

rule, but had it been severe, she would have bent to it all the same.

She pictured him sitting in his gloomy study when she was far away, with no brighter or more cheerful presence ever coming near him than Janet Scott, who had grown old and gray in his service; and sometimes Mrs. Mactavish, with her well-intentioned but utterly impracticable advice. Who would toast his bread on one side only, as he preferred it, every morning, and pour out his five cups of tea every evening, and place his slippers on the fender to warm, and do a hundred other little things which are nothing in themselves, and valueless when performed by hired hands, but more than words can express when they are the marked services of one whom we love?

She pictured him all alone in the old, high-backed pew, where she had sat upon his knee the first Sunday she had ever been to church. How long ago it seemed now. Would he climb the hills, follow the ferny windings of the burn, or gather early primroses in the woods when she was gone? Never, never! Without her, those lovely places would be no better than a dreary waste to him.

"Uncle Alan—Uncle Alan!" she cried aloud as she walked up and down the room in her misery; "forgive me if you can, but I must go—I cannot stay here! I must go away and sing to the crowds, who are waiting to hear me! You will be sad and lonely—oh, so lonely! But I shall come back some day, when I have had what Mrs. Mactavish would call 'my fling.' Yes, I must have 'my fling!'"

The absurdity of the expression struck her so forcibly, that she burst into a fit of hysterical laughter, which ended in long, silent weeping.

She commenced to pace the room once more. She could not rest. Her uncle would soon return; he never remained later than nine o'clock. How would he meet her?—what would he say?

Her heart beat wildly when at last she heard him open the outer door, and walk slowly along the passage and pause at the drawing-room door. She stood still and held her breath, straining her eyes upon the door; but it did not open, although she heard him touch the handle gently. The suspense lasted only an instant, yet it seemed an hour, and then she heard him turn, and walk away in the direction of his study. He had never done the like before, and it was as if he had stabbed her to the heart.

She took the lamp in her hand, and went upstairs to her own room, clinging heavily to the bannisters all the way, and flung herself upon the bed in an agony of despair.

"Uncle Alan is angry, and will not see me!" she moaned. "Why was I ever born?—why did I not die out in India, when I was a baby?"

All night long she wept and moaned piteously and lay on her bed and on the floor alternately, and made herself thoroughly ill and miserable.

For the first time in her life she now realized her loneliness, and with that knowledge came a great longing for the fair young mother lying in her far-off grave, whom till now she had never missed.

Had Stansmore been like other girls—the Mactavishes, for example—sensible and commonplace, ready and able to buffet with trouble and adversity, if it ever came—she would have been content to move on in the same groove all her days; but she had lived so much alone, and often in a dream-world of her own, which was suffused with a purple light, and peopled with fairy-like beings, so very different to the worthy inhabitants of St. Breeda, that going away seemed like landing all at once in the very midst of the glow and sheen.

She knew nothing of life except as a smooth, glassy lake, where each skill that sailed its waters bore youth and beauty on its prow; the dark, sin-stained side of humanity had always been hidden from her.

She was as unlike a modern young lady as that strange arrangement of tight garments, dishevelled locks, and pencilled eyebrows, is unlike her grandmother, of whose sweet, modest girlhood we get glimpses now and then which are like wafts of fragrance from an old-fashioned garden stocked with brier, lavender and marjoram.

Morning found her pale and spiritless, and afraid to see the professor. She arranged her tossed hair, and put on a fresh morning-dress, trying hard as she did so to brace herself for the dreaded interview.

She might have spared herself the alarm, for the professor had decided to say nothing to her until Mrs. Hunter had arrived.

He noted with pain her pale cheeks and weary eyes, but made no remark on them.

When he was starting for the college, he turned back, and mentioned, carelessly, almost as if it had been an after-thought, "Stannie, of course you remember Mrs. Henry Hunter?"

"Yes, uncle; not how she looks, you know, but I often write to her."

"She will probably be here to-morrow evening; that's all. Good-bye, dear!"

Mrs. Hunter coming to St. Breeda!

It was almost as good as if her own mother had been coming back from the world of spirits: was almost too good to be true. She would tell Mrs. Hunter everything, and that lady would understand and explain matters to her uncle as Mr. Graem could never do.

She went upstairs and set about preparing a room for her at once. She laid out the finest linen, and hung up the snowiest curtains,

brought ornaments from her own room, and nailed carved brackets on the walls; an arm-chair was abstracted from the parlour, then a foot-stool, next a little table, upon which she placed writing material enough to last an M.P.'s secretary for a year.

When she could devise no further improvement, she surveyed the effect lovingly, yet half-regretfully, because she could not make it more worthy the reception of her old, yet unknown friend.

Finally, she put on a hat, and strolled out into the garden, and sat down beneath the shadow of a hoary elm, under whose branches she had held many a dolls' tea-party not so very long ago, for all that she felt so ill and miserable now.

Mrs. Hunter was coming. Everything around her seemed to know it, and was brighter in consequence.

She sat with folded hands. She was not industrious at any time, and to-day was too excited for work.

"I shall hear what she says," thought Stannie. "If she tells me my duty is to remain with Uncle Alan, I will do it, and never say a word. But, oh! how long life will seem shut in amongst these dreary hills!"

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. HUNTER AND LOTTY ARRIVE.

"Dearest child, how are you? How tall you have grown! It's a shame that we have not seen you all these years!"

After kissing Stannie warmly, Mrs. Hunter held her at arm's length and gazed at her in modest admiration.

"This is Lotty, my second daughter."

An elegant girl, whom Stannie had not noticed in the bustle of the moment, here stepped forward and held out her hand.

"Will you give her a welcome? She has come uninvited," continued her mother. "Mr. Neil looked a little alarmed when he saw her at the station; but he says that you will forgive her for taking you by storm in this way."

"Please do," pleaded Lotty. "I was so anxious to see you, and to come to Scotland, that I persuaded mamma that she needed me to take care of her on the journey. She's too old to travel alone—so here I am, you see."

Mrs. Hunter laughed gaily. Her husband and children often teased her about growing old, but there was not a line on her smooth brow, nor a suspicion of silver amongst her brown hair. In the waning summer light she seemed almost as young as she had been fourteen years before, when she carried Stannie in her arms up the staircase of the Charing Cross Hotel.

"I am very glad that you have come," said Stannie. "It's delightful to get a surprise like this, and I never had a girl visitor before."

"How very extraordinary! I never heard of such a thing!" exclaimed Lotty. "Do visitors never come to this lovely place?"

"Oh, yes, lots. Professors, mostly—friends of Uncle Alan's. We never had ladies before."

"How charming to live in a university town in the Scotch Highlands—I am in the Highlands, am I not?—don't speak if I am wrong, and have only clever men to visit you! Mamma, isn't she to be envied? No tiresome girls to come visiting and bothering round. There's been such a set staying at Cumrie Chase—"

"Gently, Lotty!" said her mother. "You will frighten Stannie if you are so uncharitable. Mr. Neil, Lotty is the most troublesome of all my children, and if she is too much for you and Stannie to put up with, I'll send her home to-morrow."

"Your threats are thrown away, mamma dear. Mr. Neil will let me stay a year, if I like—I see it in his countenance—and so will Stannie. Such hair as you have! Is it all your own?"

"What do you mean?" inquired Stannie, staring in amazement.

"Do you take your back hair off at night? Heaps of girls do. And what actually grows on their heads they bleach and dye, and crimp and frizzle, until they look like lunatics; that's the proper thing now. Your hair is quite too lovely, but you dress it shockingly. You coil it high up. You should twist it into a little lump, like a potato, in the nape of your neck. I'll show you how to-morrow."

Stannie was about to defend her style of hair-dressing, when Janet Scott appeared, and announced that the ladies' rooms were both ready.

She and her assistant had been hastily putting a comfortably furnished but rarely used attic into order for Miss Lotty's occupation.

"I am afraid you will not like the attic," said Stannie, standing doubtfully in the doorway, as if uncertain whether to let her guest enter or not. "The roof slopes so. We never use this room except to keep apples in. If I had known that you were coming you should have had mine."

"Oh, Stannie, that's nonsense! The room is perfectly beautiful!"

"It is not beautiful," said the literal Stannie. "I think you had better have mine; the things can be easily changed."

But Lotty expressed herself charmed with the quaint little room and its sloping roof and dormer windows, and little white bed and old-fashioned toilet arrangements.

"It's all lovely," she insisted,—"so Scotch-

like. I am so pleased to be in Scotland, that I should be in ecstasies if you put me into the barn. Are you better?" she asked, suddenly, and, standing still, surveyed Stannie critically from head to foot. "You certainly look well enough, and you are the prettiest girl I have ever seen. What's up with you?"

"I am very well. I am never ill."

"What a constitution you must have! Are you in love, then?"

"No. Why do you ask such strange questions? I do not understand you."

"In the name of all that's wonderful, what is wrong with you, Stannie Ross?"

"Nothing," answered Stannie, fairly bewildered by the persistence of her fair questioner.

"Why do you think I am ill?"

"Mr. Neil wrote to mamma, and asked her to come at once, as you were in trouble. So we started off at a tangent, expecting to find you ill, or dead, or gone off with the baker's boy. And you are neither ill nor dead, and you haven't gone off with the baker's boy—for here you are! Mamma could scarcely control her voice at the station to ask Mr. Neil how you were. She feared the worst, you know. When he blandly replied that you were very well, you might have knocked her down with a scent-bottle. What does it all mean?"

She saw and understood it in a second—her uncle's silence and Mrs. Hunter's sudden arrival, which had puzzled her not a little; they were both to sit in judgment on her.

"They will never let me go—never!" was the thought that came flashing into her mind; and sinking down upon the floor she laid her head upon a chair and began to sob violently.

Lotty was on her knees beside her in an instant, every trace of her flippant manner gone, and genuine sympathy showing in every line of her pretty face.

"Forgive me. I should not have spoken so; I did not mean to hurt you. You are in trouble of some kind, I know; but mamma will put it all right—she puts everything right. There's no one like her in that way. Can you tell me about it, or would you rather not?"

"You are very kind, Lotty; but I would rather speak to her first. I am unhappy about something, that's all—very unhappy."

"I understand, dear. Mamma will help you. There are six of us at home, and we have no secrets from her; I often think she is more like a wise elder sister than a mother, she has so much sympathy with all our little worries. You can't possibly have done anything wrong, so forget all about it, and help me to unpack my box. I must put on a pretty dress to captivate the whole establishment."

"You have done that already," said Stannie, laughing through her tears. "Are your sisters like you at all?"

"Alice, the eldest one, is a beauty; modesty consequently forbids me to draw comparisons; besides, our juvenile copies distinctly state that they are 'odious.' And there's nothing 'odious' about me, is there?"

"Nothing," said Stannie, simply. "You are unlike the girls here, but no one could ever call you odious."

"What are the young women in St. Breeda like—like you?"

"Not very. The Mactavishes are the belles. They are tall, and have red hair and freckles; but they look very nice when they are dressed up a little."

"Belles with red hair and freckles! They must be divine! I long to embrace them! How soon may I have a chance?"

"Very soon. I'll invite them to tea one evening."

"Charming 'aesthetic' tea! Ann we'll drink it out of blue cups without handles; they are bothersome things, for if the tea is hot you are apt to burn your fingers, or else drop the cup. Are there any Mactavish brothers?"

"Yes, but not at home; they are all away in Edinburgh and Glasgow. I am afraid we haven't got that kind of tea in St. Breeda, and our cups are white and gilt, with handles," said Stannie, apologetically, wondering at the same time if she could write or telegraph in time to Glasgow for a box of "aesthetic tea," which she never doubted was the produce of some rare and expensive growth.

"You are really too amusing," said Lotty, withdrawing her head from the depths of her Imperial trunk, where she had been fishing for odds and ends of finery. You will tell me next that you don't know what high art is. It's not the tea itself that's aesthetic—it's often very bad, wishy-washy stuff—it's the indescribable state of feeling you get yourself into when you drink it, and the way you talk and go on. I can't describe it very well. Alice and Gordon are our two home aesthetes. Gordon wears his hair long behind, but cut in the front so that it falls over his forehead; and Alice wears hers like Tonsel—he's our Skye terrier. She dresses in peacock blue cashmeres, made so tight that they sometimes split when she sits down in a hurry; she couldn't even run or jump a ditch if fifteen bulls of Bashan were pursuing her; and she wears sandals—that's supposed to be intensely 'Greek.'"

"Are they pretty?"

"Not very; and they are very unadhesive articles—at least, hers are. Gordon is sorrow-stricken because he can't dress in the Greek style—togas, or sheets, or something queer. He is an artist; but his art is so very 'advanced' that you can't tell what his pictures are about; his animals look like rocks, or trunks of trees, and his roses in the distance are just like radishes. I often wonder, if he were to paint

radishes, if they would look like roses! He painted mamma once, wrapped up in a white shawl, with a white something on her head; she is looking half round, in a manner which suggests a crick in her neck. Everyone mistakes her for Lot's wife."

"How disappointed he must be!"

"Not a bit. It's considered one of his best—one of the pictures of the future. In fact, we are a remarkable family—at least, we think so ourselves. Mamma has a theory that if a boy or a girl has a talent in their anatomy it should be cultivated to the utmost. As we haven't a talent amongst us, we have to make believe a good deal. It's such fun. Gordon being the eldest, will have the Chase a hundred and one years hence—not an instant sooner, I hope. So he can afford to amuse himself with paints. It's good for the colour-man. Alice writes poetry—'aesthetic poetry,' you know. It's 'quite too touching,' our young lady visitors say when she reads it to them at aesthetic tea. Bill, my second brother, calls it 'rot,' but he is decidedly commonplace in his ways and manners, and believes in antediluvians like Shakespeare and Milton."

"What is Bill going to be?" asked Stannie.

"Something scientific; I can't tell you more. Scientific men have always been a mystery to me. They rush about the globe, and look into caves and holes, and form excursions—no, no; expeditions, I mean—to Patagonia and the Poles, and come back, and give lectures, and blow up the house now and then with chemicals."

"You have three brothers, I think?"

"Yes; there's Tom—to my mind the pearl of the family. He is young—only fourteen!"

"Has he decided tastes in any way?"

"Very! He is, for his age, the best cricketer and oarsman in the county. He can climb a tree as well as I did myself before I grew up, and took to tight dresses. He is a rare one to spin a yarn, and eats a whole pot of cherry jam at a sitting."

"I think I do like him the best," said Stannie, smiling at the list of accomplishments.

"I don't know about that," said Lotty, slowly.

She was busy over a bunch of roses which had been thrust into a mug, bearing the pathetic inscription, "For a good boy," and placed upon her toilet-table with the design of imparting an air of elegance to the latter.

It had occurred to her that the more fitting place might be in the bosom of her gray silk dress.

"I don't know," she repeated, trying the effect of two splendid Malmaisons against the lace ruffles at her throat. "Gordon isn't half a bad fellow, although he is aesthetic, and adores blue china; and Bill is the reverse of a muff; but Tom is my pet. I should like him to be a bishop, but he prefers a red coat to a black. 'My brother, the General,' won't be bad; but 'My brother, the Bishop,' would have such an awe-inspiring sound!"

"Is he very religious, that you wish him to be a bishop?" asked the innocent-minded Stannie.

"Well, no, not very—not at all, I am afraid; but a bishop's legs are so lovely!"

"Oh!" murmured Stannie, at a loss for a more suitable expression.

"You should see our bishop's at home, when he comes to a heavy feed."

"To a what, Lotty?"

"A state dinner party. Oh, those dinners, they are awful in their solemnity! The amount of eating that's gone through is appalling. No one speaks much; it's an important ceremony, going through all the courses till you come to the dessert, then they begin to talk. But I was going to tell you of our bishop's legs. He puts on his best silk stockings on such occasions, and they look so nice. His calves are real ones. When I was eight years old I was convinced that they were sawdust, like my doll's, and I was determined to make sure. So one day, when I knew that he was coming to dinner, I abstracted a long pin with a black head from mamma's dressing-table, and laid my plans. We used to be served up in white dresses (Alice and I) with the puddings in those days. When I saw that his reverence was sitting with his back to the fire—he was eating greengage tart, I remember I got up a shivering fit, and was allowed to sit on a footstool just behind him. That was my chance; so I drove the pin firmly in at the thickest part. The effect was magical. He sprang up like a Jack-in-the-box, and shrieked like a hyena. I was so frightened at what I had done, that I bounded under the table, and lay trembling there until papa dragged me out."

"How painful for the poor bishop! Who took out the pin?"

"Alice did. She was in the secret; and it was all she could do to make honourable amends. There was an awful hubbub, and I confessed and explained with many tears. Everybody laughed except the bishop, who really couldn't for the pain; but he forgave me, and said that my thirst for knowledge did me credit, only not to experiment on his 'limbs' again. A bishop couldn't say legs; it would be improper. Tom wears knickerbockers, and his legs are perfection; two cabbage stalks with the inside taken out would do for a general's supporters—no one ever sees them. Isn't it disappointing?"

"Very!" said Stannie, not knowing if the young lady was in jest or earnest.

(To be continued.)