

Our Story.

BARBARA STREET.

A FAMILY STORY OF TO-DAY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "OUR NELL," "A SAILOR'S DAUGHTER," ETC.

CHAPTER XXXI. (Continued)

WHAT commonplace speech we use at tragic moments! At such times the lips only can speak. The soul is dumb; it has no words which can give expression to its experiences. These two girls, who had never looked on the face of death, and who felt themselves seized by a sudden mighty awe which swept the soul clear of all trivial emotion, spoke to each other with the ordinary speech of an ordinary moment.

Hester dressed hastily. She found the time was after two o'clock. Two o'clock was the hour at which Waterhouse was to relieve Grace in the sick-room. Grace had had no need of help during her vigil. Her father had lain still in the same kind of stupor, which appeared to be growing heavier. Grace was more absorbed. In her own troubled thoughts than in her father's condition, which to her inexperienced eyes presented nothing alarming, while her own situation grew to her realization more and more. Her feelings were thoroughly confused. She told herself that it had been a fatal weakness not at once to have corrected the mistake her words had given rise to, yet knew that she had not dared to do it for fear of betraying Hester. At one moment she recognized the necessity of undeceiving Mr. Denston, at others she shrank from it as a thing utterly beyond her power. There was an absolute horror in the thought of denying this possible compensation to the man whose life had been wrecked by her father. There was a temptation peculiarly enticing to her proud spirit in the chance afforded her of making so desperate a sacrifice. There was in her heart all a woman's instinct to fight against it. Mr. Denston's feelings towards her did not excite the same angry resistance that Waterhouse's had done. Was this due to the difference in the situation of the two men—to the fact that Waterhouse was easy and prosperous and might experience disappointment with some profit to himself, while Denston was pressed down by the heavy hands of poverty and ill-health, and needed no further crushing? Or was it that there existed deep down in her spirit an unrecognized difference in its attitude towards the two men—a need of a barricade against one, and a calm certainty of indifference towards the other? Who can make clear the subtleties of a woman's heart? Grace sat down by her father's side and dreaded the day to come—the day which must bring with it again the need for a choice of action. At two o'clock, punctually to the moment, Mr. Waterhouse tapped at the door and entered. Grace, with some slight remark, was proceeding to take her departure, when Waterhouse's look arrested her.

"Miss Norris," he said, "don't go for a moment." He took up a light, and went close to the bedside, examining her father gravely. Then he looked at Grace.

"I think you must fetch your mother."

"What do you mean?" asked Grace, feeling herself turn cold.

"Don't you know what this look means? I do, for I saw it on my father."

Grace came nearer, and looked.

"Are you sure?" she whispered.

"Quite sure."

"That it will be soon?"

"It may be soon."

"How can I tell my mother?"

Grace turned a white face, from which her great startled eyes looked up at Waterhouse with a kind of beseeching. He looked down into them with a wishfulness to give comfort in his face, which was in itself comforting.

"Don't tell her," he said; "just ask her to come down here. She will see for herself, and that will be best."

So Grace ran up-stairs, and gave one tap at the door, and a word of summons, and then fled down again in haste, lest she should be recalled.

"Can we do nothing?" she asked Mr. Waterhouse; "mustn't we send for Dr. Black? He could not have thought this morning that he was likely to go so soon."

Waterhouse shook his head.

"He could do nothing. The doctor can only go with a man so far, and no further. No one can help him beyond a certain point, and your father has reached that point."

"Except one," said Grace, who, with a solemn face, stood gazing at him who was already far off earthly help, in the unseen hands of God.

Waterhouse said, "That is true," in a tone of simple earnestness. His thoughts were with his own father just now, whom he had loved, and whom, not long before, he had seen depart on this last journey; and tears dimmed his eyes. Grace at that moment felt his presence no restraint. It was not, till afterwards that she recognized, with surprise, that it had been so, and that, at a time when there was no room for self-consciousness, it had seemed as natural that he should be there, and that he should help, as if he had been a son and a brother.

"I am thankful my mother has had a rest before this came," she said; "but I fear she will regret that she left him."

As she finished speaking, her mother appeared—understood with one swift glance, and, with a calmness and silence full of passion, passed to her husband's side.

"He has not spoken since you left, mother," said Grace, anxious to forestall her mother's self-reproaches.

Her mother did not reply; she did not appear to hear.

Waterhouse, seeing that she was unconscious of anything but her dying husband, addressed Grace. "Shall I go?" he asked, under his breath.

Grace looked at him; her lips parted as if to speak; but no words came.

But Waterhouse read his answer somehow—she did not wish him to go, and an irresistible joy thrilled through him.

When Hester came down, and entered the room softly, she saw her mother, in her old place by the bedside, with her arm under her husband's unconscious head, and her other hand clasping his chill and nerveless one. Grace and Mr. Waterhouse stood at the foot of the bed.

When Grace saw Hester, she held out her hand, and they stood holding each other's hands fast. They stood a long time, and nothing was to be heard in the room but the ticking of the timepiece on the mantelshelf, and each one felt the beating of his own heart.

By-and-by Waterhouse moved, but it was only to get chairs for the two pale girls, and motion them to sit down.

For two hours they waited thus, and then Mrs. Norris looked up and spoke.

"He will pass away like this," she said. "I think he will not know me or speak."

But almost as she spoke, he opened his eyes, and looked at her. And Grace, at this last moment, for the first time recognized in him—so bright were his eyes, and so illumined his face—that other father of the portrait, who had never seemed one with this. That strangely clear inspired gaze held every eye. His lips moved, but only his wife caught the meaning, and what he said none but she ever knew.

She said, "Yes, Norris," and kissed his lips. They moved again. Mrs. Norris looked up.

"John," she said; "he wants you."

The girls glanced at each other. Waterhouse went up to the bedside.

"Kiss him," said Mrs. Norris.

Waterhouse stooped and touched with his lips the pale forehead.

"He is telling you to take care of me."

Mrs. Norris looked up at Waterhouse with the glimmer of a wistful smile shining through tears.

"I will," said Waterhouse, with a low-toned fervour, which reached the dying man's ears, for he turned away his eyes from Waterhouse, and fixed them again upon his wife, as though satisfied.

A few moments more and Waterhouse gently closed them. Mrs. Norris clasped her hands, and tears, in which there was no bitterness, rained down her cheeks, as she cried—

"Oh, I thank God—I do thank God for this!"

Grace and Hester cried for pure sympathy, and their mother presently turned to them for the carcases they were longing to give. By-and-by, she held out her hand to Waterhouse, and gave him an eloquent look instead of the speech that failed her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE NEXT DAY.

THE next day dawned warm and bright—a perfect June morning, with a breeze that gently swayed the poplar branches in the garden, and lifted the hair softly from the forehead; and that seemed a live thing bearing a message from that world, invisible but not unfelt, which ever encompasses us round about. Sometimes the veil which hangs between that world and us is close and thick before our eyes; sometimes it recedes and attenuates; and we can almost see through it. So it was this day with the inmates of this house in Barbara street, where a still form was lying. The peace which brooded over those still features suggested an eternal Sabbath—an eternal rest—and a true Sabbath, a true day of rest had fallen upon the household—a space for taking calmer breath, for feeling within the pulse of deeper emotions, and for seeing with clearer eyes the motives and issues of action: Grace and Hester were happy in that the touch of death reached them for the first time thus—sobbed of its sting; that the open grave which stood in their path held no bitterness. There was no wrench for them, nor desolating loss. But they had seen a soul pass from earth; and knew that strange exaltation, born of the sight, in which the spiritual world comes nearer than the actual, and draws up into itself the threads of our life here, investing them with new meaning and proportions.

It seemed, when the family life began again that morning, that the Angel of Death had descended with only healing in his wings. After the excitement of energies which a dangerous illness demands, had fallen a sweet quiet as of a summer Sunday. The mother's face was pale, and tears often filled her soft dark eyes; but there was a look in it like sunlight shining through a morning mist. Her unwonted energy had left her as suddenly as it had come, and given place to her old gentle repose. Grace found her usual position waiting for her to fill, and she assumed it as a matter of course. Her real mother seemed to have been given back to her again, after her place had been usurped by another. Grace's own difficulties occupied her thoughts hardly at all. They seemed put away on one side without her own will, and she thankfully accepted the God-given respite. To encompass her mother with an atmosphere of tenderness and help was the easy duty which duty wore that day, and her heart was made light by the sight of her mother's face and the sound of her voice, for she had dreaded for her an utter breakdown when the desolating moment came.

Keener far was now her anxiety concerning Hester. That composed manner, that quiet look, which never failed to meet Grace's anxious glances, might cover she knew not what of anguish. Hester, in spite of the vigil of the night, went to the morning service. When she returned, Grace could not refrain, as they stood together for a moment at the open window, from seizing Hester's hand and looking up at her with a searching gaze. Hester did not shrink from it. She returned it steadily for a moment, and then smiled gently. There was something in the look and smile which was reassuring.

And indeed for no one had death's gift of peace done so much as for Hester. The old days of commonplace monotony, which could not bind with any fetters Grace's bright free spirit, had kept Hester cramped and dwarfed; and were answerable for much of her morbid misery and discontent. There are some people—wholesome sweet natures—who are made for the small cares and joys of daily life, who need no great occasions to stimulate them to the heroism and usefulness for which hour by hour they find their opportunities; but Hester was not one of these. In the daily life of the past she had failed. Her nature needed for development the wider space, the freer air of life's larger experiences. And of late, finding the environment it needed, the organism had grown and thrived. And now into its destiny had come a great sorrow, with its wrenching away of clinging fibres, and recoil upon themselves of the sweeter hopes, but also with a grand chance of conquest over the principle of self, with its attendant jealousies and meannesses, naturally so strong in her, and a grand chance of nutriment for its nobler instincts.

Many struggles would have to be gone through, but to-day Hester's spirit also found respite. Up in the pure air of this mountain-top, where heaven seemed near and earth far down below, there was no struggle necessary. No bitterness towards the sister who had stolen from her the treasure so prized by the one, so useless to the other, could exist, there; no reaction of wounded self-esteem towards him who had passed her by was possible; no fretful rebellion against the will that had ordered it so. It is only sorrow having elements low and mean in it which makes the heart bitter and sore, and draws lines in the face which pain us to see. Hester's sorrow, which penetrated to the very remotest part of her nature, which changed the aspect of life for her, which held all the cruel pains

of wounded affection, yet added only dignity and graciousness to her face.

Waterhouse, too, felt the influence of the day. His mind was more at rest than it had been for a long time past, which was more owing, perhaps, to the sense he had that Grace had forgiven him, or, at any rate, was willing to let the past slip out of sight, and to the fact that he could be of use, and was allowed to be of use at this time of trouble, than to any more direct influence from the room of death. Yet that was not without its share in his state of mind. He was much with the family to-day, for Mrs. Norris thankfully accepted his assistance, and he undertook all the necessary arrangements and business matters so jarring and painful at such times. As he returned home, after discharging some of these missions, he encountered Denston, much to his surprise, strolling along in the sun.

"I have given in to-day," said he, in explanation. "I thought a day's rest would probably put me in better cue. Burrows will not object—in fact, he advised it."

"You won't patch your constitution up in that kind of way, my dear fellow," said Waterhouse; "but I am delighted to see you, and this is a capital opportunity. Come in with me; will you? But I must tell you, though, that the place is rather sad to-day. The poor old man died this morning at about four o'clock. I have been out seeing after things for them."

"How are they taking it?"

"Admirably, as far as I can see. No long faces; and if there is any crying, it is not done publicly. Mrs. Norris smiles with the tears in her eyes in a way that regularly upsets me. She is adorable. So are they all. Denston, what a wonderful creature a good woman is! They can do what they like with me. But then, I'm an impressionable fellow. You are made of sterner stuff."

Denston gave a melancholy smile, but did not reply. He was not conscious of much stoicism just then. They had now reached No. 47. As they came up the steps together, Mrs. Norris saw them through the window. Denston, who had observed this, said—

"I won't come in, Waterhouse; Mrs. Norris has seen me, and she will think I want to intrude upon them."

"Nonsense, old fellow? you can go up to my room. I must see you for a few minutes."

Denston did not resist further. He may have even hoped, that in spite of himself, he would be brought in contact with the family, which was a thing he had been equally dreading and desiring with the whole force of his nature since the evening before. Sarah opened the door to them. The sitting-room door was open, and Waterhouse looked in on his way to give some information.

"Is Mr. Denston with you?" Denston heard Mrs. Norris ask.

"Yes; he is going up to my room."

"Will he not come in and see me?"

The next moment Denston found himself entering the room. Would there be any one besides Mrs. Norris there? Yes; the whole family were there.

"I am glad to see you again," said Mrs. Norris greeting him with extreme kindness. "Won't you stay a little while? You—too, Mr. Waterhouse, if you will."

The two men, to whom alike this invitation was the cause of very keen though differing sensations, sat down; Denston by the side of Mrs. Norris. He had not once turned his eyes towards Grace, who was occupied at the tea-table. Waterhouse had given her a glance, but he began to talk to Kitty; he had never found much to say to Hester, and her face now, as she sat looking down, did not invite conversation.

"I want to know how you are," said Mrs. Norris to Denston. "I have been very selfish lately. I have heard nothing of you."

The gentle voice and the motherly expression which had come as she spoke into Mrs. Norris' face, usually apathetic and not apt to express feeling of any kind, touched Denston to the quick.

"Ah?" he said, "and now when I would fain express my sympathy with you, words fail me, while you know just what to say which will be most kind."

Mrs. Norris had been told by Grace that the Denstons knew the circumstances through which they had passed, and she had expressed her satisfaction that it should be so. But of any connection between her husband's history, and theirs she was quite unsuspecting, and she did not imagine them aware of the facts of what had taken place fourteen years ago, beyond Denston's accidental knowledge, gained at Ridley, of her change of name.

"Is it in my joy or my sorrow that you would like to sympathise? That, I hope, will not shock you; dear Mr. Denston. If you knew all, you would understand. My husband and I have been parted for so long—you know about that, I think—that this seems scarcely like a parting at all. He is nearer to me now than he has been for many years."

There was a reverent silence in the room as Mrs. Norris ended. Her words had stopped the perfunctory talk which Waterhouse was making to Kitty.

"Then that other world seems very near to you?" said Denston, gravely.

"It will be more home to me than this one now," Mrs. Norris said, with calm earnestness, and then looked at her daughters remorsefully; or it would be if I had not three dear ones here. After all, it will be but a short time before we are all there together."

Seeing that her mother was still looking at her wistfully, Grace made an effort to rise above the kind of paralysis with which Denston's presence was affecting her.

"Why, mother," she said, "we have, perhaps, long lives before us, and much to do, and much to conquer before we leave this world. I, for one, should like to do much better in this life before I am promoted to a higher. And you, mother, must stay as long as you can, to help us."

Mrs. Norris gently sighed.

"I agree with you," said Denston, with a melancholy smile; "you are in no need of condolence. One should envy you, rather. What would not some of us give for such assured faith concerning what is, after all, unknown and unknowable. You have something that paints to you the future, which is so impenetrable to the eyes of reason."

(To be continued.)

SEPTEMBER.

Shorter and shorter now the twilight clips The days, as through the sunset gates they crowd. And summer from its golden collar slips And strays through stubble fields, and moans aloud, Save when by fits the warmer air deceives, And, stealing hopeful to some sheltered lower, She lies on pillows of the yellow leaves, And tries the old tunes over for an hour.

—Alice Curry.

Sabbath School Work.

LESSON HELPS.

FOURTH QUARTER.

JESUS BETRAYED.

LESSON I., October 3rd, John xviii., 1-14; memory verses 4-8.

GOLDEN TEXT.—The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.—Matt. xiv. 41.

TIME.—From midnight till three o'clock Friday morning, April 7, A. D. 30.

PLACE.—The garden of Gethsemane and the palace of Calaphaz.

PARALLEL ACCOUNTS.—Matt. xxvi. 35-66, Mark xiv. 32-64, Luke xiii. 39-55.

CIRCUMSTANCES.—After Jesus' prayer, they sang a hymn, thus closing their long and blessed meeting, and went out into the streets of Jerusalem, towards the mount of Olives.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.—1. Brook Cedron: or Kidron, a ravine, a brook in the rainy season that ran between Jerusalem and the mount of Olives. Eleven to twelve o'clock. A garden: Gethsemane, on the lower slope of the mount of Olives. Here Jesus uttered his agonizing prayer three times, from twelve to one o'clock Friday morning. 3. A band of Roman soldiers from the tower of Antonia. About one o'clock. 4. Jesus knowing: he went willingly, conscious of all that was before him. Here is probably where Judas gave his kiss of betrayal. 9. The saying: spoken in chap. xlii. 12. This was one fulfillment. 10. Peter smote: cut off right ear; Peter was rash in his bravery. This act was likely to cause the disciples to be arrested as rebels, and to make Jesus himself to seem a rebel against Rome, and his kingdom a temporal kingdom. Jesus destroyed the evil effects by healing Malchus. 12. Look Jesus: then all the disciples forsook Jesus, and fled. 13. Annas: formerly high priest, and now very influential. He sent him to Caiaphas, the high priest, who first examined him; then called the Sanhedrim (two to three o'clock), and they decided he must die. During this hour Peter three times denied his Master, who was in the hall opening into the court where Peter and John were around the fire.

SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL REPORTS.—The order of events.—The parallel accounts.—The agony in the garden.—The betrayal.—Peter's rash act.—The trials.—Peter's denials.

QUESTIONS.

INTRODUCTORY.—Where were Jesus and his disciples the night before his crucifixion? What had they been doing? What were the two last acts in this upper room? (John xvii. 1, Matt. xxvi. 30.)

SUBJECT: THE HOUR OF CONFLICT AND DARKNESS.

I. A GREAT BATTLE AND THE VICTORY (vs. 1-2; Matt. xxvi. 35-46).—Where did Jesus go the upper room? Why did he go there? What was the name of the garden? What did Jesus do there? What did he say? How many times did he pray? What shows the intensity of his prayer? (Luke xiii. 44.) Why was he so sorrowful? How was his prayer answered? (Luke xiii. 43; John xviii. 11.) What were the disciples doing all this time? Was there any excuse for them? Did it have any bad effect upon them? (Mark xiv. 50.)

II. JESUS BETRAYED BY A FALSE DISCIPLE (vs. 3-9; Matt. xxvi. 47-50).—Who betrayed Jesus? Whom did he bring with him? How were they armed? About what hour of the night was this? Where did they find Jesus? What token had Judas given? Describe Jesus' voluntary giving of himself up to them. What in this hour did he do for his disciples?

Why did they need torches and lanterns in the moonlight? Was Judas' kiss before or after the scene described in vs. 4-8? Why did the soldiers and officers fall to the ground? Did Jesus' words in v. 8 imply to the disciples that they should make their escape? What scripture was fulfilled, and why?

III. FALSE ZEAL AND DESEKION BY TRUE DISCIPLES (vs. 10, 11; Matt. xvi. 51-56).—How did Peter show his courage? What harm might this have done? What reason did Jesus give against his act? How did Jesus remedy the evil? (Luke xlii. 51.) What did all the disciples now do? Where do we next find Peter? (Matt. xxvi. 58.) When and where did he deny Jesus? (Matt. xxvi. 59-75.)

IV. IN THE HANDS OF HIS ENEMIES (vs. 12-14).—Where was Jesus taken first? Where next? (Matt. xxvi. 58; John xviii. 19-24.) Who were Annas and Caiaphas? Who assembled to condemn Jesus? (Matt. xxvi. 57.) What time of the night was this? For whose sake did Jesus suffer all these things?

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

I. Every life has its Gethsemane of sorrow and conflict, and may have its victories.

II. In Gethsemane we are taught the nature of true prayer and its answer.

III. It is sad for the Church to be sleeping while Christ is suffering and praying.

IV. Such sleep leads to desertion and denial.

V. Every one in Christ is safe. He has never lost one.

VI. There is a wrong as well as a right zeal, and the wrong brings harm where it would do good.

VII. It is dangerous to follow Jesus afar off. It leads into temptation, and away from the source of strength.

REVIEW EXERCISE. (For the whole school in concert.)—1. Where did Jesus go after the prayer in the upper room? 2. What did he do there? 3. What was before him? 4. Who betrayed him there? 5. What did the other disciples do? 6. What did the disciples do? 7. What did Peter do? 8. What did his enemies do? 9. What did they do to him? 10. What did they do to him?

DR. IRENEUS PRIME, in his posthumous autobiography, relates an extraordinary incident of hereditary literature. "The study of the classics," he says, "has been a hereditary passion in the family. My son, Wendell Prime, reads the same Greek Testament that his father read, his grandfather, his great-grandfather, and his great-great-grandfather. Five successive generations have had the identical book. It has been rebound, but the text is clear and well preserved."