

"Ah well! if Lesley becomes Paul Halliday's wife, she will be a happy woman."

"My bonnie Lesley, I hope she will!" murmured Mollie with a suspicion of tears in her sweet eyes.

It was just six weeks after the above conversation and two months after Arthur Macdonald's death, that Sybil, Miss O'Brien and Kenneth left Canada for the shores of the old world, bidding a long farewell to their native land and to the friends they left behind them.

For a long time after that death-bed confession made by Arthur Macdonald, Mollie felt strangely restless and unhappy; she could not settle down to her ordinary occupations; the dull routine of teaching was agonizing to her in the present excited and over-strained state of her mind. The old yearning for Neal had come over her stronger than ever, and though during the day she was forced to put a restraint upon herself to avoid the searching glances of Bertie and Lesley, at night when they were safely tucked up in their beds, she would give way to passionate bursts of sorrow, until it seemed as though her heart must break for the very hopelessness of its grief. Soon all this began to tell upon her and her health began to suffer severely.

"Oh! Miss Mollie, dear, you do look awful sick; if you would but take a little rest, Miss, from teachin', its wearin' yourself out you are; and if you would only see a doctor now," said Christie one day, when her young mistress returned home, pale and weary and sank listlessly into a chair.

"You are right about rest, Christie," she answered with a weary smile. "The holidays will commence next week and then I think I will take the children and go to Buxly for the summer; you too Christie will go; you can stay at your mother's I suppose?"

"Oh! yes, Miss."

"Then that is settled; we will shut up the house. Let me see, this is Friday; I think by next Friday we could be ready to start; the children get their holidays on Wednesday." So it was arranged that they should all spend the summer in Buxly. Aunt Janet was written to and replied cordially that she would be very much pleased to have them.

About a week after their arrival in the country, Paul Halliday came one day quite unexpectedly, and announced that his father and Ruth and the Howards were coming to spend a month in Buxly, and he had preceded them for the purpose of securing rooms for the party at some private house, as they did not wish to go to an hotel. Miss Janet at once said she thought the Stauntons would receive them, as they had a large house and there were only two of them to inhabit it; namely, Miss Marjorie and her father. As they were not so well off as formerly, Miss Janet was sure they would not be averse to taking a few boarders for the summer months. And so it proved. Mr. Staunton gruffly gave his consent and Miss Marjorie was "delighted! oh! quite delighted to see such old friends again." Miss Marjorie had not changed much in the years that had passed since first we saw her. Her cheek bones were, mayhap, a trifle sharper and her voice shriller; but otherwise she was the same gushing, ecstatic creature of 'Auld lang syne.' Ah! how mournfully did those days of 'Auld lang syne' come back to Mollie Stuart as she looked upon the familiar scenes of her childhood and wandered through the green fields and lanes of the place where her youth had been spent; where she had tasted all of joy that her sad young life had known; where she had met and loved and parted forever from the brave, kindly lover, whose place in her heart was still so sacredly guarded. When she listened to the familiar voices of those friends whom she had known here so long ago; Aunt Janet and Uncle George, Ruth, Paul, Katie and Tom; and Miss Marjorie; not to speak of many others whose names have never appeared in these pages, she almost forgot the past and looked around as though seeking some other face; or found herself listening for the sound of another voice; till all at once memory rushed back thrilling through her whole being with a sickening sense of hopeless desolation. Alas! and alas! many had laid them down to their last long sleep since 'Auld lang syne.'

Everyone was kind to her and tried to make her forget the sadness of her past life in the calm happiness of the present. And they went wisely to work; for while they were gentle and considerate they were also natural and easy in

their manners towards her. All constraint was avoided and whatever innocent little scheme of amusement was going forward, Mollie was made to take a part, being always included as a matter-of-course; and she, though probably but little inclined for even the mild dissipation of a friendly picnic or a small tea party, had too much good sense and feeling to dampen the enjoyment of the others by refusing to join their little gathering. So she went where they went, and did as they did, and no one was the wiser if her cheerful face and happy smile belied the gloom that filled her heart. She was so sweet and lovable, so pleasant and courteous, that it was small wonder they all loved her. The children would rather be with her than with anyone; and Katie laughingly declared that her boys and girls were fonder of Mollie than they were of her. Aunt Janet was almost tender to her niece "Mary" as she called her. Truth to tell, time had worked wonders in Miss Janet, she had relaxed much of her severity, and her brother George profited by the change inasmuch as his face beamed now with a geniality which had been foreign to it in the days of yore.

The holidays ended on the fifteenth of September, and by the tenth they were all back at home; and once more the old routine was taken up by the little family at the cottage.

About the end of October, a grand concert was to be given in Shaftsbury Hall; which was intended to be one of the great musical events of the season. Musicians from Hamilton and other places were to take part. Mollie was waited upon by a deputation of the committee, who solicited her services most urgently. She had not sung in public since the news came of Neal's death; and she hesitated before giving her promise to sing at this concert; at length, however, she gave it, as everyone seemed desirous she should do so. And when it was announced in the newspapers that "Miss Stuart would sing at the concert in Shaftsbury Hall on the 29th of October," there was a great rush for tickets; and long before the evening arrived there was not a seat to be had, and many disappointed ones were turned away. It was evident that Mollie would receive an enthusiastic welcome upon her re-appearance in public. But she cared nothing for the praise of the crowd; a strange sadness and sinking of the heart were her chief sensations as she dressed for the concert on the eventful evening. Eventful it was destined to be for her; and one never to be forgotten in all the years of her life to come.

"Law Miss Mollie! you never looked more lovelier than you do to-night," said Christie admiringly as she arose from her knees after arranging the folds of her mistress's train.

"Thanks Christie," she answered with a smile, as turning, she surveyed herself in the mirror. In happier days she would have laughed with light hearted, girlish vanity at the image reflected there; now she did not even smile but a mist came before her eyes and her lips trembled as she turned away again.

"If Neal were to be there; I would rejoice at my beauty," was the thought that rose to her mind and made the tears rise unbidden to her eyes.

Christie was right; she did look very lovely, though so simply, almost plainly dressed, in black, of some soft clinging material that draped itself about her slight figure in graceful, classical folds. The only ornament she wore was a beautiful necklace of three rows of black jet beads which flashed and gleamed at every rise and fall of her bosom. There was white lace at her throat and wrists, otherwise the sombre gloom of her attire was unrelieved. "Good night, my own darlings?" she said, stooping to kiss the children, when the cab was announced and she stood in the hall ready to start.

"Be good children, and go to bed at your usual time."

"Yes, Aunt Mollie," answered Lesley; but Bertie threw his arms around her neck and said "Oh aunty! you do look so lovely; I wish I could go to the concert too."

"Some other night I will take both of you," she replied, and gathering her train up on one arm she went out to the cab and was whirled rapidly away to the scene of her triumphs. We will follow her presently, meanwhile events claim our attention at the cottage. At half past eight, Bertie and Lesley put away their school books, and after lingering a little while in the kitchen with Christie teasing the wits out of that honest creature, with their mischievous tricks, went off to bed. Christie went up and tucked them cosily into their beds and then bidding them good night, came down