

When he had bidden good-bye to the old lady and to faithful Susannah, whose heart had long been won by Jack's handsome face and sunny smile, Judith walked with him to the gate at the end of the lane, that ran the length of the orchard, from which it was divided by a hedge of lilac and guelder roses.

"If I have any time to spare in Montreal would you like me to go and see your sister?"

"See Dorothy! Oh Jack! would you? She would be so delighted; it was very good of you to think of it."

"Not at all; I shall be glad to meet your sister. And now, little one, what messages do you want to send to her; be quick, dear, I have not much time."

So Judy charged him with all sorts of loving messages to her sister, all of which he promised faithfully to deliver—though if he did, he must have been an unusually conscientious young man.

Then there was a last, lingering good-bye; when even cold-hearted Judith melted a little, and putting her arms around her lover's neck, said almost falteringly.

"Good-bye, dear Jack!"

And two or three days later a tall young man stood bare-headed on the deck of the good ship *Circassian*, straining his blue eyes to get a last look at the land in which he was leaving the girl he loved so dearly.

"God guard and bless you, my dear one!" when at last he turned away, and replaced his hat on his head.

Meantime, in rural Eastville, Judith Brown sang blithely as she fitted about the old farm house, trying hard to convince herself that she was ever so much happier, free from Jack's loving attentions.

## CHAPTER XI.

### LETTERS.

IT was in September that Jack Littleworth bade farewell to his betrothed and departed for England. It was now the month of March, and a dismal month it was this year. Old Sol suddenly hid his face behind masses of ugly gray clouds, and the wind moaned and howled dismally as it swept about the old farm house.

"Dear me! you are not going out this afternoon, Judy, are you?" exclaimed Mrs. Laurie, as she crouched, shivering over the fire, casting, as she spoke, a doubtful glance at the window, where the heavy rain drops were falling with a splash against the glass.

"Yes, I am going to the village," answered Judith, as she buttoned her glove.

"But it is raining."

"So I see," laughed the girl, lightly. "Don't you think I am well prepared for the weather?" she asked. "See, rubbers, mackintosh and umbrella; I cannot possibly get wet, you see."

"Where are you going?" asked the old lady.

"To the post-office; " a slow blush crept over the fair face; but Mrs. Lawrie was not quick to observe signs.

"Did you not get a letter from Dorothy this morning, and one from your brother yesterday? What more do you want? I suppose it is that young man in England," said she irritably; the cold did not agree with her, and the sight of Judy deliberately preparing to go out into the raw weather, made her feel unreasonably cross.

"Well, I do not exactly expect to find Mr. Littleworth at the post-office; but there may be a letter from him," answered the girl, with a demure smile. Then she drew the old lady's shawl closer around her, kissed her, and with a blithe "good-bye!" went out.

The past winter had seemed intolerably long and dreary to Judith. If few visitors came to the farm in summer, fewer still came in winter. To make matters worse, the Graham girls were away, and they were really the only friends Judy had in Eastville. It is true, one or two of her admirers from the village came occasionally, nothing daunted by the knowledge of her engagement to Mr. Littleworth; but they were not brilliant youths, and as Judy was no flirt she derived slight enjoyment from their visits or their clumsy attentions. Jack wrote to her regularly every week, and gradually she came to depend on these letters for her chief enjoyment and to look eagerly for them; though she carefully strove to convince herself that it was only because they were

such clever, amusing letters that she cared for them at all. The Squire, who had, after all, recovered from that severe illness in the autumn, was wintering in the south of France, accompanied by his wife and son. Jack spent most of his time paying flying visits to various parts of the country, returning at intervals to where his parents were staying. In his letters to Judith he described to her the scenery of the country and the habits of the people, and many were the anecdotes he told her of the French peasantry. They were certainly clever and amusing letters; and yet every line breathed the tenderest love for the girl to whom they were written.

And she? Was she still untouched by his devotion? Or had absence made her heart grow more tender toward the young lover, who, in that far away foreign country penned those loving letters to her? Had time healed that old wound? If the answer to all these questions is "yes," she never admitted as much to herself. Yet one fact remained. After the first month of Jack's absence she wrote not oftener than once a fortnight; but latterly—within the last six or seven weeks—there had been despatched from the little post-office at Eastville once a week, a dainty-looking little letter addressed to "J. Littleworth, Esq.," and bearing the name of a small town in the south of France.

"Letter for you, Miss Brown? Let me see. Ah! Yes—two. Disagreeable weather, very! Good afternoon."

Judith looked hastily at her letters as she turned away. One was edged deeply with black and was in Jack's handwriting.

"The Squire is dead. Poor Jack!" thought she, as she put the letter into her pocket to be read in the privacy of her own room at home. The other letter was directed in a clerly handwriting, which she guessed to be Clarence Thorpe's, though why he should write to her Judith could not imagine. On opening the letter, which she did before leaving the shelter of the post-office, she found that her surmise was correct. It was a brief note, and ran as follows:

Toronto, March 7th, 188—

Dear Miss Judith: Will you grant me the favor of a private interview at Bonny Dale on Friday afternoon next. I have an important communication to make to you concerning your sister, Miss Dorothy Brown.

I remain, yours truly,

CLARENCE THORPE.

What did it mean? She stared blankly at the sheet of note paper in her hand. What could Clarence Thorpe know about Dorothy? What could there possibly be to know? If there were anything wrong would not Reginald be more likely to know of it first, and be the one to tell her? Besides, had she not that very week received a bright, almost merry letter from her sister, saying that she expected to be in Toronto early in April or perhaps sooner, and would run up to Eastville and see Judy. So what could Mr. Thorpe mean? If it were that Dolly was ill, he surely would not be so mysterious about it. Judith puzzled herself with one conjecture and another as she trudged along that mile of wet road from the village to Bonnydale. Before leaving the post-office she had written and posted a card to Mr. Thorpe, saying that she would see him at the appointed time. Although she was not quite sure that he would get it, if he came on Friday, as he said, for this was Thursday.

So anxious and perturbed had Mr. Thorpe's letter rendered her, that it was not for some time after she reached home that she recollected Jack's letter lying neglected in the pocket of her waterproof. With a feeling of compunction she took it out and opened it. It was a very short letter, and a very sad one; for the Squire's death had occurred very suddenly, while Jack was away on one of his frequent excursions. He had been telegraphed for but arrived too late. The Squire had died with the name of his beloved son upon his lips; and poor Jack's grief was augmented by the keenest self-reproach for having left his father merely to gratify his own restless craving for action and change.

"As my mother is greatly broken down in health by her constant attendance upon my poor father, I cannot think of leaving her until I see her restored to something like her old self again. So my dear one, it will, in all probability be late in the autumn before I can be with you. But I am the more reconciled to this delay, since your precious letters, coming as they do now, every week, bid me hope, not only