

stay out here a few minits—or as long as you want—away from the children's clatter, an'—God bless you!"

Claire's gaze, following the great form affectionately, saw it pass into the darker shadows, then forth—out into the light that shone from the open door of the lodge.

"She's *home*—and they're *together!*" Unconsciously, she spoke her grateful thought aloud.

"Yes, she's *home*—and they're *together!*"

The words were repeated very quietly, but there was that in the well-known voice, so close at hand, that seemed to Claire to shake the world. In an instant she was upon her feet, gazing up speechless, into Francis Ronald's baffling eyes.

"You are kind to every one," he said, "but for me you have only a sting, and yet—I love you."

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Martha was still busy wrestling with the pyramid of dishes left over from the feast, when at last Claire came in alone.

"Did you get a chanct to compose yourself, an' quiet down some under the stars?" inquired Mrs. Slawson. "It's been a noisy day, with lots doin'. I don't wonder you're so tired—your cheeks is fairly blazin' with it, an' your eyes are shinin' like lit lamps."