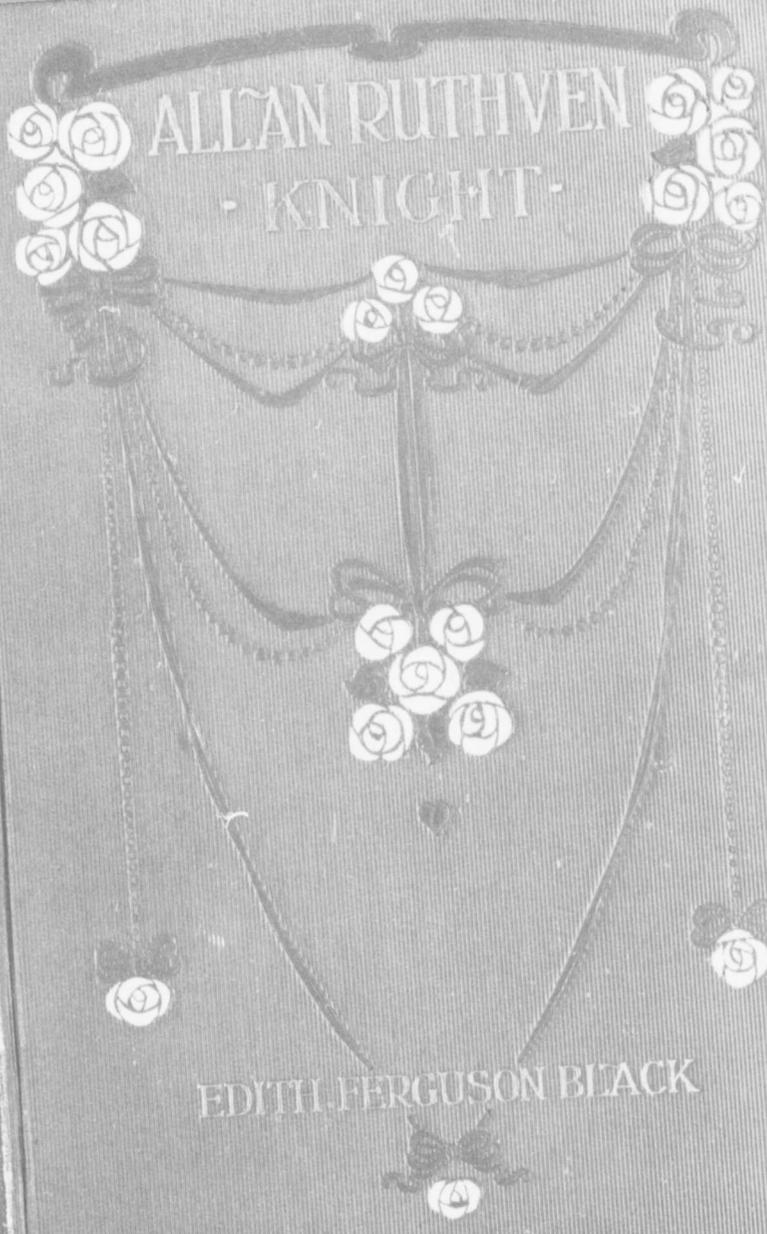


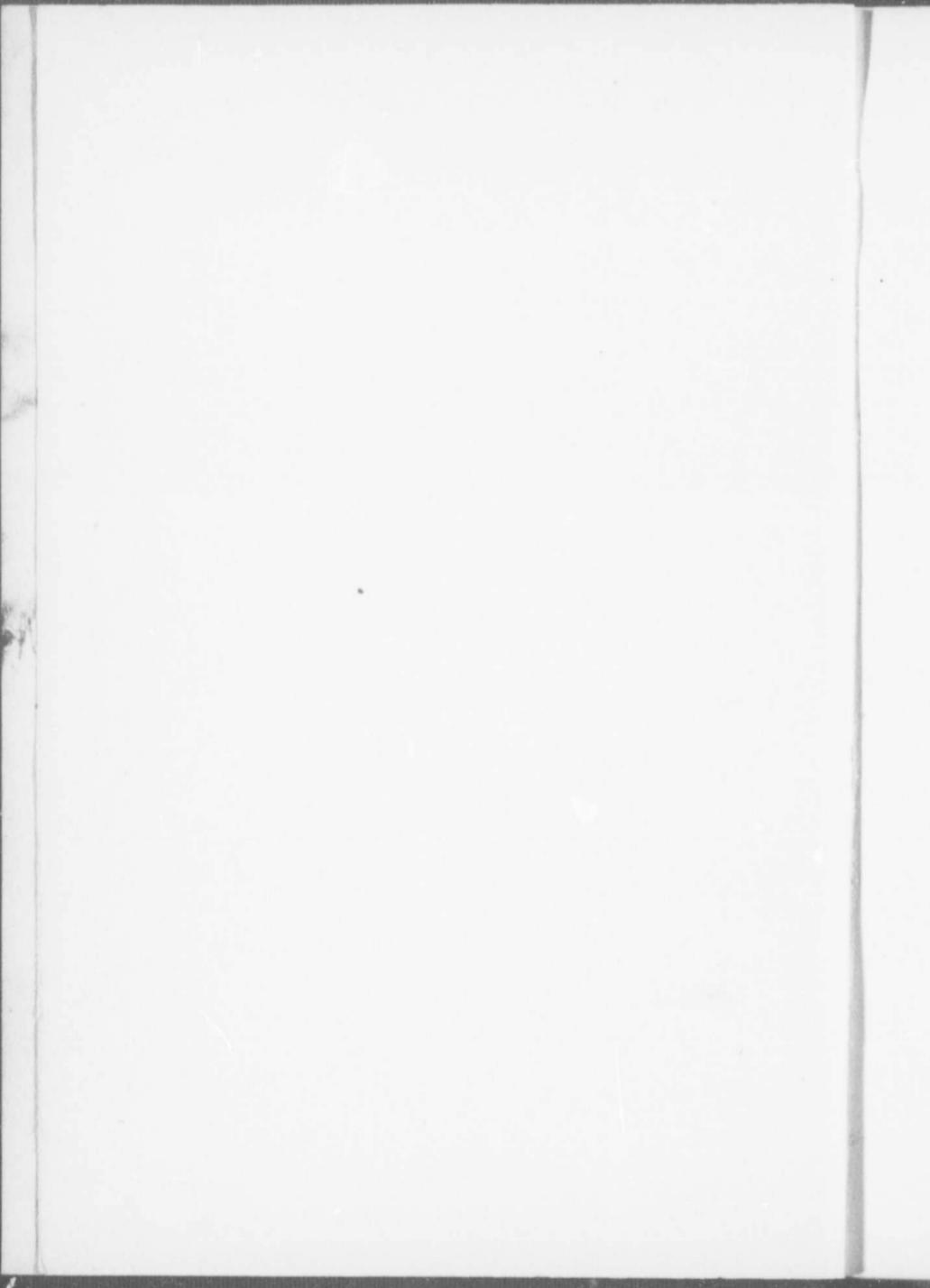
ALLAN RUTHVEN
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BLACK

EDITH FERGUSON BLACK





ALLAN RUTHVEN, KNIGHT

See page 183.

'I WAS WONDERING,' SHE SAID, 'WHAT YOU WOULD DO WITH
AUNT GRACE.'



ALLAN RUTHVEN
KNIGHT

BY

EDITH FERGUSON BLACK

AUTHOR OF 'A PRINCESS IN CALICO'
'A BEAUTIFUL POSSIBILITY,' ETC.

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ALLAN RUTHVEN, KNIGHT



CHAPTER I

The New Home

'All our splendour is outside—the free horizon, the pure electric air, the gracious sweep of hill and valley outline, the rose-garden of the sunrise, the conflagration of the sunset, the banner of the woods and meadows. Our upholstery hangs in our silver birches and bronze chestnuts, our red oaks and olive pines. Our Wiltons and Axminsters lie in our clovers and snowdrifts. Our bric-à-brac shines on the boughs of our apple-trees when the blossom blushes. Our jewels blaze on the tips of our pine fronds when the ice storms glaze and the sun of the winter thaw is hot.'

THE Raymonds had decided to become suburbanites. After several years of discomfort in a furnished house in one of the prosaic back streets of Boston, Ravenal, the eldest daughter, had made the startling proposition that they should shake the dust of the city from their feet for ever, and betake themselves where oxygen was free, the sweetness of flowers and lawns to be had for nothing, and the birds gave open-air concerts every day.

There had been opposition from the Upper House, as there frequently is to anything approaching a radical upheaval of existing circumstances. Mrs. Raymond feared it was 'a wild scheme,' while Aunt Griselda, as Dora, the youngest girl, expressed it, 'looked daggers' in ominous disapproval. But the Lower House was unanimous in favour of the measure, and, by dint of a large majority and the dogged persistency which, Tom said, was a fitting endowment for descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers, the Upper House was forced to yield a reluctant consent. Not without a protest, however.

'Just think of the furniture, Ravenal. My dear, it is impossible! It would be simply ruinous for us to attempt to furnish a whole house.'

'Simply ruinous!' echoed Aunt Griselda.

'We will not have much, mamma. Life is more than chairs any day. Besides, Tom is a born carpenter; he can make the foundations; and we will cover them with cretonne.'

'But Tom cannot make carpets.'

'I will undertake that department'—and Meg, who was the artist of the family, tapped her brushes significantly.

'The curtains won't cost anything, if we use scrim and art muslin,' interpolated Nell, who came next to Tom in the line of succession.

'I can fit up the kitchen for next to nothing at Hendry & Lee's,' said Hester, the cook.

'Give in, give in, Mumsie!' cried the irrepressible Dora, 'for the Fates have decreed against you. We will have some pretty things downstairs, just to give tone to the place, you know, but we will make the filling out of our own precious heads and fingers. We will sleep on pine and depend on our dreams for mahogany.'

And so it came to pass that Ravenal and Meg were voted a committee to discover and report on the house which had been so rapidly furnished in imagination.

* * * * *

The large railway station was filled with 'all sorts and conditions of men,' and Ravenal gave herself up to the amusement of studying them while they waited for the next suburban train.

A sudden pity made her brown eyes misty, as she caught sight of the flower-seller of the dépôt. This was a little misshapen creature, clad in rusty black which told its own sad story, moving painfully about on a crutch to and fro between the large radiators on which she had placed her wares—a half-starved-looking primrose, two or three geraniums, and a fuchsia; paper flowers made up the rest of the stock. Patiently she arranged and watered her scanty store. No one wanted flowers just then.

With a sudden impulse Ravenal left Meg and hurried across to the fruit stand. Coming back with some magnificent oranges she laid them, with one of her brightest smiles, in the poor little cripple's hands.

'For me? You cannot mean it! How good of you!'

'I thought they would be refreshing. You do not look as if you had much appetite.'

'Oh, thank you! They are just what Sally longs for. She is so much worse than me.'

'Is there always somebody "worse"?' sighed Ravenal, as they hurried towards the train gate. 'I tell you what, Meggy, if you get your rose-crowned cottage, your mission is all ready to your hand.'

'Why—what?' cried practical Meg.

'To supply that poor creature with flowers that will sell, arranged in your most artistic style.'

'How you do jump at conclusions, Ray! Have you laid yourself under tribute to all the misery in the world?'

'I wish I could!' she cried quickly, while her eyes flashed dewy soft. 'That is the pity of it, that I can do nothing!'

'There's a face among a thousand!' thought a young man, who had witnessed the episode in the *depôt* with a pleased interest, and now watched Ravenal from the third seat behind on the opposite



'FOR ME? YOU CANNOT MEAN IT! HOW GOOD OF YOU.'

To face page 4.



side of the car. 'Why, it's a face to haunt a fellow ! There are so few one would want to look at every day, but *this* one—

"In all its changes fancy free,
It's beauty, love, and all for me !"

He hummed the words under his breath. 'I don't believe she thought she was doing anything unusual, yet the way she did it was ten times the value of the gift.'

* * * * *

'What a family it is!'—and Ravenal looked round smilingly upon the eager group which gathered on their return.

'Tell us, quick !' exclaimed Dora, 'or we will die from suppressed excitement. Bottled anxiety is like yeast, if you do not relieve the pressure the results are disastrous.'

'Let us have supper first,' pleaded Meg ; 'I am fainting from starvation.'

'Never !' cried Hester, grasping her waffle-iron abstractedly.

'The Committee will report instanter,' ordered Tom, who had constituted himself Speaker of the House.

'Well, my children, we came, we saw, we conquered !'—and the Raven's eyes shone with triumph.

'Have you found a house that will suit us, really?' asked Mrs. Raymond incredulously.

'Suit, mamma—it is made for us! Two nice parlours and a dining-room, good bedrooms, a lovely kitchen with hot and cold water, and, last but not least, just the sweetest gem of a conservatory——'

'But, my dear child, what possible use would that be to us? We could not afford to stock it.'

'Ah, mamma,' laughed Meg, 'you should have heard the Raven discoursing on the way home. Such visions of competency as she conjured up out of that poor little place! I believe every pane of glass represents a fortune to her.'

'Still I do not see——'

'Don't you, mamma? Why, we will supply the flower-dealers—for of course we will only keep the choicest varieties.'

'And where will you get them to begin with?' asked Tom scornfully.

'Beg, borrow, and steal,' cried Dora, as she rumbled up his freshly brushed hair relentlessly. 'Raymond—florist. That is the idea! Bobs, your mission is cut out for you. You will have to be expressman, and trundle the precious blooms to the station before you go to school'—and seizing her youngest brother around the neck, she whirled him across the room in a breathless waltz.

'But you do not ask anything about the house,' said Meg, in a disappointed tone. 'It is just the dearest little place; gable roof, tile finish, coloured glass facings, and the sweetest verandah!'

'Yes, indeed,' laughed Ravenal, 'I am not the only dreamer. I could hardly tear Meg away from smelling the roses as they twined about its pillars in her inner thought.'

* * * * *

'Can it be possible we have again a home of our own?' Mrs. Raymond exclaimed, as she looked approvingly around the cosy dining-room, where they lingered over their first meal in the new home. Her best china and the silver which had been among her wedding-gifts shone and sparkled behind the glass doors of the wall sideboard, two or three of Meg's pictures hung on the wall, and through the half-drawn *portière* she could see the dainty sitting-room with its soft draperies and luxurious divans. ('It was such a mercy,' Nell had remarked, 'that cotton batting was cheap and the decorations came out in æsthetic shades.') Her handsome piano lamp with its rose silk shade gave tone to its surroundings, and the little table with her favourite books added the last touch of homelikeness, which she declared she would rather have than the most gorgeous upholstery.

The Lower House had worked fast and steadily

for weeks to have everything in apple-pie order. They were determined there should be no 'first night' dreariness in the new home. It must be just right when Mrs. Raymond saw it furnished for the first time.

'As soon as you are rested, mamma, you must come out to my department,' said Hester. Proudly she showed her closets full of glistening tins and granite ware, and then, delighted with her new environment, began to stir up griddle-cakes for breakfast.

'Now you must come to mine'—and Tom bore his mother off in triumph to the room where he had spent every moment of his leisure time. Bits of fretwork, chair frames and tables were there, and a sofa, nearly finished.

'Why, Tom, it is not possible! How could you do it?'

'Now, dear, don't you feel tired enough to go to bed?'—and, with the others in procession, Meg carried her off to her own room. Every effort had been concentrated there. Creamy curtains, draped with dainty bows, were at the windows; her favourite pictures hung upon the walls; the floor was painted a soft buff colour with a delicate tracery of leaves, over which was spread a rug or two; a capacious lounge of Tom's making invited her to rest among its cushions; a home-made table held her Bible

and a vase of lilies, and on the cream-painted door Meg's brush had thrown a spray of apple-blossoms.

Mrs. Raymond looked round upon it all—the knitted quilt over which Hester had toiled, the toilet table covered with pretty nothings from Dora's skilful fingers, and then sank into her own cosy rocker and burst into tears.

'Oh, my children, it is too good to be true!'

'Not a bit of it, motherdie'—and Ravenal's arms held her close. 'Of course this must be the company room, but we will show the world'—and the slight figure drew itself up proudly—'that our father left us brains that can plan and hands that can fashion, and these are better than money any day.'

'Three cheers for the Raven!' cried Tom. And the exultant Lower House obeyed him with a will.

Outdoors the birds twittered drowsily among the branches, the perfumed air blew softly through the open windows, while the frogs and the crickets chirped good-night, as the happy family held their house-warming.

CHAPTER II

Aunt Gru

'We would be gentler if we knew more.'

THE Raymonds were gathered in the kitchen after the evening meal. That is, Ravenal and Hester and Dora and Tom, who had strolled in to have his nightly frolic with Laddie, a magnificent St. Bernard, given to Dora by her school friend Jack Endicott. Meg came to the door but, with an apprehensive glance at the steaming dishes which Ravenal was drying on a snowy towel, fled precipitately to the little greenhouse just outside.

'It is wonderful what an antipathy our Meggy has to hot soap-suds,' said Dora sententiously, as, enveloped in a large apron, she deftly washed the cups and saucers in the sparkling lather.

Hester looked up from the dough to which she was giving light finishing touches. 'She always has important business when there are vegetables to

prepare, and her devotion to horticulture is perfectly alarming when clearing-up time comes.'

'For shame, girls!' said Ravenal; 'she swept Aunt Griselda's room beautifully last week, and you know some one must do the outdoor work.'

'So she did, bless her heart!' said Dora, with a merry laugh. 'That was the time she resembled Niobe's first cousin. Bobus called her "Miss Dolorosity" the other day, and I am sure the wrinkles will soon be a fixture, if she is not careful!'

'Good for Bobus! Did he, though?' and Tom chuckled as he pulled Laddie's silky ears.

'Oh, by the way,' exclaimed Dora, flying to another subject as quickly as she flirited her mop over the plates, 'I met that simple Lucy Granger to-day. I can't abide that family. They are so censorious! And they are nothing but hairpins in petticoats anyhow. I think Maude imagines her adipose tissue has dissolved into brain. She is dolefully literary, writes "pomes" and "sich." To-day she had been concocting an "Ode to Nature." It must be truly touching, and I suppose her dotting pa will pay to have it published. Lucy is interested in us just at present. Wanted to know the origin of "Aunt Gru." Just imagine! I gave her our respected collateral's full title, Griselda Rowena Strange, but that didn't satisfy her, so at last I grew desperate

and told her I chose to call her "Aunt Gru" because it rhymed with "ugh!"

'Don't get reckless, dearie,' said Ravenal softly.

'Don't preach, Poppet. There must be one black sheep, or it would not be an orthodox family. You and Meg are always proper, and Nell just now is dissolved in honey, so Hester and I are the only ones left for scape-goats. Where is Nell, anyway?'

'Out on the front steps with Harry Winthrop.'

'Oh, moon-gazing. Dear me, I shall be glad when this celestial atmosphere has lifted. It must be very wearing. She asked me to rub the back of her neck last night. I know now what is the matter with it. It is the lunar action on the spinal cord.'

'Dora, you are incorrigible!'—and Ravenal joined in the general laugh.

'Course I am, so you may as well give up trying to reform me. Oh, Tom, I tried to be St. George and kill the dragon to-day, or remove her to another sphere, which would answer our purpose just as well. Aunt Gru was reading the *Missionary News*—you know she always takes the nice fresh crackle out of every paper that comes into the house and the rest of us have to read it second-hand—I asked her if she never felt it her duty to go to Africa. I told her it seemed to me she was providentially ordained for a missionary, for she had no home ties, and one hemi-

sphere would be the same to her as another; even suggested that it would make us all feel more pious if we had a relative in the field. But it was no use. Of course she sniffed—she always does. I hate people that sniff!’

‘Dora, this is positively wicked!’

‘Now, Raven, don’t lecture. If I didn’t have some chance to let off steam, I should go to pieces! You don’t know what an effect she has upon me. I can’t see why——’

Suddenly a boy’s clear voice was heard, singing tumultuously—

‘Miss Dolorosity, you’d better take care!

If you don’t stop nagging, I’ll cut off my ear!’—

and Bobus, the baby, burst into the kitchen with flaming cheeks and suspiciously bright eyes.

‘I don’t care! I ain’t ever going to work in your old greenhouse any more! It’s nothing but nag, nag, nag, no matter how hard a fellow’s trying. I had to go and break that old china flower-pot just now. I couldn’t help it. I was up on the ladder, washing the roof, so the sun would get through, and the hose slipped. That old Meg never believes a fellow didn’t mean to do a thing!’—and the excited boy threw himself across a table and buried his head in his arms.

Ravenal came over to him quickly and laid her hand on his brown curls. 'Don't fret, old man,' she said; 'we all know it was an accident, and it might have been a great deal worse.'

Tom gave him a fatherly pat on the back. 'Cheer up, Bobus. Life's too short to worry over trifles.'

And Dora threw herself beside him and whispered, 'Be thankful you have got one sister who is a brick, if the other is a croaker. Poor old Bobs! Meg acts on you as Aunt Gru does on me, but I suppose they both have their uses, like tarantulas and centipedes.'

* * * * *

'Scrimp, scrimp, scrimp! I am fairly worn to a shred trying to pull the ends together!'—and Dora threw herself with an exhausted air on the divan in the cosy sitting-room.

'Of course it had to be chocolate day at Macdonald's and I had to meet Lucy Granger just in front of the door! She adores chocolates, and could not understand why I did not invest. I told her bluntly they didn't agree with me. I meant my monetary system, but I know she thinks it is my liver. The next thing, she will be sending me a blue pill wrapped up in quotations from Dio Lewis—she is a perfect crank on hygiene!

'She would have me go hat-hunting with her, and

wanted to know where I bought my millinery—she knows perfectly well I never buy it at all—so I told her it came direct from Paris. I'm sick of this hypocrisy! You should have seen the Granger eyeing this defunct helmet!'—she balanced her hat on her finger as she spoke. 'You know she always begins at the crown of your head, and eyes you by inches until she reaches your toes. I should think she would know every straw in it by this time, for it has done duty through spring and summer. However, I will baffle her yet! Bring along your paint-box, Meg, and I will transform it into a first-class black chip. She will think I am fond of the shape, but I will put a bow at the side and turn it up—so. Which brush shall I use, Meg?'

'It will take all the paint I have got!' sighed Meg ruefully.

'Bless you, my child! What is a tube of paint in comparison with a three dollar hat?' exclaimed Dora, who, with renewed animation, was hastily ripping off the trimming. 'I will buy you another, don't fret, Meggy, and the oil can be a tribute to sisterly affection.'

She painted for some time in silence, while Ravenal traced the outlines of a cottage, Mrs. Raymond and Meg sewed, and Aunt Griselda knitted with quick, nervous fingers; then she began again :—

"Life is real, life is earnest." What a mockery that is! Life is a sham, and the only earnestness is where people try to keep up the delusion. Why can't people be content to pass for their face value?'

'We must put our best foot foremost, my dear. It is not well to wear either purses or hearts on our sleeve.'

'I'm tired of my "best foot," Mumsie. Why shouldn't my other one have a chance?'

'Because it is not worth while,' interpolated Meg sententiously, 'to let other people know all the ins and outs. It would just give them something to talk about, and that is what they want.'

'Stuff and nonsense!' was the abrupt rejoinder. 'What do other people care about our little personalities? The trouble is, we are so accustomed to focus the sun upon our infinitesimal selves, that we imagine we bound the world's horizon as well as our own. It is time you understood, Meggy, that the world is not dying with curiosity to know the inside workings of the Raymond *ménage*. Oh, here is Hubbard's bill, Mumsie. I took it from the boy as I came in.'

Meg seized upon it with the avidity which she always displayed for monetary concerns, and ran her eye down the columns with a rapidly lengthening face.

'Twenty-five dollars!' she exclaimed, 'and just for groceries! What is to become of us?'

'The Lord is the father of the fatherless,' said Mrs. Raymond gently; 'He will not let us come to harm.'

'That is all very fine,' said Dora, 'but the Lord helps those who help themselves, remember; and I, for one, am going to do it. Mumsie, dear, I am going to learn stenography. I have made up my mind, so no one need say a word against it. It is honourable and lucrative, and I am sick of living on the ridge-pole of genteel starvation.'

'Whoever heard of a Raymond in business!' cried Meg, aghast.

'Tom is a Raymond,' said Dora coolly.

'Tom is different.'

'Oh, yes, I suppose so. Because he is so happy as to be a man and know nothing of the pinching process which makes me feel like an attenuated balloon. What does he know of this awful grind of taking in and letting out and turning upside down, in the agonising effort to make a three-year-old dress as good as new? His clothes may not be of as expensive material as in the good old times, but he goes to his tailor when they begin to get shabby and gets the latest cut. He never went to church feeling like a mixture of Shem, Ham, and Japhet, and with the ark

itself on his head for a bonnet! I am sure that is what Meg resembled last Sunday. I was tempted to ask her when at church for the latest news from Ararat, only I was afraid she would shock your sensibilities by a laugh.'

'Meg, you shall not disgrace the family in this fashion! I am sure that old silk deserves to be laid up in pickle for the rest of its life. By the way, they are making up a box at the church for the Congo Mission this week. Give it to me to fill up a corner. I am sure the bonnet would be a prize for a Zulu!'

'Somebody has to wear grey things,' said Meg, who liked to take credit for economy.

'Now she is on her self-abnegation hobby,' laughed the merry Dora. 'Go it, Meg, and I'll hold your bonnet. No I won't, though, I'll trim it up for the Zulu. Meg, why in the world won't you be reasonable? You know you have better clothes. What is the use of letting them all get out of fashion?'

'But you are not going into stenography, Dora, really?' said Meg, whose wardrobe was her weak point.

'But I really am.'

'It is such an innovation!'

'Fiddlesticks! Meg, you should have been born in the Middle Ages. You are a blot on the

nineteenth century. I suppose you are afraid that it will affect your social standing? Pity help you if it has no better foundation!

'There, Mumsie, there is Mrs. Grundy in the flesh'—as Hester announced the arrival of Mrs. Van Cliffe; 'run along, dearie, and tell her your youngest daughter is just starting out to pay the grocers' bills. You run too, Meg, and take your last look at high life, for when it once gets abroad, you know, you will have to say farewell to the Van Cliffes and their fraternity.'

She put the finishing touches to her hat while Ravenal and Aunt Griselda worked on in silence.

'I met Sylvia Marsh in the train to-day, Raven, and she grew perfectly enthusiastic over that tiresome Mr. Langdon, the new curate. I suppose she saw I did not enthuse; in fact, I told her I did not like him. You should have seen her face as she ejaculated, "Not as a man, Dora—not as a man!" "No," I said, "neither as a man nor an angel; for I suppose he aspires to that eventually." These namby-pamby people, with chin in full retreat, and an arid waste of forehead that reminds one of the Great American Desert, always think they have a special claim to the heavenly land.'

'You would do well to have your speech seasoned with salt, Dora Elizabeth!' said Aunt Griselda sharply.

Dora winced. That name was a sore subject.

'The salt of life is work, Aunt Gru, so I am likely to have plenty of the briny. Your salt has lost its savour, or you would not call me that name which I hate.'

'I would have you remember I am not used to being spoken to in this fashion. When I was young, children were taught to respect their elders!'—and Aunt Griselda marched towards the door in high dudgeon.

'I beg your pardon, Aunt Gru,' said the unrepentant Dora, as she made a *moue* at her relative's retreating figure. 'Now, Raven, shut your eyes, or else keep the reproaches out of them. It is easy for you when you have the most euphonious name in the family—however you got it is a mystery! Mine would not be bad, if they had been content to leave it in single-blessedness, but of course it had to be ruined, just to tickle the fancy of some old collateral, who wanted herself perpetuated. I am going to rebel, and annihilate Elizabeth *sine die*, and henceforth woe be to the one who dares append my second to my first, even on my tombstone!'

CHAPTER III

Ravenal Finds a Good Friend

'Life is a boundless privilege, and when you pay for your ticket and get into the car, you have no guess what good company you may find there.'

THE suburban train steamed rapidly into the city, and Ravenal looked out with a never-failing delight on the beauty through which it passed.

On the same seat an elderly gentleman eagerly scanned her face, with an expression at once surprised, puzzled, and positive. 'I cannot mistake those eyes,' he said to himself.

A text-book on architecture lay forgotten in her lap, open at the fly-leaf, on which her name was traced in Tom's bold chirography.

'Ravenal Raymond,' mused the gentleman. 'I knew it must be so, and yet—poor Tom!'

He took a card from his pocket-book and, bowing courteously, held it towards her. 'Pardon me, but

you are your father's child and he was my dearest friend,' he said briefly.

Ravenal flashed round upon him a face full of interrogation, and was met by a half-sad, half-cynical smile.

'I do not understand, sir.'

'Your father's name was Thomas Raymond?'

'Yes.'

'He was in the Civil War?'

'Yes'—breathlessly.

'And fell at the battle of Gettysburg?'

'Yes'—with a catch in her voice.

'We were college chums, fought side by side, and—he saved my life.'

She looked at the card mechanically. It bore the simple name John Derringer.

'Mr. Derringer! Is it possible?'

'You do remember me, then?'—with the same half-cynical smile.

'My father's friend could never be forgotten.'

'Bravo! It is good to know that my grave will not be wholly obliterated by old Time's ruthless finger.'

Ravenal's lip quivered. No hand of theirs had been permitted to lay even a flower upon her father's.

The keen eyes softened. 'Forgive me.' Then he took out his pocket-book again. 'I did the best

RAVENAL FINDS A GOOD FRIEND 23

I could, but I was in prison until the end of the war, and when I got north again I could find no trace of you.'

He held before her a photograph of a cemetery. In the near foreground there stood a graceful pillar of white marble. Ravenal bent her head and read the words carved on its base :—

COLONEL THOMAS RAYMOND

FELL

AT GETTYSBURG,

JULY 3RD, 1863.

He died for his country and his friend.

She lifted her eyes to his.

'How good of you! It will be such a comfort to mamma.'

'Child, child, I have done nothing good in my life! What a mockery that I should have been spared, while poor Tom——' A spasm of pain crossed his face, and he seemed to grow oblivious of her presence.

Ravenal touched his arm gently.

'You will come to see mamma?'

'Why surely. Do you think I will lose sight of you again so easily? Where are you living? And what makes you read such a book?'

'We have just moved to Arlington and we like it

immensely. As to this'—and she held up the text-book with a bright smile—'some day I mean to be an architect, and this is my foundation.'

'H'm! I see. Tainted with the fever of the age.'
Ravenal's colour rose.

'Is it a "taint" to want to earn an honest living?' she said.

'But, excuse me, it cannot be possible that there is any necessity?'

'Yes, sir. My dear father trusted every one, you know, because he was himself so true. That is the reason you could not find us. We had to sell our home, and we came to Boston because we thought there would be greater advantages here for the boys.'

Involuntarily Mr. Derringer touched his hat.

'Grandissimo! I used to wonder during the war whether, after all, your sex was not the braver of the two. Now tell me about yourself and the others.'

'There is not much to tell'—and she laughed brightly. 'I have two of the best brothers in the world. Tom is at Brewster & Benson's, and Bobus goes to school. Meg is our artist; Hester is the cook; Dora is learning stenography; and Nell is content to stay at home and take care of the flowers.'

'You have a conservatory, then?'

'Oh, yes, or rather we mean to have'—and Ravenal marvelled at herself for chatting so freely.

'You must come and look through my library,'

Mr. Derringer remarked, as he lifted his hat in parting. 'I happen to have some good works on architecture which might be interesting even to you.'

That evening he called, and Mrs. Raymond grew tearfully triumphant as he told of the last hours of her brave husband.

'So this is Tom junior! How the boys grow up! You are fortunate, madam, in being able to keep your sons so near'—and Ravenal heard a quick, half-impatient sigh. 'You have a cosy home here, too. How little I dreamed we should become neighbours!' He looked around the tasty room admiringly.

'It has all been done by the children,' said Mrs. Raymond proudly.

'No, you don't say so!'

'You see, sir,' said Tom, 'we are a co-operative family, so we encourage home manufacture and snap our fingers at the tariff.'

'What do you know about co-operative systems?'—and the keen eyes looked at him searchingly.

'It's the only system for the world,' said Tom stoutly. 'This old nineteenth century will never get rid of its tangles until the employers are willing to unravel on that basis.'

'Bravo, Tom!'—and Ravenal applauded softly.

'Tut, tut! Bellamy's moonshine'—and Mr. Derringer ran his fingers quickly through his iron-

grey hair. Then he turned to Hester and asked abruptly—

‘And what particular fad are you wedded to?’

‘I have neither fads nor fancies,’ replied Hester bluntly. ‘Since the whole family has taken to mounting Pegasus, it is all I can do to look after his food and see that he has oats enough to carry them. Some one has to be Martha.’

‘Well done!’—and their visitor laughed heartily. ‘That is practical Christianity in the concrete. The real mission of woman is to make the home, and to make it happy.’

Nell blushed prettily, which did not escape the keen eyes of her father's friend; Meg shook her head indignantly, and said, ‘Just wait and see’; while Ravenal only smiled and then closed her lips tightly, with a peculiar expression which spoke volumes.

‘That is what I tell them,’ said Tom, with the egotism of his sex. ‘Girls never rise to be anything, really. They may do to float round in the Milky Way, but all the fixed stars and planets are of the masculine gender.’

‘Tush, boy! Go beg your mother's pardon for such heresy, and thank your stars if you are fit to tie her shoe. At least it behoves Adam to be humble. Well, madam,’ he continued, as he rose to take his leave, ‘I am immeasurably glad that the happy

rencontre of this morning has put us in touch, after all my hopeless search. You must honour me by making me of use, that is, if co-operative families ever deign to accept assistance'—and he smiled sarcastically at Tom; 'and let this little girl of yours'—he laid his hand upon Ravenal's shoulder—'come and browse in my library to her heart's content. I am a lonely old man, and I promised Tom to be a father to his girls and boys.'

'Was Mr. Derringer ever married, mamma?' asked Nell, as they gathered again in the sitting-room, after bidding their guest goodbye.

'Yes, dear, and lost his wife two years after. It was a terrible blow to him. She left a little son, but I had not the courage to ask him whether he was alive. I don't believe I ever shall.'

* * * * *

Tom said the Raven haunted Mr. Derringer's library, only, instead of assuming the position that Poe has immortalised, she peered inquisitively between the covers of his books. She had taken him at his word, and every spare moment was devoted to the valuable works on her pet subject which she could find nowhere else.

She was buried one day among the pages of Corroyer, sighing a little now and then as she realised how much there was to learn and how remote were her chances of success, when Mr.

Derringer came behind her unheard, and watching her curiously for a few moments, said quietly—

‘You have been thinking you have not much of a chance?’

She smiled as she turned to greet him.

‘It does look like a steep grade, sometimes.’

‘It will not be so hilly after you have taken a course at the Institute of Technology.’

She shook her head. ‘That is impossible, yet.’

‘May I ask why?’

She looked up at him, speaking slowly.

‘You see, Meg’s painting lessons have cost a good deal, and you cannot learn stenography for nothing—’

‘And Bobus must be taught music, and Hester wants cooking lessons, and Tom has developed a fad for electricity. Would you mind telling me when you propose to take your turn?’

Her eyes flashed as she laughed. ‘You know many people plan to get a coat one winter and the next year go without.’

‘What bearing has that upon technology?’

‘Simply that this is my “do without” year,’ she answered brightly.

‘Not if I set my heart upon having the coat.’

‘That would be out of the question.’

‘Be kind, and tell me why.’

‘Because my motto will always be “For value

received." I cannot conceive of American independence upon a borrowed basis.'

"Advanced" is the more polite commercial phrasing.'

'In this case politeness is only a veneer which shows the cracks through.'

'It is no sin to borrow.'

'It is a sign of weakness. Half the world is sick at heart because of the financially and mentally weak ones who live by borrowing.'

'You are sapping the very foundations of Wall Street, and making the kings of finance to totter.'

'I do not aspire to legislate for Wall Street, and my own finances just now absorb my attention.'

'If you are to get on in your chosen profession, you will need the prestige of supposed erudition. To be a success, you must be "in the swim."'

'If my work is worth anything, it will swim of itself.'

'You are wickedly proud, Ravenal.'

She threw her head back with a peculiar gesture, and looked at him fearlessly.

'Dear Mr. Derringer, I appreciate your kindness more than I can tell, but I have a horror of parasites!'

His face softened. 'Child, will you refuse me the pleasure of taking your father's place? I am

a lonely old man. Will you be no kinder than life has been?’

Involuntarily Ravenal turned to a handsomely framed oil painting which hung over the mantel. It was a beautifully finished portrait of a young man, with the same finely cut nose, broad brow, and piercing eyes as the man who stood beside her. Mr. Derringer answered her unspoken thought in low, sad tones: ‘He went away from me six months ago.’

‘Forgive me!’ Ravenal’s heart was in her eyes, and she laid both hands upon his arm impulsively. ‘I am so sorry! I will do anything you wish.’

He looked at her with his old quizzical smile. ‘I wonder if you will, when you know what I wish. What creatures of impulse you women are! You have high-sounding theories and adore intellect, but your heart is king all the time. Well, well, it is a good thing for those of us who are fortunate enough to——’ He checked himself with a sigh, and sitting down at a desk, began to write rapidly. ‘How will this do?’ He read aloud from the paper he had written—

‘KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS

‘That JOHN DERRINGER, party of the first part, and RAVENAL RAYMOND, party of the second part, do hereby agree, that, in consideration of the party

of the first part advancing to the party of the second part a certain sum or sums of money, necessary for the acquiring by the party of the second part a full and technical knowledge of the science of architecture, the party of the second part hereby pledges herself to use the first fruits of the knowledge so acquired in the designing of a dwelling-house for the party of the first part:—

‘And it is expressly understood and agreed that the hereinbefore-mentioned sum or sums of money, so advanced by the party of the first part to the party of the second part, shall be in lieu of all claims which hereafter might be made by the party of the second part against the party of the first part for fees, or any other remuneration whatsoever, in connection with the architectural plans or design for said house.

‘IN WITNESS WHEREOF we have hereunto set our hands and seals this thirtieth day of September in the year of our Lord, 18—.

‘Signed { JOHN DERRINGER.’

‘If you are determined to have the red tape of legality softened by no tender hue of sentiment, this will about cover it.’

He handed her the pen as he spoke, and Ravenal wrote her name firmly under his clear, bold signature

He bowed, and folding the paper, filed it away in his desk.

She saw he was hurt and tried to atone.

'I cannot dream of ever becoming proficient enough to plan a house for you,' she said softly; 'the idea frightens me.'

'Most things in connection with me seem to have that effect upon you.'

'And yet I could not hope to have a kinder critic. The trouble is, you would be too kind to my failures to be just to my faults.'

'Do you think I am unjust, Ravenal?'

She looked at him with clear, truthful eyes in which he was already learning to read his answers.

'I think you are,' she said gently, 'to yourself.'

* * * * *

'Oh, Ray!'—and Nell and Dora came flying to meet her, as she drew near the Rosery, as Hester called the cottage—'the most delightful thing has happened. Mr. Derringer's gardener came this afternoon with a whole cartload of cuttings in the cutest little pots, and now the greenhouse is really stocked, after all our dreams of it. It is too sweet for anything! Come and see'—and seizing her between them, they marched her in triumph to the conservatory, the rest of the family, like a Druid procession, following in their train.

CHAPTER IV

Tom

'There was about the kindnesses we received the fragrance of flowers freshly cut, with the dew of the morning still upon them.'

INDUSTRY waxed furious in the Rosery, for Nell's wedding-day was close at hand. Hester exercised among her pots and pans to be in trim for the wedding-breakfast; Ravenal studied unceasingly—if she must accept Mr. Derringer's assistance, the term of liability should be as short as possible; Tom kept faithfully at the manufacture of furniture during his spare evenings; Dora wearied her brain over Pitman's confusing curves and pot-hooks; and unitedly they worked in the little greenhouse, until Mr. Derringer said the roses had to grow in spite of themselves. Such American Beauties and such fragrant Marechal Niels were seldom seen. Already their fame was growing, and, thus far, they had not needed to go into the city for custom.

When the wedding-day arrived, every one was up with the sun. The greenhouse had been robbed of its choicest blooms, for nothing was too precious for Nell, and the Rosery was heavy with perfume. Mr. Derringer's gardener had brought tall palms and silvery foliage plants, and Tom and Bobus had lined the little alcove in which the bride and groom were to stand with a network of wire, on which Ravenal and Meg had trained a wilderness of vines, until it looked like a fairy bower.

Dora finished a bell of fragrant lilies and brought it to Tom to hang at the entrance.

'I declare, the room looks like the Garden of Eden!' and she drew a long breath of rapture.

'It's a pretty miniature copy!' laughed Bobus, 'and if you don't hurry you'll have Adam and Eve knocking for admittance before you get the gates open. Hand us the hammer, there's a good fellow, and help train this rose-bush over the curtain.'

The table in the dining-room was stretched out to its fullest capacity, and Mrs. Raymond brought out her precious hoard of real Irish damask, while Dora abstracted a mirror from its round frame to place under the centrepiece of flowers, and Meg disposed dainty coffee-cups and plates of her own painting on the sideboard of Tom's manufacture.

'There's that old fraud of a Mrs. Miles!' cried Bobus, coming back from the front door, after taking

a survey through the curtain. 'Who wants her, with her gloom and her groanings?'

'She is old and lonely, dear,' said his mother; 'that is reason enough for us to try and give her one bright day.'

Bobus marched through the hall, rebellious, but at sight of the forlorn figure on the doorstep his kind heart reasserted itself.

'Walk in, Mrs. Miles, and make yourself at home in the Garden of Eden. Eve is prinking just at present, but you won't mind waiting, with the flowers to keep you company.'

The old lady entered the hall with a stately step. Although it was summer-time she wore a heavy cloth skirt, surmounted by a black velvet cloak of wondrous pattern, in memory of her dear departed, of whom she always spoke as 'poor Mr. Miles,' doubtless in view of his having passed out of the reach of her ministrations, although cruel gossip darkly hinted that the old gentleman had been glad to get away.

'Let me take your bonnet,' said hospitable Bobus; 'we're all fixed for company on this flat, but I'll stow it safe aloft somewhere.'

'Oh, no, no. I couldn't think of taking my bonnet off! I will just wait as I am until your ma is ready to see me.'

'Well, if you won't let me play lady's-maid, I'll

have to ask to be excused,' and Bobus vaulted upstairs three steps at a time.

'There she is,' he whispered, 'a veritable black spot in your feast. She's in the best chair, and she'll keep it all through, umbrella included. The idea of celebrating a wedding in widow's weeds of the last century!'

Ravenal laughed gaily. 'Dear boy! Nell doesn't mind, so you need not. Wouldn't you like to be sure that Mrs. Bobus would be as faithful?'

There was no formality. Mr. Derringer met Nell at the foot of the stairs and led her to the leafy alcove, where Harry and Dr. Chapman were waiting; Mrs. Raymond followed on Tom's arm, while Harry's brother and Jack Endicott grouped themselves with Ravenal and Dora under the lily bell, and the service began which was to make the first break in the Rosery circle.

The wealthy Nora Vandegrift sat under an awning on the lawn, leisurely eating an ice and looking through the rose-lined porch at the kaleidoscopic groups which flitted through the hall. She had taken a violent fancy to Meg at the art school, and Meg returned the liking with interest.

'You are a wonderful family, Meg,' she said. 'It is the prettiest wedding I have ever seen, and you say you have done it all yourselves! When I want a party, papa sends a florist and a caterer, but every-



'YOU ARE A WONDERFUL FAMILY, MEG,' SHE SAID.

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thing is manufactured to order, and the guests know they could have the same things themselves any day. This is unique.'

'Has Meg shown you our orchid, Miss Vandegrift?' asked Tom, bowing and holding out his hand for her ice-plate. 'It is very pleasant,' he continued, as he led her to the conservatory, 'to have you appreciate our efforts, for you know so well how things ought to be. Mother is always praising us, but then, that is mother's way.'

'I think that sort of praise must always be the sweetest'—and the bright eyes filled with tears. 'I have never known what it is, you see.'

'Forgive me!' cried Tom. 'Of course, I think so too, and hope you will some day, for she is just the dearest woman in the world!' To which rather incoherent remark Miss Vandegrift could only bow in reply.

'Dora,' whispered Jack Endicott, as he leaned over the front gate while his mother and sister made their adieux, 'I think a wedding half outdoors is just the jolliest thing in life. I mean to have mine exactly like it, only—you will have to help me make it a success.'

'Nonsense!' was the abrupt reply.

'I suppose, now, Mrs. Raymond, I may have a chance to speak to you,' said Mrs. Miles with a sigh. She always ended her remarks with

a sigh, as though the memory of Mr. Miles grew oppressive.

'Let me take your bonnet, Mrs. Miles,' and Dora whisked the massive structure out of the old lady's reach. 'I'll make you a beauty if you'll remember me in your will.'

'Just hear the child! And I expecting to end my days in the Home for the Friendless. Dear, dear! what it is to be a lonely old woman!'

'Now, "angel of the night," you shall not croak upon our wedding day!'—and, catching the old lady round the waist, Dora whirled her across the room in an impromptu waltz, and seated her, laughing and helpless, upon the sofa.

'Hester, I wish you would put in some extra goodies with my lunch to-morrow for Katie Merrill,' she said, when she recovered her breath. 'She is that little deformed girl, you know, who is studying stenography to try and support her brother, who is blind. Her father was a clergyman, but they are very poor, so all the girls plan to give her a little bit of their best.' She did not add she had been the first to institute the custom.

'Bless her heart! she shall have a lunch all to herself,' said Hester. 'I feel as if I could lunch the world to-day. Weddings make one wonderfully hospitable.'

'Why don't you bring the little Merrill out with

you some day, Dollie?' suggested Ravenal. 'It would be a change for her, and Bobus or Tom would take her home.'

'I never saw such people!' sighed Mrs. Miles discontentedly. 'You are always taking some new person on your shoulders to look after.'

'Everybody belongs to God, dear Mrs. Miles,' answered Ravenal softly. 'We are only trying to help some of His other children over the rough places, on their way to the Father's house.'

And so the patient little sufferer was brought into the cosy home, bathed her lonely heart in its frank kindness, revelled in the pretty rooms, drank in long draughts of delight from the tiny greenhouse, and was treated by Tom and Bobus with the courtesy they would have shown to a princess, until the clouds of her life were irradiated by a sunlight of happiness which never let them wholly obscure her sky again.

* * * * *

Tom threw himself down on a sofa dejectedly one evening and laid his head back among its cushions.

'Game's up, Ray. The manager says some of us fellows have got to put in Sunday work, and it doesn't seem as if I could do it.'

'Dear boy! Of course you can't. Begin at the beginning.' Ravenal never wasted time over unnecessary exclamations, Tom thought that was the

reason she was so jolly—she always went straight to the point.

‘There is no beginning,’ he answered drearily. ‘I suppose we have been fed too much on Exodus. The other fellows don’t seem to mind. I feel as if it were the unpardonable sin, almost.’

‘Don’t worry, dear, you won’t commit it.’ Ravenal spoke quietly, although her heart fell.

‘But, Raven, how can I help it? You know it takes nearly all I earn for the rent.’

‘Why, Tom, don’t you believe the Lord cares for His children better than that? No one is forced to sin.’

‘That’s all very fine—in books,’ said Tom moodily, ‘but you don’t know how hard it is to get anything to do. Some of our fellows were trying for months before they got into our house, and they had fathers to help them.’

Ravenal swallowed hard. How she was missing this father-love every day!

‘I know, dear, but you forget our Heavenly Father. Let us write out an advertisement to show mamma, and then you can get it in the morning paper.’

‘If I could only see my way clear, before I gave this up,’ sighed poor Tom, entangled, like so many, in the meshes of unbelief.

‘Oh, doubting heart!’—and Ravenal touched her

soft lips to his puckered forehead ; 'when we can see, we need no faith.'

'I wonder if it's much harm, after all? We can't expect the nineteenth century to be governed by the Mosaic law—it's only fitted for Jews, anyway,' and Tom tossed his head back rebelliously.

Ravenal laid her fingers on his lips.

'Hush! Some day you will be sorry you ever wondered that. Why, Tom, we have nothing to do with the Mosaic dispensation ; don't you know it is the Christ? Now come out in the greenhouse ; we won't worry motherdie until after tea.'

Days passed. Tom's faith was sorely tried. No answer came to his advertisements, and he found it terrible to be doing nothing for the family.

Mr. Derringer had been away on business. When he returned Ravenal set her lips together heroically and went to see him.

She found him in the library. He looked up with a pleased smile as she entered.

'The Raven honours me !' he said, as he gave her a chair. 'How goes the happy family?'

'Not very well, sir.'

Mr. Derringer bent kindly eyes on the young face, which already began to show signs of midnight care.

'I am very sorry.'

'It is Tom, Mr. Derringer.'

'What has he done?'

'It was what he could not do. They wanted him to work on Sunday.'

'Could not?'

'Why, no!'—the brown eyes were lifted to his, full of a clear shining. 'It would be impossible. Tom is a Christian, Mr. Derringer.'

'Oh, oh! and carries his Christianity into his business! Why, even the deacons have given that up as a bad job. You forget the progress of the age. Men can't keep Sundays nowadays. They haven't time.'

'Why, Mr. Derringer, the churches are full of business men!'

'Yes, in the mornings; that looks well; but you have no idea of the percentage that go to their offices after dinner, and I doubt very much if the sermon isn't strongly flavoured with four per cents. No, no, my dear, the fourth commandment is as obsolete as all the rest. A few choice saints stay at home and read or take a nap, but the majority of the world goes on its toilsome way. Look at the railways, and the electric cars, and the street labourers, and the dock hands, and the open stores, and the post-offices. The orthodox churchman has his mail and his Sunday newspaper as regularly as his coffee. Why, if we kept Sunday, we should lose a day.'

'Then I for one cry, Shame!' Her low, clear voice fell vibrant through the silence, while her eyes caught the danger-signals in her cheeks and flashed ominously. 'How much good have the added thousands which the millionaires have been able to hoard through this Sunday business, done them? The world wagged cheerily enough in the old days, when mails were slow and telegrams unthought of. Even the French have found a week without a rest day is a failure. It remains for the descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers to mock at the Sabbath they crossed the seas to save!'

Mr. Derringer shook his head. 'You demand the impossibilities of fanaticism. No human could fulfil your requirements.'

'Not mine, dear Mr. Derringer!' She caught up a Bible from the table, and, turning quickly to the 58th chapter of Isaiah, read aloud: "'If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth—for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.'"

She read the last words softly, with a deep glow

in the dark eyes which were lifted absently to the handsome face of his dead son over the mantel.

Mr. Derringer followed her gaze with a heavy sigh. 'Those were just his mother's ideas. My child, you seem to grow more like her every day.'

'Dear Mr. Derringer, how can I thank you! My mother says she was the most beautiful character she ever knew.'

Some days later Ravenal received the following characteristic note from her father's friend:—

'MY DEAR RAVEN,—Tell Tom to report for duty to Messrs. Vandegrift & Ward as soon as feasible.

'If he behaves himself his Mosaic tendencies will not be subject to jars, as the senior partner is a churchwarden and the junior a vestryman.

'I have told them he is a man with a commandment, so he had better see to it that he keeps the whole Decalogue. Yours obediently,

'JOHN DERRINGER.'

CHAPTER V

Dora Expresses Her Mind

'Speak louder, for your life makes so much confusion I cannot understand what you say.'

THE wind blew softly through the pines, and the sun flecked the ground with shadows in the mossy retreat which Dora had discovered and appropriated shortly after the family moved to the Rosery.

One warm Sunday afternoon she threw herself down on an impromptu couch of moss and pine-needles and soliloquised: 'Heigh ho! What a blessing it is to have one spot in the universe where one does not have to dilute the truth with worldly wisdom, or measure every word with the yard-stick of propriety.

"To be, or not to be," doesn't appear to me the burning question, Hamlet. It lies more in the quality of the B. It seems to me life's music is always set rather in the key of B sharp or B flat than

B natural. I wonder if there is any nature in this nineteenth-century humanity? There is certainly no romance left. To think that when I went in unexpectedly on Nell and Harry last night, in the hope of interrupting a love-passage, I should have found them with their heads together in solemn deliberation over the milk bill! Only a few weeks married and down already to the rock bottom of food and raiment! "Milk and honey." Well, it is a Scriptural combination, so I suppose things are as they should be.'

She lay for a long time motionless, her head pillowed on her faithful St. Bernard. At last she turned towards him and gazed full into his dark, soft eyes.

'Dear old Laddie, can it be true you are going nowhere? You darling, it breaks my heart! Why, Laddie, I should miss something, even in heaven, if you were not there. How that would shock the orthodox! I can just see Aunt Gru, pursing her lips and talking about "the beasts that perish." Beasts are creatures impervious to love, but you, Laddie, are part of myself. Dear old boy! Now, I should not miss Aunt Gru, Laddie. Why couldn't she have been on four legs, and your dear, loving heart where hers is? You look reproachful, Laddie. Well, I can't help it. I must have some outlet, for I shock them nearly into atoms at home as it is.

I was born to take the world at a tangent, I guess. I wish I didn't dislike Aunt Gru, but I do, and it is better to be honest. She is one of these prim mortals that parsons dub "very estimable." Easy for them, when they never see her out of church! Strange how people can be good and not agreeable!

'I wonder what Aunt Gru's ideas of heaven are, anyway? I suppose she means to sit bolt upright all through the ages, hugging a palm, and if I dare to look sideways at the angels, she will say, in those stage tones of hers, "Dora, don't be irreverent!" Poor old soul, she means well, but she has made a mess of her living. Nobody loves her—of free-will. They think they do, but the water of love that is drawn from the well of duty has a brackish taste to me.

'Oh, Laddie, Laddie, it's a queer old world! Do you see through our shams with those big eyes of yours? I know I'm utterly bad—one of the unregenerate, Aunt Gru thinks—but how can I be better, when the saints are such stumbling-blocks? If it were not for Ray, I should have lost all faith long ago. That girl is pure gold, Laddie. It is not that she isn't naturally as fiery as the rest of us, but she keeps the curb-bit on so that her temper never runs away with her. Most people think when theirs gets started they've got to let it have its fling, and the

Lord will forgive them, because He made them hasty! I wonder what they think the "overcomes" are in Revelation for?

'Meg is always allowing latitude for dispositions, and says I am too censorious and critical; but I'm not, Laddie, and you know it. It is this salving over the faults of so-called Christians that is playing the mischief with the world to-day. People expect to see fruits, and I don't blame them; an ounce of living is worth a pound of talk, any day, and it is a poor Christian life that has to be done up in a plaster jacket of excuses to keep it from tumbling to pieces. If the grace of God is not able to overcome our hateful dispositions, then it is no good, and I am not irreverent, Aunt Gru, in saying so.

'Oh, Laddie, Laddie, Laddie, if we could only have been born good! It makes me tired to hear people talk about mortifying their members, and crucifying their flesh, and bringing themselves into subjection, when the fun of it is they don't mortify themselves in the slightest. They have their good things of this life, like Dives, and the Nazarene comes second every time!

'I'm not all bad, Laddie Raymond; there is a good streak in me somewhere, though Aunt Gru can't find it, but I am weary to death of this eternal make-believe at Christianity. People have "grasped the vial and spilled the essence of truth" for so many

years that it seems impossible for them to be honest any more ; and so they hobble along under their mean little subterfuges and deeds of darkness, and deceive themselves into the belief that they are the followers of Jesus, the "light of the world." I declare to you, Laddie, I had rather be a nice, respectable, out-and-out Pharisee, with my phylacteries in full view, than one of these self-satisfied Christian hypocrites, who are so busy peering into corners after their neighbour's "motes" that they have no time to think of their own "beams," although they are large enough, in all conscience, to obstruct their vision.'

She turned suddenly and held out both her hands to Jack Endicott, who had come in search of her.

'Help me to be good, like the angels!' she demanded imperiously.

He caught the little hands eagerly. 'You are good enough for me, dear, as you are.'

'You are like all the rest!' she cried disappointedly, yet the close, human touch comforted her, she could not tell how.

* * * * *

The Christmas bells rang out cheerily, and the Raymonds, who were putting the last touches to the decorations of fragrant spruce and holly, stopped to listen.

'It is too bad,' Dora had grumbled, some days before, 'that that stupid old Mrs. Miles is coming to dinner. She will spoil all our fun.'

'Little girl,' Mrs. Raymond said gently, 'remember the Golden Rule.'

'Let us ask the little Merrill and her brother and make a day of it,' Ravenal had added. 'It is about time we shared some of our Christmas blessedness with those who have none.'

When they came back from the Christmas service they found the guests assembled.

'Well, my angel, I wish you a merry Christmas,' and mischievous Dora curtseyed profoundly. 'You would have had a happier one if you had gone to church, like a respectable Christian, and heard Dr. Chapman talk about the angels' song.'

'What does this preacher know about angels, or their songs either?' demanded the old lady.

'It always seems to me we can hear them in the air at Christmas-time,' whispered little Paul Merrill to Ravenal. 'Katie says, when I get to heaven, I will not be blind any more, because the angels will have opened my eyes.'

Ravenal stroked the thin hand affectionately. 'Dear little Paul! It will be One far higher than the angels, for you will look up and see Jesus.'

The dinner was one of Hester's masterpieces, and Mrs. Miles allowed Dora to put away her dignity

with her bonnet, and forgot to sigh over her future destiny in the Home for the Friendless, as she joked with Tom and told clever stories of the days when she was young; while little Paul sat close to Ravenal, quietly happy; and his sister answered Bobus' sallies with flashes of wit, until Mrs. Miles whispered in amaze, 'Why, she is positively pretty! What a pity that deformity should spoil it all!' And Mrs. Raymond answered, 'It does not, when you know her. She is so sweet of soul we never think of her body.'

After dinner Mr. Derringer's man brought his Christmas gifts. A lounging-chair for Mrs. Raymond, a microscope for Bobus, Ruskin's works for Tom; Meg was in raptures over a perfectly equipped paint-box, while Dora whirled around the poor bewildered 'Angel' in a frenzy of delight, as she examined the dainty dressing-case, on whose silver fittings her monogram was graven. Outdoors stood a thoroughbred Jersey, with a card attached to her horn on which was pencilled, 'To help Hester keep Pegasus alive.'

Ravenal opened her parcel with trembling fingers. How generous this friend of hers was! A jeweller's box, containing a small glass globe, under which, on a cushion of pale green velvet, stood an exquisite model of an arch, in dull red gold. She bent her head to read the engraving, which emitted flashes

of light from the dull surface of its keystone. 'St. Mark xii. 30, 31.' Nothing more. With shining eyes she read the note which lay in the bottom of the box.

'MY DEAR RAVEN,—Some time ago you told me the passage which I have had engraved was the keystone of all true Christian character.

'You have shown me the keystone fitted in its place, beyond all fear of swerving, since the foundation is not the vaporous essence of an evanescent emotion, but the faith of the Christ-Child who was born on Christmas Day.

'In that faith I sign myself,

'Your lifelong friend,

'JOHN DERRINGER.'

That evening, when all was still, Hester drew Tom into a corner.

'Tom, can you be serious?'

'Like a judge.'

'What did you think of the dinner to-day?'

'Inimitable, and surpassing your usual style of excellence.'

'How was the turkey?'

'Browned to the golden mean of happy lusciousness.'

'And the pies?'

'Would have made Martha Washington grow green with envy.'

'And to *entrées*?'

'Would cause Delmonico to blush for shame.'

'Tom, do you mean it?'

'On my honour as a Roman!'

'Then I am going to be a second Aunt Kitty. Will you coax the others to say I may?'

'Won't Aunt Hester suit your purpose?' asked Tom, as he thought of the new niece across the way.

'You dear stupid! Aunt Kitty is a jolly old Virginia darkey, who has made her fortune in New York by getting up cute lunches for people who want to do the thing in style. Why shouldn't I follow in her wake and earn my \$50 a week, as she does?'

'To the detriment of your family?' asked Tom severely.

'I thought you professed to believe in the dignity of labour! I should be able to keep a little maid, then, to do the drudgery while I soar. Will you help me, Tom?' and Hester clasped her hands melodramatically.

'Why don't you take it before a committee of the House?'

'Because you are the chairman and speaker combined. I'll give you waffles twice a week if you will help me through.'

'That is an attempt at lobbying.'

'You shall have whipped cream and ices, now that I own a Jersey Lily,' said reckless Hester.

'The others might not like it.'

'What can they say? Meg paints cups and I make the coffee to put in them. Define the difference!'

'I confess to inability, being neither Socrates nor Solomon, but Mrs. Grundy——'

'Is an old witch, who has wrought more mischief than ever they did in Salem. Won't you give me a chance, Tom? We were all so glad when you got one; and I have tried to keep you strong.'

'You're a brick, Hesty!' said Tom warmly, as he thought of her faithful, cheery serving. 'Hail! Lady Pie. Sweet angel of the loaf! I'll do my best to let you have your "flight," though I can't for the life of me imagine why you have singled me out for the attack.'

'Can't you, Tom?' and Hester gave him a sisterly kiss. 'You're a dear, all the same, and I wish you merry dreams and happy slumbers all the coming year.'

Wily Hester! She did not tell him that she

feared him more than all the family, since he had taken to the latest fad in tailoring, wore a rose in his buttonhole, spandy gloves, and sported a silk hat when he went into the city to church.

CHAPTER VI

Tom Astonishes Mr. Vandegrift

'There is nothing so difficult as the art of making advice agreeable.'

TOM entered Mr. Vandegrift's private sanctum one morning with pale cheeks and a resolute light in his eyes. He held some papers in his hand, but it was not of them he was thinking.

Mr. Vandegrift looked up pleasantly. He was beginning to place a good deal of dependence on this bright young clerk, who seemed to count no work too hard, and was always ready for an emergency.

'Good morning, Raymond. Are those the railway vouchers for me to sign? I wish you would attend to the Washburn and Moen draft which falls due to-day. The Brown Company and Peterson & Lewis have sent new notes in renewal; you would better discount them and put the proceeds towards the draft. Here they are. I think that is all, thank you, Raymond, just now.'

The busy man turned to his papers again, but Tom stood motionless, although he was white now, even to the lips.

'I'll attend to everything you wish, Mr. Vandegrift. Could you spare me five minutes, sir?'

'Why, certainly,' and the rich man wheeled his chair round again. 'Is it time for a vacation, or doesn't the salary hold out? Speak up, Raymond. It is about time you had a higher desk.' Mr. Vandegrift was unusually affable this morning.

'It was nothing of that kind at all,' stammered poor Tom, who was by this time shaking with nervousness; 'but I came to know if you had any objections—that is—I want to ask your permission—to—marry your daughter.'

'By thunder!'—the merchant's hand came down with mighty force upon his desk; then he stared at Tom as if his ears had deceived him. 'You young scoundrel! What do you mean?'

'Miss Nora, sir,' said Tom simply. He was beginning to regain his nerve, now the awful question was put and he still lived.

'You are mad, boy! Go back to your desk, and I will try to forget that you dared to make such a blunder.'

'I am not mad,' said Tom quietly. 'Your daughter is a great friend of my sister's. I often see her, and was afraid the temptation to speak

might prove too strong for me. I should not tell her of my feelings without your permission.'

'Then you will never tell her!' thundered Mr. Vandegrift. 'You young scoundrel!'

'I mean to be a merchant some day,' replied Tom confidently; 'and, though I am poor, I have nothing to be ashamed of. My father left a brave name behind him, and I have got the dearest mother and sisters in the world—and Nora thinks so too.'

'Apparently you have settled all the preliminaries. It was rather unnecessary to consult me in the matter at all!' and Mr. Vandegrift laughed sarcastically.

'We have settled nothing,' said Tom hotly. 'I only hope that when I ask her she will not say "No."'

'Then I advise you to give up all idea of settlement, young man, and attend to your present business. In the meantime I shall cool my daughter's ardour at St. Petersburg. Good-morning,' and Mr. Vandegrift gave him an icy bow.

'I will go back to my business,' said Tom quietly, 'but I shall never give up the hope of winning your daughter; and there will come a time when you will not be ashamed of me, Mr. Vandegrift. Good-morning, sir.'

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Mr. Derringer, going over to spend a quiet evening with his friend Vandegrift, found that gentleman pacing up and down his library in great perturbation.

'My dear fellow, what is the matter?'

'Matter enough!' growled his friend by way of greeting. 'A regular Darby and Joan romance, launched into the middle of our prosaic century! A Romeo, who calmly demands his Juliet, without a picayune to feed her with. I did think enough fools had tried love in a cottage to demonstrate forever that it was an exploded theory. Faugh! it makes me sick.'

Mr. Derringer laughed.

'So your pretty Nora has already begun to make trouble among the world of men?'

'If it were a man I should not mind—I suppose one must pay that penalty for having a pretty daughter—but a young rascalion like Raymond! By the way, Derringer, I believe you are to blame for this. You persuaded me to take the boy.'

'Well done, Tom!' ejaculated Mr. Derringer.

'What do you mean?' and his friend glared at him like an amiable tiger.

'I mean the boy has pluck, and I like him for it,' was the imperturbable reply.

'I wish I had never seen him,' said Mr. Vandegrift testily.

'My dear fellow, don't blame me! It is not at all likely that the little Nora made his acquaintance over your ledgers. Now I come to think of it, I have often met her at his mother's house. You must have known she went there.'

'Of course. A mere artistic fancy for one of the fellow's sisters. I did not pay any attention to it.'

'Just so; then why fly into a tempest, when it turns out to be the fellow himself? Where should we have been, Van, if every one had frowned us down because we were poor boys? But, pshaw! why am I talking so? Tom Raymond is every bit as good as you or I, and, though you don't ask my advice, if I were the father of your little girl, I should be glad to have him for a son.'

'The scoundrel has chosen an able pleader!' said Mr. Vandegrift sarcastically.

'If you think Tom has even mentioned the matter to me, you are tremendously mistaken. He has as much pride as you, my friend; only his is the pride of self-respect; yours, I regret to say, savours largely to-night of the pocket-book. You would rather give your little girl to a pampered idiot, who has only brains enough to spend the money earned by his father's toil, than to an honest boy, whose hands are clean and whose

heart is pure, because, forsooth, he cannot keep a yacht or drive a tandem.'

'It is only natural to want our children to have a good position in society——'

'And so we start them where their fathers left off, when, ten to one, they would be vastly happier in a small house, with a servant or two. Don't you remember how we used to declaim on the dignity of labour?'

'What makes you take such an interest in the boy?' asked Mr. Vandegrift testily.

'It seems to me we both should take a special interest in poor Raymond's lad. Surely you cannot have forgotten how we three fought side by side! We were spared, to make our lives a financial success, but poor Tom gave the old flag all he had. Dear old fellow! I often wish he could have lived to be proud of his little family. I tell you what it is, Vandegrift, you talk about social success and financial standing, but if you could see those brave youngsters of Tom's, as I have, looking at every penny twice, and then rejoicing to see how far it can be made to go—studying and scrimping to fit themselves to do this world's work, while the frail mother keeps them straight for the next, you would come to believe, as I have, that the choicest bits of living are not always found in the glare of the social footlights, but in some of

Nature's hidden places, with only the birds to applaud.'

'Pon my word, Derringer, you are getting poetical!' and Mr. Vandegrift clapped his friend on the shoulder.

* * * * *

Mr. Vandegrift and his partner sat in the former's private office, talking over business prospects.

Mr. Ward was a pleasant, genial man, and the clerks often thanked their stars that 'old Van,' as they politely called him, 'kept behind the shutters, and left Ward to manage the biz.'

That gentleman leaned back now comfortably in one of the leather lounging-chairs, and eyed his partner meditatively. He was the only one in the office who stood in no fear of Mr. Vandegrift. At last he spoke.

'Don't you think it is about time we did something for young Raymond?'

'How do you mean?'

'asked his partner abruptly.

'Only that he has been doing double duty for nearly six months without a cent of extra pay. The fellow whom we have in Johnson's place can't begin to fill the bill, but Raymond has found out somehow that he is the only support of his mother, and so he helps him over all the tight places. He knows more about the minutia of the office than any one. The boys have nicknamed him the

"encyclopædia!" and I myself would just as soon consult him as the letter-book. I never saw a fellow with such a memory for detail. He's invaluable.'

'Better not let him think so,' was the grim response.

'The trouble is, other people do. He has had two or three first-class offers. Live men are always on the look-out for such a chap.'

'Why did he not accept them?' Mr. Vandegrift was listening intently.

'That is what I like about him. He didn't tell me, mind—never mentioned it; but I heard it outside. He said you had befriended him when he was in need, and he was not going to be mean enough to desert you now.'

'H'm. The fellow is grateful.'

'I should say he was. I never saw a fellow so thankful for small favours. And his heart is as tender as a woman's. He is always sharing his lunch with some poor beggar, or going out of his way to brighten up some hovel with flowers that his sister sends. He has some idea about making the world better by filling it with fragrance.'

'Visionary!' and Mr. Vandegrift shook his head disapprovingly. 'Such ideas are not compatible with sound common-sense.'

'Well, I don't know,' and Mr. Ward stroked his

beard musingly. 'He is thoroughly systematic and level-headed, and it seems to me a few more of such ideas wouldn't be amiss in this grasping old century.'

'What makes you take such an interest in him?' Again Mr. Vandegrift asked that question.

'Because he seems more like my own son than any boy I ever met, and you know I am pretty conversant with the genus.'

That afternoon Mr. Vandegrift rang for the porter.

'Ask Mr. Raymond to come to my office.'

Tom obeyed wonderingly. Never since that memorable day had he held any but the briefest business interviews with his chief. No reference of the slightest kind was ever made to the past, and he had no means of knowing whether his present endeavours to merit approval were even noticed, only—Nora had not been sent to St. Petersburg.

Mr. Vandegrift rose to meet him. Tom stood, proudly self-possessed, just inside the door.

'Raymond, I want to—er—apologise for the way I answered you about my daughter some months ago. The fact is, Tom, my boy—shake hands on it, won't you?—I was discourteous and unjust, but I retract what I said, and—er—my daughter and I will be happy to have you dine with us this evening;

and—er—if you should have anything to say to me afterwards, you will find me in the library.'

Mr. Vandegrift had made the *amende honorable* !

* * * * *

After that the days slipped by pleasantly. Meg was in raptures, and all were glad for Tom and pleased for themselves, for they loved Nora dearly.

'Really, Tom, you are beginning to look normal again!' said Dora one morning, as she glanced approvingly at the silky moustache which adorned his lip. 'Your countenance is losing that Byronic tinge of "deep-hued melancholy" which made me fear we should be called to mourn over that saddest of all graves—a reason lost!'

'Fiddlesticks!' ejaculated Hester, as she handed him a dainty basket, in which, enveloped in dewy green leaves, two golden prints were nestled. The fame of her butter had gone abroad, but she never failed to keep the little Merrills supplied. It was one of the decimals of her 'tenth,' although only the Lord knew all the blessed little fractions into which her principal divided itself.

Ravenal, coming in from the greenhouse, laid a cluster of Jacqueminots over the top. 'Tell the little Merrills we shall expect them to spend a long Sunday with us,' she said.

Dora looked up gratefully. 'How you do devote

yourself to them, Ray! It is no wonder Paul thinks he has reached Beulah Land when he comes up our front steps.'

'Dear little Paul! I fear it won't be long before he reaches the Palace Beautiful in reality.'

'You cannot mean you would be sorry?' said Hester, although her own eyes were moist.

'No, of course not; but—how we shall miss him!'

'There's the angel!' and the relentless Dora started to greet her foe.

'I'm off!' and Tom, with a comical grimace, slipped out the back way.

Dora bore her prey in triumph along the hall. 'Now, angel, let me check that groan upon your lips, that it is too warm to live. Remember, all who grumble at the weather are relegated to King Pin Shing's purgatorial kingdom under the northern sea. Let you sit down! How can I? Mother is in the sewing-room, and you know you won't rest until you see her; and she is far too busy to be disturbed.'

'Oh, I suppose so!' grumbled the old lady. 'Everybody is too much taken up with their own concerns to pay any attention to a poor old woman. But I must have a private talk with her. It is very important.'

Mrs. Raymond looked up. She had planned a long day's work, and she knew, by sad experience,

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that a private conversation with Mrs. Miles meant a morning wasted in a fruitless effort to make her realise that a low sum in cash for the undeveloped mine, which had been part of her husband's bequest, was a better investment for her than to hold it, in the hope of realising a large sum in the future, or in the attempt to hinder her from altering her will in her momentary anger at her relatives. She smiled as she greeted her, however, while Dora seated her in the best chair, Ravenal brought her a fan, and Hester slipped away to make her a lemon soda.

That was this family's way of bearing their burdens. They must needs be courteous to all, and their definition of hospitality was not limited to state receptions to those who needed nothing of this world's goods. Always in their hearts rang the far-off echo of the tender, old-time parable, and, stretching their hands towards those who, in some of the complex meanings of this complex century, had 'fallen among thieves,' they obeyed the gentle command of the Crucified—'Go, and do thou likewise.'

Naughty Dora perched herself on a table which stood just outside the door.

'It is the will to-day,' she reported in a stage whisper to the others, who were busy downstairs; 'she hasn't mentioned mines. She's savage with the Seamans, as usual, but it's Eliphalet's family

this time. She is going to disinherit them, body and bones, and leave the bulk of her estate to Leander. "He always was a proper boy," and Mrs. Leander is "a real pretty housekeeper." Next week Leander will be under the ban, and Eliphalet will be in favour.

'Poor old soul! The idea of her making her life a burden over six or eight paltry thousands! She can't last more than another decade, in the nature of things. Why doesn't she live on her principal and be comfortable, and then trust to the Lord when she's penniless?' With which novel philosophy Dora hurried off to her train.

CHAPTER VII

Tom Catches a Burglar

'Were half the power that fills the world with terror,
Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts,
Given to redeem the human mind from error,
There were no need of arsenals or forts.'

WHITTIER.

TOM strode out of the station with a cheery whistle. He stopped to give a couple of roses to a wan-faced child, who was vainly trying to sell some papers, then he hurried on to the back street where little Paul kept house while Katie earned their daily bread.

It was oppressively warm in the city. The street where the Merrills lived was dark, the house was musty; involuntarily Tom contrasted it with the fragrant sunny home he had just left, as he looked at the wasted form and pale face of the little lad, who came towards him swiftly, with the unerring instinct of the blind.

'Oh, Mr. Tom, I'm so glad!' and he buried his

face among the rosebuds. 'I knew you would come! I was sure of it; but Katie said, "Don't depend." She is always telling me that. She is so afraid I may be overmuch disappointed. But I tell her it is different with you, Mr. Tom, because you never disappoint. Are you quite well, Mr. Tom? And how are all the family?'

'The family are well, thank you, sonny,' and Tom laughed at the old-fashioned manner which sat so quaintly on the child; 'in fact, they are very well. I only wish you were half as strong.'

'Oh, I'm doing fairly,' said the child cheerfully, 'only for this weakness,' and he laid his hand, with a pathetic gesture, upon his chest. 'The doctor says it is con-sti-tu-tion-al. What does that mean, Mr. Tom?' He put his hand confidently through Tom's arm.

Tom stroked the thin fingers with a strange tightness about his throat. 'It means, little chap, that you ought to get out of this hole—house, I mean, and do nothing but lie on the grass and drink in sunshine.' He thought a moment. 'I tell you what it is, Paul, I am going to turn doctor now, and you must try my medicine for a while. I mean to carry you off, old chap, out to the Rosery, and see if we cannot get the flowers to match their colour in these pale cheeks. Will you come with me to-night?'

The colour surged now right up to the blue-veined temples, and the lips quivered with a joy he could not speak.

‘But Katie——’

‘Will be delighted to think you are having a change at the country. It will make you all the stronger to keep house for her next winter, so you will really be doing her a good turn.’

The child clapped his hands softly. ‘Flowers, flowers, and the cow, and the birds, and Miss Dora to tell me stories, and Miss Ray to sing me songs, while your mother smooths my hair back, like the Dream Lady does, and calls me her little son!’ Then he straightened himself suddenly. ‘Oh, Mr. Tom, I had a message for you last night from the Dream Lady.’

‘Indeed!’ said Tom, with becoming gravity, ‘and what was her ladyship pleased to say to this most humble servant?’

‘You mustn’t laugh,’ said the boy seriously. ‘We were in a strange country, full of great caves; they made me think of the *Arabian Nights*; and I asked you, if all of a sudden you should see the wicked genie in one of them, what would you do? And you said you would roll a stone up to the mouth and shut him in; and then you fell asleep, and the Dream Lady came and smiled at you and said you had answered right, because if we could’nt do away

with evil altogether, the next best thing was to shut it up.'

Tom laughed as he rose to go. 'Well, you must thank the Dream Lady for her good advice, and as soon as Katie comes home, have her get you ready and I will call for you about seven o'clock.'

'If you are quite sure I will not be in the way?'

'Not a bit of it! You will help me immensely in the greenhouse before breakfast. Now that Bobus has the Jersey Lily to look after, it takes up all his time. Well, by-bye, my apostle; mind, be on time for the train.'

Tom ran lightly down the steps and hurried on towards the office. He had a horror of being late.

How hot it was! The sun blazed relentlessly on the steaming pavements and the air seemed to sizzle about him. His head grew confused, and the hurrying crowds danced grotesquely before his aching eyes. He turned into the large, dim office with a sense of relief. He had never felt afraid of the sun before.

It was a busy day, and two of the clerks were away on vacation. The strange feeling in his brain had developed into a raging headache, and he felt weak and giddy. Never had a day seemed so long! He looked despairingly at the pile of papers on Johnson's desk and then at his own. It was five

o'clock. He wrote a hasty note to little Paul and sent it by the porter.

'Sorry to disappoint you, little chap, but we'll make it all right to-morrow. I am awfully busy, with no time to think. Shall not get away from the office until ten, anyway, but you can think of the cow and the roses, and I will remember the Dream Lady.'

The clock struck six. One by one the clerks closed their desks and left the office. Mr. Ward had been hastily summoned to New Orleans. Mr. Vandegrift had gone home early. Tom could picture him sitting in the cool room which opened into the conservatory where only last night he and Nora had sat so happily together.

How hot it was! He threw up every window and set the door wide open. A great stillness settled through the building; no sound was heard except the rapid scratching of his pen. He had given the porter permission to go off. The night watchman came on duty at ten.

Nine o'clock. He was working under tremendous pressure. The busy pen flew over the paper. Suddenly it fell from his fingers and he lay back in his chair with a horrified, gasping cry. In the open vault behind him lay a large sum of money, brought in just after the bank had been closed. Coming

towards him, with a swaggering gait, an evil-faced man levelled a revolver at his head and ordered him to 'shell out.'

Tom uttered no word, but his father's brave spirit shone out of his honest eyes.

'Do you mean to gag me? I'm no match for you in muscle.'

The man swore a dreadful oath.

'Not till I've made use of you. Stir your stumps now and show me the stuff. Come on! Hurry up, before that old fool comes dawdling along with his lantern. The vault's open. That's handy. Now go in and pick us out the shiners.'

At the point of his revolver he pushed Tom into the vault and followed. Tom gave him a comprehensive glance. He could do nothing by force, that was evident; he must trust to his mother-wit to keep him busy until the porter came.

Suddenly the electric lights in the office grew dim, flickered, and went out. They were in inky darkness.

The burglar cursed Tom, as he ground his teeth. 'I've a mind to brain you on the spot.'

'Have you a match?' Tom's voice was steady. A sudden inspiration had come to him. He remembered little Paul and the Dream Lady.

'Hang it! No.'

'Let me out.' Quick as a flash Tom gave the

bewildered man a push towards the end of the vault, sprang out, seized the heavy door, and, with super-human strength, swung it to upon him. Then his momentary strength vanished and he sank in a heap upon the floor.

Half an hour later Mike O'Rourke, the night watchman, strolled leisurely into the office. He looked round the room, which was flooded again with the mysterious, electric radiance, with a puzzled air. No one was in sight. The vault was closed, yet the overturned chair which lay beside Tom's desk and the disorder of papers upon it were not Mr. Raymond's way of leaving things. Suddenly he caught sight of the prostrate figure and, with a smothered exclamation, went over to it hastily.

'I declare it's Mister Tom himself! An' what'll Miss Nora be saying at all, at all? Is it a fit he's taken, or has he had a thrashin'. There's no blood started, but it's not the look of his face that I'm likin'!' He examined the vault critically. A sound from the inside caught his quick ear and he made haste to shoot the double bolt.

'Aha, there's where ye are, ye spalpeen! Well, ye kin rest aisy till the cops git their grip on ye. If ye've murdered Mister Tom, it'll be the sorriest job ye iver tackled, I'm thinkin'.'

The stalwart Irishman lifted Tom in his arms as if he had been a baby, and carrying him into Mr.

Vandegrift's private office, laid him tenderly upon the sofa. Then he went to the telephone.

'Hullo! Cintral! Will ye do me the favor uv callin' up Mister Vandegrift, 2628, an' Dochter Brandon, 3819 an' send me a parcel uv cops from Station 253? I'm Mike, ye know, darlin', night watchman at the Metropole building, an' I've got a dyin' man on me hands ter take care uv, an' a murtherin' villain tryin' ter break out uv the vault, an' no time fer compliments at all, at all. Blessin's on yer purty face an' yer eyes ez blue ez the say; an' I'll be foriver an' iver obleeged ter ye, dear, if ye'll do this job up suddint.'

Then he went back to Tom. Loosening his clothing, he bathed his temples and chafed his rigid hands, stopping occasionally to shake his fist at the vault door, against which the burglar was pounding in a frenzy of rage and despair.

'An' it's yerself that's the villain!' exclaimed honest Mike in virtuous indignation, 'a-sneakin' inter folks' offices wi' yer nasthy, murtherin' ways! Mister Tom, dear, won't ye be after wakin'?—for it's I that'll not dare ter be tellin' Patsy at ail, at all; an' Miss Nora, with her swate ways, an' her face too purty fer the tears ter spile it. Why, it's Patsy that thinks she's an angel, iver since she waited on him whin he hed the faver, comin' in so aisy-like whin I wuz at me wits' ends ter know what ter do, an' sez

she with that purty blush uv hers, "Mister Raymond told me yer little boy wuz sick," an' thin she began ter croon her songs an' brought him fruit an' flowers, till Patsy thought he'd gone ter heaven fer surely; an' now, what wid Miss Nora comin' ter set wid him, an' the Rosery folks sendin' him flowers and sweets, an' Mister Tom bringin' him playthings, it's Patsy that fergets it's a cripple he is entirely.'

He sprang to meet the policemen, whose heavy tread just then sounded on the stairs, and then Mr. Vandegrift came in hurriedly, bringing the doctor with him.

The wretched burglar was soon overpowered, and Dr. Brandon began to examine his patient with professional gravity.

'I am afraid it is a case of collapse,' he said. 'He must be taken home at once.'

Mr. Vandegrift looked at his watch.

'We are just too late to catch the last suburban train,' he said in a troubled voice.

'Then we must rig up a mattress in your carriage and take him by the road. I do not like this continued unconsciousness.'

The doctor stooped suddenly. Tom had opened his eyes.

'Oh, I thought it was Paul,' he said feebly. 'Tell him I obeyed the Dream Lady.' Then he fell back again into the mysterious land of shadows whither

no Solon's eyes have yet proved keen enough to follow.

Ravenal, watching anxiously through the long hours, heard the carriage stop, and was out of the house in an instant.

'Do not be alarmed, my dear,' said Mr. Vandegrift kindly, as he came to meet her, while the doctor and Mike followed more slowly with their burden. 'Tom has had a slight attack of prostration, but—he is a brother to be proud of.'

* * * * *

'You do not get well as you ought to, Raymond. I believe I will pack you and Nora off together and let you do up vacation and honeymoon all at once.' Mr. Vandegrift sat by the side of his clerk, who was stretched listlessly on one of his own couches.

Tom's eyes sparkled, then he grew grave again.

'You forget, sir, I have to earn a home for your daughter.'

'Nonsense, boy!' said Mr. Vandegrift huskily; 'don't ever talk about "earning" after what you have done! There is room enough in the big house for us all, and I can never let my little girl go away from me, so you will have to make up your mind to be content.'

'Here, Nora child, come and persuade this obstinate

young scamp that it is his duty to take you away for the summer. When you come back you can have the whole upper storey to play at housekeeping in, but you will have to let your old father live under the same roof.'

Tom wrung his hand gratefully, while Nora threw her soft arms around her father's neck, and sobbed out her gratitude in the only hiding-place she had ever known. Then she looked up mischievously, smiling through her tears.

'Where are you going to send us, dearest? To St. Petersburg?'

Her father pinched her cheek good-humouredly.

'Sly minx! I was going to give you your present to-morrow. Now you shall wait for it until you come back. As for you, sir,' he said to Tom, 'you can prove your gratitude by driving to the office on your way from the steamer. You will have to begin to pay at once for your holiday.'

'I will, sir,' said Tom, with a break in his voice. 'I shall spend my life in trying to thank you for the dearest thing a man can have!'

'Tut, tut, boy,' said Mr. Vandegrift; 'don't get off on the high strikes, or you will have another attack; and Ward thinks the business is going to the dogs without you as it is.'

Fed by this new hope, Tom's vigour reasserted itself, and delightful mornings were spent with Nora

over Murray and Baedeker, while the preparations for the wedding went on apace.

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At last the wedding was over, and the Roseries settled down to make the best of living without Tom. Continental correspondence became an absorbing occupation, and Dora took a wicked delight in discoursing volubly of 'my brother in Europe' to those of her acquaintance who had never had the good fortune to cross the 'big pond.'

Nora wrote that the sea voyage had done wonders for Tom, and some weeks later he added that the delicious idleness under the dreamy Italian skies, with the most devoted of wives for a nurse, had made him a man again.

On the way home, after the delightful honeymoon was ended, he kept his promise, and ordered the coachman to drive to the office. It was closed for the Saturday half-holiday, but over the door a new sign hung, the golden letters dazzlingly bright in the sunshine—

VANDEGRIFT, WARD & RAYMOND.

Tears sprang to Tom's eyes but Nora clapped his hands and cried gleefully—

'That is just like papa! He is always a million times better than his word.'

CHAPTER VIII

The Great Refusal

'Architecture is frozen music.'

RAVENAL devoted every moment of her spare time to the mine of architectural wealth contained in the rare works in Mr. Derringer's library. She did not know many of them had been placed there for her especial benefit.

'Will you come and help me choose a site for our foundation?' asked Mr. Derringer, finding her as he always liked to do, sitting absorbed in one of his luxurious armchairs.

She looked up at him brightly. 'I shall be delighted. Do you mean to-day?'

'At once, if you are ready.'

About a mile beyond the Rosery the road swept up to a natural park. Driveways had been cut through it, and as the sleigh slipped slowly over the soft snow, which lay piled high in dazzling purity along the silent aisles, Ravenal gazed with delight at the

massive trees whose branches interlaced above their heads, and catching the sunbeams, threw a witchery of golden colour over the virgin white.

As they approached an eminence which sloped up from the road in graceful undulations, she cried impulsively, 'Oh, stop here!'

Mr. Derringer smiled, well pleased. 'This caught my fancy also, in summer-time, when all the world was green; but I decided to wait until winter had swept the leaves away before I took your impression of it. It suits us both, through all the seasons. That is well.'

He watched the girl's face flush with excitement, as her eyes took in the possibilities afforded by the situation, and her thought slowly crystallised into a dream of stately beauty, as, in imagination, she saw the terraced slope crowned with a harmonious blending of turret and arch and column, which should be the emanation of her brain. He would not mar the vision by a word, and waited patiently, while her artist soul revelled in a melody of form and colour.

'Do you count it a fitting *entourage* for your handiwork?' he asked at length.

And she answered, with a long, deep breath of content, 'It is perfection!'

The mettled horses drew them swiftly homeward through the keen air, rhythmical with the merry

sound of bells, and Ravenal nestled down among the soft robes with a sigh. She was not ordinarily envious. Her nature was too thoroughly sweet and healthy to murmur at the fickle turning of Dame Fortune's wheel, but, as the blessed Christmas-time drew near, her generous heart longed to lavish comforts on the Christ Child's poor, with whom she was constantly coming in contact, and solid greenbacks looked vastly more inviting than the imaginary bullion which she amused her fancy by spending in lavish charities.

She looked up to find Mr. Derringer's eyes fixed upon her in grave disapproval. 'I prophesied truly. You are consuming heart and brain in the pursuit of what will prove an ephemeral fancy. Give up this wild ambition, which is wearing you to a shadow, and bless an old man's home by taking the place at his fireside which only you can fill. Ravenal, my child, I am very lonely.'

Ravenal shook her head gently. It hurt her to disappoint the friend who had been a father to them all, but who only with her dropped the mask which hid his real nature from the world. His hand lay carelessly on the sleigh robes; she slipped hers into it confidingly, as a child might.

'My more than father, I cannot give it up! You do not know what it means to me. An honest power, fairly earned, to help some other souls; a

basis of my own on which to stand ; a chance to be and do. It is my life. I think of it by day and dream by night. To weave fair visions out of stone ; to be able to enrich the world with noble personations of a grand idea. To point to the creations of one's brain, and say, by this and this I have helped to emphasise the symmetry of God's plan for mankind—for I always think a noble building is but the type of a noble soul. Indeed, dear Mr. Derringer, I glory in my beautiful art and never weary of it—it is only the longing to come to the realisation of it that proves overwhelming sometimes ; I grow so tired of living in the potential mood.'

She sat erect, the soft colour flushing in her cheeks, her eyes lifted, radiant with the intensity of her feeling.

Mr. Derringer sighed heavily, but she did not hear him. When he spoke again, the old, cynical smile was upon his lips. 'You are dwelling in a dreamland of fanciful impossibilities, and having given the rein to your imagination, it is soaring with you to heights from which the fall will be ruinous. It is all keystone with you now, but unfortunately in practical life we have to deal with the foundations.'

'But indeed, I am ready for the foundations. I was only having one of my "flights," as Bobus calls them. You shall see that I can settle down to grim routine ; and that reminds me, I have been wanting

to ask your advice about this very subject. Do you not think I would better go into a practical architect's office, as soon as I am through at the "Technological"? I am determined, above everything, to be well grounded.' She laughed mischievously. One cannot be altogether miserable when one is young, and the merry jingle of the sleigh bells was infectious.

'Do you really want me to tell you the surest road to success?'

'You know I do, dear Mr. Derringer. I owe all my hopes of success to your kindness.'

'Then let me formally adopt you as my daughter, and take you to Europe. That will satisfy Mrs. Grundy, and you will have a chance of studying the best models, with no limit of time. Since you have wedded yourself to your profession, I promise to do my best to make the union a happy one. Will you do this, Ravenal?'

She folded her hands together tightly and bent her head, while the dazzling prospect unrolled itself before her mental vision.

To wander at will among the dreams of beauty in the old world she had always longed to see; to feast her eyes upon the delicate tracery and massive grandeur of its buildings; to be able to enrich her thought and train her fancy, with no distracting worriment of mundane things. She knew what Mr. Derringer's 'best' would mean. An entrance into

the very inner circle of her chosen temple of art, for there were but few places where his wealth and influence would not prove an open sesame ; a sudden uplifting from the struggle to win a place, to an assured position, where she could weave her visions for her own pleasure, with no thought of profit ; a release from the hampering bonds of circumstance into a land of broad rivers of delight and streams of plenty, where she could wander at her will. Tighter grew her hands as the vision widened, and she saw her opportunities for good growing broader and deeper ; and then, too, she would be making Mr. Derringer happy. Did she not owe him something for his goodness to them all ?

She caught her breath, with a sobbing sigh, as she pictured the little home, with her tender, dependent mother ; the sisters, working bravely for their daily bread, but looking to her for council ; and the brothers who told her all their troubles. Might it not be best for them too ? As her adopted father's heiress she could help them in so many ways, which only she could know ; and Bobus should go through college abroad, and Meg to Switzerland, and Dora and Hester——

She stopped suddenly. It would not be their own Raven, planning treats for them, as she had done ever since she could remember. If she took this step, she must devote herself to Mr. Derringer and study

his wishes, wherever those wishes might lead. He had said 'no limit of time.' Could her mother spare her? Would it be fair, even with the hope of making herself famous, to leave the others all the bitter while she drank the sweet? Would her unworldly family prize the temporal uplifting she might be able to give them, as much as they did her help in the little burdens of every day?

Slowly she unclasped her tense fingers, and folded one hand down over the other with a pathetic movement. It was the gesture of renunciation. She turned towards her companion a face in which he saw traces of the storm, over which the light was breaking. 'Mr. Derringer'—her voice faltered, but she steadied herself and went on—'I have always counted ingratitude the basest sin, but cannot hope to clear myself of its stain. You have heaped blessings upon me ever since the day I met you in the cars, and I—have disappointed you at every turn.

'When my father left us for the war, he left me with the family. I can hear his words now. "My little Ray, you are my right hand; I leave you my precious things—your mother and the babies." Since then my mother has never missed her good-night kiss, and the children have obeyed my lightest word. My appreciation of your generosity is beyond all speech, but it would not be right for me to take all the poetry and leave them with the prose.'

'Then this also you refuse me?' His voice fell measured and cold through the frosty air.

She flung out her hands with a gesture of despair. 'You will break my heart! Do you not see that I cannot, and be true to my father and my God?'

'Forgive me,' he said kindly. 'You shall do as you think best. I will never worry you with this subject again.'

She leaned back among the robes with quivering lips. He would be true to his word. She would never have even a chance to repent. She had had a golden opportunity placed within her grasp and she knowingly put it out of her reach for ever.

The rest of the drive was very silent. Just as the sleigh drew up before the Rosery, she laid her hand timidly upon Mr. Derringer's arm.

'May I beg one more favour? Do not make any allusion to this before the others. They would count no sacrifice too great to give me pleasure, and I know they cannot spare me.'

'I shall never mention it,' he replied quietly. Then he lifted his hat and was whirled away, while Ravenal walked slowly down the walk, training her rebellious heart to be still before she went in to meet her mother's eye.



SHE LEANED BACK AMONG THE ROBES WITH QUIVERING LIPS.

To face page 88.



CHAPTER IX

Julian Derringer makes a Confession

'So the dreams depart,
So the ading phantoms flee,
And the sharp reality,
Now must act its part.'

'**L**IE back and rest for five minutes, Ruthven,
and then feast your eyes upon what Emerson
might have termed the "oversoul" of Nature.'

'Thou from primeval nothingness didst call
First chaos, then existence, Lord! On Thee
Eternity had its foundation; all
Sprung forth from Thee—of light, joy, harmony,
Sole origin: all life, all beauty Thine.
Thy word created all and doth create;
Thy splendour fills all space with rays divine.
Thou art and wert and shall be. Glorious! Great!
Life-giving, life-sustaining Potentate!

Thy chains the unmeasured universe surround,
Upheld by Thee, by Thee inspired with breath!
Thou the beginning with the end hast bound
And beautifully mingled life and death!

As sparks mount upwards from the fiery blaze
So suns are born, so worlds spring forth from Thee ;
And as the spangles in the sunny rays
Shine round the silver snow, the pageantry
Of heaven's bright army glitters in Thy praise.'

Allan Ruthven chanted the majestic lines in a voice of wonderful sweetness, and then threw his arms affectionately around his companion's shoulder.

'It seems as if we had only to lift our finger now, Julian, to touch the rim of heaven.'

'Ah, you forget the "Peak of Storms" and the "Mount of Terror,"' and Julian Derringer pointed to the Wetterhorn and the Schreckhorn which lay beneath them.

'No, I do not forget; but when we get beyond them they lose their power to fright us. How far removed from us now seems the hurtling rush of the noisy old world. Who could dream of an unholy thought amid the dazzling gleam of this ineffable purity? It almost seems as if this ecstasy of earthly loveliness might be a gateway to the glory of the heavenly peace!'

His lifted face seemed tinged with a supernal beauty, and his friend instinctively tightened his hold upon his arm, as he exclaimed, 'Don't go, old chap. I cannot spare you.'

The two young men were standing on the Maennlichen, among the 'Royal Highnesses of the Alpine

Cycle.' Their eyes rested with ever-increasing delight on the delicate loveliness of the Silberhorn and the Tschingelhorn; in the far distance the Blumlisalp was outlined like a delicate vapour against the sky; while not far away the Jungfrau lifted its solemn majesty of irreproachable grandeur.

It was early morning, and subtle shadings of blue and pink softened into exquisite beauty the cold purity of the snow. Far below them lay the deep valley of the Lauterbrunnen with the foamy torrent of the Black Lutschine, from the opposite rock the Staubbach fell in a veil of mist, while the Niesen shone like an emerald from the blue mirror of the Lake of Thun.

Julian broke the silence abruptly.

'How long have we known each other, Ruthven?'

'By spiritual measurement for several æons; somewhere about two years, as the world counts time.'

'Yes. We met in Rome. You had just arrived from Asia, I from America; and, standing in the City of Seven Hills, the antipodes clasped hands under the very shadow of St. Peter's. Old chap, I don't think I have done the square thing by you.'

'What do you mean?'

'Your life, like an open book, lies before me, and I have turned the pages at my pleasure; yet I have

never told you the real reason of my coming to Europe.'

'You came to study art——'

'That is a kindly rendering. I would better make a clean breast of it, and say I left my country for my country's good, because I was a coward.'

'That, at the start, rings false!'

'Dear old chap! Why will you persist in ranking me higher than I deserve? You see, it was the old story. Father wanted me to go into the business, and I—hated the business! So I put him off from day to day, and dawdled through my life, with a little painting, a touch of music, and an abnormal amount of castle-building, like the good-for-nothing fool that I was—and am.'

'Hush!' Allan Ruthven laid his hand upon his arm. 'I won't listen to such treason.'

'Don't interrupt me!'—and Julian shook off his hand almost roughly. 'I had always been impressed with the idea that I had a destiny, though Heaven knows what part I expected to play in it! Well, I met my destiny in the railway station. Such a very romantic place, wasn't it? She was young, of course, and poor—the kind of poverty that puts its best foot foremost and asks no pity from the croaking world. But the face! Old fellow, do you think I am more impressionable than most men? The face will haunt me to my dying day. The world is full of faces, and

I have seen my share of those called beautiful, but I have admired and left them, well content. I knew, when I saw this one, there was a difference. It was not classically beautiful, but it was irradiated by a soul loveliness which seemed to fill one's thought and left no room for critical analysis.

'Carlyle says, "The conscious and the unconscious are blended inscrutably in this our inscrutable life; endless Necessity environing Free-will." That explains it. I was under a necessity which I could not fathom, and my free-will was gone. For a whole month I haunted that railway station, but I never saw that face again.

'I should have immersed myself in business and so forgotten? My dear fellow, if it came between me and the painting which I loved, by what possible chance could I forget in the business which I hated? I grew so restless that life seemed intolerable. My dear old father never said a word, but I knew what he thought of my aimless wanderings, and it is not pleasant to disappoint one's best friend—always.

'I decided to go abroad and so fill my mind with the beauty of art that I should forget, until this strange hallucination became but as the "waste chaos of a dream." Then I promised my father that I would return and become an irreproachable man of business. He consented, as fathers such as he always

do to their sons' whims, and I came. But alas! by doing so I put the power to forget for ever beyond me!

'You remember Carmelita, whom we met in Florence? She sat to me, you recollect, while you were busy reading Homer in the original. You thought I took a great deal of extra care in finishing the picture. It was an exact reproduction of the face of my vision, only lacking the peculiar, spiritual essence, which I tried, but failed, to give it. Now the dream has materialised into fleshly form. Henceforth I think of her always as Carmelita, and know, beyond all doubting, that, while this life lasts, I shall never forget.

'Now comes the hardest part. My father has been writing me constantly about the family of his special friend, which he came across most unexpectedly some time after I left home. They are possessed of all the virtues under heaven, apparently, and the dear old governor does not say so, but I can read between the lines that he has set his heart upon my marrying his particular favourite among them—of course, presupposing the young lady be willing.

'Now, old fellow, you see just where I stand. Go home I must, for the time is long overdue, and the Governor's patience already severely strained. I must either make a clean breast of it to him, and give the final blow to all his hopes, or vow to

"forsake all others," &c., when I know that in my heart of hearts I will never forsake—Carmelita!

'I come to you for counsel. Good men would tell me I am fighting windmills, I suppose. The only tangible trouble is a face, which has vanished as completely as Galatea when touched by the hand of Pygmalion. Good men, as the world terms such, are very dense when it comes to spiritual subtleties. Your conscience is attuned to a more delicate scale, and like a grim ogre, sits enthroned in judgment on your slightest actions. Give me your verdict. Remember, my father is old, and hitherto I have met him with continual disappointment. Shall I, for the sake of a mere abstraction, annihilate this last hope of his, of seeing my children before he dies, and condemn him to a continuation of his lonely life, which only I could brighten; or shall I throw all these troublesome casuistries to the winds, and make the best of what is left me? I know it would make my father happy, and be my only chance of redeeming in some measure the neglect of my wasted life. Most men have secret chambers in their hearts, and I would seal and guard mine with a Bluebeard's care. As to the rest, I could offer all the requisites of a husband, with the trifling exception of the lack of heart which I have mentioned.

'Old fellow, I have redeemed my lack of openness in the past, for I have laid bare the very recesses of

my thought to you. Now, deal kindly with me, but make your judgment true. Take your own time. I shall not hurry you.' He threw himself back upon the grass as he spoke and lay looking moodily into the arch of blue above him.

Allan Ruthven took his own time, and the hours ticked themselves off the dial of his repeater. No sound was heard except the distant tinkle of a bell, as the Alpine herdsmen led their flocks up from the valley. At length he touched his friend upon the shoulder.

Julian sprang to his feet. He would take his judgment as a man should—standing.

'Did your father love your mother, Derringer?'

'What a question! She died soon after my birth, but, through all these years, he has been loyal to her in every thought.'

'As you would be to—Carmelita.'

Julian started, but his friend spoke again.

'I have considered it in all its phases, dear boy, and looked at it from every side, and there is but one solution to the problem. Go back to your father you must, at once; but this other thing you must not do. You must be true to God as your own soul. By doing what you suggest, you would lie to God at the altar and you would be false to your inner self every day. If your father has known love in its essence, he would be quick to detect the sham; and I very much

doubt, if the young lady is what he thinks her, whether she would not esteem a husband, without a heart, a most undesirable appendage.

‘There is no reason why you should not be happy, in spite of this. I, myself, shall never marry, and yet I find the world a pleasant place.’

‘The last words were spoken in an undertone, and for some moments Julian watched the subtle changes of expression flit over the sensitive face.

‘You are right, old chap, as you always are, and have, with your delicate nicety of perception, reached in a few hours the same conclusion that days of weary thinking had brought me to. I will accept your ultimatum, and change this dreamy existence for the rigid monotony of New England life, with the condition that you accord me the comfort of your presence, to strengthen my resolution, which is but a spider’s web. Don’t refuse! I need all the help I can get. My father’s house is large enough for two, and he would welcome the world for my sake. I need your rare sympathy and quick intuition to give the key to my stumbling meaning, since no woman’s hand may ever gild the prose of our existence, or throw a witchery of harmonious colour over the cold, blue-grey regularity of our household economy.’

After a pause, he spoke again. ‘As this seems

to be the time for laying bare our inner thought, tell me why you, of all men, should doom yourself to celibacy? You are young, with the face and voice of an angel, the two things that women adore, and your history shows no trace of the spectre which haunts my life.'

Allan Ruthven was silent for a moment. When he made answer his face was raised towards heaven, and he spoke softly, as if communing with himself.

'When Jacob wrestled with the angel at Peniel, God set His mark upon him, and ever afterward he felt in his body the cost at which he had obtained the blessing. When Paul was lifted high above the common herd of men, through the abundance of revelations, God gave to him a "thorn in the flesh," lest he should be exalted above measure. Unto me too has a "thorn" been given, and I shall put no woman's heart to the slow torture of counting my fitful pulse or watching my paroxysms of pain. The earth journey to some of us must needs to be a solitary way, but it does not signify if the path be illumined always with the clear shining of the face of Christ.' A strange glow crept into his cheeks, and a silence that could be felt fell between them.

'The chrism of suffering!' Julian Derringer's voice fell unsteadily upon the clear air. 'Oh,

Allan, dear old chap, must every soul be brought into the eternal likeness through the mystery of pain?’

* * * * *

‘It is an ugly business, and I’m blamed if I go on with it.’

‘What do yer mean?’ His companion turned on him with a gesture so threatening that the young man shrank back.

‘I’d sooner starve than be hanged, any day; and we’ll be sure of the rope, if they catch us.’

‘You fool! Who’s going ter catch us? We’re puttin’ of ourselves out ter let ‘em down easy, an’ that’s a sight more than they oughter expect uv us. Ef we started ‘em over the precipice yonder, yer might talk.’ A malicious grin distorted the scowling face and his hands clinched, as if in imagination he was already giving the death-grip to his victims. His companion shivered. ‘Git down on yer knees, I say, an’ help me knock out these yere bolts, an’ see thet yer don’t turn possum; ef yer do—why, one man more or less don’t signify ter Bill Simmons when he’s doin’ a whole job.’

A fiendish laugh smote the still summer air and an evil gleam flashed from the sinister eyes. The young man crouched down sullenly to his unwelcome task.

'I tell yer there's gold in it!' said Bill Simmons, as the last bolt and fish plate were withdrawn from several rails of a track which, after rounding the edge of a precipice, stretched along a high bluff through a lonely bit of country. 'Lots o' gold! Don't yer feel ez ef yer'd like ter see the colour uv some yellor stones, when yer hev'nt a dime ter call yer own? Why don't we do the robbin', yer say, an' let the rest go free? Why, every train hand hez a revolver in his pocket, an' yer may lay yer soul this pretty cargo hez a speshul guard.'

* * * * *

The night express thundered up to the station at Follestone, and Julian Derringer looked out with eager interest at the familiar surroundings. Three stations more and he would be at his father's house. He found it hard to wait.

Allan Ruthven scanned his face, well pleased. There was a steady light now in the dark eyes, and the resolute lines about the finely chiselled mouth told of a hard-won battle. He knew now that his friend had girded himself for life's struggle and would do his duty like a man.

The track projected its moonlit rails, like silver threads, far into the shadowy distance, giving no

hint of the deadly peril which, like a crouched tiger, waited for its prey.

The oncoming train, like a huge nightbird, skimmed swiftly over the sleeping earth, its headlight changing the flying rocks and trees into weird visions and spectral shapes. The engineer leaned far out into the night. How good the soft air felt!

Far on the glistening plain a group of trees bent their tall heads and whispered softly to each other the latest happenings in forest circles. Sheltered among their branches, there crouched an evil thing, with scowling face which felt not the cooling touch of the sweet summer air, and whose eyes, gleaming with baleful fire, fastened greedily upon the loosened rails, as the carrion-bird gloats in imagination over its prospective victims. His strained ears caught the distant rumble of the engine, and, with a hellish chuckle, he settled back again to wait.

Suddenly a young man, with the light of an honest purpose in his irresolute face, sprang upon the track, and waved an old red shirt high above his head. It was the only danger-signal he could find. Five minutes more and the engineer, rounding the curve, would have seen the warning. Only five minutes!

With the smothered roar of a panther the

watching fiend flew at his throat. For an instant two figures struggled and swayed on the brink of the precipice; then, with a gasping cry, the would-be preserver was hurled on to the rocks below, and the human sleuth-hound crept back again to his post.

CHAPTER X

Allan and Julian in a Railway Smash

'About me, with the sense of hidden things,
The touch of vanished hands, a whispered word—
A chord, long lost, from some sweet-throated bird
Returns to me with whirr of angel wings.'

'**H**ERE'S a fix!' and Bobus dashed into the sitting-room at the Rosery, full of excitement. 'The express went off the track last night between here and Folleston, and Mr. Derringer's son is badly injured. He brought a friend home with him and he never got so much as a scratch.

'The poor old gentleman is dreadfully broken up. Dr. Everett is there. I went over the minute I heard it, and he had me telegraph to Dr. Selwyn in New York, and Dr. Haven in Philadelphia. Dr. Lyman is coming out from Boston, with a trained nurse, so they must think he has had a pretty close call. His bones are all

right, but Everett is afraid there has been an injury to the base of the brain.' As Bobus was preparing to enter the Medical College, he felt free to speak *ex cathedra* on all surgical matters.

'That blessed man!' and Hester dashed her hand across her eyes. 'To think of his having such a trial when he spends his life doing kind things for people.'

Ravenal sat speechless. The intense horror of it overwhelmed her, and she felt cold and numb.

Mrs. Raymond rose with sudden energy and walked towards the door.

'You are not going there?' cried Meg, horrified at the thought of their delicate mother under such a strain.

'Certainly,' replied Mrs. Raymond. 'What if it had been one of my boys?' Her voice broke.

'You're a brick, old lady!' cried Bobus approvingly. 'I'll keep things straight here and report twice a day, to keep your mind easy.' And taking his mother's arm in his, he led her away.

The solemn footman shook his head, when he opened the door to them.

'Master is not seeing any one,' he began, but Mrs. Raymond passed him quietly.

'He will see me,' she said, with a pleasant smile. 'Tell him I will wait until he is at leisure.'

Mr. Derringer came at once, white and worn

with a terrible anxiety. 'My dear madam, this is too much!'

She leaned forward, with something in her face that Bobus had never seen there, and took his trembling hands. 'I will not say "I am sorry." You know that. But I want you to make me of use. I have had a good deal of experience, and I know how much extra work sickness makes, and the nurse must rest sometimes.'

Mr. Derringer's lips twitched suspiciously, and he said, in a broken voice, 'It is unheard-of kindness, madam, but I shall never forget it—never!'

Bobus gave her a boyish hug, as he said goodbye. 'Hold yourself taut, little woman, and keep a stiff upper-lip. I will sail the good ship "Rosery" in safe waters, and take the best of care of the crew.'

And so they began their fight with death. The trained nurse was installed in the darkened chamber, where the heir of the house lay in a strange, heavy stupor, making neither sound nor sign; while the celebrated physicians made examinations, held consultations, and then went away, leaving behind them pages of professional hieroglyphics for the enlightenment of Dr. Everett, who came every four hours.

* * * * *

'Allan,' and Mrs. Raymond laid her hand affectionately upon the young man's arm, 'now that

the danger is over, you really must try to get a little rest. Your David will pull through, the doctor thinks, and when he does it will never do to have Jonathan unable to minister to his convalescence.'

A smile curved the sensitive mouth, and lit up the eyes, around which exhaustion and anxiety had draped purple shadows.

'If David does get well, which I am sometimes tempted to doubt, it will not be due to Jonathan's care, but to the mother-love which, without thought of weariness, has brooded so incessantly over his pillow. I never knew my mother, Mrs. Raymond.'

'You poor boy!' She looked at him pitifully, with eyes out of which her soul shone. Then she left him in the hall and went back to the sick-room. Going up to the bedside, she laid a cool hand upon the invalid's forehead.

If the voice is the index to the soul, then, to one of quick and clean intuition, the hand is the alphabet of the heart. Julian Derringer felt the motherhood of solicitude and looked up at her gratefully with eyes which pain had shadowed.

'My boy, you must get well, for your father's sake!'

'Poor old Governor! I suppose I must.' The sentence ended in a heavy sigh.

Just then the doctor entered. He examined his

nonchalant patient critically, felt his pulse, took his temperature, changed his medicines, and altered his diet-card, then said 'good-afternoon' with the air of a man absorbed in thought. Mrs. Raymond followed him downstairs.

'What do you think of our patient, doctor?'

'I confess I am disappointed. He does not take hold of life. His recuperative powers seem to be lethargised under some strange spell. It is peculiar. A fellow with his prospects ought to want to live.'

'Can nothing be done?'

'My dear madam, we are doing everything that we know to do. I am in daily communication with my consultants, but they, too, are puzzled. The only theory I can formulate is that he needs some powerful incentive to gather himself together. A sudden shock might do so, perhaps. It has been known to have a good effect in some cases. But it is all theorising. We are working in the dark.' He took his hat with a sigh.

Bobus passed him in the doorway, as he bowed himself out, and following his mother into the sitting-room, regarded her intently through a powerful magnifying-glass, as she bustled softly about, laying a rug lightly over Allan Ruthven, who had thrown himself on a couch and lay looking wistfully into the glowing flames, and giving home touches to draperies and chairs.

'My dear boy, what have you got there?'

'Only a lens, little woman. Contrary to discipline the captain is under orders from the mate and first officer to report on your appearance. I am instructed to note whether there are any seams starting under all this stress of weather, so I have brought my magnifier to bear upon your epidermis, and woe betide you if I find the lines deepening as the days go by.'

'You crazy boy! Will nothing make you sensible?' exclaimed Dora, whisking past him. 'You will have us worn to shreds and atoms with your antics! How do you do, Mr. Ruthven?' She nodded lightly to Allan, who sprang up to hand her a chair. 'Mumsie, how is the invalid? This is my latest creation,' and she opened a bundle of shimmering silks and creamy gauzes upon the table. 'I had to bring it to show you. Isn't it perfectly lovely? Just see this ashes of roses against this silver-green!' She draped them quickly with artistic fingers. 'Now, Mr. Ruthven, does not that remind you of sea-sunsets and rose-tipped shells and all that sort of thing? You are poetical, I know. You have the cast of face which the Muses love. Mumsie, how *is* the invalid? I wore myself to a shoe-string to-day, making some of my best jelly. Do you suppose he will touch it? You know you think I surpass even Hester at jelly. I gave some to

Jack, when he came with the Symphony tickets, and he said it was "food for the gods," but then he is always ridiculous. Mr. Ruthven, I am going to give you a taste, to see what you think of it.'

She slipped out of the room and returned, bearing a heavily carved silver tray.

Allan Ruthven looked at the snowy covering of fringed silk damask, the low bowl of exquisite old-fashioned china, in which the jelly, coldly clear, quivered and sparkled, the golden blocks of sponge cake, piled lightly on a plate whose deep colouring showed in happy contrast, and the dancing eyes and merry face of the young girl, with a pleased sense of fitness.

He bowed courteously, but his eyes were dim. He was far away on the snow-clad hills of Switzerland, and Julian's voice was saying sadly, 'No woman's hand will ever gild the prose of our existence, or throw a witchery of harmonious colour over the cold, blue-gray regularity of our household economy.' He ate the luscious morsel abstractedly.

Dora watched him, a trifle piqued. 'Well, Mr. Ruthven, does it meet with your approbation?'

He started, his lips curving pitifully as he thought of his friend. 'I beg your pardon. It is a perfect dream in amber.'

'That is very pretty, but it is flattery of the grossest kind. Does your sex always flatter, Mr.

Ruthven? Well, I must run. I am fairly smothered in work. The Angel was in this morning, Mumsie, and she is *désolée* as usual. Says you don't care anything for her now, that you are all wrapped up in silly boys and such useless creatures. I told her they were more useful in the community than such barbarously healthy creatures as she, for they support the doctors, while she cheats every one of their dues, even the undertaker!

'Don't scold, Mumsie. I am sure she must have overstepped her allotted time by twenty years or more. Poor old soul! she's not half as bad as she seems, though Jeremiah isn't a circumstance to her, for she is a perfect queen of lamentation!

'Well, bye-bye, Mumsie dear. Come, Bobus, we shall be late for supper, and I am bound to be first at the concert this time.' She drew his hand through her arm and, with a parting shake of her merry head, disappeared.

In the evening Ravenal came, and, taking her mother's face between her hands, gazed long and earnestly into the dear eyes.

'Darling, are you sure the strain is not telling on you? Do you feel as well as when you came?'

'How can I help being well with such good children?' and Mrs. Raymond smiled fondly at her eldest daughter. 'I only wish poor Julian had half my strength.'

'How is he to-day? Is he just the same?'

'Just the same,' her mother answered sadly. 'If we only could do something to make him want to live!'

And Ravenal echoed the words in a whisper. 'Ah, if we only could!'

* * * * *

Mr. Derringer entered the room where Ravenal sat, deep in calculation, before a table piled high with papers covered with roughly drawn plans.

'Will the Raven deign to grant the old man a last favour?'

She rose and faced round upon him quickly. 'You know how more than glad I should be—if it were in my power.'

'It is. I do not ask impossibilities. My poor boy is dying by inches with the monotony which we have not the power to break. He is passionately fond of music. You have a talent in your voice. Turn from this restless ambition which you are pursuing with such tireless steps and be content for awhile with the commonplace task of making a sick man well. Ravenal, will you come and sing to my boy?'

There is always a battle fought and won, when we turn from the flower-clad *meads* lands of inclination to the rugged heights of duty, which, too often,

rear stern peaks relentlessly between us and the rose-tinted clouds of hope which gild our horizon.

‘If, in our cooler moments, we question the wisdom of the heroic philanthropy which would lay our all upon the altar of human friendship, it is not that our devotion has lessened, but rather that we have allowed the clear-eyed priestess of reason to resume her sway over our actions. Ravenal was none the less anxious to prove her gratitude to Mr. Derringer, but she foresaw that to do this thing would preclude all hope of her gaining the prize which, unknown to any one, she was striving for.

Tenders had been asked for a public building about to be erected in the city, and she had thrown herself into the competition with an enthusiasm which almost ensured success. She had her hours of discouragement when it appeared preposterous that an unknown tyro should dare aspire to compete at all, but she persevered bravely, and her long hours of solitary toil had been brightened by the hope of flashing before the eyes of her devoted family her accepted plans. And now, when her labour was almost complete, she was called upon to lay it aside for ever! So often do the answers to our prayers come in the guise of shattered hopes and denied longings.

She gave a glance at the table, strewn with the result of her thought. That very day she had

arranged to finish her preliminary calculations and commence to materialise her plan, in all its fair and delicate detail.

At the School of Technology there was a model of the Taj Mahal, and, irresistibly attracted by its exquisite workmanship, she had made it a constant study, until every graceful curve and column was indelibly imprinted upon her memory. Her aim had been to adapt its symmetrical and poetic beauty to modern requirements, and, as her plan threw itself upon the canvas of her imagination, she felt with a thrill of exultation, that she had succeeded in her effort.

If this child of her dream and toil were to be chosen by the judges, her professional position would be established. To hesitate now was to lose all. Every moment must be spent in unremitting toil, if she hoped to have it completed by the date fixed as the limit of competition.

Then she turned to the man whose hopes had been laid low in a night, and yet who had uttered no word of complaint through the long hours of sickening anxiety, and, looking into his white, drawn face, said simply, 'I will try, Mr. Derringer.'

* * * * *

Allan Ruthven sat by the bedside of his friend, immersed in thought. Could nothing be done to break this dead level of calm which threatened

to engulf the life which was so dear to him? He had tried talking, but was answered in monosyllables; had read aloud bright articles from their favourite magazines, but Julian lay looking with dreamy intentness at the handsome Japanese screen which stretched the whole length of the bed, and made no sign that he even heard.

Suddenly he started. So light had been the footsteps, he had not noticed any sound, and yet some one was in the room, although hidden by the screen, and, with a voice pure and rich as a meadow-lark, was singing softly Paine's immortal melody of 'Home, sweet Home.'

Julian raised himself on his elbow and, with a new light in his eyes and a tinge of colour in his pale cheeks, listened intently until the last note had throbbed itself away, then he sank back exhausted among the pillows.

A fortnight later he said abruptly, 'Allan, help me to get up and dress. No croakings, old chap. Sick men will be humoured, you know; and I tell you I must see this siren who for the past two weeks has beguiled the monotony of horizontalism with harmony. Rather an irony of Fate though, that she should have welcomed me, of all men, with a song of home.'

Propped up among cushions, he lay on the broad couch, watching the door with expectant and almost

eager interest. He had not long to wait. There was a light step upon the stairs, a pleasant greeting to the nurse, as she passed her in the hall, and Ravenal stood in the doorway.

She was in pure white, her only touch of colour the bloom with which health had stained her cheeks and a spray of magnificent Duchess roses at her belt.

Allan heard an inarticulate cry. Julian had sprung forward, and with radiant, transfigured face, stretched out his arms to her, crying, 'Carmelita!' Then, with a happy smile, he fainted away.

CHAPTER XI

Dora's Kind Thought

'The nest of the blind bird is built by God.'

ONE of Tom's first acts, after his marriage with Nora Vandegrift, and being admitted into partnership with her father, had been to purchase the Rosery, with four acres of land adjoining it, and give the deed to his mother as a Christmas-box.

Hester's enterprise was succeeding beyond her hopes, and a week seldom passed without several appointments with ladies, who were beginning to appreciate her ability to originate the daintiest of luncheons at what they deemed a nominal cost. She already felt justified in keeping a little maid to relieve her of the routine work and allow her time to evolve the latest triumphs of her skill. Bobus declared the family grew recklessly epicurean, for every new dish was tested in the privacy of home, and she waited for the plaudits of her admiring relatives before she set it forth to delight

the taste of her patrons. And the family began to have a feeling of profound respect for the brusque, silent girl, whose earnings were unostentatiously used to fill up so many domestic gaps, and who never spoke to her left hand of what her right was doing.

Dora had graduated from the school of hooks and symbols and held a position with one of the largest law firms of the city. She had vacated her post on the ridge-pole of starvation, and spent her income with the same fertility of resource which she had shown when her hands were empty. More than one of the senior partners found the bright young face refreshing, as it bent over the pages of mysterious notes, and the juniors outdid each other in trying to be agreeable, while to each and all she was as pleasant as a May morning—and as cool.

She sat one evening, abstractedly stirring her creamed chocolate.

'Fortify yourselves!' she cried at length. 'For after supper I intend to propound an architectural problem.'

'Architecture is the Raven's domain. Trespassers will be prosecuted according to law.'

'Peace, Bobus! How often must I remind you children should be seen and not heard? The Raven is quite capable of protecting her preserves

without your assistance. Go back to your manikins and your mortars, my son, and leave wiser heads than yours to discuss matters of importance.'

'All right, Grandma. You'll have to come along then,' and his brother bent his tall form over the little lady and bore her laughing and scolding out of the house.

'Are you good at addition, Raven?' she queried, returning flushed and triumphant from a game of chase, 'or must you always have a foundation to start from?'

'Which sort, Dollie? Simple, compound, or complex? I am not quite up to it algebraically yet, but I might be able to do it by Rule of Three.'

Dora clapped her hands.

'That is it exactly! Three is the number, mystic of course.'

'Lucidate, Lucidate, Dorinda. Life's too short for mysteries.' And Bobus made a feint of attacking her again.

'Be still, Bobus! In plain American, then, I want you to add three rooms to the Rosery.'

'My dear child!' cried her mother. 'Have you taken leave of your senses? Who put such an idea as that in your head?'

'Aunt Gru,' said Dora sweetly. 'She always gives me my inspirations. She said the other day

the prophet's chamber was the most beautiful thing about the Patriarchal dispensation, and I am just longing to gratify her passion for the antique. You don't happen to remember what the style was, do you, Aunt Gru?' she asked innocently.

Miss Griselda's eyes grew ominous behind their glasses.

'Dora!' exclaimed Mrs. Raymond.

'I'm sorry; I'm sorry, Mumsie. Don't put on your scolding-cap, for I'm too busy to take a castigation with equanimity.'

'But what do you want three rooms for, Dollie?' asked Ravenal, the peacemaker.

'For the little Merrills,' was the prompt reply. 'Katie is just wearing herself to a shoe-string with hard work, poor air, and worry over Paul; and if we don't do something to prevent, that boy will go to heaven before his time comes.'

'Hear! hear!' cried Bobus, while Miss Griselda gasped in a horrified tone, 'She is fairly taking the Almighty's work out of His hands!'

'No, I'm not, Aunt Gru. It is the kind of work He is trying to put into our hands, only we shut them up tight and turn away, like the Levite, so He has to take people like Paul to heaven, because there is no place for them on earth.'

'I'm not irreverent, Mumsie; don't get ready for a preachment. It fairly makes me boil over to

see the world full of people without homes, and lovely homes without people to fill them——'

'Rosery is pretty well packed at present,' laughed Bobus.

'That is why I want to build,' was the laconic reply.

'It is a good idea,' said Hester. 'I am with you, Dor, for one.'

'How do you propose to pay for it?' asked Meg, whose eye was always on the shekels.

Dora gave Hester a grateful look. 'I propose to pay the interest out of my increase in salary, which the firm presented to-day. They had the politeness to observe that it was "richly merited,"' and she held up a banknote.

'Hooray!' cried Bobus, as he whisked it out of her hand, to see the denomination. 'Why, it's a fiver! Phew! but you're in luck, Dorinda,' and he executed one of his most skilful gymnastic feats behind her chair.

When the family excitement had cooled somewhat, Dora continued judicially, 'Katie would pay board, of course, as she does now, and that could be used towards the reduction of the principal. Of course, we should have to borrow the money, but I know where I can get it at five per cent. What do you all say to the plan?' She looked round a little anxiously.

Ravenal was the first to speak. 'It is a lovely thought, Dollie, and it does credit to your heart.'

Dora's eyes glistened. Praise from this favourite sister was very dear. 'What do you say, Mumsie?'

'Well, my love, I like your having thought of it, and if the others approve I am quite willing. They are dear children, and I shall be glad if we can do something tangible towards their happiness.'

The others all did approve; even Aunt Griselda was not proof against the winning charm of the little blind boy and the sweet humility of his sister.

And so forthwith they formed themselves into a Committee of Ways and Means, for Hester would not listen to Dora's bearing all the expense.

* * * * *

The extension soon grew into an accomplished fact, and the little Merrills became residents of the Rosery. Every one felt the better for their presence, while the delightful homeyness brought a new light into Katie's eyes, as, with the joy of great content, she took up the burden of daily toil and trudged away cheerily with Dora to her office in the city.

'I used to work for bread,' she said one morning, as she kissed Mrs. Raymond goodbye, 'and it seemed very crusty sometimes and had a bitter taste; but now we feast on rose-leaves and honey, and life seems

like a dream. You are all so good to us; I wish I knew how to thank you.'

'Dear child!' cried Mrs. Raymond, 'you and Paul have wound yourselves around our heart-strings so that I do not know what we should do without you. Life is give and take for all of us, you know, and the Rosery was always meant to hold another girl and boy.'

Little Paul, happy as a king, busied himself among the flowers, with the fine instinct and delicate perception of beauty peculiar to the blind. His heart sang all the day long, as he contrasted his present comfort with his old lonely life. They never let him feel lonely now, these good people. Hester always had some delicate task in which his quick fingers could help her; Meg carried him off to the woods, to hunt for the graceful ferns and dainty forest flowers that she threw with skilful brush upon the china, for which she was now constantly obtaining orders; he was always welcome at Nell's house, where the children clung to him with the telepathy which recognises a kindred soul; Mrs. Raymond thought no one could hold her wool just right but Paul; while Aunt Griselda struck Dora dumb by purchasing a raised Bible, and giving herself the daily task of teaching him to read.

He was never so perfectly happy as when in the greenhouse. Each flower seemed his special friend.

The roses blushed a deeper red under his gentle caresses, and the lilies drooped their lovely heads before him and seemed to borrow an added lustre from the purity of his soul. To him all the world was beautiful. Katie had taken care of that. 'He cannot see the evil,' she said. 'Why should he know the shame?' And so upon the retina of his mental vision she painted in fair colours, and, since every picture needs a background, she filled hers in with the deep, illimitable azure of God's perfect love.

'I am so rich in relations!' he would say gleefully. 'All the dear Roseries, for Katie belongs there now, God for my Father, and Jesus for my Brother, with Bobus and Tom.' It never struck him as incongruous that two should be mantled in the dazzling glory of divinity while the others were clothed in humanity's gray garb.

Sometimes his joy found vent in song, and as the clear notes were wafted towards the house, Hester would stop her work to listen, Mrs. Raymond would smile happily, while Aunt Griselda would find her spectacles grow misty, and surprise herself by wiping away a tear.

* * * * *

It was a magic summer. Julian Derringer had rallied from his swoon to take a fresh hold on life. As Dr. Everett had prophesied, the 'great shock' of

seeing the face which for years had been engraved upon the retina of his memory had been more efficacious than all the drugs in the *Materia Medica*.

The two friends spent so much time at the Rosery that Mr. Derringer found it proper to order a blue striped tent, with hammocks to match, to be set up on the lawn.

'If my lazy boy persists in appropriating your lawn for a lounging-place,' he said in answer to Mrs. Raymond's remonstrance, 'the least I can do is to hinder him from getting a sunstroke.'

Even Hester gave herself time to be lazy, and listened, with a strange sense of pleasure, to Allan's melodious voice, as he sketched graphic word-pictures of Oriental countries and the lands by the peerless sea.

Julian spent most of his time leaning over the table at which Ravenal sat, busily outlining the plans which had already taken shape in her brain for Mr. Derringer's house. He proved to have been a keen student of the different types of European architecture, and Ravenal found his suggestions very helpful, while he marvelled that he had never realised before what an intensely absorbing study it could become.

'Of course,' Dora remarked sagely, 'it is nothing but architecture, pure and simple, but I rather imagine

that Mr. Derringer, junior, is using his knowledge to build a castle in the air.'

One evening Ravenal sat in the tent doorway while Julian lounged beside her. Suddenly he turned and touched her gently. 'Sing to me,' he whispered, 'the thoughts you are thinking now.'

She hesitated for a moment, then her voice broke, rich and tender, into the plaintive melody of 'Home, sweet Home.'

After she had finished a hush fell, broken at last by Dora, who had been watching her with loving eyes. 'What a perfect Rebekah you would make, Raven, sitting in your tent door after the heat of the day. Yes,' she nodded at Julian, 'you would do very well for Isaac; you are tall and dark and stately; but you'—she shook her head at Allan Ruthven, who, with Jack Endicott, was standing just outside—'you puzzle me. Of course, the rest of us would answer to the Philistines, or whatever kind of creatures they were whom Rebekah lived among, but I can't fit you in anywhere.'

Allan smiled, half sadly. 'Call me Ishmael,' he said, 'the homeless one. I have been a wanderer all my life.'

'I would rather call you Israfel,' said Katie Merrill softly, from her seat among the shadows.

Julian turned towards her with a pleased surprise. 'Thank you!' he said heartily. 'That suits exactly.

I shall call him that hereafter when we are alone.'

A little later he took Ravenal's hand in his. 'Good-night, Miss Ravenal,' he said, 'and thank you. I think I was drawing very near the shadow country, but you have brought me home.'

CHAPTER XII

Allan Fights a Hard Battle

'Great gray seas 'neath the gray gull's wing,
And soft gray clouds drop against the sea,
That beats its grayer horizon-ring,
And sighs o' nights, and prays to be
Moon-led, moon-lifted, and set free.

Out of weird, tossed shadows the gray bird slips,
Vaguely gleaming against the dawn,
Till into some sudden splendour it dips,
Flashing outward and strangely gone,
And I hear but a cry go on and on.'

MEG sat in the new extension, painting busily, with little Paul on the floor beside her, nestled close against Dora's faithful St. Bernard.

She had fallen into the habit of consulting him about her choice of subjects, and it had grown to be an understood thing that he should arrange her groupings for the different services of delicate china which were already making her a name.

'Your sister's taste is so exquisite!' one lady had

said to Hester, as she lifted a dessert plate from her table and examined it critically. 'One could almost pick this cluster of wood anemones from its sheltering veil of maidenhair, and her red-browns and neutral tints are so effective.'

When Hester related this at the family table, Meg shook her head.

'It was very kind of her,' she said, 'but the credit belongs to my partner. I only follow where he has led the way.' And she looked at little Paul, into whose cheeks a flush of pleasure had stolen.

'Bravo! my son, you're in luck!' and Bobus gave him a patronising slap on the shoulder. 'Raymond & Co. Sounds euphonious, very. Only let me give you a wrinkle. When Madam Economy makes out her partnership agreement, have me handy to see that she does it on the equal profit basis. Poems in china are worth as much as paint any day, and inspirations ought to count far more than Indian ink.'

Suddenly Meg held her brush suspended and sat watching the group at her feet.

'Paul,' she said, 'what shall we get for Mrs. Henderson's fish-set? She is so—unique—in all her fancies. I am half afraid to undertake it, for she hates the commonplace. I myself rebel at the idea of the same dish holding a fish in paint, while another, of quite a separate family, lies smoking on its shoulders. Fish don't embrace each other in real

life, especially when they belong to different piscatorial nationalities; and one cannot always order trout for dinner because the painter has happened to choose them for a model.'

Paul laughed softly. 'Isn't she funny, Laddie?' and the noble dog beat the floor with his tail, in sympathetic appreciation of the joke he could not understand. Then he sat, deep in thought.

'I think,' he said slowly, 'for a fish-set, you ought to go where the fishes live. You want to paint things that fishes are used to, and the flowers they like to smell.'

Meg clapped her hands.

'The seaside! The very thing!' she cried. 'Paul, you're splendid! A regular seer! Why didn't I think of the harmony of environment before? Of course, we'll get "the flowers that fishes like to smell," and you shall go and help me pick them. We'll make Katie come to, and Dora, and, of course, we'll take Laddie along.'

She took the dog's head between her hands and looked in his soft, brown eyes.

'Do you like the idea, Laddie, as much as Paul seems to?' She laughed at the result of her thought, for the boy was rolling over and over upon the floor in a silent ecstasy of delight. 'The sea, Laddie, the great, roaring rolling sea, with the smell of the brine in your nostrils and the fisher-

men's shouts in your ears. Answer me. Will you be glad to go?' And again, this time with a full apprehension, Laddie wagged his tail.

Meg's idea materialised into a genuine holiday, for Dora and Katie both contrived to take their vacation at the same time, and it was a very merry party which, some weeks later, took the train for the coast.

Little Paul was radiant, and through the long days that followed the colour of returning health began slowly but surely to stain his cheeks, as he ran up and down the shore with Laddie, or lay for hours, listening with a never-ending rapture to the message of the waves.

Meg worked hard. Astir before sunrise, while the tide was out, with skirts tucked up and her feet ensconced in a strong pair of rubber boots, she patrolled the ocean bed for trophies, coming back ravenous with hunger and flushed with delight over her sea treasures. She enlisted the fisher-boys in her service, and they brought her wondrously tinted shells and delicately fronded ocean ferns and flowers from the far distant hunting-grounds where they assisted their fathers in their dangerous toil; or filled their caps with the deserted nests of sea birds, dainty crabs, quaint turtles, or other of the 'creepin' things the leddy seems so fond on.'

Then came the delightful mornings upon the beach, as she arranged, classified, pressed, or caught the fleeting colours of the delicate flora with her brush, while Katie installed herself as her assistant, Dora read aloud, and Paul lay beside them, with Laddie for a pillow.

When, months after, the order was completed, Mrs. Henderson was delighted. 'Every one can order a fish-set,' she exclaimed, as she exhibited it to her friends, 'but not every one gets a sea idyl as a result! It is Miss Raymond's suggestiveness that is her greatest charm.

'Just look at this hint of evening,' and she held up one of the pieces for inspection. 'Can't you see the fishing-boats riding through the soft glow on the water, and the old buoy, around which the sea birds are wheeling? Can't you imagine the wives and sweethearts waiting on the shore, that is just out of sight, and the merry laughter that blends with the noise of unloading, as they land the nets and rejoice over the catch together? And then, can you not picture these brave toilers, forgetting the dangers of the deep as they turn their backs upon it, and, with the babies on their shoulders, going home through the soft, weird light to the little cottages where supper is waiting?

'Or look at this one. I am sure you must hear the soft lap of the waves upon the shore, in that

treacherous stillness which always precedes a tempest, while the birds fly low, and on the distant horizon the storm king is marshalling his hosts. If you look at it long enough, you will catch yourselves humming—

“Men must work and women must weep.”

I did, and my eyes grew misty as I thought how many of the wives and sweethearts would long in vain—

“For the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still.”

‘Or here,’ she added in a lighter tone. ‘This one is just a witchery of sunshine. You can fancy how the boats are dancing at anchor, your eyes are almost dazzled by the sparkle on the waves, and you find yourself laughing at the antics of the crabs, as they execute a *pas seul* on the beach.

‘Now look at this one. Nature in repose. Everything seems waiting. The boats drawn up on the shingle and the nets drying on the shore; even the birds are resting, and across the sky no cloud is seen to sweep; only the constant murmur of the ever restless sea.

‘And look at the glee of these little fellows, each with a bird’s nest in his hands. The picturesque dress, with its gleam of red and vision of rags,

probably made more tattered in the climb after their prize. I tell Miss Raymond I believe her point of sight is always in the beyond. You never see the whole of her pictures at a glance. You have to imagine those distant crags, where the gulls are crooning their love-songs, which these hardy little fellows have dared to scale.'

* * * * *

At home in the Rosery Ravenal still bent over her plans, while Julian became more deeply interested in architecture, and Mr. Derringer watched the little drama which was being enacted before his eyes with ever-increasing delight.

She was rarely without a pencil in her hand. Even when her regular work was over for the day, she often held a block upon her knee, and sketched the outlines of a cottage in the pauses of conversation, until one evening Hester told her she was cottage crazy. She lifted her clear eyes until they met Julian's.

'I am,' she said, 'I admit it frankly. The paucity of provision for the poor, and the still greater meagreness of architectural variety in the rare instances where they are provided for, weighs upon me. How can we expect the working-man to be elevated by his surroundings in a "model town" where everything is in rows and all unsightly? I

think Nature abhors a dead level of uniformity as much as a vacuum; even the birds build their nests differently, and no two trees are alike. Oh, if some one would only build a town worth the name, and let me design the houses!

Julian leaned towards her. 'I will,' he whispered. 'It is an easy promise, with you to help me.'

Ravenal flushed, then she shook her head. 'We are both talking nonsense,' she said, with a laugh and a sigh.

Allan Ruthven saw the flush, and his quick ear caught the possessive pronoun which already fell with such wontedness from the lovely lips, and his heart smote him with bitter pain. He sat awhile, watching them. His friend, so dear, and the one whom he felt might become so infinitely dearer; then he rose quietly, and left the tent to wage in solitude the hardest battle any Jonathan is ever called upon to fight for his David.

When, some hours later, Julian stood in his favourite attitude for the talk which he and his father always had together before retiring, Mr. Derringer spoke anxiously. 'Have you noticed that Allan has not been looking well lately? He came in about half an hour ago, and said he was not feeling O.K. and thought he would go to bed. His face looked pale and haggard, and there was a drawn look about his lips I did not like to see. We

must take care of him, my boy, for he is 18-carat gold.'

'Dear old chap. I should think so!' cried Julian. '28-carat, father, if that were possible. There is not a grain of alloy in his whole make up.'

Mr. Derringer smiled. 'I believe you are right, he said. 'All the more reason for our being careful of such precious stuff. The world is more chary of its characters than its nuggets, and spiritual Kohinoors will always be in the minority.'

'He is never strong,' said Julian. 'When we were travelling, some days he was good for nothing; but lately I have not noticed anything.'

His father smiled at the unconscious admission. 'It is possible he misses those very travelling days,' he said quietly. 'Your illness was a great strain upon him, and since then he has had very little of you for himself. Why not benefit by the success of the Rosery experiment, and take a trip to the sea? Other things being equal, there is nothing like salt water for a tonic.'

Julian's voice trembled. 'You rare old Governor! Are you not tired yet of planning trips for the son who has done nothing but spend your money on his own pleasure? I meant by this time to be head over ears in business, and here I am, as useless a log as ever!'

'Time enough, time enough for that,' cried Mr.

Derringer hastily. 'Now I come to think of it, the sea is always recommended as a final brace up for people who have been as low down as you were, so off you go. I shall expect double duty when you do settle into harness,' he added, with a twinkle in his eye.

'I won't make any more promises, father,' said Julian humbly. 'I am wholly ashamed of myself. But you will find I am not afraid of work. It is so different when a fellow has something to work for,' he added, *sotto voce*.

'God bless you, my boy!' said Mr. Derringer heartily. 'You have got the right ring to you, and I am not afraid of the outcome. Never was. Well, off you go then. I would start as soon as possible, if I were you.'

With a sudden tenderness, Julian laid his hand upon his shoulder.

'You come too, father. It is brutal leaving you to drudge, while I enjoy myself, simply brutal!'

'Nonsense, boy!' cried Mr. Derringer, though there was a pleased light in his face. 'Fancy a couple of tadpoles taking an old bullfrog along on their holiday! Great fun they would have, with the old chap always croaking!

'No, no, I will do famously. I will drop in on Vandegrift occasionally; he is twenty times more sociable since he has become a grandpa; and I

can always spend the evenings with the little girls at the Rosery, you know,' he added mischievously.

'Ha, ha, jealous of the old man, eh?'—as Julian's face fell. 'Well, well, don't fret, boy; I only want to be a father to them.' His tone softened and he added gently, 'The Lord will reward you, Julian, for coming home to make an old man happy. Good-night, my son, and God bless you.'

CHAPTER XIII

Carmelita !

'In heaven a spirit doth dwell
Whose heart-strings are a lute,
None sing so wildly well
As the angel Israfel,
And the giddy stars, so legends tell,
Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell
Of his voice—all mute.'

'ISRAFEL,' said Julian the next morning, 'what do you say to taking a run to Nantucket?'

'Nantucket!' echoed Allan in amaze. 'Whatever made you think of that?'

'The Governor informed me last night that he looked upon a trip to the seaside in the light of a votive offering which it was my duty to lay at the shrine of returning health; but you look vastly more in need of a tonic than I. What's up, old man? You look horribly! Is it one of your old turns?' He came closer to his friend and said remorsefully, 'Israfel, I have neglected you shamefully! I should have seen long ago you

were not up to the mark. Can you ever forgive such a selfish brute?’

Allan laughed. ‘Don’t annihilate yourself, old fellow. There is nothing to worry about. I am as well as I ever expect to be. Tell me, what made you think of the sea?’

‘The Governor. I told him it was not necessary, but he insists, so off we go. Is there any other corner of old Dame Ocean you would rather visit than Nan?’

‘No, indeed. I shall enjoy renewing my remembrance of the quaint old place. When do you think of starting?’

‘The Governor says “instanter.” I will go up to the city and get what is necessary. You shall stay quietly at home and rest. No, you shall not come with me. I will attend to your commissions for you. I intend to do something after this besides thinking only of my own pleasure.’

Allan winced. Their friendship was no longer his David’s chief pleasure. Must he bear that too?

When Julian had started for the city, Allan went into their private sitting-room, which opened off from the library, and threw himself wearily upon a couch. He lay motionless, plunged in a mournful reverie; then, impelled by a strange impulse, he rose, and taking the picture of Car-

melita from the portfolio where it had lain since their return from Europe, set it up before him on a table and gazed long and earnestly at the vivid likeness of the dear face he had come to know so well.

'It is very like,' he murmured; 'and yet, how different!' He missed the peculiar arch of the eyebrow which he loved to watch, the graceful curve of the lip, the quick lighting of the eye. He recalled every different shade of look and tone, which his sensitive nature had been quick to recognise and respond to, then he bent his head upon his breast and groaned aloud.

A great silence fell through the lofty room, while the battle waged fierce within him. When at last he lifted his head, the light of a great peace was breaking over his pallid face, and only the deepened lines about his delicately curved mouth bore witness to the sharpness of the struggle. He smiled at the pictured face wistfully.

'Julian's wife,' he said softly. There was a pathetic note of renunciation in his voice. 'Well, Julian is my friend. We want our friends to have the best always.'

He started at the sound of Mr. Derringer's voice in the hall, and hurriedly left the room.

'Where is Julian?' cried Mr. Derringer, as he came towards him.

'Gone to the city, sir.'

'Impossible! I wanted him to take an urgent message to the Works at once. I am called south immediately.'

'I will take your message, sir.'

'Oh, will you, my boy?' said Mr. Derringer in a relieved tone. 'That will fit capitally. You ought to get the 11.45 train.' He looked at his watch. '11.33. You will have a tight pull to make it.' He handed him a folded paper. 'There is all you want to know. I knew I should not have time to explain.'

Allan caught his hat from the rack and sprang lightly down the steps.

'I will do it!' he cried. 'Goodbye, sir.'

Half an hour later Ravenal stood on the doorstep. Julian had found time to go round by the Rosery, on his way to the city, and tell her of their newly formed plans. She intended taking advantage of his absence. Mr. Derringer's library had been almost deserted since his return.

She went along the familiar hall into her old browsing-place and, selecting Rosengarten's *Architectural Styles*, settled herself in one of the luxurious chairs.

How still the house was! She supposed Allan was lying down. Julian had said he was poorly. How devoted he was to his friend; but then,

everybody loved Allan. She wondered how long they would stay in Nantucket. 'Everything would depend upon Allan,' Julian had said; 'the sea, now, has no charms for me.'

She smiled. It was pleasant to have people enjoy one's society, and of course it was natural that Mr. Derringer's son should be an exceptional favourite with them all.

The book slipped from her loose clasp and fell unheeded upon the floor. She could not compel her thoughts to study. She nestled closer into the soft depths of the large chair while her eyes wandered idly about the room, taking note of every well-known detail with a new pleasure. She would try to reproduce all Mr. Derringer's fancies in the new house, for he had given the furnishing into her care also. Julian would help. He had such exquisite taste. She hummed one of her favourite airs softly. She was very happy.

Suddenly her eye fell upon the picture which stood on the table where Allan had left it, directly in a line with her seat and the half-open door. A softened light from a window near by fell full upon it, deepening the rich colouring and making the whole figure aglow with life.

She rose from her chair and, impelled by an irresistible force, approached the table. Then she stood motionless, while her cheeks grew pale and

a strange sense of unreality oppressed her. It was a likeness of herself!

She had known Julian was an artist, but she had never dreamed he could paint like this. Besides, it was impossible! He had never even made an attempt to sketch her face, and she had always persistently refused to be photographed. There was no way in which he could have obtained his copy. What did it all mean?

A presentiment of impending evil seemed to fill the air. She leaned forward that she might study more intently the mysterious face, which now, to her excited imagination, seemed to confront her with a menace in its lovely eyes. As she did so, she caught sight of a name printed in the left-hand corner, and bent her head eagerly in the hope of being able to solve the riddle. She read the words slowly, with a great dread growing heavy in her heart.

‘Carmelita mia,
Florence,
April 29th, 18...’

This, then, was the end! Her friend, whom she had believed in, whom she had trusted, was false — absolutely, utterly false! He had taken advantage of their gratitude to his father; of their sympathy for his own suffering; and had ingratiated himself into their confidence, that

he might amuse himself, as lightly as a child with a new plaything, until his period of imprisonment was over, and he was free to return for his bride.

He had not forgotten her. Her name was in his heart through his long illness. How well she remembered the first day she saw him! How well she understood now his cry of 'Carmelita,' which had been such a puzzle to her. She had put him in mind of his love! Would she ever forget the look of rapture that had swept over his face? He had fainted, she remembered, but, in his weak state, that was little wonder. It must have been overpowering to have his thought so suddenly embodied. And, standing in the same spot where Allan had stood only two hours before, she uttered the same words. 'It is very like.'

Why had she never thought of this possibility before? It was all so plain to her now!

She remembered, one night they had been playing a game of 'Preferences,' how Dora had put the question to him abruptly, 'Your favourite country?' and how, without an instant's hesitation, he had replied, 'Italy,' and she had asked him, as Dora passed on to the next player, 'You like Florence, then?' and he had answered, 'Florence is best of all!' She remembered further, how, impelled by a strange impulse, she had asked again, 'You will go back there, I suppose?' and

he had said, with a look in his eyes which she could not meet, 'Yes, I hope to some day; very soon, if I have my way'; and then, leaning nearer, he had whispered, 'Shall I tell you a secret, Miss Ravenal? When I go back to Florence, I shall be happier than I have ever thought it was possible for a mortal to be.' She remembered too, how, one day when they were discussing art, he had said, again with that strange look in his eyes which she could not meet, 'The Italian type of beauty is my favourite, always.'

Did Mr. Derringer and Allan know, she wondered? She felt as if that could never be, and yet—Allan had been with him in Florence! She shivered. Life seemed to have grown so cold.

A sudden noise made her start. Allan must not find her here. She turned and fled from the house like a hunted creature, nor stopped to rest until she reached the shelter of her own room. She pleaded a severe headache to the family, and, when the evening brought the young men to say goodbye, she sent her regrets by Hester.

'Tell them I am lying down,' she said wearily, dimly thankful that Dora was away. She was not afraid of arousing Hester's suspicions. The clear-eyed, silent Hester, who saw, and said nothing.

* * * * *

Back in old Nantucket, with its narrow streets and

quaint houses, as much alone with his friend as when they stood together among the 'Royal Highnesses of the Alpine Cycle,' Allan seemed to grow more like himself.

He enjoyed the old-time aspect of the town crier, as he marched through the streets, announcing all that was to take place through the day of interest to the public; and Julian saw with delight that his cheeks were acquiring the genuine sea tan, as they disported themselves in the exhilarating brine, tramped along the beach, went on expeditions to Buzzard's Bay, or drove over the moors to Sconset, with its fisher cottages transformed into bandbox castles for the wealthy fishers in stocks and bonds.

'A penny for your thoughts!' cried Allan one morning, as they lay stretched at full length on the glittering sands.

Julian started. 'My thoughts,' he echoed absently. 'How do you know they are worth a penny?'

'Inferentially they must be worth a good many, for you have been as dumb as an oyster for the last hour, with lapses of abstraction all through the past week; and the oyster carries the pearl, you know.'

'The diseased organism!' laughed Julian. 'Is that your diagnosis of my mental condition?'

Allan shook his head. 'No. That state of things has passed, thank God. Your present thoughts are pleasant ones. Shall I guess them? Carmelita.'

'Wrong and right!' exclaimed Julian with a heightened colour. This was the first time the subject had been spoken of between them since his illness. 'I have concluded I must win my spurs before I can carry off the lady, and my thoughts would soon have been yours, without the asking, for I need your help.'

'With the lady?' questioned Allan quietly.

'Oh, no! With the spurs. You see,' he explained, 'I want to materialise a plan for that town I promised to build her.'

Allan stared at him.

'Probably you don't remember' (ah, did he not!) 'our last evening in the tent, when she was anathematising the wretched pill-boxes working-men are compelled to live in, I told her I would build a model town, and she should design the houses to suit her fancy.'

'You don't suppose she took your words in earnest?' exclaimed Allan incredulously.

'Why not? She is so tremendously in earnest herself, she would find it hard to tolerate an idle fellow with nothing but nebulous projects floating through his brain. The idea has been simmering in my cerebrum for a good while, partly, I suppose,

because the proper adjustment of conditions between employers and employed has always been a hobby of mine; and many times when you and Mrs. Raymond, God bless her! thought me asleep or unconscious, I was haunted with a weird sense of responsibility towards the men who so nearly robbed me of all chance of reparation for the existing condition of society which made their crime possible.

'Just before I lost consciousness with the sickening pain of those crashing timbers, I saw an evil-looking chap, ostensibly helping the sufferers, but in reality helping himself to whatever of value the pinioned wretches had about them. I am morally certain that he knows better than any one what became of the pile of booty in the express car. These fellows always have accomplices.'

'And what inference was your philosophic soul pleased to draw before you succumbed to the horror of the situation?'

'Money,' said Julian laconically. 'These fellows all worship it, and human life is as a feather in the scale.'

'And we, who ought to know better, give them the cue, in that, as well as in other estimates, of what is best in life!'

Julian nodded gravely. 'Sometimes I think mammon is the "beast" spoken of in the Bible;

for if liquor makes men howling demons, the worship of money makes them more cruel than death. We are none of us free from its tarnish. Our money, if not stained with blood, is at least wet with the tears of the toiling thousands who grind their lives out in the weary treadmill of labour. The best we can do is to try and put things on a more equable basis.'

'You ought to press Tom Raymond into the partnership,' said Allan with a laugh. 'Dora told him the other day he would soon be reduced to the mere impersonation of a basal principle.'

'A capital idea!' cried Julian. 'If Tom's firm would come in, that would enlarge our scope. In fact, we might have others——'

'A syndicate,' suggested Allan mischievously.

'Yes, a syndicate, with the sin of monopoly left out. I tell you what it is, Ruthven,' he exclaimed enthusiastically, 'this thing is bound to come! The poor old world is nearly choked to death with this horror of greed and hate and vengeance. Every man's hand is against his fellow, and the devil is over all.'

Allan turned towards him with a great light in his face.

'The idea is glorious!' he said; 'and I will help you, old fellow, with all my heart and soul.'

They talked after that long and earnestly, trying to arrange their best course of procedure in the herculean task which lay before them.

'What will your father say to the idea?' questioned Allan.

'Laugh royally at first and give us no end of chaffing, but he will come round all right. Oh, yes, you can always count on the Governor where real progress is concerned; and the dear old man is so happy over the way things are trending, I believe he would give me the moon, if I asked for it.' A half-smile of deep content flitted across his face, and he whistled a bar or two of 'Home, sweet Home.'

Allan bit his lip, and again the grey pallor which had so alarmed Mr. Derringer rested upon his cheeks. Julian did not notice it. His thoughts were far away, and he watched the sea-birds dreamily. A long silence fell between them. When Allan broke it, he had conquered his momentary weakness.

'Julian,' he asked softly, 'have you ever shown her—Carmelita?'

'Never!'

'May I ask why?' inquired Allan, secretly thankful that he had returned from the Works in time to replace the picture in its portfolio before Julian's train got in.

'I shall never do so until I can show it to her as the portrait of my wife!' Julian answered proudly. 'I would not for worlds have any one know,' he continued; 'I intend it for a surprise. I shall finish it very carefully, and it shall be the first thing her eyes shall rest upon when we get home from the honeymoon.' He laughed shamefacedly. 'I could never talk in this way to any one but you, Allan, but you see you are one of those comfortable old fellows who never have a love affair of their own.' And again Allan was thankful that he had removed all traces of the picture before his friend's return.

'Israfel,' Julian said wistfully, 'you have never wished me God-speed. Somehow, nothing seems just right until it has the seal of your approval.'

Allan held out his hand, which Julian grasped.

'I wish it to you now with all my heart, old man,' he said heartily, and Julian never noticed how bloodless were the lips which spoke the words.

Then another silence fell, broken only by the whirr of the sea-birds' wings, as with majestic sweep they smote the azure, or lifted themselves mightily from their momentary resting-place on a crested wave. Julian was looking far out to sea. Allan's eyes were lifted to the sky, which shadowed forth a vision of eternal love above him.

'Who would have dreamed of such an outcome, when I was pouring out my "wail of woe" to you on old Maennlichen!' said Julian at length. 'I do not feel that I am taking things too much for granted. At least, I know she likes me, and she is utterly incapable of anything bearing even the semblance of a flirtation. Do you not think I am the most fortunate man in the universe, Israfel?'

'I do; but you deserve it,' said Allan loyally.

Julian shook his head. 'I can never hope to be worthy,' he said humbly; 'but I am going to try. It almost seems impossible for a man to be unworthy in her presence. There is a purity about her which unconsciously lifts one to a higher plane.'

Allan's eyes took on a deeper shadow. 'She is one of the King's chosen,' he said.

CHAPTER XIV

Jack Proposes

'Diving, and finding no pearls in the sea,
Blame not the ocean, the fault is in thee.'

'OH dear!' cried Dora, as the Roseries gathered for the evening meal. 'I am so tired! It would be a comfort just to lie down and die. The Raven looks as if she would die standing. You are just killing yourself, Ray, trying to do so much! Architecture is an absorbing enough occupation in itself, but you are a whole Christian Endeavour Society in addition. It is a sinful waste of adipose tissue. But it is no use talking. I suppose you wouldn't neglect your old women if you were building a wing on the Capitol?'

'Why don't you put in the oar of your maternal authority, Mumsie, and stem the current of her suicidal behaviour? Give your dictum, "Architecture *versus* Altruism," or *vice versa*. She is too nice a little girl to go to pieces in this way.

'Oh, here is Jack!' as Jack Endicott, big and

handsome, stood smiling at them from the doorway. 'Come right in, Jack, and give us a tonic,' and she made a place for him at the table beside her.

After supper Dora went out on the verandah and took a comfortable position against one of the flower-clad pillars, where the moonlight fell about her with a soft radiance. Farther back, in the shadow, Aunt Griselda, in the straightest of straight-backed chairs, knitted vigorously.

Jack Endicott stood near by, watching the bright young face.

'You are dreaming,' he whispered at length. 'Tell me what about?'

'What if I were? Moonlight has always been congenial to visions. But I was only thinking of the flowers. This is Meg's paradise, you know, and yet she doesn't get one-thousandth part of the pleasure out of it that I do. She is always seeing branches that must be pruned, or roses that should be cut, and, like Martha, is "careful and troubled about many things," while I just sit at their feet and let them teach me. You beauties!' She laid her cheek caressingly against a cluster of magnificent Jacqueminots, and her eyes grew soft and tender.

'What do they teach you?' Jack bent a little nearer.

'That it is grand to live and beautiful to die, if we leave the fragrance of the roses behind us when we go.'

'You are lounging, Dora,' said Aunt Griselda. 'In my day young people never lounged. It is inelegant, and very bad for the muscles of the spine.'

'From all pretence to elegance may the fates defend us!' exclaimed Dora. 'As to spinal endurance, I never pretended to emulate the—antediluvians.'

Jack whistled softly, but Dora was in a wicked mood. She looked over her shoulder at the rapidly moving needles, flashing ominous in the moonlight.

'Scarlet!' she murmured, 'in August! Wool in summer-time always did give me hay fever, but wool the colour of a blazing poppy-field suggests nervous prostration! You must be first-cousin to that wonderful woman in the Proverbs, Aunt Gru. She always struck me as being painfully devoid of taste, though. Fancy a whole family arrayed in red! Do you think missionaries, as a class, are addicted to rheumatism? Red flannel is an old woman's remedy for that, I believe.'

'If the children of this generation were as anxious to get at the true meaning of the Bible as they are to twist its words to suit their own,' snapped Aunt Griselda, 'it would be a vast deal better for

the world.' Then she rose abruptly and went into the house.

'Now you have done it!' said Jack.

'I rather think I have. I would go in on my knees and say I am sorry, only she wouldn't believe me.'

'Let us go out on the river,' said Jack suddenly.

'By all means. The moonlight ought to be utilised, and the splash of the oars may be soothing to my nerves.'

She left him then to change her dress and came back in her yachting-suit, the dark blue cap, with its band of white, perched jauntily upon her curls.

There was something more than admiration in Jack's honest eyes, and she began to talk rapidly. 'You must think me a heathen, but I can't help it. Aunt Gru always does wear my patience to a shred; it is only a patched garment at best, so it does not take much to fray it.' She laughed. 'As if I hadn't the right to lounge, after grinding at old law briefs all day! But I believe she counts it her divine right to make people uncomfortable. Heigh ho! I wish I was like Ray and could treat her like an angel, but then Ray is an angel herself to start with.' She stooped suddenly to pick a cluster of field daisies and put them in her belt.

Jack laughed as he exclaimed, 'I don't believe you

could pass even a tiger lily! You are the greatest family for flowers I ever saw.'

'It is our one extravagance, you see, so we might as well make the most of it. Silvia Marsh said the other day she never wore flowers, because, if they wilted, it would be a sign of early death, and she had not the courage to put them to the test. So preposterous! And Mr. Langton is so flowery! However will they pull!' She laughed again. 'What a tremendous undertaking marriage-vows must have been in the days of Methuselah! It is as much as people can do now to keep the bond from snapping in twenty or thirty years, and if in rare instances it holds for fifty, public sentiment applauds in gold. Just imagine being faithful for nine hundred! It take's one's breath away!'

'I don't see the hardship,' said Jack. 'It is always a puzzle to me how a man could ever be anything else but faithful to the woman he loved. I couldn't be to——'

She interrupted him hastily. 'My dear boy, we are actually growing sentimental. What a blot on the escutcheons of the champions of the river! It is a warning to us to keep within our legitimate province, and leave discussions on the tender passion to the silly people who indulge in such frivolities.'

For half an hour they rowed in silence. Dora held the stroke oars, and wielded them with such energy

that Jack had as much as he could do to keep in time. Suddenly she stopped and sat gazing intently at the dazzling sheen of moon-lighted water.

Jack leaned forward impulsively. 'Dora, it is no use putting me off. You have been doing that for the last three years. Do you not know I love you well enough to be true?'

The brightness faded from her face and a tired look crept into her eyes. 'There, you have spoilt everything, just as I have been afraid you would. Why couldn't you let things go on in the old jolly way? People sneered at our platonic affection and said it wouldn't last, but I thought I knew better. Oh, Jack, Jack, I thought you would be my friend for life!' Her voice broke in a despairing cry.

'Why, Dora,' said Jack gently, 'could you have a better friend than your husband?'

'My husband!' she echoed contemptuously. 'When I don't love you and should never think of obeying you. A precious wife I should make!'

'I am satisfied,' said Jack eagerly. 'Don't say "No," dear. I have loved you so long!' There was a pathetic ring in his voice which touched her.

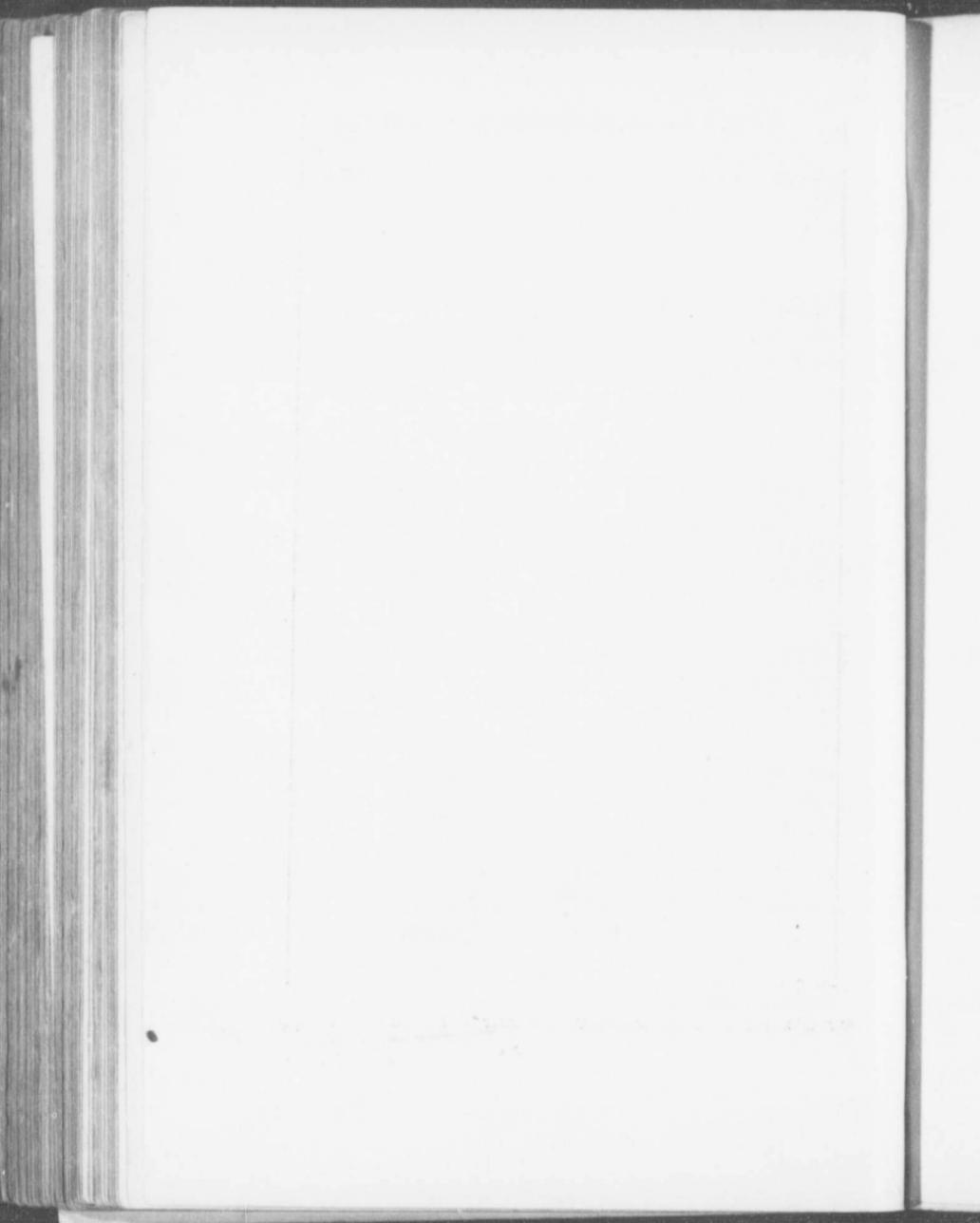
'You dear, patient old boy, I know you have! But I have done my best, Jack, and the love won't come.'

'It will come in time, dear. I will wait. Oh, I will be so patient.'

To face page 158.

THEY, YOU HAVE SPILT EVERYTHING, JUST AS I HAVE BEEN AFRAID
OF WORLD.





She shook her head sadly. 'Haven't I tried, ever since I saw you were determined not to be sensible? I thought it would, once, but now I know better.'

A jealous fear crept into Jack's heart. 'It is that fellow Ruthven,' he said hotly. 'You are all so set on him. Confound him! What right has he to interfere?'

She looked at him with a world of scorn in her eyes. 'Allan Ruthven! As if any one could think of flirting with him!'

'Then what is it?' cried Jack impatiently. 'You must have some reason, Dora.'

'I have given you the only reason there is,' she said wearily. 'I do not love you, and so I could not make you happy, Jack, though you think so now. I have tried so hard to save you from this pain, but now things will never be the same any more.' She leaned her head upon her hand and looked dejectedly at the sparkling water. She had thought it beautiful an hour ago. It seemed cruel now.

Jack straightened himself and spoke in a quick, intense tone. 'Do you mean to say there is no hope, after I have been all these years looking forward to our little home, when my whole life is just full of you? Are you quite sure you mean that, Dora?'

'There is no hope, Jack,' she said in a low, sad tone.

He clasped his arms tightly across his chest and

bowed his head. For a long time they sat there in silence, the boat rocking idly upon the waves. She could not look at him. It was too horrible that he should suffer so!

At length he took up the oars. It was growing damp on the river and Dora was always susceptible to dampness. She stole one look at him as they neared the wharf, but he did not seem like her Jack any more. His face was drawn and pale, and there were hard lines about his mouth which frightened her.

She turned towards him as they drew near the house. They had never walked so silently before.

'Jack,' she said timidly, 'you will be my friend still? You are the only real friend I ever had.'

'Why, surely, Dora,' he answered gently. 'I am your good friend, always. Only—I have been mistaken—I did not understand—and life seems hard to-night. Goodbye, dear.'

He lifted her hands to his lips and then he went away. She watched him, with a dull pain at her heart. She had always been so proud of his strength and his comeliness! She turned towards the house. Only a few hours since she had sat there laughing in the moonlight. Now the moon had gone, and the shadows had fallen.

* * * * *

'What a pretty name you have, Miss Gr'zelle!' said

little Paul, as he nestled up to Aunt Griselda for a good-night kiss. His soft tones fell soothingly upon the sore heart. She held him close and a tear fell upon his cheek. He put up his hand wonderingly. 'Why, you are crying, Miss Gr'zelle! Katie says "the tears of God's saints are the dewdrops of the angels."'

'God's saints,' and she had almost hated her niece who held her up to ridicule a few hours before.

* * * * *

Dora rose wearily after a sleepless night and prepared to catch an early train to the city. It was Saturday, and only a week ago she had been rejoicing in a whole summer of Saturday half-holidays. Now, what did it matter?

'If he had only been content to let things go on in the old pleasant way!' she said to herself, as she looked out of the car window with eyes which saw nothing of the beauty of the morning. 'Boys are so ridiculous! No one could ever take his place as a friend—dear old Jack—but a husband! Why, he must be a grand creature, whom I could look up to and almost worship. Fancy doing that to dear sensible, good-natured old Jack!' She laughed bitterly. 'I am never likely to own such an appendage, for no one with the least pretensions to grandeur of soul would dream of stooping from his spiritual altitude to look at such a crooked piece of

innate depravity as I, old maid Dora, with the flavour of a choke-cherry and the temper of a snapping turtle. Why, I shall out-Gru Griselda herself! I had better follow the example of the Angel and engage a room betimes in the Home for the Friendless. Heigh ho!' and she picked up her lunch-basket with a dreary sigh as the train steamed into the station.

The morning dragged itself to a close. The other stenographers began closing their desks and making preparations for departure. Dora looked on at their cheerful bustle with a hungry heart. Only a week ago she had been the first to hurry away. There had been a rowing-match on the river, and she and Jack had come in first. The week before there had been a walking-party with a delightful impromptu luncheon at the end, and she and Jack—— She checked herself impatiently. Had she never done anything alone?

One of the office boys handed her a note. She caught it eagerly. How well she knew the firm, strong writing. 'A man who can write like that,' Julian Derringer had said one day, 'is fit to be a king among his fellows.' And she had laughed. It had seemed such a joke, when it was only Jack.

She lifted the dainty envelope stiletto which gleamed among the other pretty trifles on her desk. There was a half-smile on her lips. He was urging her, doubtless, to take the drive which they had

planned for that afternoon, in spite of what had happened. He wanted to reason things out to beg her to consider.

'No, no, Jack,' she murmured, as she slowly opened the envelope, 'what I have said, I have said.'

Just how long she sat with the open note in her hands, she never knew. Every one had left the office, only the porter remained, passing in front of her now and then, as he went about the rooms, bolting the heavy shutters and preparing to lock up for the night, casting respectful glances of sympathy at the bright young face, over which such a hopeless shadow had suddenly settled down, as she read again and again—

'MY DEAREST DORA,—You will forgive my writing so? It is the easiest way of saying good-bye for us both, and—you will be dearest, always.

'You remember I told you, in the dear old days when I told you everything, that my father was having trouble with his mining property in Colorado. The superintendent died, you know, and father could not get a satisfactory man to fill his place. The mines are so far from civilisation that the men he would choose to send were not willing to go.

'I have persuaded him to let me try my hand.

It took me nearly all night to do it, but he has consented at last, and I am leaving on the 11.40 train for New York, where I shall get my outfit.

'The dear old father feels it badly, but he sees with me it is best. The desperate need of oversight at the mines explains my sudden move to outsiders, and I hope no one will suspect the real reason of my flight, this of course for your sake more than my own.

'You will make my adieux to the dear Roseries, and pray sometimes for your old playfellow?

'God bless you, dear, with His best.

'Always your friend,

'JACK.'

A pitiful little figure crept into the handsome station, out of which the 11.40 train for New York had steamed a few hours before.

As soon as her train was made up, she shrank into a seat near the door. Two gentlemen took the vacant seat behind her. Business friends they seemed, full of the talk of the street. Suddenly a name caught her ear, and she listened, with every nerve a-tingle.

'Have you heard that young Endicott has gone to Colorado?'

'You don't say so! Has he got the mine fever too?'

'Apparently. It is a mistake though. I do not like to see it, this trend of our promising young men westward. We need them here. Why, such a fellow as Endicott is a real loss to the city. A fellow with grit, you know, and principle. I do not know when I have seen a youngster such a stickler for clean methods. I believe it would be as easy to get him to consent to dishonesty as to move old Plymouth Rock itself; and he hates a lie worse than the devil.'

'Well, it won't hurt the boy to rough it. Develop his muscle, you know, and improve——'

'I tell you he does not need improving,' retorted the first speaker. 'For my part, I do not know what Richard Endicott is thinking of, to let such a fellow go out among a lot of half-tamed savages; Mexicans probably, with blood like fire.'

'Well,' said his friend with a laugh, 'it does not concern you. He is not your boy.'

'No,' said the other, with a quick sigh. 'I wish he were!'

Dora rose mechanically, as the two gentlemen left the train, and found she had been carried two miles past her station. She was glad of it. It would give her something to do. As she passed their seat she picked up a card which had fallen from the pocket-book of Jack's advocate as he gave his ticket. 'Roosevelt Thurman.' She knew

the name well; a merchant prince, to whom all the business world did honour. Was this the way such men thought of Jack, her Jack? She clinched her hands tightly. Not 'her Jack' any more! She could hear the quick sigh, as Mr. Thurman had wished he were his son. Why, then Jack would have been a multimillionaire. She laughed. How little difference that would have made to Jack!

She walked wearily on. She had never thought miles could be so long. And how hot the sun was! If she had been driving, well, she would not likely be driving any more.

Ravenal came across the lawn to meet her.

'You poor child! How horribly tired you look! And where is Jack? We thought he must have called for you at the office. It seemed so strange that you did not come home first.'

'Jack has gone away—to Colorado,' she said in a hollow voice. 'He told me to say goodbye.'

Ravenal laid her hands on the drooping shoulders, while her clear eyes searched her sister's face.

'Gone away—to Colorado!' she echoed, 'without ever saying goodbye! Dollie, did you send him?'

For answer, Dora flung her arms around her sister's neck and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XV

Shadows

The school of sorrow has an extensive curriculum, and, by the beautiful law of compensation, its graduates become possessed of a hidden wisdom, withheld from those who float luxuriously upon the surface-tide of joy.

'JULIAN will be home next week.' Mr. Derringer made the announcement one evening at the Rosery in pleased tones. He expected Ravenal to be pleased also; expected to see the swift flush rouge the delicate cheeks, too pale by far for his liking, as he noticed it always did lately at the sudden mention of Julian's name. He liked to watch these signs of the ultimate success of his daydream. He found it hard to be as patient as his son.

He was not prepared for the sudden start, the tight clasp of the hands, and the quick, unreasoning terror which shadowed the lovely eyes—or was it aversion? He could not tell. Before he recovered

from the shock of it, the lids had drooped. When they lifted, Ravenal was her old sweet self again.

It had all been the work of a moment. Perhaps he had dreamed it. He must be growing morbidly imaginative. And yet, at intervals through the evening, he noticed her lip quiver, a sure sign that she was holding herself under firm control. It puzzled him, and he took his leave early, disturbed and anxious. He could not understand.

After he had gone and the rest of the family had retired for the night, Hester threw herself down in Ravenal's favourite seat beside the window, while her sister stood in front of her dressing-table, abstractedly pulling out one tortoise-shell pin after another, until her hair fell about her like a dusky cloud.

'I have about come to the conclusion, Raven,' she said carelessly, 'that my constitution needs a vacation. Do you think I have earned my right to a rest from pots and pans?'

In an instant Ravenal was on her knees beside her, saying remorsefully:—

'You dear, brave child! We should have sent you off long ago. How careless we have been! And she scanned her face anxiously and said it looked worn and thin.

Hester laughed.

'No, I am not posing as a victim to prospective

consumption, or heart failure, or even the deadly liver. I simply am growing rusty and want a change. There gets to be a monotony even in entrées, you know.'

'I should think so, you grand soldier!' cried Ravenal, with one of her soft kisses. 'You must go at once. You have been the backbone of our social anatomy for so many faithful years that the bare thought of the Rosery without you seems like disintegration; but we will do the best we can and be ready to appreciate you hugely when you come home again. I am ashamed that we have not shown you before how essential you are to our happiness.'

'Nonsense!' said Hester lightly. 'They will get on excellently well, for Martha is so handy now, I can trust her with almost everything. I claim the right to take you as my companion.'

Ravenal shook her head.

'Why not?' queried Hester, a little anxiously.

'Want of funds, my child.'

'Oh, those are already provided. What is the good of being a business woman if I may not treat my friends?'

'Do you think I would take your hard-won earnings to spend on my own pleasure, you generous child?'

'Do you think you have any right to ruin my

pleasure by refusing to take them? You are too proud by half, Raven. What is the good of living, if we may not help our fellows? You will just have to go to pilot me through the mazes of the giddy world. Fancy this spinster starting off, all solitary and alone, to take a recreation! Why, even the bell boys would pity me, and the waiters would grow sympathetic over my lonely meals. Discretion is the better part of valour, my dear, so give in with a good grace—for give in you must. I have set my heart upon it, and, for once, I will have my way.

'Say you will, dearie,' she added coaxingly, 'and we will just run away from everybody to dear New Hampshire, and let God's mountains shut us out—and in.'

She caught the swift look of relief which her skilfully worded sentence brought to the troubled face, and, giving Ravenal one of her rare embraces, she said gently, 'I knew you would go, for my sake. It is good of you to take the time from your architecture to give your stupid sister pleasure. I want to start this week.'

So it was settled; and when, a few days later, Julian Derringer came home, excited and happy, full of his new project, and eager to lay it in all its fair detail at Ravenal's feet as a tangible proof of his love, he found the bird had flown.

His father watched him anxiously, but it was

evident he had no cause for uneasiness, and after the first disappointment was over he set them both at work to perfect the plans as much as possible before Ravenal's return.

'It is her idea,' he explained to his father; 'I never should have thought of it alone.'

Many and long were the consultations between the two young men and Mr. Derringer, who, although he chaffed them unmercifully, as Julian had predicted, was greatly taken with what he was pleased to call the altruistic innovations of the nineteenth century,' and threw the whole weight of his personality and influence into it with an almost boyish zeal.

Meanwhile, among the majestic solitudes of the White Mountains, Hester watched, well pleased, the success of her ruse; and enjoyed her holiday all the more that she saw the light coming back to Ravenal's eyes and caught at intervals the music of her old merry laugh.

They revelled in the intoxicating mountain air; the grandeur of the scenery; the witching beauty of the forests; made pilgrimages to all sorts of impossible places; spent long, delicious mornings on mimic peaks, betwixt the earth and sky, or, perched on top of the stage coaches, drove beside giddy precipices and across bewildering gorges, lost to all thought of fear in a never-ending rapture of delight.

Ravenal had shut the door on the past and resolutely turned the key. At least for the present she would be free to enjoy and be happy. It was Hester's holiday. This much, at least, was Hester's right. She had left even her pencils behind. Hester had no need to call her 'cottage crazy' now.

They held long talks together, these two, who at home were always too busy for much interchange of thought; and Ravenal found herself listening with amazement to the confidences of her brusque, reticent sister. On her part, Hester spared no pains to entertain her guest.

'Listen to this,' she said one morning, after they had ensconced themselves in their favourite lounging-place. 'It is called "A Common Inference." See if you think it is true.' She began to read from a small book of poems she held in her hand:—

'A night mysterious, tender, quiet, deep;
 Heavy with flowers; full of life asleep;
 Thrilling with insect voices; thick with stars;
 No cloud between the dewdrops and red Mars;
 The small earth whirling softly on her way;
 The moonbeams and the waterfalls at play;
 A million, million worlds that move in peace;
 A million mighty laws that never cease;
 And one small ant heap, hidden by small weeds,
 Rich with eggs, slaves, and store of millet seeds.
 They sleep beneath the sod
 And trust in God.

A day all glorious, royal, blazing, bright ;
Radiant with flowers, full of life and light ;
Great fields of corn and sunshine ; courteous trees ;
Snow-sainted mountains ; earth-embracing seas ;
Wide golden deserts ; slender silver streams ;
Clear rainbows where the tossing fountain gleams ;
And everywhere in happiness and peace,
A million forms of life that never cease ;
And one small ant heap, crushed by passing tread,
Hath scarce enough alive to mourn the dead !

They shriek beneath the sod
There is no God !

There was a long silence after she had finished reading, then Ravenal made answer slowly.

'Yes, it is absolutely true.'

Hester looked off at the majestic peaks, the cloud-flecked sky above them, the clustering humanity beneath.

'Why should it be,' she said softly, 'if we believe?'

'Partly, I think, because we are so ant-like in mental and moral stature. God exists for us simply as He comes within the limit of our circumscribed vision. The earth rolls round upon its axis; the centuries come and go; we hear of grand things happening in other parts of the world; but for us, as a rule, all living is centred in our own small orbit. We accept the good from His hand as a matter of course, but we are not prepared

for the evil. It is so hard for us to get rid of the "ego."

'Allan Ruthven has done it!' exclaimed Hester abruptly. 'When I look at him, I begin to understand that God did, in the beginning of things, create man in his own image.'

'Yes,' said Ravenal. 'I believe Allan is as good as he is true'; and then she sighed, while the old, worried look crept back into her eyes.

Hester bit her lip. This was not the turn she meant the conversation should have taken.

'Ravenal,' she said gently, 'you said we were not prepared for the evil. Should we welcome it when it comes?'

'As evil in itself—no. As coming to us from our Father's hand, I believe we should take it as His best for us at the time. What seems unmitigated evil so often resolves itself into a lasting good.'

'Have you proved that in your own experience? It is so easy to say what we should do and feel.'

Ravenal hesitated. Could any future good ever result from this great evil which had stricken her heart dumb within her with weary pain? Should she take this, too, as her Father's best?

She bent her head and watched, with eyes intent, a tiny mountain flower which grew in a sweet trustfulness beside her. It was alone amid the shadow,

while two-thirds of earth and air and sky were lost to it by reason of a great rock which rose, towering above it, on either side.

'You dear little thing!' she mused. 'Do you know how you are preaching to me, I wonder? After all, you are hid "in the cleft of the rock"; and it is "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."'

She sat for a long time silent after that, while Hester pretended to be deep in her book, or turned her head towards the distant hills, that Ravenal might feel herself free from the scrutiny of her eyes. Hester held very advanced ideas upon spiritual etiquette, although she never voiced them.

At length Ravenal touched her, and Hester turned towards her, wonderingly conscious of something in her sister's face which had not been there before.

'I believe I can take even the seeming evil on trust,' she said simply, 'since what we know not now we shall understand hereafter.'

'H'm!' said Hester, in the abrupt tone which was always a sign, with her, of being deeply moved; 'there is no danger of you ever becoming a denizen of the ant heap!'

Ravenal smiled, then she lifted her face towards the sky.

'It is going to thunder!' exclaimed Hester; 'and we are so far from home!'

Ravenal shook her head with the smile still upon her lips. It seemed to her, just then, as if she had got home for good.

No word was spoken as they hastily made their way along the forest paths, over which they had walked so leisurely a few hours before. They felt they must husband all their strength if they would escape from the electric storm-king that no mortal is brave enough to challenge with unconcern.

On and on they sped, until their breath came in hurried, panting gasps. The air hung motionless about them; every leaf and flower held itself in a tension of waiting for its baptism of dazzling light and grateful shower; occasionally a bird whistled cautiously to its neighbour, as if warning him to make good his retreat to some waterproof chamber; the butterflies had vanished; even the locusts were still.

Overhead the clouds, in serried ranks, marched and counter-marched, broke rank and formed again, with a concentration of purpose and swiftness of movement no army on earth can emulate, while now and then a muffled roar in ever louder echoes from the distant hills proved that the enemy was advancing to the front. Ever and anon swift drops of crystal fell, luminous with pity; the tears of the peace angel, who mourns over the havoc of war alike in earth and sky.

The air grew more and more oppressive and the mutterings of the thunder grew more angry, with now and then a vivid blaze of wrath. Hester glanced apprehensively at her sister, whose strength she saw was failing. Putting her arm around her, she half-led, half-carried her over the distance which still intervened between them and the pretty little cottage they called home, until, with an unutterable sense of relief, they sank exhausted upon the verandah.

Not a moment too soon. With the deafening roar of a hundred battalions, the opposing forces of the sky met in deadly combat, and the air grew lurid with flame. Then came a pause, so deathly in its stillness that the earth trembled with fear, while the darkness grew ever deeper and more intense; and then, out of the darkness, came the rain. Straight and steady; beating with resonant force upon windows and roof, dashing down the hillsides, foaming through the valleys; impetuous irresistible; then growing gradually slower and softer, like the music of a lullaby or the melodious tinkle of a brook at play.

Ravenal sat beside her window, absorbed. Electric storms had always held a peculiar fascination for her.

'Listen!' she cried, as the raindrops fell more slowly, with a pathos in their rhyme. 'It almost

seems as if the angels' tears were falling on the sin-stained hearts of men!'

Towards sunset they went out again into a new world. The flowers were ablaze with diamonds, the grass all rimmed with pearls, the trees were clothed from head to foot in fresh vestments of dazzling green; birds and insects joined together in an evensong of praise, and the new-made streams warbled a joyous accompaniment as they danced merrily over their pebbly beds.

The clouds were holding high carnival, crowning the mountain summits, draping their lower heights in bridal veils and filament of lace and feather-trimming, marching in mighty phalanxes over the valleys, and in the western sky taking on a thousand shapes of lovely and bewildering colours; corruscations of rose against a background of plain gray flame-tipped castles; majestic peaks, all of one solid glory; dreams in amber and gold; delicate, neutral-tinted, detached squadrons; beautiful diaphanous shapes, changing, chameleon-like, from orange to crimson, and violet-pink and gray; and then beyond, the ineffable tenderness of the ethereal, green-blue sky, making earth homesick for heaven.

CHAPTER XVI

Allan's Faith

"Ye weep for those who weep?" she said.
"Ah, fools! I bid you pass them by;
Go, weep for those whose hearts have bled,
What time their eyes were dry!
Whom sadder can I say?" she said.'

DORA threw herself down beside Laddie on her piney couch, one Saturday afternoon, with a dismal sigh.

The weeks had dragged wearily since Jack's departure, and she alternately indulged in seasons of Byronic melancholy and fits of the wildest merriment. The Roseries looked on apprehensively but wisely held their peace. She began to look thin and worn, and when her appetite grew capricious Bobus had shaken his professional head, and taking Hester into his confidence, arranged to have a daily infusion of some of his tasteless but powerful medicines in her coffee.

She threw her arms about Laddie's neck, and laid her cheek against his massive head.

'Dear old Laddie! You're all I've got left in this cold world. You must never leave me. Do you hear, Laddie? Never, never, never!

'I know you won't, you nice old thing,' she continued, as the splendid creature made vehement protestations of affection. 'You're such a comfort to me, Laddie.'

She gazed at him fondly for a long time in silence, then her head fell against his in hopeless sorrow and her voice broke in a pitiful wail.

'Oh, Laddie, you've got Jack's eyes! That is just the way his looked, that night upon the river, before the light faded and his face grew so awfully grave and stern. Laddie, what shall I do? It is just killing me! I feel as if I had sent him to his death. "Blood like fire," Mr. Thurman said those miners have, and he is so far away, and he is all alone! And he is so brave, Laddie! He never would think of himself for an instant. I just know they'll kill him, and I'll never see him again, Laddie; never, any more!

'Why can't I cry, Laddie?' she continued, in the same low, hopeless tone. 'Silvia Marsh says if anything were to happen to Mr. Langton, she should dissolve away in tears. Why, she melts with tenderness every time she mentions his name, but I am like ice and granite, there is no melt in me. Fancy her joking and laughing, as I do

about Jack! It nearly kills me to do it, but I am not going to let any one think I care. If I were to die, Laddie, do you suppose he would come back to see my grave? Do you think he would?

'Bah!' she gave herself a contemptuous shake 'I am getting as sentimental as Silvia Marsh herself! Why can't we learn to focus our thoughts on something besides ourselves, I wonder? It is no marvel people grow so narrow and despicable when their eyes are turned inwards all the time, and all the while God's beauty is around us and His sky is overhead. Dora Raymond, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!

'To "live a common life uncommonly." Ah, Laddie, there's the rub! How is it possible, when I am wedged in among a human flotilla, moored fast on the dead level of mediocrity, and, I myself, the most hopelessly mediocre of the fleet! Is it true, I wonder, that mediocrity gives us opportunities of special faithfulness to God and our fellows, which we would not have if we were effulgent with the splendour of some "bright particular star"? "Be Cæsar to thyself." I wish I could! I wonder what hinders me?'

Suddenly she lifted her head and listened, while her heart beat fast. Footsteps were approaching her retreat. She looked out between the sheltering leaves. Only Allan Ruthven, walking slowly, his

head lifted towards the sky. Obeying a sudden impulse, she called him.

'Allan, come into my parlour and talk to me of hope!'

'What hope?' he asked, as he obeyed and took a seat beside her.

'The hope of Israel, I suppose. I feel hopeless enough to need it!' and she laughed drearily.

'Why should you?' he asked kindly.

'Because of my sins,' she retorted promptly; 'and you make such a lovely father confessor. It is always a puzzle to me why you never took orders. You would have been such an ornament to the cloth.' She surveyed him meditatively.

Allan laughed. 'One may be under orders in homespun,' he said, in his tone of sweet reverence. 'I take them from my Captain every day.'

'I believe you do, you dear saint! I have to let some of my theories on the impracticability of Christian ethics go to the winds when I look at you—you and Ray. But then, I don't believe you have any sins.'

'What are yours?' asked Allan gently.

'Aunt Gru!' was the instant reply. 'My feelings towards her, I mean,' she added, as she saw him smile. 'You know it is simply outrageous the way I treat her. If it is not war to the knife, it is a mental antipathy so intense that it

needs no words. But how can I help it? She sets every nerve in my body in a quiver, and when you consider how many of those playful little horrors we have in our systems, it is beyond human expectation that, when they are all on edge, the rest of our corporealism should run smoothly.'

'Beyond human expectation—yes. Almost everything is that.'

'Speak your thought out, my saint. I don't mind your quoting Gospel to me, because you live it, you see.'

'I was thinking of Him who is "mighty to deliver,"' said Allan, with his rare smile.

'Even from Aunt Gru?' queried Dora, half incredulously.

'Even from Aunt Gru.'

'How well you know Him!' she said wistfully. He seems so real to you and you trust Him so!'

'Why, surely! Why should I not trust my Nearest Neighbour and my Dearest Friend?'

Dora turned her head away, there was such a ring of exultant tenderness in his tone. After a long pause she looked at him again, with a gleam of her old mischief in her eyes.

'I was wondering,' she said, 'what you would do with Aunt Gru?'

His eyes met hers, full of a merry sparkle. 'I think the first thing would be to love her.'

'Love her!' echoed Dora, aghast. "'Thou reasonest well, Plato," but this is beyond human achievement!'

'Still the human,' he said half-sadly. 'Do you not remember Christ said, "Without Me ye can do nothing"?''

'But Aunt Gru——'

'Yes, Aunt Gru; since "God is Love," and, if we are not like Him down here, we cannot hope to see His face up yonder.

'After all,' he continued, 'is not Aunt Gru but the physical embodiment of all the chafing ills that fret your spirit? Are you in tune with yourself, dear child?'

'No! I never was and never expect to be!' cried Dora, with quivering lips, which she would have scorned to let any one else see. 'I am just one great, crashing discord. I hate myself as much as ever Aunt Gru does, but I couldn't help being born with every bit of my "ego" in a jangle! Well, there is no use talking about it, I suppose,' she said wearily; 'I never expect to be any better.'

'Oh, yes, you will be,' said Allan, with quiet confidence, 'when the great Musician brings into your soul the eternal harmony of His peace.'

'You speak as if it were sure to come!' said Dora in wonderment.

'Surely. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men

unto Me," and "Whosoever cometh I will in no wise cast out." We do the lingering and the hesitating. I do not fear you will put it off too long.'

'How can you be so sure?' she cried, in an awed hush.

'Because I am asking for you; and "whatsoever ye ask in My Name," you know, shall be given.'

'Ah, but there are conditions to that!'

'Yes,' he answered with a reverent gladness, 'but I thank Him that He enables me to fulfil the conditions.'

After a long pause, Dora spoke abruptly: 'Do you ever wish that it might be permitted for some one else to live your life, while you stood by, with line and plummet, to measure how far above—or below—they came to your spiritual watermark?'

Allan nodded. 'I have often felt in that way about physical suffering, when visiting the hospitals. One meets such a diversity of characters there; some so patient, others about as amiable as polar bears in midsummer, from whom the kindest greeting only elicits a growl. I have often wished to change the personalities in the different beds, and see whether the dissimilarity was owing to strength and sweetness of character, or merely a lesser degree of suffering. But pain is an elusive monster, and, thus far, has defied all attempts at analysis; and in the

subtle spiritual realm of our inner thought, where all our springs of action take their rise, analysis must be, I fancy, for ever impossible.'

'And yet, in this age of wonders, what can be impossible?'

'I know. The times are wonderful, past all computation. But, behind the thought which makes our deed, there lies the personality; and a different personality placed in our circumstances would, of necessity, produce a different outcome, because each personality is on its own plane, alive to the influences of different spiritual currents. The supernatural zephyrs which play upon the æolian harpstrings of our sensibilities, attuned to a different key, and susceptible to different impressions, those swift, mysterious messengers of Heaven flash upon the sensitive plate of our moral nature, and imprint their delicate colours with more than an artist's skill.'

'Then my idea is impracticable, unless I could find a duplicate personality. Do you believe there is such a thing in the world?'

'I do not think so. And what would it avail if there were? A duplicate personality would only be a reproduction of yourself.'

'I see. It would only be a misfortune; for there is one too many of me in the world already.' She sighed the weary sigh which was becoming habitual with her.

Allan shook his head. 'There you are wrong,' he said gently. 'In all the sand upon the seashore, every grain has its place; do you think in the higher realm of human life the design is less beautiful, less perfect in its ordering?'

'Human life is so cheap!' she said bitterly.

'Not to God.' The words were spoken solemnly, and awed and half-ashamed, she saw him lift his eyes, full of a glad trustfulness, towards the sky.

'How do you explain the mystery of the heathen, and all the people whom the Israelites wiped out, and whom the nations ever since have been wiping out from off the face of the earth?'

'The same old dart which Satan has been hurling at the loving-kindness of the Lord all down through the centuries,' he said, with a smile. 'I do not attempt to explain it, nor do I care to try, but I have not a doubt that my Heavenly Father can, and will, when His time for explanations comes.

'The temerity of those who endeavour to adjust to their own infinitesimal standards of right and wrong, the justice and the love of God, seems terrible to me. How dare we, creatures of the dust, measure ourselves against our Creator, or, in our finite ignorance attempt to fathom the boundless wisdom of the Infinite? We might as well presume to legislate for the bright spirits who inhabit the glowing spaces of eternity, as to decide why such and such things have

been permitted to happen amidst the shadowy stretches of Time!

'It is the old, daring self-assertion of Thomas, "Let me see, and I will believe." Christ says, "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." Man says, "I must understand and know." God says, "Trust Me, and love."

'In our wildest flights of self-conceit we do not presume to think we could keep the earth revolving upon its axis, or manage the evolutions of the stars; yet, in our short life, which is as an instant before Him, with whom a thousand years are but as one day, we expect to compute the wisdom of His dealings in the years that are past, and His justice in the years that are to come!

'We are puzzled, overpowered, alarmed, but "there is an eye which looks on all this strange bewilderment and feels no wonder, because it looks it through and through, and sees its first principles and final issue as clear as daylight."

* * * * *

'I believe we are about ready for a consensus of opinion,' said Julian Derringer, as he lingered over his dessert, after having given his father and Allan an exhaustive statement of facts relative to industrial settlements, that he had gathered in one of his numerous trips for the purpose, from which he had just returned.

'I think we would better call a special meeting of the Co-operative Club for to-morrow evening, and get things into running order as soon as possible. Do you think Vandegrift, Ward & Raymond will come into the plan, father?'

'I believe they will,' said Mr. Derringer heartily. 'I have been doing my part by talking it up to Vandegrift, and he is evidently quite in favour of the idea, through Tom's influence, I suppose.'

Julian laughed. 'Oh, yes, Raymond owns the right of way in that business. But Ward is a progressive fellow, too. We shall have little difficulty in agreeing on a workable basis, I imagine. If only Jack Endicott had not gone to the ends of the earth! I cannot help feeling we need two or three strong firms to make it a success.'

'What would you say to Roosevelt Thurman?' asked Allan, with a twinkle in his eye.

'Roosevelt Thurman!' echoed Julian in amaze. 'What does he know about it?'

'All I could tell him in an hour and a half of steady talking,' laughed Allan. 'I was sitting at your desk in the office yesterday, deep in calculations and estimates, when he came in. Your father introduced me and gave me a lead, which I was not slow to follow, you may be sure. I never saw a man so interested in anything. It was a perfect battledore and shuttlecock of question and answer, and, if he

does not think seriously of the plan, it will be through no lack of endeavour on my part to make him do so.'

Julian clapped his friend enthusiastically on the shoulder. 'Bravo, old chap! You have done more than any of us. If Roosevelt Thurman comes into the scheme, we may count it an assured success from the outset.

'I have about come to the conclusion,' he continued, 'that one of us will have to go to France, in order to study the workings of the system thoroughly. We do not want to put in any bungling work, and old-world wisdom in this direction is not to be despised, I am told. They say a strike is practically unheard of in some of the old French establishments, and they have been run on a co-operative basis for years.'

'You can count on me for that,' said Allan, with what sounded like a sigh of relief. 'It is out of the question that you could be spared, but I shall not be missed, and can start to-morrow, if you like.'

'I don't know about the missing, old fellow,' said Julian affectionately, wondering a little at the almost pathetic sadness which had crept into his friend's voice; 'any man who can enlist Roosevelt Thurman's co-operation is a pretty important factor in the enterprise, to my mind; but, if you are sure you do not object to the trip, I shall be more than glad to have it taken off my shoulders.'

CHAPTER XVII

Blind Eyes Opened

'More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of.'

ONE night Julian Derringer drew his friend's arm within his own for a moonlight stroll. Moonlight, like a tender mother, by its silent sympathy, wins our confidence, and makes one long to share the secret grief which, like a canker, doth eat in upon the soul.

'Israfel,' he said sadly, 'when, in anticipation, I so confidently laid my hand upon the jewel, which now seems to me more than ever priceless, I totally forgot to anticipate the possibility of the existence of any counter-currents in the celestial upper air of love. I have been like a foolish aeronaut, who maps out his course without due calculation for the adverse power of the unseen forces against which he may have to contend, and who, in consequence of his deplorable stupidity, finds his frail bark of hope

tossed to and fro upon a bewildering sea of doubt and strange perplexity. Allan, old chap, I am in sore trouble to-night.'

Allan looked at him in amazement.

'You are talking in riddles!' he exclaimed. 'What is the matter?'

'I do not know,' said Julian gloomily; 'but, in the interval which I spent dreaming at Nantucket, something has happened. The whole atmosphere which, when I left, seemed charged with subtle electricity, has grown cold and dull; and if sometimes a ray of light flashes through the darkness, it is but a danger signal to warn presumptuous travellers to intrude no further on love's sacred ground.

'It is incomprehensible to me that you have not noticed it. Why, she turns to you with positive relief, and never seems to feel at rest unless you are near at hand. If jealousy of you were not an impossibility, I should find it a troublesome foe.'

A slow wave of red surged up in Allan's cheeks and then receded, leaving them paler than before. To lay one's heart in self renunciation upon the altar of friendship betokens inward grace. To have that sacrifice accounted an expected thing, and take it patiently, calls for a reserve of moral strength with which few souls are panoplied.

'Do you know, Israfel,' continued Julian, too much

disturbed to notice that he had made no answer, "I believe I will get you to change our plans and let me go to Europe. I have about come to the conclusion that absence is the only thing which will fit the altered circumstances. Something in my presence seems to mar the harmony of her spiritual diapason. If the irritating cause be removed, the delicate strings may adjust themselves again, and Time, the great healer, give me heart of grace. I do not crave your pardon for the change, for yours will be the delightful task of following with her the progress of the plan and gaining daily inspiration for its fulfilment. Remember, Israfel, I leave my life in your hands, and trust to the friendship, which has never failed me, to plead my cause. Will you do this for me?"

Allan turned towards his friend.

'I will be true to you, Julian.'

* * * * *

'Paul, my son,' said Bobus one evening, when they were alone, 'would you give your eyes if you could see?'

The sensitive face flushed, then grew pale again.

'See!' he repeated, with a tremour in his voice; 'surely you cannot mean——?'

'But I do mean just that. Would you be willing to undergo the pain of an operation?'

'You see, it is just this way,' he went on hurriedly.

'Professor Scherf is one of the first oculists in America, and I believe he has skill enough to overcome your difficulty. I have had your case in my mind ever since I began to attend his lectures.

'Some time ago I was able to do him a trifling service, and he said—well, never mind what he said ; but I feel sure that he would put you through, *gratis*, and that means something, you see, for his fees are tremendously stiff. Of course you could go to his clinic, but I'm not going to have you there, with all that crowd of fellows looking on ; it would be more torture to you than all the instruments put together. So, if you are agreed, we will just whisper it to Katie, tell her to keep mum, and go into his office to-morrow so that he may have a look at you. If he says nothing can be done, then no one will be the wiser, but if he thinks there is a hope, I believe you have nerve enough to go through the ordeal, with me beside you ; eh, old chap? What is it, Paul? What's up, old fellow?' he questioned affectionately.

The boy was trembling violently, while the tears were chasing each other down his cheeks. He lifted his face with a smile, as he caught the note of anxiety in his friend's voice.

'It seems too wonderful,' he said, 'that I should have the hope of seeing your faces and the beauties of God's world! And then that you should have

carried the thought of me in your heart for all these months! It seems to me, if Christ were on earth, He would choose the Rosery to live in, you are always doing such beautiful things.'

A warm flush mounted to the young surgeon's forehead. 'If I am ever any good in the world, it will be because you have taught me, Paul,' he said huskily. 'Your sunny patience is worth a million sermons!

'Well, mum's the word with all but Katie, remember. You had better talk it over with her to-night, and then we will go in by the 8.20 train in the morning, and catch Dr. Scherf before his office hours begin.'

The celebrated oculist received them graciously, and Paul's quick ear detected something in the tone in which he spoke to Bobus which showed him in what high esteem his friend was held.

The examination was long and thorough. Bobus was trembling with suppressed anxiety. Paul sat absolutely still, a half-smile upon his lips.

'Paul, old chap!' Bobus cried hurriedly, as Dr. Scherf was summoned for a moment from the room 'how can you take it so coolly? Where do you get your grit? You are as calm as though it made no difference to you one way or the other.'

The pale face grew luminous.

'Oh, yes,' he said. 'I could not sleep for hoping,

but I am content to have it whichever way my Father thinks is best.'

'What does he mean?' whispered Dr. Scherf, catching the end of the sentence as he re-entered the room.

'God, sir,' answered Bobus simply.

The long examination was over at length, and Dr. Scherf spoke gently, looking full in the brave, sweet face.

'It is an exceedingly complicated case, rendered more so by your constitutional tendencies. The operation would necessarily be a painful one, since I should not deem it safe to give you an anæsthetic. From the deep-seated nature of the disease, recovery would be very tedious, but I think I am safe in saying there is a hope that recovery would be complete.'

A wave of solemn joy swept over the patient's face, and Dr. Scherf bent his head to catch the low exclamation.

'How good you are, my Father!' Then the lips moved silently, as if in happy converse with some one out of sight.

* * * * *

Days and weeks had passed since the operation, which Paul had borne without flinching, his hands held close in Bobus' firm grasp; days and weeks of suspense in a darkened room, when it seemed some-

times as if the confinement was unendurable and the pain too great to bear.

Very lonely the days would have proved, for the Rosery was a busy household, had it not been for Allan Ruthven, who, in the midst of the crowding interests with which his hands were full, found time to keep Paul informed of all the latest developments in the Co-operative Colony, which was now rapidly emerging from its embryonic stages and becoming a definite fact. The outlines of management had been agreed upon by the several firms interested, a desirable property secured, and already men were busily employed in preparing it for occupancy.

Before Julian's departure for Europe he had addressed a united body of employees, and, with few exceptions, the men had agreed to the plan with cheers.

'There is just one condition necessary for citizenship,' he had said to them in his pleasant, decided way; 'every man must be a sworn abstainer from gambling and drink. If you wish to become a member of the colony, there is a pledge here on the table for you to sign; that shall be our constitution; that, and the determination of every man to do his utmost to make the experiment a success.'

There had been murmuring then, low and ominous but Julian had been firm.

'What is that you say, my friends? "Taking away a man's liberty." Well, it is just a question for you to decide, whether you would rather do the will of the Company or be slaves to the vices which will ruin your manhood and turn you out of your homes. We want to make the colony a home-land, and no home can be happy with two such serpents at its doors.

'Do not misunderstand me. There is no compulsion intended, only this rule is unalterable, and I should be sorry to have any of the old employees lose the benefits which will accrue under the plan. Viewed simply from the standpoint of expediency, we must expect to pay something for our privileges, always. We want to put out the very best work in America. That will be impossible unless our hands are steady and our brains are clear.'

And then he had motioned to Allan to take his place, and the gathering storm, which had threatened to break in noisy violence, died away into silence before the magnetism of his voice. Low, persuasive, tender, it had held them with silken cords in a strange hush, as he pleaded with them to be true to their better selves and for ever set themselves free from the blighting curse which impaired their usefulness and threatened to ruin their lives.

'You count yourselves men, my friends,' he had said; 'remember, the only true man is he who is

king over himself. Real nobility does not consist in being able to take a glass with a comrade, but in having the courage to refuse to do it. You think you hold these appetites in leash at your will ; but, as the years go by, their hold upon you is becoming stronger, until some day you will wake up to find that they are the masters, you the slaves. Break off these subtle chains that are binding you, now, while you have the power to do it—God will give you the strength—and, for the sake of the homes you have, or hope to have, make it for ever impossible that wives and children should have cause to be ashamed of their dearest earthly friends.'

And then, suddenly kneeling, he had poured forth his soul in pleading, eloquent, passionate prayer, that the men before him might, at this crisis of their lives be led to choose the right.

Awestruck, the men had listened, watching with a strange reverence the rapt, earnest face. Then, one by one, their heads had drooped and they had been lifted in the arms of his mighty faith up to the throne of God.

'It was wonderful!' Julian said afterwards, when describing the scene to Ravenal. 'He was so absolutely unconscious ; just as if he were doing the most natural thing in the world ; indeed, I think God is always more really present to him than his fellow-men. I have never seen father so deeply touched.

He put his hand on Allan's shoulder, and said, with the tears in his eyes :—

“ My boy, this, more than Roosevelt Thurman's money, should make the enterprise a success.”

‘ And it was simply marvellous to see the change in the men's faces. Angry and dogged so many of them had grown while I was speaking, but there was a softened look and the light of a new purpose in their eyes as they came forward to sign the pledge. Of course they signed, you know. Only a few went out without doing so, and they looked as if they were ashamed of themselves. I don't believe some of them had ever heard a prayer before, certainly not such a prayer as that. Allan is such a rare fellow !’ And Ravenal had smiled, a tender, wistful smile, as she murmured :—

‘ How loyal you are to your friend !’

‘ Will you not make that plural, Miss Ravenal ?’ he questioned eagerly. ‘ I have come to tell you that I, instead of Allan, am going to Europe. May I not hope you will let me count you as my friend also, and think kindly of me sometimes, when I am far away ?’ And the old shadow had fallen upon her face and the smile had faded as she repeated nervously :—

‘ Going to Europe ! So soon ! Ah, you will not need friends in America, when you get to Europe.’

And then, before he could question her meaning

they had been interrupted, and soon afterward she had slipped away, and from then until the day of his departure he had never had an opportunity to speak to her alone.

* * * * *

Allan sought her one morning with his hands full of formidable-looking documents.

'When can you arrange to meet Mr. Vandegrift's architect, Miss Ravenal, and go over the plans for the colony with him?'

'I fear he will think it most uncalled for,' she said. 'I really do not think it is necessary for me to have anything to do with any of the large buildings. The cottages will be as much as I can compass.'

Allan shook his head.

'I have strict orders from the Commander-in-Chief that nothing is to be done without your co-operation. He wishes to have you associated with the movement in all its detail, as you have been with its inception. Your approval means a great deal to Julian, Miss Ravenal.'

He smiled as he noticed the burning blush which his words brought to her cheeks; then a puzzled look came into his face, as she answered lightly, 'You are very wise, my lord, but in this, at least, you are entirely mistaken. If *you* wish it, however, I can meet the architect at three o'clock this afternoon.' Again Allan was puzzled. There had

certainly been an unmistakable emphasis laid upon the 'you.'

Then he ran upstairs to Paul's room, but stopped at the threshold, as he heard a merry laugh. Some one was entertaining the boy with an account of a ludicrous scene they had witnessed in the railway station. Allan could hardly credit his senses. It was Aunt Griselda! Then she commenced to describe minutely the condition of the greenhouse and tell him how his favourite flowers were growing, and Paul grew animated as he questioned her eagerly about his fragrant friends. Evidently these two were on the best of terms. This was an incident to treasure up for Dora's benefit; and, with a pleased smile, Allan crept silently away.

* * * * *

When, the long waiting over, the time came for the removal of the bandages, Bobus drew Katie in front of Paul's chair.

'The face he loves best must be the first for him to look upon,' he said gently.

There was a moment of solemn hush, then a cry of rapture.

'Oh, Katie, I see! I see!'

And Katie sobbed through tears of joy.

'And, under God, we owe it all to you, Bobus! How can we, shall we, thank you?'

But Bobus had left the room.

CHAPTER XVIII

Trouble at the Mine

'Personal force never goes out of fashion.'

AWAY in distant Colorado, after a hard day's ride, Jack Endicott sat in his superintendent's house, lost in troubled thought.

A letter from Allan Ruthven lay open on the table before him, and, for the twentieth time, his eyes ran over the words mechanically.

All his friends did their best, by frequent correspondence, to make him feel less keenly the isolation of his position, but only Allan's letters contained the home touches for which his soul hungered with a sickening longing. He mentioned Dora as easily and naturally as if he, at least, had no suspicion of the truth, and, to the lonely young superintendent, fighting his pain in brave and uncomplaining silence, the whole interest of his letters centred in the paragraphs which contained the treasured name.

Always hitherto they had been records of her

bright, droll speeches and gay doings, and he had read them with a smile and a sigh to see what little difference his absence had made in her life. What was there in this one to bring that look of anxious perplexity on his face?

'Dora looks poorly,' Allan had written, 'and is growing thin. She seems to be fretting about something, but her high spirit does not desert her, and she is, as usual, the life of the house. Sometimes I fancy, however, her gaiety has a forced ring, and wonder whether things might not be different if you were here. We all miss you sorely, Jack, but, unless I am very much mistaken, Dora feels your loss more keenly than the rest.'

There was a knock at the door, and, hastily thrusting the letter into his pocket, Jack rose to open it.

'Oh, it is you, Hudson,' he said, as he distinguished the face of his young foreman through the dim light. 'Come in and tell me all the news. I hope things have been going along smoothly while I have been away.'

'Not very well, sir,' answered the young man. 'I don't like to bring you bad news, Mr. Endicott, but I'm afraid there's trouble brewing.'

'At the mine?' cried Jack hastily. 'What makes you think so?'

'I have noticed for some time the men seemed

restless and uneasy, but I thought you had enough to bother you, so I didn't mention it. There has been one of those labour fellows stumping it through the State, and he reached our mine yesterday. The men left work in a body to listen to him, though I told them I would dock their wages, and to-day they have been so surly I could hardly get a civil answer, except from two or three. I'm afraid when they find you have hired a new gang for the night shift, it will bring the trouble to a head. I didn't go to the meeting, of course, but Ben Robinson told me the fellow made them swear to let no one who didn't belong to the union into the mine.'

'If that is the case, there is likely to be some ugly work ahead of us,' said Jack quietly. 'Hudson, you have a wife and baby. I'll give you leave to quit to-night, if you choose.'

'I'm not a coward, Mr. Endicott,' said the young man hastily. 'I came to tell you I'd stand by you through thick and thin.'

'But when there is danger, my friend,' said Jack gently, 'a man with a family is bound to think of them first. I have none, you know.'

The foreman smiled. 'You never saw my wife, Mr. Endicott. If you had, you would know she wouldn't give sixpence for a husband that could desert the man who nursed him through the fever, as you did me. She thinks it is my bounden duty

to be your slave for life. A slave doesn't run away from his master when trouble comes.'

Jack grasped his hand. 'God bless you, Hudson,' he said heartily. 'You make me feel as though I had a dozen men at my back! Now let us have some coffee, and then we will talk over what had better be done.'

* * * * *

'Just a word with you, my men, before you commence work.'

The superintendent's voice rang out cheerily the next morning upon the frosty air. There was no trace of anxiety in either face or tone.

'I want to tell you that your shift will be an hour shorter from to-day. You know I have wanted to put in night work for some time, but we have been so short of hands that it has been impossible. Yesterday I brought a gang up with me, so after this we will keep the mine running night and day.'

'Ain't goin' ter hev no scabs round here.'

'Who said that?' cried Jack quickly. He scanned the faces before him, while his own grew pale.

Dogged and sullen, the men returned his gaze. Evidently they were in no pleasant humour.

'My men,' Jack said calmly, 'I am very sorry that there should be any ill-feeling in the matter,

but I may as well tell you that I propose to have the new men stay. The work of the mine must go on, you know. It is my duty towards its owners to make the output as large as possible. I confess I am disappointed. I had supposed you would see the reason in the case. The work must be done, and it is beyond your power to do it, since no man can work night and day. I am not taking any work from you, it is simply what you cannot do.'

'They'll hev ter jine the union, or they don't stay here,' cried a voice, more surly than the rest.

'Ah, is that you, Dobson? Now, ought you not to be ashamed of yourself, for a citizen of the freest country in the world? What has the union done for you that you should cling to it so closely? You told me yourself, you remember, that when you went out on strike the last time you nearly starved, and could not get work anywhere, until I hired you.

'You call yourselves free and independent, you union men, and yet you are at the beck and call of every master workman. I would not give another man the power over my life that you do! You leave good jobs and sure pay just because other men have left theirs, and the loss of your time and money can never be made up to you. You are like a lot of sheep, who follow the crowd without a notion of where they are going. Do you call that American liberty, my friends?'

'We've got ter hold up the cause,' said Ben Robinson, a little shamefacedly.

'Hold up the cause,' echoed Jack, with scorn; 'not unless it is a good one, Ben. I cannot see any good in a cause that makes men idle, while their children starve.'

'We've got to hev our rights,' cried a burly fellow; 'an' the bosses won't giv' 'em ter us!'

'I agree with you there, Thomson; but all good employers are just as anxious as I am to give them to you. That is where you make the mistake.'

'Yer don't know much, boss, ef yer think that!'

and the man laughed derisively. 'Yer young at the bizness, yer see.'

Jack's colour rose, but he was holding himself well in hand.

'Well, Thomson, we won't go outside of our own mine then,' he said pleasantly. 'Are you not satisfied with your treatment here? You know your wages are higher than other miners, and now I have taken an hour off your day; but, if you have anything to complain of, now is the time to speak.'

'Why no, boss,' said Ben Robinson slowly, 'we're not kickin'; the fact is, we're purty well contented; but, yer see, it's jest this way, we can't hev any men in the mine as doesn't jine the union.'

Jack's eyes flashed. 'I thought you were above such meanness, Ben Robinson! Why, don't you

see what a piece of dog-in-the-mangerism it is? You cannot do the work yourselves, and you are not willing that any one else should do it. It is selfishness of the worst kind. The Bible tells us we are to love our neighbours, you know.'

'Them fellers ain't our neeburs,' said Thomson contemptuously. 'Them fellers is scabs, that's what they be!'

The hated name was caught up and bandied about among the crowd, while a chorus of groans and hisses filled the air.

'Silence!' cried Jack sternly. 'What right have you to give such a name as that to honest men, simply because they have dared to leave your organisation and do their work, as free men should, with no one to tell them, without a moment's warning, that they must give it up?

'I will not keep you any longer now, but remember, the new gang goes on duty at six o'clock, and I will have no interference with them in any way.'

The men moved off slowly, with angry, set faces. Jack walked past them into his office and shut the door.

All the morning he stayed there, alert, watchful. The foreman came in every hour to report progress.

All was quiet at the mine. The men were working doggedly. There was very little talking going

on. When noon came, however, they held a council of war.

'We can't hender it without a free fight,' said Dobson. 'The boss means bizness this time, ye kin see it in his eye.'

'I alluz thought yer wuz more uv a coward than a fool,' said Ben Robinson, with a sneer, 'but I'm blamed ef the match ain't purty even. I ain't per-tickler meself about hevin' me head done up in plaster fur the next two months, an' losin' me job inter the bargain.'

The war of words waxed furious after that, but every suggestion was vetoed by the majority.

At last Bill Thomson said slowly, 'Ther's dynamite. Ef the scabs goes in, we goes out, but we kin make things so ez they wouldn't be much good to 'em arter we wuz gone——'

'There's dynamite, and there's the devil, but you are not going to have anything to do with either of them!'

The voice, clear as a trumpet, rang through the mine, and, electrified, the men sprang to their feet.

The young foreman looked round on them with flashing eyes.

'I was not spyng on you, boys. I wish you'd take time to stop a bit and see that you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. It's the biggest piece of ingratitude I ever heard of! Don't you know that

there's no boss like Mr. Endicott in the whole State? and aren't you a big set of fools to throw up the easiest job you ever struck in your lives, just because that labour fellow told you to? And if you can right about face and do the boss such a mean turn, after all the good ones he's done you, then it's not Americans you ought to be calling yourselves, but the scum of the earth!

'He has the right to do what he likes with his own, boys, and if you make trouble, you'll only be hurting yourselves, for he has the law on his side you see.'

CHAPTER XIX

Jack is Shot

'Now God be thanked for years enwrought,
With love which softens yet ;
Now God be thanked for every thought,
Which is so tender it has caught,
Earth's guerdon of regret.'

THREE o'clock. Jack sat in his office, white and still. He had given the new gang their orders. There was nothing to be done now but wait.

The sun looked in at him through the window in his old, cheery way ; the dog at his feet snapped lazily at a belated fly ; he heard his horse whinny in the corral close by. The ticking of the clock grew inquisitorial. Would the afternoon never wear away ?

Four o'clock. The foreman came in, and, with an inquiring glance at him, opened a drawer in which lay a couple of revolvers. Jack shook his head with a smile. 'There is not going to be any

blood-letting on our side, Hudson. If the poor fellows want butchery, the sin of it must rest on their own shoulders.'

Five o'clock. He looked around the room, taking note of all its quaint and ingenious contrivances. He might never be in it again. Miners are troublesome fellows to deal with, and his men were in an ugly temper.

He took out Allan's letter for a last reading. Obeying a sudden impulse, he turned to his desk and wrote rapidly for a few moments. The time was growing very short. Putting the note in an envelope, he addressed it to Dora, and placed it among the other papers, in which, during the long morning, he had rendered his father an account of his stewardship. At least she should know that his last thought had been of her. His lips curved in a wistful smile. Was Allan right? Would she really care?

Six o'clock. With a steady tramp the new gang marched towards the mine, Jack and his foreman at their head. He would protect their lives, if need be, with his own.

Drawn up at the shaft, the old hands stood waiting. Two or three of them carried pistols. Several had bowie knives in their belts.

Jack swept his eyes around the horizon. With the exception of the miner's shanties, there was

neither sign nor sound of human habitation. A buzzard wheeled in graceful curves over his head, cleaving the air with massive pinions, as it slowly rose to the altitude of the mountain over which it would soon sweep and disappear. The silence could be felt throughout the broad valley. Beyond, the mountains, kissing the sky!

The men were drawn up on either side of the shaft, and Jack led the way fearlessly among the hostile forces. They had nearly reached the entrance to the mine, when one of the new gang stumbled, and, in attempting to recover his footing, lurched heavily up against the burly frame of Bill Thomson. The unpremeditated act was like spark to tinder. In an instant the quick blood was in a flame.

'You brute! What d'yer mean?' and the giant hurled himself upon the innocent offender and bore him to the earth, while the air grew full of the sound of blows and curses, as the men took sides with their respective friends.

In vain the superintendent and his foreman threw themselves between the combatants and tried to drag them apart. The men seemed turned into demons. Remonstrance and entreaty were alike useless.

Suddenly a pistol shot rang out, sharp and clear, and through the gathering darkness the men saw

the tall form of the superintendent sway, totter, and then fall heavily to the ground.

The sight acted as a cold douche upon the ardent flame of their passion. In their rough way they loved him, for he had been kind to all, and his recent fearless opposition to their unreasoning prejudice and hate, had but endeared him to them the more, for a display of muscular courage always raises a man in the estimation of those with whom brute force is king.

'You hound!' roared Ben Robinson, as he dashed the pistol out of Dobson's hand, and, with a blow straight from the shoulder, laid him prostrate. 'You white-livered, miserable, sneaking hound!' With every word he pressed his knee more firmly on his chest, until the wretch gasped for mercy.

'Mercy!' ejaculated his captor, with withering scorn. 'Tar and feathers is too good fer a dog like you?

'Stand aside, boys,' he added, as the men gathered around them with angry threats and dark suggestions of a rope over the nearest tree; 'sech scum ez this ain't fit fer the touch uv honest men.'

Catching a piece of rope from a man who had been furtively making a noose in one end, he bound the prostrate miner hand and foot.

'Help carry him to the shanty, boys,' he said. 'Ef the boss lives, he'll wish he'd never seen this

mine, I reckon; ef he dies, he won't ever hev the luck ter see another,' he added grimly, as two strong men swung the wretch roughly from the ground.

Meanwhile some of the other miners had been hastily improvising a stretcher, under the foreman's direction. When it was ready willing hands lifted Jack upon it, and, forgetful of their late differences, men from the old gang and the new bore him gently home, while the night drew her mantle swiftly down over the silent valley and the eternal majesty of the hills.

* * * * *

Nell was very ill. Bobus declared the Rosery had ceased to be a united household since the Mater and Meg found their centre of gravity in the Winthrop cottage; Paul was torn asunder between the greenhouse and the children, of whom he had constituted himself guardian; and no one was left to keep the homestead shipshape but the Raven and Hester, Griseldimus not having a passion for housewifery.

One Saturday afternoon, as Ravenal was taking a few moments' rest after a busy morning, she looked up to see Dora standing before her with a white, set face, carrying a marked newspaper in her hand, which she held towards her.

'Jack has been shot!' she said briefly. Then,

without another word, she turned and slowly climbed the stairs to her room, which she entered wearily, shutting the door behind her. And Ravenal mercifully left her in peace.

Towards evening she entered the room softly.

'Will you come down to supper, dearie, or would you rather have me bring it up to you here?'

'Supper?' Dora repeated, lifting a tearless face from the pillow. 'Of course I am coming down to supper. The mere fact of having murdered my only friend is not a sufficient excuse for loss of appetite in this prosaic world!'

Ravenal smoothed back the curls which would persist in falling over the broad forehead.

'But, dearie,' she said gently, 'the telegram says he is doing well. The wound is not fatal, Dollie.'

'Telegram!' echoed Dora, with scorn. 'What does the telegram know about it? And of course the wound will be fatal. Are there not blood-poisoning and a hundred other delightful contingencies ready to make it so? What sort of a chance do you suppose he stands among those forsaken mountains, with no doctor nearer than a hundred miles, most likely?'

'Oh, I know all about it. You can't tell me anything. And it is no use your talking, Raven. You mean well, I know. But Jack will die, and—'

I have killed him. That is a pleasant load to carry through all one's life, isn't it?'

She laughed joylessly, and with a weary sigh prepared to go downstairs. Turning suddenly, she laid her cold cheek against her sister's.

'You're a dear old Raven, and you're the only comfort I have left me now—you and Laddie. If you could keep Aunt Gru on a side track, for to-night at least, it would be a blessing.'

She went down after that and forced herself to talk calmly about the accident in the far, far West, although every word fell upon her heart like lead.

The next morning she went to the office as usual, and for several weeks that followed, but Ravenal's anxious eyes detected signs of sleepless nights, and although she made a pretence of being hungry, she only played with her food. The daily telegrams which came to Mr. Endicott were most encouraging, but she only shook her head, and positively refused to believe there could be the slightest ground for hope.

At length there came a day when she could not read her notes. The confusing symbols danced in meaningless disorder before her tired eyes. She pressed her hand upon them to still their aching.

'The time has come for me to stop,' she said, as with a long-drawn sigh she laid her head down upon her desk. 'If only I could stop for good!'

Some time afterwards she found herself in her own bed, but her weary brain positively refused to recall how she had got there. Her head ached with wild, tumultuous throbs, her back was on fire, and every separate bone seemed the embodiment of pain.

Bobus shook his professional head gravely.

'You've made a pretty stiff fight of it, Dorinda, but old Dame Nature is bound to get in her revenge before the game is over.'

He went downstairs with a troubled face, for Dora and he were the warmest of bosom friends.

'I am afraid she is in for it, poor little girl,' he said in a low voice.

'In for what?' cried Ravenal anxiously.

'Brain fever!' was the laconic reply.

* * * * *

Then came days and nights of wild incoherence, with the ever-recurring and persistent note of mournful self-reproach.

Bobus and Dr. Everett held long and anxious consultations. They did not attempt to disguise their opinion that it was a serious case.

'It is a most unfortunate complication, this accident of Jack's, you know,' Bobus explained to his sisters. 'She has been under such a heavy nervous strain for so long, previous to this attack, that she

has no strength left to fight it ; and the fact of her having this one definite thing to fret about keeps the brain in a continual state of irritation.'

To Ravenal's amazement, Aunt Griselda constituted herself head nurse. She felt half afraid of the effect her presence might have upon Dora, but Bobus assured her that, while the delirium continued, it would not affect her recovery, and the help was too precious to be refused when their hands were so full.

'It is such a comfort to me to know you have taken charge of my poor little Dora,' Mrs. Raymond said to her half-sister in her gentle way ; 'it relieves the girls of so much strain. You see I know by experience what a good nurse you are.'

Aunt Griselda laughed, though her lips quivered.

'It is about time I was of some use in the world,' she said, in her old, abrupt way.

'Poor Aunt Gru!' Dora was saying, as she re-entered the room. 'I couldn't persuade her to bite at the heathen Chinee. Poor old Gru! She is like the rest of us, and loves the flesh-pots.'

'And you say I must "love her," Allan! How could you imagine such a thing? But you do so many impossible things yourself, you have no idea how hard it comes upon common people. Raven finds good in her, but then Raven would find good in the devil. Now Jack hates the devil. Wasn't

that what Mr. Thurman said? Oh, no, it was a lie. Little Washington with his little hatchet. What was that Mr. Thurman said the miners had? Oh, yes, blood like fire. Poor old Jack! Fire and smoke, and then cold, cold lead! Did you ever think of me, I wonder, before that cruel pistol-shot? You said I would be "dearest always," and you hate a lie, you know, worse than the devil.

'Oh, what lovely lace! Like cobwebs and mist and foam. And what quantities of it! Will they never stop unwinding it? It makes my head so tired!

'What is that you say, Jack? A wedding-dress? You foolish boy? Why, it would cost a fortune. Ah, no, Jack! The only wedding-dress I will ever wear will be in my coffin, now that you are in yours.

'Who was it said you did not die, Jack? It sounded like Allan Ruthven's voice. But of course he is mistaken, for you are quite dead, dear, and— I have killed you!

'You would have got a Lady Macbeth for a wife if you had got me. Poor, dear old Jack! You will never know now that I loved you, unless the angels whisper it. You see, I didn't know it myself, Jack, until it was too late! But I always thought you would come back, and then I meant to take you on the river, and tell you I had been mistaken—

about the platonic friendship, you know. Why, I believe I would be willing to be Mrs. Methuselah herself now, if you wanted me to, Jack, in spite of the nine hundred years.

'Did I say it was nine hundred years ago? It seems longer than that. You see, I've missed you so! And now I have got to go on living, living, living, and I'll never see you any more! For they won't let Lady Macbeth into heaven, will they, Ray? Where is Allan? Allan would know.

'Who was that kissed me? Why, Allan Ruthven, I believe it was Aunt Gru!

'I wish my head wouldn't turn round so. It makes it so hard to think. I did try to love her, as you said, but I couldn't seem to think of any one but Jack, you know.'

* * * * *

The disease was nearing its crisis, and the anxious watchers waited with pale, worn faces. Allan was there, and Paul, Mrs. Raymond, and Nora and Tom. Katie spent every available moment with her friend, but she had to go to the office as usual, and Ravenal would not listen to her being deprived of her rest.

'It is certainly bringing out all the best in Aunt Griselda,' said Hester, as, after a hasty supper, the self-appointed nurse had gone back again to her

post; 'she is absolutely tireless, and seems to have put herself for ever in the background.'

'I think,' said Ravenal slowly, 'perhaps this is God's way of teaching our poor little Dollie to love her.'

Upstairs, kneeling by the side of the bed, Aunt Griselda was asking forgiveness for her harsh treatment of the high-spirited girl.

All at once she became conscious that two shadowy, solemn eyes were watching her through the dim light.

'What is that song, Mumsie, that you used to put me to sleep with?' Dora murmured wearily. 'Oh, how my head does hurt!

"Peace, my child, lie still and slumber,
Holy angels guard thy bed."

But whoever supposed an angel could look so like Aunt Gru!

* * * * *

The crisis came and passed, but the patient did not rally, as they hoped, and Bobus looked troubled, while Dr. Everett shook his head.

One evening in the gloaming Aunt Griselda was again kneeling beside the bed. She thought her patient sleeping, and she rejoiced, for since the delirium had passed she had been so very weak.

Suddenly she heard a voice which seemed to come from far away.

'You are a Christian indeed, Aunt Gru, if you have been praying for me! I have been such a life-long plague to you. I have been just as hateful as you thought me, deep down, you know; and I have wanted to tell you so lots of times, but you always seemed to twist me up in a bow knot, somehow, before I could begin. You poor, dear thing! I guess we must have been born to snarl each other up in a tangle. Do you think you could ever learn to love me, Aunt Gru? I'm sorry I've been naughty, as the children say, and I need all the love I can get, now that Jack has gone away.'

Aunt Griselda's tears were falling fast, but she answered quietly, 'Jack has not gone away, dear. He is getting strong and well. A telegram came from him to-day.'

But Dora only shook her head.

'You mean well, I know, but Jack would not like you to tell a lie, even out of kindness. He hates a lie worse than the devil, you know. He is quite dead. I dreamed I saw him, lying so cold and still! And then I looked down on my hand, and there was the bloodstain. I killed him, you see,' and she burst into a fit of such uncontrollable weeping that Aunt Griselda did what she would never have dared to do before, gathered the wasted

little figure in her arms, and soothed and petted her as her mother would have done.

At length Ravenal sent Bobus to Mr. Endicott.

'Ask him to let us have all the messages, as they come,' she said. 'It is the old trouble. She fancies Jack is dead and we are hiding it from her. She will never believe he is alive and well until she sees it in black and white.'

'Yellow,' corrected Bobus slyly. 'Accuracy in statement is essential to veracity in character. The Raven's ethics should be on as firm a foundation as her cottages.'

Ravenal smiled as she dismissed him. During the past days and weeks of crushing anxiety, her beloved cottages had been forgotten, and even her own sorrow relegated to the background.

'Dollie,' she said gently, as some hours later Bobus entered the room with a sheaf of telegrams in his hand, 'you have thought we have been deluding you all along with false hopes, so Bobus has brought you the telegrams, that you may see for yourself.'

'Conclusive evidence before the court,' said Bobus, as he laid the yellow sheets in her lap with a flourish. 'You see, Dorinda, we haven't been trumping up a story for the occasion. The "Western Union" deals with hard facts, and does not readily lend

itself to reporting "the baseless fabric of a dream."

He read them aloud in consecutive order, and then looked at her questioningly.

'Well, Dorinda, are you satisfied now, dear? Old Jack is well and hearty, and will probably be back with us as soon as he is up to the journey.'

'You are very kind to take so much trouble,' she answered, with a wistful smile; and then she turned away from him, away from them all, and buried her face on Aunt Griselda's shoulder.

So the weeks passed. Dora was very patient and still in the day-time, but at night, when she thought her faithful nurse was sleeping, Aunt Griselda would catch a stifled cry of 'Jack! Jack!' as through the darkness her spirit sought to find him across the sea of space.

One day Aunt Griselda arrived at a sudden resolution. She was alone with her patient. Hester had gone to the city. Ravenal was deep in consultation with Allan over their delayed plans in Mr. Derringer's library, which had been converted into a temporary working-room. Mrs. Raymond had gone over to relieve Meg, for Nell also was making a tardy recovery.

Putting on her bonnet and cape, she went to the door of the greenhouse.

'Paul,' she said peremptorily, 'go in and sit with Dora. I have to go on an errand.'

That evening there was an air of subdued satisfaction about her manner, and she moved briskly, as if a weight of uncertainty had been lifted from her mind.

'Gru, dear,' said Dora, with a touch of her old sprightliness, 'what has come to you? The air feels as if you had emptied a bag of ozone right in the middle of the room, and your tread is as full of triumphant elation as Franklin's must have been after he discovered electricity.'

Aunt Griselda laughed mysteriously as she kissed her, and remarked that electricity was a wonderful and useful discovery, and she was personally grateful to Mr. Franklin for having made it; but curiosity indicated a depraved imagination, and must not be encouraged on any account.

About a week later she said casually, as she laid a spray of Dora's favourite roses against her cheek: 'We must give you some artificial colouring, dear, since you have none of your own; for I should not be surprised if Jack were to walk in on us some fine day, and it would never do for the poor boy to find nothing but a ghost to welcome him.'

And then, before Dora could answer, she was gone, and Jack himself stood in the doorway! With

a low cry of delight she held out her wasted hands to him.

'Oh, Jack, you knew better than I did!' And Jack, with the joy of a great content, knelt down beside the couch and took her in his arms without a single word.

'This is what brought me,' he whispered, as, at the close of the beautiful afternoon, he sat beside her in the twilight. He took a telegram from his breast-pocket and held it towards her. 'The doctor said I was not fit to travel, but when this came, I snapped my fingers at him.'

Dora read the message slowly.

'Dora is ill, and calling for you. Come home.

'AUNT GRU.'

'Your name for her, dear,' Jack said gently. 'She wanted to make it speak to me of you.' And Dora bent a tearful, repentant face over the quaint signature, as she murmured :—

'How thou hast shamed me, oh, mine enemy!'

When, a little later, Aunt Griselda bustled in to see how her medicine was working, Dora put her arms around her neck, and drew her face down until it touched her own.

'Your "coals of fire," Gru dear, have burnt down

through my head to my heart, and I do not need to "try" to love you any more!

Jack bent over and kissed her other cheek.

'You are my "Aunt Gru" now, you know,' he said gently, 'and I shall never forget that you were the first one to call me home.'

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CHAPTER XX

The Cry of a Strong Soul

'Step aside a little oftener to talk with God.'

'**P**OOOR Julian is terribly homesick,' said Allan, drawing a foreign letter from his pocket, after greeting Ravenal, as they met for the daily consultation which was becoming perilously sweet.

'Homesick!' echoed Ravenal incredulously. 'I thought he would be perfectly happy when he got to Europe.'

'Europe loses its power to charm when one's heart is in America,' said Allan, with a steady glance at her. 'Julian's whole thought is centred here, Miss Ravenal. I do not find it hard to understand his discontent.'

She laughed nervously.

'When he reaches Florence he will forget,' she said.

'Florence!' repeated Allan, in a mystified tone. 'Why should he go to Florence, Miss Ravenal?'

I know of no reason that would take him there.' He looked at her with a puzzled expression, but she made no attempt to answer his question. Her face was bent over her drawings, and she toyed absently with her ivory rule.

'Let me read you what he says, Miss Ravenal, and then I think you will not make the mistake of imagining that Julian could be happy anywhere but here.' He opened the letter as he spoke.

'The fact is, Allan, the Old World has lost its charm, and I find myself wondering why I lingered in its musty corners so persistently.

'The rare old wine of Art has lost its flavour, and I see now, as I never realised before, that the acme of true living is not to be found in the cloister of the religious devotee, or the no less rigidly guarded seclusion of the artist's studio, but out under the clear sunshine of God's world, fighting the battle of life shoulder to shoulder, and holding out a helping hand to those in the great brotherhood of humanity who have been borne backward by the tide.

'There is a delightful zest about the prospect of such a life as this, and again and again I thank God for the rare, sweet natures who have given me the object-lesson which was needed to make me see that a self-forgetful life is the crowning beauty of earth, as it must surely be of heaven.

'Tell Miss Ravenal the roses here may be more gorgeous to the outward vision, but they lack the subtle fragrance of the ones she grows. The flowers that twine about the Rosery are more beautiful to me.'

Allan folded up the letter in silence, watching with hungry eyes the sweet averted face. The ivory rule had fallen from her fingers ; she was absolutely still.

At length he spoke, and his voice brought her back again to the present with a sudden shock.

'I have succeeded at last,' he said. 'The company have voted an appropriation for a chapel on the grounds. Miss Ravenal, will you design the plan?'

'Gladly,' she answered him, her face aglow. 'It is a lovely thought of yours, to have the home for the soul ready for occupancy as soon as the homes for the body.'

'I deserve no praise,' he said simply. 'It ought to be our first thought always.'

'Ought to be!' She sighed wistfully. 'Why is it not?'

'Because we have not yet reached the spiritual altitude of the "one idea." We dissipate our energies and are "careful and troubled" about many things. Jesus must be the Alpha and the Omega with us, as He is with God.'

So he answered her, his tone full of a reverent hush which caught and held her spirit in the silken meshes of a sweet content. The fineness of her nature rose to meet the spiritual essence of his with a great joy of comprehension and sympathy. She was conscious, when in his presence, of a sensation of absolute rest, while the sorrowful bewilderments of life seemed to adjust themselves to new points of view or were buried in the bosom of a dreamless oblivion.

They fell to discussing architectural styles after that, and the moments flew by unheeded in their flight.

'Shall you have it arranged so that it may be used for entertainments?' she asked at length.

'No!' he said, more nearly angry than she had ever seen him. 'I will not have my Lord insulted so! I mean it to be a habitation for the King, not a lodging-place from whence He shall be turned to make room for every chance amusement that comes along. Forgive me!' he said gently, 'but this subject stirs me to the very depths. It is positive pain to see the house of the Lord made a stage for amateur theatricals and a market-place for the dealers in small wares. Imagine a Jew, in the days of Solomon, presuming to intrude the sacrilege of a fish-pond or a scramble-bag into the awful sanctity of the Holy of Holies! When I

hear of these desecrations being permitted, I see the Christ knotting again His scourge of small cords and demanding that these things be taken hence. God has willed the place of His habitation shall be holy. We are His servants, Miss Ravenal; we must carry out His will.'

She flashed upon him the bright smile which he had come to count his greatest earthly reward.

'That is exactly my attitude on the whole question,' she said, 'but even if it were otherwise you would convert me. It must be beautiful to have the power of winning every one to your will.

"All the world, with but *one* face wanting;
All of earth's music, except *one* song;
But the missing face my heart is haunting,
And the harmony's marred now the song is gone."

Allan repeated the lines in a tone of such thrilling sadness that Ravenal felt the quick tears spring to her eyes.

'Forgive me!' she cried softly. 'I did not dream my words would reopen an old wound. I am so very sorry!'

'Forgive you!' he repeated, with a strange, yearning look. 'How would that be possible, since, with you, there could never be anything to forgive? Rather let the mantle of your sweet

charity fall upon me, in that I am unable to explain myself more fully. Believe me, the words which, through stress of circumstance or limitation of environment, we cannot utter, may be our sweetest after all!

A silence fell between them after that, which Ravenal was the first to break.

'How will you manage to supply the pulpit?' she asked softly.

'Dr Chapman has promised to take one service each Sunday; for the rest we must manage as we can. My thought of it is not so much a place where people may go to be preached to, as a place of refuge where they can be alone with God. It shall be open night and day, so that the labourer coming from his toil, or the woman in the midst of her household worries, may have a chance to turn their backs for a little on the hurtling world. I have long felt Protestantism is at fault, with its barred doors. Christianity, to be effective, must be a religion of every day. Men call our churches spiritual homes; but what would they think of an earthly home that closed its doors against them through all the weary days of toil? If men need one thing more than another, Miss Ravenal, it is a place in which to pray.'

'Do you never think of yourself?' she cried in wonderment. 'You are so absorbed in the welfare

of your fellows. Have you no wishes of your own?’

Allan looked full in her lovely eyes, until his own deepened with the shadow of a smile.

‘My wishes are like hounds, Miss Ravenal, best held in leash.’

* * * * *

That night Allan Ruthven spent under the silent sky.

Upon the Marathon plains of the soul victory is signalised by no blare of trumpets or flaunt of banners. In the soft-cushioned hush of solitude the triumphal bay is wreathed about the pallid brow, while the voice that is ‘calmer than silence’ speaks the eulogium, and the man henceforth walks crowned among his fellows—but human eyes are as yet too dim to catch aught but a hint of the radiance which robes him in its mantle.

Swift as the meteor cleaves its radiant path across the sky Allan’s thought went back over the months which had winged their flight into the great pause of eternity since he had seen Ravenal for the first time.

In imagination he stood again in the Rosery, watching, with the delight which only a delicately attuned nature can experience, the diverse elements blended into harmony under the subtle potency of her spell. With a pleasure bordering sharp on

pain he watched the sensitive face catch a reflected glory from the clear shining of the soul, while her mobile mouth gave eloquent index to her thought; and gazed again into the eyes, whose every glance but riveted more strongly the chains which her sweet courtesy had forged about his heart.

With a sudden cry of horror he stood transfixed. What was he doing? This was Julian's love, his future wife, and he had been fain to lay his hands upon what belonged to his friend.

His sensitive conscience stood aghast. With the dazzling gleam of spirit-photography, Julian's face rose upon his vision—amazed, reproachful. He had left his life in his hands, and he was betraying his trust! He threw himself upon the ground and lay motionless, his face buried in his arms.

When at length he rose from his vigil, haggard and strangely weary, his mind was filled with a single resolution, to which he clung with desperate persistence. Julian must come home at once.

He set himself then to find a reason for the cloud which had so darkened his friend's horizon. Carefully he collated the facts at his command, and set them in array before the bar of his judgment. They were very meagre. A doubtful questioning glance, an averted face, a sudden compression of the lips when Julian's name was mentioned—she never made the slightest reference to him, unless it was absolutely

unavoidable. There was nothing tangible, nothing but her strangely persistent belief that he was on his way to Florence. In that seemed to lie his only clue, and he set himself to its unravelment with the tirelessness of a detective.

'When he gets to Florence he will forget,' she had said. What had Julian told her to make her think he would find Florence such a panacea for his discontent?

He went back in thought over the months they had spent together in Italy's fair city. What could it be? They had done the usual amount of sight-seeing; he had read Homer, he remembered, and—it was there that Julian had painted Carmelita! The name brought a flood of recollections, keenest among them all the remembrance of the day when he had stood before the lovely pictured face and given it up to his friend.

With the unreasoning certainty of an intuition, the conviction was borne in upon his mind that Carmelita held the key to the mystery. Ravenal had seen the picture of herself, and had thought it was another!

With startling distinctness the damaging evidence printed itself upon his memory.

'Carmelita mia,
Florence,
April 29th, 18..'

But when and how? Julian had declared he would only show it to her as the picture of his wife, and he doubted if it had ever been taken from its wrappings until the day before they went to Nantucket. Ah, that fatal day! How well he remembered now his hasty return from the Works, after accomplishing the business he had undertaken for Mr. Derringer, in order to get the picture out of sight before Julian got back from the city. He remembered stopping, on his way through the library, to pick up the 'Rosengarten,' which lay face downwards upon the floor, with a vague wonder as to who could have left it there. How blind he had been! Who was there to do it but one?

On and on his swift thought flew, busily arranging the circumstantial evidence. Ravenal had had a headache, he remembered, that night when they had gone to say goodbye; and it was while they were in Nantucket that Julian said the cloud had arisen which had dimmed the sunlight of his sky.

His resolution deepened into an unconquerable determination. Julian should come home at once!

* * * * *

The next morning Allan made no attempt to unfold the plans which lay awaiting his inspection. He seemed preoccupied, and Ravenal noticed with a start how white and worn he looked

'You are not well,' she cried. 'This work is too

great a strain upon you. It is not right that you should have to bear it all alone !'

'Oh, no,' he said lightly, 'it is nothing. I shall be better soon.'

After a pause he spoke again, slowly, as if each word cost him an effort.

'Miss Ravenal, I have a fancy this morning to tell you a story. Do you think you can spare time to listen ?'

She laughed brightly. 'With such a treat, held out by the prince of *raconteurs*, I count myself justified in yielding to the temptation.' She swept the papers to one side, and prepared to listen and enjoy.

He seemed to find it hard to commence, and she would not hurry him. His eyes were turned towards the window, where the sky peeped through behind its sheltering veil of leaf and flower. There was a strange uplifted expression upon his face. She wondered vaguely why Julian, with his skill for portraits, had never taken his.

'Once, long ago', he began in a low voice, 'a young man had a vision. The vision came to him, as visions do, at an unexpected time and place, and, for the passing moment, life looked radiant ; and then the vision passed, and life grew cold and gray.

'It was the vision of a face !

'With the fatuous belief of mortals in the power of environment, he haunted the place where the vision had appeared, but in vain. Days and weeks swept by, until at length, with the desperate despair of a lover, he went abroad, the better, among alien surroundings, to commence the hopeless task of trying to forget.

'He plunged into Art, which, until now, had been his only mistress; but Art had lost its charm. The glory of God's handiwork in Nature no longer held his soul enchained; the world seemed an empty place. His winged thoughts, laughing at barriers of time and space, kept faithful tryst, where Cupid, with such unerring aim, had dealt the fatal blow.

'He gave no hint of his sorrow to his friends. He fought his pain bravely, with patience and a smile. The love in his heart gave his manner an added tenderness, so that children and dumb creatures came to him for sympathy. But he did not forget!

'One day in Florence a beautiful Italian girl passed him on her way to market, and he stood bewildered, like one in a dream. It was only one of the *contadini*, with a fragrant burden of flowers, but her face was almost a facsimile of the face of his vision in the long ago!

'He followed her, and obtained her consent to become his model, and for days and weeks she sat before him as, with tireless skill, he traced

the features and caught the expression which he seemed to know so well.

'Until then, the face he loved had been but a face and nothing more. Henceforth it became to him a tangible, living presence, and he gave it the beautiful name of his model—the sweet-voiced, gentle Italian who had put him in mind of his love.

'His father wrote, urging his return, and between the lines he read an old man's longing that his only son should take his place in the business and give him a daughter to love.

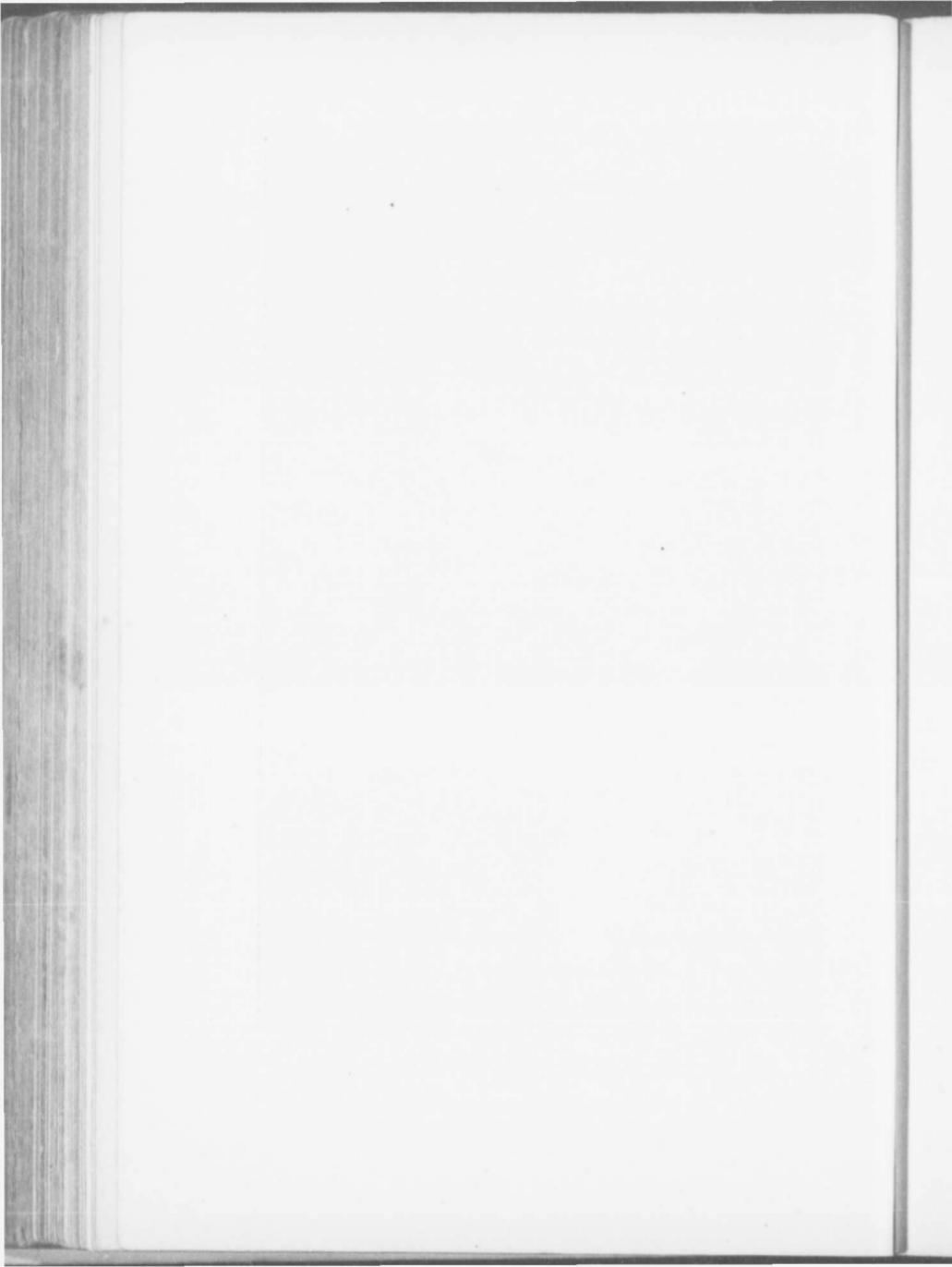
'Standing amid the snow-crowned Alps he took a high resolve, which not all men would have the strength to keep. He would go back to America and take up the business so foreign to his tastes, but he would be for ever loyal to his vision, since he could ask no woman to accept a heart which was wholly surrendered to what some would have deemed but 'the baseless fabric of a dream.'

'He started homeward, but when within a few miles of his destination a railway disaster brought him cruel injury, and for days and weeks he hovered on the borderland of life and death, until the magic power of a voice stirred his sleeping senses and brought him back to earth. The voice belonged to the one whom his father had chosen from all the world as a wife for his son.



THEN HE ROSE QUIETLY AND LEFT THE ROOM.

See page 243.



'At length he vowed he would see this enchantress who had so enticed his soul with harmony, and, propped up among his cushions, he waited for her arrival. His patience was soon rewarded. He heard the voice he had learned to know and listen for, and then a figure framed itself in the doorway. He sprang forward—electrified. It was the face of his dreams! His beautiful vision! The overpowering shock of his joy proved too great for his feeble strength, and, with the name upon his lips which had been so long held in his heart, he fainted away.

'The name was—Carmelita!'

Allan's voice ceased, and a great silence fell. At length he turned his head, and looked full at the lovely girl whom he had done his best to woo—for another.

She was sitting in the same position as when he began his story, but her eyes glowed with a tender light, the soft, shy colour was flushing her cheeks, and her lips were parted in a happy smile. She had forgotten his presence! And Allan bowed his head, and rejoiced for his friend.

Then he rose quietly and left the room, closing the door behind him. Going at once to his desk he spent the afternoon in writing. When the long

letter was finished it bore the address of Julian Derringer.

That night the cry of a strong soul went up to heaven.

'I have been true to you, Julian! Julian!'

CHAPTER XXI

The Lovers Meet Again

'I will build a cloudy house
For my thoughts to live in ;
When for earth too fancy loose,
And too low for heaven !
Hush ! I talk my dream aloud—
I build it bright to see—
I build it on the moonlit cloud
To which I looked with *thee*.'

MR. DERRINGER'S house was completed, and Ravenal went to dream among its stately corridors for the last time. It had grown to be a part of her life, and it was with a strange feeling of regret that she realised she must yield up to another her proprietorship in the graceful monument which her art had reared. She started early. She felt she must have the whole afternoon to herself.

The contractors had long since handed the building over to its owner, but he had told her he should not consider that she had kept the letter of her bond until it was ready for occupancy ; and

during the furnishing she had been in sole command. Mr. Derringer had not only given her *carte blanche*, but had absolutely refused to have any voice in the arrangement of the interior.

'It is time,' he had said in his brusque way, 'that I enjoyed an old man's privilege of having things done for me. Imagine it is your own, my child, and give the rein to Pegasus, no matter how far afield he canters. What pleases you will suit me to a nicety, and it is an old man's whim which you are bound to humour. I have a fancy to see your little hand in the fold of every drapery. I shall never forget you sang my boy back to his father, you know.'

'You have shown me I was wrong in supposing that when you became an architect you would cease to be a woman, and I own myself conquered. Ravenal, my child, you hold Julian's happiness, as well as mine, in your slender fingers.'

Her eyes had drooped as they met his wistful smile, while a burning blush had swept up over cheek and brow, and Mr. Derringer had gone home well pleased.

She walked slowly along the sweeping drive-way which led up to the entrance. The magic of the spring-time was in the air; the birds were whispering sweet nothings among the branches, while the leaves held themselves motionless to listen, except when

some topmost plumes of fresh, young green caught a message from the sky and swayed gently towards their neighbours beneath in an airy flutter of repetition.

She stopped in front of the massive doorway and looked lovingly at the broad verandah, with its graceful columns, which Julian had said reminded him of Italy; the stone turrets, with their magnificent stretch of view; the portico with its castellated windows; the covered archway leading to the side entrance, whose solid masonry gave such an air of restful strength to the whole; and the wide embracing slant of the roofs.

She drew a long breath as she slowly ascended the steps. It seemed as if each stone in the majestic pile were a part of herself. It was her dream materialised. Her dream of a home!

She fitted the key in the lock and opened the massive oaken door with a deep sigh of satisfaction. She held the theory that a house gave the key to the individuality of its owner, and she looked about her in a pleased content, as the door swung to noiselessly behind her. The rich tintings of the walls blended harmoniously with the rugs upon the polished floor, and the *portières* which fell in soft, heavy folds to the ground; rare bits of statuary looked at her from recesses in the spacious hall, the clear-veined marble gleaming white against

their warm background; while the carved oaken staircase uplifted itself through the centre.

She went slowly from room to room, with delicious pauses of reverie in the curtained embrasures of the large bay windows, with their ever-changing vistas of delight; or in front of the deep-throated fireplaces, with their quaintly fashioned andirons and tiled hearths; pausing for a loving glance at a favourite bit of Titian or Murillo or Paul Veronese; stopping to arrange the curios more carefully upon their stands; lingering longest in the library, which Dora called 'an ecstasy of harmony in colour,' where the familiar faces of old friends gave her a silent welcome, the desks stood ready for use, and luxurious leather chairs invited to repose; on and on, through dining-room, kitchen, and pantry, where Hester's systematic soul had revelled, and back to the reception-room which Meg had planned; laying soft touch upon curtain and chair, and flecking an imaginary dust-flake from the mirrors, in which she caught her own reflection with a smile.

She filled some vases with roses and sweet-scented violets and pansy blooms, for Mr. Derringer was to take possession the next day; then, going up to a handsome clock which stood in an alcove facing the stairs, she set its ponderous machinery in motion with fingers which trembled a little.

'Dear house of my heart, I will be the first to give you a touch of life,' she said. 'Hitherto you have been but a beautiful, silent vision; now let me set in motion the throbbing pulse of Time.'

Crossing the hall, she knelt on the broad first step of the stairway and laid her cheek caressingly upon the tawny mane of one of the carved lions which guarded it on either side. Her lips moved, and the lion heard her whisper, as if in self-reproach, 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols.'

Upstairs everything was in the same perfect order, and Ravenal surveyed each room approvingly. She walked over to a window and threw it up to let the cool air fan her with its perfumed breath. Suddenly she started. Was that the door opening? Could that be a step on the stair?

She listened intently. No sound was to be heard save the rhythmic monotone of the faithful servant who had patiently resumed its task of keeping the accounts of its relentless master of the hour-glass and scythe. Obeying a sudden impulse, she entered a sitting-room—a dream in white and gold—and seating herself before the piano, let her fingers roam idly over its keys.

'I have crowned you with flowers, dear house,' she said, 'and started the springs of perpetual motion within you; now let me strike the keynote of your meaning before I say goodbye.'

Involuntarily her fingers sought the familiar chords, then her voice awoke the sleeping echoes with her favourite melody of 'Home sweet Home.'

Last of all she went into the lofty room, which was her special favourite. With never-failing delight she looked through the wide stretch of windows of the panorama of hill and dale, the soft background of forest, the lake, set like a mirror of silver deep in its emerald frame, and, far against the horizon, the faint outline of the mountains—

'Bathed in the tenderest purple of distance,
Tinted and shadowed by pencils of air.'

The room was empty. 'It is Julian's whim, my child,' Mr. Derringer had said, with a curious, kindly smile. 'I only hope he may have a chance to gratify it very soon.'

She wondered vaguely what he had meant. There seemed no conceivable reason why his son should not be able to gratify his taste in decorative art as soon as he returned. He meant it to be his studio, evidently. That was why he had chosen the northern aspect. A smaller room opened off of it. That also was unfurnished.

And Julian was coming home! The wind whispered it as it flirted gaily among the tree-tops, and the birds wove it into their songs, while one professional tenor, bolder than the rest, perched

upon the coping of the window near which she stood, and in a clear flute-like tone whistled 'Ju-lian, Ju-lian.'

The sweet, shy colour flushed her cheeks. How glad his father would be! And then another feathered songster, from his vantage-ground in an adjacent tree, whistled jauntily, 'Are you glad too, Ravenal? Rav-en-al? Ju-lian is coming home.'

The colour deepened. Of course she was glad—for his father's sake. And the bird shook his saucy head and cried, 'Oh, fie! Rav-en-al, Rav-en-al. Tell the truth, my dear; the truth, the truth!'

Then the whole bird choir took up the chorus and warbled the names in concert. 'Ju-lian, Rav-en-al, Ju-lian,' and she turned away from the window to find Julian himself standing before her.

He held out his arms, and his voice broke in one longing cry, 'Carmelita, my love, my life; I have come home to you!'

* * * * *

'Dora,' said Jack Endicott, as they floated happily on the river in the twilight, 'do you know what Roosevelt Thurman did this morning?'

'Something nice, if it concerns you, Jack. He wishes you were his son, you know.'

'You are dreaming, dear! What can have put such an idea into your head?'

'I heard him say so,' said Dora with a shiver,

as she recalled the occasion of her eavesdropping. And then she told him all.

Jack's head was bent low when she had finished her story. 'To have won the confidence of such a man is enough to make one happy for life,' he said in a moved tone. 'What you have told me accounts for his action, which hitherto has seemed utterly incomprehensible.'

'What is his action, Jack? You forget I have not an ounce of Job's blood in my veins.'

Jack started. 'Forgive me,' he cried, with a smile. 'He has put the whole of his interest in the Colony into my hands, Dora. He expects to be abroad for several years. It frightens me when I think of the responsibility. His interest is very heavy.'

Dora clapped her hands. 'Delightful!' she cried. 'Now we can just give up our lives to it, as Allan and Julian and Ray are doing! But whatever will your father do without you?'

'It will not take up all my time at first, and I am in hopes that very soon father will come into the partnership also.'

'The plot thickens!' cried Dora merrily. 'I expect the Colony is a hobby which all our friends will soon be riding. How delicious the river is to-night! Don't you feel as if you would like to float on its bosom for ever?'

'Dora,' said Jack suddenly, as he leaned towards

her. 'Do you know when Julian wants to set the day?'

'Yes, did you ever hear of anything so preposterous! Fancy any man in his senses supposing the Raven could be ready in two months! But it only goes to prove the unparalleled audacity of your sex.'

'He will gain his point though; he always does. Don't you think, dear, the best thing we can do to help him, will be to make it a double wedding?'

'You are always so ridiculous!' she answered, softly.

'Jack,' she continued after a pause, during which she had been examining the network of gold which encircled her third finger, 'tell me what you meant to symbolise by this imagery?' She touched with a lingering fondness the bit of exquisite workmanship. Two paddles crossed upon an anchor, their handles set with gleams of flashing light; the band, a chain of curious interweavings, caught by a tiny padlock. 'I am so glad, Jack, you had it fashioned from your thought. I hate things ready made.'

He lifted the hand to his lips before he answered her. 'Simply, dear, that the champions of the river have decided to row down life's stream together—you know there was a time when you preferred to paddle your own canoe. The golden chain of love will hold the ship fast to its moorings,

and the anchor of faith keep her riding steady through life's fiercest storms. You see there is not much depth in the allegory,' he said, with a smile. 'I have no head for that. I am only a clumsy fellow.'

The quick tears sprang to Dora's eyes.

'You dear Methuselah,' she cried, with sweet humility. 'If only I could be sure of the nine centuries in which I might begin to grow worthy of you!'

* * * * *

The same evening on the rose-covered verandah Julian slipped upon Ravenal's finger the outward sign and symbol of the mystical union in which their hearts were joined. Inside, in delicate tracery, was engraven the name which the picture bore, with a date, followed by another.

'The day I saw you first, dear,' Julian explained, 'and then the happy present.' He leaned nearer the drooping head. 'Do you like it, Carmelita mia? Does it please you?'

'Clasped in an endless cirlet of fair gold,
An opal—less a jewel than a fire—
Burned with bright hues whose symbols sweetly told
Of deathless love, of truth and pure desire.'

She lifted her eyes from the varied flame of pulsing light to his face. 'It is beautiful. But

how could you know that the opal was my favourite among all the stones?'

'I chose it because it suits you,' he said, with a smile. 'I never think of diamonds in connection with you; they are too glittering and harsh and cold; and pearls are so deadly white and still! I wanted something in which colour and fragrance and tenderness should blend harmoniously in the sweet alchemy of love. These lines express its meaning better than I can do,' and in a voice whose every tone was a caress, he repeated:—

“Here vivid violet, in which red and blue
Blent cunningly to tell the truth of love;
And then all suddenly love's crimson hue
Triumphantly all colours spread above.

Next sprang to light the emerald's fairy sheen;
Whereat I looked to him; he, whisperingly:
'Of old, Hope's sacred symbol was this green;
Profaned, it means love's tender jealousy.'

Then glowed an orange light, where red and gold
Met in an oriflamme; and softly he
Spoke yet again: 'This union, sweet, doth hold
Sign of eternal wedlock that shall be.

Fire-like, this trembling and most vivid light
Speaks deepest passion—hear you me, my life?
Yet purely above flame reigns virgin white,
So dares this opal speak of you, my wife!’”

CHAPTER XXII

The Wedding-day

'And the birds sing like angels, so mystical fine,
And the cedars are brushing the archangels' feet,
And time is eternity—love is divine,
And the world is complete,
O Life, O Beyond,
Thou art strange, thou art sweet.'

THE wedding-day dawned brilliant.
'It is a mercy it isn't raining!' sighed Meg, who found rejoicing difficult. 'I was certain it would be a pour.'

'By all that is pitiful, Meg,' cried Bobus, as he struggled with a refractory button, 'don't go into the cultivation of dolorosity! It is a horrid weed, and does more harm than thistles. Mrs. Miles and her umbrella will be to the fore, and that ought to be enough mezzo-tinto for any picture. Hist, Dorinda!' he exclaimed, as he caught sight of Dora coming leisurely from the greenhouse, twining a garland for Laddie, 'flee to your chamber, my dear!

It is time for you to be donning the "light and airy."
Why do you linger so?'

Dora threw her arms around Laddie, who stood in front of her with his great paws upon her shoulders.

'Do you suppose I could go wreathed in flowers, and leave Laddie out in the cold?' she asked reproachfully. 'Do you suppose I could?'

'It is going to be a case of marry me, marry my dog,' laughed Tom. 'Poor Jack! He is getting a handful!'

'A heartfelt you mean, Tom,' said Jack, with his smile of deep content. 'I am not afraid.'

Julian came then with the flowers for his bride. They were so unconventional, these lovers. He had gathered them himself, culling each one with jealous care; now, no hand but his should crown her.

Upstairs, in a white peace, Ravenal knelt at her window. Her wedding-ropes fell about her like a silver cloud, but it was not of them she was thinking. Her eyes were lifted to the sky, her lips curved in a wistful smile. She was saying goodbye to her life.

Her mother came into the room softly. 'My darling, darling daughter! Julian is waiting for you.'

She rose, and throwing her arms about her

mother's neck, laid her head down upon her bosom. Mrs. Raymond drew her close, and so they stood together, speaking no word. Five minutes passed, ten, fifteen; Julian could afford to be patient; then, crowned with her mother's benediction, Ravenal went down and met him at the foot of the stairs.

The church was crowded when the Rosery party arrived. Julian and Allan, Jack and Bobus, took up their positions in front of the altar, and then the organ pealed forth its joyous notes as the fair daughters of the house of Raymond walked slowly up the aisle. Ravenal first, leaning on Mr. Deringer's arm; Dora on Tom's, with Hester and Katie as maids of honour; Harry Winthrop leading Mrs. Raymond, and Paul following with Meg, while Mrs. Tom and Nell came behind with Mr. Vandegrift.

Laddie, majestic and stately, brought up the rear. Throughout the ceremony he sat erect in dignified imposing silence beside his mistress, his massive neck garlanded with flowers, and more than one eye in the congregation grew misty as they caught the look of adoring love which this faithful, speechless friend cast upon the young wife as her little hand, where the wedding-ring now glistened, rested for a moment upon his broad forehead.

'For better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; till death us do part.'

Dora had spoken softly in an awed hush ; Ravenal's low voice fell clear and sweet through the silent church, and Allan caught a note of triumph in her tones.

When the service was ended, he watched her standing, beautiful as a dream, beside her husband, a tender smile playing about her mouth, a far-away look in her lovely eyes. It was as if she had withdrawn and stood apart in some holy place. He wondered how people dared to crowd about her and disturb the sacred stillness with their buzz of tongues. For himself he had spoken no word ; simply taken her hand in a strong, close pressure, and then lifted it reverently to his lips.

'Seeing these fellows so ridiculously happy puts one rather out of conceit of being a "bach," eh, Allan?' Bobus said to him afterwards, as they stood together in the Rosery, watching the bridal party, and he made answer, with a smile :—

'Is it not enough for the friend of the bridegroom that he hear the bridegroom's voice?'

The brides had gone upstairs soon after to don their travelling-dresses, and then the carriages came round and the goodbyes were spoken.

The Derringers were going to the Adirondacks, the Endicotts to Colorado.

'I can't wait any longer, Jack,' Dora had said, when he questioned her as to her preference ; 'I

must see just the place where you fell, and thank that nice Mr. Hudson for all his care and kindness. I am so glad that your father has made him superintendent of the mine.

Julian had planned for Europe, but Ravenal had laid soft hands upon the Baedeker he was studying.

'Not if you are going for my pleasure, dear,' she said. 'There is something which I should like so much better.'

'What is it?' cried Julian eagerly. 'You have but to speak the word, Carmelita.'

'Then let us go to some of the lovely places in our own dear land, and take the money this trip would cost to buy an organ for the chapel.'

* * * * *

The summer with its symphony concerts of lark and bobolink and thrush, with monotone of locust and roulade of bee, was over, and autumn had lighted its torches and set the woods aflame.

The air was full of a subdued melody, for the old world loves harmony, and when feathered cantatrice and impresario depart to fill their winter engagements in summer climes, she fills her concert-halls with the songs of the reapers, and the rhythmic cheer of heavily-laden vans, as they carry their golden harvests into her granaries; while, with the snow, her taste changes, and she listens, well pleased,

to the musical cadence of its sparkling rime under the runners, and the sweet-toned bells of the forest, as the icicles snap with a soft tinkle from the boughs, when Jack Frost clothes the woods with the fairy-like beauty of a silver thaw.

The Derringer carriage rolled swiftly homeward from the station, and Julian drew his wife closer as they approached the gateway.

'Carmelita mia,' he whispered, in the voice which only Ravenal knew, 'look out and tell me if you like the name the Governor has chosen?'

She leaned toward the window eagerly. She saw the broad sweep of the gravelled drive-way, the graceful iron gates set hospitably open, with their curving walls of warm grey stone, saw also that deep in the heart of the stone letters had been cut, which she spelt out slowly; then she turned to her husband a radiant face.

'Ravenswood!'

When the carriage drew up at the door, the whole family was waiting to greet them, for Dora and Jack had returned the previous week, and the hours slipped by happily until the soft twilight darkened into a long evening of delight.

When all had taken their departure, Ravenal re-entered the house, her husband and Allan close behind.

Mr. Derringer met her in the hall. In one hand

he held a folded paper, in the other a silver chate-laine of quaint and curious workmanship, from which a bunch of keys was hanging. Clasp ing it about her waist, he kissed her on the forehead, saying, 'I am happy to be able to welcome the mistress of Ravenswood to a house without a skeleton, and make over to her the keeping of its keys.

'When, long ago, you refused me the pleasure of helping you, and demanded that everything should be conducted upon the heartless basis of a frigid reality, you omitted to insert in your Shy-lock's bond one little word. "A sum or sums of money," I will not offer you, but their equivalent I cannot be denied. Ravenal, my child, let me give you a document to keep, as I shall always treasure the one you signed. You cannot refuse the old man, now that he is your father, you know.' He handed her the paper as he spoke, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

She opened it mechanically, but the words swam before her bewildered gaze. She was only conscious that her own old name, Ravenal Raymond, appeared at intervals in the strange, legal phrasing.

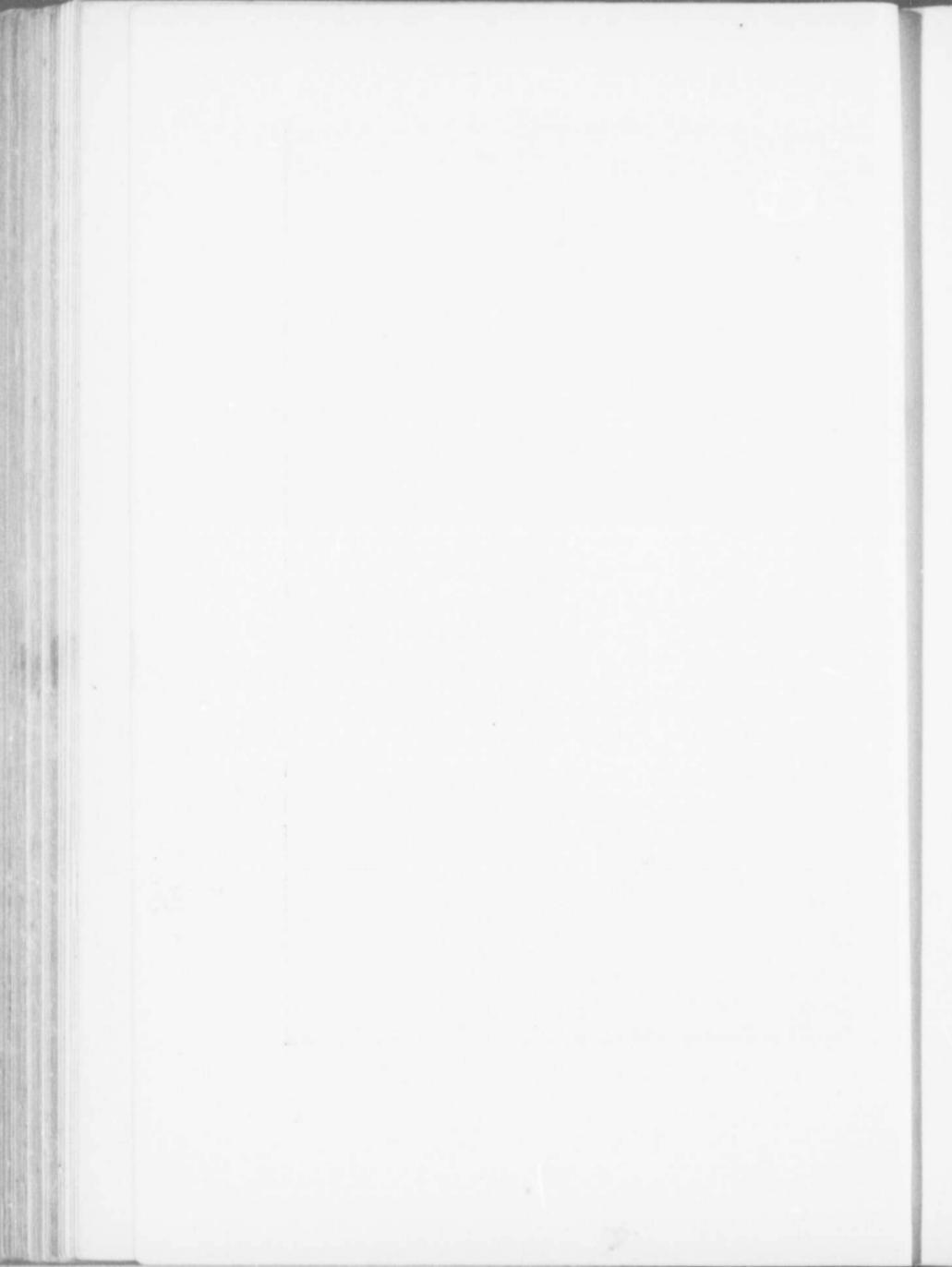
The startled colour rose in her cheeks and her eyes took on a frightened expression. She looked appealingly at her husband. He leaned over her and whispered tenderly, 'Do you not understand,

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GREAT CONTENT.

HER FATHER-IN-LAW FOLDED HER CLOSE, IN THE SILENCE OF A





darling? This is the Governor's wedding-present. Ravenswood belongs to you.'

The paper slipped from her hands and fluttered down upon the polished floor, and, with an inarticulate cry that was almost a sob, she laid her arms about Mr. Derringer's neck and buried her face on his shoulder.

Her father-in-law folded her close, in the silence of a great content. The joy which he had longed for had nestled in his heart at last!

When, some time after, they went slowly up the winding staircase, Julian stopped before the door of the room which had the northern aspect. Taking a key from the bunch which hung at Ravenal's girdle, he fitted it into the lock and led her across the threshold. The room was brilliantly lighted.

'Though I give you fair warning,' he said, with a laugh, 'that night work is positively and for ever tabooed.'

Ravenal looked round the room with puzzled eyes. This was no artist's studio, with its unfinished pictures standing upon easels or turning shamed faces towards the walls, while busts and suits of ancient armour stood, weird and gruesome, in its corners. There was but one easel, and it bore the finished picture of Carmelita. Julian led her up to it with a proud smile.

'This,' he said gently, 'is the face of my dream,

but my heart cherishes now a fairer vision, which no artist has the skill to portray. Tell me, my beautiful wife, are you pleased with my thought for you?'

She gave a low cry of delight, as she comprehended his meaning, and realised that she was standing in a perfectly equipped designing-room.

She made a pretty picture as she went swiftly from one treasure to another. The tables, with their blue prints and snowy sheets of tracing-paper, and ivory rules and measures, the carved cabinets full of shining instruments, the curiously fashioned chairs, the low divan, where Julian said she was to rest between each inspiration, the desk with its fragrant morocco fittings, the antique clock ticking softly in its corner, her favourite pictures upon the walls, books in every available corner, and in a recess a beautiful model of the Taj Mahal, looking as though it had been carven out of snow.

The smaller room adjoining was fitted up very simply. Julian's easel stood there, several fine engravings, a bookcase and a couple of pet busts, with his desk and a chair or two.

'We will live and work together, Carmelita mia,' he whispered, with a smile.

'I cannot thank you!' she said, and her eyes were dim. 'It is all like a dream, and surely I must awaken. I am not worthy that it should last.'

'My precious wife!' and Julian's voice grew softer, 'my trouble has been to find a worthy setting for my gem! But it is Allan you must thank,' he continued, 'for I have had to delegate to him most of the pleasure of this furnishing, and the Taj Mahal is his own thought, darling. He sent me the order for it when he wrote, telling me how he had lifted the cloud which hung so heavily between us, and it only got here last week. He said he wanted to have his thought of you preserved for ever in the purest marble. My Snow Queen!'

She turned suddenly as Allan and Mr. Derringer, who had bethought themselves of some important business to detain them downstairs, just then entered the room, and laid her hand upon his arm. Her voice trembled with repressed feeling. Her eyes shone.

'I am like a little child who has lost itself among its treasures,' she said. 'Your kindness overpowers me. I have no words to speak. I am so utterly unworthy of it all! Are you not afraid to spoil me so?' She gave her other hand to Mr. Derringer, as she stood within the shelter of her husband's arm. 'It is just what I should have chosen—what I have longed for.'

'If your enjoyment of possession begins to approximate our enjoyment of preparation, you

will be very happy, Mrs. Julian,' said Allan, with his bright smile.

'Allan.' How sweet the voice was! Why should it stab him with such bitter pain? 'Julian says you are the Sir Galahad of friendship. Will you give me a share, Sir Knight, in my husband's happy fortune?'

Once more he lifted her hand to his lips, this brave, chivalrous gentleman. 'I shall count your friendship my dearest earthly joy,' he said quietly.

Long after father and friend had said good-night, the fair mistress of Ravenswood lingered in the room, whose smallest detail held a thought of love.

'Julian,' she said, and her voice had a note of pain, 'I feel humiliated into the very dust. I, with the world for my kingdom, while Christ had not where to lay His head!'

Julian drew aside the curtains without speaking, and together they looked out into the quiet night. The sky was ablaze with stars, the moon swept royally over hill and valley, and flooded them with a mellow radiance; down among the trees the shadows crept, and the crisp October wind, fluttering briskly in and out among the branches, tossed their leaves hither and yon, until the shadows seemed like fairy elves and goblins turned loose in a wild revel. Just in front of

the window stretched a broad path of light, and ever and anon the wind lifted a long, pliable branch, that hung just beyond its shining, and swayed it across the radiance; the leaves fluttered gaily with pleasure and then fell a-sighing, as the branch fell back dejectedly into the darkness, but the wind, with kindly persistence, flung it out again and again into the light.

'Dearest, do you read the parable?' and Julian laid his fingers with a reverent touch upon Ravenal's hair.

'I am but dull, my lord, and of a slow discernment. Interpret it for me.'

'The shadows we may not be able to annihilate, he said gently, 'but it is always ours to lift up and out into the light. I, too, feel humbled, far beyond what it is possible for you to understand, with the overwhelming happiness which crowns my life to-night. But why should we think our Father does not will to have His children glad? It is only when there is selfishness in the joy that He is grieved, I think, Ravenal, my heart's delight, let us take this beautiful heritage of love and home, and use it to His glory.'

'But how?' she cried. 'Oh, Julian, that is what I long to do. But how, how?'

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of

the least of these”” Julian answered in a hushed voice. ‘We will make Ravenswood the home of the stranger, and—“What if this friend happen to be—God?”’

A great light swept over Ravenal’s face.

‘You have kept the best wine until the last!’ she said.

‘Do not give me the credit,’ he said humbly. ‘It is Allan’s thought. I owe everything to him.’

‘Our dear Sir Galahad!’

Alone, in his silent chamber, Allan Ruthven was upon his knees.

CHAPTER XXIII

Two Happy Homes

'As clear as amber, fine as musk,
Is the life of those who, pilgrim-wise,
Move hand in hand, from dawn to dusk,
Each morning nearer Paradise.

Oh, not for them shall angels pray!
They stand in everlasting light;
They walk in Allah's smile by day,
And nestle in His heart by night.'

THREE years had slipped by, the weeks and months full of happy work. As Dora had prophesied, the Colony was a hobby which every one enjoyed riding.

Every week, in the pretty hall which Mr. Vandegrift had built, Ravenal gave pleasant, informal talks on architecture, for she held that every woman ought to know enough to plan her own house, Dora held classes in stenography, while Hester taught the Colony how to cook. Bobus lectured on physiology, and Mrs. Raymond

gave sweet motherly counsel on child-culture and the keeping of the home.

Shortly after Julian's marriage Allan had announced his intention of becoming a resident of the Colony. In vain Julian argued, Mr. Derringer expostulated, and Ravenal pleaded.

'You must not go, Allan! We cannot spare you.'

'Thank you,' he had replied, with a strange lighting of his face. 'You are more than kind, but, believe me, it is best. The boys need constant watching and encouragement. I want to have them grow to look upon me as a sort of father-confessor; when you have once won a boy's confidence, you can do pretty much what you like with him.'

'You can be that here!' exclaimed Mr. Derringer.

'No, dear sir. Ravenswood is too far away. And they cannot help a feeling of constraint in the home of the master, you know. With a plain man, living in a house like their own, they will feel perfectly at home.

'And then, too, I want to give Paul a chance. The boy has a genius for floriculture. I propose to put him in charge of the conservatory, which, you know, I am planning to build for the benefit of the Colony and let him feel that it is his

enterprise. It will develop his latent energies, and I think he can manage it, with pointers from your man Jackson here. If I have him living under the same roof with me I can help him with his studies in the evening. He feels his backwardness so keenly, poor fellow, and he is marvellously quick to learn.'

So Allan and Paul set up their bachelor establishment in the Colony, and, by so doing, made the experiment an assured success. The men took it as a sign of confidence and good-fellowship, and the simple neighbourliness warmed their hearts.

In the words of Mike O'Rourke, who had been promoted by Tom from his old post of night-watchman to a responsible position at the Works, 'It's the one what talks the loudest about brotherhood on the platform that niver sees a feller whin they meets him on the street. Mister Ruthven lives it, an' that makes a moighty difference. When he meets you it's "Well, Mike, an' how is Patsy? Tell him I've got somethin' nice for him, an' make him guess what it is. Give us a call whin you're passin', there is somethin' at the house I'd like ter show yer; an' thet new flower hez its first bloom, you'll be wantin' ter see it, I know; an' ef Mister Merrill succeeds with it, Patsy shall hev one uv the first slips

fer his gardin'. We must make it a model Colony, yer know."

'The little chap at the Flower House hez the same plisent way wid him, an' the Colony wouldn't be any sort uv a place widout them at all, at all.

'Ef a man's under the weather Mister Ruthven 'll say, "It's yerself thet's lookin' a bit down this mornin' Mike, me lad, an' what kin I be after doin' ter giv yer a lift agin?" And whin on Sundays he gits a spakin' in the chapel, wid Mrs. Derringer singin' in her purty voice, an' the little chap at the Flower House playin' on the organ, thin it's meself an' the boys thet do be thinkin' the Colony is a foine place ter live, intirely.'

The little house soon grew to be the centre of interest. Ravenal had insisted upon furnishing it, Mrs. Raymond presided over its linen room, Meg adorned its table with her choicest china, Hester gave the capable widow, whom Allan installed as his housekeeper, a thorough training in culinary ethics, and Dora flitted in and out, 'just,' as she explained, 'to keep things from flying to pieces.'

Paul was delighted. 'I am a man now, Katie,' he said, 'with a man's work and a man's wages. Allan has been so good! Now it is your turn to be lazy and let me work for you. If you get

tired of doing nothing you can take my place in the Rosery greenhouse, and then I shall not feel so badly at going away.'

* * * * *

And now again it was early summer at Ravenswood, and again Ravenal stood in her designing-room listening, while the birds sang the old, sweet song, with a new meaning. 'Ravenal, Rav-en-al, a king is coming! And you will be a queen, Rav-en-al, Rav-en-al. Are you glad, Rav-en-al, my dear?'

And then the night fell, enwrapping the earth in velvet silence, broken only by a drowsy chirp, as the birds fell a-dreaming, a subdued murmur of insects like the throbbing undertone of the sea, and from the distant lake the far-off music of the frogs.

The stillness grew and deepened as the hours lengthened, until midnight swept in solemn hush across the sky, and Julian, looking up, saw that a new star had risen.

'Have you heard the news?' and Dr. Bobus wheeled swiftly up the gravelled path between the lawns to the verandah, where Allan was helping Paul with a knotty mathematical problem.

'Yes,' he continued, as he met their inquiring gaze 'there is a blessed baby at Ravenswood, and

it is a question whether father or grandpa is the proudest man.

'Well, bye-bye, haven't a minute to stop; but you fellows had better see to it that you show up at the Castle before the day is out, to present your respects to the stranger, for he is the most remarkable infant that ever drew oxygen into its puny lungs, at least, that is the verdict of Grandma Raymond, and she is a little woman of experience.

'Yes, the Raven is doing splendidly, bless her! and, if the youngster doesn't pan out A No. 1, he'll do violence to all the laws of heredity. Hooray! Here's to Julian Derringer, junior,' and tossing his cap far ahead of him into the air, he rode rapidly down the path again and caught it as it fell.

When the day grew older Allan and Paul stood looking at the dainty bundle of humanity which lay upon a pillow in its nurse's arms. Allan took the tiny hand in his with tender care. This was Ravenal's baby, part of her very self.

'And his mother, Janet?' he asked wistfully. 'How is she now?'

'Doing beautifully, sir,' replied the capable nurse, wife of one of the foremen at the Works, and Allan's nearest neighbour. 'Our bonnie lady will be her own sweet self again very soon, Mr. Ruthven.'

'Israfel,' said Julian, coming just then out of the bedroom, and giving his friend's hand a grip

which spoke volumes, 'Ravenal wants to see you. She has been talking about you. Will you come?'

Allan followed him into the dim chamber with reverent tread. He felt as if he were entering a holy place. The lovely face, wearing its crown of motherhood, turned upon the pillow to greet him, its pallor relieved by the rose-hued silken wrap which was draped about her shoulders. She smiled her welcome and laid her hand in his.

'I have a favour to ask you, Sir Knight, and I cannot sleep until you grant it.'

'It is granted before you ask,' he answered gently.

'Thank you. Julian and I both feel there is only one name for our little son to bear. Will you give us the right to call him after his Uncle Allan?'

* * * * *

Again the years swept by, until little Allan was five years old, and every one assembled at Ravenswood to do honour to the occasion. Long tables were spread under the trees, and the inhabitants of the Colony enjoyed their yearly treat to the full.

'It's always go-as-you-please at Ravenswood,' explained a workman to a new employé. 'Mister Derringer's folks don't make you feel as if their house was too good for your shoe leather, an' the grass an' the trees wuz all you were welcome to. Last year I felt poorish, wuz jest gettin' round from a fever, you see, an' Mrs. Derringer made me lie down

for a bit, an' then took me inter the library an' made me sit in the best chair, an' brought me books an' papers. The boys think she's a bit of an angel, an' I guess they're not far out in their reckonin'. She got me to talk to a poor chap they had stayin' there who was down on his luck (there's always somebody that needs chirkin' up at Ravenswood, you know), an' my wife wuz in the drawing-room talkin' ter Mrs. Raymond, an' Mrs. Endicott wuz playin' with the children upstairs.

'There's nuthin' the hull on them wouldn't do fer a feller, an' as fer Mr. Ruthven, well, he don't say much, but he always makes me think of Jesus Christ, an' I guess that's better than preachin'. I tell the boys we've struck oil, an' there's none of us ever worries our heads about lookin' for other diggin's.

'Mister Derringer took his turn with Mister Ruthven an' the boys sittin' up when the delirium wuz on me, an' my pay kep' on regular; an' when a man gets that kind of treatment he don't hanker after any Union bizness, you bet.'

In the aromatic shelter of a large pine-tree, Patsy O'Rourke looked up at Ravenal with loving eyes from the wheel-chair, which had been a present to him from the Colony. A cheery soul was Patsy, and the loyal slave of little Allan, who ruled him royally.

Honest Mike stood behind his son's chair and beamed at everybody, until Tom come along and carried him off to make up a set for a game of quoits, and Allan ran past, with the little king on his shoulder, to set the boys at cricket. Ringing shouts were heard from the field where Julian and Bobus were leading a game of football, while Paul constituted himself the knight-errant of all the shy damsels, and Hester and Meg and Nora devoted themselves to those similarly afflicted among the other sex. Aunt Griselda exerted herself to make the women feel at home, Mrs. Raymond mothered the babies, and Mr. Derringer and Mr. Vandegrift moved about among the different groups with a pleasant word for all.

Jack left the field after awhile to take a look at the wee maiden who had brought rejoicing to the house of Endicott; and little Allan brought his uncle to the summer-house where Dora was sitting, to give his new cousin a kiss.

Dora looked after them lovingly, as the two went off again together.

'How wrapped up they are in each other!' she said.

Aunt Griselda looked at the handsome man and the lovely child with his golden curls falling over the deep lace collar of his velvet suit, and nodded.

'The Raven does train him so beautifully, too!

She has such a high regard for the right of the individual, you know. She is not ashamed to apologise or retract, when she sees she has made a false move or given a foolish order; there is none of the bull-doing of these silly people who carry things on to the bitter end, even when they know they are in the wrong, just because they fancy their crazy commands are like the laws of the Medes and Persians, and cannot be altered. Oh, it makes my blood boil, that such people should have the power to tyrannise over poor innocent children! Of course the children see the injustice, and despise them in their hearts, but the poor little hearts have to go on aching all the same.'

'And how our little Lord Fauntleroy does idolise his mother, in his pretty, courtly way!' said Aunt Gru. 'He just seems to hang on her looks and anticipate her wishes. I love to watch them together.'

Dora listened and smiled. Verily the leopard had changed its spots, the Ethiopian his skin!

'Fancy this child posing as the orthodox happy wife and mother!' she exclaimed, as she smothered her baby in kisses. 'It is a ridiculous sensation, and yet, strange to say, it seems the most natural thing in the world. Paradoxical as ever, you see. We are a mass of tangled weavings, Gru dear; no one but God could ever make any sort of a

pattern out of us at all! I have always seemed to myself such a handful of threads and thrums.'

'The world's best weavings are a tangle, if we look at them from the wrong side,' said Aunt Gru softly. 'It is a great thing for us that the Lord gives us a chance to get the ends straightened out before the weaving is over.'

Dora gave her a grateful look.

'Isn't it beautiful the way we pull together, now, Gru dear! Allan was right; love is the surest cure for friction; but I think, after all, you need a lion's share of grace to help you through with me.'

'It is the other way, dear child,' said Aunt Gru humbly.

Dora put her disengaged arm around Aunt Gru's neck, and drew her head down to kiss the baby, who had inherited its mother's blithe spirit, and lay laughing and kicking in happy glee.

'Jack and I have come to the conclusion that the parents should have a community of interest in the first child,' she whispered, in spite of the preferential claims of its uncles, and its cousins, and its aunts; so we have decided on our baby's name all by ourselves, without any outside interference. We are going to call her after you, dear. We have named her Griselle.'

CHAPTER XXIV

Words and Deeds

'Every true life has its Jerusalem
To which it is forever going up.'

ALLAN stood leaning against the door of his conservatory, watching Paul, who was potting some choice cuttings for the Colony gardens.

'You are making a great success of this, Paul, my boy,' he said. 'Hobart came out yesterday, while you were away, and I showed him round. He thinks you have done wonders in such a short time; and says your ideas would do credit to a man of forty. His praise means something, for he studied with the first landscape-gardener in Europe.'

Paul's face flushed with delight. 'Oh, Allan, did he really? I have tried so hard to prove worthy of your trust. It was such a risk to put an ignoramus like me in charge of such a place as this!'

'Nonsense! I knew the material I was working

with, and knew you would have the Derringer gardener's advice, as well as the Rosery's. But I confess the result has proved far beyond my expectations, and the Colony Conservatory bids fair to take first rank among floral institutions.

'Well, Molly, what is it this time?' and he smiled at the quaint little piece of humanity, with face almost totally obscured by an immense sun-bonnet, which had suddenly framed itself in the doorway.

'Roses,' said the child gravely. 'Be they white?' she inquired, as Paul handed her a package of freshly cut slips.

'Some of them are. Why do you ask, Molly?'

'We wants them all white,' said the child seriously. 'Mother says we ain't goin' ter hev any flarin' colours in our gyardin'. We likes del'cate shades.'

Allan burst into a hearty laugh.

'See what it is, Paul, to have to cater to the æsthetic!' Then he picked the child up, sun-bonnet and all, and carried her round the greenhouse.

After he had put her down again, she stood silently watching Paul as he pruned the rose-bushes of their too luxuriant growth, and prepared the slips for potting.

'Be you any r'lashun ter N'polyn Boneypot?' she asked suddenly.

'Not in direct descent, Molly. What made you think of that, little one?'

'Teacher sez he wuz a man-killer, 'cause he 'headed people and dropped 'em in a basket. You's a rose-killer, ain't you?'

'I hope not, Molly. I only cut off what is necessary. It makes the roses grow better, you know.'

After the child had gone Paul worked for some moments in silence.

'Do you know, Allan, this is the part of my work I like the least,' and he held his pruning-knife suspended. 'I cannot get rid of the idea that plants have feelings, and I just hate to make them suffer, as this must do. I wonder if surgeons can see the waves of pain as they roam among the arteries and plunge their cruel knives into the quivering nerves?'

Allan shook his head, as he replied. 'No more than the farm labourer sees the scintillating waves, of electricity, which pulsate through the earth's bosom, as he ploughs and digs. How Mother Nature must laugh in her sleeve, as her foolish children go poking about in her workshop, and suddenly come running to the light with some new force, crying, 'I have discovered it!' We think ourselves Solons as we introduce electricity about the roots of rare trees and plants to hasten their development, and then wake up to find that Nature has been using this subtle, unseen power of hers

throughout the ages for every blade of grass and common field-flower! There is the lunch gong. Can you leave, Paul?’

‘Oh, yes,’ and Paul began to put away his tools. ‘I will just heel these slips in until to-morrow. By the way, Allan, the Co-operative Club meets at Ravenswood to-night. Did you remember?’

‘Yes,’ said Allan quietly. ‘I am not going.’

‘Not going?’ echoed Paul, in amaze. ‘Whatever shall we do without you? I wouldn’t miss Ravenswood for half a king’s ransom!’

‘What an impetuous fellow you are growing to be! With you for my substitute, they will get along excellently. I have some writing to do.’

* * * * *

There are battle-fields which no special correspondent ever visits, to sketch the progress of the conflict for a world at peace. That evening Allan watched Paul off, and then prepared for the fight. When, some hours afterwards, he lay back in his chair, he was utterly spent and weary, but the old light of victory was on his brow, and the bright smile of welcome, which Paul had never missed, was waiting for him on his return.

‘Allan,’ he said suddenly, after he had reported the proceedings of the club, ‘what spell have you thrown over the world to make it love you so?’

Allan laughed, his merry, heartsome laugh. ‘You

are dreaming, boy! The atmosphere of Ravenswood has affected your brain, and you are not responsible for your words.'

'It is true,' asseverated Paul sturdily. 'Every one was asking for you to-night, and you should have seen Dora scowl at me when I told her you were too wedded to altruism to come; and then, just before I came away, Mrs. Julian whispered, with that lovely smile of hers, "Tell Allan we should all have been happier if he had been here." Does anything hurt you, Allan? Are you not well?'

Allan leaned more heavily against his desk.

'As well as an old bachelor can be, with a young scamp coming in at all hours of the night to disturb his slumbers.'

'That's a good joke!' laughed Paul, 'when you always woo me into dreamland with your flute, and, for aught I know, make the welkin ring with melody until old Sol transfixes you with a sunbeam for having spoiled his nap.

'I declare,' he continued, as the door-bell rang, 'this house ought to be called "The Midnight Confessional," considering the amount of ghostly counsel that is given within its walls in the wee sma' hours. I wonder which of the boys has got himself into a scrape this time? What would they do without you, Allan, to pull them out of the mire?'

He strolled about the room, whistling softly, as he waited for his friend's return, his thoughts going back over the evening with a pleasant insistence.

'Ravenswood is just about the nicest place!' he exclaimed abruptly. 'And didn't Mrs. Julian look regal to-night! No wonder Julian looks at her as if his eyes would never be filled with seeing, while Grandpa Derringer beams on everybody like a benignant fairy. It is impossible even to dream of shadows near Ray. She is so true to her name.'

He stopped in his happy saunter to pick up a sheet of paper from the floor.

'Some more of dear old Al's schemes, I suppose. What a royal fellow he is!' He read the words, which were in Allan's handwriting, read them with a bewildered persistence, which would not give him time to realise these were no plans for the furtherance of the community of interests so dear to Allan's heart:—

'There are times when I could cry out; I am so hungry for a loving word or caress. I do not feel it every day, but sometimes the touching of a book, certain perfumes, a sunset sky, the note of a bird, wake a longing in my heart that holds me like a spasm of pain, and I feel, when it is past, years older, and as if life were a cross that I bore alone.'

Paul's head bent low over the tell-tale sheet, then

he placed it reverently among the other papers upon the desk. He had seen into the soul of his friend !

With hushed step he left the room, which had become to him a holy place. His delicate instinct rebelled at the idea of attempting to bridge the tender sacredness of silence with the harsh impotence of speech.

Far into the night, as he lay wakeful, the silver flute took on a deeper meaning, as the mournful minor of a human longing swelled into the triumphant pæan of a divine contentment, and was blended into the harmony of an eternal peace.

* * * * *

Ravenal had finished singing 'Jesus, Lover of my soul,' and the sweet vibrations still throbbed through the little chapel, mingled with the chords which Paul struck with dreamy, loving touch.

He had developed a passion for music. Every spare moment was devoted to its study, and often in the gloaming weary men and women turned aside to rest themselves in the chapel, and listen while he played.

A great hush fell upon the congregation as Allan took his place behind the reading-desk. He was unusually pale, but his eyes were full of a clear shining, and there was a strange exaltation of peace in his face.

The Bible opened easily at his favourite Gospel,

and he read the words which he had chosen for his text.

'Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so neither can ye, except ye abide in Me . . . for, apart from Me, ye can do nothing.'

His voice was low, and Ravenal leaned forward to catch the tones which had echoed through the chapel Sunday after Sunday in faithful, earnest pleading.

'My friends, the message I would leave with you is the call of Christ, your Saviour, to a higher life with Him.

'The Christ of the world is saying still, in the thrilling tones whose vibrations have swept the gamut of the centuries, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." Men and women of this century of privilege, which only His death could buy for us, are you prepared to follow your King? To lose your life for Christ's life? To die that you may live? Does this sound to you paradoxical? It is only the carrying out of the great life principle. We must let go our hold on the less always, if we would grasp the greater.

'To be like Christ. That is the watchword of His Church—the inner circle of His chosen ones, who know the beauty of fellowship with the King. Its clear notes have come ringing down the ages like

the melody of a lovely song. Alas! that we should be content to listen to its harmony, and then turn back to live among the crashing discords of our own faulty lives, hiding ourselves away from "the Light of the world" in the dreary caves of doubt and the low marsh-lands of unbelief; sheltering ourselves among the cold shadows of expediency, and looking up towards the sun-crowned heights of a life "hid with Christ in God," only to cry "Impossible!" forgetting in our blindness that all things are possible with God.'

A sudden cry of 'Fire!' rang out on the frosty air. For an instant the audience sat helpless, then, obeying a common impulse, every one sprang to his feet.

The fire, which all the morning had smouldered unseen between the chimney and the outer wall, had burst its bonds, and the flames, fanned by the wind, were making rapid headway.

Julian organised his staff with a general's skill. The boys ran for buckets; the men formed themselves into a double line, and, headed by Julian and Bobus, kept a constant stream of water playing on the flames. There was no confusion—everywhere an alert helpfulness. Boys ran here and there with ladders. Jack and Paul climbed up on the roof and commenced to chop vigorously. Allan was everywhere. He seemed endowed with the strength of

six men. Only, when all was over, and they stood together looking at the havoc which had been wrought, did Ravenal notice how utterly jaded he was.

'You are thoroughly exhausted, Allan! This constant ministry to others is overtaxing your strength. You need a long, long rest. Come home to Ravenswood and let me nurse you.' Her soft touch was upon his arm, her lovely, troubled eyes looking into his.

For an instant the brave soul faltered. Then he put the intoxicating draught aside with a smile.

'Thanks, dear friend. But "the day is for the battle," you know. The rest, when it comes, will be both long and sweet. To-night I am due at the Rosery; but first you must all come with me and remove the traces of our fight with the flames; we can do it all the more happily that we have succeeded so well. Yes, the damage is comparatively trifling, I am thankful to say, although we shall not be able to meet together for some weeks.'

'Shall we ever meet together again?' What made her shiver as she spoke the words?

'Oh, yes. We are always sure of the trysting-place where no shadows fall.'

'Don't!' she cried, and her voice was full of pain. 'What would the Colony, what would anything be without you!'

The light of a great joy broke over the weary face. 'Is it possible that you would really care!'

They walked together through the clear November moonlight until their roads diverged. Allan was the life of the party. He had put his weariness resolutely out of sight, and Ravenal listened entranced to the subtle play of his fancy and the flashes of his deeper thought. He held her hand for a moment as they parted.

'*Auf Wiedersehen*,' he said gently, 'here—or there.' Then he went on with Bobus and Paul to the Rosery.

* * * * *

There are times when a prescience of coming ill takes possession of us and holds our hearts in so tight a tension that we are incapable of thought.

Ravenal could not rest. Even the merry prattle of her little son had no power to lift the weight which seemed to be crushing down upon her heart. A spirit of uneasiness possessed her, and she wandered from room to room. When she entered the library Julian laid down his book and rose to give her a chair. With the electric sympathy of love he detected the shadow.

'What troubles you, Carmelita mia?' he asked gently.

'Oh, Julian, our dear Sir Galahad! Did you see how ill he looked?'

face. Julian's face grew grave. 'Yes, dear old fellow ; I thought him looking horribly fagged. If he would only give himself some rest ! The Colony is enough care in itself, but that, added to his outside interests, puts him under a strain too heavy even for a strong man. Yet I should not know what to advise him to give up, and it is impossible for Israfel to neglect anything. If we could only persuade him to go away for a complete change. I have suggested it several times, but he always says his time for a furlough has not yet come.'

There was silence in the room when Julian ceased speaking, only broken at intervals by a few soft notes from the canaries which had their home amidst a bower of green in one of the large windows.

'Julian, we must go to the Rosery ! Something is happening there.'

Ravenal had risen and stood beside him. Her hands were tightly clasped, a sure sign with her of intense excitement ; she was deadly pale, and her eyes had a strange expression, as though they were looking at something far out of sight.

Julian rose quickly and put his arms about her.

'Now, dear heart?'

'Yes. At once. Hurry ! Hurry !' she cried feverishly. 'What if we should be too late !'

The Rosery was strangely still. Hester came to meet them, and a glance at her face showed Ravenal was right. Something had happened.

'How is he?' they exclaimed simultaneously.

'A little easier now, but at first we thought he was dying.'

She spoke in a whisper and expressed no surprise at their knowledge. In such crises we forget the questionings which rise uppermost through the ordinary day.

'He had just come in,' she continued, 'and was standing talking to mother, when he gave a low cry, and put his hand on his heart. Bobus caught him as he fell. Dr. Everett is here, and Paul is just starting for Ravenswood to summon you.'

'What does Everett think it is?'

'He says the trouble must have been impending for years. Both he and Bobus think the over-exertion at the fire hastened the attack. The suffering has been awful! But I think he is a little more comfortable now.'

'The sword of Damocles! My brave Israfel!' Julian's voice was choked with tears.

Noiselessly they entered the room, which had been so suddenly transformed into a sick-chamber, and approached the low couch where the sufferer lay. With a great stricture about their hearts they looked at the dear face, which was furrowed with

deep lines of physical agony, and listened to the laboured, fitful breathing. His prostration was very great.

'It is just this deadly exhaustion,' said Bobus, 'which is so hard to fight.'

All night they watched beside him. When the dawn broke, he rallied. The old welcome crept into his eyes as he caught sight of Julian.

'You see, I knew,' he whispered, 'the furlough was sure to come.'

CHAPTER XXV

Near the King's Palace

'Walk softly! The world is in tears.'

NATURE has marvellous powers of adaptation. She clothes the ruins of her dismantled forests with brilliant verdure; she decks her graves with flowers!

It grew to seem natural to the Roseries to have an invalid in the house, and Allan's room became the centre of their love and care. Here all their plans were discussed, that they might have his advice and sympathy; Dora made him laugh with her bright speeches, and the Colony brought its offerings of love and laid them at his feet.

Little Allan was his most devoted nurse, while Mr. Derringer never wearied of reading aloud from his favourite authors, when he was able to listen; Julian was constantly in and out, and Ravenal spent every spare moment beside his couch.

There was always a staff of willing volunteers for

the night-watches, although he protested against becoming such a burden.

'It's the boys thet do be countin' thimselves proud ter sarve ye, Mister Ruthven, dear; an' it's sildom enough they hev the chance, what wid Mister Deringer an' Mister Endicott an' the Rosery folks all waitin' fer their turns ter cum!' and honest Mike swallowed hard and pulled out his big bandanna.

Allan had wished to return to his own house, Ravenal and Julian had begged hard to have him at Ravenswood, but Mrs. Raymond would not listen to his being moved.

'My dear, dear son,' she said, and her soft touch was on his brow, 'there is one thing you must promise me. I want you to remember that the Rosery is your home.'

* * * * *

'What have you done with your self-hood, Allan?' Dora questioned one day, in her old, impetuous fashion. 'Do you keep it like a jack-in-the-box, and only open the cover at night, when no one is near to see? You suffer all the time, yet no one knows it. You are merry with the children and as interested in the plans of the boys as if you were their brother; you know just what advice to give the men; and you are as patient as Job with all the silly women who come to you, as I do, with their troubles. Why, the confessions of a confessional in

old St. Peter's itself could not equal the tales these walls might tell! Answer me, Allan. What has become of your Self?'

And he answered in the words of the Book which was as honey to his soul, 'I am crucified with Christ.'

* * * * *

Katie sat beside Allan's couch through the soft, sweet twilight—the mystic hush in which summer bids her days goodbye.

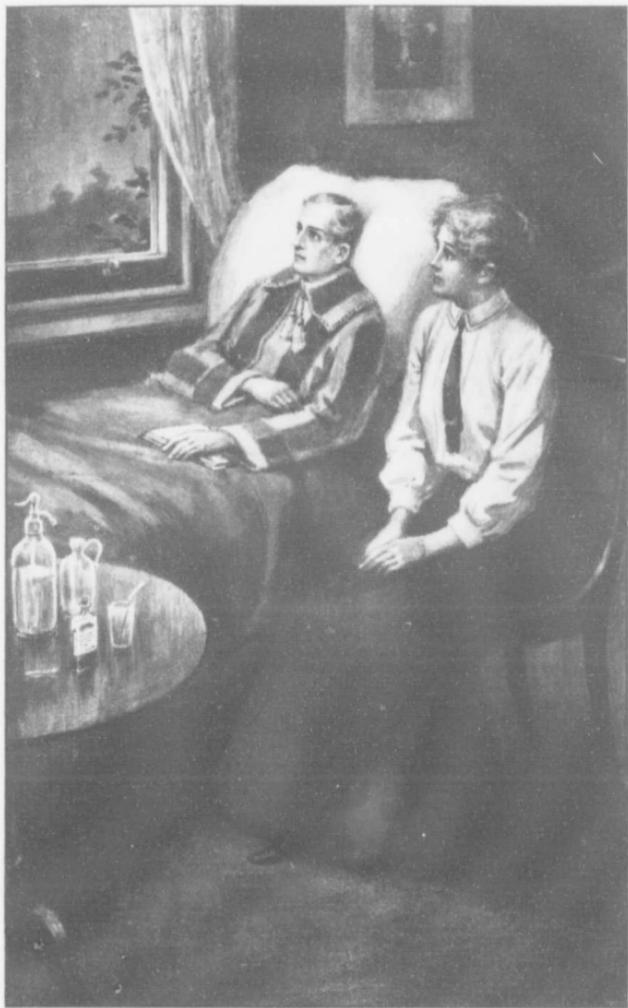
They often found themselves alone together, these two, and a spiritual comradeship had grown up between them from the very similarity of their natures, until their intercourse was largely independent of the ordinary avenues of speech.

Allan had lain a long time silent, gazing out into the soulful night. Suddenly he pointed up into the limitless azure vault that brooded, tenderly solemn, over the waiting earth.

'Look, Katie. Twilight has "flung her curtain down and pinned it with a star."

'Ah, those dear stars!' she answered, in her low voice. 'It always seems to me astronomers ought to be holy men, as they "think God's thoughts after Him," and wander among the "forget-me-nots of the angels." I am afraid I hunger too much for a telescopic soul. There is much to see and know all around us, and yet our eyes are holden.'

'You want your sixth sense,' said Allan, with a



'LOOK, KATIE, TWILIGHT HAS "FLUNG HER CURTAIN DOWN AND
PINNED IT WITH A STAR,"'

To face page 206.



smile ; then he repeated softly, " Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God has prepared for them that love Him." I think that will be our sixth sense, Katie.

' It is so passing strange to me,' he continued, ' how, with all this wealth of knowledge lying unfolded around us, any one can imagine this life is all! This world seems to me a sort of spiritual kindergarten. We play with signs and symbols ; learn a snatch of music, the rudiments of earthly wisdom, a smattering of earthly tongues ; get a hint of the marvels which God has set so thickly in our path ; but the beautiful rounded meaning of it all lies in the Beyond. Our little brains are confused, bewildered, with the limitless ocean which pours its treasures so lavishly at our feet, while our ears catch the distant thunder of its surging waves as they roll towards us in their never-ceasing, majestic flow. We try to grasp and hold with our finite capacity these wonders of the sciences, but we are like a child who essays to hold the sand in its fingers.

' We catch swift glimpses now and then of the effulgent light which bathes the universe ; hear stray notes of the harmony which makes the music of the spheres ; but there is ever the sense of being foiled by an elusive, intangible essence which the fingers of our imagination are, as yet, too clumsy to grasp.

Why should it not be so, since we ourselves are a miracle?

'But when we graduate from this preparatory earth-school we shall understand, for we shall "see" and "know." That is the promise. Then, unhindered by the limiting barriers of time and sense, we shall ever climb higher among the mysteries until we reach the highest—in the heart of God!'

'That is the afterward.'

'Yes, and there is always "a good time coming" in God's afterward. Everything we need to know now is summed up in Jesus—the Divine Alembic which fuses into peace the sorrows of the earth; the magic Sesamé which will usher us into the wonderland of heaven.'

'So few understand that!' she cried sorrowfully. 'The world is starving for God and does not know it.'

'Yes, it is only the "infinite love" that can give the "infinite stilling," and we humans try every other remedy for our pain.'

'Does it ever hurt you, Allan, to think how hungry this poor old world is? I feel sometimes as if I would give my life to help these poor souls, who make no sign and yet suffer such agony under their cold, stern faces. These people, whose souls, as some one has said, "sit on the end of their nerves, and to whom a cold look or slighting word is like

frost to the flower." It must be terrible to be shut into the chilling reserve of such natures as theirs, and they do not understand that only God can open the door and set them free.'

'Yes, they are for ever under the stern dominance of that relentless "ego" which proves a greater tyrant than Nero ever was. They have brought into the foreground what should always be in the shadow, and their vision has become abnormally diseased, until their very horizon is bounded by the hideous Gorgon of Self.'

'I suppose they see themselves outlined, a grim, black silhouette, against the luminous beauty of another's winning personality, and the very contrast makes them morbid.'

'And it is most difficult for a morbid soul to receive the truth, I think. When one has been long used to weighing and analysing and comparing, it seems almost impossible to believe and be free. And yet, you know, we must lose sight of self if we would see Jesus.'

"Know thyself." How is that possible, when we seem to be a dozen different selves in as many hours?'

Allan shook his head.

'It is the same in everything,' he said. 'We are a bundle of contrarities, a climax of antitheses; smiles and sighs, tears and triumphs, heartaches and halle-

lujahs. We may see ourselves, as you say, but know ourselves—never!

‘Until we reach the beautiful deathless country,’ said Katie softly, ‘and know as we are known.’

‘Ah, yes, that will be heaven in its fulness.’

‘Have you ever wished to go?’ Katie asked the question almost timidly.

‘Oh, yes, indeed!’ he made answer, with his old, bright smile. ‘Death to me is a beautiful angel, who opens the door for God’s weary children into their Father’s house. The oppression here—he laid his hand over his heart—‘uses up one’s strength so. I have often longed to have the weariness of living folded away for ever, and be safe at home with God. But there has always been work to do—the fields so white, the labourers so few—’

‘And there is still work!’ she interrupted him eagerly; ‘you cannot leave it, since it needs you.’

He shook his head. ‘Yes, but other hands than mine will do the reaping. I have had my home call. I feel in royal humour to-night. So near the vestibule of the King’s palace. It is triumphant, glorious!

‘Katie,’ he continued, after a pause which she could not break, ‘I think there ought to be, I believe there is, a kinship of soul between you and me. Our outward circumstances are so similar. Both orphans, you know, and indebted for love and home to these

dear people, who, with such a royal bounty, have made us welcome to their best. Have you any love to spare for your new brother, Katie?'

Her lips quivered. She rose suddenly and busied herself with some phials which stood on a table behind his couch. Then she came back quietly, gave him his nourishment, and deftly arranged his pillows.

He smiled up at her. 'Dear little sister! I believe, if it were possible, you would make the sick man well. Katie, will you carry on my work for me? May I leave it in your hands?'

She fell on her knees beside him. 'I am not fit!' she sobbed. 'I am not worthy!'

He stroked the clasped hands with his wasted fingers, on which her tears were raining.

'The fitness for us all must come from Christ,' he said gently.

CHAPTER XXVI

Allan's Secret Revealed at Last

' The clouds are broken in the sky,
And thro' the mountain-walls
A rolling organ-harmony
Swells up, and shakes and falls.
Then move the trees, the copses nod,
Wings flutter, voices hover clear :
" O just and faithful knight of God,
Ride on ! the prize is near ! "'

A STRANGE and solemn hush brooded over the Rosery as the Angel of Death stood with folded wings at the entrance of the room which for nine months had been Allan Ruthven's home ; nine months of such beautiful living, Dora said, as should make the very angels envious.

They were all with him. Ravenal standing nearest, beside her husband ; Katie kneeling motionless at the head of the couch, her face only a trifle less deathly in its pallor than Allan's own ; Dora and Jack and Bobus and Paul, Hester and Meg and Nora and Tom, Mrs. Raymond and Aunt Griselda, Nell and Harry, Mr. Derringer and Mr.

Vandegrift—all had gathered. Something told them that the end was very near.

The solemnly beautiful Communion Service was ended. They had all partaken with him, and Dr. Chapman's voice had broken as he commended to God the pure spirit, who so soon would drink the new wine of the kingdom at 'the other end of the table.' Then a hush had fallen, sacred, tender, through which Katie almost fancied she could hear the beating of the angel's wings.

Suddenly Allan took Ravenal's hand in his, and looked up at the lovely face with eyes which had forgotten their years of training. Mrs. Raymond caught the look and started; Julian caught it, and the flood of memories which rushed in upon him made him gasp for breath; Hester caught it, and involuntarily turned to look at Katie, but the face at the head of the couch was buried out of sight.

Allan Ruthven's faithfully guarded secret was an open secret at last!

'Will you kiss me once?' he asked wistfully. And Ravenal, with a great pain surging in her heart, bent her head and kissed him on the lips.

Julian flung himself beside the couch in an agony of grief. 'Oh, Allan—dear old chap—have you borne this for me?'

Allan laid his other hand upon the bowed head. 'It is just right, dear boy, he said, with his bright

smile (he was for ever beyond all human longing now), 'just right, and as it should be. Christ has satisfied me with Himself.'

His eyes went from one familiar face to another, resting on each a moment in a tender, mute farewell. He seemed to miss some one, and Bobus drew Katie gently within his range of vision. He looked at her lovingly.

'My dear little sister! You have all been so heavenly kind to me!' He spoke slowly. His strength was failing rapidly. 'I wish I knew how to thank you! It is growing—very light—in the valley; and—it is brighter—farther on.'

Once more he looked at Ravenal.

'God be with you,' he whispered. 'God be with you—all.'

A silence fell after that, broken only by Allan's laboured breathing. They would not distress him nor mar his happy peace with their sorrow.

Suddenly a great light seemed to transfigure him before them. His eyes lifted, and fixed themselves, as if on something beyond mortal ken, filling slowly with an adoring rapture, as though a vision of supernal beauty was dawning on his sight. His voice broke in a whispered ecstasy of delight and awe. Just one word.

'Jesus!'

It was the cry of a lover.

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