

"When you will make an effort to get better, as it depends upon when you are able to travel."

"Me!" she said in surprise.

"Seeing we are all of one mind to take you with us, you will have to go. Brandon insists upon it, and we have arranged everything. You have been too ill to know Fitzroy is now Lord Somerset, his father died very suddenly before he got back."

"Poor Fitzroy! what a long time he has been from us all," said Violet musingly. "Shall you not be glad to see him again, Noel?"

"He made us a flying visit, and I was prepared from his letters to find what a noble fellow he really is. Our stay at his place will be doubly glad some, for he has promised to be with us most of the time."

"My dear Noel," said his Aunt interrupting their conversation, "I have been watching you, and feel convinced you expose yourself too much to fatigue. I was told you visit in a quiet way places from which you are likely to get infectious diseases. I hope I was wrongly informed."

"Why so, Aunt Jane? Do you not approve of going about trying in ever so small away to do a bit of good?" he asked in his pleasant manner.

"Certainly, certainly, my dear, but there is moderation in all things, and you have your family to consider. Few men though are so considerate about that as your Uncle Travis."

At this surprising information Noel exchanged glances unnoticed with Violet as their Reverend uncle was not very considerate, excepting where his own individual comfort was concerned, and had some difficulty to not scandalise their informant by the smiles they had to suppress, when she went on in her smooth unconcerned way to say. "He never shrinks at the call of duty, yet so thoughtful as to its being done. How few would think to make the inquiries he does before engaging with a curate, as to who are dependent upon him or what ties he may have. It would be a matter of no consideration with some. It is the greatest difficulty to secure one with none at all, and to meet with one with as few as possible requires a deal of trouble. But he never heeds that."

"But why take any 'over' that?" asked Noel wonderingly.

"Ah! youth never thinks," said his aunt with mild reproach. "Of course with his duty to the church, to me, and our family, it would never do to endanger his life where infectious diseases abound, and in a large parish there is always some one falling a prey to one sort or other, so his curate, who has not these responsibilities, to keep him from running such risks, is thoughtfully arrange as a substitute."

"More than thoughtful of him, do you not consider, Noel?" said Brandon drily, as he came forward from the door where he had stood listening to his mother's singular eulogium.

"So I always say," returned the Rector's wife utterly unconscious that her son did not use her spectacles in viewing his paternal parent.

"Wife," he whispered, putting his arms round her, "if only you were afflicted with mother's blindness in viewing my shortcomings."

"Brandon, dear," she said, nestling her head on his shoulder and drawing his down to catch her words, "I am going in the future to look more at my own doings and less at yours. But would you like me to be like grandmamma—expose them to the world?"

"Don't care much for the world, so long as you keep your eyes closed," he whispered. Turning to Noel he said "Have you propounded our scheme to this white-faced little woman, who looks as if the sea breeze, which we hope will do so much good, would blow her out of tune altogether?"

"I really think the very talk of it has given me strength," said Violet. "But how will you go, Brandon, for Uncle Ralph could not be left alone with business now?"

"Just as if I should think of such a thing. I have consented to hand you over into the keeping of Noel, for as long as he thinks good for you—What, not satisfied?" he inquired carelessly as he saw the flush rise to her cheek and brow.

"More than satisfied if you could go. But, Brandon, I could not consent for all of us to go away leaving you quite alone."

"Well, Mrs. Travis," he said with a mocking bow, "we are not going to ask your consent. When I tell Aunt Barbara has been major-domo of the expedition you know what chance such a feeble birdie as you are will have in struggling otherwise than as she permits."

"Noel," she implored, "you tell me what he means."

"Just this, Violet, that when you get strong enough to go, you will need constant care for a time. Auntie is going earlier to Carlyon, anxious to be with Fitzroy. Beatrice and our two trots of course go with her. I, not feeling very robust, am turned out of the office by your husband to recruit, Uncle Ralph going to take charge. Aunt Barbara is going to have Brandon at the Holt until Uncle Ralph returns, when she will come down to us."

"And I intend dropping in suddenly at all sorts of odd times just to be sure they are taking care of you," added Brandon. "Now what do you think of Aunt as Commander-in-chief about this?"

"It sounds very pleasant," she answered twining his hair round her thin trembling fingers, "but it is not a good beginning, Noel, to overcome selfishness," she said with tearful meaning, "and leave Brandon alone while we are all together."

"Alone!" he laughed, "when Aunt Barbara is to be my keeper. Won't she dose me, dear lecturer as she is. I tell you, I really shall enjoy our daily skirmishes; they will be a change from the scratches of our son and heir."

The welcome May flowers were in full blooming, the lilac waved its sweet scent upon the air mingling its purple hue with the bright graceful laburnum, and a grateful welcome of perfume was showered upon the travellers as they rode slowly up the avenue greeted with the spring music from the warblers in their leafy homes.

"Beautiful as our home is," said Beatrice. "I do love Carlyon. Violet, does not the smell of the sea make you feel a child again?"

"I never feel other than that here, Beatrice. In spite of the babies, it seems as if you and I shall be scrambling up the rocks, and having all our mishaps, before we have been inside the old rooms many minutes."

"If you are contemplating that sort of business," rejoined her Uncle, noting fondly the faint colour once more showing through the marble whiteness of her face, "I must not let you out of my sight, for until you look a little more like an inhabitant of this world, I do not see how you are to be scaling such places."

"Before long you will see," she returned with her old accustomed lightness. "Beatrice, if we only had Brandon it would be old times indeed. I can scarcely believe Fitzroy will be once more with us."

"It was a glad sight," said Beatrice warmly "to see his dear face again. Poor Auntie felt losing Uncle Somerset, but you know how patient she is."

Fitzroy will make a fine specimen of what a nobleman should be," remarked her uncle. "I never saw a young man so improved."

"So we all thought. Oh, Violet," continued Beatrice impulsively, "it really was too bad of you to be ill just as he came home. He sent so many messages to you. I told him he must wait and give them himself. He is not so full of fun though as he used to be."

"You speak in a tone as if that were some great calamity," laughed Violet. "You forget we are getting older."

"And you speak," retorted Beatrice, "as if we were on the way to catch Methuselah. Let me see, he is twenty-six; you—oh, here we are," she broke off joyously. "Is Auntie all right?" she asked, as she sprang into the extended arms of her husband who accompanied Miss Fitzroy in her own special carriage."

"All right and comfortable, Beatrice," answered Fitzroy hurrying down the steps, "hope you are the same, cousin mine."

"Fitzroy! oh Fitzroy!" cried Violet struggling to get out of the carriage. "How glad I am to see you."

"Well, well, do not be impatient in expressing it and do homage by falling at my feet," he said, just as if it were only yesterday they had parted instead of four years ago. Poor Violet, he said pityingly as he lifted her out, "What a feather's weight it is. So you have not forgotten brother Fitzroy?"

"Forgotten!" she said with tears of weakness and joy shining in her eyes. "I should forget dear Noel, when I do you."

"Do you hear that, old boy," he cried to Noel. "It does the wanderer good to be so welcomed. Will Mrs. Travis think herself too dignified to remember how Miss Brandon used to do that?"

"Not a bit, my lord," she said merrily, and with the same simplicity as of old held up her face for the greeting now as then.

A month from that day of meeting, Lord Somerset in the quiet of his own room sat down to think as he never thought to have done. The solemn question to the frightened fugitive from Israel, "What art thou doing here?" came as distinctly to him. Another battle between good and evil was to be fought in a human soul, and while angels looked on and trembled, devils exulted and rejoiced. The Christian is not exempt from temptation; he has his testing time as surely and as severely as ever does the man of the world. How bitter the repentance of that one when in the forgetfulness of his own prayer, "Hold thou me up and I shall be safe," he fell into dire sin, is illustrated in the wailing cry, "Cast me not away from Thy presence." A wiser, humbler man rose out of that repentance; his temptation had shown him the weakness of his nature, and led him to the shelter he loved, but had not fully realized its need, and so all around us are poor struggling souls learning their frailty with hard lessons, stumbling, falling—ah! falling; but where the profession is sincere, rising as strong men to run a race. The world looks on and jeers at its Davids, stripping their crown of manhood from their brow, but the true penitent, like the one of old, meekly bows his head and cries "It is just; I have sinned." Why we hear of so many of the sinning Davids is because of sin's results. Only in the hereafter shall we know how many have followed in the purity and strength of a Joseph, who, though conqueror, was but mortal, and temptation no easier for him to withstand than to the man who sins. What his struggles against it may have been is not for time; these are unknown here, but the crown is for such there. These struggling ones have to go through the furnace, silent, alone. The tempter, not more lenient, but to win, often heats the furnace ten times hotter. They may at first fall down in the fierce heat, all bound and struggling to break loose from the fetters. Let but the cry go forth for help, such shall never be consumed—the One has come, with His strength they are saved.

Now was come the crucible for Lord Somerset. Had he not, after all those years of exile, believed he had conquered a love deeper than he had supposed he felt for Violet, never would he have voluntarily exposed himself to the danger of having it rekindled. His heart had been given into too safe keeping, he believed, for any transgressions against morality. Faithfully had he done a missionary work in his travel abroad. As time went on, the image of Violet seemed fading into a sweet bygone remembrance, and it was as a dear sister he pressed his lips to hers when they met but a month ago. How the childish recollections were renewed as the four explored the same old scenes, rehearsed the incidents so doubly enjoyable in the remembrance of what the reality had been, and the sweet delusive pleasure to Lord Somerset was suddenly stripped of its innocence when he began to feel a strange bitter animosity towards Brandon whenever he carried out his promise to Violet of dropping in among them. It was this that was making him question himself that night, and to the "What doest thou here?" unwillingly heard the same still voice that sounded so distinctly, "Enter not into temptation." Oh, the mighty power of the tempter was put forth to blind this soul from seeing the path all marked out for him. Angel hands restraining—the powers of darkness, with fetters all ready to bind and lead him captive, waiting. Was he to be a fallen David? or would he flee like Joseph? To hesitate, it is said, is to be lost. Lord Somerset hesitated. It was strange after that night's conflict the morrow should find circumstances conspiring to make a weak, struggling mortal weaker; for the absence of Miss Fitzroy from her usual place was the beginning of a longer spell of weakness, making her a prisoner to her room, and one of the infantile diseases attacking the children of Beatrice and Noel excluded them for a time from being with Violet, who feared for her fair curly-haired little son, so the half, only half-determined resolution to quit Carlyon seemed only all too wil-