

"From pride, I think," she returned gently. "Many do not like, do not believe in becoming as a little child. You know how trusting one such is, how sweetly dependant, because sure of the care surrounding its young life; how spontaneously love answers love and 'Except ye become as this little child'—you remember who said it, and how. Man says it is too hard a saying, and in asserting his manhood loves his birthright."

Brandon made no answer. Going up to Violet, he said "I want you just one moment," and unresistingly she took his offered hand and went with him.

"O Auntie! O Auntie!" sobbed Beatrice, throwing her arms around her neck, "Do you not think it would come right in the end? I am so miserable to see how unhappy Violet is. Comfort her, Auntie, and let her lead Brandon. I feel sure she is afraid she might turn him aside altogether."

"That is one of the subtle arguments Beatrice ever urged in the doing of wrong, *that good may come*. My child, my child. I feel you all think me too severe, but when either of you as children so often craved for what was certain injury, was the refusal to heed the cry a proof of a want of love? Was it not the sure testimony how precious you were? Not the less so is it now. Violet must either decide one way or other," said the decisive Miss Barbara; no good comes of dilly-dallying. Fitzroy will be far on in the race, while Brandon is looking out for a starting point. Pity she had not chosen otherwise," she muttered, but not loud enough to be heard.

"Oh, Barbara, when I look on Violet and see the longing to find assurance that to follow the craving of her heart might be justifiable, I fear for her. It ever seems to me the most terrible of calamities possible to befall human nature to have that really come to pass. *'He gave them their desire, but sent leanness into their souls.'*"

"Mary, not another word," said her sister. "You have spoken as you believe in the course of right, and now to bed you go. If you do not suffer for this excitement it will be a matter for surprise."

"I hope not," said Mr. Ralph Brandon who had entered unobserved.

"Mary, do you not think you may be stretching a point too far? I honour your adherence to what you believe right. But do you consider adherence there should be the same veto upon a young man such as Brandon, as upon one whose habits preclude a thought respecting him? Were he guilty of breaking any moral law or society's rules, never would I give my child to his keeping."

"Ralph dear friend," said Miss Fitzroy raising herself with painful effort, and looking at him with tender pathetic pleading. "What say you. The Father of all says: 'Give me thy heart.' Violet has obeyed the call. Has Brandon?"

"But, my dear Mary, think you such as he need such as she. Let Violet keep her hold on the helm, with her help she may turn him in any direction."

"She is but mortal, Ralph. *Ought she to run the risk of losing her hold?* Love of the creature becomes a fatal anodyne in the hands of the enemy of souls. What if Brandon leads and she follows? *She is but mortal.*"

"True, true," returned the old man gravely. "Mary, we must leave it. I cannot believe harm will come to Violet's child," he added in a low tone.

"I pray not. Ralph, I am sorry to have said anything contrary to your wishes, but her mother left me to be in her place, and the child is dear as if my own."

"Need you say that?" he asked, quickly. "I know it is from love you have spoken. But go to bed, I see Barbara is getting impatient and will not restrain herself much longer." Then turning to that lady, asked if he should stay till she came down, to vent it upon him.

"Well, unless I do entertain you in some way you run a chance of being compelled to do it for yourself, as Noel with Beatrice seem lost to any interest outside themselves."

"Aunt Barbara," exclaimed the latter, with a crimson cheek, "Noel and I were not going to leave Uncle Ralph to himself, so—"

"Make haste back," interrupted that gentleman, nodding to Miss Barbara, with a hearty laugh, "and release them from duty. Now, to begin it," he said, taking Beatrice on his knee, "give me a kiss, young lady. Only one, only one," he said, laughing. Now, Noel, he added, turning to him, "you are too big to get on the other, but you can come this side, and for once, while we have a chat, can spare this little minikin to Uncle Ralph."

The motherly element to be found in every true womanly nature was strong in that of Violet. There was a tender yearning over Brandon, and there seemed a greater need for some protecting care to be ever thrown around him, and for one to hesitate when a stern conscience says, "This is the way, walk ye in it," is to choose the one inclination leans towards, and cheat oneself into the belief that it is after all the one chosen for you.

Upon leaving the room Brandon put his arm round her defiantly, hurrying her to one across the hall; almost before closing the door, he said, "Violet, you have heard all auntie has urged; you know I love her as I have since a boy, but I want you to overcome prejudice. She, dear sufferer, has nothing to rouse her from. You have been surrounded by her influence so long that you really know nothing of other lives, and will narrow your thoughts so completely as to lose your individuality. You are becoming as morbidly sick of soul, by continually keeping your hand on your spiritual pulse, as one is who does this physically. See how cruelly this is making you serve me. My darling, do not be shocked, but instead of drawing me towards what you want it makes me almost hate the thought of it, for if I have to give you up, never will I look on your face again, but become, like one of your Bible heroes, a fugitive on the face of the earth, and may be," he added, bitterly—"a vagabond."

"Brandon! Brandon!" she said, reproachfully, trying to draw herself from the painful pressure of his strong grasp. "Let us wait awhile. Because there is no open acknowledgement of a tie between us, need you resort to such measures? It is you who are cruel," she added, with quivering lips.

"Violet, I am not one of your cool, smooth sort; with me, is to be all or nothing. I must have you for my own, or go away. As for this division, ask yourself are you wise to let me go forth a hard, embittered man, when a word from you would give you the love no woman ever had before, and make me a willing sharer of your every aspirations. My wee one once, you will with

more general thought be less exacting. When I go to the rector and see the same profession, without the terrible exaction some require, then look around and see hosts of people living lives of, to themselves unquestioning certainty as to their way being right, it amounts, to my mind, to a constitutional state of feeling in every one, and I love you the more for your pretty Puritan ways, and depend upon it, once you belong to me, I shall never rest till I outstrip you."

"O Brandon," she exclaimed with a great crimson spot on each cheek, and tightly pressing her hands to still the heart's tempest, "I must think over it."

Brandon saw how spent she was in the conflict, and knew her power of resistance becoming less and less strong, and determined she should not leave that room till she might do so—not to think over what to do, but to face her future as belonging to him. With a tenderness of manner he shared with Noel, he drew her beside him and pleaded till he won. "My wife at last," he whispered. "Have you a fear about my making you happy?" he asked exultingly.

There was not the same fearless assurance mingling with the love in her eyes as she gave the answer as there had been in those of Beatrice when that question had been asked of her by Noel, but she gave herself up to that wondrous, nameless, thrilling happiness, only known to those who take their walk in Eden's garden. Ah! if only mankind's foe might not disturb its sweetness; but so it is, the serpents trail follows every son and daughter of that first pair, as surely as it did them. It needed but a look at Brandon's face, as he returned some hour afterwards to the anxious hearts awaiting what his conference with Violet would result in, to know he had been successful.

"I am so happy," he cried triumphantly, "you might any of you ask what you liked. I could not refuse. I declare I would be a parson, Noel, if that would convince you I am not quite unregenerate, though you say business is my idol."

"Your father does enough mischief in that line without you being asked to do more," said Miss Barbara, "and conquerors in the first flush of victory are apt to promise more than they would perform when the fever has worn off. But come here, boy, I suppose I must give you a kiss. Mind, I do not alter my opinion that you might be a better helpmate as a husband."

"I really think I am right, Auntie," said Violet next day when she tearfully knelt beside her with a yearning to have her conviction a fact. "You will see Brandon no longer questions, he needs but a helping hand, and I must have you join in our happiness."

"Nothing will keep me from rejoicing with those I love," she answered so tenderly as she held the young girl in her loving arms. "Hear one word, my child, the only one I will say about this again. You must now be more than ever watchful to keep your armour bright. You *have chosen the battle field*, and must not droop because of incessant warfare. Ever remember it is your own deliberate choice, and when pressed in the fight forbear to murmur."

From that moment Miss Fitzroy never by look or word evinced other than the liveliest interest in the preparations for the wedding. Her painful duty over, she felt her mission henceforth was to stimulate to right doing—*To help keeping the armour from tarnishing.*

"Are you girls deciding to make the milliner the most important personage at your wedding?"

There was no questioning from whom the inquiry came. The same group had just come from lecture which had had a divided attention, and were now gathered round Beatrice and Violet like bees round a hive.

"Miss Barbara, now really do you think one ought to outrage the common usages of society at weddings?" asked one from the group remonstratingly.

"I do not exempt weddings from being governed by common sense whether the usages of society permit it in their actions or not," was the prompt reply.

"Aunt Barbara," laughed Violet, "we have—that is, Beatrice and I—come to the conclusion not to allow society to dictate as to how we shall be married, and have horrified these young ladies by telling them we both think marriage too solemn a thing to make dress and entertaining the chief object."

"As indeed it is," said Barbara, "and instead of the customary display, the bond would have a deeper meaning if freed from the overwhelming array brought to bear upon it. Whatever party-giving may be necessary for innocent recreation, to my way of thinking it is not the time for it then. That tie is best bound in simple surroundings and with few on-lookers."

"Why, Miss Barbara, you would sweep away half the events of life people take most interest in."

"I am only speaking my own thoughts, Ellen, on the subject, not legislating for the world, and I say the show and display now so general, the indecent rivalry of one bride out-doing the other with her fabulous laces and all the rest of it, is more like a well got up act in a drama than the solemn plighting of two lives for weal or woe. I have seen weddings high and low, but shall ever remember one in its rich simplicity, its quiet unostentatious display—that of a sweet, gentle looking Quakeress. Nothing ever touched me so much as that quaint simple service. Since then I never stood in the throng of a fashionable wedding without contrasting it unfavourably with the one at the old meeting-house."

"Miss Barbara would turn the world upside down had she her own way," said one, as that lady left them to finish their debate on the subject, "and you and Beatrice are just as bad."

"I do not mean to care a bit what you say," replied Beatrice laughing. "Violet and I have settled to be married in the chapel —" A perfect babel prevented the hearing of another word.

"Violet! Beatrice! You are joking. Married in that old dismal den. You must be crazy!" and when these exclamations subsided a little, Beatrice went on quite unmoved.

"Wait and see, then say if we have not decided well. We are counting upon your assistance, and if you will give it, as we want no hired work where flowers have to be arranged, you will see how the miserable old den, as you so politely call it, looks. I love that chapel; from childhood Violet and I used to play going to church in it, and I do believe if I had to go before a crowded