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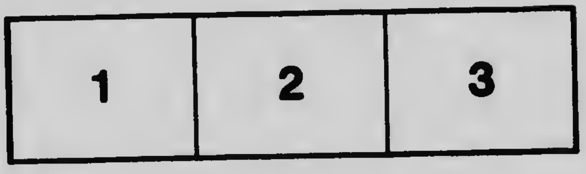

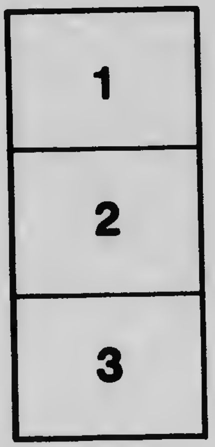

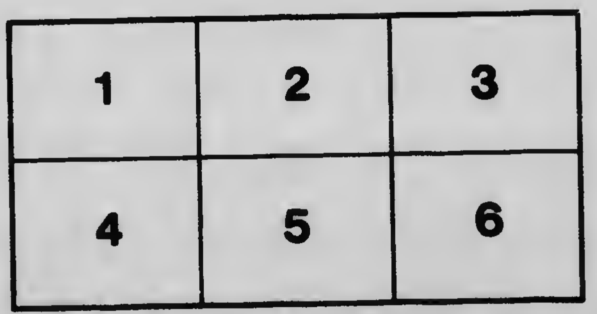

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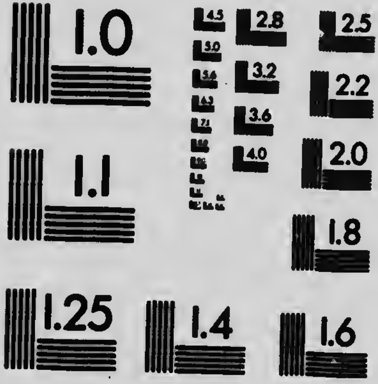
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Mary Lindsay's Trial

By JEAN A. OWEN

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MARY LINDSAY'S TRIAL.

By JEAN A. OWEN.

CHAPTER I.

THE DOCTOR'S HOUSE.

Two girls, both nineteen years old and both motherless, were sitting together in the wide bow-window of an old house in Highborough, a little town in the centre of the Staffordshire moorlands.

Joyce Middleton's father was the chief doctor in the town. Mary Lindsay was the daughter of a retired captain in the Navy. He had broken down in health, and now lived at Wolfcote, a fine old farm-house which had been in his wife's family for many generations. It lay eight miles outside Highborough, on a lonely hillside, the nearest hamlet being quite a mile distant, and until Mary's solitary condition excited the compassion of the kindly doctor she had for some years only the companionship of Bully, a powerful dog, a cross between a mastiff and a bulldog, in her long rambles on the moors that lay above Wolfcote. With Bully at her side, Captain Lindsay knew that Mary was perfectly safe. The dog sat erect on the watch beside his mistress if it pleased her to rest on the springy heather ; and if he did break away in pursuit of wild things at times, he was back and close at her side again before Mary's less keen scent and hearing had warned her of an approaching step.

Captain Lindsay was partially crippled by severe rheumatic gout, and he could not now do more than walk painfully from one room to another. Of late his bed had stood in the pleasant sitting-room, from whose wide old English windows he could look out on the life outside, and could note the changes in the sky and the flight of the birds as he had been wont to study sea and sky in the years gone by. But to him now the pleasantest sight of all was his daughter's strong, active figure and the bright glance from her frank, hazel eyes when she came up the long path between the tall lilies and the monthly roses that raised their fragrant heads above the choice pansies and pinks, which were Mary's special pride in the borders below, returning with faithful Bully from some visit to a distant farm-house or a ramble over the wide moor.

Then she had to give a full description of all she had seen during their walk in the way of man and beast and

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bird. I fear some of you town-bred girls might have thought there was little enough to tell had you chanced to be Mary's companion. It is a case of "eyes and no eyes" in rambling over such stretches of wild country. But this girl's eyes were opened fully to the beautiful, and in her sympathies she was in touch with all about her.

There had come a time, though, when her father's growing feebleness and occasional severe fits of depression weighed on the sensitive girl, and the doctor's quick observant eyes had seen this. So now it was an understood thing that she should spend one day a week in the town with Joyce, and often Joyce was left at Wolfcote for an hour or two whilst her father visited patients in that direction.

The Captain had only his half-pay and the old farmhouse; the farm, now a small one, he let to a decent couple who had an adjacent cottage. As they drove every Wednesday in their light cart to the Highborough market, they willingly gave Mary a seat to and fro with them, the said seat being generally a low oak chair, in which she sat with her back to the worthy couple. When this arrangement was first made, good Mrs. Tomlinson wanted Mary to ride beside the "master"; but the latter was quite too well bred to hear of such a thing, and she felt very happy in the quaint turn-out, with Bully keeping her feet warm in the bottom of the cart.

The day on which my story opens was rather cold. The air was, as Anne—Joyce's old nurse, who still had an eye to her child's comforts and necessities—observed, quite sharp; and whilst the two friends were talking, the good soul came in, as she said, just to "scrat together the emblems of the fire." Anne had naturally a poetic turn, and as she grew older she was returning to the dialect of her youth, so that her odd expressions were the delight of Joyce and her friend.

Having collected the neglected embers on the wide hearth, Anne came to the window.

"Dear heart!" said she. "Who'd have thought another year had gone by? There's Betsy Fall agate at her father's tombstone again!"

The bow-window commanded a view of the churchyard just opposite; beyond that were grand hills, with stretches of woods and fields between.

"Who is Betsy Fall?" asked Mary.

"She is from Grattan, twelve miles away," replied Joyce. "Once a year, on the anniversary of her father's death, she walks all that distance to tidy up his grave. She has done it ever since I was a child. Anne used to call me to watch her, years ago, didn't you, Anne?"

"That I did, bless her. Now you look, Miss Mary, how systematic-like she sets to."

The woman went briskly up to a large, flat tombstone, and she surveyed it critically. She had business on hand first: after all was finished the lines of her face would relax and a tender light break over the set features.

First she borrowed a pail from a cottage near the doctor's; next she took off her mantle and spread it carefully over a neighboring high tombstone. Then her frock skirt was pinned up round her waist, and from a basket she took a wide, strong apron and a scrubbing brush and bar of soap. From a pump in the lane she filled the pail, and then kneeling over the stone she scrubbed it with a vigor such as one sees chiefly among the hillfolk. When it was cleansed to her satisfaction, and the lettering showed out clearly, she took from another basket a large bunch of flowers—chrysanthemums, dahlias and sprays of foliage with berries—and placed them on its centre. Then she stepped back a little to admire the effect. "He'd liever have had 'em all wild," she murmured.

Her apron, brush and soap were next packed away; the pail was returned, and her mantle put neatly on again Then the tender light came over the hard-worn face; but at this point Anne always walked across to "pass the time of day" with her.

"You never forget him, Miss Fall; you're always true to time."

"It's all I can do for him as is gone, Mrs. Jones. Onest a week, year in and year out, he used to take me a-walking up the hilly fields right up to Cloud Top, and we always got two big bunches o' flowers, one for mother and one for brother John's grave. He never liked Gratton though; he said as it hadn't no view nowheres; only he was forced to stop there where he got the most work. So I promised to have him buried here, alongside of his mother, where you can look right over to the hills. He can pick his full o' flowers now, I reckon; but I like to bring my posy to put there, for all that."

Anne listened sympathetically as she had done for years.

"And how's missus ?"

"Poorly. She sits on the squab, aside of the fire, and says nowt. She never was of a cheerful mind, like father. I must be getting back to her."

"Not till you've had your cup of tea and said 'how do ye do' to Miss Joyce. The kettle's on the boil; you come reg'lar, like clockwork, and soon as I see you the kettle's put on. There's alway s abite and a sup for you. It'll be ready afore you've took back that pail to Miss Critchlow's."

"Is it not a study, Mary ?" said Joyce, watching the pair come over.

But her friend shivered. Her father was not quite so well as usual. She had wanted to stay at home with him, but he would not hear of it. Mary fancied that it boded ill for her that this scene should have happened just the morning she was there. If her father were taken, what could life hold of joy for her ?

And strangely enough, as it seemed to her friend an hour later, as she sat alone thinking it over, whilst Betsy Fall was still enjoying her cup of tea in nurse's room, the doctor came in with a graver face than usual, and, putting his hand on Mary Lindsay's shoulder, he said quietly, "You had better drive back to Wolfcote with me now, my child, instead of waiting for the Tomlinsons. I am going over to see your father. He was not quite so well to-day, you said."

A sudden fear pierced Mary's heart.

"They have been over to fetch you ?"

"Yes. But, please God, I trust to be able to set him right. It may not be anything serious. I will tell you when I see real ground for uneasiness."

After Mary had left her father that morning it would seem as though he had risen from his chair and tried to reach an old-fashioned secretaire in which he kept family papers. In front of this, prone on the floor, the poor captain was found, half an hour later, in an unconscious condition. Help was summoned and he was laid on the bed. Then the messeager had been despatched for the doctor.

Doctor Middleton entered the room alone.

"No, child," he had said decisively to Mary, when she strove to enter with him, "no ! ! !Go and take off your things. You are damp all over with the hill mists, and you must not go so into your father's room."

Wise doctor, he used the best argument with Mary. She went submissively to her room, and he entered alone. His practised eye told him at once that here no help could be of any service. His friend would never speak again, nor could his eyes rest lovingly again on the fact of his daughter.

Dr. Middleton looked round the room to see if he could draw any conclusions as to the Captain's last conscious thoughts or acts, after the old servant had described to him the exact position in which she had found her master. There was nothing to throw any light on the half-hour which had elapsed after Mary had left him, until he had been found unconscious there. Telling the servant to go and to say nothing to poor Mary, except that he would call her in after a few minutes, the doctor sat for a moment in his friend's seat as his eyes looked searchingly around. On a little table close to the chair a large Bible lay open, and the captain's pencil was beside it. Ah, he had used it. There was a clear, freshlymarked passage ; a cross led the eye to the words, "Leave thy fatherless children to Me !"

Tears came into the doctor's eyes. Strong man though he was, his heart was very tender. "He knew that his time had come," he whispered. Wiping his eyes hastily, he went to the door. "God help the poor, fatherless girl," he prayed, as he went.

Mary was waiting in the corridor.

"My dear," he said, gently drawing her into the dining-room. "Your father is very ill. You must be strong, my dear, you must be strong, and trust in God—his God and yours."

"Oh, he is gone, he is gone !" cried Mary. "Let me see my father !" and she tore herself from the doctor's arms, and rushed to her father's bedside.

Such scenes can never be adequately described. Those only who have parted with their dearest on earth, know what the soul goes through at these hours, "sorrowful even unto death."

"Does he suffer, doctor ? Oh, did he suffer before this came, when he was all alone here ?"

"Probably not at all. But he must have felt very weak and apprehensive. See, my child, his last thoughts were of you," and he drew Mary to the little table, and pointed to the marked text. "His last bequest," said the doctor.

A flood of tears blinded Mary's eyes at the first words she read. "Oh, my father, my father—will be never wake again ?"

"Only in Paradise, Mary. He will probably pass away there as though in sleep."

A neighbor having come in, one in whose kindly tact the doctor had confidence, he told Mary that he should drive home as quickly as he could, and should come back before nightfall, bringing nurse with him.

"Anne is a capital one in a sick-room," he said, "and she shall stay with you."

Captain Lindsay's change came at dawn of day. No shock disturbed the earthly frame as his spirit left it. For him the shadows fled noiselessly away, and whilst the chill air of early morn made the watcher shiver, he entered Paradise.

When Mary came into the room—she had promised the doctor that she would try to sleep and not go into her father's room until she was called—the look of holy peace and rest, even of a smiling rest, filled her with a sacred awe, until the chill communicated by touch entered her very soul.

Soon Anne led her back to her own room, and there she was alone with God—her father's God and hers—until Joyce arrived with the doctor.

* * *

"You must come back with us, Mary."

"Oh, I cannot, I cannot, Joyce! You do not understand. I cannot leave him!"

"He is not there, my child. He is in Paradise," said the doctor. "He would wish you to go with us."

So Mary was persuaded, and she stayed with her friends until they laid what was left of her dearest in the churchyard, where she could see the flower-covered mound from the old nursery window, at which she had stood with Mary and nurse just a week before.

"Look to the hills beyond, dear heart, to the hills whence cometh aid," said Anne. "The valley of the shadow lies between, but see how the sun is gilding the hilltops. It will soon go down, but where the Captain is there is no night.

A flood of tears came, relieving Mary's overburdened heart, and God comforted her.

Still the tide of grief has its flows as well as its ebbs, and the battle has to be fought out, over and over again. Prayer and work are our only weapons, and the skill wherewith to use these comes only by degrees to most of us.

Faithful Bully was a help to Mary. She had left him at home until the funeral, bidding him watch for her near the room which was so dear to her. He lay in the corridor outside the door, looking with wistful eyes at everyone who went in and out of it. Then when all was over there, he clung closely to his mistress again, as though he understood her need of a true friend such as he was.

But soon the thought of the future forced itself upon her mind. With her father's death their income, his half-pay, of course ceased. Mary had the old homestead and the rent of the land. But no one was likely to wish to live at Wolfcote, on account of its isolated position. So she must find something that she could do, in order to have enough to live upon; she could not be a burden to anyone, she declared. And, indeed, there was no one on whom Mary had the least claim.

For one branch of industry only she had an aptitude, and that was wood-carving. Her father had given her the first lessons on it; but, as he said, the pupil soon outstripped the master. She had carved panels, with flowers and birds on them, which had been a great delight to him. They were hung all about his sitting-room.

The doctor's house was a large, roomy one, and he declared that as much as Mary decided to keep of the old family furniture should be stowed away in an attic which was well lighted, a place where she could walk about amongst her treasures, and keep all free from dust.

The rest of the Wolfcote things were sold at auction, and the sum realized was very convenient for immediate expenses and needs.

One day Dr. Middleton came into the nursery whilst the girls were discussing the various possibilities of a remunerative occupation for Mary.

"I believe you could write good stories," said Joyce: "and I might illustrate them. I am sure the way in which you have often described the people and things round about Wolfocte would take splendidly."

"My dear girl," said the doctor, who came in just in time to hear his daughter's proposition, "don't imagine such a thing for a moment. In the first place, although I admit you have a turn for sketching, there is a vast amount of technical training necessary before you could become even an ordinarily good illustrator. And as to Mary's writing—well, she could probably do it; what she did write would, I am sure, make pleasant reading, but I would rather see her married to a good fellow with whom she could be happy, and, failing that, there is plenty of active work to be done, which to my mind is healthier than stooping over a desk and turning everything into copy. You know my fondness for the old classics—I wish they were more read nowadays. Virgil expresses my mind in one of his Aeneids—as far as my memory serves me. Morris gives them in English very happily. They are my advice to you, Mary:—

"'Give not thy songs to leaf of tree,
Lest made a sport of hurrying winds,
Confusedly they wend.
But sing thou them thyself, I pray.'"

"Quite a little sermon, dad," said Joyce.

"You have no bump of reverence, my dear," rejoined the doctor, pulling her ear gently. "And, by the way, I came in to reprimand you. You left your sketch-book in my consulting room, and young Jones, having to wait half an hour for me, edified himself by criticizing your presentments of the youth of Highborough. I found it open at a caricature of himself, with a legend underneath which made it unmistakable. No wonder my little girl is not very popular."

"What a catastrophe!! But I have as many friends as I want, dad, and you know you are a host in yourself," answered Joyce, coaxingly.

"Get on your things, both of you, and come with me to Stanley Moss. I am going to see your friends, the Grays, Mary. Mrs. Gray wants me to talk over an offer Gerald has had from Cape Town.

CHAPTER II.

Gerald Gray was an engineer. He was only twenty-three years of age, but he had been unusually successful, to the great joy of his mother, who was a widow. They lived about two miles from Wolfcote, and he and Mary had seen much of each other whenever he had a holiday and came home to the Moss. He had a workshop—a roomy place full of his own special properties. Here Mary had often watched him busy at his lathe. Here, too, he had fashioned rude toys when they were children, he just four years older than she was.

"Take Joyce and Mary out to see your new model," said his mother.

Joyce talked much more with him than Mary did. His eyes often wandered towards the latter, and he fancied it was her recent sorrow that made her so silent. At last, however, Mary saw something that made her exclaim :—

"Why, Gerald, how in the world did these come here? I gave them to our old Susan to light the fires with."

About half-a-dozen roughly-carved panels, very spirited, however, and true to nature—leaves, berries and blossoms—were hung on the wall round the open fireplace.

"To tell the truth, I bought them at the Wolfocte sale, Mary. There was quite a lively bidding for them, I assure you. Old Tomlinson had set his heart on having them."

"Dear, good soul !" said Mary. "Not you—I mean old Tomlinson !" she added, laughing. "But they should have been burned long ago. It was kind of you, too, Gerald."

"Not at all ! They are very good, and I enjoy them there immensely." I shall take them away with me."

Gerald did not tell Mary so, but it was he who had routed them out of thewoodshed, and, indeed, he had helped the men to arrange all the things for sale, and had been the means of its realizing much more than it would otherwise have done.

Joyce went out into the garden and left the friends alone awhile. She knew how often Gerald had called at their door to ask for news of Mary during the first weeks of her bereavement. and she had drawn conclusions of her own. Gerald quickly availed himself of this opportunity.

"I shall go to Cape Town. Mary. It's a fine opportunity—a rare chance for a fellow. Will you write to me sometimes ?"

"Of course I will answer your letters if you write to me, Gerald ! How soon will you go ?"

"In about three weeks' time; that is, I must sail then. But I have to go to Liverpool next week to order my outfit, and I have to run up to town to see some business friends who can give me introductions out there that may be useful. I wish you could have made up your mind to live here with my mother, Mary. She wants you to—she told me so."

"She wants to help me, Gerald; she does not need me. She is so energetic and independent. I could not do it. I am independent myself. The land is now let, but for very little, you know—it is not worth much, and I have not enough to live upon. Mrs. Tomlinson has a brother in London who has got on very well as a dealing in mouldings and carved panels, and a procurer of all kinds of carving and turned work. He has a shop in a small street near Oxford street. Another sister keeps his house and lives over his business place. She was staying with the Tomlinson's last summer, and they showed her some of my work. She said her brother employed several men in that sort of thing. He sells to cabinet-makers and picture-framers. I have been thinking that I would get her to write and ask her to find a lodging for me near them. I love the work."

"But you could never live in one of those dull, dark streets—all alone, too. No, you must not think of it. I cannot imagine you existing even in such a place after the free life on our moorlands."

"I could not make any money here, Gerald. I must go where I could."

"If I were in a better position—if even I had not to go away just now—Mary, you should not do anything of the sort. That is, if you would only give me the right to——"

Just at this point Joyce returned, and Gerald's words remained unspoken, words which might have influenced not only her own, but also Joyce Middleton's immediate future. And Mary slipped out and hurried away to a tiny glen near, so that Gerald had no opportunity of watching for any signs of the effect of his words on her. Joyce found him unusually dull and quiet, also cross, she thought, and she wondered if he and Mary had quarrelled a little. When they all gathered in the drawing room at tea-time, she felt sure they must have done so, for they avoided each other, and the doctor soon carried Gerald off to have a pipe and a talk in his den.

When they bade each other good-bye, he held her hand as long as he dared in his own, and tried hard to get some responsive pressure from it, whilst his eyes sought hers eagerly. But in nervous, highly-strung natures, when the heart is warmest, the hand is often cold as ice, and so it was now, and Mary dared not trust herself to look clearly up into Gerald's eyes, although she trembled under the gaze which she felt, although she could not meet it.

And so the two friends parted.

If she really cared for me as I do for her," said the inexperienced young man, "she would have given me some little sign."

A week later the war with the Boers broke out, and Mrs. Gray would have given much to get Gerald to change his plans. This, however, he would not hear of. For two years he had been an ardent volunteer, and the spirit of adventure was stirred within him. And he might wait long, as he told his mother, before he had such good chances as seemed his at present.

So all thoughts of making any definite proposal to Mary were effectually driven aside. His mother now wrote to Dr. Middleton that she should go to spend the winter with a sister in the Riviera. She confessed that the idea of her son's having to serve completely unnerved her. Gerald called on the girls before leaving to bid them a final good-bye, but they were out, "gone for the day," said Nurse Anne.

"It's just as well," was his mental comment; but he felt keenly disappointed nevertheless.

"Bully," whispered Mary, into the ear of her faithful friend that same evening, "I am very unhappy, Bully, and very lonely." Next morning, however, she looked up brightly and pleasantly at the doctor as he came in to breakfast, Joyce being not yet down, and she told him that she had quite decided to go to London, and she was only waiting to know whether Miss Curtice, Mrs. Tomlinson's sister, could take her to live in her house.

"Morrison street you say she lives in, Mary? Morrison street, near Oxford street? Quite unsuitable, I should say; close and unhealthy. After our bracing country air, unbearable."

It was, however, decided a week later, that Miss Curtice should give Mary a good bedroom and the use of a tiny sitting room, which she could convert into a little workshop, for twelve shillings a week, and in these she declared she should soon be able to make herself at home.

"You'll not go there till after Christmas, Mary," said the doctor. "I will not allow it. Remember that I am your father's executor and your legal guardian, and it would not become you to act in direct opposition to what I judge best for you."

He said this half playfully, but Joyce and he together over-ruled Mary's objections, and when she had arranged to do this, and had Miss Curtice's promise that the room should be kept for her, she looked forward more cheerfully to the coming year than she had thought possible. Christmas passed over quietly and sadly, this first one without her father.

CHAPTER III.

OUT IN A STRANGE WORLD.

Mary arrived at Morrison street in a depressing steady downpour of rain. The cab was laden with her boxes, as she had brought away many little pictures and favorite possessions which would serve to remind her of Wolfcote.

Her appearance was very noticeable : she was tall, well built, had regular features, a healthy clear skin, and well-dressed, dark brown hair. Although her tailor-made clothes had been cut by a country workman, they fitted well, and her felt hat suited her perfectly.

The Curtices had two shops, and at the side of one of them, next door to an eel supper house, a noted one in the neighborhood, was the narrow door, with its knocker and bell, of the private dwelling where Miss Curtice and her two nieces dwelt. The brother was married, and he lived away from his business.

When the cabman opened the door, he looked at the house and then at Mary inquiringly, as much as to say, "You made a mistake, perhaps, in the address."

"It is all right," she said, cheerily, although in the rain and the twilight it all looked very dreary to the country-bred girl, who had always been surrounded by pleasant sights and sounds.

A boy was yelling "Piper !" up the street, his arm full of newspapers ; another was crying, "Defeat of the Boers ! Horrible slaughter !" and again, "Ghastly murder in James street !"

Miss Curtice was still busy over her books in the shop below, but she came out to lead Mary to her bedroom, and said she would soon have finished for the day and be upstairs.

"My niece Annie atends to the house. By the time you have taken off your hat and put on some slippers, tea will be ready for you. There is a nice fire in the little sitting-room. I do hope you will not find it very cramped there. I have a bright log of wood burning ; it is more cheerful than coal, and brother John is very liberal to us with his odds and ends from the workshops below."

But for an overwhelming sense of loneliness and isolation, which forced itself upon Mary, with the thought that now, for the first time in her life, she must sit down to solitary meals—sit solitary and silent, with no encouraging smile or affectionate glance opposite to her—but for these thoughts, she had little to complain of, she told herself.

The table was daintily spread, with a glass of chrysanthemums in the centre. The bread was good, the butter of the freshest, and the fried plaice could not have been better.

"We get the fried fish from over the way," said Annie, when she came in to clear the table. "It's the best fish in the neighborhood. They get it fresh from Grimsby every morning, and the fat all comes from Brand's meat factory.

"The fat?" asked Mary wonderingly.

"What they fry it in, miss."

"Do you not fry it at home?" A fried fish shop was unknown in Highborough.

"Oh, no! They sell it opposite. There are penny and twopenny and threepenny bits. The plaice is best."

Noticing a little look of distrust in Mary's face, Annie begged her to go into another room, from which a good view of the "Fish Dinner and Supper Bar," as a big board over the window stated, could be obtained. At little tables a few respectable workmen were evidently enjoying a meal. A nice-looking woman in white apron, bib and oversleeves, was frying busily at the side, and all looked clean and tidy.

"They don't put pieces in the window," said Annie. "They do it fresh for each customer. And they fry for lots of the real gentry around. Aunty wouldn't have it if she didn't know all about it."

Annie had not been long in London. She was an orphan niece, whom Miss Curtice had adopted, a simple country girl, who, being much alone in the house over the shop, was glad to have the chance of a little talk with someone.

"And that's a hairdresser next door, miss; quite a genteel shop it is. There's everything anybody could want in our street, and a draper just round the corner.

Mary was amused in spite of herself. It was all very strange and funny. She wondered what Joyce Middleton would say when she came to London to visit some relations who lived in a big square not far from Morrison street. The rooms themselves were spotlessly clean and very pleasant-looking. Miss Curtice kept to all her homelike country traditions respecting white counterpanes and window curtains, and the furniture was new and in good taste.

"Auntie never puts a card up in the window," said Annie; "she never takes people she does not know about. We get mostly country friends who come up to see the sights and do a lot of shopping."

They had gone back to the little sitting-room. "Those do not look like country girls," remarked Mary, pointing to some photographs in a long frame on the wall.

Two of these represented a young, pretty woman in theatrical costume, another a girl in the attitude of dancing. The faces of both were refined, and underneath the apparent light-heartedness in the pose of one was a worn, somewhat pathetic expression.

They were our lodgers last winter. Very good young ladies, but my, how hard they had to study ! ! The one dancing is a young widow, quite a lady, and her husband's people keep her two little boys and send them to a boarding school. But she's got to work for her own living, and the other one is a friend of hers. They always go about, the two of them together. They do like to stop with auntie. They say they can't never get clean rooms like these when they're touring about, as they call it, in the country. They've cried themselves to sleep many a night, they told auntie, because the only lodgings they could afford to pay for was so dirty. They say decent country folks don't care to let to stray play-actors as a rule."

" And who has their room now, Annie ?"

" A lady who works in a big millinery and dressmaking business. They make costumes mostly for theatres. When a new piece is being put on, don't they have to work late hours. They're that busy now that they work late at night, and all day last Sunday even."

" But the inspectors stop that, I thought."

" They don't ; not always. If they think he's a-coming, the lights is put out, and by-and-by they're at it again. Poor Mrs. Wilson, she's a widow, too, left with children. They're all in places now, but she's had a hard fight of it. One day when she'd been working late at night, and all Sunday, she came home and lay in bed next day, just coughing up bits of her liver like."

Mary turned, pained and shocked at the picture Annie's words called up. All that suffering and slavery to provide pleasure and smart clothing, and to amuse people who ought, half of them, to be in bed resting. So she thought in the common sense of her practical and unsophisticated mind, and she was not far wrong.

" There is one more room over this, Annie. Who is there ?"

" A middle-aged lady who writes, miss. She keeps herself to herself, and has no visitors."

Of this lady, about whom Annie was least communicative, Mary was destined later to hear more and to know her better than any other inmate of the house. Her name was Seymour.

CHAPTER IV.

IN MORRISON STREET.

The first night in Morrison street was a very sleepless one. Mary had begun to unpack after her meal the evening before; but she soon gave up that work in despair. Accustomed as she had been to a large, old-fashioned bedroom, well furnished, with a roomy wardrobe, a well-made old chest of drawers, a big old dower-chest, in which clothes not immediately in use could be folded away, and a cupboard in the wall, the accommodation in Miss Curtice's best bedroom, good though it was, and suited to the size of the chamber, seemed meagre indeed. So Mary had decided to try and sleep with her possessions around her, and just to repack some of them for Miss Curtice to stow away as she suggested.

"I must have some familiar objects for my eyes to rest on to-morrow when I awake," she said to herself, "else I shall feel like the little old woman in the nursery rhyme who fell asleep by the roadside, and on waking to find her petticoats 'all cut round about,' doubts if it be really herself, until her little dog recognizes her. Ah, my poor dear Bully, if you were only here I would not feel so lonely!"

And then poor Mary fell to weeping. Brave though she was, it was all terribly lonely and strange to her. Soon she roused herself; the outburst had relieved her burdened heart, and she opened a box which held the portraits of her father and her mother. These she hung up over the mantel. On another wall a sketch of Bully, drawn by Joyce's clever pencil, was placed, and a photograph of the dear old Moss. A pair of small Dresden china vases, a grotesque old china bird and two figures—old Flaxman's design, made by Wedgwood—replaced the stiff ornaments of the mantel, and Mary felt more cheerful as she surveyed them. On her moorlands she had had so few companions that the characters in her favorite novels had been more real to her than they are to many town girls, and her mind reverted often to this heroine or that whose personality had impressed itself on her.

"There," she thought, as she gave some finishing touches to the arrangement of her little treasures, "I am like that woman in. . . .. of whom the author said she was a true dweller in tents, a wanderer without a permanent home, yet loving the beautiful. She carried always with her a few properties with which she sought to give to each place in which she sojourned an impress of her own individuality—familiar and suggestive touches which took away the strangeness of new surroundings."

After this Mary prayed, pouring out her heart to Him Who can help us to make as a soft pillow which dreams of heaven's own joy may visit, the very stones of this earth. Afterwards, although she could not sleep much, she felt at rest, and trustful for the future.

In bidding Mary good-night, Miss Curtice had said :—

"Do not be surprised if you hear steps overhead during the night, the sounds which seem loud because of the stillness. Mrs. Seymour often writes until one or two in the morning. She suffers much from neuralgia of the spine, and lies for hours during the early part of the day. Then she feels better towards night, and she begins to work. It is quieter, too, then ; some evenings hand-organs and strolling singers give regular concerts in this retired street ; and the girls dance to it. Poor things, they work hard enough all the day, some of them ! To-night it is too wet for them to be out. They used to have musical drill for the girls at one church Annie went to at Greenwich ; and I always tell my lodgers that this is our street's musical drill. You will see nothing rough here ; the street is full of respectable small tradespeople, plumbers and the like, a safer quarter for young ladies like yourself, Miss Lindsay, than some of the better-looking streets near."

There were some terrible fogs during that first month in Morrison street ; some days seemed more than Mary could bear. Still, her work was in the house ; and when she went out and noticed in the crowded streets near the numbers of girls who were always hurrying up and down the great crowded thoroughfare into which the street in which she was living led, she could only be thankful that she was placed so conveniently as she was, although at times the longing for a sight of the moors and for the fields about Wolfcote, with the clear, frosty air bracing her nerves and driving her to a healthy race with Bully, was almost intolerable. Then she worked harder than ever, and the panels with birds, flowers and leaves which she produced were better than any she had carved before. Several of them were sold in Mr. Curtice's shop ; but the pay was small as yet. Her work was much finer ; she bestowed far more pains on it than an ordinary dealer could afford to pay for adequately. It brought its reward, however, in the satisfaction she had in feeling that she was no drone in the great city's busy hives, and she never envied the weary-looking people who passed her in their carriages on those rare afternoons when Miss Curtice persuaded her to take a walk in Hyde Park with her. What gave her a pang now and again was the sight of a certain father and daughter who walked often through her street together. She found out that they dined every evening in a restaurant near, and sometimes she took a little supper-meal at a table near them, and from their conversation she gathered that they were not very rich, and they had rooms near herself, the daughter going out daily to do some teaching in a large square near.

Ah, that did bring yearning memories of the days that were gone. How glad she would have been to work for her loved one during the day, if only the evening could have been his and hers together ! ! !

Joyce wrote often, that was a comfort ; and in one letter she told what good news Mrs. Gray had received of Gerald's success in South Africa. He had at first been sent up to Natal to fill an important post in some works which his firm had lately established there, and when the war was over would return there. He had written to Dr. Middleton, Joyce said, "and he asked very minutely and anxiously," she added, "after the welfare of a certain fair wood-carver who shall be nameless." At this part of the letter Mary's eyes grew moist, her hands fell with the sheet on to her lap, and her eyes sought the bit of sky which was visible over the roofs of the tall houses opposite.

Since she had been alone, perhaps ever since the day on which Gerald had called to bid herself and her friend "good-bye," she had known how dear he was to her. And now her love for him had been strengthened by the constant anxiety on his account. Any day she might read his name in a list of the wounded or the dead. "Do tell me all you hear of Gerald," she wrote to Joyce. "You know he was my playmate as a child ; and, although we may never meet again, I shall always feel great interest in Gerald. How anxious his mother must be ! When was his letter to your father written ?"

To this Joyce replied immediately. The letter had been written at Maritzburg late in November, and Mrs. Gray was now very anxious. She had been ailing and had gone to be near a doctor in Mentone. That same day they had heard from her. She wrote that Gerald was fighting with the Natal Carabineers, he declared that he was well and hopeful, and had written apparently in the best of spirits, perhaps this was partly to re-assure his mother.

The night after Mary received this news she was very restless. This very week she had joined a women's club, one in an old-fashioned square near which had been furnished through the liberality of one good woman of the parish who intended it for the class of educated women who are earning their own living and have only small means. There Mary had been reading all the papers eagerly, always thinking that she might possibly find some mention of Gerald Gray in them, who had joined a body of mounted volunteers. As yet this had not been the case.

She seemed to see him now, lying wounded and helpless on some lonely veldt, or even—God grant it might not be so—stiff and motionless in a rude trench, with a white face upturned to the stars! She turned restlessly from side to side, and at last sprang out of bed, and fell upon her knees in prayer.

Then she heard Mrs. Seymour—that was the lady who lived in the room overhead—get up and move, in what seemed a strange, groping sort of way, about her room. All sound are magnified through the dead silence of night, and Mary was naturally very "quick of hearing," as they say. Presently she was sure that the poor lady must have fallen—there was a heavy thud on the floor, then all was still.

Oddly enough, the two had never met, although Mary had now been a month in the house. She had heard that a severe attack of influenza had left her in a very weak and delicate condition, and that she was mostly confined to her room, where only her doctor and a clergyman whom she knew in the neighborhood had visited her till lately.

"There is a law-suit pending," Miss Curtice said; "one in which the poor lady is deeply interested. Now, a lawyer comes from time to time, and whenever he has been I notice that she is not so well as usual. She is from Queensland, and she tells me she has no lady friends in London just now. It is lonely for her."

Mary sprang out of bed, and, without waiting to call Miss Curtice, she ran upstairs, tapped on the door and listened intently.

No answer! Then she opened the door. Happily it was not locked, for Mrs. Seymour lay in her nightdress on the floor!

Downstairs Mary flew, and in a few moments Miss Curtice, Annie and she were doing all they could to restore the poor lady to consciousness, placing warm coverings over her where she lay.

"Run for Dr. Alison, Annie," said her aunt: "put on some warm wraps, though; and if you meet a policeman on the way tell him to hurry here and help us. We may not be able to get her on the bed alone."

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE COINCIDENCE—OR PROVIDENCE ?

Before anyone arrived Mrs. Seymour had, however, recovered from her fainting fit, and had been helped into bed again. Mary's face, as she stood by the bedside, with a look of anxious solicitude on it, seemed to have a strange fascination for her; and her eyes followed the girl's figure as she moved across the room, with a wistful expression which Miss Curtice noticed and wondered at.

"Who is she ?" asked the lady. "Where did she come from ?"

Her manner was so excited that Miss Curtice thought she must be wandering a little in her mind. "Do not talk now," she replied gently, "you are weak. I sent for the doctor, but I feel sure the best thing I can do for you is to make a cup of Liebig. Will you wait here, Miss Lindsay," she added, turning to Mary, "whilst I get my little spirit lamp to heat the water ?"

When she had left the room Mrs. Seymour called Mary to her. "You are very kind to a poor lonely woman," she said; "where do you come from ?"

"I am living in the room below you."

"Ah, you are the clever wood-carver of whom Annie talks. But where is your home ? Miss Curtice called you Miss Lindsay."

"My name is Lindsay. But ought you to talk now ? I think you should be very quiet; you will be stronger presently, when you have taken some nourishment."

"Yes, I need that perhaps. I was troubled yesterday, and I remember I ate little. But your voice and eyes ! and! your name Lindsay !"

Miss Curtice returned at this point.

"Go down again to bed, dear Miss Lindsay," she said. "The doctor will be here present, I think; and Annie will, in any case. You look tired."

The fact was Mrs. Seymour's questions and her agitated manner had startled Mary somewhat.

"I will come up and see if I can do anything for you to-morrow," she said gently, placing her hand on that of the invalid. "I wanted to come before, but I feared to intrude."

"Will you ? I shall be very grateful if you can. You ought to go to rest now, but I shall look forward to to-morrow. Her voice and eyes remind me of someone who was once very dear to me," she said to Miss Curtice when the door had closed behind Mary. "'Lindsay,' you said. Can it be possible ?"

"Now drink this, dear lady," said Miss Curtice cheerily. Just then the voice of Annie as she entered at the door below, and her step followed by that of the doctor, was heard on the stairs below.

* * * * *

Next day, at about eleven, whilst Mary was busy in her little workshop, Annie came in and told her that Mrs. Seymour would be glad if she could spare a few minutes to run up and see her.

"I would not let her talk to you too much," said Miss Curtice, who met Mary on the stairs. "I don't think she is quite herself, although Dr. Alison says the fainting fit came only from weakness, over-anxiety and want of proper nourishment. We must look after her better. Her means are very small ; she makes her own tea, morning and evening, and keeps her little store of food in the cupboard just outside her door."

"And where does she dine ?"

"Ah, that is the weak point, I fear. She tells me that she goes to a restaurant near ; she always goes out when it is fine, but one does not know what she gets there. When it is wet I always persuade her to let Annie fetch her some fish from across the way, and I boil rice in milk for her. It is a terribly lonely life for one who has certainly been used to better things and more comfort."

"It is a mercy she is with you, dear Miss Curtice," said Mary warmly.

"What would life be worth to some of us lonely women if we could not do something to brighten other lives. But do not stay too long up there ; I know you want to get your panel finished : brother John was asking me about it this morning. I just ran in here from my books at his other shop for a moment to see how things were going on."

"Tell him I hope to have it done by to-morrow evening," said Mary, running cheerfully upstairs.

She, too, was feeling glad that she could do something for someone ; life had seemed to her of late in danger of becoming self-centred, self-ended in its aims and work.

"Ah, here you are again," said Mrs. Seymour when Mary opened the door ; "I am just about to write a short business note, and then if you will spare me a quarter of an hour I shall be so glad to have a little chat."

She was sitting up at a little table near the window, wrapped in a well-worn but warm dressing-gown, and Annie had already made the bed and kindled a bright fire.

"I will come back in ten minutes," said Mary.

In her little workshop she had a bouquet of fresh greenhouse flowers—cinerarias, spirea, fragrant, like honey-smelling friesias and ferns ; Joyce had sent them to her the night before, and they had recovered from the journey by post in a bowl of tepid water. Half of them Mary now placed in one of her own home vases, and she carried them upstairs. "They came just at the right moment," she said to herself.

"How delightful, how good of you?" Tears came into the invalid's eyes as they rested first on the flowers and then on Mary. "Now," she added, a few minutes later, "sit there opposite to me, please. You remind me strangely of someone with whom I spent many years, when we were both young. Your name is——"

"Mary Lindsay."

"You have not been here long; may I ask where your own home was?"

"It was in the Midlands, on the moors near to Highborough. Wolfcote is the name of our place. My mother died many years ago, and my father"—the girl's voice broke a little here—"only six months ago. His mother's people owned Wolfcote in Queen Elizabeth's days." Mrs. Seymour started visibly; Mary, in her own trouble, noted it.

"I think you are still very weak," she said, "we ought not to talk perhaps."

"I am weak; but it does me good to have someone to talk to. I once—long ago, in my youth it was—knew a naval officer called Lindsay."

"My father was in the navy. He had retired from it, out of health, about twelve years before he died—just after my mother's death. Wolfcote had belonged to an extinct branch of his family, and we—mother and I—had been in it just two years before he retired. The land is now let, but the dear old house is empty."

"Was your mother English—that is, born in England?"

"No, father met her in Brisbane. He was out there in the Brisk when they met."

"God's ways are very strange, dear. I knew her also—ah, well! In fact she was my nearest and dearest friend until circumstances parted us."

The tears fell down her face freely now, and Mrs. Seymour stretched out both her hands towards Mary. Mary herself felt strangely moved.

"And you are so like what she was before we parted, dear."

"Was that when she and my father married?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Seymour paused and sighed heavily.

"Do not talk any more," said Mary, "not just now. I long to hear more, but it agitates you, and we shall see much of each other now, I hope. It is indeed strange that we, who have both been so lonely, should have met under the same roof."

"My lawyer comes from a Highborough family; he knew of the Curtices here, and recommended this lodging to me. But they—the Curtices—do not know this," she added hastily. "That is, they do not know that I ever knew Captain and Mrs. Lindsay. It will seem strange to you, and I cannot, at present, explain my motive for concealing the fact from good Miss Curtice, but you must promise not to tell her what I have told you, dear. Will you promise this ?"

Mary remembered Miss Curtice's warning.

"Is it possible," she said to herself, "that the poor lady is wandering in her mind ?"

"I will not mention it," she answered, "not, at least, until you give me permission to do so. You look very pale now, do rest for a little. Shall I post that letter for you ?"

"Thank you, mary. That was your mother's name, dear, and your father's name was John."

"It was." Then this was no invalid's illusion. Mary's heart quickened and warmed towards the lonely woman, and she bent down and kissed her. "I will look in again this afternoon," she said.

"God bless you, my child. I thank Him that He has allowed us to meet."

When Mary had gone downstairs Mrs. Seymour fell on her knees beside her bed.

"He setteth the solitary in families !" she said. "My God, I thank Thee !"

"But she shall not know all," she added, "not yet. Not unless it pleases Thee to grant success to me in what is as yet uncertain. If it pleases Thee to prosper me in my suit, then Mary's child—and John's," she added with a sigh, "shall share all."

Dr. Alison marvelled when he looked in early in the afternoon to see how much brighter his patient looked. She kept her own counsel as to Mary.

"I have eaten well, and a kind little neighbor has brought me flowers, you see," she said. "I feel more cheerful."

"I am glad of that. It is more than half the battle won in your case. By the way, I met Goodwin this morning : he was on his way to his chambers. I told him I feared your affairs were not looking very hopeful, and you were evidently more anxious again.

" 'Tell Mrs. Seymour that I have just had better news,' he said. 'I shall go round to Morrison street this evening, perhaps, and tell her our latest reports."

Mary, meanwhile, could not settle to her wood-carving that day. She sent Annie across to a clean little eating-house, where for sixpence she could get a plate of good beef with vegetables. Then she put on her things and walked down Tottenham Court road and up to Marylebone road, and into Regent's Park. She wanted a long walk with only grass and trees about her ; she needed solitude and space to think out these strange new thoughts that were within her. What could have been this poor lady's connection with her parents? She longed to hear more. But when she went upstairs Mrs. Seymour's mood seemed to have changed. She asked Mary much about her own home life and about her father and mother; but she evaded any conversation as to her own early history or the events which had led her to be alone now in London, involved apparently in a law-suit which did not appear to be promising very good results so far.

CHAPTER VI.

A LETTER FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

It was now about the end of February. From Joyce Middleton, Mary had had occasional scraps of news about Mrs. Gray and Gerald; nothing very definite, however, as to the latter.

One morning, however, she opened a thick letter with trembling fingers. She felt that something more was more. Was it for good or ill?

"Dearest Mary,"—she read Joyce's note first—"Mrs. Gray has just sent us a copy of a letter from Gerald, written from the hospital at Maritzburg. I hasten to send it on for you to read. Let us have it again soon, as father wants to read it again—doctor-like, he wishes to press out every bit of medical inference he can from Gerald's account of his condition. Mrs. Gray is returning to Stanley Moss. She evidently thinks it possible that Gerald may be unfit for further service, and she would like to have him at home again, she says."

The letter enclosed, copied by his mother, ran as follows:—

"My Dear Mother—Do not be distressed about me, although I write from hospital. To go to the most important fact at once, I have been wounded twice, once near the foot, through my boot, and again in the fleshy part of my leg; the bone was smashed. It must be amputated, mother, there is no hope for it. To-morrow the operation is to take place. So many brave, strong fellows gone, so many better men than I, and more needed, wounded far worse, and with less hope in the future. Do not fret, dear ; thank God with me that I am still living, and a leg can be replaced. I do not fear the result of amputation, and, thanks to my forebears, and to your influence, my blood is good and wholesome, and I can stand much.

"It was early in the day of the Colenso engagement that I came to grief. Our horse were exposed to the hottest of the fire. It is dangerous work making for narrow passages between hills, when men who know every foot of the way lie hidden in ambush in those hills, near to the narrowest passes. We were moving on at a hand gallop, and we had neared a critical point, where we thought we were clear of Boers, when from some kopjes which we were skirting, there was a flash and a noise of rifles. I and another made a dash for it ; we sat tight and rode our hardest, but it was no use. The other man, who was ahead of me, rose suddenly in his stirrups, bounded up in the air, and as he came down, I saw the flash of a white face streaked with blood ! I see it now as I write. On I pressed—a moment more and something seemed to strike my head. I was conscious of having been hit, but I felt no pain. Then all seemed to whirl round about me. I felt as though I had been blown upwards, not as though I was falling. Then all was blackness. Out of this I emerged to find myself lying in a trench with other men, all dead and dying ; and there we lay for six hours under a hot sun, without shelter and without water.

"And after that stretcher-bearers came : and oh, the agony of being moved, gentle though these were. But once on, and moving away on a dhoolie, out from all that carnage, things seemed more hopeful. Another dhoolie was near me ; suddenly fire opened upon us, and then those two bearers near were shot dead. With an awful groan of despair, the poor fellow on the stretcher lay on the ground. I did not see him again ; my own bearers started off at a quick trot, and my agony became unbearable. Although wounded on Friday early, I could get no proper aid till Sunday, when we reached Maritzburg.

The seventy miles by train had seemed so long ; many of us being in excruciating pain, every movement of the train seemed awful ! One poor fellow shrieked in agony from time to time, clinging to anything he could lay hands on ; he could neither lie nor sit ; for the rest, the men were mostly grimly silent.

"Then the joy and relief of finding oneself in hospital, on a bed, tended by timid and gentle women, the blissful silence after those sounds which had seemed as though they would haunt one's brain forever ! A good man lying in the bed next mine says the only battle prayer that seems to him to be possible or the lips of a Christian is 'Scatter the people that delight in war !'

"On the other side of me lies a fine young officer who had only been married a month before war broke out. I thanked God, mother, that there was none who depended on me—no wife, I mean. A poor maimed chap like me is best free, and single I must remain. I have no plans or thoughts for the future as yet—but—I fear it is up with me, even as an engineer. We shall see. I shall not go home yet.

"My neighbor, on one side, who is a father, is much distressed about his wife and children.

"Absent-minded beggars indeed! I have seen few enough of them as yet, though the words may jingle well in rhythm when, as they tell us, the tambourine is passing round. R. K. is a good chap, though, too; they say he is coming out here soon. Some of our men say that the Boers are most kind and gentle in their treatment of the wounded and of their prisoners. War between good men and true on both sides is a horrible thing. One I know, quite a boy, but attached to a medical corps, was shot through the shoulder by one of the enemy whose wounds he was dressing. Then he was taken prisoner. He escaped, however. He bears no malice, good lad. He says the man did it in the brain excitement that had overmastered him. 'He knew not what he did.'

"Well, mother mine, I see you as you read this, and my heart aches for you in your anxiety. But please God, if I am not able for my engineering post any more, I can perhaps do a bit of farming at home, and you and I will keep each other warm and cosy by the big old ingle-nook on winter nights. You need not fear my marrying now. Do you remember our talk anent that before I left home?

"You will be there again soon, I fancy, although I was glad when I got your letter saying that you were leaving for Alesslo. My greetings to the doctor and Joyce. I suppose Mary Lindsay is quite settling down in London, with dreams of fame as a wood-carver.

"By the way, there is one nurse here, quite young, and with a lovely face, but so thoughtful and gentle. I hope she will be near me when my bad time comes, or after it."

Then the letter concluded.

Poor Mary! Dreams of fame, indeed! How she envied that "lovely faced" young nurse! Nay, she felt at times a strange irritation at the thought of her, and of her gentle, tender ways. But then she rebuked herself and a flush of shame mounted into her face. And he said he would never marry. But what had she now to do with that? It was very evident that his mother had been opposed to it before. And she had no dower worth bringing to him, none but the old homestead. How she longed to be in it again!

Again all thoughts of self were swallowed up in pity for Gerald. It was a hard thing to be maimed and crippled at the very outset of his career, and he so active, so fond of all healthful sports!

"There is one thought that his mother can comfort herself with," Mary wrote to Joyce. "Gerald is no longer in danger of sudden death in battle, and of a last home in a far-away, lonely grave on the wide, bare veldt. She will not read the papers with that horrible dread in her heart; and I do hope that she will be able to keep him near her. They have always been very devoted to each other."

"You have been weeping, Mary," said Mrs. Seymour anxiously, when they met in the evening of the same day.

"I have had sad news of one of our old home friends who is out in South Africa. He has been badly wounded."

"Was he very dear to you?" Mary felt the blood rise to her face. She was a brave girl, unused to subterfuge, so she answered frankly, "He was a very dear friend; we were playmates as children," and she found it a relief to tell Mrs. Seymour of her home at Stanley Moss, and to talk of the happy days she had spent there.

"No wonder you grieve, child. Still, it might all be much worse; you will perhaps see him again soon."

"No, I shall not do that. It would be painful to go to the old place. I don't mean to return there for two or three years, at least. I do wish I had my dear old Bully here, though—the dog I told you of. And you remember what I said of Joyce—of her desire to go and study art in Paris, if I would go with her? If the doctor does marry again she will go, I feel sure, and I shall do my best to go with her."

Mrs. Seymour looked grave. "I hope that will not be, Mary. And," she added mentally, "it shall not be, if I can prevent it."

At this point the lawyer, Mr. Goodwin, was announced by Annie, and Mary went downstairs to write a second long letter to Joyce. The idea of Paris had taken hold of her since the morning.

* * * * *

Mr. Goodwin's face, as he entered the room, was radiant. Mrs. Seymour felt immediately that he was the bearer of good news. Sudden joy tries us as well as grief; she became white as she gazed at the good lawyer, and swayed slightly in her chair.

"It is nothing," she said, but begged him to hand her a vial which was on a table near. "Now I shall be better. Tell me your news. Thank God, I feel it is good!"

"It is. Your suit is now practically over. Those missing letters and papers have been found, and your share in your father-in-law's will, which amounted to twenty thousand pounds, is, of course, further augmented by the accumulation of interest."

Mrs. Seymour buried her face in her hands and was silent for a little. The lawyer took some letters out of his pocket and read them over again, to give his client time to recover her self-control.

"You must move into more comfortable quarters as soon as possible now," he said.

"I would rather stay here."

"That will not be wise. You will have to attend the court with me, and you may have to receive several persons in connection with these Chancery proceedings. I shall at once advance as much money as you wish to have for present expenses, and I can recommend a comfortable private hotel not far from the Inns of Court."

After Mr. Goodwin had left, Mrs. Seymour asked for Mary again.

"My dear," she said, "a great change of fortune has come to me, in God's kind providence. I am no longer poor. I cannot tell you all to-night, but to-morrow you shall hear as much of it as will interest you. Will you thank God together with me, my child," she added simply. "My heart is very full to-night."

Sorrow and joy, and so much of it in one day! Mary felt dazed and bewildered when alone again in her room below. And she had not yet heard this new friend's history, and what the link was which seemed to be binding their two lives together.

CHAPTER VII.

AT HOME ONCE MORE

Mrs. Seymour and Mary's mother were sisters. Soon after the marriage of the latter the former had contracted an unwise and hasty marriage, and had gone with her husband to the goldfields in New Zealand.

"Did your mother never mention me to you in any way ?" she asked Mary.

"I was only nine years old when she died, and I cannot remember that she did. But there was a photograph in her room which I know now must have been yours. I asked my father about it once, and he said it was a very dear relative of my mother's, whom they had lost sight of, and believed to be dead. He always said that he was the last of his race, and that he knew of no surviving relative of my mother's."

Mrs. Seymour was silent for a time ; then she said : "My husband was a man of good family, but he had left home against his father's wish, and was cut off, as he believed, in his will. He died only two years ago, leaving no provision for me. A good friend encouraged me to write ; I had already contributed to several colonial papers, and I managed to make enough to subsist on. Then I received a letter, intended for my husband, telling us that his father's will could be contested, and giving various addresses here in London, advising us to come home at once. The friend I have mentioned lent me the necessary money, and I came, intending, if I succeeded in getting what was due to me as my husband's widow, to make myself known to my dear sister, and to beg her forgiveness. I had always kept her letter, and it gave the Wolfcote address as being the old family home of my husband.

"A strange providence ordered it that one of the firm of lawyers to whom I had been directed was from Highborough originally, and so, dear, I landed in this comfortable little lodging, the brother and sister here being well known to Mr. Goodwin."

Both were silent for a time, both deeply moved.

"Yours has been a very sad life, dear aunt—I must call you that now, you know," said Mary presently. "Ah, if only you had come a year sooner ! You would have been a comfort to my father ; he would have been so glad to think I should not be quite alone."

"Call me Aunt Agnes, dear—that is my name."

"Aunt Agnes ?" said Mary, clasping the hand that still lay in hers ; "that is a name I like."

'But now we must make our arrangements, dear ; Mr

Goodwin wishes me to be in some other neighborhood at once. You will come with me, will you not? I am a lonely woman, and you could make me very happy by remaining with me. I cannot form any very definite plans for the future yet; I must live day by day until these weary law formalities have been got through with."

Of course Mary promised gladly. She had not yet taken root very firmly as a self-supporting professional woman, and she clung to this newly-found aunt, who was of her own blood, and towards whom she had felt drawn from the first.

They moved into some pleasant, roomy apartments in a private hotel in one of the streets off the Strand, and in less than a month all requirements of the law had been satisfied, and Mrs. Seymour and her niece were free to choose a pleasant home where they thought best.

To begin with, Dr. Alison advised that three weeks at least should be spent at Hastings, so as to avoid the colder spring in the north. Mary was longing to take her aunt to Highborough to show her the old home, and to introduce her to Dr. Middleton and Joyce, but she felt the advisability of delay until the season was further advanced. She had received warm congratulations from her friends, including Mrs. Gray, who told her that she had urged Gerald to return and settle on their land but that he would not in any case reach home before June, she thought.

It was a lovely day at the end of April, when Mary and her aunt were driven over to Wolfcote—a lovely April day of bright sunshine, broken into now and again by gentle showers, which seemed all in accordance with Mary's own face, where smiles and tears alternated as she drew near the dear old place again. She was glad that she sat alone at the back of the doctor's high dog-cart, which he always used over the hills and moors.!!

Joyce had gone over to Stanley Moss the evening before; she wanted to see that the house was well aired, all the windows opened, etc., she said.

In reality she had a surprise in store for her friend. A week before she had got all the precious belongings that had been saved from the Wolfcote sale—and which had been stored, as we know, in the attics at the doctor's—moved back to their old place, and old Susan, with Billy, were already comfortably established there. With some help and loans from Mrs. Gray a sitting-room and two bedrooms had been made to look delightfully homelike. Two old china bowls were filled with cowslips and bluebells, bright fires were burning, and old Susan's face shone, as Mr. Tomlinson observed, "like the missus' warming-pan."

"Where is Billy?" Mary had asked at once, after the first greetings on their arrival.

"He has gone on a visit to Susan. You know she has remained at her sister's cottage all this time."

"Oh, I know that ! I have written to her often. Dear Susan, I long to see her again !"

So when they pulled up at the gates and Susan and the faithful dog came out to welcome their young mistress, she was so overcome that she could hardly see, and the fresh curtains and blinds at the windows did not attract her attention. She was drawn into the cosy sitting-room by Joyce, and the whole thing, the delightful welcome, which seemed perfected by the sight of the dear, familiar furniture and pictures, quite overpowered her.

Aunt Agnes, too, was happy for Mary's sake. Yet how she yearned for the presence of those dear ones from whom she had once alienated herself ! She put these thoughts resolutely aside, however, and added her thanks to those of Mary.

"And that was why you would not let me go upstairs into the attic, Joyce ?"

"Yes ; I wanted to surprise you, dear. And here comes Mrs. Gray. She helped me right well. To tell the truth, she is longing to know that Mrs. Seymour and you will really make your home here soon."

Mary had longed and yet dreaded to settle with her aunt at Wolfcote. And now that it looked so cosy, so inviting, and especially when Gerald's mother joined her entreaties to those of Joyce, Mary gave way to what had been her aunt's wish from the first, that they should repair the old-house and settle down in it together.

"I have never known what it was to have a quiet resting-place, dear, with someone to care for, someone who could love me, too. I could be very happy here."

"What about Paris, Joyce ?" asked Mary, when the two were alone in her own room.

"I mean to go some time. That affair is still on, although a delay has evidently occurred from some cause or other. The person is away from Highborough again for a time. We shall see."

"I might persuade Aunt Agnes to go there and to let me study with you for a few months later in the year. I may wish to be away from Wolfcote for a while."

"That would be delightful ! I must say, dear, your career in art, so far, like that of Gerald's in South Africa, has been cut rather short."

So Mrs. Seymour and her niece settled down in the old home, to the great joy of the scattered small farmers and the cottagers in their vicinity.

Like all those who have lived in the colonies, Aunt Agnes felt that a horse was one of the necessities of life. She bought two, one for herself and one for Mary, and they rode together in every direction. She declared that she felt quite young again, and indeed one would have taken her for at least fifteen years younger than the sad-eyed invalid who led the life of a recluse for over a year in the lodging in Morrison street.

As Mrs. Gray remarked to the doctor, "These colonial women, even the quietest of them ,do things in a remarkably rapid time ; they quite take one's breath away."

It was only the end of May, and they might have been in the place a year instead of a month. On the thirtieth a telegram arrived at Stanley Moss, saying that Gerald had landed in Plymouth. He had received leave unexpectedly—indeed he was pronounced as unfit for further service. He would be with his mother that same evening.

The news quickly spread. Mary heard it in the afternoon. The next morning she was out, wandering restlessly amongst her flowers, near the lower gates. It was not yet seven o'clock, and Aunt Agnes was not awake she thought.

She opened the gate and walked, lost in thought, down the grassy lane. She longed for, and yet dreaded the meeting which she felt would take place that morning.

Suddenly she came on Gerald. He was on crutches, but his face was bronzed ; he had no look of the invalid.

"Gerald !" she cried, her own face flushing and then turning pale again.

"I could not wait any longer, Mary. I did not sleep. And I have hobbled over—I did not want to call the groom. I would have stayed here, though, until it was a decent time for breakfast. "I've come back, not 'covered with glory,' but as a poor old cripple," he added ruefully, Mary not having found words wherewith to welcome and yet to express her sympathy.

They walked slowly up to the house together. In the garden Mary gathered an early moss-rose bud and held it towards Gerald.

"You will have to put it in my buttonhole yourself. Mary. These crutches need all my care. I feel so glad to be at home again, and you back at Wolfcote, that unless I keep my hands on the things I shall forget that they are there at all, and come to grief."

Aunt Agnes was up, and she was standing just then at her bedroom window. Her eyes grew moist.

"God bless them !" she murmured. "Mary is crowning her hero."

And so she was : for love is the crown of life here, as it will also be in the life hereafter.

(The End.)