

III.

Ten years had passed away, and again the April blossoms had replaced the Canadian snows. The honeysuckle was climbing once more over the porch of the stone-house, and the leaves were fast sprouting on the trees. Mary Leonard was all absorbed by one thought: Her father lay dying, there was no priest nearer than the neighboring town, she dared not go so far, leaving the sick man alone. Besides, he had repulsed her so sternly when she touched upon the subject, and had broken forth into so savage threats, that she was fairly terrified. The picture of the Sacred Heart had been brought with its little red light, and hung in view of the bed. Before it stood the vase of spring flowers. It seemed to have an extraordinary fascination for Leonard. Even in his ravings he talked disconnectedly about it. A doctor came once, and pronounced, carelessly, that the patient might live a month or two, but that his case was hopeless. He gave his instructions, and departed. Mary was left alone.

The dusk of an April evening was closing in, and recalling to Mary that other twilight, when, reading her schoolmate's letter, she had resolved to hang up the picture of the Sacred Heart. She sat now overwhelmed by the thought that her father might pass into that terrible unseen world, unshriven, unprepared. Oh, if she could but get a priest! If only one were near. A sound of wheels and of voices aroused her from her reverie, then a knocking at the door. Mary threw it open, and found herself confronted by the stranger of long ago. For some time after his visit he had sent them occasional tokens of friendly remembrance, then there had been silence. Mary recognized him at once.

To her wonder, he wore a distinctly clerical dress.