

had whispered courage; the mountains abiding faith, and no matter where she would go when the time came for her to take her departure, she would never entirely shake off the influence of these days when her soul had been stripped naked, and she stood face to face with natural truths.

They walked back in silence. They had progressed in friendship far beyond the stage when words were necessary to mutual understanding.

And the next morning, when the sun climbed to the top of the hill and peeped over into their part of the world, Loring's son was born.

X.

A month later she received a long letter from Miriam. Frances's engagement was broken, and the child pined to get away from her fellow creatures. Would Loring take her? Loring sent back a cordial invitation, and Frances came to the "top of the world," as she afterward described Woodsmere. The girl was as colorless as a lily, her dark eyes were tragic with trouble; her exquisite mouth drooped piteously, and her abundant dark hair framed a face stamped with youth's first great sorrow.

Anne Worth met her at the station.

"And Cousin Loring and the baby? Oh, Miss Worth, isn't it wonderful that this joy should come into her life when she needs it most? I never knew Cousin Percy well, but she seems to have grieved so for his death." And Frances's eyes filled with tears. She was remembering her own sorrow.

"I guess Mrs. Bryce is finding the comfort she needs in her son."

"Is he pretty? Does he look like her? Cousin Percy was pasty-faced and he had light eyebrows."

"He is a handsome child; but babies change from day to day, and just now he looks like any other healthy youngster of his age." Anne was noncommittal. Royal Bryce certainly did not resemble the description of his father.

Dr. Hoffman came out to bid the young stranger welcome. He had gained noticeably that spring; a fine color tinted his thin cheeks, and he held his head erect. Frances gazed at him with awe. This was the great surgeon who had been forced out of the arena while still a man in his prime! But at his first words of simple friendliness she lost her fear, and he sent her on her way feeling that she had made a friend.

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Loring stood on the threshold, holding out her arms. With a sob Frances hid her face on her cousin's shoulder.

"Cousin Loring, you are good to have me. I am so wretched, so unhappy!" she cried.

"Hush, darling; no one is unhappy here for long; there is something in the air that heals sorrow as well as sickness. Now come and see my boy!" She led the way indoors to the cradle where the child lay. Frances bent over him, and he started up at her with great, solemn eyes. She dropped on her knees beside the wooden cot.

"Oh, you blessed, blessed baby! Isn't he a darling!" she cried rapturously.

"We think he is; and he is such a good baby." Loring's pride rang in her voice.

"Now, I'll show you to your room, and you can make yourself comfortable. You won't find any luxuries, dear—perhaps you'll think you even lack necessities; but we learn to do without when we must. I added these two rooms myself; one is the day nursery, the other the guest chamber."

She threw open a door leading from the living room and ushered Frances into a small, square chamber. The walls were covered with a gaily patterned chintz; fish-net curtains hung at the wide window; the dressing table and tall chest of drawers, of native manufacture were painted white; the chairs had chintz cushions and the bedspread matched the hangings. Everything was roughly made, but the place had a homelike air that brought a lump to the girl's throat.

"Do you like it? Anne and I did it all." Loring gave Frances a chance to regain her self-control.

"I'm afraid I've given you a lot of trouble."

"It has been such fun. No one is allowed to be idle here. You shall choose tomorrow just what you want to do, but you won't be allowed to sit in your room and think," Loring said; and she kept her word.

Frances, who had been brought up to play the indolent role of a beauty, learned to sweep and dust, to lay the table and to clean the silver; but her fondness for outdoors led Loring to put her in charge of the kitchen garden, and there she displayed real talent. Her delight in the growing greens was almost child-like, and she tended the young shoots with solicitous care. When they finally began to bear, she waxed enthusiastic.

"I shall never be able to eat a tomato;

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