

It was there that much of the money that should have put the Bartons in good circumstances had been invested. That was their bank. The weak-willed father had foreseen this some time ago, and saved the roof over his head by giving his wife the deed. It belonged to the children now, and since Irving was book-keeper and Ora cashier in a down-town store, little touches of comfort and beauty were being added here and there, till you would not know it for a drunkard's home.

A step approached Ora as she stood by the window, and her brother's arm encircled her.

'It's all right, sister, dear. The struggle is over.'

'O Irving, I'm so glad—so glad!' and she drooped her young head on his shoulder.

Almost in the same instant a dark figure lurched round the corner of the house, reeling in the storm and half-tumbling over the threshold.

Ora shuddered and sickened; she knew the sight.

There was the sound of a heavy form staggering against the wall to the bedroom, a low, chuckling laugh, and a loose, careless thud upon the floor.

'Ha! ha! ha! I fixed him, the little whiffet! I fixed him! My, but Bealy owes me a sip or two for that! As much whiskey as there was depth to the water, he promised. Ha! ha! ha! But didn't he plunge! Ker-soze he went! No preachin' to-night! Ker-splash! Oh, if he'd only swore! I'd like to 'av heard him. Like enough he swore under water. Ha! ha! ha! But the boys'll laugh!'

Marion's white face appeared in the doorway now.

'See here, girls, you go out there and eat your suppers,' said Irving. 'Shut the door. I'll get him to bed. He's crazy with that poison of Bealy's.'

What passed between father and son no one heard, but silence settled on the room. The pale, fair-haired boy seemed to be wonderfully his father's master in these moods. A touch, a look, was often enough from his son.

Ora paused a moment at the door when she was ready for church a half-hour later, and the heavy breathing within told of slumber.

'Do you suppose any mischief has been done to-night?' she asked.

'Hard to say. We'll hope not, little sister.'

Brother and sister spoke little on their way to church, but he could feel the girl's arm tremble as it rested on his. Scraps of the conversation of passers-by reached their ears occasionally, as:

'Some brutal wretch.'

'Ought to be caught and put in jail.'

'Will he be able to preach to-night?'

'It'll lay him up, perhaps,' etc.

The little hand clung more tightly to Irving Barton's arm, and silently they neared the church lights. They were a little late; the choir had already taken their places, and the congregation waited in an expectant silence.

The stillness oppressed Ora as she and Irving took their places in the choir. Why was Mr. Parker not there? Then her head grew dizzy as their own pastor entered the pulpit, and she listened to the story of how some 'ill-meaning person' had waylaid Mr. Parker on Kentville bridge that evening as he returned from a country call, and thrown him into the river. He had narrowly escaped drowning, as the usually shallow

stream was deeper than its wont just then, but the exposure in the cold, bleak wind had been followed by a chill. Mr. Parker, however, insisted that he was able to preach that evening, and would be there shortly.

'No trace of the culprit has as yet been found, but it is to be hoped he will speedily be brought to justice.'

Two people in that choir shuddered at the words.

'And now, brothers and sisters, let us not let the meeting suffer by this delay, but rather let us be the better prepared for it. We will begin with a short service of song.'

'Dreadful! isn't it?' said Miss Miller in Ora's ear. 'Poor Mr. Parker, he has such a cough, too! He ought not to preach to-night, after such an accident. His throat is very weak, anyway.'

Ora's face had changed from white to burning crimson. She was sure every eye was fixed upon her. She dared at last to look up. In the gallery, down the aisles, no—no one was looking at her. Why should they? Had any one seen her father on Kentville bridge that night? Did she herself know he had been there? No, she did not. Thus she sternly quieted her fears. The song service continued and in the midst of it Mr. Parker took his place. His face was deathful white, and she fancied he trembled slightly, but he proceeded with the service after a brief apology for his tardiness, without blame to any one.

There were many that night who looked at him, and thought they had never seen a more refined personality in human form. Allison Parker was in every word and look a Christian and a gentleman. Nothing of the ranter, the blusterer, or the egotist, but a quiet and gentle spirit, and yet a man whose strength and power made many a sinning brother pause and tremble, a man in whom the fire of the living God failed not, nor grew dim.

The sermon was nearing its end when Ora fancied there was something like a catch in his voice. An occasional fit of coughing interrupted him for a moment, but he went bravely on, and his sermon passed, as it often did, into song, for he was a sweet singer.

But he had pitched his voice too high after the exertion of preaching. The tremor was quite audible to the congregation,

'Tell mother I'll be there  
In answer to her prayer,  
Tell mother—'

A cough interrupted. He turned to the choir, unable to speak, and looked appealingly at some one behind Ora's chair with an upward movement of his hand.

'Tell mother, loving mother,  
I'll be there.'

Without an instant's delay a clear, bell-like voice had taken up the strain. It was Irving's voice. Down the aisles and along the galleries the sweet words echoed and lingered. The last line died away. The church was still; it was the sweetly solemn moment when men are called upon to confess their God.

Ora was conscious that Irving was rising behind her—the first in all that throng.

'I praise God for the assurance of meeting again a sainted mother. I praise him for the strength he has given me this day to lay my all upon his altar.'

The words were spoken calmly, but Ora could feel that he trembled as he uttered them. She knew they had cost him that effort that the first confession costs to nearly every human soul.

And now it was her turn. There, some one else was speaking, then another. Then came a pause. Now was her chance. But, oh, it seemed as if she were nailed to that chair back. She made one terrible effort. She was really on her feet. The lights swayed and changed color; the crowd rocked as in a boat at sea. She was not sure just what she had said, except that it was not the words she intended to say, but she sat down with the satisfaction of one who has sealed her vows in the eyes of men.

The meetings continued for three weeks from that night, but under Mr. Gray, the residing pastor. For Mr. Parker did not stir from his bed. The wetting and the walk in the cold had been too much for a throat already weak and diseased, and inflammation of the larynx had been the result. But whether he was more powerful alone with God in the sick-room, or whether Mr. Grey was freshly endued with strength, certain it was that the work did not fail, nor the workers faint. No trace of the offender on Kentville bridge had been found. Mr. Parker alone knew anything about his appearance, and Mr. Parker, for some reason, was very uncommunicative. Meanwhile, every night, Irving Barton was in his place, singing for the voice that was still. And men flocked to hear. An Arville boy! Who would have thought they had such talent in their midst?

It was the last week-night service. Mr. Parker was in the pulpit again, pale, but able to utter a short message. Irving began with a well-known hymn:

'Some one will enter the pearly gate,  
Shall you? Shall I? Shall you? Shall I?'

A disturbance at the door broke the stillness. A drunken man was striving to enter.

'I tell you he's my boy! Let me hear him sing!'

Irving signed to the usher to let the man enter, and, drunk though he was, James Barton grew still as he listened. He had heard the same thing at home dozens of times, but it impressed him strangely here. The silent crowd hanging upon the words of his boy—his own boy.

'Some one will greet on the golden shore,  
Loved ones of earth, who have gone before,

Safe in the glory for evermore,  
Shall you? Shall I? Shall you? Shall I?'

There was a sob at the end, and the drunkard glided out, and made his way homeward. They could hear him pacing the floor and sobbing when they returned. And on the following Sabbath morning a strange sight was seen. Jas. Barton, printer, dismissed from the Cartwright Printing House for drunkenness, now sober, respectably clad, sitting in the pew where he used to sit with his young wife nearly thirty years ago, and where he had so seldom been seen since.

At the after-meeting that night, the Arville congregation heard the confession of the scene on Kentville bridge, all but the part about Bealy, of Bealy House, offering a keg of 'good rye whiskey to the man that would give Parker a duckin'.' That was not told till Bealy's gang told it themselves. But Arville Church heard something else. It heard also a confession of sins forgiven, and the hand of the law was laid not upon the man that went out, redeemed, into the star-light of that winter night.

Irving was called into the parsonage study for a few minutes after the service.