

at the piled-up carpets and the bare floor, and saw the wide oak staircase, up which three could walk abreast, knowing it would soon be demolished.

"To think of such a home as this being levelled to make way for the mushroom places they will put upon the site!" he exclaimed.

Probably he would have murmured some strong words, but a figure came towards the entrance, at sight of which the expression of his face softened instantly.

"You, Aunt Mary?" he said, as the door opened. "Are you acting as porter in these stirring times?"

"Yes, my dear, for want of a better, or I should say, because I knew you were outside, and I did not want you to be kept waiting."

"You recognised my ring, of course," said the new arrival, with a smile, to which his aunt responded.

"I can never mistake your demand for admission, Grant. It has the old peremptory note which says as plainly as words, 'My time is precious. I must not be kept waiting.'"

"Surely not all that, or I must have been an impertinent, self-asserting youngster as a boy. You all tell me that my mode of demanding admission has not altered since I was at school."

"I don't think it has. You are not given to change, Grant."

There was a world of affection in Mrs. Dimsdale's tone, and no less in the expression of the face which she uplifted to that of her tall nephew.

Grant Outram was not a demonstrative man. Most people spoke of him as almost too brusque for a physician; but he was a popular one, nevertheless. No one, watching his face as he bent over his widowed kinswoman, would have guessed what caustic words could come from the lips which touched her brow so tenderly.

"I always hoped that this place would have been spared and that you would be able to end your days in peace under the roof where your married life began," he said.

"I cherished the same hope once," she replied, "but for some years past it has been gradually weakening. The dear old home was bound to come down sooner or later. I came here first as a bride. All my children were born here. Two of them and your uncle were carried from this door to their last resting-place, and I once thought, as you say, that I should follow them from the same spot to 'the city that hath foundations.' It seems so strange that I should be going to another earthly house, I, who am sixty-three."

There was a little quiver of the lips and a suspicious moisture about the eyelids which the smile on the upturned face could not hide, and Dr. Grant Outram's features lost their calm expression as he noted these things.

They were in the old dining-room now—his uncle's favourite room, from which he could seldom be dislodged in the evening. He had been of the old-fashioned sort who took his principal meal at six o'clock. Much older than his wife, he seldom gave invitations which involved late hours, and he did not like to take much exercise pacing up and down the room, of which the furniture was, so to speak, displaced.

"Polar-bearing," the children used to say, "one or other of them would hang round the door, paced to and fro, telling him the news of the day's doings at work or play."

Dr. Grant seemed to see all this, for he had been his uncle's favourite chair, and his aunt could speak much at first of the room peopled by invisible occupants. But his father, the children in all stages of growth, the young lovers who had come to woo and were eventually to carry them away; the baby of the generation, brought by proud parents for the first time to see! Even the pet cat, that used to come solemnly up and down after her old master, and he would cease his polar-bearing.



"YOU, AUNT MARY!"