

unchanged in one thing—the true wild heathen heart had gone out to Kenneth when he fought for her, and remained his always. Her love had grown with her growth—education and refinement were as sunshine and dew to it, fostering and feeding. At first it was arranged that she was to be trained for service, but her wonderful development altered their plans. Then she was to be apprenticed to some first-rate shop; and, lastly, trained as a teacher. So she was sent to Kensington high school, and spent her holidays at Bedford lodge. She was gardening one June morning soon after Kenneth's departure, and Aunt Hannah watched the tall, lithe figure moving about among the flowers.

"Who," she exclaimed, "would ever have believed that the dirty child Kenneth brought home that memorable evening would ever look like that?" "She might be Flora, amid her own flowers," said Mattie, gently. The very sight of the girl seemed to bring gladness into the hearts of the two old spinners. Aunt Hannah had softened wonderfully under Sally's pretty influences, and, as for Mattie, Sally was enshrined in her heart next to her own dear Kenneth.

"Sister," said Hannah, abruptly, leaving the window, "we ought to think seriously about Sally. We love her dearly, but—"

"But what?" asked Mattie, anxiously. "But, of course, she comes out of the gutter. Our first duty is to Kenneth—we must let him run no risk."

"He has no thought of that; besides he won't be back for five years."

"She must go to a good boarding school and be trained as a governess. She is pretty now; what will she be when she has outgrown the awkward age?"

"But, Hannah, don't let us lose her altogether."

"Men always make fools of themselves over beauty, and always will." At this moment Sally came to the open window with two posies in her hand. Her cheeks were flushed with a tender, rosy glow, her eyes sparkled with happy life.

"This is for you," she cried, pinning the posy in Aunt Mattie's dress.

"Flowers are for the young, dear, the old never want them till the end comes. Nevertheless, Mattie tucked them in prettily and glanced at the mirror. Then Sally made a dash at Aunt Hannah, but was repulsed with:

"Be off with your tomfoolery, Sally! Put your flowers in water and go and practice." But Sally coaxed till she gained her point, and the servants started to see Aunt Hannah's uncompromising left shoulder daintily adorned.

"After lunch Mattie tried to look stern, though tears stood in her loving old eyes.

"Sarah, my dear," she said (Sally started at the unusual "Sarah"), "you are 14 now and we have determined to send you to a good boarding school."

"What! leave you all!" cried Sally, turning pale.

"You will spend part of your holidays here, perhaps," said Aunt Hannah. "Remember, you have to earn your living. My nephew can't always keep you in idleness."

Sally's dark eyes flashed, as she answered: "He has done so much; you may trust me to do the rest. They said at school I had a fine voice. If I worked hard I might—"

"You'd have to toil for years to earn even your bread, but I'll see to it."

She did so and speedily. The very next day Aunt Hannah walked Sally off to a professor to give his opinion of her singing. Aunt Hannah sat upright, umbrella in hand.

"You will understand, professor, my opinion is there's been no real singing since Malibran died, and I'd have half your modern screaming women gagged. This girl thinks she has a voice, so let her sing to you and have done with it."

When Sally had finished one verse of a ballad, Aunt Hannah ejaculated, "Goodness, gracious, bless the girl!"

At the end of the second, the professor said: "The voice is a real contralto of great beauty, but it needs training and years of hard study."

"It shall have both," said Aunt Hannah.

Five years afterward, when Kenneth returned from Buenos Ayres, Sally was still at school. Almost the first thing he said was: "What have these years done for my little Sally?"

"That style of talk won't do," said Hannah. "When Sally scrubbed floors it didn't matter; she is a pretty young lady now, and things are different."

"There was nothing pretty about Sally when I left but her eyes. I shall never forget how brightly her eyes shined."

"She's the best and dearest and prettiest girl in the world," said Mattie.

"I hope she is unchanged in some things," said he.

If he could have looked into Sally's heart he would have seen one thing unchanged. It still seemed as right and natural to her to love Kenneth as to love God; both had been so good to her. Sometimes she recalled the dark vision of Cow court, but even that caught a glory from the thought that there Kenneth first found her. There was one black memory connected with those days that nothing could brighten, but that she kept hidden in the depths of her heart.

"There's a letter from Sally," cried Kenneth, one day at breakfast; and then he said, "she has had an offer of marriage. Her music master has proposed to her—of course she had refused him."

"And why of course?" asked Aunt Hannah, sharply.

"For the best of all reasons—she doesn't love him."

"Fiddlestick! The man's honest, I suppose, and can give her a good home. She sprang from the gutter, and can't expect to pick and choose."

"She had better go back to the gutter than marry without love," answered Kenneth.

Sally wrote simply and straightforwardly. The trouble of it was that there had been so much talk that Miss Addison thought she must leave at once, and had (subject to Kenneth's approval) obtained for her the post of pupil teacher in a school at Streatham. Then came a pretty little bit, in which Sally said she hoped she had acted in a way that Kenneth approved.

"She's a brick!" he said, emphatically.

"She must come here for a week before going to Streatham," said Mattie.

VI

Sally was to come at five. Kenneth wondered what she was like. He expected to find her neat, orderly and well-mannered. At five he went into the drawing room and waited. Five-fifteen and no Sally—five thirty and she came. For a moment he stared at her in silence—the years had done so much. She stood with outstretched hand—her great, soft eyes sought his. He noticed in a stupefied way that she moved with exquisite grace and lightness. He would have liked to kiss her, but that was clearly out of the question, so he warmly grasped her hand in both his.

"Why, Sally dear, my little girl grown into a tall young lady!"

Deep as any "inmost heart of rose" the young blood flushed into Sally's cheeks.

"Yes," she answered, "but still the same Sally." Then Sally took sweet count of him in one quick, shy glance. Her heart told her that never had she seen anything so goodly as this bright young Englishman, as he stood before her with gay, glad eyes. Half playfully, half tenderly, he led her to a sofa, and said:

"Now, Sally, tell me everything."

"Where shall I begin?"

"From the moment I left England. When I left, you had high shoulders and wore short frocks, and called me 'sir.'"

"I must call you 'sir' still. But look at the dear old room—it isn't a bit changed. I wonder who has dusted it since I've been away!" Then she went to seek the aunts.

"To think that she came out of Cow court!" said Kenneth, watching her cross the hall, "and that weeds can grow into such sweet flowers! But I won't make a fool of myself."

"And now, Sally, sing to us," said Aunt Hannah after dinner.

This was the supreme moment Sally had looked forward to for years. She knew she had a superb voice—knew exactly what her powers were, and felt in full possession of them. When she sat down to the piano a soft flush came to her cheeks and a light to her eyes. She chose an old Scotch ballad—a simple, tender thing, that needed perfect style and expression. Kenneth started as her first notes fell on the air. Hers was one of those thrilling, deep contraltos, soft as velvet, rich and rounded, with the strange power to stir and move that the good contralto has. The spell of her voice fell upon him, tears came to his eyes; he moved forward to see her sweet, impassioned face as she sang; he saw her soul flashing in the sweet, dewy eyes, and a great awe and love arose in his heart. The song ended in a deep, solemn chord, like the echo of an amen.

Sally turned to Kenneth.

"Did you like it? I have labored so hard for your praise."

He did not speak at first, but when she raised her eyes to his she saw there a look so eager, so ardent and sweet, that she almost wished she had not spoken. He caught her hand in his.

"Am I pleased? Oh, my dear, surely you know; it is too beautiful for praise of mine."

Sally sang no more that night, but felt she was rewarded. That song had changed the world for Kenneth. Could a man's heart be sung out of him in such fashion? Were the days of magic still with us, and had this sweet witch of 19 summers made him forget all prudence and wisdom?

Next morning he was full of content, bathed in the brightest mental sunshine; joy was in his heart, love ruled his life. Sally was in the house. Sally was his—surely all his! had he not fought and conquered for her; he sang as he dressed, breaking off to laugh at the contrast of his rough baritone with Sally's velvet tones, and it was not till he saw his aunts—the very models of family propriety—that he realized the difficulties of his position.

But little sleep had come to Sally that night. Love has divine insight, and when their eyes met after her song she knew that he loved her. But he should never marry her. Her valiant heart screwed itself up to the sticking point and settled that forever. The consciousness of his love came on her as a bitter-sweet surprise. When, finished with her song, she looked into his eyes and saw love there radiant and enthroned, her difficulties were at one stroke doubled. When her own heart was her only foe she had buckled on her armor and gone down into the fight; but now she had to face another foe, before whom she felt powerless. Flight was her only chance. At 6 she rose and packed, at 7 she went to Aunt Hannah.

"I am going away," she said. "I ought never to have come." Aunt Hannah's honest eyes searched her face in silence. "I shall never come back; it is the only way. I thought I was strong, and I was, till he was weak."

Aunt Hannah took her in her arms, kissed her, and said, "I honor and respect you, Sally. I saw it all last night. You are a good woman."

"A grateful one, I hope. After all your and his kindness, can I let him run any risk?"

"But it is terrible for you, my child."

"I can bear my own grief. I have loved him for so long my heart has got used to its ache. It is harder now, but still I can bear it."

At breakfast Aunt Hannah said Sally had slept ill and could eat no breakfast. All Kenneth's inquiries got nothing more out of her than that.

At 12 Sally went quietly out of the back door, her eyes full of tears, her heart like lead.

At lunch Aunt Hannah said: "Sally has gone, Kenneth—for your good as well as her own. She has saved us a terrible trouble by acting so nobly."

Then Kenneth lost his head, but Aunt Hannah presented a front of iron.

"It was the right thing to do, and so you will own in time. Be patient. My heart is sore for you both; but you are young, and life with its duties is before you. At any rate, don't let a girl of 19 beat you in self-sacrifice."

But Kenneth flung family pride to the winds, and said: "You may say what you will, I'll marry her to-morrow if she'll have me."

After an hour's hot debate he agreed to wait a month.

VII

Sally went to Miss Parker's school. She had to face all the drudgery of preparing the girls for their lessons, and taking them safely through the rudiments. She knew

what awaited her and did not mind. During the last five years she had learned how to master her love, to use it as an incentive to hard work, but it was easier to fight the battle alone; to fight at all in Kenneth's presence was impossible. Day by day she plunged with feverish vigor into the work of teaching, plodding on with a pale face and heavy eyes through the long list of pupils. During the night watches she thought it was a hundred times better that she should suffer than he, better that the wretch should come now than that he should marry her, and his good name be clouded by her shameful story.

Time passed more quickly for Kenneth, for at the end of it shone hope. Sally had none.

When the month was over Kenneth said, "Today I am going to Sally."

"What! you will let the whim of a moment ruin your life?" said Hannah.

"If I followed your advice two lives would be ruined."

That very day he went to Streatham. Sally's work had been harder than usual. The everlasting exercises, the never ceasing scales, the persistent wrong notes, the enormous difficulties of teaching suburban young ladies without voice or ear to sing had worn her out.

Suddenly a pupil exclaimed, "Oh! there is such a handsome young man coming up the drive." (Sally was unmoved; no young man was likely to call on her.) "He must have come to see Miss Davison. That's four cousins in three weeks!"

Sally looked up and saw Kenneth. Her heart seemed to rush into her mouth. She dismissed the girl and steadied herself. A mirror was in front of her, and she saw her own face pale as death, with dark shadows round the eyes. She wore a dingy old black dress, but even that could not conceal the grace of the lovely young neck and the sweep of the beautiful shoulders. And now Kenneth entered, and when she saw his radiant face, full of strength and fervor, she felt that he looked years younger than she did. That sorrowful, girlish face, full of pathetic endurance, appealed to his heart irresistibly, and without a moment's thought he flung his arms around her and kissed her.

All Sally's 19 years of life culminated in that first unwarrantable embrace. As her pretty, flushed face rested for a moment on his shoulder, her heart whispered, "Why not rest there forever?" Then she wrenched herself free, and her blush ebbed away, leaving her as pale as marble and as hard.

"You might, at least, have spared me this, and left me some self-respect," she said, looking like a young Joan of Arc. He ought to have been abashed and humbled, but he wasn't.

"Sally!" he whispered, so tenderly that she drew back again, mistrusting herself and him. "Sally, I love you—you know I do." Sally tried hard to keep back the food of joy that welled up from her heart into her eyes.

"Do men in your rank of life act like that and speak afterward?" Looking down into the sweet depths of her eyes, he said:

"Oh, my love, you are wasting moments that might be so sweet. We love each other—Ere he could finish Sally flashed in:

"Who told you I loved you? Have I ever led you to think I loved you?" He gazed at her with such sweet, manly assurance that she felt, her anger melting away.

"Sally, my darling, I see it in your eyes—I hear it in your voice. Love has given me insight."

"Of course you know it." And her voice took those thrilling tones which had moved his heart so when she sang. "I dare say every one does. I have loved you for years, and shall love you always. I am not ashamed to own it. It has been the strength of my life. If you had never spoken I should have gone on loving you all the same, and gone down to my grave single for your sake; but oh, my love, I shall never wed you—never be with you."

Kenneth would once more have flung his arms around her, but she composed herself by a great effort, and said:

"Wait just a moment and I will tell you all."

"You told me all when you said you loved me."

"Not all. Let me speak once and for ever. What I am you made me. All I have you gave me; and in return I mean to guard your good name—to guard it from yourself and from me." He interrupted her with and impatient gesture, but she persisted.

"You know what I was when you found me. You think you know all, but no one ever told you that I had been in prison for theft—that I had my hair cut short—wore prison dress and ate prison food, and—"

Her voice faltered—her face grew deadly white—her hungry eyes searched his face to see if he shrunk from her. "To her joy the brightness of his eyes never clouded for a moment. He took her hand with a sweet gesture of love and reverence, and holding it steadfastly between his own, he spoke:

"Dear, I know it—have known it for years. Biddy came and told me long ago; and, knowing all, I still ask you to be my wife."

Sally's blood slowly came back to her pale cheeks, slowly flooded her fair face with its tender rose, slowly the sweet light mingled with the tears in her eyes and conquered them. It was so doubly sweet that he should know all and yet love on. Her joy at first was too great for words. She moved a little closer to him, then with swift, sweet abandonment she flung her arms around his neck and drew his face down to hers.

"But, dear," she whispered, "the world will know." As their lips met he answered: "You are all the world to me."

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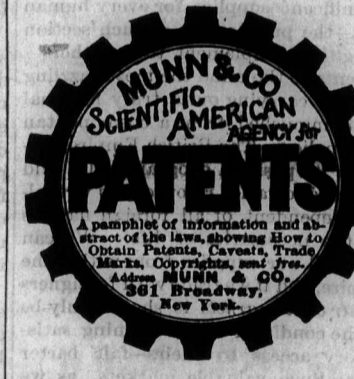


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