

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## A DAY OF FATE.

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## BOOK FIRST—CHAPTER XI Continued.

Miss Warren sat before her piano quietly for a moment, and her face grew thoughtful and earnest. It was evident that she was not about to perform some music, but that she would unite with her sincere and simple friends, Mr. and Mrs. Yocomb, in giving expression to feelings and truths that were as real to her as to them.

"How perfectly true she is!" I thought, as I noted the sweet, childlike gravity of her face. Then, in a voice that proved to be a sympathetic, pure soprano, well trained, but not at all great, she sang,

"My faith looks up to Thee."

Their faith seemed very real and definite, and I could not help feeling that it would be a cruel and terrible thing if that pronoun "Thee" embodied no living and loving personality. The light in their faces, like that of a planet beaming on me through the open window, appeared but the inevitable reflection of a fuller, richer spiritual light that now shone full up in them.

One hymn followed another, and Reuben, who soon came in, seemed to have several favourites. Little Zillah had early asked for those she liked best, and then her head had dropped down into her mother's lap, and Miss Warren's sweet tones became her lullaby, her innocent, sleeping face making another element in a picture that was outliving itself deep in my memory.

Adah, having found that she could not secure my attention, had fallen into something like a reverie. Very possibly she was planning out the dress that she meant to "cut to suit herself," but in their repose her features became very beautiful again.

Her face to me, however, was now no more than a picture on the wall; but the face of the childlike woman that was so wise and gifted, and yet so simple and true, had for me a fascination that excited my wonder. I had seen scores of beautiful women—I lived in a city where they abounded—but I had never seen this type of face before. The truth that I had not was so vivid that it led to the thought that, like the first man, I had seen in the garden the one woman of the world, the mistress of my fate. A second later I was conscious of a sickening fear. To love such a woman, and yet not be able to win her—how could one thereafter go on with life? Beware, Richard Morton! On this quiet June evening, in this home of peace and the peaceful, and with hymns of love and faith breathed sweetly into your ears, you may be in the direst peril of your life. From this quiet hour may come the unrest of a lifetime. Then Hope whispered of better things. I said to myself, "I did not come to this place. I wandered hither, or was led hither; and to every influence of this day I shall yield myself. If some kindly Power has led me to this woman of crystal truth, I shall be the most egregious fool in the universe if I do not watch and wait for further possibilities of good."

How sweet and luminous her face seemed in contrast with the vague darkness without! More sweet and luminous would her faith be in the midst of the contradictions, obscurities, and evils of the world. The home that enshrined such a woman would be a refuge for a man's tempest-tossed soul, as well as a resting-place for his tired body.

"Sing, 'Tell me the Old, Old Story,'" said Mr. Yocomb, in his warm, hearty way.

Was I a profane wretch because the thought would come that if I could draw, in shy, hesitating admission, another story as old as the world, it would be heavenly music?

Could it have been that it was my intent gaze and concentrated thought that made her turn suddenly to me after complying with Mr. Yocomb's request? She coloured slightly as she met my eyes, but said quietly, "Mr. Morton, you have expressed no preference yet."

"I have enjoyed everything you have sung," I replied, and I quickly sustained her momentary and direct gaze.

She seemed satisfied, and smiled as she said, "Thank you, but you shall have your preference also."

"Miss Warren, you have sung some little time, and perhaps your voice is tired. Do you play Chopin's Twelfth Nocturne? That seems to me like a prayer."

"I'm glad you like that," she said, with a pleased, quick glance. "I play it every Sunday night when I am alone."

A few moments later and we were all under the spell of that exquisite melody which can fitly give expression to the deepest and tenderest feelings and most sacred aspirations of the heart.

Did I say all? I was mistaken. Adah's long lashes were drooping, her face was heavy with sleep, and it suggested flesh and blood, and flesh and blood only.

Miss Warren's eyes, in contrast, were moist, her mouth tremulous with feeling, and her face was a beautiful transparency, through which shone those traits which already made her, to me, pre-eminent among women.

I saw Mrs. Yocomb glance from one maiden to the other, then close her eyes, while a strong expression of pain passed over her face. Her lips moved, and she undoubtedly was speaking to One near to her, though so far, seemingly, from most of us.

A little later there occurred one or two exquisite movements in the prayer harmony, and I turned to note their effect on Mrs. Yocomb, and was greatly struck by her appearance. She was looking fixedly into space, and her face had assumed a rapt, earnest, seeking aspect, as if she were trying to see something half hidden in the far distance. With a few rich chords the melody ceased. Mr. Yocomb glanced at his wife, then instantly folded his hands and assumed an attitude of reverent expectancy. Reuben, idly likewise. At the cessation of the music Adah opened her eyes, and by an instinct or habit seemed to know what to expect, for her face regained the quiet repose it had worn at the meeting-house in the morning.

Miss Warren turned toward Mrs. Yocomb, and sat with bowed head. For a few moments we remained in perfect silence. There was a faint flash of light, followed after an interval by a low, deep reverberation. The voices in nature seemed heavy and threatening. The sweet, gentle monotone of the woman's voice, as she began to speak, was divine in contrast. Slowly she enunciated the sentences,

"What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

After a pause she continued: "As the dear young friend was playing, these words were borne in upon my mind. They teach the necessity of faith. Thanks be to the God of heaven and earth, that He who spoke these words is so worthy of the faith He requires! The disciple of old could not always understand his Lord; no more can we. We often shrink from that which is given in love, and grasp at that which would destroy. Though but little, weak, erring children, we would impose on the all-wise God our way, instead of meekly accepting His way. Surely, the One who speaks has a right to do what pleases His divine will. He is the sovereign One, the Lord of lords; and though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

"But though it is a King that speaks, He does not speak as a king. He is talking to his friends; He is serving them with a humility and meekness that no sinful mortal has surpassed. He is proving, by the plain, simple teaching of actions, that we are not merely His subjects, but His brethren, His sisters; and that with Him we shall form one household of faith, one family in God. He is teaching the sin of arrogance and the folly of pride. He is proving, for all time, that serving—not being served—is God's patent of nobility. We should not despise the lowliest, for none can stoop so far as He stooped."

Every few moments her low, sweet voice had, as an accompaniment, distant peals of thunder, that after every interval rolled nearer and jarred heavier among the mountains. More than once I saw Miss Warren start nervously, and glance apprehensively at the open window where I sat, and through which the lightning gleamed with increasing vividness. Adah maintained the same utterly quiet, impassive face, and it seemed to me that she heard nothing and thought of nothing. Her eyes were open; her mind was asleep. She appeared an exquisite breathing combination of flesh and blood, and nothing more. Reuben looked at his mother with an expression of simple affection; but one felt that he did not realize very deeply what she was saying. But Mr. Yocomb's face glowed with an honest faith and strong approval.

"The Master said," continued Mrs. Yocomb, after one of the little pauses that intervened between her trains of thought, "What I do, thou knowest not now." There He might have stopped. Presuming is the subject that asks his king for the why and wherefore of all that he does. The king is the highest of all; and if he be a king in truth, he sees the farthest of all. It is folly for those beneath the throne to expect to see so far, or to understand why the king, in his far-reaching providence, acts in a way mysterious to them. Our King is kingy, and He sees the end from the beginning. His plans reach through eternities. Why should He ever be asked to explain to such as we? Nevertheless, to the fishermen of Galilee, and to us, He does say, 'Thou shalt know hereafter.'

"The world is full of evil. We meet its sad mysteries on every side, in every form. It often touches us very closely—" For a moment some deep emotion choked her utterance. Involuntarily I glanced at Adah. Her eyes were drooping a little heavily again, and her bosom rose and fell in the long, quiet breath of complete repose. Miss Warren was regarding the suffering mother with the face of a pitying angel.

"And its evils are evil," resumed the sad-hearted woman, in a tone that was full of suppressed anguish, "at least, they seem so, and I don't understand them—I can't understand them, nor why they are permitted; but He has promised that good shall come out of the evil, and has said, 'Thou shalt know hereafter.' Oh, blessed hereafter! when all clouds shall have rolled away, and in the brightness of my Lord's presence every mystery that now troubles me shall be made clear. Dear Lord, I await Thine own time. Do what seemeth good in Thine own eyes;" and she meekly folded her hands and bowed her head. For a moment or two there was the same impressive silence that fell upon us before she spoke. Then a louder and nearer peal of thunder awakened Zillah, who raised her head from her mother's lap and looked wonderingly around, as if some one had called her.

Never had I witnessed such a scene before, and I turned toward the darkness that I might hide the evidence of feelings that I could not control.

A second later I sprang to my feet, exclaiming, "Wonderful!"

Miss Warren came toward me with apprehension in her face, but I saw that she noticed my moist eyes.

I hastened from the room, saying, "Come out on the lawn, all of you, for we may now witness a scene that is grand indeed."

## CHAPTER XII.—ONE OF NATURE'S TRAGEDIES.

I had been so interested in Mrs. Yocomb's words, their effect on the little group around her, and the whole sacred mystery of the scene, that I had ceased to watch the smoking mountain, with its increasingly lurid apex. In the meantime the fire had fully reached the summit, on which stood a large dry tree, and it had become a skeleton of flame. Through this lurid fire and smoke the full moon was rising, its silver disk discoloured and partially obscured.

This scene alone, as we gathered on the piazza and lawn below it, might well have filled us with awe and wonder; but a more impressive combination was forming. Advancing from the south-west, up the star-lit sky, which the moon was brightening momentarily, was a cloud whose blackness and heaviness the vivid lightning made only the more apparent.

"I am an old man," said Mr. Yocomb, "but never saw anything so grand as this before."

"Mother, mother," said little Zillah, "I'm afraid. Please take me up-stairs and put me to bed." And the mother, to whom the scene in the heavens was a glorious manifestation of the God she loved rather than feared, denied herself of what was almost like a vision, for the sake of the child.

"It's awful," said Adah; "I won't look at it any longer. I don't see why we can't have nice quiet showers that one can go to sleep in;" and she disappeared within the house. Reuben sat down on the piazza, in his quiet, undemonstrative way.

Miss Warren came down and stood close to Mr. Yocomb's side, as if she half-unconsciously sought the good man's protection.

The faint lightnings played from some portion of the cloud, zigzagging in fiery links and forkings, while, at brief intervals, there would be an exceptionally vivid flash, followed more and more closely by heavier and still heavier explosions. But not a leaf stirred around us: the chirp of a cricket was sharply distinct in the stillness. The stars shone serenely over our heads, and the moon, rising to the left out of the line of the smoke and fire, was assuming her silvery brightness, and at the same time rendering the burning mountain more lurid from contrast.

"Herbert, Herbert, now I know how brave you were," I heard Miss Warren exclaim, in a low, awed tone.

I saw by the frequent flashes that she was very pale, and that she was trembling.

"You mean your brother," I said gently.

With her eyes fixed on the threatening and advancing cloud as if fascinated by it, she continued in the same tone, that was full of indescribable dread,

"Yes, yes, I never realized it so fully before, and yet I have lain awake whole nights, going, by an awful necessity, over every scene of that terrible day. He stood in his place in the line of battle on an open plain, and he watched battery after battery come down from the heights above and open fire. He stood there till he was slain, looking steadily at death. This cloud that is coming makes me understand the more awful storm of war that he faced. Oh, I wish this hadn't happened," and there was almost agony in her tone. "I'm not brave as he was, and every nearer peal of thunder shakes my very soul."

Mr. Yocomb put his hand tenderly on her shoulder, as he said,

"My dear, foolish little child—as if thy Father in heaven would hurt thee!"

"Miss Warren," I said earnestly, "I have too little of Mr. and Mrs. Yocomb's faith; but it seems impossible that anything coming from heaven could harm you."

She drew closer to Mr. Yocomb's side, but still looked at the cloud with the same wide-eyed dread, as if spell-bound by it.

"To me," she resumed in her former tone, that only became more hurried and full of fear as the tempest approached, "these awful storms seem no part of heaven. They are wholly of earth, and seem the counterparts of those wild outbreaks of human passion from which I and so many poor women in the past have suffered;" and a low sob shook her frame. "I wish I had more of good Mr. Yocomb's spirit; for this appalling cloud seems to me the very incarnation of evil. Why does God permit such things?"

With a front as calm and serene as that of any ancient prophet could have been, Mr. Yocomb began repeating the sublime words, "The voice of Thy thunder was in the heaven; the lightnings lightened the world."

"Oh, no, no!" cried the trembling girl, "the God I worship is not in the storm nor in the fire, but in the still small voice of love. You may think me very weak to be so moved, but truly I cannot help it. My whole nature shinks from this."

I took her hand as I said warmly, "I do understand you, Miss Warren. Unconsciously you have fully explained your mood and feeling. It's in truth your nature, your sensitive, delicate organism, that sinks from this wild tumult that is coming. In the higher moral tests of courage, when the strongest man might falter and fail, you would be quietly steadfast."

She gave my hand a quick, strong pressure, and then withdrew it as she said, "I hope you are right; you interpret me so generously that I hope I may some day prove you right."

"I need no proof. I saw your very self in the garden."

"How strange—how strange it all is!" she resumed, with a manner that betokened a strong nervous excitability.

"Can this be the same world—these the same scenes that were so full of peace and beauty an hour ago? How tremendous is the contrast between the serene, lovely June day and evening just passed and this coming tempest, whose sullen roar I already hear with increasing dread! Mr. Morton, you said in jest that this was a day of fate. Why did you use the expression? It haunts me, oppresses me. Possibly it is. I rarely give way to presentiments, but I dread the coming of this storm inexpressibly. Oh!" and she trembled violently as a heavier peal than we had yet heard filled the wide valley with awful echoes.

"Not even a sparrow shall fall to the ground without your Father. We are safe, my child. God will shield thee more lovingly than I;" and he drew her closer to him.

"I know what you say is true, and yet I cannot control this mortal fear and weakness."

"No, Miss Warren, you cannot," I said; "therefore do not blame yourself. You tremble as these trees and shrubs will be agitated in a few moments, because you cannot help it."

"You are not so moved."

"No, nor will that post be moved," I replied, with a reckless laugh. "I must admit that I am very much excited, however, for the air is full of electricity. I can't help thinking of the little robins in a home open to the sky."

Her only answer was a low sob, but not for a moment did she take her wide, terror-stricken gaze from the cloud whose slow, deliberate advance was more terrible than gusty violence would have been.

The phenomena had now become so awful that we did not speak again for some moments. The great inky mass