Mara

Isabella Alden

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Mara

Chapter 1

"So runs the round of life."

Naomi sat on the bed. She nearly always sat on the bed. When the three chairs were occupied, as they generally were, it became, by common consent, her place.

"Young ladies," she said, as she plumped herself into the middle of it, "beds were made for people to recline upon in their hours of repose, and should never be used as substitutes for chairs." The tone was primness itself, and was evidently not Naomi's own. The others laughed at her little fun, as they had done dozens of times before, and as each knew they would soon not have opportunity to do again. There was an echo of last things even about their worn jokes.

"This particular bed was evidently designed for students in geography," said Gertrude, laying her hand upon one of its many humps in a way that suggested tenderness. "Poor old Nebo! I presume we shall spare a regretful sigh now and then, even for you."

That particular hump, the largest, had been named "Nebo" because, when perched on it, the best view of the outside world could be secured from the one window.

Nobody laughed at Gertrude's words; her tone had grown too distinctly sad. Naomi made haste to say:

"Don't let us grow dismal. If there is anything I especially hate, it is retrospection, and regrets, and sighs, and general dismalness. What if our school days are over? There are other days in store, quite as good, I dare say; and to what have we been looking forward all these years but the getting through? Now that we have done it, why not enjoy it? I do wonder when we four will be together again, and where we shall meet, and what will have happened in the meantime. Oh, girls, *girls!* Think of all the larks we have had!"

They all laughed now, little fitful bursts of laughter, of the sort that is near neighbor to tears.

"You are an excellent person to preach!" said Bernice, an attempt at reproof in her tone. "Who is 'retrospecting' now, I wonder?"

"We are not to do it!" said Gertrude, with decision.

"'Look ahead, young ladies, look ahead! Ignore your limited horizons and insist upon being lifted up and beyond.'" It was the prim tone again, well imitated, but the girl broke off to say in her natural voice:

"I wonder if we shall have a sigh of regret occasionally for even Madame Nordhoff?"

Barbara arose from her seat under the window and crossed the room to her trunk, which was packed so full that the four had agreed upon the impossibility of locking

it, yet it was being left open for certain "last things" which must be added in the morning.

"You are all alike," she said, as she bent over the tray in search of a fresh handkerchief. "You resolve not to look back and be dismal, and then you let every sentence end in dismal suggestions. I think we would better all go to bed. We shall feel cheerier in the morning."

A general protest arose.

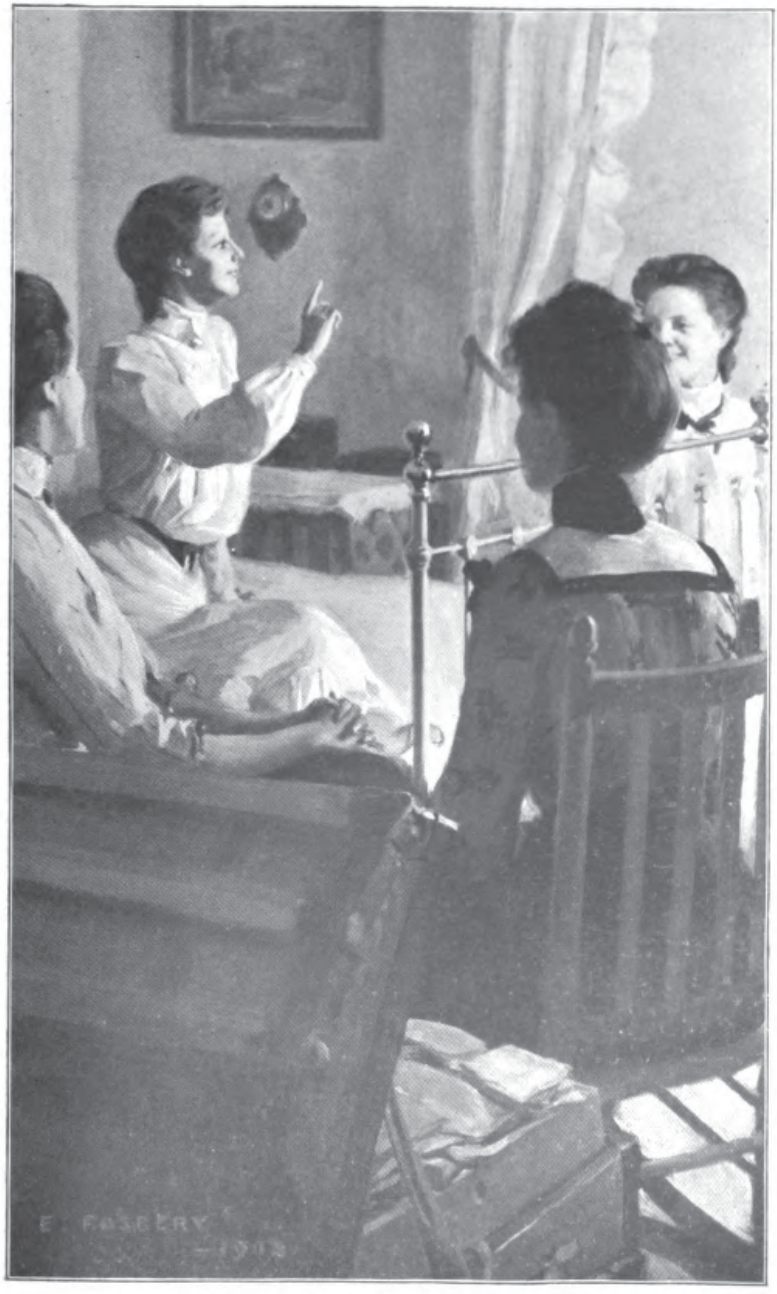
"Oh, not yet, Bab dear! Why, the moon is just rising! Look at it, beloved, and think where we shall be when it rises next."

"We shall be asleep, I hope," said Barbara, amid the general laugh at Gertrude's success in making cheerful suggestions. "It rises an hour later than this tomorrow night, remember."

"But we are not a bit sleepy," said Bernice, "and I own that it seems rather hard to go to bed as usual, at reasonable hours, on the first night of our lives when we have been given unlimited liberty. We might as well visit a little longer, since it is the very last night. When we are a thousand miles apart, we shall each think of a thousand things that we meant to say to one another and didn't."

"A thousand miles!" echoed Gertrude. "That is putting it far below the facts. Think what distant regions of the earth we represent. Barbara stands for New England, Bernice for the middle West, while little Naomi is almost as far toward the sun setting as she could get."

"And you represent the center of things," said Bernice. "Or no, Boston is the center of the earth, isn't it, Bab?"



"Think of all the larks we have had"

Then Naomi, who had been silent longer than usual, and who was by turns their hoyden and their sentimentalist, suddenly changed the subject.

"Girls, you will none of you forget our pledge to come together on our wedding days, no matter how widely we may be separated? I wonder which of us will issue the first call? Isn't it interesting to have it all so shrouded in mystery? Yet when one thinks of it, it really seems strange that not one of the four has any plans laid in that direction."

They laughed then, merrily, as Bernice, leaning over to pat Naomi's shoulder, said:

"It is strange and sad, my dear. Advanced as we all are in age, especially you! It looks as though we were designed by the fates for four old maids, doesn't it? If there should be no weddings for us to attend, what would become of us?"

"Well, but nonsense aside," said Naomi, "I mean that it seems unusual that not one of us has an intimate friend of whom she thinks occasionally as a possible lover. Girls at school nearly always have at least their fancies. I don't believe you could find four more in our three hundred who haven't. It is queer that just we four got together."

"Birds of a feather flock together," quoted Gertrude. "Only that doesn't describe us; there isn't a 'feather' among us that is like any other. It is rather remarkable that we should have become such close friends. Madame Nordhoff would say that it was due to propinquity rather than affinity; but I don't believe it. People can be like and unlike at the same time. Naomi, my dear, you are to be

the first to give us a wedding—we expect it of you, and shall depend upon you. See that you don't disappoint us."

"I!" echoed Naomi. "Why, I'm *years* the youngest."

"That is not of the slightest consequence, my child. I am surprised that you should not remember that we count time by heart throbs, not by figures on a dial.' It is written in the annals of fate that Naomi Newland shall be the first to change her name. And do insist, dear, that his name shall commence with 'N.' I am so fond of alliteration."

"I do not know even by name a person of whom I would think for the second time," said Naomi. They laughed at her contemplative tone with its tinge of sadness, and Gertrude answered:

"That is dreadful, and you so old! What about that Richard T something—I don't remember what—that I have watched you write on envelopes in your best style?"

"Oh, Dick!" with a toss of her head, "I should as soon think of marrying my brother. We are more intimate than many brothers and sisters are. Dick is my own first cousin, and don't you think we are twins! He was born on the very day that I was. But I insist that it is a singular thing, now that I think of it, that I have never so much as laid eyes on a person whom I could be induced under any circumstances to marry."

"I have," said Gertrude. "There was a nice old man in the village where we used to live. He must have been about sixty when I was six, and he was a wood sawyer by profession. But he had a head shaped exactly like Judge Holworthy, who was the very biggest man in the village in every way. Everybody noticed the resemblance. For

years I never saw Judge Holworthy without thinking of dear old father Brandt the wood sawyer. The same kind eyes and pleasant mouth. He used to give me red-cheeked apples and hazelnuts, the woods sawyer did—not the Judge. I used to say that when I grew to be a woman I was going to be father Brandt's wife. I still think I might have made a worse choice; his type of men are rare, I believe. Environment is a strange matter. Old father Brandt—set down in his childhood among cultured people and given opportunities—would have developed into a college president, or something of the sort. As it was, with as fine a head as any of them, he became a wood sawyer."

"Moralizing not allowed," said Bernice. But Naomi gave no heed.

"Life is strange," she said. "How we go on, generation after generation! Meeting strangers, falling in love with them, marrying them, growing old, and by and by dying, leaving children behind us to go through the same round."

"Tennyson in prose," said Bernice. "'So runs the round of life from hour to hour,' you know. The pity about it is that none of us grow any wiser, but proceed to make the same mistakes that our grandmothers did before us. I think I shall vary the programme and be a fine old maid."

Barbara was looking at her watch. "Now we have had enough," she said, with decision. "It sounds inhospitable, I know, but you two girls must simply go home. Naomi, remember, has to make a very early start, and ought to have been sleeping for an hour; and we can't any of us be sensible tonight if we try. We might as well give it up and go to bed. Come, Namie dear, your charming future is waiting for you, without doubt, just a little way ahead;

and Gertrude will be sure to find another wood sawyer in due time. Kiss us good night and run away, both of you."

"There is not a speck of sentiment in your composition, Barbara Dennison," pouted Naomi as she slid down from the hump on the bed and shook out her skirts, "not a speck! Turning us out in cold blood on the last night that we shall ever be together, and the first night in our lives that we have been allowed to stay as late as we pleased!"

Shouts of laughter greeted this contradiction, but Naomi held her ground.

"She knows what I mean," she said, with a toss of her head toward Barbara. "It isn't necessary for her to state that there has never been any romance in her life—that fact lies on the surface. She never saw a man yet to whom she wouldn't be ready to say—if he were calling upon her and the clock struck ten —'Come, it is time you were at home; I shall have a busy day tomorrow, and I want to go to bed.' If it were the last evening he would ever have to spend with her, it wouldn't make the least difference to Barbara."

She held up her lips for Barbara to kiss, as soon as the last word was spoken, and the kiss she received was clinging and tender. The laughter in which they had tried to join at Barbara's expense died out suddenly, and for a moment no one trusted her voice. Then Barbara came to the rescue with a commonplace:

"Don't leave your west window open tonight, darling. There is a keen wind from that direction. Don't let her, Gertrude; if she does, you will both take cold."

"We'll be good, grandmother," said Gertrude. "Dear old Bab! I—there! Good night." She drew herself suddenly

from Barbara's embrace, and ran after Naomi, who had slipped away. The "two B's," as the others called them, were left together.

"Poor little Namie," said Bernice, trying to smile. "I hope that mysterious future about which she dreams so much has something very bright in store for her. It doesn't seem to me that I could endure it to have trouble touch her life."

Barbara made no answer, but busied herself in setting the room to rights.

When Bernice was in her night wrapper she pushed aside the curtain and exclaimed:

"Oh, look! The moon is in her glory. I am glad we shall have a full moon for traveling. I shall watch it rise tomorrow night. Will you, Barbara, and think of me?"

"That would do for Naomi," said Barbara; but her smile was tender, and she came and kissed the tip of Bernice's ear, a queer little caress reserved for special occasions. Bernice broke the silence that fell upon them again.

"Naomi was very certain that none of us had ever felt a heart throb, wasn't she?"

"Does that mean, dear, that there is some deep secret which has never been revealed even to me?"

"No," said Bernice, with a hysterical little laugh, "it doesn't mean anything. If there were anything in the world to tell, of course I should have told you, but —"

"Well, dear," said Barbara, after waiting a few minutes, "but what?" and she slipped an arm about her friend.

"I am not like Naomi, Barbara, nor yet like Gertrude. I have seen him, and he isn't a wood sawyer."

"My dear child! And you never even showed his shadow to me?"

"I have nothing to show," said Bernice, trying to laugh. "I mean, there is no 'shadow' in which I have a proprietary right. He is simply one of my friends. Perhaps we might be called intimate friends, but we are equally intimate with a half dozen others, and I have no reason to think that I am more to him, or ever will be, than those others are. So you see, there is nothing for me to tell."

"Not even his name? Am I not to know that?"

"Why should you, dear? So long as it is—as it is—what right have I to use his name in this talk?"

"But I may tell it to you if I can?"

And then Bernice laughed outright. "Oh, yes," she said. "You may if you can. I know you can't."

"Isn't it George, Bernice dear? George Wilbur?"

She felt the start in the girl's frame, and in the moonlight which flooded their room could see that Bernice was distressed.

"Barbara," she said, "tell me how you know? Is it possible that — but no, that is too absurd. I am sure you have never met him. It seems equally impossible that I have ever, ever —"

She trembled with excitement. Barbara bent and kissed her on her sensitive mouth.

"You have never said or done anything, dear friend, that was not sweet and womanly. How can you imagine such folly? I know, or, I mean I guessed, the name because—I hardly know how to tell even myself how it was. There is a slight, the very slightest shade of

difference in your tone, dear, when you speak that name, from what you have for other friends; and just a touch of difference in the way you handle the papers that come with those initials on the corner, or the cards bearing that name. Not perceptible, of course, to anybody else in the world, but how could you have a thought, dearest, that would not insist upon sharing itself with me?"

Chapter 2

"The glories of the possible are ours."

"And so you knew all the time!"

Barbara laughed. "I know very little, Bernice, dear. I have fancied sometimes that you liked him a trifle better than your other friends, and that possibly he might be the one whom you would, someday, like better still; but I did not know, of course; and I would never have spoken my fancy if you had not given me permission."

"It humiliates me to think that I may have told others in the same way," said poor Bernice. Her friend had to turn comforter and go over the ground again and again, assuring her that such a thought was absurd, when she herself had but dimly surmised possibilities. Bernice was to remember how intimate they had been for four years—so entirely one that their very thoughts seemed to flow together.

"I know it," said Bernice, comforted. "And I am sure I ought to understand it. If you had a special thought for anyone in your heart, however remote, I should certainly

know it. We couldn't deceive each other if we wanted to, could we? I know I am freer with you than with any other person in this world. If there had been the least thing to tell, I couldn't have helped telling you. But—he never said a word to me in his life that could not have been said before all the world; and yet—there are intonations and words which are commonplace enough in themselves but—" She broke off in such pitiable confusion that Barbara made haste to help her.

"I understand you perfectly, dear friend; and I hope and believe that he is all and more than you think him to be."

"He is all that is grand and noble, you may be sure of that. Now that I have begun I may as well complete my confession and say that he is the only man on earth whom I could ever marry. I am sure of it. So I was much more sincere than the girls thought tonight in saying that I should never marry, because I do not believe he will choose me, and I will not be chosen by anybody else."

Barbara smiled. She had it in her heart to remind her friend that she was still young, and that perhaps—but she held her lips from the words. Of what use to argue about such matters? Time must show all of them what time could do for them.

On the following evening at that same hour Barbara Dennison stood alone by the moonlighted window. Instead of being two hundred miles removed from that point, as she had expected, she was still there, though the others had gone their ways. A telegram from her father, announcing twenty-four hours' delay, with directions for

her to join him a day later at the point where they were to meet, had come just in time to hold her.

"That means a double dose of desolation for you," Naomi had said when she kissed her good-bye. "Poor old Bab, I wouldn't be left alone in these rooms for anything in the world; they are haunted. Bab, dear, memories will stare at you from every hump on the bed."

Barbara thought of these words as she turned off the gas and gave herself to moonlight and melancholy. How still the old house was! And how dark! Not a room lighted on the south side, where literally hundreds of girls had swarmed but the day before. It happened that Barbara had never before in the years of her college life been left until the last. This was the last in more senses than one. The four years to which she had looked forward as an all but endless period of time were of the past. School days for her were over, and real life was at the threshold.

She shivered a little and told herself that the night air was chill, June though it was. But she hunted for a wrap and placed herself in the window seat for a deliberate survey of the years. Sleeping, at present, was out of the question. Very prominent figures in all her recent past were her three friends—Bernice, Gertrude, and Naomi. Bernice, her room-mate and inseparable companion; the other two, next door, and so entirely in accord with them that out of study and sleeping hours one room had been sure to hold the four. How steadily intimate they had been! Just they four, out of the hundreds who had swarmed the halls. Not certainly because of similarity in appearance or tastes or former environment. Gertrude

had been right when she had said, “Not a feather about them was alike.”

“But there must have been similarity in some direction,” Barbara told her thoughts. They had been drawn toward one another from the very first, and the attraction, whatever it was, had steadily grown through the years. They had been like sisters. Oh, more intimate than sisters, and she thought of Elinor. Yet there could hardly have been greater contrasts than their home environments represented, or must represent. They had never visited at one another’s homes, and knew only what chance references or perhaps, on occasion, marked silences had revealed. Barbara gave over, at last, trying to plan reasons for their friendship, and let herself enjoy the sweetness of the fact. They were friends, fast bound for life.

“For more than life,” she said, looking straight through the path of glory which the moonlight was making in the shimmering lake over toward what seemed radiant enough for the entrance into the celestial city.

“This little earth life does not bound friendship. As surely as I know there is heaven beyond it, I know I shall love our little Naomi there as here. Still, short as this life is by comparison, I want it bright for Naomi. The rest of us can endure trials if we must, but dear little Namie we instinctively shelter. There isn’t one of us but would give up much for the sake of making her happy. I wonder if the wretch lives who could be other than good to her?” Her thoughts had reverted to the last night’s talk.

“Sentimental little puss,” she said, with a smile, and a sigh, as she seemed to hear Naomi’s voice planning for

their reunion at a wedding. Danger to the child might lie in that very direction. If some designing man should woo her for the sake of her father's millions, and then break her heart, Barbara felt as though all their hearts would break in sympathy.

By a natural transition of thought, Bernice next appeared before her—Bernice, and her last night's confidences. She smiled to think how carefully the girl had guarded her secret, which was no secret to her. Numberless times she had seen those expressive eyes off guard while looking at one photograph. There were a dozen photographs in the case on Bernice's table, among them her brothers' and several of their college chums'; but this special one was constantly at the top of the case, even though it had been left underneath but an hour before; yet it never occupied the place of honor on the little easel, where first one brother and then another, or a brother's friend, was merrily placed "for company." Bernice would never openly seek the company of George Wilbur. By these and a hundred other trifles her closest friend had come to know her story nearly as well as she knew it herself. There had been times when she felt almost hurt because it was not told to her. And yet Bernice had been far more frank than she herself had been. She blushed in the moonlight over this thought, and then promptly justified herself.

"I had no occasion for frankness. I have absolutely nothing to tell. I should despise myself if I had even mentioned his name."

She did not mention it; yet the image of a tall young man with fine blue eyes and a wide forehead crowned

with masses of brown hair arose distinctly before her. She had no photograph of his face, yet she had compared it dozens of times with the pictured face of George Wilbur, to the great disparagement of the latter, and wondered whether it would be possible for Bernice, if she were given the opportunity, not to see the infinite stretch of difference between them. George Wilbur's face to represent the noblest type of manhood, indeed! Didn't she know better? She admitted to her secret self that she did not quite like his face. Not for the world would she have hinted such a thought to Bernice. It was unfair and foolish to judge of character merely from a shadow which might or might not do the substance justice. Yet she had been unable to put from her the fancy that there lurked behind that pictured mouth, yes, even in the eyes themselves, a suggestion, or at least a suspicion of insincerity. Instinctively she felt that she would hesitate to trust him utterly.

But this other face—no one who was the least judge of character could look into those singularly penetrative eyes without feeling that they belonged to a man to be trusted.

"There is no human being whose word I would trust for a moment if it contradicted his." She said the words aloud, with only the moonlight, it is true, for witness; but it gave her pleasure to put the thought into words. She was not often quite alone. She would perhaps be even less so in the future; there was Elinor to share her room. Elinor who was more assertive in all ways than Bernice, and had none of her fine delicacy of feeling. Barbara's face instinctively shadowed a little at the thought of her. This

was by no means a remark to be made in Elinor's hearing; but for once, just once, she would put her thought into words, and let herself see how it sounded.

"No truer, nobler, stronger human being walks the earth than Ellis Carpenter," she said. "Someday I should like to tell him that he, more than any other person, has illustrated to me the kind of man that Jesus Christ may have been when he lived on earth. He would think that irreverent, but it is not. It is truth."

The name Ellis Carpenter startled her, absolutely alone though she knew she was. She had never spoken it in that room before. Through the year that she had spent in it since she came to know him well she had never mentioned his name. In their chatter together when Bernice and Gertrude and Naomi and she herself had been detailing vacation experiences, and describing for one another's enjoyment new acquaintances, never, even incidentally, had that one's name come to the surface. The reason for this she had not chosen to explain even to herself. She was not young; she had come late to college—as girls count time, and now was twenty-four. She was not sentimental; she had had no school-girl escapades of the common kind; she had indulged in no frantic friendships or heart-breaking experiences of any sort. She had held herself as superior to all such follies, and had been glad to know that she was not cast in that sort of mould.

Her sister Elinor's frantic friendships with young men had by turns frightened and irritated her. Elinor was twenty-six, but she neither looked nor acted it, nor wished to, indeed, and was more than willing to pose in

public as younger sister of the quiet, dignified girl who, for what seemed to her half a lifetime, had been embarrassed and humiliated by Elinor's way of doing and talking. Not for all that the world contained would she have stooped to think and speak of Ellis Carpenter as Elinor spoke of half a dozen of her friends; and as for mentioning his name before Elinor, that was never to be done.

Truth to tell, it had surprised and at first humiliated her to make the discovery that she could not think of Ellis Carpenter in the way that she thought of other friends, but that there was a place in her thoughts where he dwelt apart, so far removed from others that she could not, had she wished to do so, have mentioned his name indifferently. The humiliation had been keen for a time. Was she, after despising girls of that sort all her life, now that she had passed her twenty-third birthday, all at once to become like them? She never would, she told herself, with firmly set lips. At least, no other should ever know that she had fallen from her ideal of young womanhood.

Being strong of will and outwardly quiet by nature, she had succeeded well in hiding her secret within her own heart. She had filled her life with work, becoming a closer student during that last year of school than ever before, which some of those who were competing with her said was unnecessary. Nor had she allowed herself to brood in secret over her discovery. As a matter of fact, this moonlighted evening which she was spending alone was the first time that she deliberately took out her own heart and looked at it. Bernice's confidences had brought this about. The girl's conscience was asking her if she had

been as true to Bernice as Bernice had been to her. This made it necessary for her to find just where she stood. Her conscience acquitted her. She had done wisely in keeping silence. Had she spoken, it must have been to say that she had a friend who never by word or tone or glance had hinted that she was more to him than any of his other friends, and yet he was consciously more to her at that moment than any other human being. Such knowledge as that it was surely wise for a self-respecting young woman to keep to herself. Yet the time had passed when she felt humiliated by it.

"There is no disgrace," she told herself, "in discovering that you have a friend whom you respect and admire above others. The disgrace lies in letting such a discovery spoil one's life. That, I shall not do."

On the whole it was not an unprofitable hour which Barbara Dennison spent with her secret self that night. She was very frank with herself, or thought she was. She admitted gravely that, given the opportunity, she could live a brave, true, helpful life with and for Ellis Carpenter. But she added with equal gravity that she had not the slightest reason for believing that the opportunity would ever be hers, and that her business was to live her true, brave life without him. Yet, behind all this, was an undertone of which she was hardly aware—a secret voice entering its protest. Why was it necessary to settle possibilities now, and make of them impossibilities? What if Ellis Carpenter had never by word or look hinted a special interest in her? Neither had he, so far as she knew, to any other woman. Yet he was a young man, with his life-work fairly planned and entered upon. It was

natural, certainly, to suppose that in due course of time he would single out one woman from all others. Why should not that one be Barbara Dennison?

The thought did not present itself so baldly as that, but it lingered subtly about her. She could not help recalling the number of afternoons that Ellis Carpenter had spent at the farm last summer, and the plainly written complaints of Elinor as to the infrequency of his calls during the winter. Then, recognizing the trend of her thought, she drew herself up sharply, and told herself that even little Naomi would not be so silly. Straightway her heart took up the interests of this young, tenderly loved friend, dear little Namie; it was natural to apply diminutives to her. The vigil ended in a prayer for Naomi, that the world opening so brightly before her might be all to her that this world should be, and yet might not dim the prospects of that other world. And then this young woman, who was usually practical, resolutely subdued the moonlight with blinds and shades, and went to bed.

Chapter 3

"Thus are my blossoms blasted in the bud."

"For pity's sake, Gertrude Fenton, what are you willing to do, I should like to know? If you can't wait on tables, nor take the tickets, nor do any of the things that I plan, what are you good for? You might as well go back to school and stay there. It is just as I said; I told your father that four years more of schooling would spoil you out and out, and it's done it. You are too fine for our kind of living, and I can't afford to dress you up and let you set in the parlor and play on the piano, I know that. We have to work for our living, the rest of us; and unless you caught a rich husband out in that college where you've been for so long, I guess you will have to do the same."

Annie Fenton laughed good-naturedly. She was nearly four years younger than her sister Gertrude, and as unlike her in every respect as a girl could well be. Blue-eyed, fair-haired, and freckled, like her mother, large of bone and with plenty of flesh, her plump figure and round good-natured face were pleasant enough to see. Annie

was nearly always good-natured. She was a favorite with the boarders with whom she could joke and laugh, and for whom she would cheerfully do her best, taking extra trips from dining room to kitchen to indulge their whims, until it had come to be the fashion in this popular boarding-house of the second class, for the initiated to make a dash for Annie's tables.

This house which Mrs. Fenton ruled with energy and success was, in fact, a semi-restaurant. Besides caring for a large class of boarders who were more or less regular, it was a house where meals of some sort could be had at all hours, and transients were almost as numerous as the regular boarders. From being a comparatively modest little venture, such as it was when Gertrude first went away to school, it had grown to startling dimensions; and the girl fresh from college life, with a diploma in her trunk bearing her name and setting forth in excellent Latin for all who could read it the fact that she had completed the curriculum of study with satisfaction, was expected to fit into these surroundings and assume her share of the work. Nothing more utterly distasteful to her could be imagined. It was not simply that four years spent in a different world had unfitted her for it; she was unfitted for it by nature.

"She don't take after neither of us," was an explanation concerning herself that she had heard her mother give many times.

"If she favors anybody, it is her pa's gentleman brother. Goodness knows, I hope she won't be like him. He is too fine for this world; everlastingly at books; spending every cent he could earn or get on 'em, and looking down on

common folks who earned their living and didn't know anything about Greek and Latin and such things." The tones in which Mrs. Fenton made this explanation were always peculiar. She was professedly expressing strong disapproval, and there was that in her mind, without doubt; but there was also a curious little undercurrent of family pride. It might be inconvenient, and there were occasions when it was disagreeable to have this scholar intimately connected with their family; but there was at the same time distinction in it which she could not quite overlook. The same curious mixture of feeling had been evident in her treatment of the daughter, who was unlike the others.

"You are as like your Uncle Edward as two peas in a pod." This often repeated statement conveyed, and was meant to convey, strong disapprobation, yet that thread of pride was woven through it. It was strange and vexatious, but it was also interesting, that her oldest daughter should be "bookish."

The Fentons believed that life had treated them badly. The father, an excellent mechanic, with good prospects for rising to the heights of a master builder or "contractor," had been suddenly stopped in his prosperous career by an accident that had resulted in two years of utter helplessness. After that, "about half of him," as he sometimes jocosely expressed it, got well. Head and arms and hands were able to resume their duties, but the lower limbs were paralyzed; the poor feet would never walk again.

It was when the full realization of this fact came upon her that Mrs. Fenton—who during the two years had

struggled bravely, making the small sum laid aside for emergencies go as far again, she affirmed and with truth, as most women would have done, and adding to it by work of all sorts as she had opportunity—arose in her strength and declared her determination to open a boarding-house.

"I can cook," she affirmed, "as well as anybody, if I do say it that shouldn't; and I believe there is a living to be made in that business if a body knows how to manage. Anyhow, I'm going to try it. We can't set around and starve because *he* is laid by."

She tried it and was eminently successful. In less than two months from the day of her first venture it began to be noised abroad that over at that little corner house with its modest sign that read, "Board by the day, week, or meal; prices reasonable," better bread and cake and coffee could be had than anywhere else in that part of town. This was when Mrs. Fenton's girls were small. She had kept them in school because she had grown to understand that in these days the place for children was the schoolroom. But when at fifteen Gertrude was ready for high school, her mother had argued the question vigorously. She needed the child's help in the dining room; work was every day growing heavier there. And what more schooling did Gertrude need, she should like to know? She could write now as pretty as engraving, and there wasn't a word in the dictionary that she couldn't spell. As for figures, she was quicker at them than her father. Why should she go to high school?

But the girl's heart was set upon going; and her father in his invalid chair, brisk of brain if not of feet, was on her side.

"We may as well have another scholar in the family, mother," he said, and there was undisguised pride in his tone. "Her Uncle Edward went across the water to study, you know; and they say he is making his mark there, too. It will be a fine thing to have a girl of ours who can match him at his books."

The mother grumbled; but that hidden pride in education of which she could not quite rid herself added its force, and she yielded. Annie took her place, very willingly, in the increasingly popular dining room, and Gertrude went to high school. She easily led her class. It was the winter before her graduation that her Uncle Edward came home.

He was a pale, frail, scholarly man, with scarcely an idea in common with his brother, or, especially, with his brother's wife. But, as the former had prophesied, he "took to" his niece. The two spent much time together, talking of books and studies. Uncle Edward spoke of the girl's acquirements and evident talent in flattering terms. He fed her ambitions unsparingly, and urged her not to be content with a mere high school education, but to aim for a college course. When she sorrowfully told him of the difficulties which had to be surmounted before she had reached the high school, and of the impossibility of her going farther, he looked wise and said:

"Don't you worry, only be determined to go to college. A great deal can be accomplished if one has determination;

I've proved it. When you are through with high school, we will see what can be done."

What was done was not in accord with his plans at that time. He had secured a good position as teacher, and his salary was fair. He had been teaching for some years before he went abroad, and while in Oxford, what with writing frequent acceptable articles for the home papers and magazines, he had managed to live his modest life without drawing very much on his savings bank account. His plan had been to set up a quiet little home and install his niece Gertrude as housekeeper, or at least as nominal head, giving her spare time to study, under his supervision, until he was ready to have her enter an advanced class in college. Instead of that, he died. And the will he left made Mrs. Fenton for a time almost too indignant to express her mind. All his savings through the years, and they looked to her like a small fortune, he left to his niece Gertrude. Mrs. Fenton admitted that since he did not see fit to leave it to his only brother, which would have been more natural, the least he could do was to remember his own nieces. But why should he pick out one of them to have it all? And worse than all the rest, why should he tie it up in a way to be of no use to anybody? Such was Mrs. Fenton's point of view.

What he had done was to plan in his will that every penny of it should be spent for Gertrude's education. She was to go to a certain college carefully pointed out, was to enter at a given time, and remain through the entire college course, the funds being carefully divided for each year and apportioned: so much for clothing and traveling, so much for college and incidental expenses. There was,

he had calculated, enough money to take her through the college course and support her for possibly six months afterward. He had planned as wisely as he could, and foreseen and made provision for possible obstacles in the student's way. Any deviation from the terms of the will, not caused by disability on Gertrude's part, and the money passed to a third cousin, a boy not yet in high school.

"There is no help for it, mother," the father said from his invalid chair, in a pitiful attempt to be merry. "The girl has got to have either an education or an accident that will perch her up here along with me, or else lose the money."

"Such a fool will!" said Mrs. Fenton, severely, but she said no more, and Gertrude went to college. Her uncle's reasoning had been that, with such an education as a girl like Gertrude Fenton would secure, six months would give her ample time to get well settled to her life work, which he was sure ought to be teaching. But there were thirty girls who graduated with her, and there were hundreds of colleges and high grade schools which sent out their graduates at about the same time, and fully two-thirds of them were seeking positions as teachers. Moreover, it seemed to Gertrude that there must be hundreds of thousands of girls and young women who, without higher education, or special training of any sort, were eager to teach school until they could marry, and were willing to take low salaries and to stoop in many ways in order to secure positions. There was competition everywhere. And the scholarly uncle was gone; she had no special friend to watch for her interests.

There were days when she gave herself over to the terror of the thought that she must spend her life in that restaurant, where she was expected not only to wait upon tables, but to be friendly and merry with those of the customers who liked that way of being served. Why not? Annie could do it, and Gertrude was no better than Annie. Poor Gertrude looked at her mother in perplexed silence, and knew not how to explain to her why she shrank with inexpressible horror from a life that her sister Annie admitted she liked.

"There's such a lot of them to feed," explained the red-cheeked, good-natured girl, "and some of them are so full of notions, and their notions are all so different. It's as good as a circus, Gert, to hear them go on."

Why could not Gertrude take life in that way? Such was the mother's thought.

"She's all books, spoiled for anything useful, just as I told you she would be." It was Mrs. Fenton's complaining tone. She had been telling the father of Gertrude's revolt from the functions of the dining room.

He laughed a little, sympathetically. Many days of sitting alone in his little room had given him clearer vision than some had. He was sympathetic with both currents of feeling in his wife's makeup. He distinctly felt that undercurrent of pride, and heard it sound in the half-contemptuous emphasis which she placed upon that word "books." The pity of it was that Gertrude never understood this part.

She had been at home for nearly three months, and they seemed to her, at times, as long as a full year at school. She had been earnestly trying to fit into the home

life, and shoulder faithfully her share of the work. It was not work from which she shrank. She believed that she could have spent the entire days in the kitchen, baking, boiling, or frying. She was ready to scrub, to wash dishes, to do anything, so that she might be saved from the horrors of that dining-room service when the guests crowded in. And it was in the dining room that her mother wanted her especially. The brawny-armed Irish and German workers that were at her command in the kitchen were stronger, and also, in their way, more capable than her school-trained daughter. There were times when she was even in the way there, with her "fine" ideas and her temptation to "wash a dish three times" before she used it. The mother's first plan was for her educated daughter to "dress up fine and stan' round as a sort of head waiter; jest keepin' her eyes open and puttin' in a hand here and there where it is needed, and havin' a word with this one and that one, kind of as if she was interested in makin' 'em comfortable. Easy work—enough sight easier than school-teachin'—and a chance to keep fixed up all the time."

"If you will do that," she said, "and take the tickets from the regulars and the pay from the others, and keep that part of the accounts straight for your father, why," —rising to the heights of magnanimity—"I'll excuse you from *work* altogether. You don't seem to be cut out for that."

So Gertrude, hiding her dismay and her reluctance as much as she could, had done her best. She had been prompt in her attendance in the dining room, and vigilant in her attentions to the customers. They had not been

compelled to ask twice for her service, nor to wait unduly; but she had been far from giving satisfaction.

The mother tried to explain the difficulty to her bookkeeper, who never left his invalid chair, and who waited each night for a history of the day's doings, while he made up the day's accounts.

Chapter 4

"Alight with vanished faces,
And Days forever done."

"She tries, Joseph. I believe the girl tries as well as she knows how; but it ain't in her. To begin with, she looks like the queen of Sheba the whole time. I don't know how she does it. She don't wear nothing but a plain black dress and a white collar, but she looks for all the world as though she had dressed for a party. And the boys are afraid of her. She doesn't ever say a pleasant word to them, you know, as Annie does, nor laugh a little, and make them feel at home and satisfied with themselves. She is just as grave as though it was a meeting-house and she was the preacher. They look at one another when she comes down the room, and nudge each other's elbows, and stop their chatter, and act half scared. She'll thin out the room for us as sure as the world, and I'm at my wits' ends."

So was Gertrude. The day she had rebelled and begged to stay in the pantry and cut pie and fill up bread plates,

or go to the kitchen and scrub the floor, or do anything but serve in that terrible dining room, was the day in which Mr. Perkins from the variety store, and the acknowledged wag at his table, had attempted a weak joke with her. The manner in which she had looked at him in reply had made him color to the roots of his hair. It was after that dinner was over that she had fled to her mother with the result which has been described.

The sense of aloneness had never been stronger upon the girl than when she sat that afternoon in the upper back room which she and Annie shared together, and while Annie, downstairs in the kitchen, sang cheerily at her work, went over in detail her woeful present, and contrasted it with her recent beautiful past. She let a few tears struggle through and drop on her folded hands in the hope that their fall might ease the pain of disappointment and humiliation at her heart. What a failure she was! Her poor uncle himself, who had saved and sacrificed for her, would be only disappointed if he could know what she was doing with her life. As the days went by her hope of soon getting a situation as a teacher sank low, and lower. The schools had all opened now. She must wait for another year, at least; and how was she to live for a whole year the life that now hedged her in? It was impossible to make her mother understand how she hated the role that had been planned for her with such evident belief that she was being given the easy place in which she could be "fixed up" all the time. The girl's lip curled as she recalled the phrase which seemed to mean so much to her mother and Annie. She hated the neat dress she wore, since it must be put on for the purpose of

entertaining the "guests," and that, in her mother's mind, meant listening to their puns, and laughing and bantering with such as chose to notice her. If she could serve real men and real women, she told herself, who would know enough not to notice her at all, save in the way of business, she would not mind. But to be stared at, and even complimented to her face, and to be expected to laugh and respond—she loathed it.

Oh, the contrast between this life and the four beautiful years standing in the near background! What would Barbara and Bernice and dear little Naomi think if they could have but a glimpse of her home life? She had been very reticent about home matters. Oh, they knew; she would have scorned to keep silence over the fact that they were poor; that her father was an invalid, and that her mother supported the family by keeping boarders. They knew how strong were her ambitions to make life easier for father and mother by her salary. But there are various ways of keeping boarders. Gertrude had not considered it necessary to enter into details as to her mother's way; nor had she said very much about Annie. Although she had been quite reticent as to her own environment, she knew, or thought she knew, all about the home life of the others. There came to her a pang of something very like jealousy as she called those friends of her past before her and told herself how much they had to make life blessed.

There was Barbara Dennison living among the grand hills of New England, on a farm of wide stretching acres in the quaint old farm-house to which her mother had come as a bride. Every window of the rambling old house,

Gertrude was sure from the photograph she had seen, commanded views that must remind them all the time of the wonders of the eternal city. She believed that life on a farm in daily communion with nature led one closer, of necessity, to nature's God. She believed that it was the most interesting, as well as the most independent way of making one's living. Just to plant, in soil that God's rain and sunshine had prepared, seed, into whose heart He Himself had hidden the life principle, and then to stand aside and see Him work His miracle of growth and development and maturity. People so living could hardly be coarse, she thought, or sordid. It was *very* different from living where one's outlook was rows of tall chimneys or more brick houses, and the sounds that greeted the ear were the endless clatter of dishes and the endless chatter of silly tongues. Barbara had no need even to teach school for a living. Her family wanted her at home, had been looking forward to her coming. The blessed earth furnished them with food enough and to spare. They took no boarders, and could live as they would, and be happy in one another. Barbara was going to teach for the love of it, as people should, and not because she must.

Then there was Bernice, who lived in that lovely town too small to be called a city, yet large enough to have the advantages and escape the discomforts of city life. Gertrude had looked long at the pictured view of their large stone house set in a square of greenery, its very stones seeming to speak to her of dignity and repose.

"Oh, no, we are not rich," Bernice had told them; but there had been complacency in her tones, and she had told of brothers who idolized her, and who considered it

the extreme of folly for her to think of teaching. They had spared her from home for her college course, and that was enough. They would see to it that she and mother had every comfort that money and love could furnish.

As for Naomi, dear little Namie! She lived in California, and her father was chief owner in a gold mine, and heavily interested in a copper mine, and was a bank director, and a railroad magnate, and Gertrude did not know how many other vast interests he represented; but she knew that Naomi, the only child, had more money even now than she knew how to spend, and that she had but to hint at a wish to have it gratified. Would they love her less, those three dear girls, if they could look in upon her in her stuffy little room, dominated everywhere by Annie's belongings, and Annie's tastes, and redolent at that moment of the ham which was being boiled for the next day's needs? Would they care just as much for her, if they knew? Gertrude repelled indignantly the thought that they would not; she was loyal to her friends. Nevertheless, her sensitive face flushed over the knowledge of her surroundings, and for the time she was glad that they were all so far away from her, and living such different lives, that a visit from any of them in the near future was not among the probabilities. She recalled Naomi's cherished scheme that the sound of wedding bells from any quarter should summon them all from far, and smiled in dreary sarcasm over the impossibility of her journeying to California, for instance, to see little Namie married.

"I'll write to her," she said, "that she must try to get me a situation in Washington, or Oregon, and then wait for

her wedding day until I have earned enough to buy me a gown, or I can't come."

And then her mother's voice broke in upon her unprofitable thoughts, and her mother, without the ceremony of knocking, pushed open her door almost in time to see the tears.

"Where are you, Gertie? What you doing? I wonder if you can't go over to Mather's a little while in my place? They've sent for me to come and stay while the doctor is there, and I'm that tuckered out with the canning and the extra things that it doesn't seem as though I could go just yet. Seems as though I'd got to have a little let-up before I pitch into the dinner. All they want is somebody with a head on her shoulders to tend to that doctor. He knows all there is to know in life, that doctor does, and more too, he thinks. They want somebody to obey his orders and take his directions. Mrs. Mather is so scared and worried over the baby that she hasn't got more than half her wits about her, and that Mamie who is helping 'em isn't worth a piece of tissue paper. Do you s'pose you could go for a spell?"

Gertrude had arisen when her mother entered, and had begun to make the necessary changes in her dress, as soon as she understood the nature of her call. She was more than willing to give the needed help. The Mathers had become neighbors of theirs but a few weeks before. They were people in moderate—indeed, now that illness had come upon them—almost in straitened, circumstances, and the little child was very ill. Gertrude had wished more than once during her last year in college, that she had turned her attention and her

training for service in the direction of nursing. She was "a born nurse," the girls at school assured her, and she herself believed that she had native talents in that line of no mean order. To escape from the bustle of dinner-getting for no one ever knew just how many people, would be a distinct relief to Gertrude, even though the escape was by way of a sick room.

She spoke with prompt cheerfulness.

"I'll go, mother, and be glad to do it. Don't you want to lie down on our bed and get a little rest while I'm away?"

"Me lie down in the daytime!" exclaimed the burdened mother. "When I do that, you may send for that lordly doctor to tend me, for I'll be sick, sure. I'll get my rest peeling the apples and sorting over the beans for tomorrow; but I can set down to that, thank goodness." Nevertheless, she liked the touch of consideration in her daughter's words and manner.

"Education didn't spoil her heart, anyhow," she said to herself, as the door closed after Gertrude. The thought had in it a hint that in all other respects the girl had been spoiled; and yet it was tinged with motherly tenderness and pride.

One swift glance Dr. Adams vouchsafed to the strange young woman who stood at his elbow, waiting for orders, then he issued them.

"A dish of boiling water, please. Boiling, remember, not merely hot. Be as expeditious as possible. I shall want ice

water, also, a bowl full. Let me have that phial, Mrs. Mather, please, and the flannel compress I used yesterday."

His manner was courteous and his voice was evenly pitched, but there was a masterful note in it which made Gertrude understand what her mother meant by saying that he "owned the earth." The child was desperately ill; that was evident even to one unskilled in sickness, and the doctor was fighting for a forlorn hope, but he fought well. The frightened mother watched for his words, for his glance, with an eagerness that was pitiful to see, and he did not forget her. He smiled when the child swallowed the drops of liquid he skillfully gave her, and said cheerfully, "She swallows better than she did this morning; that's quite encouraging."

When he received the water at Gertrude's hand, he asked:

"Are you the one who is to help me with this? Are you a trained nurse? No? Then take hold of the sheet at this end, and do just as I tell you."

An anxious as well as a busy half hour followed. When everything had been done that the physician's skill and care could compass, and he was making ready to leave, he turned to Gertrude who had obeyed him as silently as an automaton, and asked:

"Are you to watch here tonight? Can you? Do so, please, if you can; it will be a critical night. Trained service is what is needed, but so far we have been unable to secure it. You will answer, however, for I see you can do as you are told. If you can be here tonight, I will come in later and give you explicit directions."

When Gertrude went home, the house was still redolent of ham, and the odor of onions had been added. She caught her breath as she entered the hall from the outside air, and felt that even the odor of disinfectants was preferable to this. Her mother received her deprecatingly. She had meant to get over there long ago, but one thing after another had hindered. Yes, she had "sort of" promised to set up that night; there didn't seem to be anybody else that the doctor thought would do. She was astonished to the point of bewilderment to find that Gertrude was willing to take her place.

"Are you sure you can keep awake?" she asked. "Annie can't; she goes right off to sleep as soon as she sets down and keeps still. I think the baby is right sick. I ain't had any hope of her from the first; and she may die in the night. Hadn't I better go? It will be hard on you if she does."

Gertrude, looking into the worn face of her burdened mother who had been hard at work since an hour before day, felt a sudden accession of respect for a woman who, freighted with cares and responsibilities of her own, could thus patiently shoulder the burdens of others. She was glad at the thought of being able to take her mother's place, thus giving her the night's rest that she needed.

Two days afterward, while Gertrude was piling generous slices of home-made bread on the plates for the midday meal, Annie dashed in from the dining room, importance on her face, and her voice louder than usual.

"Mother! Don't you think that swell doctor has come here for his lunch; he has taken a seat at that middle table on the left, and he looks as though he meant to

order turkey and lobster salad. Gert, you'll have to go right in and wait on him; just looking at him scares me, he's so awful swell!"

"Dear me!" said the mother, in a flurry of satisfaction. "I hope he'll get what he likes. If them kind of folks would come oftener, we could afford to raise on our prices. Gertie, you'll see to him and fix him up nice, won't you? That's a good girl." But Gertrude was unaccountably irritated, and spoke in her haughtiest tone.

"I shall treat him exactly as I do others, of course."

The color flamed into her face as she spoke, and the knowledge of this increased her annoyance. For a night and day she had served under Dr. Adams's orders, obeying them with punctilious care, but to serve him to luncheon in her mother's house for pay, was quite another matter. She shrank from the ordeal, and was ashamed that she did so. But he had seated himself at a table which she had undertaken to serve; so without more words she went to her task.

Dr. Adams did not so much as look up. He seemed to be absorbed in a letter, and gave his order mechanically, pausing in the midst of it with his mind evidently on the page before him. After waiting a reasonable time, Gertrude felt compelled to recall him to the business of the hour by a question. Then he gave her a glance of surprised inquiry, and immediately claimed a common interest.

"Why, good morning! The child is distinctly better; I may almost say past the danger line."

"I am glad," said Gertrude, putting into her voice the joy she felt. It was good to have this battle with a common

enemy end in unexpected victory. Others besides her mother had been hopeless.

"Yes," he said genially, "so am I. That poor little mother needs her baby. She has many burdens. It was good in you to give her the timely and skilful help that you did; she owes much to you."

Gertrude's sensitive face flushed, but she made haste to explain.

"I merely took my mother's place for a little while. I know nothing of nursing. Will you have coffee, Dr. Adams?"

"One wouldn't have suspected it by the way you handled the case. I should not care for better help than you gave me. No coffee, thank you; cold water, please."

Behind the glass doors Annie was watching and giggling. "What an age you were taking his order!" she began. "And he talked all the while! I guess he came here in search of you instead of lunch. Say, Ma, look at her cheeks."

It made Gertrude more angry still to know that they flamed. This was intolerable.

"I wish you wouldn't be coarse, at least." The words seemed to say themselves; she had not meant to make them audible.

"Hoity toity!" said the mother, instantly jealous for her younger daughter. "Annie didn't mean any harm. Don't you go to putting on too many airs, even if you have caught a beau. You had just as many as her and me could stan' before."

Annie laughed good-naturedly.

"Never mind, Ma," she said. "We ain't college educated, you and me, and I s'pose we do bother her some. I don't mind, Gert, I ain't thin skinned."

This last was in reply to Gertrude's low-toned "I beg your pardon, Annie." At that moment the college-bred girl felt distinctly inferior to her sister. She, under provocation, had been able to keep her temper.

Chapter 5

"Let's love a season,
But let that season be only spring."

The lawn looked like a flower garden. Its carpet of thick, velvety grass was dotted over with bright color: pinks and blues, and lavender and white, with here and there a touch of vivid yellow. The girls were out in summer glory.

Conspicuous among them, distinctly the queen of the hour in the eyes of more than her fond mother, was Bernice Halsted.

It had been a tennis, and was now a garden party. The young women, flushed from exercise, were reclining on cushions and gay-colored afghans in graceful pretence of fatigue, and being served to ices and wafers by attentive young men. Mrs. Halsted from a shaded window that overlooked the scene and protected her from view watched with appreciative eyes every movement of her daughter's. How pretty she was, and how graceful! That last year at school had added just the touch of womanliness that the child had needed. It made her more

Being served to ices and wafers

fascinating than ever, while it suggested to all her acquaintances that she was not any longer a child to be played with, but had grown up. The young men seemed to realize it. They hovered about her. They served the guests courteously enough, but they were eager to serve the young hostess. Mrs. Halsted watched especially "that artist youth," as she called young Davenport, who, from being a boy in their midst, had recently returned from a four years' stay in Europe, an artist "of decided talent," the local newspapers said when they heralded his coming.

Mrs. Halsted, as she watched his marked attentions to her daughter, allowed her face, shielded as it was by the network of climbing vines, to gather in a frown of disapproval. Frank Davenport might be well enough; he came of good family, and had always been respected in the community. But he was poor, and would, of course, remain so. "A struggling artist," that was the qualifying word always used in such connection. The phrase, "a struggling young artist," had a certain distinction of its own, but how would it sound when that ugly word "old" took the place of "young," and the struggle continued? Mrs. Halsted knew that such was the rule, and that the exceptions were not many.

She was not mercenary. She often expressed herself as "truly thankful" that she cared very little about money. So that they had enough to make them comfortable it was all she would ask. It is true that her ideas of what was required to make one comfortable would have differed from many. Neither was she a matchmaker. Heaven knew that the last thing she desired in this world was to give up Bernice, now that she had her again after a

sacrifice stretching through four years. But, girls married generally, of course. It seemed to be a common lot; and since Bernice would in all probability be like the rest, it was certainly a matter of ordinary common sense to watch her associates and choose her friends with discrimination. And this careful mother, as she watched the groups in the garden, almost settled it that her visiting list was already quite long enough and need not be enlarged to take in the name of Frank Davenport's mother. That good woman, though eminently respectable, had never been classed among those who received and paid formal calls; why should she be now that her son had returned? George Wilbur had probably brought the young man with him today, without any formal invitation. George was given to taking liberties with her. Probably he felt that he had a right to do so, his friendship with them being of such long standing. She did not pause to reflect that she had known Frank Davenport even longer; that would not have been to the point.

Of all the young men who had moved about her spacious grounds that afternoon Mrs. Halsted knew that George Wilbur was her favorite. The others were well enough; in fact, unexceptionable, of course, as became her daughter's friends. But George was—there was really nothing left to be desired for George. Most of the other young men had their way to make in the world. For a number of them the way ahead, it is true, looked sufficiently prosperous. They were established in good positions or professions, with every prospect of advancement before them. If one excepted Frank Davenport, there really was not another who need

awaken anxiety on that ground. But George's place in the world had already been made by his father. George had no need to lift his ringer unless he chose; his father's millions were sure to become his, eventually, and were lavished freely upon him now. It spoke volumes for the character of the young man, she thought, that he chose to be a lawyer; it proved that he had no intention of living the life of an idler.

George and Bernice had been intimate friends from their very childhood. Since he had grown to manhood it was quite true that George had many intimate friends among the ladies. He did not hesitate to say that he enjoyed the ladies' society, and found them vastly more interesting than men. Certainly with none had he been more intimate than with Bernice. The mother, behind her screening vines, watched the two, and went reflectively over the years. Was there a touch of difference in his manner to her this afternoon? Did he, too, see plainly, that when Bernice had been last at home she had been one of "the girls," and that now she had blossomed into young womanhood? He was certainly watching young Davenport with eyes that did not express a high opinion of that rising artist. She wondered if he felt that he had been foolish in bringing the large-eyed youth into paradise with him that afternoon? It would be curious and interesting if George should really be growing a trifle jealous. But it wouldn't do for Bernice to be careless. He was too popular a man, and too much given to having his will, to brook interference.

The garden party was breaking up. One after another of the bright bits of color flitted away with black-coated

attendants. One or two carriages rolled up and carried away others. Young Davenport lingered as long as he could, until someone called to take him reluctantly to another engagement. At last, to Mrs. Halsted's quiet satisfaction, there were left on the lawn only Bernice and George Wilbur. He had his hat in his hand and might be making his adieux. She waited until the last other guest was out of sight, then parted the vines and glanced out.

"Daughter, will not some of your friends stay to dinner with us? I think I might have my share of this garden party. Why, have they all gone?"

"No, mother; there is one tardy guest who hears your hospitable intent."

"And he was waiting in the hope of getting an invitation to stay," said the young man, quickly. "I am the sole representative, Mrs. Halsted. Will I do, or is so insignificant a part of the brilliant scene worse than nothing?"

Mrs. Halsted laughed indulgently.

"It is you, is it, George? Stay to dinner, by all means. I am sorry I was so tardy with my invitation that there are no others to keep you company. But Bernice and I evidently need you. The train is in, and none of my boys have come. They told me they feared being detained in town until late. If you do not take pity on us, Bernice and I will be forced to a tete-a-tete dinner."

He needed no urging, he assured her; and he put aside his hat and arranged an afghan and five sofa pillows under the great oak with such evident alacrity that the mother's heart was glad. She pushed open the casement and stepped out on the lawn to enjoy a nearer view of her

daughter. Mrs. Halsted was very fond of her three grown sons, but she could not help being a trifle glad that they were detained late in town that evening. There was something very cozy and interesting in sitting down to a table laid for three, with George Wilbur at her right and her beautiful daughter opposite her. Mr. Wilbur's table manners were like all things about him—perfect. He did the honors which fell to him with more ease and grace than many hosts can compass. Mrs. Halsted's satisfaction in the occasion was so manifest that she felt as though it demanded some explanation.

"You do not know what it is to me to have her again," she said, turning her beaming glance from daughter to guest.

"Do I not? I know what it is to the rest of us who have been shut away from the light of her countenance for — how long is it? Two years?"

"Just nine months and two days," said Bernice, with smiling composure.

"Is that possible? I will appeal to your mother to know if it is not almost two years since we had our last lawn party together."

"It is only nine months," said Mrs. Halsted. "I know by the calendar. I have the date marked on it; but I agree with you that it seems more like two years. Children have no idea what their absence means to their mothers, and I have but the one daughter."

"I know something about it," the guest said heartily. "It is wonderful how mothers reach out after their children, even when the child is nothing but a son. In his mother's eyes he is beyond rubies. I am my mother's only son, you

know. But Bernice has no idea of the large space that she leaves desolate. I thought of that on Sunday. To hear her voice again in the music is something that she cannot appreciate. If it were possible for her to come invisibly to this town, at the same time that she is absent in body, she would have some conception of what we have been sacrificing through these years. But, do you know, I am afraid she doesn't care. I really fear, Mrs. Halsted, that she is growing hard-hearted. If this whole town were in mourning for her, so that she could have the society of those three friends of whom I am distinctly jealous, I don't think she would give us a thought."

Bernice laughed easily, albeit there was a heightened color on her face.

"I care very little for the town," she said, "as compared with my dear girls." And she felt that she was speaking truth. So long as George Wilbur made himself merely one of her acquaintances, and spoke of them in masses, she might affirm that her school friends were dearer to her than any others.

"There! What did I tell you?" he said triumphantly. "Mrs. Halsted, I hope you will not aid and abet your daughter's scheme to get those three young women to this part of the world. I feel that I shall disapprove of them all."

"I am afraid Barbara and Gertrude are hopeless," said Bernice. "They have home duties that I fancy will hold them, but little Naomi flits about wherever she chooses. I should not be surprised to see her at any time. I should like to have you know her," she added, with sudden earnestness, and she looked thoughtfully at the face of

their guest, and tried to fancy what effect little Naomi's dainty beauty and winsome ways would have on him. There was a sudden thrill in her heart that was almost like jealousy. Would she be afraid to have those two meet? But she answered her thought in instant scorn. Afraid! Of what? If there was a woman living for whom he could care more than for her, did she want his love? He might be the one man on earth for whom she could ever care very much—she was afraid he was—but unless he were equally sure of himself, she wanted none of him.

He was prompt to reply.

"I haven't the least desire to know her. What a disagreeable name she has, by the way. 'Naomi.' I once had an old aunt who bore that name, and it fitted her well; she was fully as lugubrious as it sounds."

"There is nothing lugubrious about my Naomi," said Bernice, with emphasis. "She is charming, and everybody who comes in contact with her feels the charm. Mamma, will you write and invite her to spend the winter with us, so that George can see for himself how lovely she is?"

"Don't, please," said Mr. Wilbur. "I am entirely satisfied with the prospects of my winter as it opens before me. I want no other charm than I already have, and I have a feeling that this Naomi would be distinctly in the way."

"That is a Bible name," said Mrs. Halsted. "Why didn't they call her 'Mara,' I wonder? That is prettier."

"And that would have relieved her of the alliteration," Mr. Wilbur added. "Isn't she the one whose last name is Newland? Naomi Newland—think of it! I detest alliterations."

"'Mara' wouldn't have fitted her," said Bernice. "Doesn't it mean bitterness or trouble, or something like that? No shadow of trouble ought to touch her bright nature; we were always planning happiness for Naomi; she seems made for it."

"Then I predict that she will wade through seas of trouble," George Wilbur said confidently. "She will marry some wretch, probably. These butterfly creatures made for sunshine always get their wings injured early."

"Naomi is no butterfly," said Bernice, half indignantly. "And I don't believe the wretch lives who is mean enough to cause her an hour of unnecessary sorrow. Wait until you know her, and you will understand."

He did not want to know her, he protested. He already knew ladies enough to keep him in a constant state of distraction. He returned to the subject when they were left together on the piazza, while Mrs. Halsted received a caller. He asked many questions about her friend, with the air of one who thought he was in this way gratifying his companion. Suddenly he broke in on one of her replies.

"Do you realize, Bernice, the reason why I do not care to know her, or any other young woman? It is because I am more than satisfied with one. I wonder if you know her name? If you had a spark of vanity in your composition, you would have guessed it long ago. Don't you really know, dear girl, the name of the one woman in the world for me?"

Chapter 6

"We know not what we do when we speak words."

Gertrude Fenton's somewhat romantic ideas as to farm life and its elevating tendencies would have received a set-back could she have shared her friend Barbara Dennison's home for a few weeks. Mr. Dennison's acres were far-stretching enough, and were under a high degree of cultivation. The barns and outhouses were ample, and the stock generally was all that could be desired. But the rambling old house, with all its picturesqueness and its many charming views of river and hill and valley, could have been improved in numberless ways. It had been built when people's ideas of comfort differed materially from the present ones, and it had not kept up, as the stables had, for instance, with the march of improvement. There was running water for the dairy, but for the kitchen it had to be pumped laboriously in the old-fashioned way. This one item will serve as an illustration of many others.

Mr. Dennison represented in his make-up that curious mixture of narrowness and broadness which a certain kind of farm life often develops. He mingled with men and affairs sufficiently to have advanced ideas as to farming, and intelligent views with regard to many questions of the day. In public he was spoken of as a prosperous man and a worthy citizen, with reasonably progressive ideas. In his home life he had stayed narrow. The small economies which necessity had pressed upon his youth had become habits by the time he had prospered so well that he might have given them up. He still considered it wasteful to use cream freely at the family table; even milk, at certain seasons, should be dealt out sparingly. When his wife's excellent butter brought forty cents a pound in the market, it seemed to this man wanton extravagance to save many pounds of it for home use. It was the same with eggs when prices were high; and as for fruits, it was only the unmarketable that he believed ought ever to appear on the home table.

By a like process of reasoning it seemed to him folly to pay out money for hired help in the kitchen, when he had two grown daughters to share the work with his capable wife. When Barbara went away to school, there was the more need for economy, with heavy school bills coming in twice a year. Moreover, there was, of course, less work to be done, with one member of the family away. So "mother" and the older daughter, Elinor, shouldered the burdens between them, and did not complain; at least the mother did not, for the habits of a lifetime were upon her.

This family lived much as their farmer neighbors about them did, without regard to the significant fact that there

were no such highly cultivated fields and blooded stock and assured bank accounts connected with any other farms in the neighborhood. Mr. Dennison's curious mixture of character showed plainly in his ideas about education. He mingled with the outside world sufficiently, and read enough in general to be a reasonable believer in the higher education not only of men, but of women, if they wanted it.

"I should never oblige a boy of mine to go to college," he was fond of explaining; "but if he really wanted to go, and had brains enough for it, I would open the way; and I don't know why I shouldn't do the same by my girls, since I haven't any boys." When Barbara early showed not only the brains, but an intense desire for a college course, her father was proud of her, and bravely planned for the necessary expenditures. Since the expense seemed to him very great, he was heartily glad that his daughter Elinor's ambitions did not lie in that direction, and that she was quite content with such education as was to be had in the common school. He had impressed it earnestly upon Barbara that she would be having really more than her share during those royal four years, and that she must come back prepared to make up for it. A college education ought to command a good salary as a teacher. They paid forty dollars a month in the upper district, and the young woman who taught there wasn't college bred either. Mr. Dennison's farm education had led him to feel that forty dollars, in what he was pleased to call "hard money," meant a great deal. Counted in stock or in land it was a mere nothing.

To such a home Barbara returned from her college life; and because of the pressure that she felt, compelling her to get to work as soon as possible, she had, without waiting for better opportunities, accepted the vacant school in their own district, which had heretofore been taught by a man, and which paid fifty dollars a month. She was to be boarded at home for three dollars a week, and to be carried to and from the school each day.

To Mr. Dennison's mind this was a very liberal offer, and viewed from some standpoints it was. The three dollars a week rather more than paid the wages of the stout girl who was hired to take Barbara's place in the farm kitchen; for "mother" was ailing, and didn't seem able to get along any longer without more help. Barbara's indignation over the fact that her small worn mother, who had overworked all her life, was compelled in these days to work at all, was growing with her years and her powerlessness to change the conditions. But for one obstacle she knew that she would have refused the school with its munificent salary and stayed in the kitchen, putting her trained mind to the problem of making the day's toil easier. She believed that she could have influenced her mother and managed her father so that, in time, the old kitchen stove would be exchanged for a modern range, and the whole house would be piped to bring them abundant water from the excellent spring which now supplied the cattle, and that a dozen other much-needed modern improvements would be a question of short time. The obstacle was Elinor.

Barbara, with her logical mind and pleasant ways, might manage her mother and coax her father, but she

could neither coax nor manage Elinor. That young woman, who was in her twenty-seventh year, had a mind of her own, and a sharp tongue with which to express it; and her ways were never Barbara's ways. It may almost be said that she did not believe in Barbara. In her secret soul she resented the idea of her sister's superior education as being in some sense a reflection upon herself, although she had by no means desired further opportunities in that line. She had a way of doing everything in the kitchen and out of it in exact opposition to Barbara's ways. She was given to tossing her head and sneering at any opinions put forth by Barbara with regard to practical life, and assuring her that such ideas belonged in books, and wouldn't apply elsewhere.

Nor were household matters the only things in which they differed. Elinor was popular in a way in the society that she had gathered about her, and her manner of entertaining guests was not always in accordance with Barbara's ideas of propriety. These ideas were invariably sneered at as "educated whims." The adverse atmosphere of the home had been discovered by Barbara during her long vacations, and but for certain reasons she would have tried to secure a school in another district, that she might board away from home. Two objections offered themselves to this course. In the first place, she longed to try if she could not put a little more brightness into the life of her over-wearied and evidently fading mother, whom they were all so used to seeing at work, that none of them, least of all the father, had realized that she had worked too hard. The father and Elinor did not realize it now, but Barbara's eyes were open; she thought she saw

ways in which, despite Elinor's antagonism, she could be helpful. The other reason was that another district would have meant another church, and Barbara wanted, more than she wanted anything else in life, to attend the home church. So, failing in finding at once a better opening elsewhere, she had withdrawn her application, and given up a hopeful outlook for the near future, to take charge of the school in the home district.

"There!" said Elinor Dennison one evening as the family were rising from the supper table. "Mr. Carpenter is tying his horse at the gate; that is what I expected now. Twice in one week; it begins to seem natural, though he came every day last summer. Wasn't it every day, Barbara? We had no trouble in keeping count of his calls after you left, I know. I'm going to congratulate him on having discovered again that we are living in this neighborhood."

It was fortunate that the guest was at the door and there was no time for reply, else Barbara, in her haste and annoyance, might have said words needing repentance. As it was, the fear as to what her outspoken sister might say, and the consciousness that she was being closely watched, made Barbara's greeting extremely formal, and kept her constrained and unnatural during the visit. She was taken to task for it as soon as the guest had gone his way.

"I shouldn't think a college-bred young lady need be so terribly embarrassed over having a call from a man—that would be enough for an ignorant country girl like me. You blushed till your face looked like a peony, and you were as stiff as though you had been put into splints and were

afraid to bend. Didn't you notice, mother, how absurd she was? I shouldn't want to let a man know that I thought so much of him."

The flash in Barbara's eyes led her usually quiet mother to speak with unwonted spirit.

"Nonsense, Elinor! Why do you want to nag at Barbara? I didn't notice that she acted any different from usual. Of course Mr. Carpenter will come oftener now that she has got home. She takes an interest in the Sunday school, and the young people, and is ready to help; and that, you know, you never would do."

"No," said Elinor, "I haven't Barbara's reasons for being devoted to church work. For my part, I don't see what she finds in Mr. Carpenter to admire so much; but she is quite welcome to him, he is too proper for me."

This is illustrative of Elinor Dennison's method of torture. As the days passed, Barbara often found it nothing less than torture. The young pastor, who was an enthusiast in his work, and who had immediately involved Barbara in scores of plans for the development of his young people, found reasons so evident for frequently consulting with her that they need not have been named "excuses," as Elinor called them. Some of the many schemes would have heartily included Elinor, and more than one effort was made to enlist her, but she held aloof from all church work with tart dignity, assuring the pastor that she was not good enough to "pose" in that line, and contenting herself with being always on the alert to "tease" Barbara. That was what their father called it, and he saw in it only the kind of "fun" which was prevalent in the neighborhood. Neither father nor mother had any

conception of the suffering that their younger daughter was enduring at her sister's hands. For that matter, it may also be admitted that Elinor herself did not understand what she was doing.

For the most part Barbara suffered in silence. First, because she came to realize that whatever she might say was capable of being twisted in a way to afford additional fuel for her sister's "fun." The second reason for forbearance—Barbara acknowledged with humiliation that it was second—grew out of her honest effort to control her naturally sarcastic tongue and to establish more sisterly relations between Elinor and herself.

However, life was by no means all discomfort to her. School duties, it is true, were onerous, and before the winter was well under way, she became certain that she should fully earn even the fifty dollars a month that seemed so large a sum to the board of trustees. But, as the weeks passed, and she began to get control of the turbulent element in the schoolroom, and to arouse in some of her scholars an interest in and enthusiasm for their studies to which they had heretofore been strangers, the work grew fascinating—grew so absorbing that she found herself saying one day to that inner self of hers with whom she often talked: "I believe I was designed for a teacher. What if, after all, I ought to make it my life work?"

She was instantly glad that Elinor's keen eyes were not there to note the flush which this thought brought to her face. What did that phrase "after all" cover? But Barbara was growing more frank with herself. It began to seem reasonable to her that the minister, who was deeply

interested in her pupils, and who almost daily expressed his joy in the thought that she was their teacher, should have some interest in her, for her own sake. It was true that he never called either at the school-house or the farm-house without having in mind some plan connected with their work together that he was eager to discuss, but that was as it should be. She wanted nothing better of life than to be able to work with and for him in his chosen field. Was there anything better in the world than that? By degrees, as her school and church duties multiplied, and her friendship with Mr. Carpenter grew, Elinor's tongue hurt her sister less and less. Even the broad hints, that it was high time for details, did not stab Barbara as she had once supposed such talk must.

When Elinor said, "For my part, I think it would be much more sensible for him to say out and out that he wanted to marry you, and set the day, than it is to set all the tongues in the congregation to talking, with nothing definite to talk about," she was able to reply with a semblance of indifference:

"I should think Mr. Carpenter gave his congregation abundance to talk about! And so much to attend to that one would think they would have no time for idle gossip. He came last night to plan the new committee for Christmas. I wish you would let us put you on that committee, Elinor; you could be such a help to us. You do just the kind of work needed in it better than anyone else in the congregation."

"Thank you for nothing!" said Elinor with unusual brusqueness. "When you are actually the pastor's wife will be quite time enough for you to go around hunting

humdrum niches for your commonplace members to fit into. You can remember then what I tell you now: that I decline to be fitted in anywhere; and that I am not one bit hoodwinked by all this parade of church work and school interests. I should think more of him, and of you too, if you would do your courting in a common-sense way like other people, without everlastingly inventing excuses for it."

Chapter 7

"I, too, was sorely hurt this day,
But no one knows."

It became evident that there were others in Mr. Carpenter's congregation who thought as Elinor Dennison did. There came an evening when Mrs. Barbour, with whom the minister boarded, spoke her mind. Her opportunity was a rare one. Mr. Carpenter was late, so late that the other boarders had gone their ways, and Mrs. Barbour served the tardy one with her own hands, and then sat down to enjoy this unusual chance while he ate his supper. She had been nerved for the occasion by a conversation indulged in at the Ladies' Aid that afternoon. As a matter of fact, she had promised to secure certain much desired information the very first chance she had. So she began without circumlocution.

"Well, Mr. Carpenter, when is it to be? I think you might let us ladies know a good while beforehand, because—I don't mind telling you there's a good many

little things we would like to do for your comfort, and hers too, if you give us time enough."

Mr. Carpenter's face flushed slightly as he looked his astonishment for a moment, but he spoke in his usual genial manner: "That sounds friendly and pleasant, Mrs. Barbour, though mysterious. You leave me quite in the dark as to the 'it' that I am supposed to be guarding in secret. Won't you speak plainly?"

"Oh, well, now! Mr. Carpenter, of course you know just as well as I do that I'm talking about your getting married. Even though you haven't seen fit to confide in any of us, we can't help having eyes in our heads. It is plain enough, I'm sure, that sometime or other, and before very long, I should say, you mean to get married. What we were thinking was that it seemed kind of foolish to keep the date a secret any longer. There isn't anything else about it that is secret, and if you once spoke out, you and she wouldn't have to keep busy inventing excuses for being together."

The sentence closed with a little half-apologetic laugh, but the minister's face was grave, and the flush had faded from it. Indeed, Mrs. Barbour saw with uneasiness that it had grown pale and troubled. He had a bit of cold chicken on his fork and he held it poised, and looked at Mrs. Barbour like a man who had been startled out of a calm.

"Perhaps you are right," he said at last. "I may not have made my private affairs as plain to the congregation in general as would have been wise. I will consider your advice, Mrs. Barbour. Thank you." He left the chicken uneaten, drained his glass of milk, and arose from the table, declining her eager offer to make him a bit of nice

toast if he didn't feel like eating the bread, and to bring two other kinds of cake if he didn't want that on the table.

"He acted real queer," Mrs. Barbour explained to one of the Ladies' Aid, who dropped in to see her a little later. "I was all taken aback. If he had told me I was meddling with what didn't concern me, I believe I should feel better than I do now. He wasn't disagreeable a bit, but he seemed startled, and kind of hurt. I told Joel that he acted for all the world like a boy who had been surprised into something that he didn't mean to do."

"He didn't mean folks should know about it, not till he got ready to tell 'em," explained her neighbor. "Them kind of make-believe frank folks are always close mouthed about their own affairs."

"But good land!" said Mrs. Barbour, "what did the man expect? Hasn't he been running there steady ever since she got home? He's talking about selling his horse to the milkman and getting a new one. Joel heard that he wanted a carriage horse. That sounds like getting ready for two, doesn't it? What should he want of a carriage, a man all alone, and he so fond of horseback riding? I told the milkman if he bought the minister's horse there would be two places where he could be trusted to deliver milk all by himself: the Dennison farm, and the schoolhouse in that district. He's gone there this minute, I guess; he saddled his horse within half an hour of the supper that he didn't eat, and galloped off in that direction. I s'pose he'll go and tell her all I said, and she'll think I'm a meddlesome old woman. I wish I had held my tongue."

Did the minister wish so? He did not go directly to the Dennison farm; instead, he took the roughest road he could find and galloped hard and fast, paying no attention to the suggestions of his horse that he should stop at certain places for calls. It was eight o'clock when a horse who bore the marks of having been ridden hard succeeded in doing what he thought was the only sensible thing done that evening; namely, stopping before a familiar post at the Dennison gateway.

There was a party in the neighborhood to which Mr. Carpenter knew that Barbara had declined and Elinor accepted an invitation. So, although he had made no engagement with her for the evening, he hoped to find Barbara alone. Elinor's fondness for neighborhood evening gatherings had given him much satisfaction thus far in enabling him to talk over with Barbara their many plans for church work, without being trammeled by her sister's mocking tongue. Mr. Dennison was an early riser and a hard worker, and he and his wife liked to retire early. The minister, as he had thought of all these details during his ride that evening, had set his lips once or twice and told himself that he had been a fool.

The stout girl who had been installed in the kitchen in Barbara's stead was on her way upstairs to bed when Mr. Carpenter's ring intercepted her. She smiled broadly on him, and without waiting for question, said, "She's home; she's in the settin' room all alone. Walk right in." Something in her tone made the color flame for the second time that evening into the minister's sensitive face.

"I am glad to find you alone," he said abruptly, breaking off from one of the commonplaces he had been trying to say. "I have been hoping on the way out that I should, because there is something I want to tell you. Something that I have looked forward to telling you, when a convenient hour should come. I should like to tell it now. May I?" The book that Barbara still held in her lap trembled visibly, and there was a look in her eyes that might have troubled the minister had he seen it. He did not wait for her murmured word that she would be glad to hear whatever he had to tell, but made a dash into the center of things.

"You may wonder that I have not told you before, since we have been so intimately associated in church work. I have had the story almost on my lips a number of times, but something else would intervene."

There came to Barbara a swift intuition of what Elinor would say could she hear the manner in which this young man was wooing her sister. She could almost hear Elinor's sneer that he was far too certain of his answer to suit her tastes; but their tastes were different, and this was something which Elinor would never hear.

The minister hurried on.

"First, I want to show you a picture." He drew a small photograph from his breast pocket. "It is a shadow, and not at all a satisfactory shadow, of a face which is dearer to me than any other." Could he be speaking of his mother? Barbara reached for the picture and studied the face. It was that of a woman, young and beautiful. The dress was modern; it could hardly be a picture of his

mother in her youth. Barbara felt herself to be trembling, and felt an instinct which made her want to hide the fact.

"It is a beautiful face," she said, and she struggled to speak in her usual tone.

"Does it impress you so? What else do you see in the face? It belongs to one who is beautiful in character as well as in feature. It is a joy to me to believe that you will know and love her one of these days."

A sudden light glowed in Barbara's face, and a strange stricture at her heart gave way.

It is his sister, she told herself eagerly. That is why the face looks familiar to me; it resembles him. It is his only sister, and he means to make a home for her some day.

"I should think it would be easy to love her," she said aloud, and the minister noted the sweetness of her voice.

"I am sure you will find it so," he said heartily. "You are my first confidante, Barbara. I have no home friends to talk to, you know."

"Will you tell me all about her?" said Barbara, fullest sympathy in her voice.

He laughed genially. "It might not be safe to start me with such a promise; the pleasure of talking about her to an appreciative listener will be very great. We have been engaged for nearly three years, and yet it may be years before we can be married. She is held at home by the hopeless invalidism of a mother, who cannot be moved, and from whom she cannot be separated. So my future, so far as setting up a home of my own is concerned, is very uncertain. This is why I thought it best to be silent to the church about my affairs. There is a great deal that one does not care to share with a congregation. But I felt

that I would like to tell my story to you, and claim a share of your friendship for my Lilian."

Barbara said the correct words. In thinking it over long afterward she felt sure that she must have done so, though what she said could never be recalled. He was evidently satisfied with her sympathy, for he stayed longer than usual, and talked freely about the woman of his choice. She could not imagine, he told her with one of his winsome smiles, how delightful it was to sit talking with her of Lilian. He had fancied himself doing it, and yet had hesitated lest he might be claiming too much in expecting her to be interested in a stranger merely for his sake He went away in the best of spirits; to talk about Lilian to her, he said, was the next best thing to a visit with Lilian herself. He should go home now and write to her what an evening they had had, and what a friend was awaiting her. Oh, he had told her often about his good right hand in the church, and about what a helper she was to his girls and his boys in the school; but now a special interest would attach to it all, because *she* had been admitted into the circle.

He gave Barbara's hand a cordial clasp, holding it a second longer than usual as he said:

"Good friend, you have met my confidences tonight just as I felt sure you would, and I thank you. You cannot know how much I thank you."

When he was well away from the house, he drew rein and let Selim walk a few paces while he bared his head to the night, and said a few grateful words to God for having saved him from the humiliations that had opened before him as possibilities but an hour or two before. If that

well-intentioned but hopelessly coarse woman had had a shadow of truth on which to base her words, he felt that he could never have looked into Lilian's eyes again without a blush of shame. He, by his heedlessness, to have implanted false ideas and awakened false hopes in the mind of any woman, worst of all such a noble woman as Barbara Dennison was! Could he have borne the society of himself had such been the case? Thank God, there was nothing like it. How rich and full her voice had been, how free from the suspicion of petty jealousies when she said, "It would be easy to love her."

The minister was jubilant. He had been saved from a great sorrow and shame. Not by his own good sense, for he must have been culpably careless, else that woman who was honest and good-intentioned, if she was coarse, would never have dared to speak such words to him. It was a merciful preservation. His mind and heart had been so filled with Lilian that he had never thought, not once, of gossip. It must be a lesson to him in the future. Perhaps the gossips had been busy for weeks; yet, if they were going to talk, why had it not been about Lilian? Had not a thick letter found its way, with the regularity of the sunrise, twice each week to the village post-office, bearing the same feminine name? And then he laughed to think how he had unwittingly outwitted the talkers. It was the name which had misled them. "Miss Lilian Carpenter," his own name; Lilian was a cousin so far removed that it seems even he had forgotten it, and the people evidently believed her to be his sister.

"I must be posing as a devoted brother," he said, and he laughed joyously.

Barbara sat quite still in the chair to which she had returned when the door closed after her caller—sat there motionless for a space of time that she did not reckon by the clock.

"We count time by heart throbs." The trite quotation, which Gertrude had been fond of getting often when she felt melodramatic, persisted in repeating itself to Barbara's dazed brain. Her hands were dropped in her lap, not clasped, and there was no tenseness in their position. There were no tears shed. She sometimes cried, like other women; but, with her, tears were always about comparatively trivial matters that would bear being brought to the surface. She had no tears for this experience. But there was no bitterness in it to shadow her face with hard lines. Ellis Carpenter had not disappointed her. He was a true, strong man; he was all that she had believed him to be; he was more. He held shrined in his heart of hearts one who was young and lovely and loving, from whom hard duty had separated him and might separate him for weary years to come. Yet he was brave and bright, and had been able to throw himself heart and soul into his work with such an abandonment of self that he had deceived even her into thinking that—

She would finish no such sentence; she left it abruptly. She was a good woman with a strong, true heart. In her pain—and there was pain—in her humiliation—and for a

time there was humiliation—there was also a touch of comfort. She had not to reconstruct her friendships. Her model of true manhood had not fallen, had not even been marred; in nothing was her nobility of soul more plainly revealed than in the fact that this gave her comfort at once.

There was the sound of feet crunching the snow, and the chatter of tongues in gay good nights, and Elinor rushed in upon her from the outside world.

"Mercy! How cold it is! I am half frozen, and you have sat here mooning and let the fire go out. Mr. Carpenter has been here as usual, I suppose? I saw Selim's tracks at the gate; that's the reason you hadn't brains for even the fire. Well, I do hope you settled things, and set the day."

"I am sorry I let the fire get down," said Barbara, rising. "I did not realize that it was cold. I will see if there isn't fire enough in the kitchen to warm your feet."

"Oh, never mind my feet; answer my question. I am just worn out trying to evade the questions hinted at me about you and Mr. Carpenter. The girls think I know all about it, of course, and won't tell. I must say I think I am being treated meanly. Why can't you be honest with me, at least? If it has got to be such an awful secret, I'll keep it fully as well as I do now, perhaps better."

Barbara turned back from the door out of which she was intending to slip, and spoke steadily:

"Elinor, I will be honest with you once for all. I am never going to be married to Mr. Carpenter nor to any other person."

"Goodness!" said Elinor. "You don't tell me you have refused him, after all? Well, of all the flirts!"

Chapter 8

"I meant to have but common needs,
Such as content, and heaven."

Midwinter everywhere. What had happened on this particular morning in Barbara Dennison's home was announced in the parlance of the farm by the succinct and startling statement that the pump had frozen! Mrs. Dennison, with an old shawl pinned over her gray head, her teeth chattering with the cold, struggled with the icy pump handle while her daughter Elinor stood wrathfully by, feeding its mouth with dippers full of boiling water, and expressing her mind about pumps in general and that one in particular.

At the Fenton boarding-house, which was several hundred miles removed from the Dennison farm, the same general conditions of weather prevailed. The boarders rushed in from the biting outside air, half hidden in heavy overcoats and mufflers, and conversation at the tables was sure to begin with:

"Well, is this cold enough for you?" or, "I tell you what, this is weather!" or some other of the original and brilliant remarks that are kept in stock for such occasions. The snow lay thick on the ground in both these regions, and Elinor Dennison and Annie Fenton, all unknown to each other, bemoaned the fact that with such "splendid sleighing" it was too cold and blustery to enjoy it.

In Bernice Halsted's home the programme was varied by rain and slush and slipperiness.

"It is an awfully treacherous world," George Wilbur told them as he divested himself of outside wraps. "I all but lost my footing several times between here and the corner. If I had been on skates, I could have done better. But there is a sleety rain falling at this minute which, in time, will spoil even the skating. Beastly climate this! I believe I shall try another one before I'm many years older. How would you like to go a good deal farther west, Bernice? Far enough to reach civilized weather?"

Could they have seen Naomi at that moment, they would have been sure that she had accomplished it. Midwinter still, by the calendar, yet earth and air were combining to make for the vision and the senses a scene fair enough for another world than this. Naomi, dressed in white, as was her pleasure at all seasons of the year, stood bathed in sunlight, with a spray of yellow roses in her belt, and a mass of blooms, just gathered, in her arms. She was thinking at the moment of the snows and frosts and stormy winds which had been described to her in recent letters from the girls, and wondering, Why did they live there? Why did people the world over content

themselves with discomforts and disagreeableness connected with weather? Such an easy thing to manage, it seemed to her. There was surely room enough on the great sunny, flower-strewn earth for them all.

From the spot where Naomi stood the splendid hills of the San Bernardino range, with their heads crowned in snow, were distinctly visible. That was as it should be. Snow enough to cap those glorious hills and help to make an added glory in the sunsets; that was what snow was for, and where it should be always kept. There was more than hills to hold the gaze, though these were so varied in their lights and shadows that the eye never wearied of them. The faint, purple-gray line in the near distance Naomi knew was the lovely bay, the most beautiful piece of water, she believed, to be found on this beautiful earth; yet she had not to look away to distant hill or bay for beauty; it surrounded her. The fine old house which was her home was set in the midst of it. The lawn that stretched away from it on either side was of that vivid green which is seen only in winter time in semitropical climates; it was of velvet richness and smoothness unmarred by a stray weed or even a dead leaf.

Dotting the lawn at convenient distances were fountains that tossed up and played with and sent out in countless fine sprays the blessed water which was responsible for all this freshness and greenery. Luxuriant pepper trees, also in vivid green dress and aglow with scarlet berries, vied with the grand old live oaks in furnishing wide stretches of shade, within which rustic chairs and bamboo settees and gay-colored hassocks

invited the weary or the indolent to lounge, and rest, and dream.

As for flowers, viewed from her standpoint, the world looked to be what Naomi thought for the most part it was—made of flowers. Roses everywhere, climbing the trees, wandering over the fences, clambering the lattices to the very tops of second-story windows ready to shower bloom and perfume upon whatever hand stretched out to gather them. All shades and grades of roses, from the lovely "gold of Ophir," with their sunset tints and their faint sweet breath, to the tiny "seven sisters," who huddled together in their shy beauty and made Naomi more fond of them than of any of their brilliant rivals. Nor was it roses alone; blossoming vines in gold and crimson rioted over the latticework of the wide porches in such reckless display of bloom and sweetness as almost took one's breath. Down below were calla lilies, of the same variety that Naomi knew from letters Barbara and Bernice were nursing as house plants, rejoicing each of them over a single promising bud, and hoping and praying it to bloom for Easter. She thought of them as she stood counting hers, and presently made known to one inside.

"The callas on this side are doing fairly well, mamma; I can count eighty-three large blooms from where I stand."

Yet roses and heliotrope, even when they bloom as they did about Naomi in reckless masses, do not make up the whole of life. The golden sunshine flowed unceasingly about her that winter morning, and the balmy air, just crisp enough to serve as excuse for the fluff of pink and white wool that trailed from her shoulders, was laden

with the perfumes of literally a thousand flowers; yet there was a slight reflected shadow on her fair face which would have been new to her school friends. Life was beginning to touch even Naomi in a way that jarred.

"It is so tiresome," she told herself, in a discontented, rather than a sorrowful tone, as she thought of it. "It will make no end of disagreeableness," and she sighed.

Presently she turned from the beauty spread with such lavish hand, and went in with her masses of flowers, only to come upon beauty of a different kind—of the kind which cultured taste and unlimited means can cause to appear, even inside of walls of brick and stone. The sunlight's softer hues had been imitated in the furnishings. Carpets, cushions, even the walls lent themselves to the impression that the sun was setting in glory and sending its rays into the room. Costly furniture of the rare kind which shows its costliness in its exquisite fitness to surroundings and the wealth of comfort it has to bestow, rather than in the glory of its finish, filled every niche where furniture could be placed with advantage, yet left an impression of ample room. A lady with a delicate face and a general air of fragility seemed to have been dropped by someone gently into the pillowy softness of an easy chair, and been left to toy with a dish of fruit on a small table by her side.

She smiled gently on Naomi and her flowers, and asked:

"Did you try some of these oranges this morning, darling? They are not so sweet as they were last year."

"Nothing is, mamma," said Naomi, the shadow on her face gathering strength as she went about the room

disposing of her flowers. “Even these roses that used to have the sweetest breath in the world do not smell as sweet this morning as the poor little bud that Gertrude and I nursed last winter to make it bloom for the first day of spring.”

“You have the blues, I think, child,” said the lady, in gentle chiding. “And there can be no one in the world with less reason. If you were an invalid, now, like your poor mother, there would be some excuse for the roses not smelling sweet.”

“But, mamma, haven’t I some reason? Think how very trying it is, this about Dick! How can I make roses or any other flowers satisfy me when he has gone off in a huff and thinks himself ill treated?”

Mrs. Newland laughed softly. “You are over sensitive, child,” she said. “If you have no heavier trial in life than poor Dick, I shall be thankful. What did you expect, you foolish creature? You had been away for a year, and Dick had thought of you always as a child, and expected that you would always remain one. When, instead, you burst in upon him like a new variety of June rose in full bloom, a lovely young woman instead of his child playmate, what should he do, being Dick, but fall desperately in love with you, and rush to tell you so? It is the common lot, dear, of womanhood. You cannot expect to be exempt.”

“But, mamma, it is worse, a great deal worse, than you make it seem. Dick thinks I am to blame; that I understood his feeling, and even—even led him on.” The pure face flushed with indignation. “As though I would be guilty of such an act as that! I would never dare to look Barbara Dennison in the face again if I had harbored a

thought of the kind for a moment. He has insulted me by suggesting it; and yet he has gone away so hurt and grieved that I cannot be as indignant with him as I ought. Do you think, mamma—I mean have you thought at all—that Dick and I have been any different this time from what we have always been, just like brother and sister?"

"Well, dear, to speak truth, I have never had as much faith in Dick's brotherliness as you had, and of late no faith in it at all."

The indignant color flowed over Naomi's face, and there was reproach in her voice. "Mother! Why didn't you tell me?"

Mrs. Newland laughed again, still softly.

"Why, dear child, I did not realize the need. I must ask you again what you expected? You have blossomed into lovely young womanhood, and of course young men will find it out. Poor Dick is the first, but I am afraid he will not be the last. You cannot help being loved, daughter."

"I can help encouraging people to fancy that I have a feeling for them such as I never dreamed of having. At least, I always thought I could, and said so, and I am humiliated that I have failed. It hurts me to think what Barbara would say if she knew I had. It does seem to me, mamma, that if you understood, you might have given me a hint and saved me some of this. Dick and I have been together so constantly from our very babyhood that I never dreamed of his having any different feeling for me from what I had for him, and what we had always had. But I can see now that it is as he said; I must have appeared to be leading him on. I don't know what to do."

There was such evident distress in her tone that the mother pushed away her fruit and gave herself to the task of being comforter.

"Nonsense, darling. I will not have you growing morbid. There isn't the least need for your worrying about Dick; he will recover. Young men of his age are not crushed by such experiences. If they were, I should have to send you to a convent, I am afraid. You are fortunate not to have had this lesson earlier. Why, bless you, at your age I had broken at least three hearts which were never to be mended; but they were, some of them in a single season, and I lived to see them all happily married."

"But, mother, conditions must have changed since you were a girl. Self-respecting people do not talk in that way now. We all believe that a girl who conducts herself as she should has no need to make a man whom she does not intend to marry go through the humiliation of a refusal. I certainly thought I was a girl of that kind, and it hurts me more than I can tell you to find that I am not."

Mrs. Newland leaned back among the cushions with a somewhat bored though indulgent smile. "A 'Daniel come to judgment,'" she murmured. "My dear little Namie, those strong-minded women of whom you are so fond have all but spoiled you. That Barbara, especially, whom you quote so continually, could never have been a girl, I think; she must have been born an old woman. It isn't well to force life, daughter; you will be a woman soon enough. Be a care-free girl as long as you can. Take my advice, and don't torture your poor little heart over Dick. Your mother is glad that you do not care for him in the

way he fancies he wants you to—so glad that if she had seen the slightest indication of it, she would have interfered long ago. Dick is a dear boy, and I love him well enough to be his auntie forever; but I do not want him for a son. I look higher than that for you, my darling."

"Mother, I have no such feeling. There is no man living whom I would sooner marry than Dick Holwell if I wanted to marry anybody. I mean if—in plain English, mamma—if I loved him, or ever could, in any such way, there would be nothing else to prevent my marrying him. But I—oh! *Don't* you understand?"

"Certainly I do, dear. Dick was premature and foolish, but it is just as well to have it over thus early. I felt that it was bound to come. As for your marrying, child, be sure it is the last thing your father and I are anxious about. You may wait and welcome, until you find that perfect being who was created from all eternity for just you. I know your romantic nature, darling, better than you fancy I do. I feel it my duty to hint that the ideal creature who must alone claim you is by no means so common as girls of your friend Barbara's type would have you believe, but wait for him by all means as long as you please."

"Then, mamma, if the one whom I can love and honor with all there is of me does not come for me, I shall never marry. We all said that, we girls, and meant it. It shall be the right one, or no one."

"Very well, daughter, I am content, I assure you. Your father will be quite able to support you as long as you give him the chance, without the aid of a husband. But

suppose just now you ring for Maida. I think I must lie down for a while; the gravity of our conversation has quite exhausted me."

As the girl's eyes followed the delicate form being half carried from the room in the arms of her attendant, and smiled back in answer to the kiss thrown to her from the tips of her mother's fingers, a fuller realization than usual came to her that this dainty little mother was of another world from Barbara, for instance, and that there were things which she did not understand.

Chapter 9

"I've none to smile when I am free,
And when I sigh, to sigh with me."

Left to herself, Naomi wandered out again among the roses, and gathered great masses of them because it seemed natural to pick flowers, and they needed to be gathered. Then she wondered what she could do with them, and wished that she knew someone to whom to send a basketful. If she could only send them to Gertrude, who had written about nursing a single tea rose. There was more than one reason why this child of luxury was not so happy in her lovely home as she might have been, nor as she had expected to be. She missed, and at times longed inexpressibly for, the wholesome atmosphere of her school days; the systematic division of her time into periods with duties and responsibilities belonging to each; the feeling that she was one with the busy world and had her portion with the workers. Then, aside from routine work, there had always been some interest which held her and her chosen friends to eager plans and doings, and

kept the sense of comradeship and usefulness alert within her. Now that she was stranded in a luxurious home, with servants to anticipate every want, and horses and carriage at her bidding, she was not a little dismayed to discover that even driving under such circumstances was by no means the delight that it had been when she took her turn at school in driving old Dolly to town with half a dozen girls in the carryall, and errands to do for a dozen others. It half frightened her to think how sweet was the memory of those homely errands. A paper of pins for one, the careful matching of a spool of silk for another, and perhaps a pair of shoes to be left for mending, in the interest of a third.

That Naomi Newland, the petted darling of a millionnaire, should have need to look longingly back to such homely memories as these, is a circumstance which might well afford food for thought to others besides herself. She did not like to think of it. Too young and untrained for close introspection, her regretful longings for the dear past seemed to her like rank ingratitude, and she struggled to rise above the sense of loneliness and actual weariness which sometimes possessed her. It had been well enough during her vacations. The flowers and the horses and the servants and all the other trifles that represented ease and luxury had been enjoyed with a zest which had deceived her. She knew now that there was always in her mind the thought of going back to those third-floor rooms and meeting the girls and telling them with voluble tongue about the lovely holiday. That word just expresses it: home had been holiday; school and study and the girls had been life. To shut down upon life,

all at once, by turning it into perpetual holiday, was to make it pall upon the girl without her understanding why.

She left her flowers at last for Maida to arrange, and betook herself to her room and an unfinished letter to Barbara.

"You dear Bab, I must flee to you for comfort this morning." That was the sentence with which she began the day's record. "I am lonesome. What will you think of me, I wonder, if I tell you that I am so most of the time? Yes, I know it is dreadful when I am at home with my own beloved ones for the first time in years; but you must take in the situation fully before you look at me with those reproachful eyes and suspect something wrong in poor little Namie. We live a mile or so out of town, you know, and while there are any number of girls in town who are pleasant enough, and who would be neighborly perhaps if we lived near together, there isn't one among them whose neighborliness stretches over the mile, nor, to be frank, whom I sadly miss when she doesn't come; so I am very much alone. I even have to drive alone, which you know we never had a chance to do with Dolly. Dear old Dolly! I wonder who drives her now? A big carriage and two horses who step on the ground as though they hardly considered it good enough for their feet, and me on the back seat alone. Does it sound very cheery when you remember that I was used to five girls at once, and there was no back seat to speak of? Yes, ma'am, I hear you; and there is reproach in your dear gray eyes, too. You are sure that I might find people, if I chose, who would delight to take drives with me and who would be helped thereby.

You would do it, you darling, and I should delight to go along and help entertain them; I mean to try all by myself someday, just for the sake of your approval, but—the truth shall be spoken—your poor little Naomi doesn't know how to do such things. She isn't you, and she never can be, no matter how hard she may try. It's all in her heart, you know it is, but it won't come to the surface, somehow, without seeming like patronage, or goody-goodiness.

"Oh, I am not always alone. Mamma drives with me occasionally, but it is *very* occasionally. She is an invalid, you know, and the weather is generally too bright, or too cool, or too *something* for her comfort; and poor papa never has any time. Barbara, do you know who are the worst drudges in the world? They are the businessmen. Our man Rogers who takes care of the horses and carriages has a great deal more leisure and a pleasanter time in life than papa has. Really, I never before realized the downright drudgery of it all. Papa goes to town in the morning before mamma or I have thought of breakfast, and as a rule he cannot get home until after mamma has retired. Even then there are papers to sign and letters to be read that require the sending of telegrams, and all sorts of what he calls 'tag ends of business' that have followed him home. It is really dreadful. I should like to get real well acquainted with my father, but I don't know how I'm ever to do it. Still, I'm not fretting, dear; I'm only talking. Imagine me perched on dear old Nebo and let me go on. (Do you suppose they have a new mattress on that bed this year?) I don't want you to think I have forgotten that there are lovely things in life. I know there are in

mine; for instance, flowers. Our gardens are simply intoxicated with bloom. If you were here I could literally smother you in roses. Speaking of roses reminds me of Gertrude (not that I have forgotten her for a minute since I heard her great news). How fond she was of them! If the wedding were to be in March, instead of June, I would express a barrel of them to her; but by June I suppose even that bleak world in which she lives will have its own roses. Two peals of wedding bells—think of it! And you and I not in them. I thought you would be the first one, Bab dear, I did indeed. Don't ask me why, it was just a presentiment I had, and I might have known then that it was not correct—my presentiments never are. I certainly never dreamed of Gertrude as the first to break our ranks. Bernice seemed much more probable. She, however, appears to be content with him just as he is. Do you know, those convenient pronouns 'he' and 'him' are all the knowledge I have of Bernice's friend even yet? I presume he has a name, two of them indeed, but I am none the wiser. 'My wood sawyer' she called him in her first letter after the engagement; you remember, don't you, what Gertrude told us that last night about the wood sawyer of her childhood? Since then pronouns have done duty entirely. Not that Bernice has wasted many of them on me. I have never had many letters from her, and I expect fewer now than ever. I don't believe I like her choice utterly, without reserve. Now isn't that supremely silly when I know nothing about him, not even his name? Can't help it. I suppose it is presentiment again. We'll consider him angelic and drop him. I'll go back to Gertrude. Isn't it lovely that she is so happy? I know Dr.

Adams must be a good man; I like him. Gertrude sent me a tiny little photograph of him; wasn't she nice? I wish she were to be married next month instead of waiting until June. Not that I am hungering and thirsting for a wedding; instead, I have my melancholy hours over the fact that our ranks are to be so soon broken, but I shall never be able to tell you how my heart bounds over the thought of seeing you all again. Barbara and Bernice and Gertrude and Naomi—think of it! How can I wait?

"Bab dear, I'm going to tell you something: I have decided to be an old maid. I used to think, you remember, that that wouldn't be nice, but I have concluded that it will. I find that I like some people a little and a few people very much, but that I don't really *love* anybody, not in that way, you understand; and I would never marry a man simply because I liked him quite well. I have been too long under your influence to believe in such things. Barbara dear, don't go to being engaged, please, not just yet. I am so lonesome with Bernice and Gertrude both gone, that if I were to lose you, too, I couldn't endure it. I know I am being silly, but if you were here you would be very gentle with me and tell me I was indulging in a sentimental streak. It is more than sentiment, Barbara, that which I have been telling you about not being married ever. There are reasons why I am quite sure of it."

Before Naomi wrote that last phrase she held her pen and thought. She wanted to confess to Barbara about poor Dick, and tell her that she had not meant to lead him astray—had not dreamed of such a thing until the mischief was done—and assure her that the experience

had made her realize that she was not like other girls. Dick had told her that. He had said that any girl in her senses would have known that she was either willing to marry him, or else that she was flirting.

"I was not flirting," Naomi would like to say to Barbara, "and I am not willing to marry him, therefore." But she would say none of it. Much as she longed to exonerate herself in Barbara's eyes, she would keep silence. It was poor Dick's secret, not hers; she would not spread it out on paper for other eyes to read, even for the pleasure of having Barbara write, "I know you did not mean to do wrong, dear child."

It was, perhaps, the first time in her life that she had held herself deliberately and resolutely from sympathy. It was an indication that the woman was stirring within the heart of the child when she determined to bear this trouble alone. Not quite alone, it is true. Dick had rushed away in such high wrath, making it so hopelessly apparent that something was terribly wrong, that silence had been impossible, even had Naomi's sense of filial duty allowed her to keep a secret from her mother. But—the girl in thinking it over came to a distinct pause with that word and would not finish the thought coherently. It may be said for her, however, that she was beginning to study mothers. She had spent short vacations at different times with school friends, and had seen other mothers; she knew there were varying types. There were some, for instance, who were not invalids, who were strong in many ways, whose daughters leaned on them and were guided by them in small as well as in great things.

"There are mothers," said this homesick child to herself, "of the kind that Barbara would make," and then she sighed. For whom and for what was the sigh? Her loyal, loving heart would not for the world have admitted—mothers were sacred; but some of them stayed young while their daughters grew up and grew old.

"Mamma has stayed young," said Naomi, one day. She said it aloud and with deliberation, and thenceforward she felt more alone than before.

Barbara was the one with whom she thought aloud—with certain reservations. She read her letter over carefully before she wrote another line, after that one which has been given, then began a sort of running commentary on part of her text.

"Dear Barbara, let me warn you; you will be much dissatisfied with this letter; I shall not wonder, I am myself. Please, ma'am, I do consider my mercies and I know they are many. Indeed, I do consider it a privilege to be with mamma, and she tells me a dozen times a day that I am a comfort to her. There is a sense in which I know I am, and yet I cannot help knowing that Maida is even more so. She, you see, knows how to arrange the pillows and the footrest and the carriage robes, and oh, a hundred things. She knows just how warm the broth ought to be and just how cool, and at just what hour it is needed without being told, and you must see that all this is a comfort. She has been at mamma's elbow for four years while I have been—with you, for instance. It is reasonable that Maida should know more about everything than I do, and I appreciate mamma's feelings when she kisses me and pats my hair and calls me her

darling, and says I would better ring for Maida. I do it cheerfully, and I am not jealous, I am even fond of Maida in a way; but I am lonesome. I am planning, however, for the future. In that good time coming, when I have become a neat and well-preserved old maid, and papa has wound up his business affairs and retired—he has promised me that he will—my blessed days will begin. Papa, you see, has no 'Maida,' and has no time for being waited on save by office boys and telegraph boys and the like. He doesn't know how to be petted, and it will be my duty to teach him. I will have his easy chair in just the right corner, and his slippers—don't you know they always have slippers—I think I will put them on his dear old feet myself if he will let me, and I shall find out his favorite flower so soon as he has time to like any of them, and his newspaper—they always have newspapers read to them—I will find out somehow just what ought to be read; and while Maida is petting mamma, I will make a scientific business of petting papa. I think he will like it; and I am sure I shall; somebody just for me. Oh, dear! Now your big gray eyes look bigger and a trifle grayer than usual, and your mouth has two puckers in the corners that mean disapproval. 'She is inherently selfish I am afraid,' you murmur, meaning me; and I'm afraid so, too. I discover an element of self in every thought of mine. It seems strange, too, when we four were together I never thought of such a thing; I even fancied at times that there were streaks of genuine unselfishness in me. I know now that it must have been simply the reflex influence of the other three. I'm going to be unselfish now; you shall not be burdened with me another minute. I shall go down at

once and order the carriage and drive to town and match mamma's worsteds, a task that nobody can ever perform, and call on her friend Mrs. Bertrand, whom I don't like, and take her to the studio of a disagreeable young artist where I don't like to go, and wait while she and he pretend to make plans for a picture which neither of them intend to carry out, and take her back by way of the Boulevard where I don't like to drive, and she does, and bring her home for a five o'clock tea with mamma, which function I detest. There! Isn't that an interesting, not to say exciting, day's programme? And haven't I put enough unselfishnesses into it to spread over several days? Oh, dear Bab! Your poor little Naomi! There is something to her; I believe it in spite of appearances.

"'She needs the discipline of life in order to her true development.' How many times did Madame Nordhoff repeat that striking statement with special reference to poor me? Put your ear close until I whisper. Barbara dear, it is true; I feel it. What will the discipline be?

"Under all circumstances and disciplines I am as ever

"YOUR LITTLE NAMIE."

Chapter 10

"What I thought was a flower,
Is only a weed, and is worthless."

The height of Mrs. Halsted's ambition had been reached: her daughter was formally engaged to Mr. Wilbur. This was what the good mother had been expecting for years as the natural and, in fact, only reasonable conclusion of the intimacy. Yet there had, with the expectation, been an element of uneasiness. George had been so careless about it all; so leisurely in his efforts to settle his happiness on an assured foundation. He had been willing to be silent through years in which he might just as well have had everything comfortably arranged. Even now he was leisurely. Instead of trying to hasten the marriage, as an eager lover might be expected to do, especially when there was not a conceivable obstacle in the way, he had not even asked that the day might be fixed, but seemed quite content with his present happiness. Mrs. Halsted assured herself that of this she was very glad; the longer George could be content without having Bernice all to

himself, the better it would be for her mother. Nevertheless she was glad with just a shade of anxiety. Why should not a man who had chosen a wife and was abundantly able to set up a home, be eager to set it up?

If Bernice had any such questionings in her heart, she kept them hidden, as a loyal nature was bound to do. It is doubtful if she questioned. Her belief was so entirely in the man she had long before singled out as the embodiment of all manly virtues that it ruled out all forms of anxiety.

Gertrude Fenton was to be married in June, and she and George had been bidden to the wedding. Mrs. Halsted had remarked casually that it was a wonder George wasn't begging to be married just before Gertrude's date, so making the journey part of his own wedding trip, and Bernice had smiled peacefully as she replied:

"Not yet, mamma. You won't get rid of your daughter so easily as that." She would not for the world have admitted that she, too, had wondered why some such plan had not occurred to George. But there had been no anxiety in the wonderment. Of course George had good reasons for not hastening his marriage; she would not sully her absolute trust in him by letting herself linger over the wonderment as to what they were. Matters were in this state when their first separation since the engagement came to them. The law firm with which Mr. Wilbur was connected signified their wish to have him take a trip westward in the interests of certain clients. The plan would involve an absence of at least two months, and he grumbled over it a little, assuring Mrs. Halsted that had he foreseen such an extended trip he

would have carried Bernice off with him, adding that had Satan upset the original Eden with mining interests and a scheme for a new railroad instead of with a paltry bit of fruit, it would have been more in keeping with the trend of modern history.

It occurred to the mother that, in view of such an extended western trip, including the California which her daughter desired so much to visit, it would not have been unreasonable to have pressed for an immediate marriage; but she did not say it, of course, and George Wilbur went his way, leaving Bernice to learn by his absence how necessary he had become to her happiness. It was a lesson that came to her forcefully. The unrest she felt during those early days of loneliness half frightened her and almost vexed her mother. It was all very well for Bernice to be devoted to the man she was to marry; Mrs. Halsted would not have had it otherwise. Nevertheless it was trying that the girl for whom she had lived twenty years and more, and whose brothers were devoted to her, should seem to have no interest in life because one person was gone away.

"It isn't wise to center everything on one human being," she said to her daughter, reproof in her tone. "What would become of you if you should lose him?"

"Mother, don't!" said the girl, sharply; then she laughed apologetically. "I beg your pardon, mamma; but what is the use of putting unnecessary horrors into one's life? I provoked that naughty speech of yours, though, by wearing such a long face; I know I did. I don't mean to be miserable, mamma. I shall get used in a few days to being without George, I suppose; but you know I have seen him

every day for months, and cannot help missing him at every turn."

She missed him so much, and was so long and slow in rallying, that when there came an invitation from a school acquaintance who was spending the summer with an aunt living but a half day's ride by rail from Bernice's home, she suddenly decided, with her mother's approval, to accept it.

It is true she had not been extremely fond of Celia Archer during her school days, but at least she was one of the girls, and all the dear old times could be talked over with her, and it would help to wear away another week of George's absence. Mrs. Halsted approved, and smothered a sigh. In the accomplishment of her plans for her daughter's happiness she had been only too successful. It was plain that every nook and corner of the lovely home was distasteful to her now that George was not there. When her daughter was fairly gone for a week's visit, the mother said to her sons: "Of course it is lonely without Bernice, yet it is a positive relief to have the child away for a while. She hasn't done much but mope since George went. I tremble to think what would become of her if anything should happen to him on this trip. I don't think I ever in my life saw a girl so absorbed in another as she is in him. I must say I am surprised and a trifle annoyed. She has been so intimate with him all her life that I thought she would have grown used to him and not have cared so excessively."

While one son laughed over his mother's ideas about a life-long friendship, the other essayed to lessen her possible anxieties.

"No danger of anything happening to George Wilbur, mother. He is a good traveller, and is used to himself, and better able to look out for No. 1 than any man I know of."

When Celia Archer and her friend Bernice had talked together for several hours, and reached at last a point where something besides old school days could be admitted, it was discovered that the afternoon had waned and neither of them was dressed.

"Well, never mind," said Celia, "there is no one here only just ourselves and Louise. Perhaps not even Louise; sometimes she doesn't feel well enough to come down to tea. Oh, I haven't told you about her. I'm anxious to have you meet her; she is a study. It is quite romantic, her being here. Her mother is an old friend of Aunt Kate's, a school friend of forty years' standing. Think of it, Bernice! Do you suppose any of us girls will keep up an intimacy for forty years? She married unhappily I believe—at least Aunt Kate is grim and severe whenever she mentions the husband. This daughter is the only child, and she is in a decline. Aunt Kate has invited her here for her health. They live in town on one of the narrow streets and on a narrow income, and Aunt Kate is trying to build this girl up on country air and cream and things; but she can't—the poor thing fails every day. She is very interesting though. She has a history; I don't know what it is. Aunt Kate is darkly mysterious in referring to it. She despises all mankind, I believe, for Louise's sake, but she keeps

the girl's secret. I hope she will appear tonight so you can meet her. Now that I think or it, I presume she will, for the sake of seeing you. For some reason she is especially interested in you. As a rule, she shrinks from meeting strangers. I was here nearly two days before I had a glimpse of her; but the only bit of color I have seen on her face since I came was caused by the mention of your name."

"What does she know of me?" Bernice asked with an amused laugh.

"Goodness knows! Perhaps she has heard of some of your conquests and wants to see a girl who has been successful when she has failed. That sounds rather heartless, doesn't it? But I don't mean it in that way; I'm wonderfully interested in Louise."

Within two days Bernice could have said the same. The pale-faced, sad-eyed girl who was evidently fading steadily out of life, had a peculiar fascination for the one aglow with health and radiant with the hope and expectation of a blissful future. Her naturally kind heart was touched by the girl's physical weakness, and she exerted herself to make the hours pass less wearily in a way that won Aunt Kate's unqualified approval.

It was but a day or two before the time set for the limit of her visit that Bernice had an evening alone with her hostess. Celia, after much coaxing and some grumbling, had gone her way to a society function that it seemed necessary to observe, Bernice having persistently though gaily refused to accompany her. It was a rainy evening, and she believed that she had a suggestion of a cold—at least she did not feel like exerting herself. The people to

be met were strangers to her, and she would have no opportunity for cultivating their acquaintance. Why should she go when she should like above all things a cozy evening at home with Aunt Kate, whom she admired immensely, as well as liked?

It was a cosy enough picture upon which Aunt Kate looked as she came down to the sitting room after making her invalid comfortable for the night. Bernice, with true home-keeping instincts, had drawn the shades close, set out the little round table with its white cover, lighted the shining Rochester burner, and was comfortably seated in an easy chair, with Aunt Kate's favorite rocker drawn to just the right position and waiting for her. Bernice had a book in her hand, but a bit of work lay in the basket at her feet ready for service if their mood was to talk. She had a winning smile for her hostess, but that lady's face was gloomy. She dropped into the waiting chair with a sigh that came from the depths of her large heart as she said:

"That child is growing thinner all the time. Her poor body would make you shiver; it is nothing but skin and bone. Her little mother has another heavy sorrow right at the door. It does beat all how much some people have to bear."

"Has she had a hard life?" Bernice asked, her voice tender with sympathy.

"Which, the girl or her mother?"

"Both of them. If the life of one were hard, it would make it so for the other, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, it would; you are right there. You understand something about life, I see. They have lived for each

other, Louise and her mother; and now she is slipping away. Pretty soon her mother will have nothing."

"Is it consumption, do you think?"

"No," said Aunt Kate, fiercely; "it's murder; that's what I call it. The doctor's name for it is consumption, I suppose. Oh, it's the old story—a trusting girl and a brute of a man. I haven't told Celia anything about it. She is such a flighty sort of girl I was afraid she would let on to Louise that we had been talking her over; but sometimes I get so indignant thinking about it that it seems as though I had got to talk to somebody. It was going on for nearly a year, the courting was. Louise went away from home; she went to Brandon to learn millinery; there happened to be an opening there, and after she had learned the trade she had a chance to stay and work at good wages. They were so pleased with her, you know; the forewoman said she was a genius. She wanted to stay there, poor thing; his office was only a block or so from her shop. From all the mother has told me—and I've heard it from others, too—he was about as attentive to her as he could be. We all thought it was a sure thing and very fine for Louise. He was rich, you see, and educated, and all that. You can see that Louise is a perfect lady, and so is her mother, but she stepped down a good deal when she married. I suppose she thought that Louise was getting back to the place where she naturally belonged. The mother used to talk everything over with me, because we've been the same as sisters ever since we were girls at school together. There was one thing I never liked. I kept asking and asking when the wedding was to be, and it troubled me that, as near as I could make out, there was

never anything said about it. The others seemed to think it was all right. Louise thought there was some business trouble in the way of his being married, perhaps, and he didn't want to plan until he knew just what he could do; but I didn't like it. It seemed unnatural. Well, all of a sudden that man stopped coming. Louise had come home to her own city, and he had been to see her several times, although it is a good hundred miles to come. One night he stayed for a later train than usual; Louise told her mother that he said he couldn't bear to leave her, and he laughed about having a presentiment of something coming between them. Sure enough; something did. That fellow never came near her again."

"Why not?" asked the horror-stricken listener.

"You may well ask—that is what it took us all a good while to find out. As near as can be discovered it was because he didn't want to. He had another fancy; or maybe he had it all the while and only took Louise up to play with between times; all we are sure of is that he never came near her again."

"And it was this trouble that made her ill?"

"Well, that is what helped. Louise was never very strong, and she took a hard cold just about that time, and didn't have strength to shake it off. The doctor prates about a 'lack of vitality'; it is a lack of inclination; the poor child doesn't want to get well. She hasn't very great strength of will, you can see that; but she was a lovely girl, and just as bright and sunny as a bird before her life was spoiled. I think hanging is altogether too good for such men."

"But wasn't there any effort made to clear up the mystery?" persisted Bernice. "How do you know but there was some third person, some unprincipled gossip who made trouble? Such things have been."

"Oh, bless you! Effort enough; trust her father for that. He is a kind of a scamp himself. He had been wonderfully pleased over Louise's 'catch,' as he called it, and more eager than I was to have the day set. It was all they could do to keep him from meddling; and when the break came, he nearly killed Louise outright with his investigations. Louise sent back the man's notes and some little trinkets he had given her; she had spirit enough for that, though no doubt he would have sent for them if she hadn't; he wasn't the kind of man to leave any evidences that he could get rid of. But he forgot a few scraps with 'My darling' and 'My own,' and lies of that kind on them, and his name signed. There was a little photograph, too, with some dangerous stuff written on it. The poor child's father got hold of them, and as soon as report came that the fellow was planning to be married, he threatened him with a breach of promise suit. You can see what kind of creatures they both were when I tell you the fellow dared to try to hush him up with money, and was willing to pay well for it. I suppose the only reason he couldn't buy his man was because he expected a suit to bring him more. It is no wonder the poor child is dying when one thinks of what she has had to endure between them."

"And did the man marry?"

"No, hasn't yet. They say he is afraid to while she lives. Pleasant, isn't it, to think of a villain watching out for one victim to die so he can marry another? If I knew the name

of the girl, I'd write to her and tell her the whole story. They say he is playing sharp all the time, paying attention to half a dozen girls at once so that outsiders can't be sure which it is; maybe he doesn't know himself."

"Do you know the name of the man?"

"Oh, yes, I've heard it often enough! I heard only this week that his old home is in the town where you live, though he lives now in the city. I thought I would tell you something about it and ask if you knew anything about him. It isn't likely you do; you wouldn't be his kind; but his name is Wilbur. George Wilbur, and he is a lawyer himself, and probably knows how to manage."

Chapter 11

"His honor rooted in dishonor stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true."

Mrs. Halsted's usually placid face was in shadow. Her fair plans upon the prosperous working of which she had congratulated herself were in mortal peril. The daughter whom she believed that she had herself trained, and over whom she had rejoiced as one who did her theories credit, had suddenly developed ideas which seemed to the mother untenable, accompanied by a degree of obstinacy that was alarming. They sat together that fair spring morning in the luxurious morning room that Mrs. Halsted had delighted in refurnishing, just before Bernice's final return from school, with special reference to her tastes and fancies. Her chosen colors were there in lavish profusion, and the couch near which she sat was luxuriant with cushions such as she delighted in. But the girl had no cushions to support her that morning. She sat bolt upright in the only straight-backed chair the room contained, her face pale save for small red spots that

glowed on either cheek, and her mouth drawn in the firm lines which lent a shade of unwonted gravity, not to say sternness, to her face. Her mother was regarding her with a look of perplexity not unmingled with dismay. She broke in upon the silence which had fallen between them, disapproval in her tones.

"I must say, Bernice, I don't understand you in the character which you are exhibiting this morning. I never imagined that there was a spark of jealousy in your disposition. Don't you know that it will not do to look for perfection in any man? I might have expected this when you set poor George up on a pedestal and tried to worship him. He is human, like the rest of the world, and you have been determined to make him into a saint; that is just the trouble. I am sure he has given you proof if ever a man did that you are the only girl he has a thought for now, and if he had his friendships while you were away at school and he was in no sense bound to you, I don't see why a reasonable person should blame him."

A spasm that might have been of pain, but was certainly mingled with indignation, crossed Bernice's face; she made quick answer.

"Mother! Haven't I told you enough? The girl was as much engaged to him in the sight of God as ever woman can be. It is true that no marriage day had been set. Do you remember, mother, that none has been set for me? It is too evident that he is waiting for his victim to die in the hope of escaping, in this way, public disgrace. Do you think I am one to wait patiently for a woman to die, in order that I may comfortably marry her murderer?"

"Bernice, you are too much excited to talk. You have allowed your jealous passions to get such control that for the time being you are simply insane. I cannot listen to such talk as that. Why, you are positively almost coarse, and that I never expected a daughter of mine to be. It is certainly well that George cannot see you at present; deeply in love as he is, he might be repelled by this exhibition. My daughter, listen to me, and not to your wild fancies. George cannot help being a fascinating young man, and he is undoubtedly what people who use such language would call a 'catch,' especially for one struggling with poverty. Why, I could point out several girls to you who have made frantic efforts to win the prize. Must he be held responsible because one person has chosen to fall so deeply in love with him that she has even been made ill by it? Do try to be reasonable, and remember that you have heard but one side of this remarkable story, and heard it from those most anxious to put the worst possible construction on acts that were probably merely kind-hearted efforts to cheer a girl who was lonesome and homesick. George is very kindhearted naturally. He is very free, too, from petty suspicion, and so deeply in love with you that he will bear almost anything. Nevertheless I feel it my duty to remind you that you are insulting him by these doubts, and that no man will bear everything. It is quite beneath you, Bernice, to go on in this way; I must say I am ashamed of you."

The young girl arose and moved across the room toward the door. The crimson spots on her cheeks were

deepening and they emphasized the pallor of her face, but her voice was low and controlled.

"Mother, it is useless for us to talk longer about this matter; we do not understand each other. It seems to be impossible to make you understand how slow I was to give up my faith in the man whom I believed I could trust utterly. You will not consider that I spent days in sifting this story to its depths; that I went to the girl's mother and heard the minutest details of the acquaintance, and saw with my own eyes words written by a hand in which I could not be mistaken, words that he had no right to use to any woman but the one to whom he had given all there is of him to give. Mother, some of those words were written less than one week before the day on which he told me that I was the one girl in all the world who was of interest to him. Do you think I would marry such a man as that? Can you want me to, even though I were homeless and friendless and he were the last man left on earth?"

Mrs. Halsted was thoroughly alarmed. The vein of what she was pleased to call obstinacy in her daughter's disposition was not altogether new to her. "She is like her father," had been a phrase often on this mother's lips in speaking of her daughter; and she had had more than one occasion in her life to think that Judge Halsted was obstinate. She regretted it as a blunder, this having roused his daughter to speak words to which she might obstinately adhere. She made what effort she could to repair her blunder.

"Poor child," she said soothingly; "you have been through an ordeal, I am sure. I should have remembered

it, and not forced you into going over offensive details. That you are making mountains out of molehills is very evident; but I ought to have remembered what provocation you have had. You are right, dear, we ought not to talk about it anymore. We both feel too deeply to be quite just to each other. Of course there must be investigations; gossip of this sort has to be looked after; your brothers will attend to that. You mustn't imagine that your experience is peculiar or startling. If you were older and more familiar with the world, you would know what an easy matter it is for unprincipled people to get up a fair-sounding story out of very meagre material, especially when there is a wealthy man and a possibility of extorting money. I am not saying anything against the girl, Bernice; you need not look so indignant. Upon my word, I do not know that you could have espoused her cause more fully if she had been your sister. Probably the worst that can be said about her is that she was too soft-hearted, and that she is the victim of an unprincipled father who has led her on. But, of course, your brothers will do what ought to be done, and will know how to manage. Meantime, daughter, let me beg of you to do nothing rash, nothing that you will have cause to repent all your life. Men, especially men of such honorable connection as George Wilbur, like to be trusted, and find it hard to forgive unnecessary prying into their affairs. Everything should be managed with the utmost discretion. I cannot too deeply deplore the fact that you have evidently fallen in with a set of sharpers, of whom the 'Aunt Kate,' who knew so much, is evidently one."

Mrs. Halstead was growing excited again. The thought of investigation frightened her.

Bernice opened her lips to reply, then closed them. Of what use to say more? Her mother did not and would not understand; they belonged, it seemed, to different worlds. After what had been told to her in minutest detail of the revelations which her vigorous following up of Aunt Kate's story had resulted in, she was still willing, nay, anxious, that her daughter should marry George Wilbur. It seemed incredible to Bernice. Why should her point of view be so unlike her mother's? It was when she puzzled over questions like these that the girl thought of Barbara, the high-principled, strong-souled friend, whose views of honor and truth had dominated her own life for four years. Barbara, who was clear-eyed and free-hearted, would have leisure from herself to help one in sore need of help. Bernice thought with a sick longing of the miles stretching between them, and felt at times as though she must fly to her friend at once. Her brothers would "investigate." She, too, turned sick at heart over that word. Had there not already been sufficient investigation almost to undermine her faith in mankind? How was she to live through more of it and withstand them all, even her mother?

The days that immediately followed, Bernice was never able to look back upon without a distinct sense not only of pain, but of humiliation. There was much which had to be endured. Among others, the varying opinions of her brothers, two of them business men accustomed to dealing with and weighing other men.

"It is undeniable," said the oldest brother in confidence to his mother, "that he has done some tall flirting. If the girl's father can't be bought, and she doesn't die before long, there will be some intensely disagreeable revelations. But the probabilities are that the man can be bought; most men of that class have their price. George must make up his mind to pay well for his entertainment, that is all. A man is a fool to get himself into such a scrape as that. I thought George had more sense."

"It is a wretched business," said the second son when the anxious mother interviewed him in the hope of some encouragement. "I don't wonder Bernice is angry. She'll forgive him, I suppose; but I should think she would find it hard work. What the fellow meant by running with that girl, writing her notes and sending her presents, and professing at the same time to be devoted to Bernice, I can't imagine. He deserves a lesson that he will remember for life; but it is going to be disagreeable work to give it to him. Everybody knows that he is engaged to Bernice, and there will be no end of gossip if it is broken off—fact is, I don't see how it decently can be, it has gone so far. You better urge Bernice, if it is necessary, to patch up peace somehow for appearances' sake."

It was only the youngest brother, hardly yet reckoned as a man, who boldly took the ground that Bernice was right in her judgment and ought to be sustained in her resolve to have nothing to do with an unprincipled man. He knew he should feel just as she did if he were a girl, and he admired her for standing up to it.

The others laughed at him for a boy who did not know the world. He might admire his sister as much as he

pleased, they said; they were willing to join him, so far, but that was far from making agreeable the notoriety that such action on her part would involve. It must be remembered that Wilbur had not done anything so very new or strange. Society fellows were always getting into some scrape of the kind; but George had been abominably careless. They were sure they did not know what to advise for immediate action. It might be well for Bernice to go away from home for a while; she might even take a position as teacher for a few months, if she still felt eager for it. That would occupy her mind and give her anger a chance to cool. In the meantime the girl would probably die. One of the brothers had seen her, and gave it as his opinion that she would not live the year out. Wilbur had evidently been waiting for affairs to smooth themselves out in that way, and if Bernice had been kept away from people like that Archer girl and her gossiping aunt, who were distinctly not of her set, the probability was that the affair would never have reached her ears. The more they thought about it the more sure they were that the best possible thing to be done was to let Bernice go away before Wilbur returned from the West. It would keep her from a personal interview with him, which was of all things to be avoided just now. In this way she might be prevented from making a break that it would be difficult to mend.

"But what could be done about that wedding" the distressed mother questioned.

All their friends knew that Bernice was to go East to attend her classmate's wedding, and serve as maid of honor, and George was to go with her. All sorts of

questions would be asked if there was a change of arrangements, and there would be no end to the embarrassments.

Oh, well, the brothers said, the details must be managed in the best way they could. It was a disagreeable business, of course, and there would be more or less talk; but they couldn't force Bernice to act as though nothing had happened; couldn't expect it of her, indeed, not right away; and this plan was simply making the best of a bad matter. It was finally settled that Bernice was to be hurried to an uncle's in Colorado, whose family had been long urging a visit from her. The mother heard herself explaining to inquiring friends that the child was really quite run down with the spring weather and needed an invigorating climate. Her uncle lived close to the mountains, and she had finally persuaded the young people to give up their plan of going off to that warm little New York town, and going through the fatigues of a country wedding. It sounded well, and she began to take courage.

Events proved that they were all reckoning without regard to that vein of obstinacy which the mother had discovered in Bernice. The girl refused to go away before the return of George Wilbur. It was not she, she declared, who had occasion to be ashamed of her conduct and hide in Colorado. Neither was she going to give him a chance to say that she had condemned him unheard. If he could tell her that the words she had read on paper in his handwriting were base forgeries, that he knew no such person as Louise Webster, or knowing her had spoken none of those words and performed none of those acts

which marked him in the eyes of all respectable people as her suitor, why then—she would be ready to go down on her knees before him and beg his forgiveness and would feel that he would be justified in having nothing more to do with her. But—here the much-talked-at and suffering girl made a distinct pause and drooped her eyes with a sense of shame that was not for herself, and then began again, her cheeks aflame.

Chapter 12

"There be many kinds of partings—yes, I know—
Some with brave hands that strengthen as they go.
Ah yes, I know—I know.
But there be partings harder still to tell,
That fall in silence, like an evil spell,
Ah yes—too hard to tell."

"Mother, his own mother knows it all. She has been to beg the girl to use her influence with the father, that he may not ruin her son's name. Could anyone ruin his name if he had not first done so?"

"Child!" said Mrs. Halsted, new dismay in her voice. "What folly is this? How do you know what his mother has heard or what she has done?"

"I know it from her; I went to her. On my way home I stopped over one train and went to the hotel where she is staying and heard from her lips that which confirmed my worst fears. I had been told things which made me sure that she knew all about it, and I had a feeling that she would tell me the truth. I think she did. But she is like all

of you, consumed with the desire to pose before the world as honorable, no matter who is sacrificed thereby. To this end both Louise and I were expected to contribute. She can't do her part, poor thing, though I believe she would if she could; but I won't. None of you need plan and urge and lay before me the complications of misery; don't I know them? Be sure I realize it all as it is not possible for the rest of you to do; and I tell you now what I have said before, I will never marry George Wilbur, never! He has deceived me. If he had met me later in his life, after he had unwittingly or heedlessly compromised himself with another girl, and if he had told me the truth; owned that he had no right to ask what yet he wanted to ask; owned that he was bound in honor where his heart was not, I might have thought him weak, but I could have pitied, and, in time, forgiven him. But I tell you he *lied* to me! His falseness was premeditated and uncalled for. I trusted him utterly and asked no questions; yet he took pains to repeat to me the lie that from my very childhood up to the present time he had thought of and cared for no other girl. He said that he—but I will not humiliate myself by repeating what he said. Isn't it enough that I know he has taken pains to repeat and emphasize a series of falsehoods, without even the poor excuse of being called upon for explanations?"

For once in her life Mrs. Halsted was speechless. It was not at the moment the falseness of the man she had trusted which overwhelmed her, but the thought that the whole miserable business had been talked over between her daughter and Mrs. Wilbur—the woman who represented in its most august form that potent word,

"society." How could Mrs. Wilbur be expected to look with favor upon her prospective daughter after such a scene? Poor Mrs. Halsted could not get away from the hope that however much incensed her daughter might be at the moment, time would furnish a healing balm which would make all things well. But this was not so sure, if the all-powerful mother had become prejudiced against Bernice.

Viewed in any light there was much to be endured. Bernice could talk resolutely before her mother and brothers, that vein of obstinacy in her nature seeming to stand her in good stead; but alone in her room, hidden by darkness from even her own observation, there were depths of self-abandonment into which she sank, when it seemed to her impossible that any other's pain and humiliation could be like unto hers.

Among many minor questions pressing to be considered came those connected with Gertrude Fenton's fast approaching marriage day. Was it going to be possible for her to keep her pledge and pass through all the tortures connected with that event? Even if this were possible, how was it to be accomplished? If she went alone, having written George Wilbur such a letter that he would not dare attempt to accompany her, how was she to account to formal inquirers for the absence of the guest whose name had been so closely linked with her own? What was she to say to Gertrude herself and to Naomi, who would have a right to question closely? To Barbara she thought she could lay bare her heart; it would be a relief to do so; but would it be possible, so soon, to go over her humiliations to the others? This was one phase of her feeling. There were times when the longing to see

Barbara, and to hear her say while her arms were about the stricken girl, "You could do no less, dear. You could not retain your own self-respect and do less than you have done," took such possession of her that she felt she could brave all the others for the sake of this. Barbara was the one friend who, she felt, would understand her moral revulsion, and at the same time her pitiful desolation in losing the one to whom she had given herself unreservedly. But there were other hours when she shrank and cowered and was sure that it would not be possible for her to meet even Barbara.

The days did not wait for her decision; they moved steadily on until it was within two weeks of the wedding.

During this time, in the always bustling boarding-house or restaurant where Mrs. Fenton carried on her brave work, life was at a much higher pressure than usual. Both Mrs. Fenton and her daughter Annie were determined that as fine a wedding as they could compass should be the portion of the one who was to bring them honor. That it was a distinct honor to be allied as a family with a physician so universally respected as Dr. Adams, both mother and daughter heartily conceded.

"It isn't that we aren't just as good as any of them," would Mrs. Fenton affirm as she and Annie worked and talked. "Your father and me both came from first-rate families as far back as you are a mind to go; and some of them were real well-to-do, and smart, too; but they weren't doctors and lawyers and things of that kind. Still, Gertie is every bit as good as he is, and educated, too. It is a fine thing, after all, that she went to college. It wouldn't be quite the thing, I s'pose, for a doctor's wife not to know

how to talk books with her husband. He seems pleased enough to think she can do it; but he isn't a bit stuck up, and he's helping your father right along; I'm dreadful glad she's got him."

The unselfish Annie agreed to it all heartily, and worked early and late to help carry out the preparations that, despite Gertrude's constant protest, were in danger of being elaborate.

To Gertrude herself life was golden-hued. Nothing about the wedding dresses or the wedding breakfast troubled her. Indeed, her mother, half in pride and half in vexation, accused her of being willing to be "married in her old brown serge, and to have johnny-cake and warmed-up potatoes for refreshments, so that she had a chance to go off with him and no one to interrupt."

Gertrude had laughed and blushed over the charge and admitted to herself that there was truth in it. Why should commonplaces of any sort interest her now? The very best that life has for mortals had come to her in the exclusive love of a good man—a man in whose nobility of soul and integrity of life others as well as herself placed perfect confidence. What had not the year brought to her—that single winter which had opened so drearily and from whose daily ordeal she had shrunk so abjectly! How rebellious she had been because no opening came to her through which she could get away! What if she had secured one of the situations to teach, for which she had tried so hard, and had gone away and missed knowing Dr. Adams? How good her Father in heaven had been to her, even when she was living in indifference to all His claims! That time, too, was past for Gertrude. The beautiful

winter through which she had just passed had brought her much more than a full cup of earthly bliss. Very early in her acquaintance with Dr. Adams she had discovered that One was his Master, and that his highest aim in life was to follow in that Master's footsteps. It had been an easy and delightful work to lead Gertrude Fenton's awakened heart to recognize in Jesus Christ a stronger claimant for her love and service.

"It seems strange," she wrote to Barbara, "that I have never understood before. I had an idea that becoming a Christian was a very solemn and gloomy thing to do; and it is so simple and easy and beautiful. I realize now what it was that made you so different from other girls. Why didn't you tell me, dear, more plainly—so plainly that a girl as stupid as I could understand, how your love for the Lord Jesus Christ had colored all your life?"

Barbara had looked grave over those words. They had told her more plainly than she had before realized that her following of Christ had not been as it should, else she would have won to fellowship those friends of hers who seemed so willing to be led. But she was glad for Gertrude, and the coming wedding festivities were being looked forward to with keen interest. The occasion was to mark their first reunion.

"Isn't it strange," wrote Gertrude, "that I, the least probable of the four, should have been the one to ring the first wedding bells? I surely thought it would be our little Naomi. And isn't it wonderful that nothing has occurred to prevent the reunion? So many things might have happened in a year. I don't believe schoolgirl fancies as a rule work out in this way."

Over all this rose-tinted time there fell suddenly out of the clearest of June skies a thunderbolt. Mrs. Fenton, who had enjoyed through the years her poor little chances to boast, was saying to a morning caller, with a complacency that those who liked her, and they were many, simply smiled over:

"Yes, it is nice for me to keep my girl right here in town. The doctor's house is in as good a neighborhood as there is, and he has furnished it as well as the best of them. Gertrude will be about as well fixed as any girl in this town, and she will make a real nice housekeeper, too, if I do say it that shouldn't. I used to think that she was too fond of her books to ever amount to much in other ways, but they ain't spoiled her a bit as I can see; anyhow, the doctor thinks she is about right; and he—" And then she heard herself called loudly in the tone which always brings immediate response, and ran to see what had happened.

Gertrude Fenton remembered through the years, with a never fading distinctness, just the spot where she stood in her room and just the size and shape of the tiny hole she had discovered in the sleeve of the dress she was folding away, her face alight over the thought that she would not need the garment again until she was ready to work in her own kitchen. These minute details burned themselves into her memory of the morning, and belong with Annie's scared face and eager, anxious voice as she burst suddenly in with her message.

"Oh, Gertie! Dick Foster run into the doctor's carriage and he's hurt. They hope he ain't bad, but they want you

to come right away. They took him into the drug store at the corner; mother's there, helping."

Annie had called these particulars after the girl, who had asked no questions, waited for no further word, but had seized the hat that Annie, who was crying, thrust at her, and had run in morning wrapper as she was down the stairs, down the street, across the road to the drug store, before whose closed doors a crowd of boys was gathered. As they drew back respectfully for her, she remembered afterward that their stillness struck at her like a blow. What had happened to hush that crowd of noisy boys?

Within three hours afterward telegraphic messages began to speed over the wires. Bernice Halsted's came to her on the evening that George Wilbur was expected to reach home. She held it a moment, trembling, in a curious mixture of indignation and wild hope. For the moment she thought it was from him. What right had he to send her telegrams? Unless, indeed—Unless what? She did not answer her thought, but controlled herself and read her message:

"*Dr. Adams, thrown from carriage this morning; died at noon!*"

Long afterward Gertrude Fenton told Bernice that the first words of helpfulness piercing through the midnight which shut down upon her in the midst of that June day came from her. Bernice had just before that reached her decision. She could not go to the wedding, could not write, could never again write to any of them. She had lived that

which could not be told, and she had no other life about which to write. She, of all others, had been singled out for misery; she must keep herself to herself, and not shadow by her presence or her words the joy of other lives. And then, after the first shock of the news was over, she had written out of the very depths of her soul to Gertrude. She did not enter into the details of her story; so far as mere words are concerned, the story was very brief; and yet she laid bare her heart for Gertrude to see what pain really was.

"I know, dear friend, that you think the words, 'there is no sorrow like unto my sorrow,' were written to describe you; but it is not true! Let me, the one who has lived a lifetime in this little year, and who knows as you never can, assure you that it is not true. Gertrude, you have an honored grave that belongs to you, and strong, sweet memories that no one can steal from you; while I—I cannot tell my story; I have *lived* it, but some things which have to be lived cannot be told in words. Dear friend, there is no grave for me to cry beside, save the grave of my buried faith in one whom I trusted utterly and vainly. Forgive me for thrusting my pain upon you; my only reason is the belief that it will help you to see how sweet and holy is your sorrow beside mine."

There was no reunion of the four friends. The illness of Barbara's mother prevented her going to Gertrude in the early days of her sorrow, as she would otherwise have done, and Naomi, who shrank from sorrow and could not endure the thought of meeting poor Gertrude, gave up her Eastern trip altogether and went with her father on one of his mountain mining tours.

As for Bernice, she so far accorded with her brother's views as to catch eagerly at the thought of going away from home. To teach school for a few years had been her ambition in early girlhood, and had only been set aside because her mother and brothers would not listen to such a thought. Most opportunely an unexpected opening occurred in a school of good standing where Bernice had several friends. So it came to pass that by October of that eventful year she was hundreds of miles away from the scene of her happiness and her humiliation. Before that time, however, George Wilbur came home, and came in haste to see if he could not in person satisfactorily answer Bernice's letter which had reached him two days before. Just what took place during that interview no one but those two ever fully knew. Mrs. Halsted, who had hoped much from his presence, sorrowfully told her son that she had never in her life seen a person look so utterly crushed as poor George did when he went through the hall after his hour with Bernice. And the son replied that he was disposed to be almost sorry for the puppy; that when his sister Bernice once got upon stilts, there was no woman living whom he wouldn't rather meet.

Chapter 13

"Weary of the weary way
We have come, from Yesterday."

Her hand rested on one of the great stone pillars in the corridor, not for support, but because it was natural for Naomi to put out a hand toward whatever was nearest. The years had changed her in some respects, or else it was the deep mourning she wore that accentuated the pallor of her face. Her eyes, too, seemed to have grown larger; they were certainly sadder. Naomi believed that life had dealt hardly by her. The girl graduate of nineteen and the young woman of twenty-five seemed to her to belong to different worlds. None of her plans had matured as she had meant they should. Certain letters of Barbara's had awakened within her a desire to be more, much more, to her mother than a pretty darling to be kissed and chatted with on very pleasant mornings when the invalid felt equal to it. Reading the twelve-page letter over carefully for the third time, studying the rugged farm life, as Barbara designedly laid it bare for her to

study, Naomi began to absorb the thought of what Barbara was becoming to her mother, and to covet a like experience. She began a systematic scheming to win her mother to herself; and had Mrs. Newland been stronger, physically, the girl would have without doubt succeeded, to a degree. As it was, the delicate lady, who had indulged herself and been indulged by others all her life, could not for so much as an hour rise to the heights of her young daughter's vigor. She loved her child with all the blind, unreasoning fondness of a self-indulgent mother, but the girl's abounding fullness of life wearied her.

"I feel as though I had walked miles," she would say pathetically to Maida, as she leaned languidly among the pillows after one of Naomi's mornings in which she had steadily devoted herself to her mother. "The child is so full of energy and does everything with such vim, even her reading, that it exhausts me."

And Maida, who had been a necessity to her mistress for six years, and who had no desire either to relinquish her post or share it with a rival, fostered with much care and skill the sense of fatigue and discomfort.

"Miss Naomi is too young, ma'am, and too well and strong to accommodate herself to the ways of an invalid. She ought to keep out among young people where things are lively, and not play at being nurse when she doesn't know how, and just makes you worse. I can't have you being tired out in this way, ma'am. The doctor will scold me well for it."

This is but an illustration of the forces at work to make Naomi's efforts a failure. By degrees, as her mother grew weaker, the girl, who did not realize the growing

weakness, could not fail to realize her signal failures in making herself a pleasing necessity; she could not but see that she was not even an important adjunct to the invalid's train. It was humiliating to know that Maida was distinctly and constantly preferred to herself; but she tried to stay her disappointed heart with the thought that it was because her mother was used to Maida, and that when she grew stronger it would be different. But the hoped-for strength never came. Both father and daughter had been used to seeing the wife and mother recline among the pillows, being waited upon. She had accepted early and with a sort of relish the role of invalid, and it had grown to be a kind of second nature. Even she herself did not realize that she was steadily slipping lower and lower in the scale of life, and certainly none about her realized it, unless indeed it were Maida. The busy man of affairs was distinctly shocked when his hurried career was arrested one morning with the astounding news that his wife was sinking and the doctor feared she might not rally again. She did not rally again; and both father and daughter were overwhelmed with astonishment and sorrow.

"I never thought that she would die," wailed the girl, held close in her father's arms. "She has always been ill; but I thought she would stay here, and grow into an old, old lady, and get used to having me near her waiting upon her, and like it. I was waiting to have her grow used to me, and she never did."

The poor father could not comfort his darling; he was himself too much surprised and bewildered. It seemed wonderful and dreadful that the wife of his youth was not

there among the pillows any more—those luxurious pillows that he had furnished with lavish hand. Despite the luxury in which he had enveloped her, he had his regrets. There had been a time when the delicate lady had liked nothing in life so well as a quiet drive with him, or a slow walk about their own extensive grounds leaning on his arm; but of late years he had been so busy that all those little pleasures had slipped out of their world. In the rare moments when he allowed himself to dream day-dreams, he had planned for a time of leisure when he would give them back to her, and teach her, as poor Naomi said, to grow used to him again. It was all over now; no rare, sweet leisure time would avail anything for her. The thought crushed him.

After Naomi's first prolonged outburst of grief passed, she came to understand something of her father's feeling, and roused herself to try to minister to him, succeeding so well that the memory of it afterward was sweet to both. It helped the man of affairs, who could not linger long even to pay respect to death, to feel that there was still something to which to look forward. His child was growing into a woman, was companionable. When that coveted leisure came, he and she would enjoy it together. But the sod was still fresh on the new grave when he was out again in the hurrying world, meeting his committees and secretaries, receiving reports from all sorts of mammoth business operations, and receiving or seeking audience with persons important in the business world. The treadmill of life must go steadily on for him. He told his daughter so with a sigh, and believed that he

regretted that he had no time to spend with her in the great dreary house that she called home.

For poor Naomi the dreariness went on. There were times when it seemed insupportable; when she felt that she would welcome any change. Yet, when possible changes presented themselves for consideration, she found that she shrank from them. During those early years she had been for the most part unconsciously measuring her acquaintances by the standards of her friend Barbara, and always finding that they fell short. More than one eager aspirant to the place of fairly exclusive friendship once occupied by her cousin Dick had been thus measured, Naomi seeming to feel Barbara's grave, gray eyes resting on her the while, measured and dismissed. Her father had watched with no little anxiety the development of some of these experiences, but the dismissals met with his unqualified approval. He had found no one, as yet, upon whom he cared to bestow the title of son-in-law and the management of the millions he would have to leave behind. As the years went by, he continued to be pleased. Naomi, womanly though she was growing in some respects, was still a very child. She would mature late, like her mother. What a perfect child the mother was when he married her! And at such moments he would take time for a single sigh over his lost youth.

In this way the years passed. Cousin Dick recovered from his sore wounds that he had declared were mortal, and in time brought home a bride as unlike Naomi as a man's second choice is generally unlike his first. Naomi welcomed her new cousin with eagerness, and for a time

was violently intimate with her; it was so delightful to have someone near her own age who really belonged to them. By degrees the intensity of their friendship lessened, and there came a time when they were simply civil to each other, seeing as little of each other as possible, to the evident comfort of both. In some respects it was unfortunate for Naomi that the habit had grown upon her to measure everybody by that one friend of her girlhood.

Time and separation were, however, working their inevitable results with those early friendships. The solemn event that had shut out the sound of wedding bells and interrupted the proposed reunion had brought other changes in its train. Naomi had not yet ceased wondering over the sudden decision of Bernice to become a teacher after all, when her thoughts were turned into another channel by Gertrude Fenton's unexpected movements.

Gertrude, to the surprise of everybody and the vexation of her mother, had "gone back to school." At least, that was the way the mother put it. Through Barbara's letters Naomi learned that Dr. Adams had left his little property entirely to Gertrude—a pretty home and a few thousand dollars; and that instead of investing the money securely and having what her mother called a "snug little income to depend upon," Gertrude had determined to enter a training school for nurses and fit herself for a professional nurse, using what money she needed to effect that purpose. To Naomi, who was used to conventional lines, this seemed almost as wide a departure as it had to Gertrude's mother, and she wrote to Barbara that she did

not wonder that Gertrude did not want to write letters to her friends anymore; she had done so queer a thing, that it must be hard to explain her reasons.

By degrees Naomi ceased to expect to hear directly from either Bernice or Gertrude. Both young women shrank a little from writing to her. In their eyes she was still a child to be shielded, and there was no need to lay bare their hearts for her to weep over, and neither of them knew how to write to her in the old, half-playful strain, so they did not write. They had been from the first rather poor correspondents—as for that matter, Naomi was herself. Her letters were the creatures of her moods, and if the mood for writing did not present itself, her friends suffered. She held on the longest to Barbara. But that young woman was very busy and had not time for long letters. As the months passed and her mother's illness continued, and the busy teacher felt it incumbent upon her to give every possible moment to her mother, the letters, of necessity, grew less and less frequent. Naomi understood, and the habit of not writing, always easy for her to form, gained on her. Then came word that Barbara was motherless. And the girl shrank from writing other than the merest word of immediate sympathy, because everything that she tried to write sounded either cold or trivial. She did not know how to talk to people in trouble, she told herself; it seemed impertinent to say anything. Within a few months her own bereavement came and then she shrank and trembled at the thought of writing out her pain, even to Barbara. It was her first experience of sorrow, and it hurt her to touch it. Barbara's long, tender letter remained

unanswered until she was all but ashamed to write at all, and when she did, found it hard to gather up the scattered threads.

"It is impossible to get back to where we left off," she said aloud to herself one day with a weary sigh, when she had been trying to talk to Barbara. "*Living* has come in between, someway. If I could only see her for a little while." But that continued to be not easy to manage.

The time came when Barbara, too, left home. Bernice Halsted brought that about. There was a vacancy in the school where she was teaching, just the one that she was sure Barbara could fill better than any other; so it came to pass that the "two B's" were together again within school walls, and Gertrude was not very far from them, working hard in her chosen field, and only Naomi was at home, and unoccupied, and dreary—"left out," as she expressed it. It may have been this feeling of having been "left out" that helped her to drop her schoolgirl friends, not by any means out of her thoughts, but out of her daily life. At last an entire year was allowed to pass without having written to any of them. After that by tacit consent all attempt at correspondence ceased.

In the spring that marked Naomi's twenty-fifth birthday her father, warned in a peremptory manner by his physician, suddenly broke away from his pressing home cares, and went abroad, taking his daughter with him. This had been a long and eagerly anticipated pleasure, Naomi having lived in the fond belief that when the ocean rolled between her father and his place of business she could have him all to herself. She knew nothing of the family physician's fears, and believed that

the trip had been taken largely for her sake. She felt that the time had at last come to make herself so necessary to her father, and so happy in his society, that neither could, hereafter, do without the other, and that gradually she could coax him to give up business altogether.

She almost succeeded. Mr. Newland laid aside his business cares in a way that delighted his daughter's heart, and liked nothing better than to have her beside him. In fact, he clung to her in a way that was at the time an unmixed delight and became a pathetic memory. For three months Naomi was happy. Then, suddenly, without word of warning, night dropped down upon her, and she was alone in a strange land. Her father had kissed her good night with a long, lingering kiss, and had said, with his arm about her, "We are having a happy time together, are we not, daughter?"

She had returned the kiss effusively, assuring him that she had no other wish in life than to be able to be always with him. And in the gray of the next early morning a stranger, a physician, had bent over her with grave, pitying face to tell her as gently as he could the story of her desolation. Her father's bell had rung vigorously, and been promptly answered, but the father, even then, was not there.

She found friends, of course, that suddenly stricken foreigner. They thronged about her; they fairly oppressed her with their efforts to serve. Not foreigners alone, but her own countrymen; some whom she had known by reputation, some of whom she had never heard; but they came, eager to help, to sympathize. It all endeared her to that sunny land in which she was stranded, and made her

feel like lingering. It was more homelike there, she told herself, than that great, desolate house she called home could ever be again. So she stayed on and on—at first because she was too much prostrated to undertake the journey; afterward because she did not want to take it. She was singularly alone in the world. The cousin Dick, whose marriage to an uncongenial wife had made her realize how little he really was to her, was her nearest relative. There were others, distant relatives of her father, scattered over the country somewhere; she did not know, and felt that she did not care, where. What did she want of relatives whom she had never seen?

It was then that she thought sorrowfully of her schoolgirl friends, and told herself pitifully that if they knew how desolate their poor little Naomi was, they would be sure to come to her help in some way. She made resolutions to write to them, but shrank from the task. There would be so much to explain, such a long, long chasm to bridge over. And she let the days drag their slow length away without doing it.

Chapter 14

"The instruments of darkness tell us truths;
Win us with honest trifles, to betray us
In deepest consequence."

There came a day when Naomi's seclusion was invaded by one who claimed relationship with her father. "I am only a cousin by marriage, and twice removed at that," he said, with a regretful smile on his face. "I don't think your father and mine ever met, yet I have ventured to call upon you and claim the right to serve you in any way that I can. You observed, I hope, that I bear the family name. I have been alone in a strange land myself, and know something of the sense of loneliness. I hope you will at least let me try to make some of your hours less weary."

Naomi had looked again at his card, which she still held in her hand. "Volney Hermann Newland" was the name engraved on it—the family name, certainly. A faint color showed on her otherwise pale face as she read. It certainly had its ludicrous side that of all the thronging memories of her life the one which should claim her

thought just then was frivolous in the extreme and was in Gertrude Fenton's voice:

"It is written in the annals of fate that Naomi Newland shall be the first of the group to change her name; and do insist, my dear, that his name shall commence with N. I am so fond of alliteration."

Mr. Volney Newland proved to be very pleasant. His first call was limited to the prescribed time, and he did not obtrude himself upon Naomi's notice in any offensive way. He had referred her to several prominent men who were among her father's acquaintances and whom she might consult if she chose to prove his right to the name of Newland, and his claim to recognition as in the family connection. Then he begged the privilege of serving her in any possible way, assuring her that for the sake of his mother he was always glad to be of service to any woman. After that, his attentions were constant and delicately considerate. Before a week had passed Naomi felt that she knew him better than anyone else in that land of strangers; and when he told her that the business which had called him to that part of the country was likely to hold him there for weeks, possibly months, she felt distinctly glad, and was confirmed in her belief that she could not do better than to carry out the original plan and remain where she was for the winter. It was her father who had engaged the rooms and made all things comfortable to that end, and there was not only nothing to call her home, but everything to make her shrink from going. By degrees she grew to looking for Mr. Newland's coming, and to feel a sense of disappointment when he failed to appear.

As a rule, his mornings seemed to be given to business matters, and during those hours she wandered about a good deal in search of something to beguile her thoughts from her utter loneliness. It was on one of these mornings that she had wandered into a massive stone structure, in the vestibule of which she stood leaning against one of the pillars lost in sorrowful thought. She had been attracted inside the building by the sound of an organ grandly played. She had found worshippers devoutly kneeling, bowing, crossing themselves at intervals, going through all manner of genuflections that were strange to her; but she was interested because the people seemed to be in earnest. Many were, like herself, in deep mourning. They had felt sorrow, then. Were they being helped by all these prayers—if they were prayers, as she judged by the attitude?

She looked at them curiously, wistfully. Some of their faces brightened occasionally, as though they saw rays of hope through the gloom. There were two or three peaceful faces with the traces of storms outlived marking them. Most of the service was in Latin, and Naomi did not remember her schoolgirl Latin well enough to understand much of it; but she caught here and there a phrase sufficient to discover, at last, that prayer was being said for some person or persons who had died. The idea startled at first her Protestant ears, then interested her strangely. She had not prayed for her father and mother while they were with her; she had not thought of such a thing. But if it were possible to pray for them now, she felt that she would gladly learn to pray, simply for the privilege of speaking their dear names to God. Still, of

course, Protestants had no such belief; and the thought left her profoundly saddened.

It was very little that this girl, born and reared in a Christian land and educated in a nominally Christian school, knew about religious beliefs. Except for certain more or less vague ideas rather than learned, she had no beliefs, and was practically as ready to embrace paganism as any other "ism," provided it presented itself in attractive guise.

Barbara Dennison used to keep a Bible often lying open on her desk, and the impression had been abroad through the school halls that she read in it at other times than during the responsive chapel service. Once Naomi had burst heedlessly into her room, in the belief that her careless knock had been absorbed from the atmosphere, recognized, and surprised Barbara on her knees. She had gone away on tip-toe with a curious feeling, half yearning, half jealousy, tugging at her heart, born of the thought that Barbara lived a life in which she was not included. The next time she saw her friend she had watched her sympathetically for a while, with a fear that some ill news might have come to her that had driven her to prayer, which was about as much knowledge as the young woman of twenty-five still had with regard to practical religion.

She had been waiting for the worshippers to pass out, and was ostensibly studying the marbles within view, but was really absorbed in her own sad thoughts, and the half-formed wish that she could speak to one of those white-robed priests and ask him what the service meant, when Volney Newland seemed to appear mysteriously

from behind one of the marbles, and in another minute was beside her.

"Listening to the music?" he asked. "I find myself often stopping at this corner for the same purpose. The organ is played by a master hand."

"The music lured me in," said Naomi, speaking at once from her deepest thought, as this man had a strange way of winning her to do; "but I stayed for something else. I was interested in the people. They seemed to be helped by the prayers; some of them looked that way, at least. I discovered, after a while, that they were praying for their dead. I found myself half wishing that I was of their faith, or at least that there was somewhere a Protestant church where I could go for the same purpose. I believe I could pray, in such case."

Mr. Newland gave her a quick, searching look. Here was evidently a hungry soul. Was she ready to be led? He had not hoped for it so soon. He resolved upon a bold effort.

"My dear Miss Newland, all Protestantism is not so cold as you seem to think. There are people, not Romanists, who do not teach that we must consign our beloved dead to silence and oblivion. On the contrary, they teach distinctly that we may do for them still; do more, indeed, far more than we could oftentimes while they were with us."

She made a single step toward him, lifting her eyes to his face with a sudden light in them that fairly dazzled him, as she said eagerly:

"What do you mean? Do you mean that there is such a church, and that it teaches truth? Teaches what

reasonable people can accept? You cannot mean that, of course; but I believe I could join such a church today, and promise to do all that it could ask for the sake of doing for my father and mother what I did not know how to do nor think about at all when I had them. Are you a churchman, Mr. Newland?"

He met her interest with a smile that expressed deep sympathy.

"I trust I am, in the truest sense of the word; though I belong to none of the cold and formal churches with which you are probably familiar. I may as well say frankly that I belong to one which some of your friends would probably sneer at, even brand as false. We are quite used to such treatment. It does not argue against the truth, you know, that its advocates are called upon to be martyrs. The greatest martyr who ever lived was Jesus Christ."

"That is true," she said, impressed. "But I know very little about churches. What is the name of yours?"

"It has, in one sense, an unpretentious name, and yet there can be no grander. We call ourselves simply the Church of Jesus Christ."

"But I should not think that would be distinctive. Are not all others the same? In what respects do you differ?"

"There are various points of difference. Some of them would not interest you, probably; others, I think, might. Do you mean that you have no acquaintance whatever with the church which I represent?"

"I do not think I have. As I said, I am not very well acquainted with any church. My father was a liberal giver to all churches, but we were none of us members, and I know nothing about their distinctive creeds. Still, I

thought they were all able to claim the name by which yours is called. But of course, I know that what you said a few moments ago is not taught in any of them—at least, I never heard it. I should like to understand just what you mean."

He was fascinated by the light in her eyes. He spoke with infinite sympathy.

"Poor hungry soul being fed on husks! Believe me, I know all about it, and shall be very glad to explain my meaning. I meant all and more than my words conveyed. The church to which I have the honor to belong teaches, as one of its most blessed truths, that we may think of, pray for, believe for, and do for our dead in a sense that, as I said, is often impossible while they are living. Shall we walk on? We can talk with less interruption than we can here."

The worshippers were still passing out, and the two foreigners were the center of some curious eyes. Naomi turned quickly and followed Mr. Newland's lead. She had forgotten the people; she must hear more of this wonderful talk. She heard more, much more. They walked slowly, and Mr. Newland talked as one who understood what he was explaining. He sat down with her in her little parlor, and took her own Bible, to prove to her the truth of his words.

"I will show you that I am not teaching heresy," he said, with one of his winning smiles. "What did you think these words meant when you read them? Listen: 'Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?' It is true that Paul's argument just here was to

prove the doctrine of the resurrection; but I do not need to tell you that he would not have used a service that was not in existence as an illustration to point his truth."

She did not know, she confessed to him, that the verse was there at all. She was afraid that she was not much better acquainted with the Bible than she was with churches. These subjects had not interested her as they ought to have done. It was only since life had become to her a desolate thing that she had felt the need of something which reached beyond this life.

"Poor heart," he said tenderly. "That is a confession which too many who have been nursed by your cold creeds would have to make."

He found other verses equally new to Naomi, and read them and marked them for her to read; and promised to call again when he could give her more time. After he was gone she read again and again the marked verses, especially that one about being baptized for the dead. It had so new a sound to her that she told herself she would hardly believe that it was in the Bible if her own eyes did not see it; but she lingered with it. Her desolate heart longed for some link strong and tender to bind her once more to her own. She could never get away from the feeling that she might have been more, especially to her mother, if she had but known how. The possibility of atoning for it now, of being permitted some definite, tangible action in the name of her father and mother, at once thrilled and soothed her.

It was strange indeed that she had not heard of this; it must be true, must be right, this being baptized for the dead, else it would not be in the Bible. And there were the

words before her eyes, and they must mean that and nothing else. So reasoned this young woman, who had spent a quarter of a century in a Christian land, and was a graduate from a nominally Christian school. Yet her very desire to believe in the new doctrine awakened doubts and anxieties which she spread before Mr. Newland at her next opportunity, and he took care that she should not have long to wait.

"But why do not the churches generally observe such ceremonies?" she asked him. "I said I knew little about churches; but of course I have been a more or less regular attendant at church all my life, and I never saw or heard of such a service as you describe."

"That is true," said Mr. Newland; his tones were not bitter, but sad. "It is humiliating to have to admit it, but it is painfully true that this direction, like too many others, is simply ignored by the so-called orthodox churches. The only explanation I care to give is that they have grown away from the directness and simplicity of the gospel. It is an age when human intellect is greatly exalted, and when human theories and precepts are permitted to take the place of the divine. The very fact that you, a fairly regular attendant at the churches, have never even had your attention directed to those plain words marked in your Bible, is a sad comment on the condition of things. The command is there, you can see for yourself, so plain that a child may read."

Naomi ventured a faint protest to the effect that the verse did not really command anything; but he was ready for her. "My dear friend, isn't a reference to a manifest custom in a household almost, if not quite, equivalent to a

command in the eyes of a dutiful child? By the same token couldn't you say that the fourth commandment of the decalogue does not really command anything because it begins with the word 'remember'?"

She was too unskilled in argument, and too eager to accept the new doctrine, to realize the folly of such words. She was intensely interested, and her teacher was sympathetic and gentle; patient with what she thought he must consider her dullness, gentle over her criticisms. It was quite natural, he assured her, that she should have her doubts and difficulties. She could not be expected to imbibe new phases of truth, some of which ran counter to all her preconceived ideas, without much thought and study. What their church courted and coveted was people who would read and think and decide for themselves.

"To the law and to the testimony," he quoted, with one of his significant smiles. Did she remember how that quotation ended? And then there was no smile, but intense solemnity of face and voice, as he repeated solemnly, "If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." It became everybody, he said, to be careful. Then he borrowed her Bible, and returned it with more verses marked and with penciled explanations.

Chapter 15

"An evil soul, producing holy witness,
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek;
A goodly apple rotten at the heart;
Oh, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!"

It was all new to Naomi, and it was very fascinating. Her new friend was indefatigable in his efforts to help her, while at the same time he managed so skillfully to awaken her interest that it seemed always to be she who was urging on the investigation. Besides her own marked and carefully annotated Bible, little leaflets and booklets, also carefully marked and with copious marginal notes, were left with her for study. Among them was the Thirteen Articles of Faith, which represented, Mr. Newland told her, the belief of his church. The first one read, "We believe in God the eternal Father, and in his Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost." This had the ring of words that Naomi had often murmured in company with great congregations.

She read the articles through with utmost care, and with her limited knowledge of religious terms and

religious belief saw in them much to admire and nothing to disapprove. But it was, after all, the living teacher who had most influence. She was lonely, desolate; and he was uniformly thoughtful and tactful with regard to her. He was interested evidently, not in herself, as a young woman, but in her highest interests. He told her that he wanted to be earnest, "in season and out of season," to save souls. He found the verse in her Bible for her where a disciple was ordered to be all this, and more. He found many verses for her that she had not known were in her Bible. She read it much during those days, but she confined her reading to the verses that he marked, and read no notes but those of his writing. He talked much to her of Jesus Christ, of His tenderness for humanity, of His abounding sympathy, of the joy of having Him for a personal Friend. Above all, he talked much to her about her beloved dead—her father who had so recently gone from her, to whom she had meant to be so much, and there had not been time to carry out her plans.

Mr. Newland was an excellent reader. Even familiar words read by his sympathetic voice, with his impressive manner, sounded new and wonderful to her. One evening he drew from his pocket a small, daintily bound volume, and without other introduction than, "Will you let me read some significant words to you?" began:

"'And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.'" He interrupted himself to rise and bring to her her own Bible, found chapter and verse

that she might follow closely, then read the verses again in his most impressive manner, and without pause of any sort glided into an explanation of them, still reading from his own dainty volume.

"The books spoken of must be the books which contained the record of their works, and refer to the records which are kept on earth. And the book which was 'the book of life,' is the record which is kept in heaven." He paused to make clearer to her just what this meant, then read again:

"'Whatsoever you record on earth shall be recorded in heaven, and whatsoever ye do not record on earth shall not be recorded in heaven; for out of the books shall your dead be judged.'"

It was all so simple, he told her, and so beautiful. God, in His infinite mercy, had provided a way by which the dead, who had neglected the path of truth for themselves in life, could, by reason of their union with those still living who would obey for them, and be baptized not only for themselves, but for their beloved ones, secure eternal salvation. Then he read again:

"'Herein is glory and honor and immortality and eternal life. To be immersed in the water, and to come forth out of the water, is in the likeness of the resurrection of the dead in coming forth out of their graves.'" At this point he leaned forward to turn the leaves of her Bible and indicate the words as he read: "'Howbeit, that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also

that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly; and as are the records on the earth in relation to your dead, which are truly made out, so also are the records in heaven.'"

Here again he stopped to emphasize to his eager pupil the wonderful love and grace of God as shown in this provision. What had he done but so link the destinies of the living and the dead that "as they without us cannot be made perfect," —and he found that phrase for her in Hebrews— "neither can we without our dead be made perfect; for their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation."

"You see this is no new idea," he assured her. "Let me show you the words of the grand old prophet who had his eye fixed on the glories to be revealed in the last days, and especially this most glorious of all subjects—the baptism for the dead. Here it is in Malachi. Read it for yourself, please."

And Naomi read, "'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.'"

"Could anything be plainer?" he asked her with a reassuring smile, as she lifted her startled eyes to his. "Plainer or more gracious? Let me read the inspired explanation:

"'The earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other, and behold,

what is that subject? It is the baptism for the dead. For we without them cannot be made perfect."

"It sounds very plain," said Naomi, trembling with excitement, "and it seems simple and beautiful; I want to believe it. Such a little thing to do for my dear ones. And yet it seems so strange that I should not have heard of it before, and that all who recognize the claims of Christ do not practice it."

"My dear friend, that is as simple and beautiful as the rest of it. Shall I tell you why? The world was not ready for the truth; would not receive it. Why, it is only a handful that is ready for it now. You see how it is. I tell you frankly that it is only here and there one who will listen to truth; but thank God there is here and there one, and the Lord knew that, when He made this the fullness of time and ushered in a new dispensation. Notice how inspiration puts it:

""Those things which never have been revealed from the foundation of the world, but have been hid from the wise and prudent, shall be revealed unto babes and sucklings, in this, the dispensation of the fullness of times. Now what do we hear in the gospel which we have received? A voice of gladness, a voice of mercy from heaven, and a voice of truth out of the earth. A voice of gladness for the living and the dead. Glad tidings of great joy. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that bring glad tidings of good things, and that say unto Zion, behold, thy God reigneth. As the dews of Carmel, so shall the knowledge of God descend upon them.'"

Naomi had never in her life been so moved. As the magnetic voice of the reader filled the room, seeming to grow jubilant with each added phrase, she felt her breath coming in quick throbs, and all her soul shone in her eyes. For the first time since death had robbed her of her father just as she was beginning to make herself indispensable to him, she felt that she could continue to live not only, but be glad of life, for had she not a work to do, for him and for her mother, that was worthy of her?

By the most natural and reasonable steps possible the intimacy between herself and her teacher grew and flourished. There was much for the new disciple to learn, even after she had frankly opened her heart to the truth in a way that Mr. Newland told her was exhilarating beyond anything that she could imagine. She had not been laboring for years to win people to these sublime truths of God only to find the vast majority of them with visions so blinded by prejudice and ears so dulled by the superstitions of the past that they could neither see nor hear. Naomi was a more than willing learner. She was eager, intense. She continued to study with the most painstaking care every verse that her teacher marked for her in the Bible of which she had known nothing. She read and re-read them with ever increasing satisfaction; in the light of the copious explanations which accompanied them they seemed beautifully clear and convincing. She made great strides in the truth, Mr. Newland told her. On the day that she announced herself ready to accept his faith as hers, and to be baptized whenever he wished it, not only for herself, but for her father and mother, he bent over and lifted her hand to his

lips with an emotion that for the moment seemed too deep for words.

"Dear child," he said at last, his voice tremulous with feeling. "Forgive me for using that word, but you seem a very child to me, so simple and childlike in your faith. I have been constantly thinking of the Master's words since I have come to know you intimately: 'Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.' The trouble with many people is that they are too wise; they want to argue instead of to believe. The directness of your faith rests and comforts me."

He had abundant ground for comfort. From the hour that her great decision was made a new life seemed to Naomi to open before her. She did nothing by halves, this girl of a strong though undisciplined nature. She became enthusiastic for the faith she had espoused. She began to attend the meetings where Mr. Newland spoke, and to take such part as she could in the personal explanations which were arranged to follow the more formal talk. In this work her excellent knowledge of German was at last put to what she believed was good account. Mr. Newland was very proud of his most distinguished proselyte. He accepted meekly her extravagant estimate of the service he had rendered her, and was grateful for her help in the meetings. One evening he told her smilingly that he should soon begin to be quite jealous of her; that she was having better success with some of the inquirers than he had himself. It was evident to all who came in contact with the girl that she was tremendously in earnest. All her past seemed to her as so many wasted years— years in which she had not known how to live; and now

opportunity had been given her to atone, to make up as well as she might for lost time. Her first disappointment was close at hand. Her desire to submit to baptism in the name of her precious dead burned with a fever that could ill brook delay. She could not understand why Mr. Newland allowed the subject to drop constantly into the background, treating it almost as though it were a matter of minor importance. At last she compelled him to a direct statement.

"I confess that I have rather avoided the subject of late," he said, with a grave smile. "It was because I foresaw that a disappointment was in store for you, and I do not like to have you disappointed in anything. Do not look so startled, my dear friend; it is nothing but a little necessary delay, which one of a less intense nature than yours would think nothing of."

"But why should there be delay in so important a service when I am quite ready?"

"It is because of its very importance. When we first talked about it, I neglected to explain that we do not perform this solemn service in all places nor with ordinary surroundings. It is necessary that the ceremony take place in one of our temples, and with peculiar and very solemn accompaniments. Let me read you what our prophets say of it." That daintily bound volume appeared from his pocket and seemed to open of itself to the right page:

"'To be immersed in the water and to come forth out of the water, is in the likeness of the resurrection of the dead in coming forth out of their graves; hence this ordinance was instituted to form a relationship with the

ordinance of baptism for the dead, being in the likeness of the dead. Consequently the baptismal font was instituted as a simile of the grave, and was commanded to be in a place underneath where the living are wont to assemble, to show forth the living and the dead.'"

Naomi regarded the reader with wide-eyed wonder not unmixed with terror, and the voice in which she interrupted him trembled.

"That has a very strange sound; it almost frightens me. Why are secrecy and mystery necessary? If to be baptized for one's dead is right, is a merciful provision that God has made, why may it not be performed, as other church functions are, wherever there is a gathering of good people who wish it and a minister to do it? Why do you plan that it shall be done only in certain places that I should think it would be impossible for some to reach, and hide the service away from sight?"

He began very gently. "My dear friend, these things are all so new and strange to you that I must not wonder at your questionings. But consider what a solemn service it is, linking as closely as it does, and as no other ceremony professes to do, the living and the dead. Consider that revelation has declared that the records of these ceremonies must be kept with utmost accuracy so as to accord in every particular with the records kept in heaven, and surely you will see how dangerous it would be to multiply the places where the rite might be performed, thus leaving the records perhaps in careless hands. But more than all that," —and here his voice grew solemn and slightly stern— "do I need to remind you that men did not make the laws which govern us? They were

revealed to us through our prophet, and are to us the voice of God. Who are we that we should question his ways?"

Chapter 16

"Suspicion sleeps
At Wisdom's gate, and to Simplicity
Resigns her charge, while Goodness thinks no ill
Where no ill seems."

"Forgive me," said Naomi, humbly, "I did not think of that. If the minutest details of service have been revealed to you, of course you must obey."

He promptly followed up his advantage, adding a touch of reproach to his gravity.

"After all, does that seem so hard a condition to you, in order to attain such wide-reaching and eternally important results? Just a journey by rail over an interesting country to our Mecca, which all true believers long to see, and personal greetings from the honored heads of our church. Still, I must remember that all these matters impress you very differently from what they do me. Your environment has been utterly different, and you have only my poor word to set against all the preconceived ideas of a lifetime. I ought not to think it

strange that you find it hard to trust me, and I do not. Believe me, I am not in the least offended with your evident doubts. It may be that I am just a trifle hurt, but even that is foolish, and I shall be able to rise above it after a little."

Naomi was utterly subdued. She begged him not to so misunderstand her questions; she assured him that her trust in him was complete, and could not be shaken; she would have believed his teaching even though she had not read the same truths in her own Bible. What motive could he possibly have for deceiving her with regard to such matters, or any matters? He smiled sadly over that question and said, "What, indeed!" Then he told her that he desired nothing in life so much as her highest good.

Having yielded a point, it was like Naomi to yield utterly. Very soon after that conversation she was able to cheer her teacher with the statement that it had grown to seem to her not only appropriate but altogether beautiful that there was a sort of holy pilgrimage to be taken in order to perform her service of love for her dead. Such details lifted it above the common—set it apart as it should be. Of course the condition was not a hard one, not at least for her. It was true, as he had said, that one had a natural desire to visit the city which in a peculiar sense seemed to have been set apart for God's peculiar people, and to see that wondrous temple, of which he had told her, in all its massive beauty. She would be very glad to go. But she meant not to be unreasonable again. She had been acting very like an undisciplined child, as she was; but she meant to curb her impatient spirit and wait whatever length of time he considered wise before

starting on her journey. More than that, she had resolved that she would show her utter faith in him by not even asking for the reasons why she must wait; she knew the reasons must be good, and she could trust him.

Mr. Newland was very much touched by this exhibition of trust. There was almost a tremble in his voice when he said he hoped to prove himself worthy of such confidence. Then he walked the floor of her little parlor with a face so grave and so suggestive of trouble, or at least of anxiety, that she grew sympathetic at once. She had promised not to ask questions, but the promise applied only to her own affairs. Might she not ask about his? What was troubling him? Had anything gone wrong in his work? Couldn't she help him in any way?

She succeeded in winning a grave smile, and he came over and took a seat near her. Nothing had gone wrong, he told her; but he was perplexed as to the right or wrong of a certain course, and so sorely tempted in one direction that he feared it was biasing his judgment and making the wrong seem right, or at least the unwise seem wise.

Couldn't he tell her about it, she asked winsomely, and let her help decide? Papa used to say sometimes that two heads were better than one, even when one belonged to a silly little woman.

He shook his head and looked even more grave as he said that if he were but sure of her approval, he could afford to laugh at the views of all others. It was just what she would think, or, rather, what effect his thought would have upon her, that was troubling him. A great deal was at stake, and it was possible by making a careless move to

lose all that he had dared to hope for. He looked steadily at her as he spoke, but she was innocently bewildered, and begged him to confide in her if he could, and let her help him in any possible way.

He let the silence fall between them until she grew flushed and embarrassed under it; she could not have told why. Then he began to speak in low, impassioned tones. Since she advised, he would take his chance and risk all. She had been good enough to call him her teacher, but the truth was he had been a pupil, and had learned one lesson during these weeks, such as he had never expected to learn. He realized that he had already gone too far for retreat, so must tell her plainly that, so far as this world was concerned, his hope of happiness depended upon her. He knew only too well the infinite stretch between them: he a middle-aged man, and she a radiant young woman; and yet—and then he made good use of the other side of the question—he knew how to use words, and he poured them out upon her in an impassioned way, just enough tinged with hope to thrill her, just enough oppressed by fear of failure to enlist her sympathy. He watched her closely the while, and when at last he paused, and waited for what he called his fate, he knew that Naomi was ready to speak.

She looked at him with eyes that were swimming in tears, but that yet had in them the suggestion of a smile.

"I am overwhelmed," she said. "I have thought of you as my teacher, my guide; you seemed so far above me that to think of you as a friend I told myself was presumptuous. I am all alone in the world; to find that you care for me is almost too much—" She had no time to

complete the sentence; she was gathered suddenly into a pair of eager arms, whose owner assured her had been longing for her while he waited and trembled over possibilities.

The next few weeks were as a long-drawn-out dream of happiness to Naomi. It was much as she had told her suitor; surrounded by innumerable friends in the general acceptation of that word, she had yet lived her life—at least since her school days—chiefly alone, and had looked forward to loneliness to the end. Marriage and home, and all the joys connected with those strong, pure words, she had fancied were not for her. Her early experience with her cousin, when she found herself simply astonished over the story of his love, and utterly unable to respond to it, had given her an impression that she was not like other girls; and the ease with which many of her acquaintances had loved and married, choosing for life men of whose society she wearied in an hour, had confirmed her in that impression, and made the conviction grow upon her that she was intended to create an earthly paradise for just her father, and dwell in it with him. Then, suddenly, in the hour of her deepest loneliness, a rich, new world had opened for her, growing in interest and in promise as the days passed.

She had not realized what this new friend was becoming to her; she had not analyzed the sweetness of the companionship. So far as she had thought at all, she had told herself that her new peace and joy grew entirely out of her new faith, and the hopes and opportunities that it opened before her; and there was enough genuine heart experience in this to hold good for her belief. But the

moment she heard from her new friend a confession of more than general interest in her as a human being with a soul to be saved, her heart sprang to meet the confession and revealed itself as ready to respond. When in the quiet of her private room that first evening after their interchange of pledges she went carefully over the way she had been led, up to that supreme moment when her deepest self had been revealed to her, she said aloud and solemnly:

"God has given me everything but heaven, and that is in store. I must give my life to His service."

Plans for the immediate or at least the near future—*their* future—were now in order. Heretofore Naomi had not planned beyond an impression rather than decision that she would remain in the lodgings her father had secured until summer came.

"After that I suppose I shall go back to the place which other people call my home," she had said once to Mr. Newland, speaking in tones that represented desolation. It began to give her little thrills of exquisite joy to realize that she need no longer try to make home in that desolate place. Her home now and forever was in whatever locality Mr. Newland called by that name. She might even cease planning, which she told herself she hated. It was for another to plan, and it was to be her joy simply to assent.

From the first, Mr. Newland dominated her, always in a gentle way that seemed to defer to her slightest wish, and yet that carried out his own. When she referred to the fact that she was singularly alone in the world, that there was no one living who could claim the right of a relative to advise her, or who had even a right to inquire

into her plans, Mr. Newland frankly said he was glad of it; that it made her seem more entirely his own. It made him bold, perhaps, to urge swift movements. In reality he planned them carefully, but he let them appear to Naomi as if precipitated upon him because of circumstances not under his control. Some of them were not. They had been engaged but a few weeks, although they had already discussed and set aside as not desirable several plans connected with their future, when Mr. Newland came to Naomi's parlor one evening with an open letter in his hand, and perplexity on his face.

"Here is a complication, Naomi; I am practically ordered home. At least, certain complications have arisen connected with our interests that seem to demand my presence earlier than I had expected. I have a letter here from our president, which all but directs me to rearrange my plans, and come home as soon as possible. It is rather disappointing to me, I must say. How do you feel about it, dear?"

What could she feel but dismay? She saw herself stranded again; alone in the great dreary world, as she was during those terrible days after her father went away. To lose suddenly the prop on which she began to realize that she had unconsciously leaned since the first hour of their meeting, to be separated from one who for a few blessed weeks had practically thought for her, tenderly shouldering each responsibility as it loomed up to be considered, was to go back into the depths of desolation. She put her distress into her eyes and spoke no word.

"Poor child!" he said with infinite tenderness. "Poor little girl, it is too hard, after all you have endured. I wonder if the only other way would also be too hard for you?"

Of course, he was called upon at once to explain that other way, which he did with skill and a conviction of its advantages that grew upon him as he talked. What did they care, they two, about conventionalities? It was not as though she had home friends waiting for her. They were both sadly alone in the world; why should the commonplaces of custom hold them apart? What reasonable hindrance was there to their immediate marriage? Then they could take that long journey together with no weary separation to haunt their future.

Naomi was at first greatly startled, almost shocked. She had traditions, and an inheritance of sentiment to overcome. She had dreamed—and a marriage of this sort did not in any sense of the word fit the dreams. But all that belonged to her silly schoolgirl days—days when Barbara and Gertrude, and even Bernice, who was more romantic by nature than they, had laughed at her for being sentimental. It was years since she had dreamed, and she need do so no more; blessed realities had come to her.

Presently, as she grew familiar with the idea, she began to ask herself why she should make Mr. Newland's life hard as well as her own because of a few conventionalities. What, indeed, did they care as to what people would say? What right had anybody to criticize their doings? Mr. Newland prevailed, of course; he had meant to when he began. Naomi and he were quietly

married one sunny morning without other witnesses than a few of the stranger friends who had gathered about the girl in her bereavement. There were none who had known her before her trouble appealed to them. They said among themselves that it was rather unusual, this being married in a foreign country, away from all one's home friends; still, the girl was unusually situated, being left alone unexpectedly. She had probably known Mr. Newland all her life, and he was certainly old enough to take care of her; for that matter, she was not a child herself. Of course, none of them talked to Naomi, which was, perhaps, quite as well; she would have resented all advice as intrusive. She had given her faith unreservedly with her heart, and the sense of loyalty that made her place Mr. Newland's judgment above that of all others but echoed her heart's desire.

It is true she had shed a few self-pitying tears on the eve of her marriage day, as she thought of her father, and told herself how he would have admired and enjoyed Volney; as she thought of Barbara and the others, and wished the circumstances had been such that she could gather them about her. It was very unusual and sad for a girl to be all alone at such a time in her life. Had not the girls promised to respond to wedding bells? And behold, hers were the first to ring. Who had dreamed, at the time that sentimental promise was made, that the years and the solemn happenings of life would stretch themselves between those four as they had. Poor Gertrude! It must be hard for her to go to weddings. And there was Bernice, whose life story Naomi had never understood, save that she knew there had been no wedding after all. Perhaps it

was well that she was so far removed from the girls as to make invitations out of the question. But she did not shed many tears; her heart was tender rather than sad. Chiming in with the sense of loneliness was the blessed thought that her lonely days were over. Tomorrow they would be together, not for a precious hour or two, but forever; and nothing but death, no, not even death, could separate them again.

They made a rare holiday of the marriage day. After sitting down together at a wedding breakfast, as fine as the resources of the locality would permit, they drove to one of the many wonderful views which they had hoped to visit together sometime. They met many tourists, and pleased themselves with the belief that they acted just like the others, and could in no way be distinguished as a bridal couple on their first outing. Yet to them it was a day set apart from all others. Naomi, in living it over afterward, decided that she would not have had one thing about it changed. It was eminently fitting that they two should have been quite alone together, with no outsider in all the world who had a right to intrude upon them. Did not they each represent the other's world in a singularly unusual manner? She felt that she understood what her husband meant when he confessed himself not always able to be sorry that she was so entirely alone; if this really made her more fully his, she could not find it in her heart to be sorry either.

Chapter 17

"Master, go on, and I will follow thee
To the last gasp, with truth and loyalty."

Mr. Newland had sounded the depths of loneliness for himself; so he told his wife. She agreed with him that his experience in this respect had been far harder than hers. His father he could not remember, and his mother had died when he was a lad of twelve. He had brothers, it is true, but had been separated from them since childhood. His aunts, however, had been devoted to him. One was still living, and he told Naomi that she would find in her a woman to lean upon.

Early in their acquaintance Naomi had learned that Mr. Newland had married when quite young, and had lost his wife several years before. It had evidently been hard for him to talk about that period of his life, and Naomi, out of sympathy for him, held herself from asking some questions that she would have liked to ask. She inferred, more from his silences than his words, that the marriage had not been a happy one. She believed that his sense of

honor, as well as his duty to the dead, kept him from speaking plainly, but he had told her that he was a mere boy when he chose his wife; and sometime afterward had said he was beginning to believe that a man never understood his own heart or his capacity for loving until he was at least forty. Naomi was too regardful of his honorable silence to let him suspect what these and several other statements revealed to her. She had been his wife for a week before she made the astonishing discovery that he had children of his own.

"I suppose I ought to have told you," he said, with an embarrassed smile. "I am going to confess to a weakness of which you do not suspect me. My gray hairs never troubled me until I looked at your fair face; now I seem to myself too old for the prize I have won. I shrank from talking to you about my daughter, for instance, who is sixteen, lest I might seem a patriarch to you instead of a bridegroom. Since you have come into my life I like to forget that I ever had any other life; and in truth I am in danger at times of literally forgetting it. I seem to myself to be a newly created being just beginning to live. My shadowed past is so far in the background and so unlike this life that it seems to belong to some other creature."

After that he made haste to explain to the grave woman who was regarding him with serious, not to say anxious eyes, that of course he would not have so far forgotten his honor and his duty toward her as to be silent about such a matter had it made the slightest difference in their life together. His children had not been with him for years, were not to be with him at all; different arrangements had been made for them so long

before this time that there was a sense in which they had really gone out of his thought. Some experiences connected with these arrangements had been painful; he had been glad to forget them as much as he could. Not that he had really forgotten his children, of course, or was not ready to do for them if he ever had opportunity; but the sweetness of the life into which she had led him was so new and so precious that for the time being everything else had dropped away. Still, if she were going to think for a moment that he had not been strictly honorable in his silence, he was sure he could never forgive himself.

He looked so miserable as he said this, and conveyed so well the impression of a long series of painful scenes which she had succeeded for a time in shutting away from his memory, that Naomi felt all her heart rise up in pity for him. She made haste to assure him that nothing which he could tell her could shake her faith in his integrity and honor. Of course, since he was so utterly separated from his children and must be, she could understand how he had felt that it was not important for her to know about them at once. Then she asked as delicately as she could certain questions, which he answered with such hesitation and evident pain as confirmed her in the belief that there was a bitter chapter in his life, a wound indeed, that perhaps had healed over, but must not be probed. She felt only pity for him, and arranged, when by herself, a story that fitted the situation. The children were with their mother's relatives—he had admitted that when she asked—and there was bitterness, probably, between their father and their mother's relatives; perhaps his children were being

taught to dishonor their father, and he was powerless to help it. Having planned all the details to her mind, she gave herself up to so intense a sympathy that the chains of his influence were wound about her more closely than before. She began to realize that she must fill the place in his heart not only of wife, but of parents and children as well.

For several weeks following their marriage they were in a pleasant bustle of preparation for a long journey; then came a change of plans. Mr. Newland came into Naomi's dressing room one morning with an open telegram in his hand.

"Do you suppose, dearest, now that you have set your heart on an ocean voyage at once, you will be disappointed over delay? This telegram looks as though we were not to reach home as soon as we had planned."

The message was brief enough; it read simply:

"Defer departure. Explanations by letter."

"Why, of course," said Naomi, hesitatingly, studying the yellow paper meanwhile, as if to find something that did not appear on the surface. "I am ready to do whatever you consider best, only—"

"Only you are disappointed over more delay. So am I, dearest; but it may not be for any length of time."

"No," said Naomi, " I was not thinking of my disappointment; but it seems very strange to me that a man like you should be so entirely under the control of others that they can order a complete change of plans without even consulting you. I should think it would be very difficult for you to do your work, or to plan it. Why, Volney, even a trusted agent has responsibility laid upon

him, and goes and comes a great deal at his own discretion; and you are in business for yourself. Nobody ever ordered my father in this way. Why have they a right to tell you what you shall do?"

His face had clouded over a little, but it cleared under her anxious gaze, and he laughed pleasantly as he said:

"I believe you would make a fierce little rebel, dearest, on occasion, meek as you seem. I suppose there is in our organization what looks to outsiders like despotism. Not that you are an outsider, darling, but I mean to one not brought up in our faith. You have constantly to remember that we have men among us who are directly taught of God, and to them we may defer without any loss of self-respect. If you had been with the Israelites in the wilderness, would you have thought it strange that the people were to obey Moses implicitly?"

"But there is no such disparity between you and these men as there was between Moses and the Israelites, is there? Or if there is, it is on your side. Judging from their letters they are not so well educated as you—why should you not be the one to direct others? In other words, dear, why don't they trust you?"

There was a shadow of a frown on Mr. Newland's face; he spoke with deliberate emphasis.

"My dear wife, can you not be made to understand that they direct me as the representatives of God Himself? Do you not know that in times past He chose some, not necessarily any better or wiser than others, to be His mouthpieces, speaking through them to the people? That time has come again, and our leaders simply quote to us

what they have received from God. Would you have me superior to even His voice?" Naomi's face cleared.

"No, Volney," she said earnestly. "A thousand times no. I must seem very stupid to you. I cannot realize that there are men living today to whom God speaks just as He did to the old prophets. Be patient with me, dear; it is all so new. I shall learn in time."

Since she was eager to go, it was she who had need for patience. Apparently Mr. Newland was under dictation. The letters he received were not shown to Naomi, it was merely made known to her that they contained detailed explanations with regard to matters of which she had no knowledge, and which would be dull and unintelligible reading to her; but they seemed to radically change all his plans. Instead of starting homeward they began an extended tour whose central object seemed to be sight-seeing, though many meetings were held, and what Mr. Newland called good work was accomplished. Naomi was an indifferent traveler, and had been sight-seeing all her life. There were times when she longed for the quiet of home. Moreover, the desire to carry out that new and blessed ceremony in the name of her father and mother remained as strong as ever, and she referred to it so often that Mr. Newland told her once, smilingly, that she certainly made as determined a little saint as the church could possibly desire. Still, sight-seeing with Mr. Newland as guide, and with his tender forethought to anticipate every want, had its pleasant side, and the months slipped away in a manner that surprised the woman on whose hands time had often hung heavily.

At various points, too, they settled down, and had long periods of rest "playing home," Mr. Newland said. He played it with a relish which made Naomi think tenderly that his home joys had been few.

It came to pass that when they did at last set sail for home, with much evident reluctance, and some outspoken criticisms on Mr. Newland's part as to the peremptory nature of his summons, nearly a year of their married life had passed—an eventful year to Naomi. Her husband watched her as she stood on deck getting her last view of the swiftly receding shore, and settled it with himself, as he had a hundred times before, that she was a strikingly beautiful woman, and he was a man to be envied. There was just a tinge of sadness on her face which did not detract from its beauty. Full of joy and hope as her present and future were, she could not forget that when she had reached that foreign shore her father was beside her, and now that she was journeying homeward he would not be there to greet her. Her husband knew what made the tender shadow, and kept his face decorously grave, in sympathy; notwithstanding the fact that he was distinctly glad of having Naomi quite to himself. Aside from his love for her, there were reasons why it was better that no outsider should have the right to ask questions.

Their trip was swift and uneventful. Mr. Newland showed a willingness to linger in New York and Philadelphia if Naomi wished, and even proposed to take her to visit some of her school friends, but she promptly gave her vote against all delays. She did not care for New York, and Philadelphia she did not know. As for the girls,

the only ones she was eager to see were gone West somewhere; she mourned that she had forgotten or perhaps had never known just where. But she was sure they were none of them in their old homes, and for herself, what she desired above all things was to be at home. Mr. Newland laughed at her eagerness; told her there were long years before them in which they could stay at home, and it might be years before they would have opportunity to travel again.

"We will make the opportunity whenever we wish," she said, with a willful little toss of her head that her husband rather admired when it did not indicate opposition to cherished plans of his. "You and I are going to do just as you and I please; and do let us please to get home now as soon as we can. If you knew what it was to me to think of our having a home together of our very own!"

He laughed indulgently, omitting the slight frown with which he generally greeted her rebellious hints that they should order their own lives. He had himself criticized too recently to make reproof effective. Naomi had enjoyed his criticism, and it made her bold.

"You may obey the church," she told him lightly, one day, when he attempted to check her independent suggestions. "If it is expected that you should do so and you are willing, I shall try not to interfere; but for myself, I will obey only you. I have not promised to be subject to any other man."

He smiled and kissed her, calling her a beautiful little rebel. Wait until she saw some of the church dignitaries, and heard their authoritative deliverances. Still, if she

could manage to keep obedience to him in her creed, he should be able to make it all right with the church.

Matronly dignity sat well upon Naomi. The year had rounded out her nature in many ways. Her exaggerated estimate of her husband's wisdom had made her feel very humble and ignorant in his presence, and during her leisure hours, when he was employed with business connected with his mission abroad, she had set herself steadily to the task of making herself more worthy of such a man's companionship. Because the Bible was now the most interesting book in her possession, as well as because Mr. Newland seemed to be entirely at home with it, she chose it as her text-book. Earnest study of the life of Christ led, as it inevitably must, to a yearning desire to draw closer to Him, to live in His atmosphere. This drew her to much prayer, and by degrees the sense of loneliness which had oppressed the later years of her life slipped away. She grew into the understanding that Jesus Christ may become a potent factor in one's daily life, and that His unseen presence is a real and abiding thing.

The changes which this experience wrought in her, though subtle, were distinct. Mr. Newland was conscious of a steadily growing charm about the woman he had won, and exulted in her. Just what was causing this rapid development of her character he but dimly understood, and attributed a large part of it, as Naomi herself would have done, to daily companionship with himself. His life, he told himself, had been made broader by contact with the world, by association with men and women of affairs,

and this was precisely what Naomi had needed, and to a degree had missed.

He had not realized that she needed anything, but the changes in her were charming. And yet there were times when he looked at her with anxious eyes, and told himself that the child-nature which had been so apparent when he first knew her was developing rapidly, and the possibilities were that here was a woman who would have a mind of her own, and dare to differ radically even from him. But he put the thought away as far as he could. It would do no good to borrow trouble. He must try to plan so as to hold her from the knowledge of anything that she might not like, until his influence over her was still stronger. In the meantime he would enjoy the present.

Chapter 18

"Where it concerns himself,
Who's angry at a slander, makes it true."

One episode of their journey which was given only passing attention at the time returned to Naomi with startling vividness afterward. They had stopped between trains for Mr. Newland to attend to certain business, and were obliged to travel for several hours on a crowded way-train. During this time a woman seated just behind them embraced an opportunity afforded by Mr. Newland's trip to another car to enter into friendly chat with Naomi.

"I reckon that ain't your husband?" she began inquiringly, with a nod of her head toward Mr. Newland's retreating figure.

"Why do you reckon that?" Naomi asked, in an amused but not unkindly tone. The woman belonged decidedly to the uneducated and commonplace, but she was more than middle-aged, and probably was tired of her own company. The cultured woman had no objection to beguiling a little of her time.

"Well, he looks too old for one thing, and not like you, somehow; though for the matter of that, husbands and wives don't often look alike, do they? But there's somethin' about him, somehow, that makes me feel he don't belong."

"Nevertheless he does," said Naomi, with a happy little laugh. "I am very glad to be able to tell you that he is my husband."

"Well, now," said the woman, "I didn't think it. I told Sarah that I knew he was twenty years older than you if he was a day, and maybe more. She thought so too; she even allowed that he might be your father, though I told her he wasn't old enough for that. Sarah's my girl; it's that one over there asleep. She ain't very well, Sarah ain't. I'm goin' out West for her sake. Are you goin' fur?"

"We are going to Utah," said Naomi, absently, studying the while Sarah's face with its tell-tale color high on the cheek-bones. Did the mother realize, she wondered, what a futile journey she was taking?

Her questioner made an indescribable sound with her tongue intended for emphasis as she said:

"So am I, and I'm half scared about it. Seems to me I wouldn't live there for anything. Sarah and me are only going for a few weeks, just to get past the nasty spring weather, but I dread even that. Seems to me I don't want to breathe the same air with them Mormons for even a few weeks."

It was Naomi's turn to be startled, though she made no visible sign. Mormons! She had not thought of them for years. What were those schoolgirl stories that used to make her heart swell with indignation for a few minutes

until some local excitement crowded them out? It seemed almost strange that she had not recalled even the existence of that sect in connection with her husband's home. The voluble voice went on:

"Still, they are everywhere nowadays. My sister lives in Iowa, and she says there's quite a settlement of them there; but Utah is kind of headquarters, you know. Horrid set, with their half a dozen wives apiece—it always makes me mad just to speak their names. I'll tell you what I think: every man of them ought to be sent to state's prison; that would settle them."

The girl Sarah moved in her sleep, then roused herself and sat up and looked about her. She was a pretty girl, in spite of, or perhaps partly because of, the hectic flush which helped to make her eyes very bright. She laughed a little at her mother, having caught her last words.

"You are on your hobby, ain't you?" she said.

The mother laughed also, in a shamefaced way.

"Well, I dunno how I come to mount. She—" with a nod of her head toward Naomi "—said she was traveling to Utah, and I said we was too, but I wouldn't want to go there to live. And I wouldn't, not if I had a husband along, anyhow, and goodness knows I wouldn't if I hadn't! Think of me being a second or third or fourth woman trotting along after a piece of a man! Faugh! It makes me feel creepy just to think of such things!"

"All the folks in Utah ain't Mormons by any means," volunteered Sarah, perhaps out of sympathy for the look of horror on the face of the stranger. Her mother caught at the relief.

"No, they ain't, that's one comfort. Where we are going they say that more than half the folks are decent Christian people; but if I was them I'd want to pull up and make my home where other decent folks lived. If I had to make my home there, I don't believe I could help being kind of afraid that my husband, or my girl or boy, if I had one, would get roped in somehow with that set. They say they are as smart as snakes at getting around people."

"Oh, come, mother," said Sarah, "you are getting too excited."

She spoke wearily, and the watchful mother's thoughts turned swiftly from all outside interests to center on her own little world again, leaving Naomi to her thoughts. She had not thought much about either names or localities in connection with her new home. She had remembered only that it was *his* home, and was therefore henceforth to be hers; with this blissful fact in the foreground, nothing else had mattered. She did not try to analyze why there was a vague sense of unrest stirred within her by the talk of this ignorant woman who had been distinctly disagreeable at the last. That suggestion about being afraid even of one's husband was awful! What sort of husband must a woman have to be able to think such thoughts about him? But it could not be pleasant to live near to people with such ideas as had been baldly brought to her memory. The talkative woman changed her seat, presently, to the farther end of the car, where there would be less opportunity for the wind to reach Sarah, but her words stayed with Naomi.

She began on some of her half-formed thoughts as soon as her husband returned to her.

"Volney, it seems strange, but I never until just now thought of that singular sect called Mormons in connection with your home, though I knew, of course, that they originally settled that region. Are there many of them left? Do you ever come in contact with any of them in business? And are they as peculiar as they have been represented?"

Mr. Newland gave his wife a quick, startled look, but all he said was:

"What an array of questions! Although not a Yankee, I shall follow one of their customs and ask another. What suggested the Mormons to you just now?"

She told him of their fellow-travelers, and repeated bits of the talk she had heard.

An unmistakable frown gathered on his face.

"That is a consequence of our missing the through train and having to travel with all sorts of people," he said loftily.

"She wasn't offensive, Volney—at least she had no thought of being so. She began to talk to me simply for the purpose of having a little human interest while her invalid daughter slept. You should see the girl; she has a pretty face, and it is quite refined in appearance. The mother is taking her West in search of health, and is almost afraid to go to Utah on account of the Mormons. She even hinted to me that it might be a dangerous place to live; not for me, of course, but for your sake."

The hint seemed sufficiently ridiculous to laugh over, but Mr. Newland did not laugh. A deep red spread itself

over his face as he said in his most reproving tone, "I should think the woman was insulting."

"Volney, she had no such intention; she is not that sort of person at all—not coarse, I mean—and she was not trying to be smart or funny. On the contrary, she was very much in earnest. Of course, she is ignorant and misinformed and prejudiced; we need not notice what she said. But I want you to tell me about those people. I used to hear a good deal of them at one time, when I was in school. Was there any truth in the horrid things said about them? They don't really pretend to have two wives at once, do they?"

She had never before heard his voice sound positively harsh.

"What utter nonsense you are talking! That woman is densely ignorant evidently as well as coarse, but surely you know you are speaking of something that is directly contrary to the laws of our land! How can you ask if it is a practice among a law-abiding people?"

"I suppose I know very little about it," said Naomi, meekly. "Papa never talked about laws and such matters much at home. Mamma was an invalid, you know, and we ordered all our talk for her entertainment. Of course I heard about current events, and understood them in a general way, and I remember that at one time there was a good deal of excitement over the Mormons, and we girls, especially Barbara, were quite wrought up over it, but nothing is very clear. I know that there is a law against bigamy, but there has always been that among civilized people. I mean, there has been for hundreds of years, so that doesn't explain the excitement over the Mormons.

Still, of course, one knows better than to believe half of what one hears. I suppose they have been slandered, and the lawless attempts of a few half-civilized persons made to stand for the morality of all."

Mr. Newland caught at her words.

"They have been fearfully slandered. No martyrs of old have had more to endure at the hands of an ignorant public. And yet there is no body of people more law-abiding and God fearing and worthy of all respect than they. Wait until you know them and are able to decide for yourself."

"Oh, shall I know some of them? Do you really know any Mormons personally? Volney, this is very exciting! Did you ever know a man who tried to have two wives at once?"

Mr. Newland uttered an exclamation which was perhaps caused by a sudden eccentric movement of the seat they occupied. Some bolt or bar chose that instant for slipping out of place, and let the seat down with a thud several inches below its proper level. Some bustle and confusion followed. A brakeman appeared and one or two other train men, and an ineffectual effort was made to get the seat back into its place. It ended in a search through the crowded car for another seat; and after some waiting and much grumbling on the part of those who think that one ticket entitles them to two seats, Mr. and Mrs. Newland were reestablished. It was fully half an hour afterward that Mr. Newland reverted to their interrupted talk quite as though there had been no interim.

"The Mormons, my dear, are an inoffensive, maligned, sensitive people. It will be wise for you not to talk with

anybody about them or their affairs. I mean after we reach home, as well. Especially, I want to guard you against the use of the word 'Mormon.' It has sad associations to many of them; they have suffered, you understand, for their faith, and they have learned to be cautious as to whom they trust. You will come in contact with them, of course; they mingle with others on common ground so far as they can, and are just like other people. You will not know, or need to know, for that matter, whether the people you meet casually are Mormons or not; the point is, don't talk about that matter."

"Then, Volney, you are really in sympathy with them as a people?"

"Certainly I am. So are all the people with whom you will come in contact. They are the victims of intolerance and prejudice, and have had enough to endure to awaken the sympathies of all right-minded persons."

"Still, wasn't it their insane ideas with regard to marriage that caused the most of their troubles years ago?"

"By no means. It was political jealousy, and a concerted attempt on the part of unprincipled politicians to make people throughout the country believe a mass of falsehood concerning them. But we need not unearth all that filth; it would be useless as well as disagreeable. You are right in saying that you do not understand political questions, and I confess that I have no desire that you should. There is no present occasion for your burdening your mind and vexing your conscience with such matters. As for that question of plural marriage which troubled your intelligent friend, I can assure you of my own knowledge

that it never was the rampant thing that sensational enmity tried to make it; and, of course, you know that in any case it is a past issue, and need not be discussed. What I want to impress upon you by all this talk is the importance of your avoiding any reference to your former ideas with regard to this people. I mean, of course, in your conversation with others. There are facts concerning them that I will be able to explain to you later as occasion arises, but do not, I beg of you, encourage others to talk with you along this line. You will be sure to hurt somebody's feelings if you do, and I am certain that you want to avoid that."

Naomi believed that she understood her husband thoroughly. He had espoused the cause of those Mormons as she felt he would be sure to do for any oppressed or ill-treated people; and perhaps he had suffered for it; been the victim at least of careless and hateful tongues. It might be that he dreaded a like experience for her; she was sure of it when, after a moment of gloomy silence, he said:

"I wish I could shield you always from coarse and irresponsible tongues."

Under cover of the heavy wrap that was thrown over the back of the seat she stole her hand into his. He pressed it instantly and smiled on her, though a moment before his face had been in a frown. It gave her an exquisite sense of happiness to note that whatever annoyances he had had to bear in the past, great enough to have their memory overspread his face with gloom, she had power to chase away the shadows and bring the smiles. She resolved to be as wise as a serpent in her

intercourse with all classes of people. She would not only see to it that the feelings of no outsiders were hurt by careless words of hers, which was what her noble-hearted husband evidently thought of, but she would shield him. His sensitive nerves should not be jarred by the repetition of careless words such as that ignorant and garrulous old woman, for instance, had spoken. She could understand how their repetition might have awakened memories of unpleasant scenes. If she had understood before, she would not have repeated them for the world. It was plain that he could not get quite away from their memory. His annoyance showed in his next sentence:

"We are nearing the junction where it is to be hoped that we can connect with a through train. We have had enough of broken-down seats and low-bred tongues."

Chapter 19

"Beautiful as sweet!
And young as beautiful! and soft as young!
And gay as soft! and innocent as gay."

Instead of frowning over the experience connected with the way-train, Mr. Newland ought to have rejoiced. He did not realize how effectually it had contributed to the closing of Naomi's mouth to the word "Mormon," or to the many curious questions which she might have liked to ask. Whether or not Mr. Newland had intended it, the impression had been made upon his wife that to talk might in some way injure her husband, which was, of course, enough to seal her lips. She resolved to abide literally by his suggestions and ask questions even about apparently commonplace matters of no one but him.

She had entered upon her new duties as responsible head of a household with some trepidation. She had never really ordered a house, the nearest approach to it being the making of more or less tentative suggestions to the well-trained servants who had been for years in her

mother's employ. To be the real as well as the nominal head of a home, to interview "help" and direct all the machinery of a new home in a new country, was quite different from any former experience. She expected trouble and friction. Mamma, she remembered as a girl, had had what she used to call "seas of trouble" with servants before she finally gathered about her those who were willing to be trained and to stay when the training process was over. Naomi wondered curiously and with more or less anxiety whether or not she knew how to train servants. Her husband's home had been rented, he told her, for a number of years; but he had given directions to have it thoroughly renovated and put in perfect order, so that all she would have to do would be to "walk in and take charge." It sounded easy when he said it with a smile, but Naomi had had enough experience of life to tremble sometimes over the thought of her responsibilities.

She need not have worried. Before she had been at home a week, she told her husband that domestic service in this part of the world must be perfect, or was it that perfect housekeeper of his who managed everything so that there was no jar and nothing to wish different? Where had he found Mrs. Roper, and how was it that so refined and apparently cultured a person was willing to be a mere housekeeper in somebody else's home?

Mr. Newland replied that he had been able to befriend Mrs. Roper at a time when she needed friends, and he believed she was grateful to him. The other servants she had herself chosen, and she was a woman who knew where to find good ones and to keep them in order. For

herself, she seemed to be quite satisfied with her position. Why not? She had a good home and was treated kindly by everybody. He was more than glad that Naomi was pleased. He had been anxious lest she might not fancy Mrs. Roper for some reason; there was no accounting for women's whims about housekeeping matters; it was a great comfort to him that his borrowed trouble had been unnecessary.

Truth to tell, Naomi saw comparatively little of Mrs. Roper, and was really but the nominal head of her household, although utmost deference was paid to her suggestions. Mr. Newland, despite the business cares which he had explained to his wife would be heavy, contrived to give her a great deal of his time, acting as her escort to all places of interest, and devoting himself almost as exclusively to her entertainment as he had during the first few weeks following their marriage. This, of course, was delightful to Naomi, and she saw the beautiful city under the most favorable auspices; one who was thoroughly acquainted with the city and its suburbs was taking care that she saw only the beautiful portions. Thus guarded, there was continual pleasure in their almost daily rounds.

"Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is mount Zion, the city of the great King." Naomi quoted the words as she stood one morning at a point which gave her a wonderful view of mountain and minaret and lovely vale. "It reminds me of it, Volney. I found that verse the morning after our first walk—just happened upon it, you know; and I cannot tell you how many times I have thought of it as we have walked or driven about the town.

Can you think, I wonder, how glad I am that the great tabernacle as well as the beautiful temple will be mine in a sense that church never was before? I like, too, to think that the people I meet are consecrated in a peculiar sense to the Lord Jesus, and live with his directions in mind as you say they do. It is what I have always thought religion should be, diffusive, you know, permeating the whole life."

He had looked with admiration at her eager face and shining eyes, and called her, as he often did, his "little fanatic," and then he had added, with a gravity which she fancied was growing upon him:

"Do not set your mark too high, Naomi. This is earth yet, remember, not heaven, and the people are, necessarily, of the earth. It will not do to expect too much of them."

She had need for this caution as she began to make acquaintance with the people. She learned early what she had suspected, that her husband stood very high among them, and his social circle was therefore of the choicest. But Naomi was compelled to confess herself disappointed in the women, who were, of course, the chief callers. They were not in appearance or conversation what she had imagined women who made their religion the center of their lives would become. An occasional face attracted her, belonging to a woman of middle age: not because of its beauty, not because it expressed happiness in the sense that Naomi had heretofore used that word, but because it suggested a kind of peace that was born of pain.

"I am sure she has been through deep trouble," Naomi said to her husband referring to a caller. "She shows it on her face. I wonder what her history is? Do you know it, Volney?"

He had known her for years, he said, and was not aware that she had had more than her share of trouble. Some people made trouble out of what was intended for blessing; the woman might be one of that kind. Still, he believed that she had lost a number of children; that might have shadowed her face.

His tone made Naomi think that the caller in question was not one of his special friends, and that he did not care to see her often. She was sorry for this. As nearly as she could be said to feel an attraction for any of her new acquaintances she felt for this one. The social talk which she heard was one of the disappointing elements. It was bright enough, sparkling with gay nothings —some of the gayest even suggested the word "reckless"—but there was an utter absence of that spiritual tone which Naomi had expected would give her an uplift into purer realms. The talk was of any subject under the sun rather than the Lord Jesus Christ and his recognized claims. Yet the very gateways of the city and the supporting columns of the business houses proclaimed abroad their foundation and their faith. Afterward Naomi recalled with a sickening pain the impression that those initial letters made upon her when she saw them gleaming from tower and arch, "Z. C. M. I.," and learned that they meant "Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institute." It seemed beautiful to her, as well as eminently appropriate, that the

businessmen should thus proclaim whose they were and whom they served.

"If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

Naomi quoted the verse to her husband one evening when she had been telling him about calls from certain women, and confessing to him that their talk disappointed her.

"I could not help thinking of the letters on those stone columns on Broadway, Volney; they rebuke such talk as we had this afternoon."

But Mr. Newland had answered her almost sternly, that she ought not to allow herself to judge so continually by mere externals. The very women she was criticizing lived their religion, which was far more important than to be continually talking about it. She had been almost hurt by his words, but had comforted herself with the thought that her husband was evidently so fond of this people that he did not like to have their failings pointed out, and resolved to keep her future disappointments quite to herself.

One great disappointment, however, overshadowed all others. That vicarious baptism for her beloved dead was still being postponed. Mr. Newland was emphatic with regard to it. He wondered that she did not herself understand that she was not strong enough for such an ordeal. The summer would soon be upon them, and she would need all her strength and nervous force to carry her through. There was no occasion for haste, and when their beautiful autumn had come and she was quite strong again would be the ideal time for such a service.

To her timidly put question, "But, Volney, what if, in the meantime, I should die?" he had replied that he considered her far too sensible a woman to allow herself to grow nervous and brood over such matters. And then he had added tenderly that in any event she might rest assured that the memory of her father and mother should be held sacred. If she wished, he would accept it as a trust, pledging his word of honor, in the event of her not being able to take this sacred duty upon herself, to see to it that proper persons were found to be buried in baptism in the name of her dear ones.

Mr. Newland did not know it, but to Naomi this was the first jarring note in the beautiful provision which had been explained to her as one that linked her dead to herself by an indissoluble tie. How could persons be found who could assume acceptably such a duty? Did he mean they were to be hired? But her husband's will was growing daily to be more fully a law to her, and she felt that she must hide away this disappointment also, and bide her time.

As the weeks passed, a wonderment grew within her over the fact that she had nothing to do with her husband's relatives, near or remote. She asked often about the aunt, who lived not many miles away, and whom she was to find especially congenial. And his children—was she not even to know them?

He smiled on her, called her an impatient little wife who wanted the world all at once, assured her that they would go, someday, to see his aunt, who never left her own home. Then he grew grave, with a gravity that always had a touch of annoyance in it, as he said that

there were reasons why it would not be well at present for her to make the acquaintance of the children. Couldn't she trust him?

Of course she assured him that she could and did, and she felt her heart glow with sympathy for a man whose crosses were so heavy and so peculiar that they must separate him from his own children.

Matters were in this state when their first separation occurred. Mr. Newland announced the necessity for it with a clouded face, and was so evidently reluctant that his wife had to turn comforter. He had tried in vain to make different plans, he said, but the Council had been too much for him this time. They were quite determined that it was he should go, and no other.

Naomi was very helpful. She was not surprised that he was the one chosen, she said, if there were important business matters to manage. They probably knew, as she did, that he could manage better than anyone else. He was not to worry about her; she should do very well for a little while.

He grew cheerful under her soothing, and repeated his assurance that he would make his stay as brief as possible. He was glad, at least, that he could leave her in such competent care. Mrs. Roper was thoroughly efficient and prepared to do everything possible for her comfort; she might trust her fully.

The parting was very tender, Mr. Newland assuring his wife, as he came back for one more kiss, that he had planned not to leave her, at least overnight, for a good many months yet. Naomi indulged herself in a few tears as she watched him from the window and received from

him a final bow and smile. What a dreary thing life would be without him! But she put her tears aside promptly, resolved to consider her blessings. Suppose she were like the woman who called yesterday, and who said she was sure she did not know how long her husband expected to be gone, the longer he stayed the better she should like it. The words had been spoken laughingly, of course, but with a half-veiled sting in them that had not escaped Naomi. There were women, without doubt, who regretted their marriage bonds. What awful living that must be!

Mr. Newland had certainly not overrated Mrs. Roper. She was constant in her care and watchfulness of Naomi. At times it seemed to the wife almost like espionage. When, therefore, on the second day of Mr. Newland's absence, the housekeeper was summoned by telegram to the next town to attend at the dying bed of a relative, Naomi could have almost found it in her heart to be glad. She assured Mrs. Roper that there was no reason whatever why she should not remain away overnight, and that there was not the least need of having an outsider come in to fill her place. Mrs. Roper was thoroughly efficient, was ladylike, was eminently respectful to her, was, indeed, what Mr. Newland considered her: a "treasure." Yet his wife could not help a sense of relief in the thought of being free from her guardianship for a few hours.

"I am not used to being treated like a child by anyone but Volney," she told herself, as she tried to account for the feeling of relief.

She had hardly been alone for an hour when a gentle tap sounded at the door of her sewing room, and a clear voice asked, "May I come in?"

The voice was followed at once by a vision of loveliness—a young girl with a fluff of shining hair, and a singularly beautiful face, and wonderful eyes, and a mouth that seemed made for kissing. Naomi could not help a little exclamation which meant pure delight at the sight of such beauty, and gazed t her much as she might have done at a lovely picture which had suddenly been unveiled before her.

"You want to see me, don't you?" the girl said, advancing and dropping among the cushions of Naomi's couch as though they had been placed expressly for her.

She was dressed in exquisite taste3 and with careful attention to small details, so that the whole effect was faultless. Her voice was as silvery sweet as the face suggested, and had in it a note of similarity which puzzled while it charmed Naomi.

"Certainly I do," she said heartily. "You look as though you belonged on that very couch. I find myself wondering how those cushions have done without you all this time. Now will you introduce me, and tell me why you have not come before?"

"You want to see me, don't you?"

Chapter 20

"If I chance to talk a little while, forgive me,
I had it from my father."

Her guest gave a musical little laugh.

"I should have rung the bell and been formally introduced," she said, "but, you see, I was afraid. To be sure, I know the General Manager is away. I waited until I was certain that she was out of town before I ventured; but I thought she might have assistants trained to consider me dangerous, and as I was simply dying to see you, I resolved to run no risk. I had a glimpse of you from the window, and knew you were here and alone."

Naomi looked both amused and puzzled.

"For what do you take us," she asked merrily, "that you consider such diplomacy necessary in order to call upon the mistress of the house? Who is it that you consider General Manager?"

The girl tossed her pretty head with a wise and half-defiant air as she said:

"Oh, I know Mrs. Roper. I knew her before you did." Then, without a suggestion in tone or manner that she was saying anything unusual, added:

"I heard that you were beautiful, and it is quite true. I think you are perhaps the prettiest person I ever saw, and I expected to see a pretty one. Brother Newland may be trusted for that."

Naomi laughed almost as gleefully as her guest had done.

"You are deliciously frank," she said, "or is it premeditated deception? I can fancy you a queen of the fairies come to cajole a poor mortal by words of flattery which sound so real as almost to deceive her. Do you come straight from Fairyland, my dear?"

"I? No, indeed! I come from a land of plainest prose. Although it is true that I made my escape somewhat after the fashion of a fairy—at least I made myself almost invisible. But I was very nearly caught at the last moment. Don't you know who I am? Really? Nor even surmise? Why, I'm Mara."

"Mara," repeated Naomi, face and voice expressing only amused interest. "It has rather a queenly sound, and a suggestion of unreality. I don't think I ever heard it before applied to mortals, and it doesn't enlighten me in the least. What should it suggest to me?"

The girl's smiling face suddenly settled into seriousness as she said gravely:

"It is a Bible name, I believe. My mother gave it to me. I have often suspected that she had too good reason for choosing it."

Her gravity prevented Naomi from further questioning. Evidently some delicate family secret was hidden here that perhaps the girl ought not to have even touched upon. While she hesitated as to just how to continue a conversation with this very fascinating but certainly peculiar guest, the girl began again, in her former light, almost reckless tone:

"Do you really mean that the name does not tell you anything? Upon my word, I think my respected father might at least have mentioned me."

A sudden premonition of the truth broke upon Naomi. This must be—it would account for that bewildering reminder which she had felt, rather than realized, at the first.

"Is it possible that you are Mr. Newland's daughter?"

"I have that honor," said the girl, with a whimsical toss of her head. "That is, I am one of them—the one that he likes the least, I think, which is disagreeable, since I am the oldest. I trouble him sometimes, I fancy, with my tongue, and my ways generally. Hasn't he told you a thing about me?"

Naomi's face was grave now, and her manner dignified. What way was this for a daughter to speak of such a father as hers? It gave her a hint of what the poor girl's home influence must be, and of what her father might have had to suffer.

"He has spoken of his children, of course," she said, with a dignity that she tried to make gentle, "but at this moment I do not recall his mentioning your names; still, my memory for names is poor."

She was answered with an outburst of laughter.

"You might certainly be excused from remembering them all," the guest said gaily. "But I don't believe he spoke of me at all. As I told you, he likes me the least. The truth is, I see through a hundred little subterfuges that he meant I should not understand, and it is embarrassing at times."

"My dear, what a strange remark to make about your father!" Naomi could not keep reproval from her tone, strangers though they were. She resented for her husband such unfilial words.

"Is it?" said the girl, lightly. "I don't know—I think fathers are queer creatures; they are not a bit like mothers. When is the General Manager coming back? I must be on guard; if father has spells of not fancying me, that woman absolutely hates me, I believe, which is ungracious in her, for at one time I took her part a little. Don't you dislike her? Or has she got you under her thumb mentally as well as bodily? I warn you that you want to watch out for her; she weaves just the meshes about people that father chooses to have woven; and yet, strange to say, she has more influence over him than anyone else has. I believe she is a hypnotist."

This was certainly disagreeable to the limit of endurance, yet Naomi felt that she must endure, and for her husband's sake must understand what extraordinary tales his enemies had poured into his daughter's ears.

"You have not told me yet of whom you are speaking," she said coldly. But the girl did not seem to notice the changed tone.

"I'm speaking of Mrs. Roper, so called," she said gaily. "That is a convenient name for her at present, since she is right in town; but, of course, you understand."

The tone was too significant not to convey some disagreeable meaning. All the blood in Naomi's body seemed to rush in one indignant stream toward her face, as she rose from her chair with an instinctive and overpowering desire to get farther away from this unnatural child who could thus carelessly insinuate suggestions against her father's good name. But the child regarded her with wide-eyed and apparently innocent wonder.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "What did I say? Why, I mean nothing new. Is it possible that father has not told you about her? I didn't think of that, and I think he ought to.

Naomi sat down again. The girl's commonplace tone and evident innocence of wrong intent recalled her to her senses. She began to feel that she had been foolish. This gay child, who talked at once older and younger than her years, was probably referring to some piece of gossip in which low and ignorant people had indulged concerning her father and his housekeeper; and had been silly enough to suppose that the father had magnified its importance by repeating it.

"Never mind," she said to the girl's repeated question as to what was the matter, "I misunderstood you at first; you mean nothing wrong, evidently. I am sorry that you have taken a violent dislike to Mrs. Roper, she seems to be an estimable woman, and is certainly very efficient in her position. I do not know how we could have a better

housekeeper. But perhaps we need not talk about domestic matters. I wish you would tell me of yourselves, dear. I do not like to talk to your father about his children, it seems to make him sad. I think he misses you."

She was answered with a mocking laugh.

"I think he *dreads* us," said this unnatural daughter, "or rather me. I don't like some things that my beloved father has done, and he knows it. Do you know, for instance, why he wants to keep me away from you? I think I do. I think he is afraid you will side with me in our dispute, and that would be very inconvenient and disagreeable. I have thought it out since I have seen you. He told me, you see, that I was on no account to come here, not even for a call, until he gave me formal leave. He was so positive about this, and so evidently anxious lest we should meet, that I knew there was some splendid reason why I ought to come at once. I am acquainted with my father. So, under cover of going to Aunt Maria's for a couple of days, I skipped, took the train coming this way instead of the one going west, and here I am. It was great good luck to find after reaching here that the General Manager—I beg your pardon—of course I mean that Mrs. Roper was gone for the afternoon, because I hadn't planned how I should manage her. I suspected that my thoughtful father had blockaded the house against me, and I dare say he did, but he didn't think of the windows. I came into the house by way of the dining-room window. Why do you look so shocked? Are you sorry I came? I wanted very much to see you, and now that I have, I feel that you can help me."

"I am glad to know you," said Naomi, gently, feeling that this was a dangerous girl, and that she must use her influence to try to save her; "but I do not like to think that you had to act contrary to your father's wishes in order to come."

"Why, that is nothing," said the girl. "We all have to plan and contrive, and use a little deception occasionally; we couldn't live our lives at all if we didn't. Don't they do such things where you came from? I wonder if the world is very different where you lived? Do girls, for instance, marry whom they please? If they do, I should like to run away for good and live there. Since my respected father hasn't mentioned my name, it is not likely he has told you why he especially disapproves of me. I'm just going to tell. It is because he wants me to marry that creature he has picked out for me, and I won't. You needn't look reproachfully at me—I say I won't! I don't believe you would, if you were in my place; you don't look like that kind of woman. To be sure, you married my father, and he must be at least twenty years older than you; but that is different. My father is a handsome man who does not look his years, and you are not a young girl with life all before you. Wait until you see the man who has been chosen for me, and you will understand. Why, he is over fifty, and I am not quite seventeen! Isn't that horrid? And he is disagreeable in every way. There isn't a man anywhere around that I detest as I do him. Would you marry a man about whom you felt that way? I won't; I'll run away and drown myself first. It isn't that I'm not willing to be married. Of course I know I ought to be ready for that; but I want to do my own choosing, especially when I have

the person already chosen, and he is willing to stand by me. Don't you think a girl of seventeen ought to be allowed to choose a husband for herself?"

Naomi was both shocked and puzzled. Her father's enemies must have been very busy and very skillful to be able to impress this young girl with the belief that such a father as hers meant to force marriage of any sort upon her.

"My dear," she said gently, "what I think is that you are much too young to be troubling your brain with such matters. Are you not still a schoolgirl? Young misses not yet out of school have no occasion to let their thoughts run upon questions of love and marriage. As a matter of fact, I don't think a girl of seventeen is called upon to decide whether or not she will ever marry anybody. Let her wait until she is a woman and has a woman's judgment to help her."

The girl regarded her with surprise, perhaps also with curiosity, and spoke gravely:

"I don't think that at all. I know it is my duty to marry, and I am quite willing. I told you it wasn't marriage that I was fighting against. I fully understand that we were made for just such a purpose. But when we have to live all the rest of our lives with that one person, it does seem hard that we cannot pick and choose as the men do. If that old grandpa whom father has picked out were the only one who wanted me, it would be quite a different matter, but that doesn't happen to be the case; there are three or four others. I told father that I was willing to marry George tomorrow if he wanted me to, and I am sure George would like nothing better. Now when I tell

you plainly that there is somebody else who wants me, and that I hate the other man, won't you take my part? You are in high favor with father just now; I am sure you can coax him to let me have my choice. You can tell him that it isn't getting married that I object to, if he insists upon that. I think myself that girls might have their liberty a little while longer than they do; I am sure they have a hard enough life afterward; but I shall not complain if I can only marry George. I am sure he would do almost anything for me, and I suppose I ought to take him while the mood lasts —they get over it soon enough. George isn't a young boy; he is as much as thirty-five, I suppose, perhaps more, but he doesn't look it, and the other one does. Oh, there is as great a difference between them as there is between day and night. George is from away East. He isn't one of us exactly, not yet; but he says he likes our ideas and would as soon join us as not. I'll risk but that I could manage George if I could get father to have anything to do with him. Look here, I have risked a great deal and run away here on purpose to get you to use your influence for me; will you?"

Naomi was more than shocked, and she was also bewildered. Where could a well-dressed young woman of the present day have got her extraordinary ideas of the marriage relation? And her ideas of her father were almost equally bewildering. How was it possible for her to have been even slightly associated with him all these years and not know him better?

"My child," she said, answering the eager look in the girl's eyes, "you do not need to have me tell you that I would do anything I could for your happiness, but I must

own that I am dismayed over some of your ideas. Of course you would not marry any man unless you loved him with all your heart and believed that marriage with him would be for your and his best good. And I must repeat that I cannot understand why you should talk about marriage as a matter of course; you surely know that there are good and noble women who do not marry at all. How can you tell at your age but that you may wish to be one of those? I cannot imagine what has led you to think that your father, of all fathers in the world, would be one to force marriage upon you at any age."

Her guest regarded her with wide-eyed astonishment. "What queer talk!" she said. "Is that the way they feel about getting married where you came from? It isn't the way here, I can tell you. Everybody marries, and girls are expected to marry very early. We don't hear so very much about love, either. Of course it is nice if we can be in love, but we are expected to do our duty anyhow. Some of my folks think I ought to have been married a year ago. One old thing told my father that he would have had less trouble with me if he hadn't humored me so long. I presume there is some truth in that. I don't suppose I should have made half so much fuss about it before I knew George. Still, I always disliked the man father has chosen. But I know, of course, that it is my duty to marry."

Chapter 21

"O! many a shaft, at random sent,
Finds mark the archer little meant."

"What do you mean by that?" Naomi asked abruptly. She had decided that it would be necessary to lead this strange girl to a definite statement of some of her false ideas if she was to help her get rid of them. "How did you discover that it is your duty to marry? Marriage is a blessing when all the conditions are as they should be; but as I reminded you a moment ago, there are, as there have always been, unmarried women by the hundreds who are living noble lives and blessing the world by their daily ministries."

"But they are doing wrong," said the girl, confidently. "They are being wicked every day, or else they are very ignorant. I presume most of those whom you know are ignorant of the true way. You are speaking of people who are out of the true church. Every member of our church knows that God made women for a work that they cannot do until they are married, and the work is waiting for

them, and God wants it done. Why are they not wicked in refusing to do it? Didn't my father explain all that to you? I think he ought to have done so. How can you help others to do their duty when you do not understand it yourself?"

She spoke with the air of a seer; was actually trying to teach—and what teaching! The fear crossed Naomi's thought that she was entertaining an escaped lunatic. Surely, no young girl of sane mind seriously held such extraordinary views. Still, perhaps she did not understand her; she must make another attempt. It was important to know what such a strangely fascinating and dangerous girl really meant.

"What work do you fancy is waiting for women that they can be fitted for only by marriage?" she asked, trying to speak lightly, so as not to attach too much importance to what might be the vagaries of an over-excited brain.

"Don't you know?" the girl asked, regarding her as though she were a curious specimen from an unknown world. "Haven't you been taught that the air is filled with little immortal spirits waiting for bodies, and that they will be forever lost unless bodies are given to them, because God's plan of salvation is that it must be secured through tabernacles of clay? Besides, we all know that our only way of salvation, as women, is by being sealed to men. Your unmarried women that you talk about will be forever lost if they stay unmarried, and the little bodiless souls that they could help to save if they were married will be lost too. I think that is an awful responsibility for a woman to take just for the sake of escaping a little trouble here, don't you?"

Naomi's eyes fairly blazed, and her whole expression was that of indignant horror. It showed in her voice as well as words.

"What monstrous doctrine is this? Where did you get it? What human Satan has deceived you into thinking that ideas which belong only to the pit are actually teachings of the God of truth and purity?"

The girl stared at her in innocent wonder.

"I think you must be crazy," she said. "It cannot be that you are so ignorant. Don't you really know that these are revelations from God, and that those who reject them are living only for this world and can never get to heaven? Could any other motive than their own salvation make women willing to give up their husbands to other wives instead of having them all to themselves? I'm not willing. I'm not one of the saints. If I marry George, I know I shall hate, HATE, mind you, any other woman who gets her salvation through him; but all the while I know I ought not to feel so, and perhaps when I am old and gray and homely I shall get over it."

A sudden revelation came to Naomi. This girl was a Mormon; her mother's relatives were doubtless Mormons, perhaps even her mother had been. It would account for many mysteries which she had felt were connected with her husband's life. It would explain why he had felt it desirable to hold her from acquaintance with his children; he wanted to shield her from the disgrace of this as long as possible. Probably he still hoped to win his children—this girl—back to the true faith. Perhaps in his misery he even wanted the deluded child to marry a good man in the hope of thus winning her away from awful dangers.

These thoughts rushed through Naomi's mind, rather than presented themselves as reasonable deductions, and made her wish that she could be very wise and very gentle in dealing with this dangerous sinner, who had evidently been steeped in error from her childhood, and who verily thought she was doing God service in trampling upon even the instincts of purity. But she must be sure that her surmise was correct.

"Are you—have you been taught the Mormon beliefs?" she faltered. It seemed almost an insult to speak of such peculiar beliefs to so young a girl. Again there was that astonished gaze fixed on her.

"How queer you are!" said the girl. "Of course I have. How else should I be taught?"

"And the other children? Are they being trained in the same way? How many children are there?"

"Father's children, do you mean? Why, I think there are thirteen; I have to stop and count up. Yes, there are thirteen—unlucky number, isn't it? What is the matter? You look as though you were going to faint. What have I said to distress you—anything? I don't want to trouble you; I want you to like me and be my friend. I have had a feeling ever since you came that you could help me. Didn't you know before how many children father had? You needn't mind. Father has money enough to take care of them all, and he is real good about that. He can't see much of us nowadays, scattered as we are, but each mother looks after her own, of course, and none of them will ever be allowed to trouble you. Brother Newland has always been master in his family. Really, there is nothing to make you look as white as a sheet. What if you had

been my mother when father brought home his third wife? They used to live in the same house then—all the wives. I'm glad that can't be done any more; I should hate it. Oh, dear! What have I done? What is the matter? Don't faint! Shall I get you some water? I didn't mean to say anything to hurt you, and I don't understand now."

Naomi clutched at the fair wrist within her reach and held it as in a vice.

"Girl," she said, "who are you? Where do you live?"

"Why, dear me," said the distressed girl, "haven't I told you? I am Mara Newland, Mr. Volney Newland's oldest daughter, and I live with my mother, of course. There are three of us who belong to her, and we have a little home of our own. We lived in town with father until the Government made that awful fuss, you know. We don't anymore. It is all right; everybody understands. Mother told father only last night that she would never say a word to make you any trouble. Didn't father explain to you? Oh, I think that was cruel! Oh, dear! What *shall* I do? She has fainted dead away."

The vice-like grasp had loosened at last. The girl ran frantically for water, poured it over the prostrate form, then dashed into the hall, crying: "Kate! Nannie! Where are you all? Come quick! I'm afraid she's dying."

When Mr. Volney Newland returned to his home on the evening of the following day, having been sought for by telegrams which had failed to reach him, he found his wife lying at the point of death, and a trained nurse on guard who firmly refused him admittance.

"It is of no use, sir, the doctor's orders are imperative. He will be here again in a few moments, and you can get

them from him. It would be no comfort to you to see her. She is in wild delirium and does not recognize anybody; yet she notices the coming and going, and grows frantic over every new face."

As far removed from the sick room as the limits of the house would permit, in charge of another trained nurse, a little child who had opened its eyes too early on this sin-cursed world was wailing feebly. Mr. Newland, to whom the birth of a daughter had long been a commonplace event, turned from that door without desire to enter, and with a look of almost resentment on his face. What was that insignificant atom of humanity worth that she should peril the life of the only woman he ever truly loved?

Days, heavy with anxiety, were lengthening into weeks, and still the cloud of trouble did not lift, and the door of the sick room was still closed upon Mr. Newland.

"It is a peculiar case," said the doctor. "She is better certainly, at least so far as the physical is concerned. I begin to have hope now, as I told you, that she will battle through. But her brain is still decidedly unbalanced, and the slightest move in the wrong direction might result fatally. She still refuses vehemently to see you, and that, of course, complicates matters very much. That is not an uncommon accompaniment of her mental state; indeed, it is quite a common result of some forms of aberration that the patient goes back on his best friends; but you can see how carefully we must guard her on this account from any possible shock. No, Newland, I can't even admit you while she is sleeping. Who is going to be sure that she won't suddenly open her eyes and receive a shock that

will settle the question for life? Be patient, my dear sir, and thankful that it is a condition that will not last. She will be all right as soon as reason resumes its seat."

So the man who had been used to swaying his household with a motion of his authoritative hand was compelled to submit to orders, and pass on tiptoe the closed chamber which he knew held all his heart, lest footstep of his should further excite his wife's unsettled brain.

Meantime, they puzzled together, doctor and trained nurse and husband, as to the nature of the shock which the doctor was sure had been sustained. Mr. Newland was able to surmise that his wife had heard certain facts sufficient to shock her, and he cursed the fate, almost the authority, which had compelled him to leave her at a critical time, and was so fierce with Mrs. Roper for proving false to him and abandoning her trust for even a few hours, that that devoted slave was well-nigh heart-broken. But he could not discover who had been with Naomi, or determine the character of the interview which had helped to bring her to the door of death.

The two maids whom Mara in her haste and fright had wildly summoned had not appeared. Kate was out for the afternoon, and Nannie had been dismissed from Mrs. Roper's service several weeks before. It was the stout German girl with but few words of English at command who reigned in her stead, and had answered Mara's frantic call. Not much information was to be had from her. It was a lady, and she had never seen her before. She had screamed and scared Hilda, and she had run and had called out of the window to Karl, who was in the back

garden, to run for the doctor, and the strange lady had disappeared, and that was all that Hilda knew. Her stern-faced master might question and cross-question her all he pleased; he could frighten her out of what little English she knew, but he could get nothing further.

As a matter of fact, Mara had waited only to see that there was someone to care for the woman who had fainted, then had made all speed to the street car and the railroad station, and within the hour had boarded a train that took her at the rate of forty miles an hour to the "Aunt Maria's" where she was supposed to be. It was there that her father found her when he called that evening on his way farther west. The telegrams which were searching for him had failed to penetrate to Aunt Maria's retreat, and the girl who was almost dying to know whether her poor victim had survived the shock she had unwittingly given, dared not mention her name, dared not stay long in her father's presence, lest she might, somehow, reveal what she knew. It was not difficult, however, to avoid her father. He had not seen "Aunt Maria" and her children—his children—in more than a year, and he naturally had enough to interest him during an overnight visit, without paying close attention to his oldest daughter, who had offended him by presuming to question his wisdom and almost disobey his commands. Mr. Newland could on occasion obey, even without question, those set in authority over him, and he expected at least a like habit of mind on the part of those under him. His daughter's attempt at rebellion had been a surprise as well as an annoyance.

She had always been a singular girl, and he had told himself when he looked again upon her lovely, half-defiant face, that she was at times as disagreeable as she was beautiful and fascinating; and that she must on no account come in contact with Naomi at present. There were certain truths which Naomi must learn from him, not from others, and she was not strong enough to bear them now. He had repeated his prohibition to the girl with emphasis; but having seen her at her Aunt Maria's, whither she had been under appointment to go, and having himself attended her to the train the next morning and seen her start homeward, he did not in any way connect her with his wife's sudden illness.

There came a day—and it was the day on which her little daughter was six weeks old—that Naomi awakened at last from a sleep which had been so long and quiet that the trained nurse had twice reported its duration to the attending physician. Everyone in the house knew that much was hoped for from this long, unbroken rest. Their hopes were not disappointed. Naomi awakened without the nervous start and the half-frightened roll of her restless eyes which had attended all recent awakenings. Instead, her eyes had that indescribable but easily recognized look which said that reason had resumed sway. She lay quite still and looked at the white-robed figure of the nurse, who sat over by the window, as still as a statue, with eyes purposely turned from the bed, awaiting developments. She was pretending to be absorbed with a bit of soft white stuff belonging to Baby's wardrobe. Her patient looked, and *looked,* and presently spoke in a quiet, though wondering tone:

"Did I die, then, after all?"

The reply was quiet and cheerful.

"No, my dear. You are very much alive. You have been quite ill, but you are getting well, now, steadily."

"But you are Gertrude Fenton?"

There was a swift exchange of glances between the nurse and the doctor waiting behind the screen.

They had planned for this, and risked the possible shock in the hope of a counter interest that might help to keep the thoughts away from some unknown excitement. The doctor's look had been reassuring, and the trained nurse went forward.

"Yes," she said in cheerful, commonplace tones, as though that were the most ordinary of happenings, "I am Gertrude, and you are our dear little Namie, and are to swallow this liquid like the good little girl you always were when you were ill, and not talk at all until the doctor comes to say that you may. You remember you always minded me when I took care of you at school?"

Naomi smiled, opened her mouth obediently and swallowed the potion, then closed her eyes again, too weak to wonder twice how it was that the friend of her girlhood was at her side ministering to her wants. She opened her eyes after a few minutes to say softly, "It was when I had the fever that you took care of me."

The trained nurse nodded, smiled, and laid her ringer significantly on her lips. Naomi answered the smile, and presently dropped back into sleep. Thus quietly was the chasm between her present and her past bridged over, for the time being.

Chapter 22

"The shadow of a starless night was thrown
Over the world in which she moved alone."

The quietness did not last. With the return of sanity and a degree of strength, memory asserted itself. Naomi did not ask many questions, did not apparently want to talk. The unquietness showed itself in an eager, almost frightened anxiety with regard to the people who came and went in her sick room. She begged excitedly that no one save the doctor and the assistant nurse should be admitted.

"Not any one at all," she repeated, with so much earnestness that Gertrude hastened to promise, and to add that the doctor had given the same orders. She was not to see any of her friends until she was stronger. "Don't make any exceptions," Naomi said, with strong emphasis on the "any." "I don't want to see *anybody,* not yet."

Outside, the half-frantic husband was reaching the limit of his endurance, and was almost ready to dismiss

both nurse and doctor as imbeciles, or enemies conniving against his interests. It was only the doctor's solemn warning that a single misstep now might make of his wife a maniac for life that held him in check so far as action was concerned. Nothing restrained his tongue.

"But, Doctor, of course this prohibition on her part is not intended to exclude me. It is very natural that she should shrink from others—they are almost strangers; but if she is sane, as you say she is, her first thought would be for me, and her first desire to have me with her. Why, she hated even a day's separation. We have been more to each other, Doctor, than husband and wife usually are. I cannot think that she understands the situation. I was absent when she was taken ill, you remember, and you say she does not realize the length of time that has passed. It must be that she supposes me still away. Why on earth don't you ask her if she does not want me?"

The doctor tried to explain and at the same time be reassuring. He was persuaded that Mrs. Newland knew of her husband's presence in the house. They had taken pains to discover that. There was no accounting for a sick woman's whims. What did her husband think of a mother who asked no questions about her baby, and did not want to see even her? They must all wait and be patient. The case was peculiar, and only one thing was clear: these whims of hers must be carefully deferred to; more than her life—her reason was at stake.

But one day Naomi asked for her baby. She had not spoken for an hour, and had lain so quiet that the

watchful nurse thought her sleeping. Then suddenly she said, "I have decided that I want my baby."

This event had been looked forward to with mingled hope and fear. Thus far their patient had done nothing as other patients did, and they felt that they could not foretell the effect of this experience upon her. No sooner was the child placed in her arms than she burst into bitter weeping—the first tears she had been known to shed, and the paroxysm lasted until the nurse was grave with fear. But the doctor, upon being informed, expressed relief and almost satisfaction. It was natural for some women to cry when they were under great nervous strain, and tears relieved them. He had no doubt but that they would do Mrs. Newland a world of good. In fact, he believed now that all the shoals were safely passed. He was mistaken.

It is true that Naomi began to gain steadily in strength, and that the interest she had at last manifested in her daughter increased with each passing day. Still, she not only declined to see her husband, but had fits of violent trembling, brought on evidently by the sound of his voice in the hall. The puzzled doctor held a long conference with the trained nurse.

"There is some mystery here. This is not, of course, a normal condition, and we cannot consider Mrs. Newland on the high road to health. In fact, we must consider her distinctly in danger while it lasts. There must be a producing cause for this nervousness that we do not understand. I am told that they have been an unusually devoted couple, and the husband is certainly well-nigh distracted over the state of things. I cannot hold him in

check much longer. Cannot your woman's wit plan a way to get at the secret, if there is a secret?"

Gertrude shook her head. She was more bewildered than the doctor could be. She knew as he did not their confiding little Naomi, and unless the years had strangely changed her, as it seemed not possible for years to do, this silent, reserved woman was not the friend of her youth. There were times when, despite her apparent sanity, Gertrude had grave fears lest the shock, whatever it was, had forever unbalanced the delicate brain. While she puzzled over ways to win back the confidence that used to be so fully hers, Naomi met her halfway by a sudden question.

"Gertrude, tell me all about it. How is it that you are here with me? I remember the faintness and my falling. Then, everything else is worse than a blank, a horrible nightmare, until I awakened and found you. Where did you come from, dear?"

"It was a happening, Namie, darling. That is what some people would call it. I am so glad to be with you that I know it is a Providence. I am a nurse, you know; it is my business to attend the sick, and your promised nurse was out of town when you were taken ill. I had just reported at the office as off duty and was sent here to what we call an emergency case. When I found that the patient was our dear little Naomi, I begged to stay. I had not imagined that the same city held us both. I was fanciful enough to believe that even though you did not recognize me, you might like to have me about you."

At this point Naomi reached forth a hand that was trembling, and said with an energy that her friend knew

the outward circumstances did not explain, "Don't leave me, Gertrude. Promise me that you will not."

"Not while you need me, dear. I have made arrangements to stay with you as long as I can be helpful. Don't you want to know about the others—Bernice and Barbara? I have been waiting for you to get strong enough to talk about them, and to see them."

Naomi raised herself up from the pillows, an eager look in her eyes such as had not been seen before, and spoke excitedly:

"Gertrude, where are they? Where is Barbara? You do not mean that she is here? Not in this city?"

"In this city, not three miles away from you. She is a teacher here; both of them are. Of course, they had no idea that you were within a thousand miles of this city until I wrote to them who my patient was. You can imagine their anxiety since, and their eagerness to see you, now that you are getting well enough to admit your friends. I try to send them daily messages; and fruit and flowers and love come almost daily from them. You are gaining so steadily now that we hope in a very short time to let them see you. Of course, Mr. Newland must be the first one admitted, but I almost think you will want Barbara for the second."

She was watching closely while she talked, none of her words being spoken at random. She saw the eager light that had glowed on Naomi's face go suddenly out at the mention of her husband's name. The heart of the anxious woman sank within her. Here was trouble. How should she discover of what character? The wound must be

probed and understood before they could hope to help heal it. She began again, carefully:

"You are a good deal stronger today than you were yesterday. Don't you think that by tomorrow you could admit Mr. Newland for a few minutes? He is very anxious, of course, and it has been a long waiting time for him."

The words did not seem to excite her patient; so much, at least, was gained. She had dropped back among the pillows and lay with closed eyes. The stillness lasted between them. Gertrude, perplexed and distressed, afraid to say more lest she should say the wrong word, could only wait. At last Naomi spoke, in tones unnaturally quiet:

"Gertrude, were you acquainted with Mr. Newland before you came here to take care of me?"

"Not personally, dear. I knew him by sight, as I know a large number of the businessmen of the city. I have passed him often on the street, and never even dreamed that he had a special interest for me. But of course, I have met and talked with him daily during your illness; hourly, indeed, part of the time. I have never in my experience seen a more eager and devoted husband. There were days and nights when he simply haunted the halls for word from you. It has been a long, hard experience; we have all had deep sympathy for him."

"Gertrude, what do you know about him? I mean, what did you know before you came to this house? You say you saw him often, you must have heard things about him. Tell me what?"

"I heard nothing special, dear," said the sorely troubled nurse. "I knew of him as a businessman standing high in his own circle."

"What is his circle? Did you ever see him at church? Do you ever go to the same church that he does, Gertrude?"

"My dear," said the distressed nurse, "what is there in this to excite you? I am afraid you ought not to talk longer. Why, yes—" in answer to an almost imperious movement on Naomi's part, "—I have been in the Tabernacle; it is an interesting building, and the organ is, of course, very fine."

"Never mind the organ. What is the name of the church, of the organization?"

What was Gertrude to say? She had had her hours of deep distress over the fact that this friend of her girlhood had so far forgotten her inheritance and environment as to marry a Mormon. She had cried over it and prayed over it and written anxious letters to Barbara and Bernice about it, and received anxious ones from them in return. And they had, all three, determined to stand by poor little Namie, and if possible help her through some of the trials of her new surroundings. Over some things they had in their ignorance rejoiced.

"At least," wrote Bernice, "she hasn't the slime of polygamy to wade through. We may thank God that the strong arm of law has reached after that and made it impossible that she should be menaced by it. Her husband is considered an honorable man, we are told; and he buried his first wife years before he sought Naomi. So we must just try to make the best of it, and hold on to her. Perhaps she can win him from his errors. If she is as

winsome as the dear girl Naomi, it will be hard to resist her. She *can't* have accepted their absurd and blasphemous doctrines. I will not believe that. Her heart has simply run away with her judgment—that was to be expected, poor child."

A swift memory of these and kindred words flashed over Gertrude's mind while she waited and questioned how to answer the woman whose eyes were searching her. What did the child mean? Was she taking this way to learn whether or not her friends knew of her lapse from the world to which she belonged?

"Surely you do not need an answer to that question," she began in a soothing tone, "and I am not going to let you talk any more until you have rested; your cheeks are getting too much flushed."

"Gertrude, will you answer my question? Is there any reason why you shrink from naming the organization to which Mr. Newland belongs?" Naomi's tones were imperious, and her intense excitement evident. This whim, if whim it was, must evidently be humored at once. Her nurse made haste to speak:

"There is no reason, my dear, since you wish it. I knew when I came to this house as nurse that it belonged to a prominent Mormon who had brought home his wife from abroad, but I had not the remotest idea that the wife was my dear girl friend."

She was watching closely, but her patient did not start, or pale. The momentary excitement was already dying out; she had closed her eyes, and lay quite still. The terrible suspicion that she had been deceived, which had flashed across Gertrude, was put to rest. But this sudden

stillness was perplexing, and might indicate danger. While she waited, trying to decide whether to speak or to hope that her patient had over-wearied herself, and was dropping to sleep, Naomi spoke again:

"I wanted to hear it in words. I knew it was so. I have thought it all out, lying here, but I had to hear you say it. Gertrude, do you understand? I have come to this knowledge recently. I knew his church was different from others, but I thought it was a holy and blessed difference. I knew no name for it except the Church of Jesus Christ, and I thought it was the earthly embodiment of His holy life. I never for a moment imagined that that other name could be associated with it, until—*that* day. Until then I believed in it and in him, utterly, as I did in God. Now, oh, Gertrude! I must be let alone. I cannot see him, not yet. I must think; I must pray."

Then there came to Gertrude a fear, and with it a thought that she hoped might bring a measure of relief.

"Darling, you know—of course you know—that you are his honorably wedded wife? His first wife died years ago."

The woman who bore the name of wife recoiled as though a blow had been struck.

"Don't!" she said, crying out as one in pain. "Go away! I must be alone. Go to the other end of the room; let me feel myself alone. Oh, Gertrude! Forgive me; I am in sore trouble. I must pray. I have not lost Jesus Christ."

In distress too deep for words, if she had had wise words to speak, the impotent nurse moved slowly away. Here was something far beyond her skill—a case which only the Great Physician knew how to handle.

Mr. Newland paced the room in a fever of anxiety and pain that he could not control, and tried to listen to the doctor's carefully chosen words.

"You see, Newland, your policy of secrecy hasn't worked well. Instead of waiting until you had carefully prepared her to hear what you meant, sometime, to carefully tell her, she has heard from careless and probably malicious tongues what has given her a terrible shock. Brought up as you say she has been, and in total ignorance of facts, you cannot wonder at it. The wonder is that she was not made into a hopeless maniac. I know something about women, and I can tell you it was a marvelous and a narrow escape. Moreover, I must warn you now that the utmost caution must be used, lest in her weak state a fatal relapse should occur. Her whims must be humored at any sacrifice. She refuses for the present to see you; she must not be forced, or urged. Of course, when she is really well again, with her mental powers fully balanced, all will be right; but she must not be hurried. What you want to do is to take yourself off out of town, on any pretext you choose. Go down to the other house and let that pretty daughter of yours comfort you. She drives plenty of other men to distraction, she ought to balance it by comforting somebody. In any case, don't disturb this Mrs. Newland at present. Let her go to her friends as she wants to. They cannot hurt your cause any more than it is already hurt. They may even be able to help you. She is a legally married woman in their eyes as

well as ours, and when that is once established, their sense of what propriety, even respectability, demands, will come in to aid you. Anyhow, it is that, or a raving maniac for life on your hands; you can take your choice." The last sentence was added with significant emphasis, as Mr. Newland paused before him, opposition in his eyes.

The doctor prevailed, and the troubled husband went his way without so much as a glimpse of the woman who grew every day dearer to him. The outside world, that part of it which knew anything about them, knew only that Mrs. Newland was now well enough to be left in the care of her friends while her husband went away on important business.

On the morning following his departure a close carriage conveyed Naomi and her baby and Baby's nurse to the house at the other end of the city where Barbara and Bernice were boarders, and Naomi took formal possession for an indefinite time of the suite of rooms across the hall from her old-time friends. That evening the long-ago planned, long deferred reunion of the four friends took place in Naomi's room.

Chapter 23

"Thine to work, as well as pray,
Clearing thorny wrongs away."

The weeks that followed stood out long afterward to Naomi as the ones which marked the real turning-point in her life. Up to about that time she realized that she had in some respects remained a child; then she became a woman. She knew that she must have appeared childish both to doctor and nurse in steadily pressing her determination to go away from Mr. Newland's house and not to see him for even a moment before she went. With the doctor she felt that it must pass for a sick woman's whim, and help to mislead him as to her actual mental state; but to Gertrude she tried to explain.

"Gertrude, I cannot talk, not yet; but there are reasons why I cannot meet Mr. Newland now, and why I must see Barbara. I must have a long, long talk with her before I can decide some things which must be decided. That doesn't sound rational, does it? But I am fully in my right mind. Perhaps I can make it plain to you afterward.

Won't you trust me? I am not a child anymore. I have lived, oh, an eternity in a few weeks, and I know I am doing the best that is left for me. Won't you help me?"

And Gertrude had helped, had set her face like a flint against every other plan, and had argued the doctor into agreeing with her.

So it was that Naomi sat on that first evening, among the cushions and footstools like a young queen being hovered over by three willing subjects, and studied these friends of her girlhood whom the years had developed into women. They, too, had passed through the furnace, she reflected; at least Gertrude and Bernice had had their heavy sorrows, but they had not been crushed. Still, their trouble was not like hers; for in Naomi's heart was that old cry of the stricken soul, "There is no sorrow like unto my sorrow." She had no friend who would not have instantly agreed with her; it had been given to her to drink the dregs of a peculiarly bitter cup of misery.

As she watched Barbara's face the poor young woman told herself that she had not been mistaken; she had come to the right source. Barbara could help her if any human being could. She had grown into just the kind of woman that Naomi's hungry soul had often fancied her—a woman to be trusted. They were grand women, all of them—full of energy and purpose, doing a work in the world that was surely as great, yes, infinitely greater, than that of a multitude of mothers. Yet that poor stunted soul, that girl with a face like an angel's, and with thoughts like those of the pit, would look down upon them as women who were shirking their duties and living to please themselves and failing in that for which they were

created. Hush! She must not think of Mara, not yet. She could not, without beginning to tremble.

They talked incessantly that first evening, the three friends. Not letting Naomi talk much, touching upon and glancing away from topics that would not bear analysis, and feeling cautiously for common ground on which it would be safe to tread; and feeling, each of them, keenly that this reunion was not in the least like the one which had been planned. It seemed difficult to find common ground that was not too exciting; they had lived such different lives, they three, from Naomi's.

It was Barbara who lingered latest, or who came back to give her another good night after Nurse Gertrude had seen to it that every possible office for her comfort had been performed.

"Our little Naomi," she had said, bending over to kiss her. "She does not know, she cannot guess, how glad we all are to have her again." She had promised Gertrude to say nothing more exciting than this, and then to slip away. But Naomi had caught her hand and drawn her close and held her with arms that trembled as she said slowly, with the sort of solemnity which starts the tears:

"Call me not Naomi, call me Mara; for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

Work began in earnest for Naomi the next day. She had solemn work to do, a problem to solve, and a new lesson to learn, which, turn it as she would, must of necessity be hard. But she was resolute. She must learn not only just what she had done with her life heretofore, but just what she must do with it now. She had come to Barbara for help, and her girlish intuitions did not fail

her. Barbara, in her full, serene, strong womanhood, living her beautiful life of daily toil and daily helpfulness, was just the human help she needed.

Naomi laid bare her heart before her. She described the lonely years when school days were over—years in which she had been at home and yet not at home. She told of the hope deferred with regard to her mother and herself; of the comfort it had been at last to go away with her father; of the hope she had cherished of blessing his life so soon as she got him quite away from the awful grind of the business world; she described her but partial success, and the blank that had come when he died. And then of the friend who had appeared to her suddenly out of the darkness as though he were an angel of light. She explained the dear hope he had at once held out to her that she might redeem some of her lost opportunities and bless her beloved dead.

She dwelt on the fact that he had spoken to her of that unseen, ever present Friend in such a way that she had been drawn to Him, and that a new light and joy had come into her life through fellowship with Him. And then came the story of her surprise and her happiness in the discovery that this new earthly friend was not only friend, but lover. She told of her glad yielding of herself to him, and of the year of wedded happiness that followed—a year in which he had been all to her that human friend could be, until there had suddenly, out of clear sky, swooped down upon her a horror of great darkness from which she felt that she could never get away.

It was a long story, with a lonely beginning, a dreary stretch of years, a single belt of light, and then a yawning

cavern of blackness. Barbara cowered inwardly before it, and said to her conscience-stricken soul: "If I only had! I could have helped her, led her, saved her. Intimate acquaintance with the perfect Life, the soul-satisfying Love, would have saved her, and I could have led her to Him."

"Now," said Naomi, when she felt that she had made all plain, "you can see, can you not, that I have work to do? I know now that much, very much, of the joy that I thought I had in religious things was joy in the friendship of one man; when I thought I loved God, it was love for man, instead, that was leading me on. And yet, Barbara, that is not all of it. After my marriage, when Mr. Newland was necessarily absent from me, and I felt lonely, I turned to my Bible, and to Jesus Christ as I found Him there. I studied the story of His life and loved it, and loved Him, and gave myself to Him anew, and I know now that I surely belong to Him; in that, at least, I was not mistaken. The misery into which my life has plunged has not separated me from Him. That is why I did not die, Barbara, because He was left. Now I have a lesson to learn, and I have fled to you as my human helper. Do you understand what it is? There have been revelations made to me since I came to this place to live—doctrines hinted at, some of them spoken all too plainly, which seem to me monstrous, disgusting beyond belief, and yet I have learned that the man whose name I bear believes them, and believes that he is taught of God. And, Barbara, if it is of God, I am bound to obey it, though it kill me. I found a verse this morning that expresses my thought: 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' I

feel utterly slain, yet I know that what He requires of me I will try to do, even this. The awful question before me is, Does God require it? Are these horrible doctrines fresh revelations from Him? I must study, I must pray, I must think. Will you help me? I might have read their books, they were about me; but I could not get interested in them; I liked the Bible better. I thought since it was a first revelation it would be simpler, and I told myself that I was too much of a child in the new life for strong meat, and that I would keep to the first Bible, especially to the New Testament, where the human life of my Lord was made plain, until I was strong enough to read for myself those deeper truths; and so I did not know until it was sprung upon me what some of those beliefs were. I knew, of course, about Mormons, Barbara—something about them, at least; but I never for one moment imagined that the Church of Jesus Christ, as it was described to me, had anything to do with that."

By degrees Barbara understood the skillful way in which her girl friend so utterly alone in her world had been led and blinded and controlled. One blessed gleam of light shone out of the dark picture: iniquity had overreached itself, if it was iniquity pure and simple. Given the Bible and the story of Jesus Christ and communion with Him, the inevitable result had followed, and beyond and above all other loves stood His. What Naomi was convinced that He taught, she would obey. In her sudden horror she had fled to Barbara simply for a chance to make sure what this supreme Leader asked of her. When her friend was convinced of this, she thanked God and took courage. The next weeks were solemn

weeks; great issues were at stake. Awful questions were up for consideration, and on their answers hung the saving or the wreck of souls. The three friends felt the solemnity of the hour. As they sat together after Barbara had explained to them as much as could be explained of Naomi's position and desire, a silence fell between them, lasting until Bernice pushed her open Bible toward Gertrude, pointing with her pencil to a marked phrase.

"That is our part," she said. "Isn't it? Barbara can help her personally, in addition; but I believe this is our stronghold."

The phrase was, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer."

Barbara had many questions to answer during those days.

"I know," said Naomi at the beginning of the study, "that you do not believe in their doctrines, in any of them. But why do you not? Have you reasons for the things you believe? Or did you simply suppose you believed them because the people about you did, and ordinary propriety seemed to call for some such form of belief? Barbara, do you know just what you believe? And more than that, do you know what these people believe? And why they believe it?"

The clear-eyed woman whom she was searching with her singularly penetrative gaze did not flinch. She not only knew what she believed, and why she believed it, but she was thoroughly conversant with the early history and the present teachings and practices of the strange people among whom she lived. Early in her experience as a teacher she had discovered that in order to be able to

meet the insidious errors which were not only being drilled into the minds of the very babies, but pressed upon the inquiring at every point, she must understand the organization as thoroughly as possible. The result of four years of hard study and close watching she had put into a single sentence but the evening before, in reply to a remark of Gertrude's.

"I believe that the most cunningly devised and, at this present day, the most dangerous of all the lies which the 'father of lies' has used to deceive the earth since history began will be found just here. The system has enough truth skillfully woven in with its monstrous falsehoods to accomplish exactly what it was designed from the first that it should do—deceive the ignorant and win the unthinking and the lonely and desolate. Our poor little Naomi! When we were girls together, if I had not been content with living my own selfish Christian life—if we girls had read and studied the Bible together as we studied our rhetoric and our philosophy, and Naomi had come to know Jesus Christ in His purity and grandeur of character as a personal Saviour, she would not have fallen a sacrifice to this latter-day abomination. You and Bernice haven't so much to answer for; but I can never forgive myself."

"Have we not?" said Gertrude, her face very grave. "There is another way to look at that. At least you lived before us a life different from ours; we all felt it. But I had not interest enough in the truth even to study it myself."

The studying and the praying went on steadily. All day, while the three women were busy about their regular routine of duty, Naomi, with her child sleeping near her,

went over with intense soul interest the ground that Barbara had marked out for her; and Barbara's evenings were given to discussing step by step the way thus carefully studied.

It was not the first time that she had had occasion to traverse the same ground for an inquiring soul. She was able swiftly and clearly to call attention to the misquotations, to point out the wresting of sacred words from their connection and obvious meaning, and to probe the false logic of the penciled annotations in Naomi's Bible. Little by little there fell away from the poor new disciple the standing ground that had seemed so solid when laid for her by Mr. Newland's fine voice and skillful interpretations. She had much to unlearn. She had not lived for more than a year in the daily companionship of such a man as Mr. Newland without imbibing from him unconsciously ideas not distinctly taught, and there was much that he had taught carefully. Yet they made rapid progress. Barbara had said to her fellow-workers that they must expect to move very slowly; that Naomi had been for so long under the power of a strong-willed teacher of error, and with no background of early experience to rest upon, that their way would doubtless be beset with many modern doubts.

In that she had reckoned without one potent Force. She forgot for a moment the crumbs of truth scattered through those monstrous falsehoods—crumbs at which the poor hungry soul had grasped, and taken them forever to itself. Long afterward Naomi grew into a realizing sense of the fact that the Shepherd was searching even then for his lost sheep, and through the

difficult and dangerous paths which her straying feet had persisted in finding for themselves, was guiding her to Rock foundation. Through the maze of error one truth clung—the Lord Jesus Christ. She could not read and study all day long, nor indeed so much as she believed was possible. The trained nurse who was still watching carefully over her body laid stern commands upon her; but while lying on her couch resting, or taking her daily walk about the grounds, she could pray, and pray she did, almost with every waking breath, and she hushed her tired brain to sleep each night surrounded by the atmosphere of prayer.

Under such nurture her faith grew, and the fog of error cleared away. When she came to study the tissue of lies by which the extraordinary doctrine of plural marriage had been built up and was being perpetuated, two forces helped her mightily—the innate purity of womanhood which had been her birthright, and her growing intimacy with Jesus Christ. It was not difficult to convince a soul who was living in hourly communion with God that, so far from its being her duty to live the life of duplicity and impurity which such a doctrine demanded, it was her duty as a woman and a follower of Jesus Christ to enter her solemn protest against this lowest form of religious travesty. Yet in order that she might understand the rapid downward trend of the doctrine and the depths of blasphemy into which the advocates of it had sunken, it became necessary for her to wade through what Barbara indignantly called a very cesspool of filth.

"It is horrible," she told Gertrude, "to drag that pure-souled woman down into the slums of impurity as I have

been forced to do in the name of religion. But somebody must wade in slime if victims are to be saved, and I believe the child has a work to do for God in this very direction. There are depths connected with the past history of this horror that I do not dare to so much as hint at, for fear of its effect upon her physically, just now. But I believe now that her eyes are opened she will study the whole iniquity for herself."

Chapter 24

"Thou hast done evil and given place to the devil;
Yet so cunningly thou concealest
The thing which thou feelest,
That no eye espieth it,
Satan himself denieth it."

It was while this latest and most revolting of her studies was in progress that Naomi was one morning interrupted by a caller. Since escaping to her retreat, the outside world had left her in peace, the understanding among Mr. Newland's friends being that she was not yet strong enough to see people. The three friends who were watching over her interests had anxiously discussed what could be done when it should become no longer possible to shield her in this way, but as yet nothing had been said to Naomi, nor had she hinted that she had any plan as to her future. She remembered just what she had been reading when the interruption came.

It was a copy of a sermon delivered in the Tabernacle where she had been worshipping, and it was by a man

whose memory she knew was highly honored and whose teachings were quoted as authority in her husband's church. This was the paragraph she had three times read, feeling unable at the first reading to trust her eyes or her senses.

"If he (Jesus Christ) was never married, his intimacy with Mary and Martha and the other Mary also, whom Jesus loved, must have been highly unbecoming and improper to say the best of it. I will venture to say that if Jesus Christ were now to pass through the most pious countries in Christendom with a train of women such as used to follow him fondling about him, combing his hair, anointing him with precious ointments, washing his feet with tears and wiping them with the hair of their heads, and unmarried, or even married, he would be mobbed, tarred and feathered, and rode, not on an ass, but on a rail.'"

Naomi caught her breath and trembled with the horror of it, and looked again to see if she could possibly have been mistaken in the source, and read again to make sure that her nerves were not playing her false, and read once more with slow deliberation to compel herself to realize the fullness of the blasphemy, to make herself understand that it was actually the Lord Christ, the divine Redeemer, about whom this infinitely coarse pen was writing; then dropped the leaflet and bowed her head on the table before her, a great yearning in her heart to flee at once to Him for cleansing from contact with a thought so vile. It was just then that Huldah came to her with a card. She had but that morning explained to her maid that hereafter calls might be reported to her at once,

leaving her to decide in each case whether she would or would not receive them. It was her first little step toward taking up the cross of living again and of getting used to people whom she knew she must meet.

She held the card for several minutes, not studying the name so much as staring at it with a face so pallid that Huldah ventured to ask if she might not tell the lady her mistress was too ill to see people. Huldah's voice seemed to help her to a decision.

"No," she said, "you may show her up; and then, Huldah, close the door between these rooms and do not let me be interrupted for anything less than a necessity."

The card she held read: "Mrs. Maria V. Newland." The lady was tall and stately in manner. She was stylishly dressed and quite at ease as she came forward and held for a moment Naomi's cold hand while she spoke in a cordial tone.

"I am very glad to learn that you are able to receive your friends. What a long, weary time you have had! Illness is wearing upon one's courage, I think, as well as upon the body. The little daughter is doing nicely, I hear. I am longing to see her. I am so fond of all the children. I have been quite anxious to welcome you. I should have called before your illness if Brother Newland had not seemed to think you were not equal to meeting any of his people just then. I do not live in town, you know, but I should have been glad to make the trip on purpose if he had considered it wise."

Naomi sat like one turned to stone; this was not the kind of interview she had expected.

"Are you Mara's mother?" This was her first spoken word.

"Oh, dear, no! I am only her Aunt Maria," said the guest, seating herself in an easy-chair. "So it was Mara who made all the trouble, was it? I suspected it at the time, and told Brother Newland so. I found that she left home for my place five or six hours before she reached there, although it is only an hour's ride from her house. I knew then that she had been up to some mischief. That girl ought to be whipped, old as she is. If I had her in charge, I would tame her down, but her mother spoils her, and always has. You poor creature! What did she say to give you such a turn? I suppose it was the way she said it that shocked you. I told Brother Newland before your illness that it was a mistaken policy on his part to be so silent about our peculiar institutions; because, of course, you had a general knowledge of affairs, and to talk them over frankly and have a perfect understanding in the families would be much more sensible than to act as though there was something to hide. We have to do some hiding, it is true, in these days, but that is on account of our enemies, and ought not to be carried on among ourselves. However, Brother Newland thought he knew best, as he generally does. You have not lived with him for a year, I presume, without discovering that he is a man who is fond of his own way?"

Her tone was lightness itself. It helped, some way, to increase Naomi's sense of shame. Her uppermost feeling just then was that she must make an effort in behalf of her self-respect.

"When I married Mr. Newland," she said, and she might have wondered at the sound of her own voice, so unnatural was it, "I knew only that his wife was dead, and that his children were living with their mother's relatives."

"Is that possible? You mean that you did not know of his living wives? You poor dear! I don't wonder you were shocked. It is a shock at first, of course; especially to those who have not been educated among us. If it does not prove to have done you a lasting injury, I think we may all be thankful. At least it will be good for Brother Newland to discover that he is not infallible."

"Will you tell me who you are?"

The guest looked her well-bred surprise at such a question.

"Why, my dear sister, did you not receive my card? I am Mrs. Maria Newland, the mother of four young Newlands of whom you must have heard? I cannot think that their father disowned his children, even though he had in a sense to disown his wives." The sentence closed with a sarcastic little laugh; but without waiting for a reply the guest continued:

"I am surprised to hear that this is new to you. You cannot mean, of course, that the institution of plural marriage was unknown? At least I supposed that our affairs had been blazoned all over the United States, especially when Congress passed those infamous laws calculated to separate families. I think the country has a fearful crime to answer for, attempting to separate husbands and wives and bring distress into happy homes.

The holiest institution of our land was touched when Congress tried to separate what God had joined together."

Mercifully for Naomi, she had in a sense lost her personality. She was listening now with a kind of fascinated horror, much as a child might have listened to a deadly serpent that had been suddenly given power of speech. It seemed to her that she did not belong to a world where such conditions could obtain, and that she was looking down on some creature of another sphere, simply curious to understand her level.

"Do you mean you believe," she said in that strange impersonal tone, "that a man may honorably have two living wives?"

"My dear sister! I am myself a third choice, and the second one is living; that surely is a sufficient answer to your extraordinary question. I do more than believe it; I am as sure that the plan was ordained of God as I am that I exist. I believe that the general practice of plural marriage would furnish the grand solution to the problem of the social evil—a problem which the enlightened people of our land pretend to have been working at for years; yet they are as blind as bats to the remedy which the chosen people of God have tried to live before their eyes. Instead of accepting the God-revealed remedy, they have set to work to persecute the ones who have followed His voice. But that is simply history repeating itself. It was the way they treated Jesus Christ and the people of the early church. You read your Bible, I suppose?"

"And yet you are a woman!" It was the impersonal voice that spoke, and Naomi's gaze was still that one which suggested fascinated horror.

Her caller went on briskly. "Certainly I am a woman, my dear, and a mother, and glory in both. If you have given intelligent thought to this subject, as I am sure I hope you have, how would you plan otherwise? How else than by some such scheme as has been revealed in these latter days could woman fulfill her destiny and rescue from immaterialism immortal spirits who have been waiting for thousands of years? This is leaving out altogether the question of personal salvation, you see; although we believe, as you know, that there has been no provision made for woman in the other world except as the wife of some good man; and of course you know that there are not men enough for each woman to have one all to herself. If there were, for my part I have no desire to be so horribly selfish as that. Don't you understand human nature enough to be sure that no one woman is able to fill a man's heart? We women are differently constituted. We live chiefly in our children, anyway, and the love and care of one good man is all we would ask, if a wicked government would leave us our share of him in peace. We learn not to require exclusive attention. But men's natures have a wealth of love that no one heart will satisfy. The Creator made them so—that is, some men. There are small and sordid souls among them who profess to feel satisfied with one wife, just as there are mean and selfish women who want to claim sole right to the man whose name they bear, but these are the exceptions among us, we hope and believe."

"And you," said the fascinated victim, "you mean that you went to live, as a wife, with a man whose wife was

living, and you knew that she was living, and you were willing to do it— you mean that?"

The guest drew herself up and spoke coldly.

"Sister Newland, I trust you do not mean it, but you have a way of putting questions that makes them sound insulting. There are no first and second and third wives among us, when it comes to that. Once married, we are all wives, and on a level. As Brother Newland's third choice I consider myself as much his wife in every respect as the woman he married first. She is dead now, but she wasn't when I was married. You will take notice that I do not say 'third *wife*,' but 'third *choice*.' A man does not rate his wives in the order of their coming, any more than he does his children."

"But the law—" faltered the horror-stricken Naomi; "I thought that—"

"Oh, the law!" interrupted her guest with a defiant toss of her head; then she laughed. "Of course we are law-abiding citizens, and adhere strictly to even unjust and inhuman laws; everybody understands that. I suppose that lovely Congress and the good Christian people who urged them on, believed that as soon as their infamous law was passed our men would hurry home and pitch their wives out of doors and toss their children after them. Chivalrous men they were, who enacted such laws, and charming wives and mothers they were who tramped about with petitions praying for it! We women owe our country a debt of gratitude, don't we! Oh, yes, of course we obey the laws—only between ourselves we know that God's law is higher than that of any man or set of men. But really, my dear, Brother Newland would be shocked

beyond measure if he were to know how long a call I am making. I am afraid I have wearied you. You are still deathly pale, aren't you? You need to get out into our nice bracing air. Well, I am very glad that you will soon be among us. I told Brother Newland last week that I shouldn't wonder if you could help to bring that oldest daughter of his to use something like common sense; though between you and me, he would have to get rid of her mother before he could expect her to have much. I assure you, I don't feel flattered in being mistaken for Mara's mother. Brother Newland certainly has had his trials with us women. When do you expect him? I haven't seen him for nearly two weeks. Are you going to give me a peep at that wonderful baby? It seems rather hard that Brother Newland himself hasn't seen her yet, doesn't it? Still, he can afford to wait; he is used to babies."

She went away at last talking volubly—offering graciously to come and assist Naomi about getting the nursery established when she went back home, adding with a sarcastic laugh that it was true "the Roper" might object. Then she waxed confidential and admitted that Mrs. Roper was really like an outsider, and obnoxious to all of them; but Brother Newland knew how to make her keep her place, and if Naomi would really like assistance, she had but to mention "Sister Maria's" name to Brother Newland; he was in the mood now to give her the moon if she asked for it.

Just how she got her caller outside of the door, with the door closed and locked, Naomi never knew. But at last she was alone. She lay back in her invalid chair with closed eyes and hands clasped, making no sound,

indicating only by her breathing that she was alive. Huldah came on tiptoe again and again to look anxiously at her and retire without speaking. Baby awakened and cooed and cried, and was fed and comforted by her faithful nurse, and slept again, and still Naomi lay back in the chair almost as white as the pillow on which her head rested. Faithful Huldah told the story in whispers to Barbara and Bernice when they came to look after their charge.

"She is that pale, ma'am, that I'm sure she can't be whiter when she is dead. And she is all tuckered out. That woman—I could have choked her, ma'am, with a good heart—she stayed, and *stayed!* But I haven't dared to wake her even for her tonic, she is that sound asleep."

Chapter 25

"There are no seas, no mountains rising wide,
No centuries of absence to divide—
Just soul-space, standing side by side."

Yet Naomi had not been sleeping. By degrees the numb horror of fascination that had held her spellbound passed, only to be succeeded by an equally numbing horror of despair. What should she do? Where stay—or fly? How should she live at all and bear her agony of pain?

These questions beat themselves against her brain, receiving no answer, the poor victim being under the spell that there was no answer for her in earth or heaven. And then, just then, she thought of the Lord Christ, of that pure and perfect life revealed to us when the Son of God walked the earth, a man; thought of the weight of pain that He had borne for humanity—pain and shame and blasphemy—had borne, and was bearing still. What were those awful words she had read but that morning—that blasphemy which had paled her face and almost stopped the beating of her heart for terror? Who was she

that she could not bear pain and shame when He, her Lord, was still being traduced in this vilest of human ways? And He was not simply a poor human creature like herself; He was her Lord. All her soul cried out to Him for help. This was why she lived through even such a morning as has been described. Though she had lost everything else that women and wives count dear and sacred, God lived and reigned, and the Lord Jesus Christ was her Redeemer.

Her friends asked no questions about her caller. Barbara had before this time been told all that Naomi knew and much that she feared with regard to Mr. Newland's present position. She had heard in minutest detail of the interview with the girl, Mara, and had been charged with a trust. She was to learn, in ways that she best would understand, how much or how little of the girl's story was to be believed. And Barbara in her investigations had learned not only that Mara's statements were in the main correct, but that there was much more which she might have told.

These revelations came as a shock to the three friends. Up to about that time they had believed that Mr. Newland had been but twice married, and that his first wife had been long dead. Not being familiarly acquainted with men of his class, the possibility that he was personally involved in the offence against decency that had flourished under the name of plural marriage, had not so much as occurred to them. They had been too long at the center of Mormon influence, and were too thoroughly in earnest in their desire to help the world upward, to have fallen into the trap in which many

transient visitors have been caught. They had not been made to believe that the laws passed and the solemn pledges taken by the people against this crime had abolished it; they had abundant evidence to the contrary. But instinctively they had relegated all actual association with it to the lower classes, and had passed men like Mr. Newland on the streets of the city hundreds of times, knowing that they were disciples of the strange religion, but not imagining for a moment that they were personally associated with this form of sin. Therefore the condition of things revealed by this later investigation had been a shock to them differing from Naomi's only in degree. They read the caller's name on her card and imagined the rest. They scarcely talked of it even among themselves. Such a condition of things, coming so close as to envelop in its horrors the friend of their youth, seemed too appalling for words. And Naomi did not talk about it in detail, not even to Barbara.

On that first evening, as Barbara was bidding her good night, she said in the steady monotone of one who had got beyond emotion:

"Barbara, I have gone down today into the lowest depths of degradation. I have come in contact with a woman who is passably educated and superficially refined, who not only accepts as a doctrine of her church this awful sin against womanhood and against God, but who admires and exalts it as the most blessed of human institutions. I could almost respect an ignorant endurance of it as a curse from God, but to glory in it! Can humanity fall lower?"

Naomi's next caller, as was to have been expected, was Mr. Newland himself. A long, carefully written letter, which had cost Naomi hours of agony to prepare, and which had made as plain to him as words could her careful study of the past weeks and her solemn conclusions, had seemed to make no impression whatever upon him. He had made no attempt to reply to her. His letters, received almost daily, were very brief, were simply expressions of undying love for her, and of an unaltered and apparently unalterable determination to see her as soon as he reached home, and to reach there at the earliest possible moment. She began to understand that this ordeal was before her and to prepare for it as best she could.

It was a midsummer Sunday morning when he came. Baby and nurse had just departed to the shade of the great tree at the farther end of the lawn, and Barbara and Bernice, dressed for church, were saying good-bye to Naomi when Huldah announced him. Barbara and Bernice exchanged significant glances as they heard the name; then Barbara quietly drew off her gloves as she passed into the next room. Naomi caught and understood her look as she passed. She could not at the moment trust herself to words. Their darling Naomi! To what a low estate had the sins of others reduced her when they felt that one of them must stay to watch over her because the man to whom she had given all her heart was coming to visit her.

He came forward swiftly with eager step and outstretched hands, but Naomi, who had risen and stood with one hand resting on the back of her chair, with the

other motioned him back, and indicated a seat across the room from herself. He stopped midway and looked at her, all his soul in his eyes.

"Naomi," he said, "my wife!" And then a flash of Naomi's girlhood and the voice she had sometimes used, but never for him, were given to him.

"Not that name, that last. You have no right, and I do not want it."

He was awed, and he showed it, but he rallied and spoke sternly. "Naomi, this is worse than folly; it is sin. I will not try to tell you how cruel it is. I bore with it patiently while you were not yourself, but now—it is hard. Your letter to me I tried to regard as the ravings of a lunatic. Was I so utterly deceived in you, Naomi? Are the solemn vows you took worth nothing? Have you forgotten the words of the marriage service? Death has not parted us, and nothing else can. My heart is wholly yours; I have told you so again and again. I swear it to you by all that you hold sacred. My poor little wife! Victim of fate and of tongues as cruel as death, let me take you in my arms and comfort you as only I can. I will blot out the very memory of these awful weeks of separation. You remember, surely you remember, what we were to each other?"

It was a fearful ordeal. Naomi, who had believed that she had drunk her cup of pain to its dregs already, discovered that there was a still more awful potion. She was white to her lips, but her voice did not falter.

She remembered everything, she told him; it was he who had forgotten. When she took those vows upon her lips at the marriage altar, she did not know that there

was another woman living to whom such vows ought to be an insult. He knew it and had kept silence and let her make them. God would forgive her ignorance; He had forgiven her and made her His child. But for him, the man who had betrayed her trust, the least he could do for her now was to go away and leave her to her insulted womanhood.

He stared at her as one bewildered. She must still be insane, he told her. Did she not remember that he taught her a new religion? That he told her of another revelation from God, and of commands laid upon them that they must not disregard?

It was these very commands, which had been told to her hastily, unwisely, by heedless tongues, that she did not understand, and that had so wrought upon her nervous system as to make her beside herself. He could have explained, he could have made everything right; he could do it yet if she would but trust him. It was his cursed folly in delaying that had been the cause of all the trouble; he could never forgive himself for the pain he had occasioned, but he had done it to shield her for a while from revelations that, coming upon her suddenly, might hurt her. He had made a mistake, but it had been because of love to her; surely she could forgive him. Nothing should be hidden from her ever again. He had not meant to hide, only to delay. He would make all plain. He had married wives in order to do his duty, to accomplish that which God required at his hands. He had married her because he loved her, and her alone, of all women in the world. All his heart was hers, and hers only, though he had done his duty by other women; he had been good to

them, and faithful. If Naomi would but be true to him, would come home with him now, at once, away from those mistaken friends of hers with their narrow ideas and false religion, he could make all things plain to her, could show her the true way, the only safe way, and could promise her, swear to her, that no human being should ever come between them. Wouldn't she come with him? Did not she owe it to her solemn vows to give him so much opportunity to explain?

He was terribly in earnest; at the same time he was consciously using all his power over her, and watching closely every muscle of her face. He remembered the spell that his voice and his views had woven about her in the past; if he could but have opportunity, he believed that he could win her to his way of thinking, against all other influences in this world. Perhaps he might have done so if all influences could be counted as of this world. Naomi had loved him with no common love; but during the weeks of separation she had drunk deeply at the fountain of eternal love, and the lines between that and the earthly and sensual were distinctly drawn. One result was that the very words Mr. Newland used with which to woo her, withdrew her from him. This man to talk to her of going "home," as if the sacred place belonged jointly to those as two, when within the very weeks of their separation he had been in other "homes" as husband and father! And he had done this in the name of religion, and was quoting God as his guide!

She made quick answer. The time was past, she told him, when such arguments could move her. She had been studying and praying. She knew of a certainty that she

was being led by the Lord her Saviour, and she knew that what he was talking to her in the name of God was a network of lies, the so-called revelations on which it was built being an outgrowth from the father of lies. She ought to have studied and prayed long ago, she told him, instead of submitting to human leading because the way was pleasant; but she had not, until the pit yawned before her and she found where her life was tending. Then indeed she had fled to God, and He had not spurned her. He had made her sure that the new teaching on which she had been leaning had its foundation in falseness and impurity, and was rotten through and through. She would have none of it, nor would she have fellowship with those who lived it. He must not quote marriage vows to her. No woman had ever made them in better faith than she; no woman would ever have been truer to them than she, if he had not himself made it impossible. There was another woman living who had the right to claim place beside him as wife. With such knowledge as that before her, the use of the name as applied to herself was only insult. Her last word to him was to go to that other woman and be true to her.

Mr. Newland, experienced diplomat as he was, made one mistake. In his bitter pain and impotent rage over what he believed had been wrought by the interference of enemies, and with an eager desire to make plain to Naomi the folly of her words, he said quickly, with the sound of a sneer in his voice:

"Which of them?"

She understood him instantly, and the effect was the opposite of what he had desired. The words recalled to

her suddenly and terribly the depth of degradation into which this man had sunken. She visibly recoiled from him, with a cry like that of a wounded creature.

"Oh! *Won't* you go?" she said. "You must do what you will—what you can—I do not know. I only know that I am to keep myself as pure as I can from this latter-day curse. I am not pure; I have helped others—other women and girls—into its depths, believing, in my folly, that I was leading them toward God. I have given my life, what is left of it, to the task of trying to help someone out of the pit. Volney Newland, I am not the woman you knew; sin and misery and grace have changed me. You might as well talk to a stone as to me when you talk of our past; it is dead and buried. It is beyond resurrection. I would not have it resurrected if I could; now go."

With that last word she turned and walked out of the room, closing the door behind her; and Barbara, the friend of her girlhood, received the stricken woman in her arms.

Not thus easily, however, did Mr. Newland give her up. This man of many wives and numberless fancies had met at last the woman who held what heart he had to give. He had spoken truly when he said that his first marriage had been one of convenience, of advisement, with no feeling upon his part more pronounced than that of indifference. Naturally he was ready for the second venture when it was suggested to him, in accordance with the peculiar views in which he had been born and reared—far more ready than his wife was. The poor young thing had loved, if he had not; and she did not "live her religion" well, but took to heart her husband's indifference and almost

desertion, and hated royally his "second choice," notwithstanding the fact that she went through the public farce of receiving her. Much domestic infelicity had resulted, and although Mr. Newland had been a "good man," judged by the standards about him, and had "done his duty by his wife," his home was anything but peaceful, and it must have been a distinct relief to him when the poor victim of his youth gave up the struggle and was laid in the grave.

His "second choice" he had made for himself, but, in accordance with the teachings of his religion, he found that she did not "fill" his heart, and he had made more than one further effort to have that troublesome member filled, with more or less discord and discomfort and dissension as a result. Then, suddenly, when he was a middle-aged man, father of many children, without previous intention on his part—so much may be said in his favor—that heart of his had been taken by storm and hopelessly filled. The man who had played with emotion and passion in the name of love, learned for himself the meaning of the word, as fully at least as a nature like his could learn such a lesson.

Chapter 26

"I have already
The bitter taste of death upon my lips;
I feel the pressure of the heavy weight;
But if a word could save me, and that word
Were not the *Truth,* nay, if it did but swerve
A hair's breadth from the Truth—I would not say it."

He went away that morning, slowly, with bowed head, as one vanquished. But he was only repulsed. He came again and again, and between his visits wrote volumes to Naomi, and interviewed her friends, beseeching their assistance, promising abjectly anything, everything that she could ask, if she would only come back to him. For a time it seemed impossible for the man who had all his life succeeded in securing whatever he greatly desired, to believe that one small woman, over whom he thought he possessed unbounded influence, was proof against his power, and that he could not move her from her solemn determination to separate her life from his forever.

By degrees, Naomi came to understand him; to realize that he was not the villain which the first revelations had seemed to unmask to her. He had not plotted deliberately to deceive her, and ruin her happiness for life. Instead, she came to believe, and in a measure to understand, that he was a man who fully believed in himself and in the reasonableness of his course. He lived in the firm conviction that he could win her to his way of thinking, in time, and that then all would be well between them.

"He is a product of the religion in which he was reared," Naomi said to Barbara, speaking in that impersonal tone which meant that she was putting herself outside of the scene and viewing it all as though it were being acted by others. "He is an inevitable product of the system. I have studied it thoroughly, and I see that he could not well be other than as he is. Remember, Barbara, that he was born in an unholy atmosphere: that his father before him had subjected his mother to the awful torture, the thought of which fills us with horror, and that she yielded and accepted it as a part of her religion, her cross, to be borne for Christ's sake, and reared her children in that faith. How can such a one be expected to understand our moral recoil? Morality to Mr. Newland means something infinitely lower than it does to you and me. He has not our foundation on which to build morality. Barbara, he has no God! Not such a God as you and I worship. He has many gods, manufactured ones, made out of such worthless material as human clay and fallen human nature. Even Jesus Christ, the Perfect One, is made by this system into a creature of mere human impulse, his infinite love for humanity draggled in the

mire and spoken of as human passion. What can one expect from such a source, a system that can drag down to earth, and lower than earth, the name of the divine Christ and pollute it with blasphemous utterances? And that disgusting priesthood with its iron hand on every man and woman and child is the rotten foundation of it all. Barbara, scorched as I am, *burnt* almost to death by this awful doctrine of plural marriage, even I can declare to you that I believe Bishop Fowler was right when he said that polygamy was the 'whitest bird in this infernal nest.' Those were his very words, and he showed by them that he had studied the system and reached to its black heart. Because of this a man cannot be a man; he is simply a tool. He must sink his reason, trample on his judgment, choke every uprising of his better nature and blindly obey. You think you know this thing, Barbara, but you know it only as those can who stand outside and look down at it. There is a deeper knowledge, and I have it; I am in it, remember; its curse is upon me, and I *know*. I might have known before. I read its description and the warning against it this very day in my Bible; I read that 'in the last times there should, be mockers who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.' 'This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.' Is not that a moral photograph of the whole scheme?"

Barbara listened amazed. Was this their "little Naomi," as they had delighted to call her—the "child" for whom they had prayed that life might be sweet, and that Time should treat her tenderly? What strides had she taken,

not only in her study of the facts connected with this abnormal development of sin, but in her ability to grasp the moral issues involved, and to see the inevitable trend of the whole.

Bible words came to Barbara also. Instinctively in her thought she applied them, "From whence has this one wisdom, having never learned?" And instantly the inspired and well-fitting answer came to mind, "They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus."

By degrees, fighting vigorously every step of the way, Mr. Newland came to a realization of the fact that he had lost his prize. The day had gone by when the extreme measures could be applied to which he was well aware his sect had resorted in the past to carry out the "designs of Providence." "Gentiles" were present in large force in the "City of the Saints," and many of them had keen eyes and were on the alert. The United States government had spoken in no uncertain voice, and United States artillery could be used on occasion. It became the advocates, not only of a new religion, but a new morality, to move carefully in cases where there were powerful and open-eyed Gentile enemies watching. Mr. Newland knew that he must be careful. In addition to that, perhaps above that—for Mr. Newland was in deed and in truth as good a man as his system of religious belief would permit—he loved Naomi. Loved her enough to sacrifice even himself to what he became at last convinced was the inevitable. In truth, he loved her enough to sacrifice his own soul, measured by his standards. He had made terrible propositions. He would sacrifice his home, his business, yes, even his religion—he would be anything or nothing,

as she wished; he would go away with her to the ends of the earth; he would never mention the old life to her again, or think of it, if she would but come to him and let them live their lives together.

It had been another of his terrible mistakes. He had seen in Naomi's face that visible recoil from him which cut into his very soul as she said:

"Your children—you would forsake them! Those other women to whom you say you feel yourself bound in the sight of God—you would desert them!"

They were awful lessons in righteousness, those questions. They made him feel the yawning gulf that he was constantly widening between himself and the woman he loved. Once only she broke before him, bowed herself in an agony of misery, and stooped to abject pleading. It was when after one of those solemn renunciations of hers, in which she had tried to make plain to his moral nature that the potent forces separating them forever were named RIGHT or WRONG, and that no amount of love or desire could overcome them, he said to her:

"And the child, Naomi, my child and yours—what of her?" Then a groan, such as he had never before heard from her, escaped her lips. She must acknowledge his rights here, and she did. She pleaded as for her life. He had said that he loved her, that he would do anything for her, would he do this great thing? Would he give her the child?

"And let you teach her to despise her father, and hate his religion?" he said sternly.

Naomi turned as white as the gown she wore, and put her hand suddenly to her heart as though its strange beating hurt her. But her voice grew steady.

"I will be true," she said, "though it kill me. I will never speak one word to the child against her father. But that which he calls religion, and which has him in its awful toils, I will teach her by every means in my power to hate! *hate*! HATE! So help me God."

The perspiration stood like great beads upon the man's forehead. He clenched his hands until the flesh shrank at the print of his nails. He wanted to take that woman in his arms and fly to the ends of the earth, and force her to be only his. And he could not touch her. She was haloed about with righteousness.

After a moment he spoke in a low, hoarse tone, "You may have the child." Then he turned and went away.

Naomi had won. But she had another wish, and it grew upon her and oppressed her until she began to know that it was of God. She must have the girl, Mara; she must save her for the Lord Christ.

Mr. Newland did not come again, but she wrote to him.

She had written him but one letter before this, and he had practically ignored it; but she put all her soul into her plea for Mara. The girl haunted her, she told him; day and night she thought of her. She was in peril, in deadly peril. He did not know it; being a man; perhaps he could not understand how a girl like his daughter might ruin her own life, would ruin it, if she were not helped. Would he let her come for a little while? Just for a day or a few hours, perhaps, if he were not willing for more?

It seemed to her folly when she wrote it, this plea to a father to give her a chance to save his daughter from the very life that he was pressing upon her, from beliefs on which his own soul rested. But she prevailed. It might have been partly because Mr. Newland had no very deep affection for his eldest daughter that he interposed no serious obstacles in the way of her going to Naomi. He had had ambitions for her as regarded her marriage, and she had succeeded in thwarting them thus far, on account, he believed, of the perversity of her nature. He was in a state of semi-irritation with her, and was at the same time at a loss what step to take next in regard to her. It was a relief to think of being rid of such a troublesome responsibility for a time. But the main reason, after all, for his yielding had to do with Naomi's power over him. He had offered to peril his own soul for her sake, and it was not likely he would hesitate over his daughter's soul. There was a forlorn hope in his heart that the beautiful girl, who seemed to fascinate everybody with whom she came in contact, might be able to accomplish with Naomi what he had not. The experiment should at least be tried, come what would of it.

He went down himself to bring Mara to town. He had not seen the girl since the evening on which a certain very stormy domestic interview took place, in which he had angrily accused Mara of having wrecked her father's happiness for life; and her mother had taken the girl's part, and told him with a plainness which was new to her, that it was time he knew how wrecked lives felt. They had parted in anger.

He was dignified when he returned. He told Mara coldly that despite the fact that she had brought heavy sorrow upon a father who had been only good to her, he was still disposed to give her another trial. The people were few in this world who were offered opportunity to undo some of their own mischief. She was one of those favored few. Her Aunt Naomi wanted her. If she chose even now to be true to her father, all might yet be well. He found Mara eager to go, willing indeed to make all sorts of vague promises for the sake of being once more in the atmosphere of the beautiful woman who had fascinated her, and whom she had unwittingly brought near to death.

On the way back to town Mr. Newland, having done all he could to impress his daughter with the magnitude of her sin, changed his tactics, and condescended in a dignified way to bribe. He gave Mara to understand that if she should succeed, as he believed was entirely possible, in bringing about a different state of things between Naomi and himself, there was nothing which money could buy, or his resources compass, that would be considered too great as her reward. Poor man! He understood his daughter almost as little as the woman whom he persisted in calling wife.

Mara was charmed with the state of things. She rejoiced with a young girl's joy in the sense of power. Rebellion against the will of a man, especially when that man was "Brother Newland," as she delighted to speak of him, was so new to the girl's environment that it gave her exquisite pleasure. Most of the women she knew intimately, however they might rave in private and

among themselves, were meek enough in the presence of the men who dominated them. It had not been so with Mara. She had dared to rebel, and she knew, in consequence, that the eyes of many were on her wonderingly. She hoped and believed that she would find in Naomi a kindred spirit. She had been startled and shocked at first over the idea of a wife rebelling against her husband, then she had rejoiced in the daring spirit that it indicated. What might not they two accomplish together? It was in this mood, and not at all as the mediator that her father hoped she would be, that she came again to Naomi.

The first day or two of her stay resulted chiefly in a succession of shocks to Naomi and the earnest women who were to struggle with her for this periled soul.

"She is as beautiful as an angel," Bernice said to Gertrude, as she reported some of the talk which had been carried on that day, "but if that name applies, she must represent a fallen angel. Could you have conceived of such ideas being advanced by a young girl in her social position?"

"That would depend upon whether I had lived in this part of the world long enough to be acquainted with it," Gertrude said calmly. "Why should we be astonished at the fruit, Bernice? We know how the very children talk together in their play. We know what they see and hear at home. Why should they not talk, and why should not each succeeding generation begin on a lower moral plane than the last? I think that is inevitable."

"Well," said Bernice, with a long-drawn sigh, "I suppose that is true; indeed, I know it is; but isn't it

awful? It has never come home to me so closely before. She is so beautiful, and so winsome in many ways. Oh, Gertrude, we must save her!"

"We will try," said Gertrude, gravely; "but it is a hard problem we have to solve—nothing less than how to save a girl from her father and her religion."

Chapter 27

"'Tis not a life;
'Tis but a piece of childhood thrown away."

It was not a difficult matter to learn Mara's views of life. She talked freely about her own affairs as well as the affairs of others, having none of the reticence with regard to personal matters which these women had been accustomed to find in young people of culture. Naomi the girl admired exceedingly, and was eager to express the feeling.

"I just glory in her pluck," she said gaily. "To think of her being able to withstand Brother Newland of all men in the world. That is good fun. I wish I could have seen him when he first took in the fact. But it didn't have a good effect upon his disposition, I can tell you. When he came out to us he was in a towering rage. I was really afraid for a while that he would order the earth to open and swallow poor me. Think of attributing all his troubles to me! Such a time as I had! I assure you, I had to tell a

succession of very skillful lies gotten up in haste in order to escape immediate destruction."

"Does your religion allow you to tell lies?" It was the usually patient Gertrude who could not resist this thrust.

"Oh, well," with a graceful shrug of her pretty shoulders, "it was to save life this time, you know—that makes a difference, doesn't it? Father was certainly angry enough for a while to do some desperate deed. But we are on better terms now; he expects great things of me." This last, with a shrewd, half-comical glance toward Naomi, who at that moment entered the room.

"What am I to call you?" she asked abruptly. "It is awkward to be talking about you all the time, and never having a name for you; but you do not seem to like to have me say 'Aunt Naomi.'"

Naomi shrank from the words. She had lived in the tainted atmosphere long enough to be aware that this was the form of address of children toward the plural wives of their fathers. The phrase seemed to place her irrevocably with that class.

"No," she said quickly, "do not call me that; I am not your aunt."

"Well, then, shall I say Mrs. Newland?"

The victim shuddered as though the sound of the name had caused physical pain. Mara laughed lightly.

"You see, you don't like any of your names," she said. "What am I to do?"

"Call me Naomi," said that poor woman at last. "Nothing else."

"Oh, shall I, really? I like that; it sounds so friendly and companionable. That is what your old friends call

you, isn't it? And it makes an old friend of me? Good! I haven't any friends, someway. I have even lost my poor old lover, the one I told you about that day, you remember? He has been after me for months. Poor old grandfather! He has lost a tooth, and it is dreadfully unbecoming. I don't mind gray hairs, they make one look rather distinguished; but yawning chasms where teeth ought to be are horrid. He has got mad at me. I think it is because I made faces at him one night. He turned around at just the wrong moment and saw me as I was showing the girls how he looked when he told his experience. He has found another girl. She isn't sixteen yet, and you ought to see the airs she puts on because she fancies she has cut me out—as if I cared! Oh, Mrs. Naomi—no? Well, then, just plain Naomi, if you will only plan it so I can marry my George, I will do anything else in the world that you want of me. I haven't seen him in five weeks; he is out of town, but I know he must be dying to get back to me. Couldn't I have him call here to see me when he comes back? Mother doesn't dare to have him at our house except on the sly, because father is so set against him. The old grandfather has put him up to that, and those wretched young ones of father's are always on the watch to spy out something against me to tell him. But away out here we could manage it; and I'm under your care now, anyway. You have made a splendid rebel once, couldn't you rebel again for me? Look! I'll kneel to you as a slave if you will. I should enjoy being your slave. I can easily fancy you as a queen, with loyal subjects. You are queenly, you know, and so pretty. I don't wonder that father adores you. Will you hold your sceptre out to me?"

She had dropped gracefully on one knee before Naomi, and was touching her lips to a cold hand in mock humility, closing the farce with a gay little laugh.

"Who is George?" questioned Barbara, her main object being to save Naomi just then from having to speak.

"George is my willing and disconsolate slave. George is divine. I adore him. If he had seven wives already, I would willingly be the eighth. But he hasn't, you understand. He doesn't approve of plural marriage, not now. But very soon after we are married I shall take him East, because such disapprovals do not hold in this atmosphere. By the way, Miss Halsted, I wonder if George Wilbur was originally from your part of the country? I am sure I have heard him mention the name that I saw on the postmark of one of your letters this morning. Did you know such a man in the East? He isn't young; I suppose he is forty, perhaps more; but he is a handsome man, and he looks and acts young. I like him better than if he were a mere boy. In fact, I think little boys are as disagreeable out of their place as old men are out of theirs. I have always told mamma that since I had got to be married, I thought I might at least have the liberty of choice, and not be compelled to marry either a grandfather or a child in knee pants. That was when they wanted me to marry a silly boy of about my own age. I have had oceans of trouble. Miss Halsted, wouldn't it be delicious if my George should prove to be an old acquaintance of yours? You would aid and abet me then, wouldn't you? He could come here all he chose under cover of visiting you. Wouldn't that pull the wool over Brother Newland's eyes in a most charming manner?"

Bernice replied in utmost calm of tone that she had once known a George Wilbur, and that he and Mara's friend might be one and the same; when she had more time, they would compare notes. Then she had risen at once, and broken up the circle. But from that moment her interest in the girl grew apace. She interested herself in Mara's every movement, studied her tastes, and bore with her whims in a way that amazed Barbara and Gertrude, both of whom had almost daily spasms of despair over the hope of doing anything for her.

"There is more to the child than appears on the surface," Bernice would say emphatically. "She has very great possibilities for good or evil. Naomi is right; she *must* be saved."

"She is so painfully frivolous," objected Gertrude.

"I know; but don't you think part of that is assumed—is a sort of necessary outgrowth of her surroundings? The more I see of these girls the more I realize that they must make either comedy or tragedy of life. Poor Mara is in the comic stage, or the pretence of it."

As the days passed, and Bernice's interest in the strange young girl continued unabated, it began to look as though she, and not Naomi nor Barbara, was to be the one to influence Mara; at least they grew hourly more intimate, until at last they spent every moment of Bernice's leisure together. Then, suddenly, there came a break. For an entire day Mara held herself coldly away from her new friend, declining invitations to walk, or drive, and showing by every means in her power that she was offended. In the evening she expressed her mind to Naomi.

"That Miss Halsted can be awfully disagreeable when she chooses. I have always heard that old maids were horrid creatures, and I think it must be true. Do you know why she never married? I do. Don't you think she was engaged to George Wilbur? My George! Isn't that strange? She threw him over, too—there's your honorable woman for you, who would die for the truth, all because he had flirted with another girl and broken her heart. It was mean in him, of course; but I don't think he deserved such treatment as that, do you? Still, I suppose I ought to be glad. If she had married him, he wouldn't be out here probably, dying to marry me. Perhaps he would. He might have come and joined us and taken me for his second choice. Isn't it interesting the way lives are mixed up? He told me a horrid fib; see if I don't pay him for that one of these days, if I get a chance! He said he had never married because he had never met anybody he liked well enough until he saw me. But they all say pretty things like that, these men. I presume they are all very much alike. Miss Halsted wants me to give George up, just because, years and years ago, he cheated a girl. I think that would be cruel, don't you? What do you think, anyhow?"

What did Naomi think? She sat long that evening, considering the question. Was this girl already hopeless? Had her terrible inheritance, together with her environment up to this present time, coarsened her nature beyond redemption? What foundation was there upon which to build true womanhood? But Bernice was courageous.

"We must save her from that man," she said with emphasis. "It is strange, as she says, that his life and mine have crossed again, but I believe it is for a purpose. I have kept some knowledge of him, Naomi. He is less worthy of trust than he was eight years ago; he shall not have Mara's life to ruin. The child doesn't love him; it will help us very much to remember that. She does not love anybody but you, unless it may be her mother, a little, with a sort of protecting love. She loves you, Naomi, with a love that is almost idolatry, and it will save her. You can do what you will with her, after a little. Just now she is fascinated with the attentions of a man of the world who knows how to flatter her. George Wilbur can be very fascinating, but that is all there is of it. She is still a child, although the awful system in which she has been trained has tried to force womanhood upon her. I don't think it is ingrained coarseness that leads her to talk as she does, it is atmosphere. You and I cannot realize what that would do, it is so foreign to our experience. Imagine a girl reared in an atmosphere from which a child of twelve can come to school and chatter with her mates after this manner: 'We have had an awful fuss at our house, and papa has gone to the other house to stay; he says he won't come back until mamma can behave herself. Mamma can't endure Aunt Kate, you know; yesterday she shut the door in her face and told her never to come to our house again. But Aunt Kate just laughed; she knows papa is sweet on her just now.' Forgive me, Naomi, for bringing such a picture before you—" for Naomi was pallid and trembling. "I felt that I must, so that you might understand the environment of the very *children,* and be

encouraged for Mara. It is wonderful, all things considered, that she has stayed as much of a child as she is. Naomi, I could tell her more about George Wilbur. I shrank from it for her sake, and I hoped that it might not be necessary; but I think it will be, and I think we can win her to protect herself from his influence. Don't be discouraged, dear. This child will be one of the stars in your crown some day."

They waited and were patient with the girl, who was so new a study to them. Her fascination for Naomi continued. She named her the Queen, and Barbara was the Princess, but after nursing her dignity for a few days, she returned to Bernice as a companion.

"There is no use in trying to quarrel with you," she said frankly, "you won't let me. I don't believe you know how to quarrel; and being an old maid with peculiar views and no fear of being compelled to marry your grandfather, you cannot understand how anxious I am to watch my own fate a little and save myself from the worst by marrying poor George. I'm going to forgive you, even though you are hard on him. When he and I are married, you will come and see us, and you will find how nice he has become, and forgive him those youthful follies."

"I shall have to tell her more," said this good woman to herself; and she said it with a sigh. But she resolved to wait a little and try to weave the meshes of their influence still more strongly about the girl. And their influence grew apace. They had opened a new world to Mara, and in some directions she thrived in the purer atmosphere. She asked shrewd questions from time to

time, not always of Naomi, though she continued to be the "Queen."

"She is grand!" the girl said to Bernice. "She is wonderful! Think of voluntarily giving up such a man as my father to another woman. She ordered him to go back to my mother and be true to her. I heard him tell Aunt Maria so; and it made Aunt Maria like a tiger; she wants him herself, you see. But the Queen is away ahead of them all in her influence over father. I believe she could get him to do anything she wanted, and she has *given him up*. It is such an awful pity that mother doesn't care; she doesn't, any more. She sneers at father, sometimes, and says that Mrs. Roper is the one who should have him because she can worship him in spite of everything. Mother can't. She thinks she has borne too much. She told me once that she would not send for father if she were dying; she would not want to see him. I think she is foolish. It is different from the Queen, you know; mother married father with her eyes wide open, knowing at the time that he had another wife. But you see she was very young, and she believed him when he told her he was marrying her for love and had never loved anybody else, and never would. I should never think of believing the creatures when they talk that way; I have heard too much of it."

It was when the girl dropped into talk of this character that the three women who were trying to save her grew faint-hearted. They had constantly to remind themselves of the conditions in which she had been reared, and to comfort one another with the thought of the transforming power of real unadulterated religion. Mara's questions

with regard to the only religion about which she knew anything were answered with perfect frankness and the strictest adherence to historic facts; and every day the girl's insight seemed to grow keener. At last Bernice determined that the time had come when she must venture upon other facts connected with George Wilbur. The man was now daily expected, and it seemed important to forestall if possible the effect of his personal presence. Bernice chose her time with care, giving up her Saturday to a long drive alone with Mara, and surrounding the susceptible child with all the sweet and holy influences of earth and air that the country in its beauty could furnish.

It was during their return drive, after having spent what Mara declared was a heavenly day that the revelations which Bernice had hoped to spare her were made. The young girl received them in startled silence. She was peculiarly a creature of moods, and it had proved not safe to predict what the next mood might be; but Bernice was surprised and perplexed at this one. At times she told herself that she had done harm instead of good by her story. Still, she had done what she could, and there was nothing for her now but to await developments.

Apparently Mara was not angry; she appeared as one who had nothing that she cared to say, and who did not wish to be questioned. Her reticence and dignity included them all, though she hovered about Naomi, and was still devoted to her.

"We have evidently reached a milestone," said Barbara as Naomi's three helpers anxiously discussed the

situation. “It remains to be seen just what it will mark in the future. We must wait.”

Chapter 28

"I slept, and dreamed that life was Beauty,
I woke, and found that life was Duty."

"God did anoint thee with his odorous oil
To *wrestle,* not to reign."

Sunday was a day of constraint and general discomfort. Mara declined to go to church and gave most of her time to the baby. It was when they were sitting together in the twilight, the four women and the restless spirit who was so unlike them that she might have come from another world, that she suddenly broke the silence which had fallen upon them with a remark that had nothing whatever to do with the subject they had been discussing.

"I don't see that your boasted religion or morality or whatever you call it is any better than ours; it isn't so good as ours by your own showing. There is that girl you talked about yesterday, Miss Halsted, ruined soul and body. If George Wilbur had belonged to our sect instead of yours, he would have married her decently and taken care of her after a fashion, at least. She would have been

recognized as respectable, and gone into society and all that, instead of skulking about as a wreck. Then George could have married his other wives when he got ready, and he needn't have had any more to do with the first one than he chose; but she would have had her place and there wouldn't have been any scandal. I don't see why that isn't a great deal better than the other way."

Naomi's breath came quickly, and she felt her face burn. They were all glad of the darkness. Starting from such a moral plane as that, what hope was there for the girl of seventeen? It was Nurse Gertrude who first found voice.

"My dear, if you had been reared in an atmosphere of ordinary purity, you could not raise such a question; your whole soul would revolt from it. I do not think you are to blame for not seeing the matter in its true light, it is your misfortune; but I wonder if we cannot make clear to you what it is to us? To lift the poor victim of a bad man to the plane of supposed respectability by the road you propose, is to take Sin, all reeking with filth, and cover it over with white robes and label it Purity. What good would the label do? If you were trying to rescue a child from the slums, would you put the clean garments you had prepared for her over the vile ones of the gutter, and say to her, 'Now you are clean and pure, be happy'? If you would, that is not the way we do in a world where the Lord Jesus Christ sets the standard of living. There are such words as righteousness and purity, and there is such a word as sin. We lead no one into moral filth in the name of religion or respectability. One who makes the descent, whether man or woman, does so with eyes wide open,

being plainly taught what God and those who take God for their Guide will think of him. Isn't that after all the safe way?"

But Mara had retired again into silence. She was obstinately uncommunicative; no amount of planning could draw her out. The spell lasted for several days. Then, as she laid the baby in Naomi's arms one morning, the girl burst forth again:

"Do you know, I believe in my soul that all those horrid things Miss Halsted said the other night are true? They were awful things, at least what they hinted at were. They made my blood boil with rage at first, but I believe them. There is such a thing as purity, and there is a kind of veneer named purity which our people use, but it covers Sin. I feel it. I believe I have always felt it, without knowing what was the matter with me. It is what has made me queer. I hated to marry that old man; I felt in my soul that it would be sin for me to do so, in spite of all they said. Queen Naomi, I am not all bad; won't you believe in me a little?"

She bent and touched her lips to Naomi's forehead, then stamped her foot and added imperiously: "I won't be bad; they shall not make me so! I won't live the life my mother has; she has had to lie. The system teaches it, requires it. I won't! I'll follow your example; I'll leave them! I hate it all! I believe I always have, though I should never have dared but for you. Some streak of my great-great-grandmother must be in me; she was a Puritan; I will be. I don't want to get married; it was only that I knew I must; and I thought that George Wilbur woul—" she stopped suddenly, then burst forth again. "I

hate George Wilbur, too. The old man who was brought up in it is more decent than he. Do you know what he has done? Did she tell you? And to think that he could tell me he had never cared for any human being until he saw me! Oh, lies! *Lies!* LIES! I am sick to death of it all. I have lived in a lying atmosphere all my days; but I hate it. I have struggled and fought, yes, and prayed, against my hatred of this life, but I will not anymore. I will pray to be delivered from it, and God sent you to answer my prayer."

Suddenly she dropped upon her knees before Naomi and the baby. "Naomi, couldn't we go away somewhere, you and I, where the air is pure—miles and miles away from it all? Mother would be willing, would be glad. Poor mother, she hates it, too. She told me once that she would rather go to my funeral than to my wedding. Think of that! Couldn't we do it, somehow?"

Then Naomi leaned across her sleeping baby and kissed the kneeling girl, who was sobbing now, and knew that God had given her this soul in token of her martyrdom.

"We will go away, dear," she said.

It was on the evening of that day that Mr. George Wilbur's card was brought to Mara. She glanced at the name and tossed the card down scornfully. "I want nothing of him," she said, "except never to see or hear of him again. Will one of you go and tell him so for me?"

It was for this reason that Bernice Halsted bridging over a gulf of years moved once more down the stairs on her way to an interview with George Wilbur. In her pocket at the moment lay a letter from her mother

received but the day before—her poor mother, who still had spasms of hopefulness for her daughter.

"Mrs. Wilbur is visiting here," so the letter ran, "for the first time in six years. She is much changed. Poor woman, she feels her separation from George keenly. He has never married, she tells me, and has lived what she calls a wrecked life, on account of a bit of boyish folly. Those were her very words. Bernice, dear, you said I must never mention this to you again, but that was years ago, and time may have softened you. I have made the most exhaustive inquiries, and I am sure now, as I was at first, that poor George was more sinned against than sinning. He was not to blame because girls would lose their hearts to him. You are a dear daughter, and I am blessed above most in my children; but I am growing old, and in a little while must go away and leave you. If I could but see you happily married first, to the man who was so long ago like a son to me! Poor George has been true to his first love; his mother told me so with tears in her eyes. He is living a roving life somewhere in the West. Would it not be strange, most romantic indeed, if his path and yours should cross again? Daughter, if you should meet him, I trust you will not lose sight of the fact that it is a Christian's part to forgive. Whatever wrong you may fancy the poor fellow did in thought to you, must surely be amply atoned for by his years of martyrdom."

Bernice had smiled as she read the letter, and sighed. The sigh was for her mother, who had been trained in an environment which seemed to make it impossible for her to believe that an unmarried life could be a successful and happy one.

Mr. George Wilbur, waiting for the coming of his latest charmer—ready to say, "My dear child, what an age it is since I have seen your beautiful face!"—was all unprepared for the vision which was presently framed in the doorway. Bernice Halsted!

He had not thought seriously of her in years, and the sweet faces and forms with which he had consoled himself in the interim were numerous. Yet here she stood before him—the girl who had once been his ideal—a woman now, and he knew in an instant that she was his ideal still. He could not for his life have told what she said to him as she stood there in the doorway. He did not remember, afterward, anything about Mara's message; he discovered, somehow, that he was dismissed, and he found himself on the street, and realized, not that he had not seen Mara, but that he had seen Bernice Halsted.

He troubled Mara with no more letters, as they had feared he might. But he did write one letter to Bernice which in its way was a masterpiece. In it he assured his first love that she had been his only one; all through the years he had not been able to tear her image from his heart; but it was only recently, very recently indeed, that he had dared to let in a little trembling hope that the years had made her—not less good, but less severe. He had sinned, but not to the extent that she had believed. That poor dead girl should not be blamed for mistaking kindly interest for a deeper feeling on his part. Let that pass; he was willing to bear all the blame, and to own that he had been careless, culpably so indeed. But if he had sinned, he had also suffered. Would not the past

suffice? Had not the years in a measure atoned? Would she suffer him to call her—friend? And might he visit her occasionally? Surely that was not much to ask of one who had been to him—but he would not weary her with reminders. She must allow him, though, a word of explanation with regard to that lovely child, Mara. His interest in her had been extreme; and his desire to save her from a cruel fate had led him into efforts which had possibly placed him in a false position. It seemed to be his fate, someway, to have his sympathies run away with his judgment. Now, however, that Mara had found wiser and more influential friends than he could be, he need think no more about her except to be thankful that she had escaped.

This letter Bernice returned to the writer with these added lines: "I have acquaintances in Ardmore. I have been at the home of Mrs. Bennett Searles, and have met several times the poor girl known in that region as Sarah Bateman. I have done what I could to help her in the 'cruel fate' which has fallen upon her. The 'false position' in which she is placed I fully understand. If you have any desire at this late day to unite 'judgment' and 'feeling,' the way is certainly open for you to make what tardy atonement you can.

"BERNICE HALSTED."

In this way George Wilbur learned once more that in the souls of some women there is a power that makes for righteousness; and that with them the name of sin is Sin, and may not be disguised. To say that he was disappointed, is to put it feebly. When this man had first

engaged himself to Bernice Halsted there had been deep in his heart a fully formed purpose to marry her sometime. Through the years and his innumerable passing "fancies" he had steadily nursed that idea. Sometime, somewhere, when he was tired of pretty faces, and surfeited with adoration, he should look up Bernice Halsted, a good comfortable, sensible old maid, grown wiser with the years, and marry her, little as she deserved it. He had not looked her up, he had blundered upon her, and the effect upon him of the meeting had astonished himself. But it was not until he read those lines appended to his long, carefully worded letter that he realized that Bernice Halsted would never marry him.

They were planning to go away, Naomi and Mara. Barbara had been urging it for several weeks; Naomi she was sure needed entire change of scene.

Barbara's plan had been to send them to her friends in Colorado, Dr. Ellis Carpenter, pastor of the First Church of Glenmere, and his wife Lilian: two better friends than these for Naomi's sore heart, and for the dangerous girl Mara, Barbara was sure could not be found this side of heaven. Moreover, she, Barbara, always spent a generous part of her summer vacations with them, and this would give her opportunity to be with Naomi. Much correspondence had ensued, and all arrangements were satisfactorily made. Mara had undertaken the task of

securing her father's consent, and had not found it difficult.

"Poor father," the girl remarked to Bernice as she folded the letter in which he had written that his daughter was to do in all respects whatever her "Aunt Naomi" wished. "Poor father, he thinks I am a connecting link. Strange, isn't it, how I can stand outside of my life, someway, and appreciate it all? Father worships Naomi, and he thinks that sometime, somehow, he will get her again, and he never will! I begin to understand her; but father never can. Father breathes tainted air, and it has got into his lungs, and become a part of him."

There were no financial problems for Naomi to struggle with. Her keen-sighted father had seen to it that the princely fortune he left his one child was so hedged about with trustees and provisions that even Naomi herself could dispose of but small portions of it for other than her personal use. Mr. Newland had made no effort to change the business conditions surrounding her vast wealth; in truth, he had been comparatively indifferent to it; it had not been Naomi's money that he wanted, but Naomi.

It came to pass, then, that the four old-time friends were once more spending a last evening together. Not one of them but thought of that last evening behind the years, in the third story south room of the old college; not one of them referred to it; the changes had been too solemn, the sorrows resting upon one of their number were too tense for words. They tried to be cheery, or, failing in that, at least to be sensible and commonplace; but the conditions were not commonplace. Naomi going away alone with her baby in her arms, widowed, yet not widowed. And always

there was *Mara*. The conditions would not even bear thinking about.

Gertrude caught up the evening paper for relief. She glanced down the latest telegraphic news column, suppressed an exclamation, glanced apprehensively toward Naomi, who was just then bending over her baby, and pushed the paper to Barbara with her finger on a paragraph; and Barbara read:

"Just as we go to press we learn that our esteemed townsman Mr. Volney Newland has met with a terrible accident."

There followed the usual account of a belated and foolhardy man, a moving train, and a misstep.

The three friends managed to get away on some pretext and hold an anxious consultation as to whether they should tell Naomi at once.

"And Mara," said Bernice. "After all, he is her father."

Still, no message had come to them, and it was already late. They determined to wait until morning. Probably the account was exaggerated—first news of accidents generally was. In the gray of the early morning tidings came. Mr. Newland had lain unconscious for several hours, and then had ceased to breathe.

Barbara went with her friend to the closed and darkened room where the body lay. "I want to see him," Naomi had said, her face almost as white as the dead. "It can do no harm to anyone now."

At the door they met Mrs. Roper, her face swollen with weeping. She darted wrathful glances at Naomi and at Mara, and rushed away as though the sight of them were hateful. The poor slave of a man for whom she had lived,

resented with all her ignorant power the coming of those who had not bent to that man's will. Mrs. Roper loved him as a dog might, fiercely, unreasoningly, and hated whatever caused him trouble. Barbara went with Mara into the closed room, and stood with an arm around her while the girl with bitter weeping sobbed out her regrets that she had ever been rude, disobedient, unfilial. She had not known her father very well, nor loved him much; but yet he was her *father,* and for a little while nature had its way.

Naomi went in alone, closing the door behind her. She wanted it so. What passed between the living and the dead in that quiet room only God knows. She did not stay long. She made no scene, she shed no tears. As for pallor, she could not have been paler than she was when she went in. She spoke no word, and her friends respected her silence.

That evening, after Mara, still sobbing, had said good night and gone away with Bernice, Barbara lingered for some tender ministries, looking to the comfort of mother and baby, then bent over to kiss Naomi and was drawn close.

"Don't go, Barbara, not yet. He was the father of my baby, and once—I thought he was my husband. Stay and pray."

Not long after that they did what Naomi once thought she could never do—they went back to the home of her girlhood, she and Mara and Baby. The deserted house was opened and renovated, and filled with sunshine and roses and all cheerful colors and odors and sounds. Naomi meant to surround the young life added on to hers with

all the brightness that she could. Moreover, she entered at once into the life of the village near at hand. She interested herself in the church, in the women's societies, in the young people's gatherings, in whatever invited cooperation; and the open doors, of course, were numberless. They gathered about her, the good friendly people who had known her mother a little and respected her father and remembered Naomi as a girl. They were glad to have her back, and said so. They had reason to be glad; she made life richer for them in many ways.

They talked about her in friendly fashion when they met.

"What a beautiful woman Mrs. Newland is. She was a pretty girl, but as a woman she is charming. Isn't it strange that she married without changing her name? Naomi Newland she is still."

"But isn't her stepdaughter lovely? She is the most beautiful girl I ever saw, and so devoted to her stepmother. Naomi is certainly blessed in that respect."

"It's queer that she calls her 'Naomi,' though, don't you think? To be sure, there isn't a very great difference in their ages; I suppose it would be absurd for her to say 'mother.' The baby must resemble the father; she doesn't look in the least like Naomi, nor like Mara."

"Naomi never mentions her husband, does she? I tried to think of something proper to say about him one day, and I couldn't. Someway she silences one, I don't know how."

An older voice took up the word: "Poor young widow, she worshipped him, I suppose. That was Naomi as a

child, you know. Silence is kinder to some natures than words. I wouldn't touch her sorrow if I were you."

So they kept merciful silence.

By degrees, as the months passed, other talk began to be pronounced in church circles.

"That lovely Mrs. Newland is an ardent missionary worker, isn't she?" said a newcomer. "Was she so as a girl?"

There was a general laugh, in the midst of which one explained that neither Naomi nor her mother before her had apparently been aware that there was such a subject as missions.

"Nor a church either, for that matter," added another. "Naomi wasn't even a church member before she went abroad. It must have been her husband's influence that made her over."

"Mrs. Newland has a hobby," announced Mrs. Sinclair, the president of the missionary society. "She is intensely interested in the Mormons, and the best-posted woman with regard to their peculiar beliefs that I have ever met."

"Speaking of Mormons," said one of the young women "you should hear that girl, Mara Newland, talk; she is absolutely fierce. She has lived, she says, where she saw some of the fruits. It is wonderful to hear her, and terrible. It doesn't seem as though half she thinks can be true. I never heard such talk! I always thought the Mormons were a harmless set of fanatics, queer but honest."

"That is what too many of our people think," said the president with firmness. "I believe the United States will waken some day to the fact that under the guise of that

harmless fanaticism they have been harboring nests of poisonous serpents. My hope and prayer are that the government will get its eyes open before irreparable mischief has been done."

"Dear me!" murmured a woman in the next room. "Our president is getting fanatical, too. There is no use in being excited over it, I guess. The Mormons have a right to their religious notions, I suppose; it is a free country. If we let them alone, they will probably do the same by us."

Naomi had entered in time to hear that last remark. It made her eyes flash with a strange light. What would those people, those good, quiet, uninformed people, think if they knew her story? If she should lay bare before them the way in which this religion about which they talked so smoothly had let her "alone"—a girl reared in their midst, counted as one of their number? What ought she to do to help open blind eyes? Victims? Why the country was filled with them. Who might be the next one? And in the meantime there were those girls born and reared in the pestilent atmosphere—lovely innocent girls, as innocent as their awful environment permitted—being daily drawn downward by the hundred, even as their mothers had been before them.

She had rescued one, but what was one? Oh, why would not the safe, sheltered people, wives and mothers in honored homes, fathers and sons and brothers whose lives were pledged to keep those homes inviolate, why would they not understand this awful whirlpool of impurity? Why did they not study the problem, and watch it, and pray, and ACT?

So once more in the depths of her desolated heart did this one victim cry out, “Oh, Lord, how long?”

The End

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