to me—"I'll go to Gordon. I hope I don't forget what's becoming in a Southern gentleman—besides, he's come far enough. You wait here—I'd know him in a thousand, unless he's enough sight plainer than he used to be. Always did have a hankerin' for him, I believe, like a nigger for a watermelon. You wait here, Helen," and he made his way, straightening himself with all the old-time dignity, upon his courtly errand.

It was the following evening, the evening of a day that had been filled with unmixed gladness to me and Gordon. If it had not been for that one skeleton closet—which I need not name—the whole house of life would have been one big banqueting hall to his heart and mine. More than once, through that happy day, I noticed Gordon's laughter die away in silence and the brightness leave his eye as there evidently floated before him the vision of the one absent face. Indeed, he said as much to me, that all the gladness only threw into darker contrast the abiding cloud that was always in our sky.

But uncle had been so lovely to us both this day; and we had just finished dinner at some resort he had discovered where Southern dishes, new and old, were to be had in all their glory. We were all seated now in uncle's room; and the dear old man was directing all his powers of persuasion upon my husband.

"It's the purest play I ever saw in my life," he urged, one hand holding Gordon by the knee; "it's as good as a sermon. I've heard heaps o' sermons that didn't do me as much good as 'The Old Homestead,' I tell you."

"I was never at the theatre in my life," my husband made reply, "except twice I went to see Irving—and I don't altogether believe in it."

"This is far better'n Irving," uncle urged; "and you'll preach better after it."

"I don't feel much in the mood for theatres," Gordon responded; "my days for merriment are past, I fear," which came with a smile that showed he didn't quite believe it.

"That's the very time to go," insisted uncle; "that's when you want to get the cobwebs blown out of you—and this'll do it all right."

“I’ll leave it to Helen,” Gordon suddenly exclaimed; “if she wants to go, I’ll give in.”

Five minutes before, I can frankly say, I had hoped Gordon would carry his point. The theatre, that particular night, had no charm for me. Yet now that Gordon had left the matter in my hands, some mysterious impulse settled my resolve at once. Nobody need tell me that women, true women, live far from the unseen. For my resolve was taken on the instant, so suddenly and confidently that it amazed myself.

“We’ll go,” I said quietly. “The play sounds good; I’m sure I’ve heard of it before—and I want to see it, Gordon.”

Three-quarters of an hour later we were seated five or six rows from the footlights, watching the haymakers gathered about the moss-grown bucket that gives its charm to the opening scene of “The Old Homestead.” But the play had not proceeded far before I began to regret bitterly that we had not stayed away. When it dawned on me that the plot centred about an absent boy, a son for whom a father sought in vain, I knew that Gordon’s Gethsemane was deepened by every word and act. This particular kind of anguish was realistic enough to us both, without any representation so vivid. Yet we had to sit there, uncle alternately laughing and weeping at our side, and witness the rehearsal of all we knew so well. I was sitting beside Gordon; and I covertly got a hold of his hand, pressing it silently to let him know my heart was aching too. I found myself, almost before I knew it, leaning forward in an agony of interest and suspense as the great emotions of a parent’s love and loneliness were set forth in terrible reality. It was as if Gordon’s heart and mine were both laid bare that night; and I found myself wondering if all this meant to any others in that crowded throng what it meant to us.

Uncle was enraptured at our fixity; he knew not the source of our deadly interest. “Didn’t I tell you?” he whispered to Gordon as the tension came near its height; “ever see anything like that before? Isn’t that true to life, eh?”

Gordon never spoke, his eyes looking far beyond, as fixed as though set on death itself.

“Isn’t that true to life?” uncle repeated, accustomed to being answered.

“Yes, oh, God, yes—yes, it’s true,” I heard poor Gordon falter as he bowed forward and covered his face with his hands. Uncle, dumb with wonder now, uttered never a word. I prayed for strength.

The tide ebbed and flowed, as is the way in plays, laughter and tears following each other in quick succession. A wave of mirth—about the pillar box incident, I think, when the old man imagines the collector is robbing the mails—had just overswept the audience when Gordon whispered to me that he could stand it no longer.

"Don't go yet, Gordon," I whispered; "I think he's going to find him," and I saw his face white with the pallor of the dead.

He made no reply; but, clutching his hat, he rose to go, swaying unsteadily where he stood.

I began reaching for my wraps and was just rising to follow. He paused to wait for me, holding out his hand, I think—of this I am not sure. But just before we turned to go, my eyes were cast in one farewell glance upon the stage. My head reeled; my heart stood still; my lips clave together, parched and dry.

"Oh, Gordon," I cried, bleating, "look, Gordon, look," swimming towards him even as I pointed at the stage.

His towering figure turned where he stood; and his burning eyes, aglow with the passion that was rending him, leaped to where I still pointed with outstretched hand. Then I straightened myself too, as one might gather his soul for the Judgment Day, and joined my gaze with his. The eyes of all in the house were upon us, I suppose—but I shall never know. We stood together, oblivious to all except the destiny of weal or woe that waited us, looking, both looking, as the eye of the Eternal itself might look. We could not—we dared not—be sure, lest we might court the bitterness of death. The light was not bright enough, or true enough—for us to stake our souls. We feared exceedingly; and for each other; wherefore neither spoke any word.

The scene was the great Broadway scene, where the anguished father finds his son at last. And the tattered youth upon whom that father—that acting father—gazed, on him our eyes were set in dreadful silence, in questioning that involved our souls. We could not—we dared not—know; but suddenly the old man on the stage—oh! the perjured wastery of simulated love like that—broke forth with a wild outcry of love and rapture as he leaped towards the soiled and wasted prodigal before him.

And then—and then—mingling with the father's chant, there came from the bowed and broken wanderer one single note; a little cry, a muffled plaint of penitence and hope. It was such a little sound, subdued and faltering as became a broken heart, and it was almost lost in the father's louder strain—

but I heard it, and my soul laid hold of God. Only a stifled cry—but it was the same I had heard when I first came out of the valley and my new-born baby boy lay helpless at my breast; the same I had heard a thousand times when he was hurt or wronged and toddled in to me with the boyish story of his grief; the same I had heard when he came home that night and told me of his sin; the same I had heard when he bent above his sleeping sister and kissed her a long farewell.

"Oh, Gordon," I said, fainting, "it's Harold—it's our Harold!"

He knew it too. And he left me where I was, half conscious in uncle's arms. I see it all again, dismantled though I was, as in a dream. The curtain dropped just as uncle's arm received me, as Gordon glided towards the narrow half-hidden passageway leading to the stage. Slowly it fell, right down close to the floor, shutting out the last fragment of the vision that had flooded our hearts with heaven. Ah, me! no one there—not even uncle—knew that for us life's curtain had really risen, the play, the wonderful play of life, only just begun.

The orchestra had softly started some subdued and sympathetic air; I knew not, nor yet do know, what strain it was—but it fell on my reviving heart with the sweetness of such music as angels make—and my eyes flew after Gordon as he was swallowed up of the shadowy passageway that led back to that mysterious region where actors are men and women, players now no more. I think somebody, some hireling who knew not what he did, tried to turn Gordon from his course—as well have tried to stop Niagara. I fancy I caught a glimpse of him as he swept the intruder by—his eye was flashing, fearful in its purpose of love and power, as though he were asserting his claim to life itself.

He never stopped—this was described to me afterwards—till he stood beside the pair of actors, the old man and the young, already repairing to the dressing-room behind. And the old man's face, so they told me, was a study to behold as he was swiftly brushed aside, dispossessed, the unreality swallowed up of Life as Gordon took the tattered form into the arms that long emptiness had clothed with almost savage strength.

"Oh, my son! Oh, Harold, my son, my son!" was Gordon's low cry that all about could hear; for the stillness of the grave was on every heart. "Come, come, we'll go to mother," came a moment later as he turned and tried to lead Harold gently away.

I do not know all the son said to the father. But Gordon told me after how Harold clung to him as though he were hiding for his life, speaking no

word, but burying his face as though none must see the shame—or the holy gladness; and in a minute or two, though I know not how long it was, some one in authority said that the play must go on, that the audience would be impatient and indignant.

"Then come, my son," said Gordon; "get your clothes on, Harold, and we'll go—your mother, your mother knows it's you," his face radiant, I ween, as it turned upon his boy.

But Harold wouldn't—the play must be finished, he said, and he must take his part. Harold's face was resolute, his father said, his words full of determination, when he avowed his purpose to stay till his work was done. And really—it was one of the most amusing sides of my husband's character I ever saw—when Gordon told me this his face fairly shone with pride. "The lad wouldn't forsake his duty," he said, as proudly as if Harold had been a foreign missionary instead of a play-actor; it was too funny to hear Gordon, with the views I knew him to hold about the theatre, belauding Harold because he wouldn't leave his post even at such a time as that.

So his father came back and resumed his place beside me. No word escaped his lips, but his eyes spoke the language of Everlasting Life as they were fixed a moment on my own. Uncle gazed at him—I suppose everybody did—but he knew that question or answer had no place in an hour such as this. And the curtain rolled up again—ah, me! how different now—and my hand was once more in Gordon's; but now I could feel the strain of gratitude and gladness that his happy heart was chanting. Our eyes were fixed on Harold only; I heard his voice amid that closing revelry—and my wild heart leaped in my bosom as though my son were born to me anew.

We were home at last. In the hotel, I mean, in Gordon's room and mine —for uncle had gone to rest. Only a little tiny bit of a room it was—but it was home; for we had Harold—and Dorothy was asleep in an adjoining room.

Gordon went out for a little. He said he wanted to enquire about trains— but I knew why he left us alone together. Gordon was an eloquent minister —but I was Harold's mother. And there are queens and priestesses, as well as kings and priests, unto God. Which Gordon knew.

It was while he and I were still alone with each other that Harold broke out with bitter plaint of penitence, so full of gusty sorrow, of self-reproach, of broken vows and purposes. I shall not, must not, write it down. It was all

holy to me, and shall ever be; for the breath of spring was in it, and I knew then that God had brought him back, all back, the broken heart sick of the sin and shame that he now hated and deplored. My son was alive again, I knew in that moment; lost had he been indeed—but God had kept aglow his memory of the Home-light that never had gone out.

"I couldn't tell this to anybody else," the faltering voice said as his face was hidden on my bosom—"not even to father—what I'm going to tell you now. But I'm going to——"

"Tell it to God, my son," and I kissed the quivering lips.

Gordon came back just after that. I think he must have known our souls had come close to each other and to Him. For a great peace was on his face—and yet it shone with a kind of human happiness that I thought was truly spiritual. He simply didn't seem to think there was anything that needed reproach, or explanation, or forgiveness. He talked with Harold about his old friends, his old games, his old pursuits; and about what we would do, and see, before we returned to Hertford. Then pretty soon he said it was time we were all in bed, and, in the most natural way, that we would have worship before we separated. So he took the Bible. But, before he opened it, he started one of the old familiar psalms, just as we had always done at home.

"We'll sing the one hundred and twenty-sixth," he said, with something of grandeur in his manner that reminded me of Harold's grandfather; for that is one of the sublimities of the Scottish race. I have heard both Gordon and his father declare that something could be found in the psalms to suit every occasion, no matter what. But I wondered what could express the emotion of such a time as this. "We'll sing the one hundred and twenty-sixth," Gordon repeated, already pitching the key to the "grave sweet melody" of a tune that bore the happy name of St. Andrew's. And we sat in silence as he sang

"When Zion's bondage God turned back
As men that dreamed were we;
Then filled with laughter was our mouth
Our tongue with melody."

Harold's head was bowed; my eyes were fixed on Gordon. For my heart was busy with the thrilling memory of that long distant night when I first had heard the power of that earnest voice, first learned the grandeur of these mighty songs. Gordon seemed unconscious of our presence. His eyes were lifted up, beyond the things of time: he was like one lost among the hills,

transported by their grandeur. Something more than human ecstasy throbbed through his voice when he sang the verse:

"As streams of water in the south
Our bondage, Lord, recall;
Who sow in tears, a reaping time
Of joy enjoy they shall."

Then he read some selection from the Scriptures. It was very short; and he read it slowly, his eyes never lifted from the page. When he prayed, he talked with God—all I can remember was the way he said "Our Father."

It was long after midnight when he and I went to our rest—we sat talking for hours and hours, and Harold was asleep in the room next to ours. Just before we put out our light Gordon suddenly turned to me, and his face was as youthful as when I saw it first.

"Helen, let us go and tuck Harold in—so he won't be cold."

I smiled, for I couldn't but remember Harold's age, but I threw a wrapper about me and Gordon and I went in together. We tucked him in, one on either side; I don't know whether Harold knew or not, but he played the part of childhood once again—when we kissed him good-night he turned a little in his sleep and smiled.

XXX
EDEN IN THE ATTIC

I SOMETIMES wonder what the other guests thought of our behaviour at breakfast the next morning. Uncle was simply ridiculously happy, even boisterously so. And he wouldn't hear to any dissent from the project that possessed his mind. We must all go South with him, and that was the end of it. He and Aunt Agnes had never had a difference in all their married life, he said, but the trouble would begin right there if he went back without us! And he settled the whole thing an hour later by suddenly appearing, after a very mysterious absence, and flaunting in our faces the tickets for the entire party. They were taken via the Old Dominion Line; and the little sea voyage would be the very thing for all of us,—and Harold had assured him that a release from his company could be easily arranged. So Gordon left it to me again—and I left it to Harold, and Harold elected to see his mother's old Virginia home. Dorothy lent loud approval.

Thirty-six hours later we were in the dear old Southern town, driving from the old familiar station along the old familiar street. My heart was full; its burden was partly sadness, altogether song.

"Stop here," Gordon suddenly said to the driver as we turned on to a street neither of us was likely to forget. "Come, Helen," as he held out his hand to help me from my seat.

I knew. It was under that very elm, just opposite the church, I had first come face to face with love—even if I did have a pitcher in my hand, *going for the cream*.

"Drive on," said Gordon; "we'll join you later," and the carriage rolled away.

We followed, slowly; sometimes looking up into the deep shade of the bending elms, sometimes into each other's faces; with much of speech we walked—of silence, sweeter silence, more.

Soon a turn in the road brought us in full view of uncle's house. There it stood, ivy-clad, the same stately, frowning structure, looking forth at us as calmly as though we had gone away but yesterday. There was the magnolia tree beside the steps of stone, not now in bloom but still spreading forth in umbrageous beauty. And there, just beyond, flowing still, its copious stream unfailing, rolled the shining river; rolling on, as time rolls on, unhasting, unresting, bearing all its burdens in silence to the sea. The years had passed and fled, yet the selfsame wavelets could be seen—oh, parable of Time! And the bridge was there; repaired and strengthened some, yet the same bridge it was on which I had seen the love-lorn pair seek the shelter of the dark. And I felt a shudder thrill my frame as I descried the very pier that had been the scene of the tragedy but for which Gordon had never made his noble protest; but for which, our long years of exile had never been. I looked away.

Aunt Agnes was at the door as we climbed the steps of stone. She led me in and closed it tight before she told me, with love's speech of silentness, all the joy of welcome that was in her heart. She was thinking, and I was thinking, of the absent one—oh! why these ever-absent ones?—whose face was now withdrawn forever. I roamed the hall; I wandered about the broad porch; I drank my fill of the library, dearest of them all—my mother's face met me at every turn. And I wondered, with passionate hope that it might be so, if she knew that her child had returned to the scene of girlhood days once more; if she knew how laden with the spoils of time I came, rich in the harvest that love and sorrow give, anointed by the holy hand of suffering, by life's fleeting vanities beguiled no more.

"Show Harold through the house, Helen," uncle said to me when supper was over and the first tumult had subsided; "let him see the old place from cellar to attic. It will be his some day, I reckon," and his tone and glance left no doubt as to what he meant.

I did as he directed, partly. All but the attic. Not yet must any enter there but me. I soon restored Harold to the merry circle—and then my steps turned, almost reverently, towards that upper room. It did not take me long, what I had to do, for love's task is soon accomplished. And I knew it would not be in vain—I knew that Gordon would not fail me. Yet my heart beat fast as I turned at the attic door and looked back once more before I went down-stairs. Everything was perfect—and the gentle breeze was ruffling the curtain of the tiny window.

They were all in bed when Gordon and I betook ourselves to the room set apart for us. It was just above the parlour, the largest and most imposing apartment in all that roomy house. A large mahogany bed was planted,

immovable, in the centre; hand-carving, richly wrought, made the ceiling and mantel things of beauty; oil-paintings hung upon the lofty wall; soft draperies bedecked the windows.

We closed the door and Gordon looked about the splendid room. I began unpacking a valise that lay upon the floor.

Suddenly he came over and stood beside me. One hand touched my shoulder and I looked up.

"We're not going to sleep here," he said quietly.

"Why?" I asked. "Where?" although I knew, and my bounding heart bespoke my joy.

"You know—come," with which he took up the valise and led the way aloft.

The roof was low and I think Gordon really bowed his head a little as we passed within that attic door. The same discarded articles, finding their limbo here, stood about the walls. But the fire was crackling on the hearth; the coverings on the bed were snowy white; the silver toilet set on the old bureau was the same I had laid there so stealthily years before. And on the little table in the corner was a bowl of the choicest roses, their fragrance floating through the room.

I looked at Gordon. Perhaps I was just a little disappointed that he did not speak. His eyes rested on the fire, turned to the roses, lingering long.

"That's the same fire," he said slowly.

"Oh, Gordon," and I laughed; "how can you say that?"

"The very same," he persisted; "it never has gone out. And the roses too; they're the very same—they've never faded."

"I thought you'd want to come here," I said, stupidly enough; but I knew not what else to say. "You know, you said—long ago, when you first came here—you said you always loved an attic."

"Yes," he said simply, his eyes fixed on me; "yes, I do."

"Why?" I asked, though I knew it was such a foolish question.

He stood a long time silent in the firelight, his eyes never moving from my face. "Because it's nearest heaven," he answered low; "come, Helen"—and his arms were open wide.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Incorrectly listed page numbers in the CONTENTS have been corrected.

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[The end of *The Attic Guest* by Robert E. Knowles]