

CARMICHAEL: By Anison North

CHAPTER VIII
A NEW LIFE

THE days that followed were filled with a strange sort of life for us. Everyone vied in kindness toward us, and presents of all sorts poured in upon us, bedding and cheeses, and cans of fruit, and clothing. Even Gay Torrance's second best, ribbons and all, was not too good to be dyed black and sent to me all pressed and ready for wearing, with a little black hat, and shoes and stockings, all complete.

For a time we still stayed on at Mrs. Might's, but every day my mother would insist on going back to our ruined home. There she would sit with that helpless, dazed look, in the hammock that still swung, idly enough, beneath the trees, looking round upon the desolation of it all, the gaping cellar full of ashes and cinders, the gaunt, smoked chimneys, and the scorched, shrivelled leaves of the trees nearest where the house had been. Farther down in the garden the bushes were yet green, and clumps of late phlox and fall sunflowers still showed an odd glint of colour; but this touch of the old home only seemed to make the desolation more complete.

Once, just once, she went to the apple-house door and looked in, but turned away with a shudder, and put her hands over her face.

So the days went by idle-handed for her, in a sort of living death.

As usual it was Amanda Might who came to the rescue.

"Adam Might 'n' me's jist been thinkin'" I overheard her say to Miss Tring one day, "that Mrs. Mallory 'll never be herself again till she's somethin' of her own to clean 'n' fuss over, 'n' somethin' to save."

"I've been thinking that too," said Miss Tring, "something will have to be done; but what? That's what I've been puzzling over."

"Isn't the remains o' that old log shanty back in the clearin' yet?" asked Amanda.

"Why, yes, but"—in a tone of discouragement—"there's no flooring in it, nor doors nor windows; and the cattle have been running through it. It's nothing but an old ruin!"

"All the same," said Amanda, with decision, "it's a good size, with a loft, 'n' if the logs is standin' up all ready, why, with a good big bee the men could soon fix it up. I'll do the cookin' fer them."

"But,"—Miss Tring still hesitated—"it's such a lonely place!"

Mrs. Might said nothing for a moment, but when she spoke again it was with her usual confidence.

"She'll be more contented there," she said, "than where it all happened. The only thing's how to mention it. If I did she might think I was tryin' to get her out o' my house, which the Lord knows"—with all reverence—"I'm not. 'Twas never the way o' the Greens to grudge anything to them that was in trouble 'n' it's not goin' to be the way o' the Might's. Only—somethin' 's got to be done fer Alice Mallory or she's goin' crazy, sure's as my name's Amanda Might!"

Miss Tring considered.

"I'll talk to her about it," she said presently. "I understand," how you feel about it, Mrs. Might."

The way my mother brightened up when the proposition was made to her, very delicately indeed, astonished us all. There was now something to see to, something to plan about, and she threw herself into the preparations with a feverishness that showed how strongly the reaction was working in her, and even caused Miss Tring and Mrs. Might some uneasiness.

"There's some money in the bank in Saintsbury," she said, "'n' some more that was owin' us beside, 'n' we'll jist draw out what'll be needed fer the lumber 'n' stuff."

This arrangement was agreed to, but, had my mother been more of a woman of the world, she might have known how suspiciously small the bill was. However, her sense of independence was preserved, and when she moved into the "new" old house it was with the feeling that it was all her own, although she was much put about that the men who had come to the bee would accept no wages for their work.

"Ye know we've nobody to send back but Chris, now," she said, "'n' he isn't as young as he used to be

But I thank ye all kindly. Ye've been very good to Peggie 'n' me."

Very strange it seemed in the little log house, and to me, for a long time, very little like home. There was just one large room downstairs, but upstairs there were bedrooms enough for us all, even though the beds had to be slipped very close under the slant of the roof, and it was necessary to keep as nearly as possible under the ridge in order to walk upright. But oh, how bare it all looked, notwithstanding the bits of furniture that crept in one by one, and the flowers that Miss Tring kept on the table, and the dainty muslin curtains that she hemmed with her own slender fingers and put up at the windows.

Very strange, too, it seemed, to go out about the door and see just the bare, weedgrown clearing with the forest all about it, instead of our snug garden with its gravelled walks and picket fence; and when the first snows came it looked bleaker still. That day, coming home from school with Miss Tring through the thistles and dried, fuzzy goldenrods, and mulleins all ragged with snow, I said, thinking of the terrible time we had passed through, and all that we had lost, "Oh, Miss Tring, do you think God is all kind?"

"And it shall come to pass that at the eventide it shall be light," she quoted softly, then added, squeezing my hand gently, "it is hard, so hard to understand things, girlie, and you have begun to wonder early—but I am very sure that everything will be clear some day, and that we will then see that everything has been for the best."

If we didn't feel this," she added, suddenly and impetuously, "I don't see how some of us could live! . . . But"—passing again to her sweet, even tones—"oh yes, be very sure that God is good. After all, there has been much sunshine in your life and in your mother's, and there will be again, never fear. You have still something to be thankful for, girlie."

"Yes," I said, "people have been very kind," and I thought how our problem of housing the stock—a very very serious one for me in my love

for the animals, cows, sheep, pigs and all, and my fear lest they should suffer from hunger and cold—had been solved by our neighbours who had offered to take, one here and one there, all that we, or Chris, rather, had not been able to sell to advantage.

"Yes," she said, "very, very kind. There is much kindness in the world—when you get really down to the hearts of people."

That night she took me in her room, and talked to me long and earnestly, telling me that I must be cheerful and brave for my mother's sake, and that I must try ever to look at the bright side of things if I wanted to grow up to be a strong, useful girl. And when she went away for the night she left me a little book in which the words were marked:

"Oh yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;

"That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete;

"That not a worm is cloven in vain;
That not a moth with vain desire,
Is shrivelled in the fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain.

"Behold, we know not anything;
We can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring."

Since those days the poem has become very dear to me.

So the winter fell, and the dismal Christmas and the New Year came and went; and so closed our Annus Mirabilis, our year of wonders; saddest, most eventful year of our lives.

(To be continued.)

Copyrighted. All rights reserved, including that of translation into foreign languages.

This Story was commenced in the issue of October 23rd, 1907.



HOME IN THE SUNSET GLOW.