

mine. I was not jealous of that beautiful lady, it would have seemed sin in me to be so; I knew that Walter Edmonston and I were as far apart as if the wide Atlantic flowed between us. I had never entertained one feeling of earthly love for him; but I had thought of him by day and dreamed of him by night, until he became a part of my very being: an idol which I could no more tear from my heart than I could forget my hope of heaven; and I could not bear the thought that another should love him as well as I did. Poor child of seventeen years! I believed with a faith that knew no change nor wavering since I first beheld him; that heaven could hold no joy for me were Walter Edmonston not there.

Dr. Turnbull accompanied us home; Archie must be kept quiet; there was no danger; the blood came from some small vessel in the throat.

Christmas eve, the fourth, came with more of happiness than we had known since we crossed the sea. Archie was so well that he had the doctor's permission to resume his labours in the New Year, and his employer was eager for his return, promising him an advance in salary.

My mother was herself again; the spring round which all in the household moved, as she used to be in our old Scottish home.

We had a nice cake baked at home and iced all over, set on one of our old silver salvers adorned with a wreath of scarlet geraniums and green leaves cut from our own house plants.

The old pictures we had brought from Scotland, covering almost every available space of our humble walls were ornamented with scarlet berries, branches of dark green fir and cedar. The sideboard looked quite grand with the old plate, and to do honour to the night we were all dressed in our best—the two little girls and myself in white muslin, each with a little sprig of scarlet geranium in her hair. The cake was cut, and, behold, Sir Humphrey's ring was mine! I was reading the legend "Kind heart be true, and ye shall never rue," amid shouts of merry laughter from my brothers, when the door opened, and a well-known voice thrilled through my heart.

"Excuse me, Madam, I knocked twice, and I fancy the laughter of your pretty children prevented my being heard. I am in search of a family of the name of Denholm, where there is a sick boy; they live in this vicinity, and I have mistaken the number of the house; perhaps you could direct me where to find them?"

All this time I had remained standing with my back to the speaker. I now turned round and said smilingly, "Do you wish to find our house, Mr. Walter?"

At first he was evidently so taken back, that he remained for a second without answering, but, quickly recovering himself, he replied with his usual suavity, removing his hat as he spoke: "It is indeed your house I am seeking; will you introduce me, Miss Denholm?"

I did so, and my mother requested him to be seated, with more coldness and hauteur of voice than I could have wished, had the power of modulating her tones been mine.

Walter Edmonston sat only a few minutes, but in that time gained a little in my mother's good graces by praising her beautiful children, and offering to send from his library any book Archie might wish to read.

I felt quite sure the books were mentioned merely as an excuse for a visit, the true motive for which I was yet to learn.

A few days after this visit I met on the Longueuil ferry boat two girls who worked as compositors in Edmonston and Fornam's, and lived almost opposite our cottage. Although we passed over each morning to work in the same establishment, we rarely met, as I regularly gave myself half an hour in advance of the others.

"How do you do, Miss Denholm?" said the older of the two; "you had a visit from Mr. Walter Edmonston on Christmas eve; I saw him going into your house."

"Yes, we had the pleasure of seeing him for a few minutes."

"I hope he gave your mother a nice present."

"What?" said I, with a feeling of painful surprise my face must have betrayed.

"I hope he gave your mother a nice present of cake and fruit and something, and your brother some wine."

"No, certainly," replied I, my blood running hot and quick as I spoke. "I am sure he never thought of such a thing."

"Well, then, it is a real shame," answered the girl, who, occupied by her own view of the case, never for a moment fancied that his doing so could occasion any other feeling but that of satisfaction.

"He asked me in the morning," continued she, "where you lived, and I told him you had a sick brother and everything I thought could do you good; and to think of him going himself and not giving you anything, when he sent a large cake and lots of fruit to us; it's a real shame!"

How thankful I was that our little home had been more than usually bright and gay that Christmas eve.

Several months after this conversation, I was engaged on work which it was impossible for me to finish in time unless I went to the office early in the morning. With this view, I left home at six o'clock. It was the first time I had put on a coloured dress since my father's death; long as the time had been we kept on our black dresses, as expressive of the feelings of sorrow, which, although weakened by time, still kept its hold on our hearts.

My dress was a light grey merino, with a hat and shawl of the same colour, and very careful I was lest anything, in coming or leaving the ferry

boat, should put the smallest stain on my new attire.

The morning was lovely for the season, and I walked leisurely along, enjoying the fresh, sweet air. As I approached the printing house, I was all at once conscious of a crowd hurrying on towards the street where it stood, while at the same time dense clouds of smoke seemed to be rising in the air from the same direction. I hurried on only to see the back wing of Edmonston and Fornam's printing house one sheet of flame! While such sentences as "God help him!" "He's a dead man!" "They say it's one of the firm!" struck my ear on all sides.

I pressed in among the crowd, and again heard—"No power on earth can save him; they have only old wooden ladders, and they are broken! The escapes are useless; they have gone for others, but he will be burnt to death before they come!"

I still pressed through that dense crowd of human beings, waving to and fro, and could now clearly distinguish Mr. Edmonston's voice calling out in accents of thunder—"ten thousand dollars—twenty thousand to the boy who carries a rope up that ladder!"

By stooping down and pushing myself under the men's arms, I got into the space where the firemen were working. The building presented a scene I shall never forget; the roof had in one part entirely fallen in, and seemed like the crater of a volcano pouring out flame and smoke, while through each place over the entire back of the building where windows had been, came great licking tongues of flame, as if having consumed all inside they sought something else to devour.

My eye took in all this at a glance, and at the same moment I saw Mr. Edmonston attempting to scale a ladder which was placed against the building.

Several of the firemen rushed and by force dragged him away, calling out—"You will break the ladder in pieces; that weakly, broken thing will support nothing heavier than a slight boy."

Guided by the ladder my eyes sought the top of the building. Oh, pitiful heavens, amid the fire and smoke, stood Walter Edmonston!

"What is the boy who climbs the ladder to do?" I asked of the fireman who stood next me.

"To carry this rope to the very topmost ring of the ladder and then throw it to the man up there," pointing to Walter Edmonston. As the man spoke, he eyed me keenly all over. I am sure he knew why I asked the question, and was trying to ascertain if I had courage and strength to climb the ladder.

"Fifty thousand dollars to the boy who will climb that ladder!" Mr. Edmonston shouted in tones of agony.

"A good price," said a man at my side, "only he would never live to claim it."

I threw my shawl to the fireman I had spoken to, at the same time lifting my dress and folding it round my waist, and seizing the rope, I climbed the ladder swiftly and lightly.

Shouts of "Hurrah! hurrah for the brave girl!" mingled with cries of "For shame; take the girl down, she'll be burned to death, she'll be dashed to pieces," were uttered on every side.

I heeded them not; I was light and sure of foot. When I was fourteen years old I could climb any tree in Marsden forest. I was without fear, there was no such thing in the world for me while Walter Edmonston was up there with death amid the fire.

I stopped one moment at the top of the ladder that I might take a steady aim.

CHAPTER III.

I was still a long way from the window by which he held, yet saw by his attitude as he clung to the rail, that he had little if any support for his feet. I threw the rope, and saw him seize and fasten it to a beam at his side.

He was saved! By the time I was again on the ground he was half-way down, the rope and ladder both aiding him. As I descended, my dress unfastened, and, floating out beyond the ladder, attracted one of the many protruding tongues of flame. It did not alarm me. I knew the dress was worsted, and could only become black cinders, incapable of communicating fire to any other part of my clothes. Before I reached the ground, the fireman who held my shawl tore out the burning part of my dress, and, snatching my shawl from him, I rolled it round me, so as to hide my burnt dress, and hurried into the crowd.

Ere I was clear of the crowd, I knew by the loud hurrahs which rent the air that Walter Edmonston had reached the ground. Shouts of "Where is the girl?" came on my ear as I swiftly sped along the way to St. Mary street and Longueuil ferry. I walked so swiftly that, in an hour after I had descended from the ladder, I was showing my burnt dress to mamma and Catherine, and telling them of the burning of Edmonston and Fornam's printing house. Fortunately I was never asked how my dress came to be burned. They were all too thankful to see me back safe to be much concerned about the dress, which was forthwith consigned to the garret along with my shawl and hat, both covered with black soot marks.

All that week the newspapers rang with praises of the girl who had saved Mr. Walter Edmonston's life, and in every daily paper in Montreal there appeared advertisements, signed by Mr. Edmonston, requesting that she would send her address to Edmonston and Fornam, and then, when these were unsuccessful in finding

the girl, others were inserted, naming the banking house, where fifty thousand dollars were placed for the young lady who produced the rest of the burnt dress, and matching it with the piece torn away by the fireman, could prove her identity with the one who risked her life to save Walter Edmonston.

CHAPTER IV.

Time sped on; Archie's salary was a large one but the children were growing into big girls and boys, and there were school fees to be paid as well as double the money in rent we at first gave for the same cottage.

My own work had changed wonderfully, ere our sixth Christmas Eve came round. Instead of correcting the proofs, I now wrote for the weekly paper printed in the establishment, and I was well paid for my work; but if I had not been I would as soon have thought of living amid the wastes of snow in Siberia as of leaving Edmonston and Fornam's; my resolution was formed long ago—I would live and die working for Walter Edmonston. On the morning of Christmas Eve he came into the little office I now called my own and with a look of care on his brow and a slight tremor in his voice said: "Miss Denholm would you oblige me by writing a few verses on the death of a little boy who was just beginning to speak. I wish to give them to his mother."

He paused as if to still the emotion he could not conceal and then continued: "the child was so dear to me I can scarcely realize that I shall go in and out and hear his voice—see his face no more forever."

"Is it your only child, Mr. Walter, who is dead?"

"My only child," said he, repeating my words and speaking in a hard voice, "what could make you fancy it was my child?"

I did not immediately answer, but looked up in his face that I might read there what he meant by speaking in such a harsh tone. He was looking down upon me with compressed lips as if he would force himself to be calm, his brow and cheek suffused with crimson.

I replied at once looking him steadily in the face as I did so. "It was a very natural conclusion for me to come to when you said you loved the child so well. I cannot see why you should feel my words as you seem to do."

"Miss Denholm," said he, "are you aware that I am unmarried?"

"No, sir," replied I quickly, my face doubtless betraying the penitence I felt for my involuntary mistake. "I have believed you to be married man for several years back."

As I spoke a light seemed to break in on my soul. That lovely lady with her fair face and beautiful form, "Vashti the beautiful" must have passed into the silent land. And I added with a softened low voice such as we use when speaking of the dead, "Has God taken away the beautiful woman whom I thought was your wife?"

As I finished speaking he sat down at the corner of the table where I wrote, and looking in my eyes said in a slow distinct voice: "You are laboring under a great mistake. I never was married; I never knew but one woman I would wish to marry; and in thinking over all her words and actions, I have ever come to the conclusion she would not accept me if I offered myself. He rose; and placing his hand on mine just for an instant, said: "Miss Denholm, if I needed further proof, your words to-day have told me I was right."

He was gone. I wrote the verses. I did my very best. I poured all the sorrow, all the poetry of my soul into them.

CHAPTER V.

Our sixth Christmas Eve. Since the third, each one as it came round brought a visit from Walter Edmonston. These visits were the white spots in my Christmas. Somehow I thought he would not come this evening, yet hoping against hope by one excuse or another I kept mamma from cutting the cake. The old clock warned eight; further delay was useless. We all left the room that mamma might cut the cake and put in the ring. This done she called us back and putting the plate heaped with the cut pieces into my hand bade me help myself and then serve the others. I had just taken the plate from her hand when a light tap at the door made my heart leap; against all rule I opened the door myself and admitted Walter Edmonston.

"Welcome," said I, in a heartier tone than I was accustomed to use. I did not mean to do so, but unconsciously I spoke as my heart dictated. "You shall have to-night a piece of our Christmas cake."

As I spoke I presented the plate. He lifted the top piece with a few words of compliment, and then passed to the upper end of the room to address mamma and Archie. When he was seated, mamma explained to him that he was not expected to eat the piece of cake, only to break it in pieces; that this was one of our Scottish superstitions connected with Christmas, adding, "I hope, as you are the guest, you may be fortunate enough to find the ring."

It was even so, Walter Edmonston got Sir Humphrey's ring.

After examining and admiring the curious old ring with its grotesque carving and quaint legend, he said, addressing mamma.

"I am entitled to retain this ring for three nights, am I not? You see, although I am a Canadian, I am not wholly ignorant of your Scottish customs."

"You are," replied my mother, "but only on condition you repeat to us the dreams it inspires."

"The conditions are agreed to," replied he, putting the ring on his finger, observing as he did so, "this must be a very old ring; I once saw in a monastery a silver jug of similar workmanship which was supposed to be three hundred years old."

"That is the age we ascribe to this ring," replied my mother, "and also to a bowl which my ancestor, who left the ring in our family, brought from the Holy Land, and had the ring made in Scotland in imitation of the bowl."

Mr. Edmonston expressed a wish to see the bowl, to which my mother replied by handing me the key of a chest where the bowl was kept saying, "be careful in lifting the desk from the top of the chest; I observed some time ago the back seems quite loose." Turning to Mr. Edmonston, she said, "this old desk is one of my household gods; it is the only thing I possess belonging to a dear grand uncle who was father and mother and everybody to me, and who died thinking he left me heirless to all his land."

Mamma was fond of harping on the loss of Morton Castle, which she believed had been brought about by the destruction of the will made in her favor, and I felt annoyed by her present reference to it.

Mr. Edmonston, as in duty bound put on a look of sympathy. Archie came forward to show him some drawings which had lately arrived from Scotland, in order to change the conversation, which we dreaded as it always brought on mamma a fit of the blues.

I had obtained possession of the bowl without injury to the old desk, when on attempting to replace it down it fell and seemed to come to pieces.

I came down stairs with the bowl which of course was duly admired, and shortly after our guest bade us adieu. On Mr. Edmonston's departure I ran up-stairs to an end window where each Christmas Eve I watched his receding form until it faded in the distance; and having assured myself that my ear could catch his footsteps no longer, I brought down the broken desk and showed it to mamma. She took it from my hands without a word of reproach, although I knew, poor as we were, she would have rather lost a hundred pounds. It was put on the table as tenderly as if it had been a thing of life. The back had fallen out. It had originally been fastened by a spring which Archie in vain tried to refasten. In his endeavors to make the spring work the bottom of the desk fell to the ground and with it a large parchment.

My undemonstrative mother called out, "Oh, children, give praise to God! here is my uncle's will!"

Verily so it was. My mother spread it out, holding it in both hands, while Archie read over her shoulder its contents, and wills to her, thirty years before, the Castle and lands of Morton, a town house in Edinburgh, and fifty thousand pounds! The will signed and sealed.

My mother wished Archie at once to go home and enter an action against the heir in possession, she proposing to part with our plate to pay the expenses of his journey. This he absolutely refused to do, for the first time in his life disputing her commands. He argued thus: "The present proprietor has been thirty years in possession; is it likely he will give it up without a long and expensive law-suit? Every valuable in our possession would not pay the expense of even beginning such a suit in Britain. I am the principal support of the family. How are they to be provided for in my absence?"

Little more was said on the subject that night, but subsequently my mother told me that she had formed the resolution of going home herself on purpose to obtain her right; the idea of being foiled in the attempt could never be forced upon her.

My mother and I often talked over this matter in our own room after all the others had gone to bed. She never wearied of the theme; she was convinced we were by the finding of the will to become rich and live in our own land. Often night after night have I counted the midnight hour and then one, two, three, four—when wearied in mind and body I have fallen asleep while my mother still talked on. She was determined to go, that was certain; and it was as certain that she who had never mixed with the world all her life was as unfit for even taking such a voyage alone as little Florence with her seven years. My dear mother who depended upon me for buying all the clothes and linen for the household, because she could not bear to come in contact with strangers. She go to Britain alone! No, such a thing could never be. If it must be done, I resolved to go myself, and one of our sleepless nights I told her so. She grasped at the idea, and it was at once decided I should go in February.

I had saved two hundred dollars in order to pay for music-lessons for Maud, to whom mamma had imparted all of the science she herself knew, and I resolved to take this money and devote it to going home. And although I was strongly inclined to adopt Archie's opinion on the subject, yet I considered my devoting my money to this purpose was a sacred duty to my mother, who had never known peace of mind since that ill-starred will was found. We had all been so happy before it came to disturb our peace. Ah! how I wished I had handled that old box with more care.

On the fifth of January I wrote to the firm, saying that I must leave the office for some months, that I was to visit Britain on business of importance, but I would return, if such was their wish, as soon as possible. I received the