

PRETTY MISS NEVILLE

BY B. M. CROKER

CHAPTER XIII

I SET OUT TO SEEK MY FORTUNE, AND MAKE A BAD BEGINNING

"Live ships, that sailed the sunny seas, but never came to shore—Hervey."

I had a first-class carriage entirely to myself, as I traveled up to Dublin by the midday mail. Leaning back luxuriously against the dusty blue cloth cushions, and curling myself in a corner, I gazed out on the flying landscape—chiefly fields of yellow stubble, and monotonous stretches of flat green pasture—and tried to realize that I, Nora O'Neill, with ten pounds in my pocket, was casting my old life altogether behind me, and setting out alone on a journey of four thousand miles. I was most emphatically "on my own hook" now, as Rody would have expressed it; I had taken my affairs entirely into my own hands, and whether for well or woe time alone could tell. I felt a strange sinking of the heart as I thought of my long voyage among total strangers, my arrival in a strange land, also among strangers, and I wiped away one or two tears, and swallowed down a huge lump in my throat, as I looked back on Gallow, where almost every tree and field and face were dear familiar friends; but nevertheless my resolution was unshaken—nothing, nothing, would tempt me to return. As we glided into Kingsbridge station I promptly responded to a cabby's eager signal, and was soon rattling along the quay in solitary state, my portmanteau on the roof above me and my bonnet-box at my feet. I proceeded to the North Wall direct, and at once went on board the Liverpool boat. The stout, jolly looking stewardess was not a little surprised at my early arrival; but when I explained to her that I had no friends in Dublin, and was crossing alone, she was very civil and hospitable. Finding, on further inquiry, that I was not a school-girl, but a young lady who considered herself quite grown up, and was proceeding abroad in that capacity, she regarded me with sincere but kindly astonishment, and took me under her immediate protection, saw that I had a substantial tea, and a comfortable berth, and, waiving the *déshabement* of her usual afternoon gossip in the steward's pantry, brought herself and her knitting into the lady's cabin, in order to keep me company till the rest of the passengers arrived.

Although I baffled all her round-about inquiries as to where I was going, and where I came from, she was not the least offended by my reticence—on the contrary, she applauded my reserve, saying, with an air of good-natured approval: "You do well to be close, going out in the world alone; and keep yourself to yourself is my advice to ye; but how your friends allowed a young lady with your looks to be 'straggl'ing about by herself, bates Banagher!" My looks! my friends' opinion of them was the meaneast. How often had Miss Fluker told me that I had not one redeeming feature—that I was peculiarly and disagreeably plain!

Next morning the motherly stewardess personally confided me to a cabin of her acquaintance with strict injunctions to take every care of me, and drive me to Waller's Shipping Agency, in Water Street. As we jolted along the docks I looked forth and saw big drays thundering past, crowds of gentlemen, workmen, navvies, and sailors hurrying to and fro, and heard the ceaseless, deafening roar of traffic. I asked myself whether I were waking or dreaming, and if I were the very selfsame young person who had left Gallow the previous morning? I felt quite amazed at my own self-possession and *sans-froid*, as I alighted in Water Street, passed through an open doorway, and made my way up to Waller's office on the second flight. On the stairs I was met by several young men, hurrying down in various degrees of haste. It was very evident that in this part of the world time was money. In two minutes more I had passed through a swing-door and made known my errand in a low and timid voice to a clerk, who conducted me to an inner sanctum, in which the head of the house, Mr. Waller himself, was seated at a high desk, with a pen behind his ear.

"Pray sit down," he said, graciously waving his hand toward an easy-chair. "Miss Neville, I believe?"

"I bowed—scarlet. This was the first time I had heard my new name. "I have had a telegram about you from a Colonel Neville, your uncle. It came yesterday. It says: 'Come by *Corinna*, with Colonel Keith.' I can't lay my hand on it just this moment"—searching among his papers with hasty, nimble fingers. "The *Corinna* sails to-morrow evening from Morpeth Dock, Birkenhead, at 8 o'clock sharp. Shall you be ready to start?"

"Yes, quite ready, thank you!" I answered, meekly.

"Your heavy baggage—is it all right? It will have to be on board this afternoon," authoritatively.

Before I had time to reply, the swing door was vigorously pushed open, with the most good-humored face I ever saw, hurried in in breathless haste. He was dressed in a suit of dark blue serge, and carried a small bag in his hand, and an overcoat on his arm.

"You are the very man I want!" said Mr. Waller, rising and shaking hands with him cordially. "Here, indicating me, 'is your young charge, Miss Neville, just come to inquire about her passage.'"

"Delighted to see you, Miss Neville," said Colonel Keith, seizing me eagerly by both hands, and shaking them as they never were shaken before. "Your uncle and aunt are my oldest friends, and I am only too glad to hear that I am to take charge of you. Did you travel over from Ireland by yourself? and where is your luggage? and where are you stopping?"

I told him, in answer to his treble-barreled question, "that I had but just arrived, was stopping nowhere as yet, and that my luggage was on a cab below—only a portmanteau and a box."

"Only a portmanteau and a box!" he echoed, in a high key of astonishment; "well, you are a reasonable young lady. Why, when Mrs. Keith went out with me last time, I think we had about five tons of luggage? To be sure, we took out a piano, and all the glass and crockery," he added, as an aside to himself.

It was easy to see that he was an energetic, bustling individual. In five minutes he had received all directions touching the *Corinna*, where she lay, when she sailed etc.; and, armed with our tickets, we took leave of Waller's office, and hastened down-stairs. We drove to a splendid hotel, where we breakfasted at 12 o'clock, and then we sallied forth to see the town of Liverpool.

My attention was distracted between my new friend, who was volubly relating his family history for the past five and twenty years, telling me all about his wife and his daughter, and his son in the staff corps, and his own "off-reckonings." My attention, as I have said before, was divided; as my ears were given to Colonel Keith, my eyes to the many new and marvelous sights. The life and activity everywhere struck me forcibly; no one dawdled; every one appeared to have an object in view as they hurried briskly by.

The crowds and crowds of men, evidently very busy men, amazed me, as did also the immense and ceaseless traffic of trams and omnibuses as we walked up Lord Street, Church Street, and Bold Street. Before certain shop windows I lingered, awestruck and dumb; not only was there more energy and vitality, but there was quite as much variety and fashion as in dear, old, dirty Dublin. Colonel Keith bought me some books, a steamer chair, a sunshade, and a box of Everton taffy, and having seen St. George's Hall and the reading room, we retraced our steps to our hotel. I was not sorry to sit down and rest, but my indefatigable companion had no sooner ordered dinner, and provided me with a book, than he posted off to Birkenhead, to make arrangements about our cabins and our (or rather *his*) luggage.

The next evening we were quietly steaming down the Mersey; it was a fine starlight night, and the lights of the shipping in the Sloyne and of Waterloo and Seaford on one side, and Birkenhead and New Brighton on the other, made a very pretty, and to me, wholly novel scene. Once out past the lights, I experienced a curious and most uncomfortable sensation, and precipitately retired to my cabin below.

It would be useless to pretend that I was a good sailor, because I was the very reverse! Four days' incessant rolling reduced me to my lowest physical and mental ebb; on the afternoon of the fifth I staggered on deck, a mere wreck. The weather was warm and sunny and the sea comparatively smooth and calm; the sky overcast and the refreshing breeze invigorated my much depressed spirits. I no longer wished to be flung overboard, to die at once and have done with it, as I had yearned to do for the last four days.

I had escaped from the clutches of the stewardess, too, a merry-looking young female, who took a flenish delight in acquainting me with the menu at breakfast and dinner.

"Bacon, miss," she would urge cheerfully, when I loathed the taste of meat of food. "Do try a taste, there's a dear; a nice bit of fried fat bacon to give a relish to the toast." At dinner time it was the same story, despite my loudest and most energetic disclaimers.

"Lovely smell of roast pork, miss; the very smell of it would do you good—just try a morsel—do now!"

For four consecutive days I had been a passive victim in this woman's hands; now I had come on deck, I was rid of my tormentor. I had at last an opportunity of studying my fellow-passengers. There were not many, not more than twenty, I remarked to myself as I glanced languidly round. Colonel Keith took me under his immediate protection, selected a nice, sheltered spot for my chair, enveloped my knees in his warm maul, and laid himself out to entertain me. He brought up and presented to me a young officer, a Mr. Campbell, who had been home on leave and was now returning to his regiment, the "West Shetland" (newly named) strange to say, stationed at Mulakapore. He and Colonel Keith were evidently old acquaintances, and talked an incoherence of Indian "gurg" across me as I sat between them, an amused and bewildered listener. I could not make out half what they meant. For instance, Colonel Keith observed that "one of the Juke's girls was going to be married, and it was really Pucka this time." What did that mean, I wondered.

"Oh, trust her mother for that! She won't let another fellow slip through her fingers. She's a first-class old shikarry," returned Mr. Campbell, decisively.

What was a shikarry? I gathered from the conversation that Mulakapore was a very gay station, and celebrated alike for sport and "spins." As twilight deepened it became quite chilly, and I shared the maul with its owner and Mr. Campbell. Other passengers gathered round, and soon we were the center of a sociable circle, all in the best possible spirits. Some sang songs, some told stories, and all made jokes. It was quite a new kind of life to me. One week ago I had been sitting on the stile at Gallow, taking my last look at the bog and bidding it good-by. Now I was on the deck of an ocean steamer surrounded by strangers, and yet quite at my ease, under Colonel Keith's broad wing, putting in my small or now and then, and adding a few words to the general conversation. I got on very well with Mr. Campbell. In some ways he reminded me of Rody. Like him, he was outspoken, and perhaps slightly dictatorial, but he was a more refined and (dare I even think of it?) a more gentlemanly type than my old playfellow—all, very slight, with thin aquiline features and curly brown hair—hair which thatched a considerable amount of brains, as I afterward discovered. In answer to the tea-bell we descended to the cabin, and sat together; I dividing the two gentlemen. I was very hungry, and quite ready to do ample justice to the first meal I had enjoyed for nearly five days. The sear had made me sleepy, and after a short turn on deck I again went below. The bay was now as smooth as glass, the night very calm and foggy. As long as it was not rough I did not care; and I lost no time in undressing and tumbling into my nice little white berth, and ere my head had been five minutes on the pillow I was sound asleep.

Out of a deep, dreamless slumber I was awoke by a bump that nearly shook me out on the floor. Another followed, still worse, which discharged me into the middle of the cabin. I jumped up now, thoroughly awake. Shouts and cries and a great many people running overhead, warned me that something serious was the matter. I cautiously opened my cabin door and peeped out, and in so doing came into violent collision with Colonel Keith, who in shirt and trousers only, and with his hair all brushed the wrong way, burst into the doorway, exclaiming breathlessly: "We are aground! On rocks! Slip on something and come on deck this instant! Don't waste a second, there's a good girl! There's no danger," he added reassuringly, as he turned and ran down the cabin with an *alacrity* I could not have believed possible.

It seemed to me that every one was running. The passengers appeared to be rushing frantically up and down the saloon with coats and bags, and anything that came to hand. I returned to my cabin instantly, and slipped on a petticoat, a pair of shoes, and a pale blue flannel dressing gown, and hastily made my way down the saloon and up on deck. As I reached the top of the companion ladder, the ship, which had run straight on to the coast of Spain in the thick, dense fog, suddenly heeled over, and lay on her beams ended nearly hurling us into the sea. Colonel Keith seized me, and dragged me to a kind of shelter at the lee side; and there I covered, shivering with cold, clutching him convulsively, knowing well that he was my sheet anchor. The scene was indescribably horrible. Daylight had broken, and through the fog I could dimly discern towering perpendicular rocks towering hundreds of feet above us—the coast of Spain, and very dangerous, grim and forbidding it looked. The *Corinna* lay over on one side, completely at the mercy of the sea, which broke over her from bow to stern.

Several attempts were now made to lower the boats. One was stove in, and one was swamped with all hands; another had been carried off the davits and swept out to sea, and all that now remained, betwixt sea and destruction, was the lifeboat. Presently we were accosted by the captain—now changed from the gay and cherry sailor of the previous evening! His face looked drawn and agonized, as he took my hand and said:

"It's all my fault, Miss Neville, all my fault; but never fear, I'll save you. Come with me."

We followed him with the greatest diffidence to the bridge, where the lifeboat still remained intact. The most strenuous exertions of two or three sailors, and nearly all the passengers, at length succeeded in lowering her, but the instant she was launched a wave drove her against the steamer and stove her side in. Being a life boat, her air chambers kept her still afloat, and we prepared to descend. Just as we were about to do so an enormous wave washed over us; it drenched us from head to foot, and dashed the unfortunate stewardess against a hen-coop, cutting her head open in a frightful manner; it also disabled two of the men. Directly after this we were lowered into the boat, already half full of water, and shoved off from the dangerous neighborhood of the *Corinna*. There were at least thirty of us tightly packed together in the seemingly sinking boat—half a dozen sailors, some second-class passengers, a doctor and his wife, Mr. Campbell, the second officer, ourselves, and some others, all closely huddled together, wet and half frozen.

We took it in turns to bail out, using our hands and the men's caps, but our exertions were of little use. The women and the men passengers were crowded up at the stern, which was a little higher out of the water than the bows.

One of the sailors, a young man with a bright, cheerful face, kept up our sinking spirits by telling us that he had been in many a worse scrape before, and that we were right in the line of ships, and certain to be picked up before long, and would breakfast on board some steamer without doubt.

"There's the blessed sun!" he cried, as the sun at last made its appearance through the fog, "now we are all right!"

I sat for more than an hour with the stewardess's head in my lap. She seemed to be quite stunned—only moaning a little from time to time. I had bound up her head in Mr. Campbell's silk handkerchief—it was all I could do for her. Fortunately for us the bay was comparatively smooth; great, long, rolling waves were all we had to contend with, and over these we slowly drifted, perfectly helpless, and momentarily deepening in the water. In spite of incessant, almost frantic, bailing—well, every one knew that they were toiling for their lives—we still sank steadily.

The fog lifted a little, and presently we saw a fine large steamer coming in our direction. Oh, the joy of that moment! Mr. Harris, the second officer, took off his coat and waved it on a boat-hook. We shouted, and screamed, and finally cheered—such a miserable, forlorn cheer—led by Colonel Keith's stentorian voice.

"Cheer, boys, if you ever cheered!" he cried; "now, all together, I'll give the time. Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Fancy people cheering—giving voice to three times three in the very jaws of death! Our cheers had some effect—the steamer stopped. We thought we were saved. Poor deluded wretches! we laughed and talked hysterically; we shook each other's hands. Some of us actually shed tears, such was the revulsion of feeling. But what was our frenzy, our agony, to see the steamer put up a jib and calmly resume her course; she had mistaken us for a Spanish fishing boat.

A blank, an awful silence, succeeded her departure. Even Miller, the young sailor whose cheerfulness had hitherto buoyed us up, even he was dumb, and his face assumed a ghastly, ashen hue. At last he like all of us, found himself confronted with death. One of the second-class passengers—a big, rough man, in butcher boots—now rose and with frightened oaths and imprecations pushed his way among us, thrusting us violently aside, and taking his seat at the very end of the boat. He was followed by two boys, nearly mad with fear; indeed, one of them, who was quite insane—clung to Colonel Keith, gibbering and shuddering—his eyes were turned in his head, and he presented a most awful, horrible spectacle. The other and elder lay rolling in the bottom of the boat, tearing his jacket with his teeth, and apparently stark mad. I was just as much afraid of these frantic fellow sufferers as of the great, green, hungry sea that was waiting to swallow me. The boat now made several rolls, as if preparatory to sinking. At each successive roll we expected to go over; at length she gave one tremendous lurch, and we were all instantly struggling in the water. It was well for me now that I had learned to swim. Colonel Keith and I struck out for the open, and had a narrow escape of being dragged down by the drowning.

How awful it was! There were our fellow-creatures drowning all around us. Colonel Keith had a life-belt and I had an oar, and so we managed to keep ourselves afloat. We saw the boat righted, and the survivors—alas! how few—scramble in; but as we knew that she would probably capsize again, we made no attempt to return to her, but remained in the water, now floating on a wave, now in the trough of the sea. This continued for two mortal hours. Presently we were accosted by an old man, who seemed to be a priest, and who, with a grave and earnest expression, said: "I dread with unspeakable horror the hand of death—the last agony. Oh, that it were over! Oh, that I were already dead! Where would I be then? where would I be within the next half-hour? 'God help me!' was all I could ejaculate, as I my mind took in the frightful reality of my position—that the time I had to live might now be counted by minutes, and that the sands of my life were ebbing fast.

Colonel Keith's mind ran very much on his pension, and he seemed to find some relief in uttering his thoughts aloud.

"At any rate, she'll have four hundred pounds a year and the insurance money. They ought to make it double for this," I heard him mutter. "Only fifty-one my last birthday; it's a bad business—a bad business." Then very loud to me, "Keep up, Miss Neville; what's your name?"

"Nora!" I gasped, with chattering teeth.

"Keep up, Nora! Never give in. 'While there's life there's hope.'"

With such like little speeches he would encourage me from time to time; but at last I ceased to make any response. My limbs were so cold and so cramped I had lost almost all power over them. I could not "keep up" much longer. It was no good. "Colonel Keith," I said, "good-by! I'm going to throw up my arms and go down, I cannot hold out any longer!" I had said I would sooner die than marry Maurice—how soon I had been taken at my word. "Good-by, Colonel Keith!" I cried, now utterly exhausted and worn out. I had risen on the crest of a wave as I said this, and at that instant I descended the mast of a ship! Again we were buried in a hollow; but when next we rose on a wave, she looked quite close. The fog lifted at that moment, and I could distinctly see a small steamer rapidly coming straight in our direction.

"Screen now, if ever you screamed!" shouted Colonel Keith, frantically. "I needed no second bidding. I did scream! I screamed with all the strength of despair. I screamed so that I was heard. In another instant the engines were slackened, and we saw some one on the bridge waving his hat.

"Oh, happy moment, shall I ever forget you! I knew that we were saved! It seemed a good while before a boat reached us, and then Colonel Keith, a generous, unselfish gentleman, directed the sailors flat to take in a poor drowning man who was close to us, and whose agonized entreaties for 'an oar! an oar! oh, send me an oar!' had added considerably to my mental torture. He had on a life-belt, but it seemed insufficient to keep him above water. He was lifted into the boat, and we followed—dragged in by main force, utterly incapable of moving a finger to help ourselves. I remembered nothing more till I found myself in a berth in the *Pelican*, warmly wrapped up in blankets with Colonel Keith's anxious face bending over me. Poor Colonel Keith! I believe he thought I was dead, but I soon relieved his mind—relieved it very much, judging by his sudden change of countenance. What quantities of hot brandy and water he made me drink, and I was so cold and exhausted that fortunately it had no intoxicating effect. I heard that eleven others besides ourselves were saved and now on board the steamer—a coasting collier, bound for Gibraltar. What mutual congratulations we exchanged the next day, when I, attired in my dressing-gown (dried in the engine-room), and my costume eked out with a blanket, joined the rest of the shipwrecked passengers! The women kissed and hugged me, the men nearly wrung my arms off, and I need hardly say that I was equally delighted to see all of them, and returned their greetings with corresponding warmth.

We had no stewardess, and no woman on board; but the captain and first mate made us kindly welcome to their wardrobes, and I had no hesitation in availing myself of a warm blue coat, lined with scarlet flannel. Colonel Keith, in the captain's clothes, was really quite too funny. Trousers half-way up to his knees, a most painfully tight pea-jacket, much too short in the sleeves, and showing a goodly space of bare wrist. He also displayed a considerable portion of bare legs, which concluded in socks and gorgeous carpet slippers: a cap with the *Pelican* band was added to his outfit, and in this costume he went ashore at Gibraltar, and set about getting some garments that would enable me to appear in public. Unknown kind sympathizers sent me a petticoat, a brown barege of the year one, an old circular cloak, and an ancient bonnet of the once famous "spoon" shape. Thus adorned, and wearing the captain's socks and boots, I made my *début* at Gibraltar! I had no collar and no hair-pins. What a miserable creature I looked, as I caught a fleeting view of myself in a glass door! I was the image of "Mad Mary Ann," a poor lunatic who used to frequent Kilcoo. We were treated as heroes and heroines, and met with very great kindness on "The Rock." I was given an ample supply of underlinen, a neat serge dress, and a couple of white muslins for the Red Sea. Colonel Keith replenished his wardrobe, and added considerably to mine; such necessary articles as brushes and combs, shoes and stockings, a hat and umbrella, were among his most welcome contributions. I wrote a very long letter to Deb, telling her of my adventure, and merciful escape; and I promised her a full budget on my arrival in India. I also told her of my bold flight from Kilcoo, as I had only sent her a few lines from Liverpool; and I again entreated her to keep my whereabouts a profound secret from all the world save Mrs. West. Colonel Keith telegraphed to my aunt, and I added a few lines on the chance of their arriving a day or two before me. After spending nearly a week at Gibraltar in company with Colonel Keith and Mr. Campbell, and visiting the galleries, the fruit-market, and various other "sights," we once more resumed our journey to the gorgeous East, on board the P. and O. steamer *Indostan*.

THE DECISION

Written for the Visitor by Kathryn Hurley

Ding—Dong—D-o-n-g. Sweetly, almost pathetically, the last note of the church-bell died away. It had called—let those who would respond.

The last few worshippers hurried up the broad steps of the sacred edifice—the Catholic Church of West-mount.

At the last, lingering notes of the bell died away and the services for the souls in Purgatory were about to commence, a sweet-faced girl walked up the aisle, bowed reverentially, and entered her pew.

She was a young girl, just turned nineteen.

As she knelt in prayer, her eyes fixed upon the altar, there was a heavenly rest crept into them, and for those few moments, at least, she saw no one—heard no one—she was alone with her God.

Ever since a toddling child, she had come to place all her little pleasures and trials at the feet of the sweet Infant and His blessed Mother—and now—now—she had come with her heart breaking, to ask their aid and guidance, for a crushing sorrow had come into her life, and a decision had to be made.

Mary Armstrong was one of a large family; her parents had worked hard to educate the five sons and four daughters, and could now look with pride on their family. All had good positions, and when Mary, the youngest, and pet of all, had finished school, a splendid place was ready for her, and she entered happily on her new duties, in the office of a large manufacturing concern.

All who came in contact with this sweet girl, loved her: whether business or social life called, she had ever the gentle charm to win all hearts. Little wonder that the fine, mainly fellow, who daily saw her loveliness and sweetness of character, learned to love her, and she in time returned his love.

And now—oh God! could it be true! she must—must—must give him up. In a dull, wandering way, she chanted the Rosary, responding to the peters and aves almost mechanically; and then her mind ever turning to the one subject, decided, with almost a convulsive little sob—"It is best."

And kneeling there, murmuring with the multitude, she reviewed her little romance.

It had all commenced so easily, so sweetly.

She could remember the morning she first entered the office—the usual fear and trepidation, fearful of making some great mistake; and yet how good they had been to her; and their goodness seemed cold when compared with his kindness; he had not allowed her pretty brows to frown long over a complicated invoice—he seemed ever watchful to make things easy for her.

And then the delightful walks home. It seemed strange, at first, that he was always ready at the same instant as she, the walks home from the office drifted to evening walks, strolls in the moonlight; then social gatherings, the theatre and concerts; he was always watching and waiting a chance to show his devotion.

It was all over. She must tell him to-night. As the services went on the battle still raged in her heart. How could she tell him "No."

Last night, when he had asked her to be his wife, she knew that never again could she love as she loved this man—William Dunmore; and when her cup of happiness seemed filled to overflowing, it was dashed to earth, and like many another such cup, the pieces could never again be made to form a semblance of its former self.

Her lover—her hero—her, whom she thought had no equal on earth; he, oh! God! the thought almost drove her mad—he was an unbeliever.

He has acknowledged it, hesitatingly, at first, but convincingly just the same—he told her as kindly as man could, that his want of belief need never cause her one moment's pain—too late—the drop had fallen—the blow of the executioner's axe could not have cut more keenly than that assertion, coming from the lips of the man she loved.

They had been so happy that no thought had entered her mind to question him.

An unconscious thought had possessed her that any man so noble, so upright and true, must necessarily acknowledge the authenticity of the divine Father—for she, sweet child of heaven, saw the reflection of God's goodness and greatness in everything animate and inanimate, by which she was surrounded.

And now, this very unbelief of her idol, had brought her even closer to her God.

Hush—another bell—slow, sweet and solemn—'tis the Benediction; and as the priest holds the Sacred Host heavenward, Mary Armstrong bows low; and a calm, such as only follows a great battle, enters her heart, and as the words of the "Act of Reparation" fall from her white, drawn lips, she again kneels erect, answering clearly—"we ask pardon and make reparation."

Her battle was won.

At the foot of the steps, William Dunmore was waiting for her as he had done countless times before.

"My darling—it seems so long—so very long, and yet it is only a few hours since we parted at the office. You left early. I missed our walk."

She calmed her heart's wild throbbing and tried to speak.

They had walked along a favorite path. The shades of night had lowered over the picturesque town; but even

the dreariness which inevitably accompanies November, could not hide the beauty of the scene.

The inhabitants had interfered but little with Nature, yet none could dispute the beauty of the painting ever fresh from the hand of the Great Master.

Mary Armstrong's voice came at last; low, sad, and yet distinct—oh—so distinct that years after, when sitting by his fireside or in his office, William Dunmore found himself repeating them, word for word.

"William! we have met—we have loved, and now we must part."

He stood and gazed dumbly at the young girl—no words would come, try, as he did, to speak.

Again she looked at him sadly.

"Do not try to talk, dear."

"There were some things we might have said over, but that of which you told me last night, leaves no possible bridge. Do not interrupt me, let me speak—for God's sake—while the words will come."

"Had you committed some grave mistake, yes, even so great as to steal, I think I could find some possible excuse, to forgive you; my love could triumph over many petty faults; but to know that the man I loved, and who loved me in return, could not acknowledge or bow his head to the sweet Saviour, the Guide of my infancy, childhood and girlhood; to know that come what could, let it be pleasure or sadness, we could not be united in our pleadings with the Great Father; and when the bright things of this world had flown, old age creeping on and still the husband of my dreams could see naught ahead but darkness; when I saw all this tonight, I felt, William, that just one moment's prayer at the feet of my Saviour's meant more to me than all your love, all this world's goods—yes—more than my very life itself."

"It is good-by."

"Perhaps some day God's light may dawn upon you—I shall ask it, and in asking it and waiting for it, my life's work is set for me."

They had reached her modest home, and when Mary turned and walked up the little uncovered path he still stood, his head uncovered, his arms outstretched like a man suddenly bereft of reason.

He felt she was right—but for him—life was over.

Next morning an empty desk, an empty chair, told the world that William Dunmore had been suddenly called West, and his return was indefinite.

Mary Armstrong took up her daily tasks. She was ever the same sweet girl, truly a comfort to many and a help to all. The very battle she had fought had left her purified; and many a girl—and many a boy—found in her a true friend. She straightened many a tangled path—always weighing well her much sought advice.

Many marveled that she did not marry, for the finest youths of the town laid siege to her heart. She was kind to all—told them so sweetly as maiden could that her hand could not go where her heart did not follow.

At times when in the sanctity of her own room, it seemed as though her very heart would break, when she thought of what might have been; and then, as quickly, she would drop on her knees, and thank God that He had given her sufficient strength for the sacrifice.

And thus ten years rolled by.

It was the most beautiful hour when day lingers to take a farewell glance at its own departing glory and the shades of night seem reluctant to hide the glorious sunset—the masterpiece of the Almighty.

A stern faced man sat gazing vacantly into space; as one foot tapped nervously the casement of the window, he looked drearily out at the magnificent sunset; but he minded it not.

He was dreaming—ever dreaming. He had been sitting there since the close of his office. As his clerks and helpers had left and respectfully called "good night," he answered them briefly—but still dreamed—his dream was ever the same.

With a weary sigh and all the unrest of a strong man's heart, he fought again life's battle.

Ten years had changed William Dunmore; from the pleasant faced boy he had grown into a stern visaged man. He had tried to drown his great grief in the maelstrom of business.

He had succeeded, financially, but the result was not satisfying—he could not learn to forget.

From the dreams of his early love, he moved on and on, over the years between.

"Just four years ago to-night," he mused, "Father FitzMaurice came to me. The dear old man. I decided at first I would not see him, but he pressed business—so I consented. How his kind old face glowed when he explained his pet charity home—he must have a club house for his boys."

"We must keep them off the street—out of the taverns," he said so earnestly that I had to agree with him. And when I gave him a contribution, the amount of which I was afterwards ashamed of, he placed his trembling hand upon my head and blessed me.

"That blessing—how strangely I have felt since that day."

Thus mused William Dunmore.

His reverie went on and on.

He had thought about the boys' home until he considered it a personal matter. Going to the good priest he had the plans explained more fully to him. Should he ever forget the clasp of the saintly man's hand, as