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sending Chris away to visit Catherine's sister, wife of the Reverend Drake who lived in Chicago. And Chris didn't want to go; as Ruth described it was crying as if to break her heart, was white as death with fear. I tell you, Bates, it was terrific," Gray continued with a humorous play to his lips; "Ruth declared she wouldn't stand it—Cousin Catherine was a heartless wretch! I heard part of it—it was terrific! Then, of course, Mrs. Gray had to confide in Ruth.

"There is only one hypothesis for what made this school girl, Ruth, rise above the conventional horror of such a situation, made her oblivious of everything but the fact that a helpless girl needed sympathy and encouragement and love. She took possession of the whole situation. I must go down at once and stop the barbarity of sending Christine away amongst strangers. If her own parents turned against her we were to give her an asylum in our house."

"She was a heroine," I interjected. "She was," Gray concurred, and continued: "I went down to Holt's house. David was there. In the end he showed me a letter from the Reverend Drake. 'He's a fine spiritual guide!' I declared in anger—to speak of giving the child away—of having it adopted."

"I was startled by Catherine Holt's voice, hard and bitter, asking: 'And why not? Do you ever suppose I ever want to look upon the child of that Judas, Black Angus McCrea? I'd rather have Christine dead! None of my people had ever anything like this brought home to them—I can tell you that to your face, and to the whole village, too!' Her voice was harsh with suppressed disdain, and she looked at David as if thrusting the stigma of degradation, in a hereditary way, upon his side of the house.

"Stop, my good woman!" I commanded; 'the sin is Angus McCrea's, and will be visited upon his head some time; but we must not commit sin—perhaps abet murder—' and I put my hand upon the letter that had suggested the throwing into the vortex of an unknown world the child. 'Blood is thicker than water; and a child is a holy thing—to be prized above the fear of reproach or anything. Here!' I commanded her with sudden inspiration, 'Get out your Bible and read of the terrible longing of Rachael pouring out from her barren heart its wail of desolate longing for children!' I tell you, Bates," Gray interjected, with a glint of soft humor in his eye, "I'm not sure that I was not cut out for the ministry. I preached at that dour Scotch woman—grasped ideas that two minutes before I had known nothing about. At any rate I won out to the extent that Chris was not to be sent away. But so far as the expected child was concerned there was not the slightest glint of reluctance; that Puritanical face of the mother would petrify to stone in a second mention of it. I had only succeeded in awakening the dulled love for Christine—that was all.

"I had a veritable shower of thanks when I told Ruth Chris was not going away. She buried her face in my shoulder and just simply cried with sheer relaxation and joy."

"Human sympathy is a great thing," I contributed.

"Indeed it is; that is, if one keeps it up as Ruth did." Gray was chuckling. "I have seen a pair of robins that have built for years in that maple in front of the house watching over their little ones—fighting the cats away; and I tell you, man, Ruth was like that in her guardianship of Chris. And sewing things, too—every day. When I'd come in suddenly sometimes I'd be pushed back from the door by the mother; or I'd see Ruth scurrying up the stairs with parcels of drapery in her arms. These were curious little touches of false modesty, quite at variance with her pluck and independence over the real issue.

"Then one evening, returning from the city by the nine o'clock train, I missed Ruth at the usual door-greeting, and asked for her.

"She's down with the baby," Mrs.

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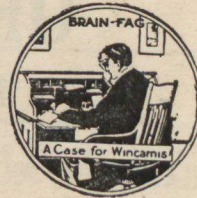
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