

BORROWED FROM THE NIGHT

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CHAPTER XXI

Teresa did not die, and when the turn of her illness brought life, she rallied back to health quickly, and it was observed that St. John Worthington's recovery was correspondingly rapid. As soon as the physician declared his patients out of danger, both urgently requested to be removed to their respective boarding houses, realizing that their long illness had been a severe tax upon the hospitable Boyles. But Mr. Boyle set his verdict against their wishes.

"Man alive!" he said to Mr. Worthington, "do you care so little for your life as to risk it in the release of a change of room and bed? When you are able to walk without assistance to the carriage, you may leave us; not before. Trouble! Don't speak that word to me, sir! I am honored, St. John, in being of any service to you and that lovely girl! All the thanks I want, or will accept, is for you to remain my willing guests until you are completely restored to health. But," and he laughed, "willy-nilly, you remain anyhow."

So St. John bowed to the inevitable, and when the master's will was delivered to Teresa, she smiled faintly. But the day came when both patients could go across long hours on the shaded veranda; and then, with regard to Mr. Boyle said that his time as warden had expired and he begged them to permit him to become their host. But Mrs. Martins, who was present, declared that Teresa's room had been waiting for her for weeks; and St. John Worthington remembered all the undone work of the rapidly approaching election, and was forced, also, to decline the invitation. When the warm afternoon made the others seek their sisters, and sent the slaves to sleep under the long grass covered arbors or on the shaded back porch, Teresa and St. John sat together in the cool, dim, dreamy old parlor. One window, looking to the east, was open, and before it those two, brought from the outer court of death, sat, drinking in the rich, languorous glory of the summer day. The window looked first upon the flower garden, then on a strip of orchard, heavily set in red clover, beyond which was a field of Indian corn stretching up a slope to the deep, darkly green woods. The man and girl sat in long, despondence, filled with gladness which comes with returning life.

"It compensates for illness, such a getting well," said Teresa, gently, her eyes on the flowers which grew in luxuriant profusion in the well laid out garden. "You never realize how transcendently lovely are the flowers you grew up with, until coming back to life, which is precious, and finding the flowers before you, you marvel at your former blindness in not really seeing them to be what they really are—the finishing touch of God's hand upon His sublime creation. O the beauty, the wonder of the flowers! Henceforth I shall walk among them humbly, knowing my unworthiness."

"It is sad to think that it takes the dew from death's hovering wings to wash this blindness from our eyes and leave them clear-visioned to the goodness of our Maker," replied Mr. Worthington. "Look, from the clover to the orchard! There grows the clover, winter food for the cattle. What a royal web that crimson-crested meadow shows! Lift your eyes to the trees! There the red of the peach, the purple of the plum, the yellow of the apple, the olive of the pear, defy the skill of the artist's brush. Look beyond to the corn, the army of the corn! gold-plumed, green-weaponed, carrying on their loyal breasts the great Father's provision for His children. Around are the circling woods, and His sky spread over the beautiful and the useful, the fragile and the strong; and His love folding all—sky and garden, trees and corn and crimson covered meadow!" He paused, then added: "Yes, it is worth while coming back, to even a life of pain, thus clearly to realize that the law is love-directed."

Teresa gave a slight, involuntary start. Those words "a life of pain," recalled the past, which to one emerging from the shadow of irrevocable change, had appeared so unimportant, so unworthy the anguished attention she had given, yet that past was a part of the life back to which she had come over. Illness may leave us with clearer vision, but it does not alter the conditions of our lives, does not make us different beings. Still, as before that dreadful night, St. John Worthington loved her; she now, as then, loved him; and between them Preston Martins stood to day as he had stood yesterday. Illness had made Worthington's care worn face wan and haggard, set deeper the tender gray eyes and the lines about the patient mouth. All the brooding tenderness of the woman's heart yearned over him. She craved to be near and held before her mind's eye the face of Preston Martins; but the thought sprang up and pressed upon her that she had come back to find the old conflict awaiting her.

It was then St. John Worthington turned from the beautiful world the open window showed to him, and looking on her white face, asked softly, "Teresa, is my future to suffer the pain of the past?"

Weak, her mind still confused, she could frame no reply to ward off the words which she knew must follow. A rare light came into his eyes, a smile threw its radiance over the lined face as he leaned toward her and took her hands. She feebly tried to withdraw them, but he clasped them the closer, and drawing her toward him whispered:

"Teresa, I love you, as I thought never again to love a woman! I missed happiness once, Love, shall I miss it again?"

His arms were circling her fragile figure, when summoning all her strength of soul, she tore herself from his clasp, and rising, cried, "Yes—yes—I am going to marry Preston Martins."

He staggered to his feet, but in the next instant was holding Teresa's arm as he assisted her to her chair. She sat before him, very white, the anguish of unshed tears in her eyes, the quivering of suppressed sobs on her face. Then, almost sternly, he broke out:

"Teresa, what have you done?" For he heard again the piteous confession before she had fallen across his seemingly lifeless body.

"My duty!" She gasped the words. He leaned against the window sill to support his enfeebled frame, and pondered upon her answer.

"I do not understand," he said at last. "Will you explain?"

"I cannot," she said. There are some negatives that throw an inner illumination upon the mind. Such was the effect of Teresa's answer upon St. John Worthington.

"Teresa, has he—the father—not the honorable son! employed his serpent's guile upon your young mind, blinding it to the real and the true, perplexing your idea of right and wrong? Was this the hand that pointed out this duty to you?"

She made no answer beyond bowing her head upon her hands.

"It is so! Then, I tell you and beg you to heed my words, you are not doing the right, but the wrong, in following his counsel. What his purpose is I cannot tell, but I know that it is an evil one, for the man's entire life rests upon what is evil. He never works but for his own ends. I ask you, Teresa, to pause before you sacrifice your young life and all my future."

A half-sob came from the bowed figure, but no words; and he continued:

"If you loved him, I should be silent. I should turn to my lonely way again, with blessings for the beloved one. But I cannot remain silent when I see you preparing a life of wretchedness for yourself at that creature's bidding, for the accomplishment of one of his own selfish purposes. He has deceived you by his sophistry as he has deceived many another. Your duty to him? You owe him none! Do you owe no duty to me, Teresa?"

As over her poured his words, she saw again the piazza of the hotel at White Sulphur, heard George Martins' words, and her own solemn promise. She lifted her face.

"Did we come back under the wings of death with only physical eyes made clear," she asked, and her voice was calm, her tones even.

"Were the souls left dim? I believe not, for as I walked in that darkness, I had flashlike visions of Truth, the truth of life and its purpose. I saw that we are not our own, but God's, and those creatures of God whose need is greatest. The law of giving and receiving is ordained to work as harmoniously in the animate as in the inanimate world. God is the great foundation stone of this beautiful temple of the human, and we the sample of the great ordains, but all assisting and depending upon each other. And sacrifice, even on an unworthy altar, is never lost. I would have been glad to go away from this life. It is one of pain and I love not pain. God willed that I should return to do the work which I was willing to let slip from my hands. You will not urge me from it? You will not make the pain greater, the conflict harder?"

Was there ever such a confession of love! Was there ever a more hopeless situation, because of poor human interpretation of Divine purpose! But the bravery of the young soul appealed to his chivalrous manhood. It was recalled, the sacrifice of her young life and the happiness of both was unavailing; yet not the less did he reverse her for her heroism. He might not turn her aside from her purpose, except by undecieving the man to whom she, at his father's bidding had pledged herself; and from such a course all his manhood shrank. He turned again toward the window, but the beauty of the earth had no dispelling influence on his misery. He sighed, the old expression of his unhappiness rising familiarly from his heart. A leaf fell to the ground from one of the trees in the garden. It already showed the yellow of autumn, and he remembered that in a little while all which he now gazed would drop as that early decayed leaf, and only the memory of its loveliness would remain, a memory which would perish when the next season came with its charms. So was it with life, his and hers. In a little while they would again enter Death's court, and this time pass through the door—what matter then if life here faded well with them or ill? Sacrifice is not lost. It either brings its reward here or elsewhere, or otherwise the plan would not be flawless, and who will impute imperfection to the Creator! "Bear, and help thy brother bear, during thy little day on earth, O man! Soon you and he

will lay your separate and common burdens on the bosom of God, even as I, after my brief day, rest on the lap of earth." Thus the early fallen leaf spoke to St. John Worthington, and he turned from the window.

"I do not know that you are right," he said to Teresa. "I do not know that it is expected of us to mar our own happiness and the happiness of another, even though we thereby bring help and succor to a third. I do know though, that God will unravel the threads which our poor fingers twisted, make fair the pattern which we destroy in our poor effort to fashion after what we believe was His design. We can trust Him to do this for us, and we learn to bide His time."

He crossed to her chair, paused, laid his hand upon her head, then, with the old weariness in his face, the old pain in his eyes, he walked slowly from the room.

CHAPTER XXII

The days crept on, bringing nearer that one which was to prove whether the people of Kentucky wished to be governed by the policy George Martins represented or the one St. John Worthington advocated. The scales seemed to dip evenly, for as soon as he was able to do so, Mr. Worthington had written a strong letter to the press, contradicting the impression which the people had naturally accepted, and which unprincipled partisanship had made every effort to heighten, that he was the victim of a political conspiracy and when Teresa recovered, her simple statement of the facts of the case confirmed his words.

The abrupt departure of the Spaniard on the verge of capture had excited strong suspicions, though the negro porter declared that no one had visited his rooms during the night. He was gone, however, and the sheriff and his deputies started in pursuit of the stage. They came upon it on the outskirts of Paris, and when the surprised driver drew up at the command of the Lexington officers and looked down into the coach he saw that Senor Martinez was gone. There had been no other passengers that morning, so where or when the wily gentleman had stepped out of the slow going conveyance, the man could not say. He was permitted to continue his way, while the pursuers dispersed to search for the lost criminal. Their work was unavailing, and though the story of the escape excited the country, making every man a detective, nothing was seen of Senor Martinez.

One evening toward the close of the week which had brought St. John back to his office, a man attired in the now unfamiliar garb of the trapper, entered and timidly inquired for Mr. Worthington.

"I am Mr. Worthington," he said, gazing with pleasant eyes upon the stranger. The man's face was covered with beard, his hair was long and unkempt; he looked like one who, for years, had not held intercourse with his fellow creature. Even his voice seemed to have an unused ring, and his words, at first, came slowly and with marked un-usualness.

"St. John Worthington," he began, "I have come a great distance to see you. I have seen you before this day, but you have forgotten me."

"Pardon me, sir, but I fear you are mistaken. I never forgot a face, and yours is the face of a stranger."

"John Worthington, we have met before. It was a peculiar meeting—a sad and sorrowful meeting. There were many others in the assembly besides ourselves! You were a new-comer to this State and I was a man like you, was leaving it. Now do you remember?"

Worthington passed his hand across his eyes for he saw a crowd of men in a clearing, who were looking toward the solitary figure of a trapper standing, with hand pointed toward a dark speck upon the blue of the morning sky.

"Yes, I remember. There was a backwoodsman with us that morning. It was he who found her body."

"Yes," replied the man, "and you found something too. You found a purse which fell from the poor woman's dress. You knew whose purse it was, and yet you spoke no word. Why did you act thus?"

"Sir!" demanded Worthington, half laughingly.

"Answer me the truth, St. John Worthington! I have a story for your ears. I have come a great distance to tell it; but I must return with it unaided, if I find that you will not deal frankly with me. You said no word against the man to whom the purse belonged; was it because you were not sorry for the poor woman?"

"I would have given my life to save hers!"

"When you found his purse, fallen from her dress, did it not seem strange to you? Did you not ask yourself why this should be?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Worthington, impressed by his catechist.

"Did you not begin to suspect that there had been foul play, and that that purse might have been left there as a witness against it?"

"I did."

"Then, man, why did you remain silent?"

"Yes! Why? Why?" cried St. John Worthington, not to his visitor but to himself. "I cannot say," he then went on, "unless I feared that my suspicions might be the working of a half-crazed mind. When I grew calmer, and began to find reasons for them, Gerald Martins was dead and his child was secreted from friend or foe."

"And you believe that her death was a part of a well-laid plot that miscarried in its execution?" asked the man.

"I believe such to be a fact."

"And if that fact could be conclusively proven, and you were asked to avenge the wrong done the innocent dead and living, would you do so in spite of personal considerations or private affairs?"

"I would not," said St. John Worthington, decisively. "Nothing is to be gained by such a course as this late day. The dead do not want vengeance; there are no living to be justified."

"But there is one living to be both justified and avenged!" explained the trapper. "I have a strange story to tell you, St. John Worthington. I am come from a distance and I shall take neither rest nor refreshment, until I have delivered it to you. Some weeks ago, there came to my dwelling in the mountains of Tennessee, a stranger—a gentleman, he appeared and of foreign birth. He reminded me of the Spaniards I had met on the opposite shore of the Mississippi. He was weak and worn by the hardships of his journey through the forests, and was half-famished by reason of his long fast from food. I gave him the best that my poor cabin provided and offered him my bed to sleep upon. In the morning he was sick. I knew the symptoms of fever too well not to see that instead of a guest I had received a patient. I ministered to him, strove to save his life, but all my efforts were unavailing. The night he died, he told me his story. He was a half-breed, the son of an Indian mother and white father. That father was George Martins."

Unnoting the violent start which his listener gave as he heard the name, the trapper went on in his halting voice with the story of the Indian, adding, in conclusion:

"And he charged me to come to you and tell you this, tell you that to you Gerald Martins left his property in trust for his daughter, whose guardian he made you."

Worthington lifted his head, a glad light on his face, for the confidence Amy Martins' husband had reposed in him was like a balm to his sore heart.

"And he calls upon you," continued the trapper, "with Gerald Martins, to strike down that man, the destroyer of hearts. Gerald Martins asked you to serve him in his dead wife's name; the half-breed asked you to do likewise in his dead mother's name—both brought to death by that feud."

"My friend," said Mr. Worthington, "while your story confirms all my worst suspicions, I have no proof."

"There is ample proof," said the man quietly.

"But of what avail will it be? That man has a wife whom I honor as one of the best women—shall I bring her to the grave in sorrow by revealing the criminal character of the husband she loves? They have a son, than whom none nobler, braver, truer lives—shall I throw a blight on his young life by giving him the knowledge of his father's sin? No! Mercy for the living—the dead do not require our justice."

"But the living demand justice, the wronged, innocent living!" said the other.

"Who is the living that demands justice because of the wrong done to Gerald Martins?" asked St. John, sadly, thinking of the three graves in the little burial ground.

"Gerald Martins' daughter," replied he.

"She is dead," he said softly.

"She is not," contradicted the strange man. "When George Martins could not discover her, he brought this letter in which was folded away forever her brief and happy romance."

"Great God!"

"Gerald Martins' daughter," went on the other, unheeding the interruption, "heir to all George Martins' wealth, is she whom George Martins' son is going to marry—Teresa Martinez."

St. John Worthington sprang to his feet.

"Man! what are you saying?" he cried. "Proof! proof of your words!"

"I have the proof, St. John Worthington, of every word I have uttered. It is here!" and he laid his hand on the breast of his old coat.

"But I am tired and hungry. I must have rest and refreshment. Afterwards—afterwards!" and a peculiar smile finished the sentence.

TO BE CONTINUED

OUR LADY'S ROSES

It has been such a beautiful visit. Marian's eyes, apparently viewing from the car window the gliding and receding scenery, were grave and retrospective. She was going home now, after a delightful vacation spent with her aunt, confident that though the visit was over, the romance of it was not. She glanced down at the books, and candy, and flowers, piled high on the seat beside her, which he had placed there in the way of a man with a maid when he considers her charming. He had been frankly attentive throughout her visit, while her aunt had been jubilant over what she designated Marian's "catch." Remembering the word, Marian grew just a trifle grave; her aunt was a very different type from the girl's mother, the latter being a convert to the Catholic faith, while Aunt Emma was quite ignorant on religious subjects. With a smile Marian recalled explaining that she could not eat meat on Friday; and her aunt had inquired soliloquously: "Wouldn't she eat a

little if it was boiled, and it was mutton?" evidently considering her something in the nature of a Jewess. She reflected now with some uneasiness that she knew nothing of the religious principles of Edmund Norris; but surely it would not be difficult to show him the truth of Catholicism—were not the ideals already Catholic? She remembered when he had said in regard to his ideal woman; before all things she must be good, with a heart as innocent and undefiled as that of some little child. Smiling he had added that she must have grey eyes, and light brown hair that curled.

At the last he had held her hand for a very long time, much to Marian's embarrassment and the amusement of her fellow-passengers—and she had promised him letters. Surely her romance had only begun!

But now the girl gathered up her belongings, and peeped into the mirror to straighten her hat; as she was nearing her destination, and soon she was in the midst of a bevy of brothers and sisters who had come to the station to meet her and escort her home.

It was late that night before Marian finished talking things over with her mother who was an invalid, seldom able to leave her room. She had spoken of Edmund Norris; how attentive he had been, and how very nice he was—quite innocently telling about the ideal woman, though leaving out as irrelevant what he had said about the grey eyes and curly hair.

Mrs. Newcomb sighed, and did not tell the girl that the ideal woman of any man is good. Perhaps they had not been wise in allowing Marian to visit her worldly aunt; but she had needed a change and the invitation had seemed most opportune. She (Mrs. Newcomb) would write to her sister and ask for full particulars in regard to Edmund Norris.

The next few days passed very happily for Marian. She was living over again in imagination all her beautiful summer romance. Then one morning came a letter; and at once she fled to the privacy of her own room to open it.

"My dear one," it began, "I had thought my first letter to you would have been a formal affair. I had meant to woo you slowly, fearing that any impetuosity on my part would prove fatal to the blossom that is your love; but since you have gone, I can realize only this: I want you to be my wife just as soon as it can possibly be managed. Every thought of mine is a thought of you; every pulse beat of my heart is longing for your presence. Dearest, there is something I am going to tell you. I had thought at first it was not necessary, believing that should it come to your knowledge after our marriage, I could explain things satisfactorily; but I feel now that such a deception might wound you irreparably. Dear love of mine, you can not know how dear you are to me; how your sweet face—pure, beautiful and fair came to my life's—unrest as some white dove of peace; for, before I ever saw or knew you, there was a face I loved—a face as beautiful, perhaps, as yours is beautiful, but with an evil loveliness, where yours is fair in goodness. Yes, I was married to her; but the law freed me, and it is ended, passed from my life forever. My Marian, write to me at once, I entreat, when you receive this, to tell me that our love may go on as before, and that soon I may come for you, my own white dove of peace, to take you away as my bride."

Marian sat quite still and folded the letter carefully, folded so many times, until it was a very small thing; this letter in which was folded away forever her brief and happy romance.

She rose and went to her desk, for this thing must be put out of her life at once, while the pain in her heart was only a stunned, half-sensible anguish. Very concise and clear was the little note when written, in which Mr. Norris was informed that in the eyes of the Catholic Church death only could sever the marriage tie between Christians; consequently, Marian could not consider his proposal, and requested that he hold no further communication with her.

She paused uncertainly by her mother's door on her way out to mail the letter, wishing for her sympathy and counsel, but Mrs. Newcomb had been quite ill lately, and it was best not to trouble her more than was necessary.

The next few days Marian went about quietly. The household tasks required her supervision, so she was very busy, and with smiling lips she hid the heartache that was sharp and constant now, but at night in the privacy of her own little blue-and-white room, the tears fell ceaselessly, and only the early morning hours brought the gift of sleep.

One afternoon she was lying down (all this day she had been suffering from headache, though now the pain had ceased), when one of her younger sisters entered with a note which, she said, a little boy had just brought. Though sealed, it was not stamped, and all unsuspecting Marian opened it. In startled amazement she read the first few lines; then calmly continued to the end. He was here in town, at the hotel, and demanded an interview with her. He would have come to her house, but feared her people might object. He supposed her father and mother had dictated that cruel little note he had received, so unlike herself. All morning he had been wondering about the town, hoping he might meet her; but he could not stay over night, so she

must see him some time to-day. Surely she had not understood that he was freed from the woman. Did her Church hold itself higher than the law of the land? He would wait on the River Road, beyond the town, from 5 to 6:30, and she must meet him there, for it was his right to see her, if only to say good-by. At the old abandoned mill he would be waiting. She sat up wide eyed and stricken with fear; here in her own blue-and-white room, with the Madonna picture smiling down at her sweetly, compassionately from the wall, this evil thing would draw near to touch and hurt her.

"He does not understand," she whispered, with white lips. "It is because he does not that he asks me to do this thing." In truth he did not understand—no more does the vulgus understand the whiteness of the dove his talons clutch and rend apart. One sentence of the letter had branded itself ineffably in her brain: "Marian, my Marian, what is heaven or hell or creed to us who love? One moment may hold an infinite bliss, and why should we care for the rest?"

"Or an infinite pain," she answered the sentence wearily, "to us who love," and there was a crimson flushed face and brow, as she remembered that she must not love the man, that it was vain to do so. He would wait, and wait, in vain, on the quiet River Road this evening—and then it was that something seemed to call to her sweetly, almost irresistibly, "Marian, my Marian." It was as though his voice was in her ears, tender, beseeching.

After all, would there be anything wrong in seeing him once? Would it not be best to explain in person the barrier between them was insurmountable?

The clock on the mantle struck three, and she started tremblingly; then rose and looked the letter in her desk. The next instant her heart gave a sudden wild leap as the door-bell sounded. "Was it possible that he had come after all?"

With a sigh of relief she recognized the voice of her own particular friend, Alice Greyson, inquiring for her. The blue-and-white room was always open to Alice, and it was only as a matter of form when she now came upstairs that she knocked before entering. In her arms she carried a great bunch of American Beauties.

"I'm depending on you, Marian," she said, "to go to the church with me and arrange these properly for the Blessed Mother's altar. You know to-morrow will be the Feast of the Annunciation, and I never can put flowers in a vase myself, as you are aware, without having them look like hatpins or poker." Then she caught sight of Marian's pale face. "You poor child," she said pityingly, "you are not feeling well?"

Marian was brushing out her brown curls deliberately. She was thinking if she went with Alice no one would ask if she were going anywhere else, and after doing what her friend had requested, she could also keep the appointment, though as yet, she reminded herself she had not decided that she wished to keep it.

"I did have a headache," she responded, "but it is better now. I shall be glad to go with you."

While Marian finished dressing, Alice ran in to see Mrs. Newcomb. The invalid was somewhat better today, though secretly anxious over her daughter's pallid looks and languid manner. She was convinced that her affair with Edmund Norris had something to do with it, and was impatiently awaiting an answer from her sister to the letter she had sent asking for particulars concerning him.

Presently the girls were on their way to church, talking gaily as they went, but in Marian's inner consciousness two sentences kept repeating themselves, as though they were beggars knocking for entrance at her heart. "What is creed to us who love! Marian, my Marian," and the other only this: "To-morrow will be Our Lady's feast day."

Both Marian and Alice were quite at home in the church, so at once they made their way to the baptistry, and selected suitable vases for the flowers, after which Alice could only admiringly watch her friend arrange them. When this was done each girl carried a vase to the altar, and then returned to sweep up the scattered leaves.

"Of course you are coming home with me," Alice said, drawing on her gloves.

"Not to-day," Marian answered, flushing hotly. "I will stay in church a while."

There was something queer in Marian's voice. Her friend glanced at her in surprise; then her face cleared. "Oh, you are going to confession," she said. "I noticed Father Grey was hearing when we put the flowers on the altar. Isn't he nice—Father Grey? Though it must be a little hard for him just yet, so new to the parish as he is. Well, I will not wait, as I went to confession Saturday," and with a nod and a smile she was gone.

Marian looked at her little watch. It was just 4:30. She would wait half an hour, and then go to meet Edmund; and she passed into the church, preferring to wait there.

A little later, Father Grey came out of his confessional, his penitent having departed, and glanced inquiringly at the young girl kneeling near the back of the church. Was she preparing for confession, he wondered? If so he must not hurry her, and kneeling down he quietly held his hands while he waited. Again he glanced at her, and found himself growing anxious over the child, for he it is who bids us to be perfect. On earth we learn His lesson of per-

fect: all those in whose faces, as in this girl's, he could read marks of suffering, or in whose eyes gleamed that mute look of anguish which comes alike to brute or human creatures in its hour of pain. He felt he must speak to her. "I will be back in just a few minutes, if you wish to go to confession," he said, passing beside her on his way up the aisle.

Startled, she looked up. "I do not think—that is, I do not wish to go," she faltered.

"Very well." Father Grey returned quietly, and passed on, to kneel within the sanctuary before Our Lady's altar. As he looked up at the sweet face of the statue it seemed to him that the Blessed Mother was not quite pleased with him, as though she considered it somehow his fault that this child was not going to confession in honor of her feast day to-morrow; as though, indeed, she was asking him to do something more about it. But he had surely done a little more than his duty in suggesting confession; besides, the girl had said she did not wish to go, so there the matter must end. He just barely knew the child. But still the Virgin seemed to be gazing at him reproachfully, and her outstretched hands seemed to beseech him earnestly for some gift he could grant for her feast day; and she was so beautiful, and so sweet on her altar; but apparently she did not care for roses to-day! There was a slight movement in the back of the church. Was the girl leaving? Panic seized the heart of this old priest. He rose and in the act of brushing an imaginary speck of dust from the altar cloth his elbow came in contact with something—and down crashed a vase of roses to the marble of the sanctuary floor. The rose worked admirably for even as he stooped to pick up the fragments, the girl stood at the railing.

"Wait just a moment Father," she said. "I will get a broom and sweep them up," and an instant later she disappeared in a dim recess near the choir stairway, emerging with broom and dust pan. Very carefully Father Grey picked up the fallen roses and brought them into the baptistry where Marian, carrying the debris, joined him presently.

"I hope it was not a very valuable vase," said Father Grey, with a quail of uneasiness at thought of a wrathful altar society he might have reckoned with.

"Oh, no," Marian reassured him; "and there are more like it. I will place the flowers in one, as they are not injured in the least."

"You are surely a friend in need," said Father Grey as he watched her artistic arrangement of the roses. "Whenever I can be of any service to you, please let me, will you? Do you know," he continued gravely, "I think we often make mistakes in that way—we do not let our friends help us enough. Trials come—perhaps they are new to us, and we do not quite understand how to meet and bear them; but the more we keep them to ourselves the more heavily they press upon us and the more unable we are to cope with them. If only we could trust some friend with our trouble, it might be that he has had experience in just such a trial as we are undergoing, and therefore could show us how to triumph over it, though it might be that he himself had failed."

The girl glanced at Father Grey suspiciously. Was it possible that he had guessed something of her trouble? But he surely was speaking of merely abstract things, for on his face was a far away look and he seemed to have forgotten that she was with him. She could not know that his thoughts were with the Presence in the sanctuary—that a command, clear and sweet, as when given long ago on the shores of Galilee, seemed to issue from the Tabernacle to him who held its key: "Feed My lambs."

"But surely," the girl responded doubtfully, "it is best to keep our troubles to ourselves. We should not thrust them on others."

"In my opinion," he assured her calmly, "it is good for people to hear about the troubles of others. It keeps them from brooding too much over their own. As for me, I have met a great many people in sorrow, or who have allowed me to help them."

She had finished her task now, but she made no move to go, and her face was very troubled and wistful. She spoke at last haltingly: "But sometimes there is no way we can help; sometimes, through no fault of ours, we get tangled up in things, and there is no way to free us." She paused—"No, she would not go on." Passionate and pleading a voice called to her: "Marian, my Marian!"

Father Grey nodded encouragingly. "I understand just what you mean," he said. "At least it seems that way occasionally, for we know, always we know, there is some way to free us when it is a question of right."

"But is there?" she questioned doubtfully; then went on recklessly. "You see it is like this: There is something I have tried to put out of my life because I found (only lately) that it is wrong. I thought I had succeeded, but to-day an event occurred which showed me that I have not—indeed, that I cannot, even if I want to."

"Are you quite sure, my child," he answered gravely, "that you want to? To say you cannot means you have thought of compromise with this evil, claiming it necessary to your weakness. Ah! One there is Who knows our weakness as we can never know it, and therefore does He give Himself to us to be our strength, and He it is Who bids us to be perfect. On earth we learn His lesson of per-