

One morning, just when the first frosts had nipped the dahlias in the night, the shutters of the little shop in the High Street remained up, and Garrow Down knew that the struggle was over. The big store across the way was displaying its fresh autumn stock behind its fine plate-glass windows; it started in on a record at the poor little blindfold shop it had so mercilessly snuffled out.

"Poor Miss Marston—she did her best!" was the pitying comment. "But what else could she expect? One must buy in the best shops, and really Blockbuster offers such variety, and so cheap."

The inevitable had happened—it was only an everyday occurrence—the march of progress had trodden; Agnes Marston understood.

She paid her creditors in full, though it swallowed almost all her capital, and she put so brave a face upon it that a rumor began to gain ground, chiefly through Miss Harding, that it might be, after all, a voluntary retirement from business.

"Failed! Don't you believe it!" said Miss Charity, with tender mendacity. "Tired of the fog, that's all. And no wonder. What's the good of worrying when she has nobody but herself to keep?"

Agnes Marston let it go at that. Later on they would know the truth, but meantime it was something to be saved their pity.

She sat in the window of the parlor behind the closed and darkened shops face to face with the shadows of an uncertain future. The nipped dahlias hung their heads in the frosty mist; the petals of the last pink rose lay shrivelled on the gravel. What was she to do? she asked herself. She had cleared herself of debt, but what was left? The old-fashioned furniture would not fetch much. She was not an old woman yet, but was she young enough to find fresh work now that there were so many in the field? Her Bible lay open on the table in front of her; the capable, nervous hands that had been so swift to duty were folded in her lap. It was too dark to read, and candlelight must be economised. She had been reading again the words that had given her their message of uplifting that Sunday afternoon that seemed so long ago but they failed to comfort her now.

"Weeping? Rejoicing?" Ah, there had always been more of tears than joy in her life! And the shadows were gathering, gathering. What was to become of her? She wrung her hands in vain protest against Fate.

A sudden summons at the door startled her unstrung nerves. She waited till it came again. Then, half-fearfully, like one who dreads another blow and can hope for no good news, she went along the passage and unbarred the door.

Two figures stood between her and the grey gloom of the street.

"Miss Marston, don't you know me?" asked a clear young voice.

Two blue eyes looked into hers, and then she knew.

"Harry! My boy! You have come home!" she cried. She grasped his hands in hers, drawing him into the parlor.

"You have come home!" she said again.

"Yes," he answered, "I have come home. Do you remember that Sunday afternoon when you told us the story of the Prodigal Son? Well, I had made up my mind to bolt. That was why I listened. But I meant to make a better thing of it than the Prodigal did. I didn't mean that you should be ashamed of your scholar. Yes, I know poor father is dead; I found a stranger in our cottage. Father never believed in me much, but I wish I had been able to show him he was wrong. I did not come to the hanks out there, and I think it must have been your prayers and your faith in me that saved me. I found a friend who gave me a helping

hand, and whatever I am I owe to God and you and him. Those Sunday School lessons of yours stuck in my mind; I didn't seem to heed them much at the time, but they kept me out of mischief. I thought some day I might see you again, and I couldn't think of facing you if I had forgotten what you taught me. I'm not good at talking, but it would have been right down mean to let you have all your work for nothing, and I couldn't, that's all."

Tears rushed to Agnes Marston's eyes, but this time they were tears of joy.

"Thank God!" she said. "The message is true. I sowed the seed in tears, but the harvest is with rejoicing."

Then, in courteous compunction, she turned to the silent figure in the background.

"Your friend?" she asked. "This is he? Will you make me known to—"

The other stepped forward into the twilight of the window. What she saw

he's a rare hand with animals. Well, we used to chat together at nights, and he told me of his Sunday School teacher, and the last lesson she had taught him. That's how I found out you weren't married, Aggie, and that's why I am here."

"Married!" she echoed. "Who told you I was married?"

"Well, your aunt wrote me you were going to marry Rounce, the schoolmaster, and I wasn't to worry you with letters, for you had quite given me up. I believed it, for you never answered my letters; but I never forgot the girl I loved. I reckon now it was all a mistake; I got the wrong end of the story somehow."

The flush of youth came back to Agnes Marston's face.

"Yes," she said, "it was all a mistake. Never mind how it happened."

"Then I guess the tangle has got sorted out through the meeting of Harry and me. I shouldn't wonder but your prayers brought us together. You will marry me, Aggie, and Harry and you



JUST BOYS; BUT BOYS GROW INTO MEN!

was a sunbrowned face and frosted hair and blue eyes looking into hers as they had looked long ago under the autumnal stars. As in a dream, she saw again the moon on the ripe sheaves, and around her were the scents from the apple orchards.

"Aggie!" he said, using again the old, tender name.

And at the sound of his voice Agnes Marston knew that life still held gladness.

"It was strange how Harry and I met," he told her later, as they sat at tea. "It was almost as if some bonds of love from the homeland had drawn us together. Do you know this lad is a hero, Aggie? He saved my life in a flood in one of the rivers at the risk of his own. I was crossing the river at Jackson's Creek, and my horse stumbled and sank, falling on top of me. He dragged us both out, and we were friends after that. I saw he had grit in him, and I took him on my ranch. Life was to stoke for him here. Shipbuilding is not in his line, but

and I will go out West together. You will make home for us, and help us along on the upward journey."

Miss Charity Harding's news lent that good soul wings. Before long it was known throughout Carrow Down that John Ransom, Agnes Marston's lover, had come home, and that the link that had drawn them together was the lad she had called her incorrigible.—In *Sunday Companion*.

"The trees are standing, straight and bold,  
Striped for their wrestle with the cold;  
The clouds are scudding, torn and gray,  
The restless birds have flown away.  
The storm-tossed Soul hath cast aside  
The vestments of her summer pride,  
Come snow and ice! Come, shrieking blast!  
The Soul, deep-rooted, standeth fast,  
And bears, thro' winter's luffeting,  
The secret promise of the spring."