

bread, with a morsel of cheese. This primitive repast over, and the tray removed, we brought over our study books and seated ourselves near the lamp, George rejoicing in the variety and scholastic appearance of half a dozen different volumes, whilst I was yet restricted to the dulllest of all spelling books, without even a childish tale of twelve lines to enliven the monotonous columns of spelling, or the equally arid moral axioms and proverbs of which the reading part entirely consisted. A half hour's study was followed by a half hour's instruction from my father—he was our only preceptor—and then the same servant re-entered to bring us to bed.

The latter, Dorothy Hurst, a tall, angular woman, singularly plain in point of feature, had lived with my father in the capacity of house-keeper for many years before his marriage, and though abrupt, even harsh at times in manner, was really a devoted, faithful servant. When my father bade farewell with his young wife, a few months after their nuptials, to the quiet English town in which they had both been brought up, and emigrated to Canada, Dorothy had accompanied them, and continued to hold undisputed, in the New land as she had done in the Old, the responsible post of house-keeper. On the night in question, Dorothy happened to be in what she herself termed one of her "cross-grained humours." She angrily turned upon us as we somewhat luggerily followed her through the long bare passages, up the unpainted, uncarpeted stairs, to enquire if we intended keeping her all night in the damp passages and bring on an attack of her rheumatism. On this we hurried our steps, but as we parted in the hall—George occupied a small bed-room next the large desolate chamber in which Dorothy and I slept—he encouragingly whispered, "all this is precious dull, Ada, but it won't last for ever. Wait till I'm a man, and I'll take you out of this gloomy barrack of a dungeon!"

When my brother was excited he always employed two or three superfluous adjectives to give additional force to his sentences.

Alas! poor, bright-eyed, fair-haired George, that dream so confidently indulged in, was never to be realized, but the hopes it inspired cheered many a lonely day, enlivened many a sorrowful night!

Morning dawned, dark and rainy, a chilly east wind bringing with it those dispiriting influences so fraught with suffering to many delicate organizations. We children, however, blessed as we were with childhood's usual happy birthright—I speak of childhood neither over-fed, over-clothed, nor over-indulged—found sunshine or storm make little difference to us. The routine of our lives remained the same, except that the hour's exercise, taken after our breakfast of bread and milk, was confined to the upper part of the house instead of being passed on the banks of the aforesaid sluggish stream, floating miniature boats on its surface, or, gathering with infinite eagerness, pebbles that were destined to be remorsefully thrown aside a few moments afterwards. Three hours of mingled study and instruction under our father's direction was followed by an early simple dinner, from which pastry, jellies, and condiments of every kind were rigorously excluded—the master of the house disapproving of them on hygienic principles—then came a couple of hours of recreation, generally passed out of doors, study again, our simple supper, study, and bed. Such a life, despite its monotony and our complete isolation from the outer world, from the companionship of children of our own age, might still have been happy had it been brightened by affection or tenderness; but beyond what George and I cherished in our lonely little hearts for each other, none fell, at least in outward seeming, to our share. Our household retainers were but two in number, an elderly man-servant, as surly and disagreeable as it was possible to be, and Dorothy. The latter, as I have already said, was kind-hearted and sincerely attached to us. She often used to take me on her lap, and whilst encircling me with one arm, draw George towards her with the other, and tell us about the pretty young mother who had landed fair and blooming in Canada one bright spring morning, and who, after five years of wedded life, had quietly breathed out her existence in Dorothy's arms without a single sigh or sign of regret, more than the infant son who had preceded her by some months to the tomb.

"But what did she die of, Dorothy?" I would sometimes question.

"Well, the doctors called it decline. They may have been right, but, for my part, I think it was fretting for the home and friends she had left, as well as the mortal dullness of the place here that killed her; though, to be sure, it was gay and finer in those days than it is now," and the speaker would fall into a train of musing from which it was sometimes difficult to rouse her.

"And was she as much afraid of papa as we are?" outspoken George would boldly enquire.

"No, child, no! Why should she be? Mr. Dunmore loved her dearly, but somehow he hadn't much the way of showing what he felt. Not being used to the ways of the country here, he lost lots of money, one way or the other, when he first came out. Later, he was worried with law suits and many other vexations, so that perhaps he hadn't as much liveliness and cheerful ways as such a winsome young creature might have liked or expected. Well, her death nearly broke his heart. Six months after, his hair was as gray—himself almost as stooped as he is to-day. He has never been the same man since."

"But, Dorothy, why isn't the house gay? Why don't we have fine dinners, horses, dogs, and visitors? All that would soon cheer him up."

"Because, Master George, there is neither means nor money for such things. The law suits all went against your poor papa, and he is obliged to live very sparingly now. I, who have known him so long, can tell you he is anything but stingy or ungenerous by nature. He never looked closely after money when he had it."

"And did you love mamma very much?" I would question in turn.

"Did I love her very much, Miss Ada? Aye, did I, or I would not be here to-day perhaps. The place is lonely—the work heavy—the wages—though I do not mind that much—light, and the Master, but my tongue runs too fast, so I'll just say the master at times is dull-like; and yet, please the Lord! I'll never leave this house till I'm turned out or carried out."

"That means till you are dead, does it not?" asks practical George.

"Just, my boy. Your poor mamma, the very day she left us for Heaven, turned to me and said, 'Dorothy, I can die as happily and willingly as a little tired child falls asleep—her very words, I have never forgotten them since—if you'll promise me to always stop with my poor motherless darlings,

And you, Danmore, you'll give me your word that you will always keep her with them?' and she turned to your papa. He could only say yes, short and sharp-like, for his heart was full, and he was always afraid of showing what he felt, so I believe she died without knowing half the great love that was in his heart for her. Well, well, she wasn't one for this troublesome world. Too gentle, too delicate-like. Ah! it's well for them that's called early home!"

With such reminiscences as these did Dorothy while many a gloomy autumn or winter evening as we all three sat round the stove in our bleak bed-room, dimly lighted by one poor candle, whilst the wind rattled the ill-fitting windows and doors, or filled the large half empty house with strange echoing noises, wailing and moaning meanwhile outside in a weird manner that made us draw closer to the old servant with beating hearts and suspended breathing.

How often did I lie awake long hours after Dorothy had carefully tucked me up in bed, thinking of the loving young mother I had so early lost, and yearning with a passionate longing to be clasped in her arms, to feel even once her fond kisses on my forehead. Then, as the thought would arise, that this never, never could be, I would give way to paroxysms of grief, stilling my sobs under the thick coverings with an instinctive dislike to betraying my emotion, unusual at so early an age.

Time sped on, but brought no changes to our household, except that George and myself increased daily in strength and stature, advancing rapidly also in our studies, always, of course, under my father's sole care. Only son of an English country gentleman, a careful classical education had fully developed in him a natural love for science and study, the pursuit of which formed now the chief occupation, as well as solace, of his existence. A residence, during his youth, of two or three years on the continent, had enabled him to add to his classical lore, a perfect knowledge of the French and Italian languages. Though the course of education we were pursuing with such unlagging industry was admirably calculated to prepare my brother for almost any career in life, it must be acknowledged it was not so well adapted for a young lady. At fifteen years of age I knew nothing whatever of music, drawing or fancy-work, but then I was well acquainted with French and Italian, had mastered the rudiments of Latin and Greek, whilst many a tall, over-grown school-boy might have envied me the facility with which I could construe a difficult problem in Euclid. History, biography, were to us what the perusal of amusing tales is to other children, mere pastime; and more than once George and I bitterly deplored in melancholy conclave, the unfortunate accident of my sex, which would prevent me accompanying him to College, my father having hinted that he intended sending him there at a later period—and would keep me moping at home with Dorothy, instead of striving for the honours which I would have so fair a prospect of winning, if only afforded a chance in the race. As I grew older, this thought induced a certain discouragement, a conviction of the inutility to one of my sex of the abstruse masculine studies to which I was devoting my time and energies. My father at once perceived the change, and on sternly questioning me as to the cause, was frankly answered.

"Listen to me, Ada," he briefly and coldly said. "I have no dower to give—no inheritance to leave you. Accept then, all I have in my power to bestow. It will, at least, serve hereafter to render you independent."

"But, father!" I timidly remonstrated. "I know nothing whatever of music, which is, I believe, considered essential to a woman's education, nor of drawing."

"Nonsense, child!" he sharply interrupted. "You know that which is far more important. Any boarding-school chit can give a smattering of the accomplishments just mentioned, but you will not meet many women capable of imparting as thorough and complete an education as you will, hereafter, be able to do, if you only persevere in what you have so well commenced. Besides, as I cannot afford to send you to a boarding-school, you have no other resource."

After this, I returned more cheerfully to my usual studies, concentrating entirely on them the attention and care, which differently situated, I would probably have frittered away as many young girls of the age I was then, generally do, on dress, pleasure or frivolous reading. Greek roots, however, and mathematical problems, had not imparted to my nerves the degree of strength and masculine power they might possibly have done to my intellectual faculties, and I possessed as inveterate a terror of fire-arms, as great a dislike to fishing, boating or shooting pursuits, as any young Miss "finished" in the most genteel Ladies' Academy. In vain, my brother, who was passionately fond of all such pastimes, remonstrated, ridiculed and encouraged. My timidity, which was constitutional, inherited probably from my poor mother, was proof against every persuasion. I remember distinctly, even at this distant date, how, when he had sometimes succeeded in seducing me into the light little skill, which he had called by my name, the quailing of my heart as we went farther and farther from shore, and how a sudden ripple on the water, a curl of foam, or a brooding dark cloud overhead, would make me turn sick with terror, till George, moved to compassion by my pale agitated face, would turn back to shore, solacing his annoyance by muttering: "Tis certainly fortunate after all, Ada, that you are not a boy, for you would have been an awful mull, a miserable coward!"

"A disgrace to the sex, George," I would smilingly rejoin, as I stepped on land again. "Who knows though, that I may not possess a double share of moral courage to atone for the want of that physical bravery in which I am so lamentably deficient?" Whether I possessed and displayed at a later period, the quality thus lightly alluded to, my readers will judge for themselves; but that I had ample, terrible necessity for it, is, alas! beyond all doubt.

CHAPTER II.

One of the most unpleasant results of my unconquerable timidity was my being deprived of a considerable portion of my brother's society, which I would otherwise have enjoyed. Many of his leisure-hours were devoted to shooting, and as game abounded in the part of the country where we lived, the temptation to a youthful sportsman often proved irresistible.

It was sufficient for me to see him throw his game-bag over his shoulder or take up his fowling-piece; that instant I put down my hat or took off my shawl, deaf to all entreaties to accompany him. He might trip or stumble, I argued, and his gun go off by accident; or, in aiming at a plover or

partridge, the ball might glance towards myself; or, in short, I was a coward whose pusillanimity was incurable; and often after a futile discussion of the point, George would march off in stately wrath, declaring that for a girl who was so thoroughly at home in the classics, so well read in all the laws and phenomena of science, such cowardice was at once disgraceful and ridiculous. I have sometimes wondered since was there anything prophetic or instinctive in the shuddering aversion I always felt towards the long brown rifle, with its gleaming bore and delicate trigger, which George carried with such careless grace on his shoulder.

As my brother advanced in age, my father somewhat relaxed the severity of his domestic rule, at least in his case—George had always been the favourite—and when the usual routine of instruction and study was over, would permit him to be absent for hours at a time without questioning him in any manner. One day that he had been away for a considerable period, he and I were sitting alone after his return in the chamber adorned with a few old-fashioned maps and scantily-stored book-shelves, which we dignified by the name of study, and were both occupied with our tasks. On suddenly looking up I found that my companion, whom I had supposed deep in his Greek translation, was attentively regarding myself.

"Do you know, Ada, that you are growing very handsome?" he abruptly said. "I met Nellie Carr to-day, and though she looked as pretty and blooming as a rose, when I came to examine your face, I find she is not to be compared with you. Her features are small and regular enough, but she has not that refined intelligent look that you have."

Astonishment kept me mute for a moment. The gratuitous information that I was handsome—the first time I had heard or imagined such a thing, for Dorothy had but one standard of beauty, my blue-eyed golden-haired mother, whom I in no manner resembled, and she had always led me to infer by her lamentations over the latter circumstance that I was deficient in point of good looks—coupled with this familiar mention of an unknown female name, overwhelmed me with surprise.

"Pray, Ada, do not look so bewildered!" he laughingly remarked, the colour mounting, however, up through his fair skin to the very roots of his hair. "Nellie Carr is the daughter of that good-natured farmer, at whose place, on the outskirts of the wood, you and I stopped once last summer for a drink of milk, when tired out with our long dusty walk."

"But we saw no Nellie then, George?"

"No, she was in a neighbouring village with a childless aunt of hers who has almost brought her up. If you remember, though, we made the acquaintance of a little rosy-cheeked fellow, whom you took on your lap and wanted to coax walking with you for a half hour. I met this little youngster to-day, strawberrying in the wood, with a slight tall pretty sister as rosy-cheeked as himself, and there was a formal introduction, then a sociable chat, and finally a strawberry feast, eaten out of an earthenware bowl and a cracked soup plate. A couple of old mossy logs served for tables and seats, and you have no idea how delightful it all was."

I mused for a moment in silence over this piece of information, scarcely knowing whether to feel pleased or sorry. Remembering, reader, George and I were as inexperienced as two children, destitute of the worldly knowledge which the perusal of even a few novels of the day would have imparted.

"Well, what are you thinking of, Ada? Why don't you speak? Would you like to come with me to-morrow. She said they would be strawberrying again, and I will leave my gun at home?"

"I do not know what to say," I slowly rejoined, shaking my head. "In the first place papa, who has always kept us in such complete seclusion, would not like it, I feel assured; then she is of common parentage."

"Yes, but her waist and hands are as small as your own, and she had a prettier hat and dress on than you wear even on Sundays."

"That may be," I replied, still unconvinced, "but I feel certain she is not as well educated."

"Oh goodness! No," he returned, going off into a succession of ringing, merry laughs. "Such grammar! such pronunciation! why she doesn't know her own mother tongue, much less the different languages that you have at the tip of your tongue, as perfectly as your prayers. I may laugh now, and he wiped the mirthful tears from his eyes, "but I tell you it was no laughing matter when I was with her. Why I felt so much for her, I scarcely knew where to look, and at each new blunder or barbarism, used to colour up like a school-miss. You are right, Ada," he continued, becoming suddenly grave, "we must give up the strawberry feasts, for she would be no fitting companion for you."

"Nor for you either, George," was my prompt reply.

"I don't know that. You see our sex have wider privileges than yours, but, perhaps, you are right in that respect too. There is one point about her which I could not help admiring. She is as full of pluck and courage as you are wanting in both. I had left my gun standing against a tree at some little distance, when she chanced, in making preparations for our banquet, to approach it. Take care, it is loaded, I said. Instead of recoiling with a little feminine shriek or a terrified start, as, hem—I will not be personal, Ada, but will only say, as some young girls would have done, she coolly took it up, and before I could divine her intention, discharged both barrels in the air, apologetically remarking to me, brother Johnny might get near to it and do mischief. I always look after father's—she pronounced it father's—gun when I happen to be at home."

"And you are not afraid?" I enquired. Her laugh of mingled surprise and mirth was answer sufficient. She can row, spear as well as catch fish. Is it not too bad, Ada, that such a glorious girl should murder our fine old Saxon tongue as she does?"

"I will not say a word for or against her," I rejoined, "till I have seen her, though when that will be, I have no idea."

"Not later than next Sunday, for she told me that since her return home last month, she attends church in the village regularly, and occupies a seat, almost opposite our own. She acknowledged she had watched us both with great interest, these two last Sundays, we being the only quality (so she phrased it) apart from Doctor Jackson, his wife and old maiden sister, who attended there. She said she wondered much at the great plainness of your dress, and at your not wearing even a ribbon or a trinket about you. But there is eight o'clock striking, and I have not even commenced this senseless Greek ode."

To be continued.