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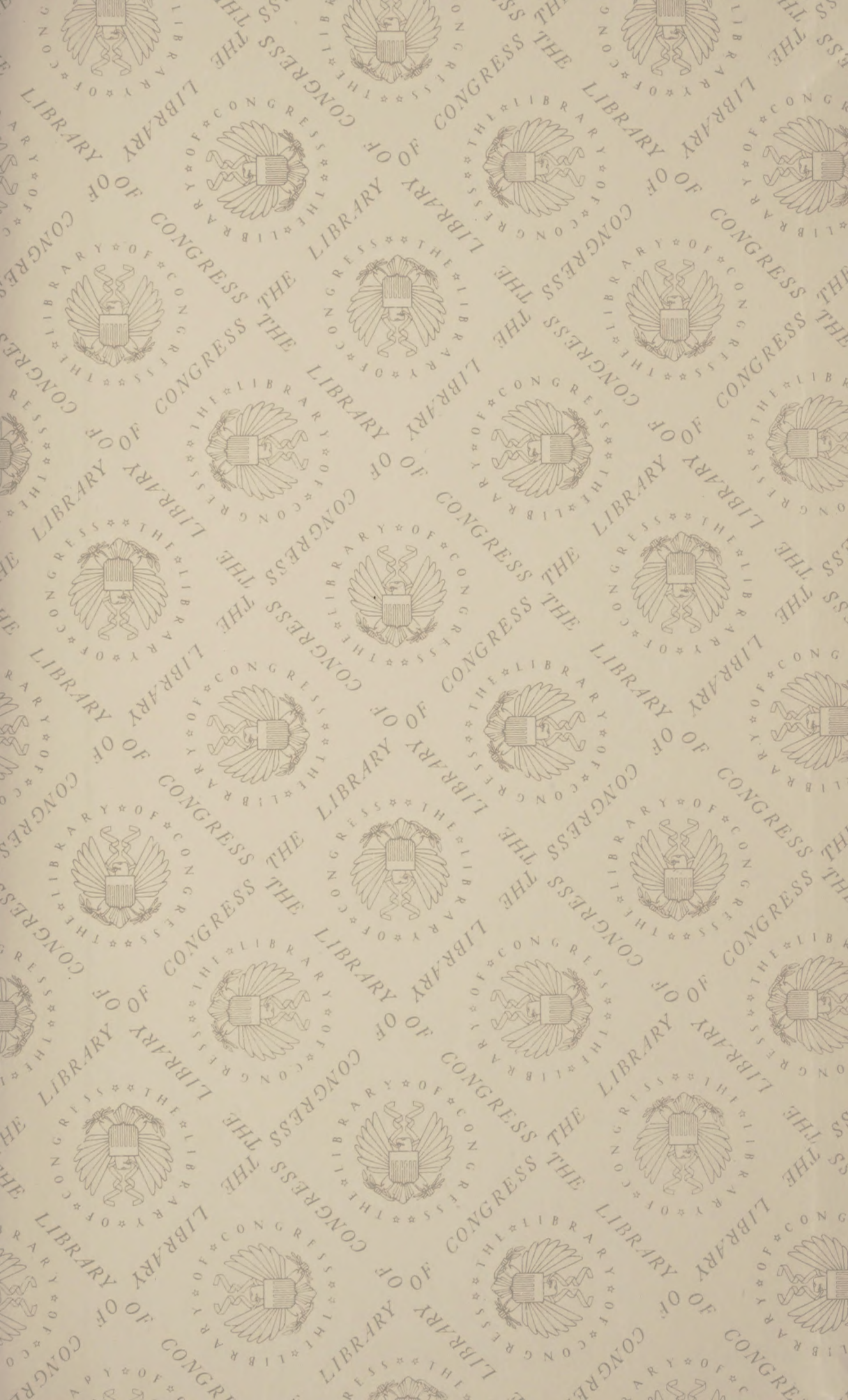


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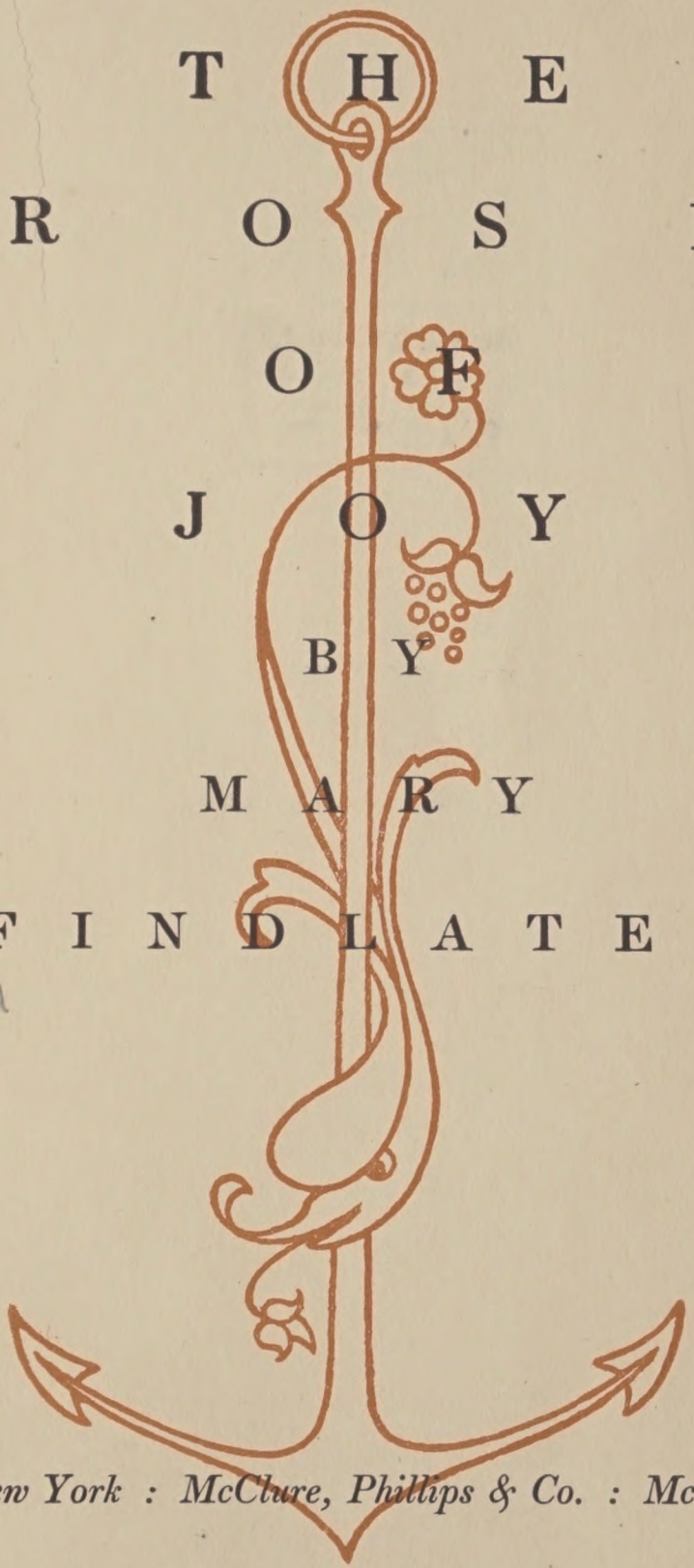
THE ROSE OF JOY



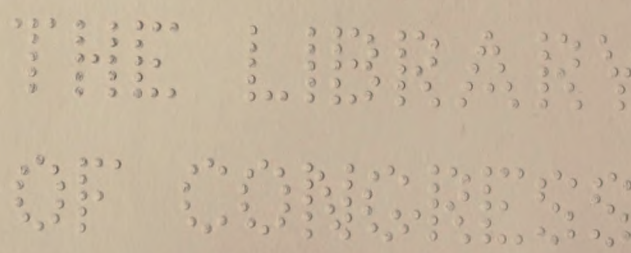




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F I N D L A T E R



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THE ROSE OF JOY







## CHAPTER I

THE night was warm, but very dark. It seemed to Maurice Hamilton that the carriage had moved on through the darkness at that same pace for hours. The light faded gradually, the last village was left behind; they drove deeper into the lonely pastoral country. Fields and their hedges changed from green to gray, then from gray to black, until night closed in and he could see no more of the landscape, but watched instead the round spot of light made by the carriage lamp at his right-hand side. The circle of contracted radiance traveled along with them, touching a bush here, a stone there, giving very little indication of the way they went.

He put his head out of the window at last, and called to the driver, "Are we never going to arrive anywhere to-night?" The man grunted in reply and touched up his horses. Presently the spot of light swam across a milestone, where Hamilton read the inscription, "4½ miles."

He leaned back again in the carriage and stared idly into the darkness. Somewhere in the distance a lighted window showed like a red star. "There is a house," he thought. "I shall go early to-morrow; it may be her window."

The young man had reached an unfortunate period in



his romance: the lady had married another. His bitterness of feeling had at first been very keen. Her new home was far away, and they had never met since the marriage; now, however, nearly three years afterwards, he found himself in that part of the country, and resolved to go and see her again. It was a little damping to hear that she was "very happy" (as her mother expressed it) "in her husband and her home," but he felt that now he might rise to the generosity of admiring both. Still this slow approach in the darkness strained his nerves; he could not even see what sort of country it was.

The driver pulled his horses to a stand and leaned down to call out, "We're near the inn now, sir, jest at the top o' the hill."

"All right, go on," said Hamilton, and they crawled on once more. "It's like a funeral," he sighed, with impatience, and the words "*dead Love*" mixed in his thoughts with the plodding sound of the tired horses' feet.

At last the spot of light that traveled with the carriage was merged in a broad shaft of light that came from an open door. It streamed across a few flagstones, out a little way into the night, then stopped, and nothing more was visible.

"Is this Burrie Bush?" called the driver, to a man who appeared at the inn door when the carriage drew up.

"It is," was the reply, and Hamilton gladly jumped out and asked if they could be put up for the night.



The landlord was not expansive, but the wife came hurrying to the door, full of assurances that she could provide man and beast with every comfort.

“We’ve only two of the *quietest* commercial gentlemen in the coffee-room, sir, if you’d go in there,” she said.

Hamilton stood under the lamp in the narrow passage by the taproom door. The light fell sharply on his smooth, thin face, with its high nose and delicate mouth—a young face, but marked just then by lines of grief and unrest. He replied to the woman coldly, “He wanted nothing to eat—it was too late. He would go to his room at once if it was ready.”

“You’d best have something to drink, and go to bed, sir. We’ve a room aired now,” she said, glancing at his face.

She showed him upstairs to a half-lighted, fusty parlor, and in a few minutes returned with candles and a tray. He was standing with his back to the door, gazing gloomily at a stuffed hawk on the chimney-piece, and he gave a deep sigh as she came in. Then, nodding silent assent to all her explanations, asked her suddenly, as he filled his glass:

“Does—does a Mrs. Crawford live here?”

“Crawford?” she said. “There’s a Captain Crawford, sir. Yes, Mrs. Crawford, too—his wife—a young lady—very pretty, sir.”

“Yes”—he gulped the last of his liquor and set down the glass. “Does she—do they—live far from here?”

“Dear, no, sir! Quite close at hand—the house with



the high wall that you passed on your left coming up like."

"I saw nothing; the night is too dark."

The woman looked as if a little encouragement would have made her say a great deal more, but he did not give it, so she took up the tray, wished him good-night, and left the room.

"Hamilton is the name," she said to the barmaid. "An' he's inquiring after Mrs. Crawford—the Captain's leddy."

"Oh!" said the other, "it's hardly the time for *her* to be receiving gentlemen."

"This one looks to have more stuff in him than the Captain," said the landlady reflectively. "He's more of the soldier like."

The barmaid, who was round and rosy, looked earnestly at her own reflection in the blurred mirror. "May be easy that," she said.

"He's a dear, though, the Captain," pursued the landlady. "Irishman or no."

She turned an eye on the barmaid, who, still looking in the glass, answered occultly, "Maybe"; then, after a pause, as she turned to swipe a beery circle from the counter beside her, "*Gentlemen is fine sand*," she said.

"They are that," said the landlady. The aphorism seemed to content them both.

"Young, but sad-like," said the landlady. "A chop would do him good, I'm thinking."

"Jest raw indigestion if he's dined already," said the barmaid, with a sigh.



The newcomer meanwhile, whether "fine sand" or not, was slow of falling asleep. He heard all the final noises of the inn: the last toper shambled out into the night; the quiet commercial gentlemen came upstairs; the doors down below were shut: there was a pushing back of chairs, a banging of shutters on the lower windows; then silence; then snores; then, at last, he slept.

A sudden dreadful jangle from an eight-day clock in the parlor awoke him with a start.

"Three o'clock—I've been asleep after all," he thought.

When the last whir from the clock had died away he lay wide awake, aware of the intense, motionless stillness. The night air blew in warm from the open window, but carried not a sound upon it, till suddenly he heard a footstep on the road below—a light, frightened, scurrying step it was. Then at the door of the inn came a rattle which awakened no response—another—a woman evidently knocked, whose bare hands could not make noise enough; still no answer.

She made another attempt, this time knocking on the shutters of the window underneath his own.

Hamilton jumped up and looked out. He could just discern a round white face below the window.

"What do you want?" he asked. "Can't you make the people hear you?"

"Oh, I want Mrs. Reid, sir, and a man an' horse for the doctor—it's the mistress—Mistress Crawford, sir—took real bad—it's that sudden—she——"



But here the window below was thrown up, and Mrs. Reid cried from within:

“Is’t you, Lizzie? Sic a start! What? It’s the mistress—dearie me—before her time, too—yes, John ’ll go himself. I’ll on wi’ some clothes, an’ come up wi’ ye the noo.”

Hamilton drew in his head abruptly. He stood by the window till he heard the two women go off together, scraps of significant gossip floating up as they hurried away; then he heard the clatter of a horse being led out of the yard—a plunge in the darkness, and off it went; he listened until the sound of the galloping hoofs died away in the far distance.

Again he leaned out of the window and stared into the night. The warm air he breathed was very pure, laden with a faint scent of autumn clover; the darkness now was less intense—he could trace a faint white line of road, and the dim bulk of the land against the dim sky.

He turned, sighing, and flung himself down on the bed. “My poor Mollie—my poor Mollie,” he said to himself, and after passing half an hour or so in reflection that may, perhaps, be left to the romantic fancy of the reader, he was surprised by the morning to find that he had been asleep.

He ate his breakfast to the accompaniment of the landlady’s tongue, receiving from her fuller particulars of young Mrs. Crawford’s illness than he at all desired.

“But a nice little girl, sir—a very nice baby, though so small—blue eyes like the Captain, sir.”

With this comforting assurance, and hearing that the



mother too was well, he paid his bill, and got into the carriage to continue his journey.

“You won’t be going up to the house *to-day*, sir?” said the landlady, “though the Captain’s wonderful calm.”

“No, not *to-day*,” he answered.

A few yards from the inn door he turned his head abruptly away as they passed a house standing within a walled garden by the roadside.

It was a fresh morning, the wind blew in his face like a breath from heaven, and, young as he was, and miserable as he thought himself to be, he could not help noticing that the cheerful business of the world was all begun again with the new day. The little village houses that he passed had opened their doors to the sun.



## CHAPTER II

**N**EARLY twenty years after the foregoing incident, the same, or I should rather say a very different, man came again to the same place. Time in such localities makes few changes.

To the eye of a stranger it was but a forlorn village still, lost almost in the swell and monotony of the surrounding land. The old road from Edinburgh passed above the village, "the king's highway" that ran on to London once.

There was a single street, very steep, so that all the houses appeared to be climbing earnestly upwards. The place was too small to have a church of its own, but had now a small schoolhouse and two shops. The old inn stood as if it had been the first of the climbing houses to arrive at the top. The door opened wide off the road—the old-fashioned windows looked out full upon it. There was still the same signboard hanging above the door: it bore, irrelevantly enough, the Saracen emblems on a blue ground.

At the end of the village street, a short distance from the inn door, stood a high wall inclosing a garden, as was evident from the treetops visible along its edge. Beyond came one gable of a house, and in a corner of the garden the conical roof of a dovecot was half hidden by apple boughs.

Passing this last house in the village the highroad,



wide and white, ran on and on through lonely, almost uncultivated country. Here and there came a farm, or a cottage with its little field, but for the most part it was grass land—low hills, like waves stilled and grass-grown, few trees, nothing to attract the fancy except the quick rolling and changing of the cloud shadows, and the faint purples and greens of the inconspicuous undulations—and the great road running on and on—fair, open, and suggestive, as far as the eye could see.

This village was a spot forlorn, forgotten, far away, with no past history beyond the dulled recollections of its oldest crone, where all that was modern was its vulgarity—the advertisements in the grocer's windows, the bicycles at the inn door, the mean little fountain erected in memory of some local event.

However, even in those days a stranger was still an object of interest.

As a rose-red evening was fading into dusk, the group of children that paddled about the cast-iron fountain, and the eight or ten women who stood gossiping by their doors, all turned their heads one way as two men on horseback rode up to the inn door.

“Can you tell me,” said the older man, speaking to the innkeeper, who came out, smelling of beer, and stood by his bridle, “whether a Captain and Mrs. Crawford live here now?”

He glanced about him as he spoke, noting the small change that twenty years had made in the scene before him; they had altered him a great deal. His face was brown and deeply lined, like that of a man who has lived



long in a hot country; the rosy light flushed incongruously on his gray head—he had taken off his hat, and bent a little over the saddle as he spoke. His companion bore a kind of likeness to him; he too had a smooth face with a high nose, but in spite of his riding dress there was something in his appearance that gave the impression of a monk masquerading in ordinary clothes. He sat back in his saddle, listening with an expression of fixed gravity to the conversation.

“Mrs. Crawford, sir?” said the innkeeper. “A widow now—in the big house on the left—ye passed it, coming down.”

“Ah, thank you!” Hamilton looked at his watch; there was still daylight left. They wanted supper, he said, and beds for the night.

He turned to his companion. “I’ll go and pay my visit to Mrs. Crawford now, Archie; you can wait here; it won’t be long, I dare say.” He dismounted, gave his horse to the innkeeper, and walked off in the direction that had been indicated.

The house was not “big” in any sense of the word, except as contrasted with the cottages in the village street. The garden wall was plastered with lime; bits of the plaster had fallen off; the old gate that had once given entrance to the garden had been replaced by a new one which bore the words “Laurel Mount” in gilt letters; there were no laurels anywhere to be seen.

Hamilton stood still for a moment looking at the gate, then opened it and went in, up an ill-kept walk that led straight to the front door. He knocked more than once;



there was no bell. At last the door was opened by an untidy maidservant. Two little girls in pinafores hung behind the maid, watching him. He smiled at them when at first they were going to run away; after a second stare they silently followed him along the dark little lobby.

He waited again for a moment after the maid had announced his name before he entered a shabby sitting-room, where a middle-aged woman in a widow's cap rose to receive him.



### CHAPTER III

**W**HEN Mrs. Crawford married she possessed a fresh complexion, good teeth, and abundance of hair; also a pretty power of blushing and sitting silent. By thirty-six her complexion had lost its bloom, and her hair was thinning fast; at fifty hair, complexion, and teeth were alike gone; her husband was gone too—so that in place of Maria Simpson with her girlish charms there remained merely Mrs. Crawford, an elderly woman like a thousand others, neither noticeably plain nor in any way pleasing. She could no longer blush, but she could still sit silent because she had nothing to say. What few accomplishments she had laid on in her youth were long since worn away—gone as completely as the plating off an old spoon—but seven children, all living, formed her solid contribution to society.

“Blessed,” says Carlyle, “is the man who has found his work—let him ask no other blessedness.” Mrs. Crawford had asked no other. She was not a woman with any administrative ability. During her husband’s lifetime their income had been narrow, and her daily existence unbroken by any gayety or excitement, so that for many years she had practically spent her life in the nursery.

But children’s clothes, children’s ailments, children’s food, and even children’s sayings and doings do not



go far to furnish the intellect, and by the time that her nursery was empty she was far behind her own eldest child in point of intelligence.

“The tragedy of the mirror” might have made it painful to many women to meet an old lover after such an interval of years (there is a good side to vanity), but it never occurred to Mrs. Crawford to give her appearance a thought.

She saw before her a man whom she could scarcely have recognized, till his name and something in his greeting recalled the agreeable fact that he had once admired her. She was one of those (now almost extinct) females who divide life into solid and distinct phases—youth, girlhood, married life, middle age. Now widowhood, it seemed, had severed the last ties of connection with her past. She felt faintly flattered by Maurice Hamilton’s reappearance, and said that she was glad to see him again. As he entered the room, for a moment the feeling at his heart ran strangely high. He came forward unable to speak, till she gave him her flaccid hand and turned her dim eye upon him, and the flood-gates locked again.

“I suppose you would hardly know me now—or remember me,” he said.

“Oh, I am quite astonished to see you, but I remember you quite well,” said she. They sat down, and Mrs. Crawford kept silence as of old; then, as if pleased that she had suddenly found the suitable thing to say, she remarked, with a gesture that indicated her widow’s cap:



“You have heard of my loss?”

“Yes; just before I came here.”

She again caught at a fortunate stock remark. “It was a sad blow.”

“You have children,” he said, catching at another.

Mrs. Crawford smiled in her torpid way. “Oh, yes!” then added after a moment, “Children are a great resource.”

“They are,” he said, with a sudden laugh. “How many of them are there? The eldest is a girl, I think?”

“Seven—seven,” said Mrs. Crawford solemnly, adding “Yes, Susan is a girl.”

This remarkable fact afforded them both matter for a little reflection.

“Are you married? I forget really—it’s so long since I have heard anything of you,” said Mrs. Crawford.

“No, I have never married.” There was another pause. Mrs. Crawford gave a sort of feeble, bridling smile that might imply reminiscence, then said in a tepid voice:

“Oh, you’re quite young still.”

“Quite young!” he laughed, and checked a sigh. “I’m come back to the old nest,” he went on. “My Uncle Robert died and left Linfield to me—you remember; we met there long ago.”

“Yes, I remember now; I wore a pink dress. Dear me! How time flies!—at least” (correcting herself) “it soon passes.”

“Sometimes,” he assented.



“Are you going back to Linfield to-night? It’s a long way. How do you get to the station?”

“I’m staying all night at the inn,” he answered; “my nephew, Archie Hamilton, is with me.”

“William’s boy?”

“Yes—the eldest.”

“Ah, I never saw William after his marriage,” said Mrs. Crawford, now vaguely warming to the recollection. “How sad his death was!”

“Was it? I wonder if it was,” he said half aloud to himself.

“So sudden,” said Mrs. Crawford; “and just when he seemed to be getting on. But, of course, we hope he’s gone to something better.”

“We hope so,” he said, looking at her not unkindly, in spite of the smile that he found it difficult to conceal.

“Lady Agnes is an excellent woman, I hear,” went on Mrs. Crawford.

“She is a very strong woman,” he said. Mrs. Crawford made nothing of inflections.

“Ah, robust health is a great blessing!” she said. He smiled again, but did not explain farther.

“How is your sister Julia?” inquired the lady.

“Julia is a widow now. She lives with me at Linfield—she and her daughter. I need someone to look after my house, and Juliet brightens up the place. She is a dear girl. Julia was at school with you, I think.”

“She was always so clever,” said Mrs. Crawford.

“Was she? I cannot fancy Julia clever at any time.”



“Well, she was clever compared to me,” said Mrs. Crawford, unconsciously stating the truth.

He looked at her in silence.

“And do you like Linfield now?” asked Mrs. Crawford.

“Yes, very well. I like the quiet—it suits my bookish habits; and we are not too far from Edinburgh—my sister and my niece like that.”

“There was a pond,” said Mrs. Crawford.

“There is a pond still,” he said.

Mrs. Crawford had the air of one who turns out a drawer of old rubbish, mildly surprised at what is brought to light. “I remember standing between you and William, and looking at myself in it—that was before William married,” she remarked.

“Yes, I remember,” he answered.

“I should like to see William’s boy,” went on Mrs. Crawford.

“Oh, I wish I had brought him. I’ll come up tomorrow morning and let you see him, then, before we start.”

“Is he like William?”

“Not at all. But he’s a sailor, too—and looks like a monk,” he added, with a laugh.

“William was not like a monk,” said Mrs. Crawford. Colonel Hamilton agreed, and another pause fell.

At last Hamilton said:

“I should like to see your eldest daughter; I have an interest in her, because I happened to be in this village on the night that she was born.”



“Dear me! How curious! That was twenty years ago and more—Susan was twenty in August.”

Mrs. Crawford then rang the bell and told the maid to send in the children and Miss Susan.

The children soon appeared—two thick-looking boys of seventeen and fifteen, a smaller boy, and little girls mixed. He felt confused by their number.

“Susan must have gone out, for Jane says she is not in the house,” said Mrs. Crawford.

Colonel Hamilton smiled upon the children, feeling foolish, and asked their names and ages; but fortunately, before he was reduced to farther questioning, realized that it was beginning to get dark and that he must go away.

“I’m sorry Susan was out,” he said; “I hoped to see her.”

Mrs. Crawford bid him a torpid good-by, and he went out slowly into the gathering dusk. Bats flittered past him as he went down the garden walk, and he saw the moon rising behind the trees.

Coming up to the inn door, he remembered how the broad light from it had struck across the darkness that night so many years ago. He was received by a stout, rosy woman (the barmaid turned landlady), who led him up to the very same parlor he had been in before.

She left him, saying the other gentleman had gone out, and that she would bring up candles immediately. He turned with a smile to see the same stuffed hawk, now considerably shabbier, still in the same corner. In its fixed bead eye he seemed to read derision of all things



here as he sat down in the glacial leather-covered arm-chair beside the vacant grate.

Once that bird hung in the sky, living, with powerful wings; now the twenty years that had passed had only thickened the dust upon the moldering feathers.

He remembered the long, warm, wakeful night that he had passed there—"a night of memories and sighs." Then he thought of the woman he had just seen, and the gloom of the room and the hour seemed to penetrate to the very roots of his heart.

You who have old loves, beware how you revisit them. There are few things in life more dreary. So few people go forward, so many stand still, so many more fall behind in life's long race. A sweet ghost is surely better than an ugly exhumed reality.



## CHAPTER IV

AS the light faded the landlady entered with candles. Colonel Hamilton roused himself to speak to her about supper, whimsically trying to remember the meal he had eaten in the house before. At last the thought darted through his mind that he had refused to eat at all that night. "And now, though I swear that I've spent a much more painful hour than I did then, I'm going to sit down to eggs and bacon with a tolerable appetite. Well, Archie?" The last words were spoken to his nephew, who came slowly into the room.

"You must have found Mrs. Crawford charming; you stayed for a long time," he said.

Colonel Hamilton rubbed his hand across his eyes.

"I found her—changed," he said. "Made me realize how time changes everyone."

The young man stood by the table. The candlelight flickered upon his singular face. "I understood you to say—at least you didn't *say*, but I understood you to mean—that the lady was your first love?" he said.

"She was. She was just the loveliest creature you ever saw in those days. I remember dancing with her one night in Dublin, and she looked like an angel."

"She refused you, then?"

"Yes, thank Heaven!" said Hamilton fervently, and



the young man smiled—a smile that wonderfully lit up his big, solemn features, and softened for the moment the bitter expression that spoilt the delicate mouth.

“Read, and compose your mind,” he said, handing his uncle one of the two books that lay on the table by the stuffed hawk. “You will find the ‘Complete Farrier’s Guide’ a corrective to excitement. I had an hour of it when you were out.”

They sat for a little in silence. Then the landlady came in again, saying, “Here is Miss Susan Crawford, sir.” She drew back, and at the same moment there appeared in the doorway a young girl dressed in a holland frock, holding by the hand one of the children that Colonel Hamilton had seen before.

She came into the room slowly; the light of the two candles struck full on her face, making her blink for a moment; the little sister dragged at her hand, and looked shyly at the two men from under her lowered eyelashes.

“Ah!” exclaimed Hamilton, “you are Susan Crawford. How pleased I am to see you!” He came forward to shake hands with her. She looked up in his face, saying:

“I’ve come with a message from mamma, please—to know if you and your nephew”—she looked at the young man, who stood grave and silent behind him—“will come to supper with us to-night? Mamma meant to ask you, but she forgot.”

She delivered this message and then stood quietly by the table as if there was nothing more to be said. Her



attitude had the grace of complete composure. The white cloth cast up a light against her face; her whole figure was backed by the darkness of the doorway. As she stood against that dark background, holding the little sister by the hand, Hamilton thought that she looked like an old Dutch picture. Her holland dress was almost outlandish in its make—more an overall than a gown; her very dark hair, plaited smoothly, lay low down on her neck, giving her almost a childish look. She had rather thick, irregular features; her red lips were tucked slightly in at the corners, giving a quaint, smiling expression to the whole face; her eyes were very sincere and blue, with a simple, outlooking glance, as of a creature unafraid, looking about in a new world.

“Of course we will come with you.” Colonel Hamilton turned to his nephew. “You had better go and tell the woman that we don’t want supper here.”

“Oh, I’ll tell her—we know Mrs. Reid *very* well,” exclaimed the little girl, and, glancing at her sister for permission, she ran downstairs before them. The two men followed along with Susan, and the child came out of the inn kitchen saying proudly, “I’ve explained it all—Mrs. Reid quite understands—it’s only a taste of syrup she gave me,” she said, rubbing a ball of handkerchief across her lips. “It’s run down on my pinafore——” It had indeed. “Oh, not your *good* handkerchief, please!” she panted, for Archie with unrelaxing gravity had bent down and was rubbing the syrup off the front of her pink overall. The little girl stood still until he had finished, gave two quick glances at him



through her long eyelashes, and then, placing her soft hand in his, walked along by his side.

“Emmy is generally afraid of strangers,” said Susan, looking at them as they walked ahead.

“All children like him,” said Colonel Hamilton, and Susan wondered, for she felt afraid of the young man.

They had only gone a few yards from the inn door when Susan halted.

“Would you like to see a hedgehog?” she said. “I should suppose it was some time since you had seen one.” She looked at Colonel Hamilton.

“I—I haven’t seen a hedgehog for years.”

“There is one, then, that we know very well,” she said. “Oh, Emmy, I’m afraid he’s going to the inn hens! The big gray hen is sitting just now.”

The hedgehog darted aside into the bushes, so that the precious glimpse was very brief, but for a moment there certainly had been a dark circular object on the road in front of them. The young man asked if they had many pets. Susan did not reply, but Emily laughed gleefully, then looking up at him, she explained, “Susan is so fond of all the creatures that we have them only for a little—we know them all.” He tried to make Susan explain, but she was shy or not interested.

Colonel Hamilton asked them about their life in winter, their lessons, and their neighbors. The girls evidently possessed that penetrating local knowledge which early gives a child brought up in the country such a grip on one side of life. There is no vagueness about



the minds of healthy country children. The sphere of the village is a small one, and they grasp it entire; they know at an early age, with a flat finality of knowledge, all that there is to be known about everyone.

The Crawfords knew every inch of the ground at Burrie Bush, every field and hedge and dyke, every plant in the cottage gardens, every child in the hamlet, cart on the highway, dog and cat even—could tell you the owner of the cows they met on the road—recognized each shepherd on the distant pastures by his gait or his call to his dogs.

“How old are you?” asked Emmy, suddenly addressing the young man.

“I am twenty-seven—that is, twice as old as you are and a little over.”

“Emily, you shouldn’t ask so many questions,” said Susan gently.

Then said Emmy, looking up in Archie Hamilton’s face, “Mrs. Reid said you ‘had a nose on you like an eagle.’”

Both men burst out laughing.

“Emmy! Emmy!” said Susan, horrified.

“Well,” said Colonel Hamilton, smiling at the child, “don’t you think he has?”

Emmy considered the question gravely. “Perhaps—I think he’s like an avenging angel.”

“’Pon my word, you’re about right, my child.”

“Did you ever see one?” asked the young man gently.

Emmy, who had looked up fearfully to see if he was displeased, sighed with relief.



“In dreams and in pictures,” she said, adding conscientiously, “Not real live ones.”

“Are you a soldier?” she asked after a pause, turning her inquiries to Colonel Hamilton this time.

“Yes, I am.”

“Then why do you not wear a red coat?”

“I do at times—not always.”

“Do you kill men and horses?” the child asked, looking at him with awe and interest.

“No, I do not. I am what is called a carpet knight—a soldier that has never been in a real battle or killed anything.”

“And you so old!” said Emily reproachfully.

“It’s your turn now!” said the young man, looking at his uncle with a smile.

They had reached the house by this time, and Susan conducted them to the drawing room, where they found Mrs. Crawford, who had assumed a less dubious cap, waiting to receive them, encircled by a few more of the children.

“This is my nephew, Archie,” said Colonel Hamilton.

“William’s boy!” exclaimed Mrs. Crawford. It seemed the one idea she was capable of receiving in connection with him.

Colonel Hamilton sat down beside her, and took the smallest child upon his knee. As she played with his watch he leant his cheek against her soft hair and looked sadly, in silence, at her mother. “Is it possible? Can it ever have been?” he thought again, unwilling utterly to surrender all memory of his earliest romance. But



literal fact calmly confronted him in Mrs. Crawford's solid form and vacant, unlovely face.

"William's boy," meanwhile, sat back in his chair, with his long, thin hands on the elbows of it, wearing an air of utter detachment, making no effort to join in the halting conversation. He looked at his uncle and at Mrs. Crawford with a little, bitter smile of very unamiable criticism.

So Susan found them when she came into the room. She was too young to read character except by instinct, but she took a sudden, active dislike to the young man. His face had, indeed, a curious mixture of expressions. The fair hair lay thick on a small head, one lock of it hanging down on his brow like a child's; the deeply cut, singular features wore at the same time a look of bitterness and of an almost downcast humility—the look of one that found the spectacle of the world at times both pitiful and absurd, yet found himself as absurd as any.

"He is laughing at my mother. Why did he come here?" thought Susan. Then she noticed how Emily (who had come in with her hair brushed and clean hands) took her place silently behind his chair, as close to him as possible. "He is not unkind, after all. I think I like him, too," she concluded.

Supper was a long meal; the food, as Dr. Johnson said, "ill chosen, ill cooked, and ill served." The room in which it was eaten had the look of having been so much used by a large family that everything in it was now worn away to its original structure—the carpet felt flat under the feet like oil-cloth; the chairs had white corners; a



rug once hair, now skin, lay before the hearth. The mantelpiece was surmounted by the Lares and Penates of all such households—black, glittering things representing something hideous, probably equestrian. At the end of the room was a huge bookcase full of shabby books—the only thing that indicated any intelligence which Hamilton had as yet noted in the house.

Mrs. Crawford's conversation was unenlightened by a spark of feeling or of interest; the two elder boys were too shy to speak, the younger children sucked their spoons and stared according to their ages. "They have *all* been allowed to sit up to see you," said Mrs. Crawford. Hamilton tried to smile kindly in recognition of the compliment, but he seemed to find nothing to say. Only Susan was cheerful and able to talk. She had changed her holland frock for a curious garment of green merino with a white frill around the neck, and she wore a white apron; even Colonel Hamilton was vaguely aware that in some way or other it was not the usual dress for her age.

"She's like a young green shoot growing from a withered tree," he thought; then his heart gave a twinge again as he noticed Mrs. Crawford's peevish, vacant face under the rigid lines of her widow's cap. "After all," he thought, "she might have lost all that she has lost, and yet one could still have remembered"—concluding with the reflection, as he tried not to observe her wrinkles, that it is not Time's writing, but the character of what Time writes, that spoils the faces of most women.



## CHAPTER V

**T**HE meal over, they returned once more to the little sitting-room where every color was a mistake, and each attempt at decoration a failure. Conversation became very difficult. At length Mrs. Crawford drew Colonel Hamilton's attention to a crayon drawing on the wall—the one good picture in the room.

“That was my dear husband,” she said.

With a great deal of interest Hamilton went up to examine it. He saw the portrait of a thin-faced young man, with a peculiar arch, yet pensive expression in the blue eyes. It made him look at Susan to find the same in hers.

“This was a later portrait,” said the widow solemnly, showing him a photograph. There was a marked change. The arch expression had almost disappeared; in the lines of rather flabby fat all grace of youth was lost; indolence and ill health were written on the weary face. Hamilton laid it hastily aside, but he looked at Mrs. Crawford this time with more indulgence.

He saw that Susan had taken up some sewing, and his nephew was listening to the children, who were showing him Emily's canary. The bird, thus awakened to light and noise after roosting time, fluttered about, uttering cries; hempseed was scattered liberally on the



floor, and for a few minutes it was impossible to hear what Mrs. Crawford was saying. At last, at Archie's suggestion, the cage was redarkened, and the cries ceased. Colonel Hamilton glanced at the clock, wondering if they might now go away. But it was too early; he knew that he must put through another ten minutes. Then, in low tones, as he sat beside her on the sofa, Mrs. Crawford felt impelled to give him a few particulars of her husband's illness and death.

The illness had been lingering and painful; the death, from what he could make out, rather dreadful. But it was difficult to follow the unilluminating details, chiefly consisting of, "It was on the Thursday," or "He had asked twice to have his bed made on the Friday, but on the Saturday morning. . . . A little beef tea. . . . I said I would send immediately. . . . That was about twelve."

As she talked on, his eye rested vaguely on a screen which was placed just beside her, the working of which had once employed hours of Mrs. Crawford's time. It represented the sacrifice of Isaac—the son, the father, the pile of stones, the knife, the ram caught in the thicket were all there—neatly worked in Berlin wools, with an occasional patch of beading to emphasize the high lights. The spirit of the scene had somehow evaded the simple needle-woman. Very much the same impression was produced by Mrs. Crawford's recital of any sad event. Still, between the rifts of her minute detailing, he caught glimpses of the truth. "We had no time to send for a clergyman—Mr. Munro lives at such a dis-



tance. . . . I read him a few portions. . . . My mother was with me. . . . ‘You’ve not had a long life, William,’ she said to him. I was just preparing a cup of soup. . . . God! fifteen good years of it in this hole. What have I done with it?” She paused, with tears in her eyes. These words at least she had remembered. Hamilton felt kinder to her as she spoke. She had a few sensations, after all. “But the end was peace,” resumed Mrs. Crawford happily returning to the conventional. “He just slipped away—we couldn’t make out whether he heard us or not—he seemed asleep.”

“Mother, Tommy’s got such a toothache,” said little Emily, coming in to interrupt the last words. A distant sound of howling confirmed her statement. Susan put down her sewing and hurried away.

“Susan will quiet him, no doubt,” said Mrs. Crawford, as she turned her conversation to less personal and more cheerful themes. “It’s time for you to go to bed, Emmy,” she said, turning to the little girl. It was a suggestion, apparently, not a command.

Emmy wriggled in her chair, then said suddenly, “We’re not going to bed till ten to-night.”

Here Susan came into the room again, and Mrs. Crawford remarked, “Oh, Susan, Emmy *won’t* go to bed!”

“I’ll tell you why, mother,” said Susan sweetly, with a side glance at Colonel Hamilton. She stood before her mother in the same simple way that he had seen her do before, with her fingers twisted together, and her hands hanging down in front of her like a child. “It’s because Alec says there is a lark that sings to the moon



at Burrie Knowe just now, and he said if we went out at ten o'clock that we would hear it. Emily will be so much disappointed if she is not allowed to go too."

"Hear a lark that sings to the moon!" repeated Mrs. Crawford. "How very singular! Should you like to hear it?"

Susan's eyes brightened for a moment as if she were about to make some quick reply. She said quietly:

"Yes, mother, I should like to hear it."

"A lark that sings to the moon!" repeated Mrs. Crawford. "Dear me, young people are so foolish!"

Colonel Hamilton rose. "If you will trust me, Mrs. Crawford, I will go with them. I, too, should like to hear a lark sing to the moon."

"Please mother—please!" said little Emily, pulling at her mother's gown. Mrs. Crawford said it was late, it was cold, it was dark, Emmy should have been in bed an hour ago, they could hear a lark sing any day.

"It is not cold, mother—it's May, remember; nor dark—there is such a big moon," Susan answered.

In the end Mrs. Crawford gave her consent. She even went to the front door with her guests. It was a warm night, now nearly as clear as day. The moon sent all kinds of questing shafts through and through the network of branches and the twisted stems of the low trees in the orchard, filling the place with romantic suggestion. Susan came out, still wearing the white muslin apron. Emmy was wrapped in a shawl. She took hold of Archie Hamilton's hand at once, and skipped with delight at seeing her own shadow on the steps.



“ Oh, it’s lovely, lovely, lovely, and we’ll run races with our shadows all the way! Come, mother.” She looked up in Colonel Hamilton’s face. “ Don’t you think mother might come, too? ”

“ To hear a lark sing to the moon? ” he repeated, looking down at Mrs. Crawford standing in the romantic light. The years for a moment rolled away, and he saw her once more, fresh and blooming and maidenly, as she looked when he saw her first. He blinked with the shock as his eyes recalled him to the present. “ I think, perhaps, she is wiser not to come, ” he said, and bid her good-night again.



## CHAPTER VI

EMMY pulled the young man ahead, chattering to him like a magpie. Susan followed more slowly with Colonel Hamilton. They walked between walls for a little bit, coming out presently on the open road, that lay fair before them for a long way without hedge or wall.

There was not a cloud in the sky now, and the great moon "looked round her with delight." A shining mist hung on the higher levels of the land; the road stretched out as white as ivory.

"We must go across to that knoll over there, where the thorn tree is," said Susan. "Alec heard it there."

"Please come—let *us* run," said Emily, looking up at the young man, whose face suddenly relaxed from its severity as he smiled at her. They set off together, racing over the short turf, the child chirruping with delight. Colonel Hamilton and Susan walked behind them.

"I must have passed along this road," he said, "twenty years ago—one dark night in autumn, when I came here—but I could not see anything then."

"Mother told me that you had been here long ago; I don't remember," said Susan.

"No," he laughed, "you wouldn't remember. I was a very unhappy young man in those days."



“ Oh! ” said Susan, with timid sympathy. She added softly, “ I hope you are happy now. ”

“ In some ways. Young people, you know, ” he said, turning to the girl, looking down at her with his pleasant eyes—“ young people always think, if their own lamp is gone out, that the world is dark. ”

Susan looked at him hard, trying to understand. There was not a trace of unhappiness anywhere on her smooth young face.

“ Then after a while, ” he went on, “ they begin to look about them, and find there are innumerable lights—solid satisfactions that are always to be had—which have nothing to do with them or their own life. ”

“ Satisfactions? ” said the girl, a little puzzled.

“ Yes, lots of them; friends and philosophies, and beautiful places, and books and pictures—these are the indestructible joys forever. ”

“ I think I understand, ” said Susan, hanging her head.

“ You will understand some day, no doubt. If you learn to love those things when you are young, when you grow older they will receive you, as the Bible says, ‘ into everlasting habitations. ’ ”

They had crossed the turf by this time, and the land in front of them now swept gently upwards to a long, low ridge. It was bare of any fence or tree. On the slope of it were a few sheep; above, the deep sky. At the side of the knoll there was an old twisted thorn. There Archie Hamilton and the little girl stood waiting for them. They all stood in silence for a few minutes,



hearing nothing. "There!" said Susan, with a sudden smile. Sure enough a lark had risen, singing loudly, from the side of the low hill. Up and up the song mounted in the stillness; the moonshine was as bright as day. Susan stood upright with her hands clasped before her and her face lifted: her white apron shone in the moonlight; she was entirely unconscious of any observation; she seemed to follow every note as if she were listening to the familiar voice of a friend. Then the lark dropped suddenly. "It's over," she said, turning with such a bright smile upon her fresh lips that the two men smiled in sympathy. "We must go back at once now," she added, with a sudden return to practicality. "Emmy, it is *so* long past your bedtime."

They turned again onto the road, still like an ivory pathway in the fantastic light, and went slowly back to the house.

After they had left Susan and the child at their own door, Colonel Hamilton and his nephew walked on to the inn together.

"What a funny interior that was!" said the young man.

"Funny, did you think it, Archie? It didn't strike me that way."

"Well, I can imagine that; the children were intelligent."

"Children! The girl is twenty, Methuselah!"

"Is she, indeed!" He smiled urbanely on his uncle. "You seem to me very young at times yourself, sir. A 'man of feeling' like you is never old."



“You’ve a nasty, stinging tongue, young man, that will do you no good in life, I can tell you,” said Hamilton, laying his hand fondly enough on the other’s shoulder as they entered the house together. He began searching in his pocket for matches, and pulled out a letter. “Oh, by the bye, here’s a note from Dally Stair that I got this morning; I haven’t looked at it.”

He read the letter by the light of the dim lamp in the little inn parlor. Archie watched his face. The note was written in a curious, legible, yet sprawling hand on a long bit of blue paper.

“My dear cousin wants a little assistance, I suppose?” said Archie.

“Not exactly that this time. I might have gone to see him at St. Fortunes if I had thought of it, it’s not far from here; he’s gone to the brewery there, you know.

“There’s a postscript,” said Archie, looking at the note.

“Oh,” (he turned the sheet) “it’s poetry, I see. Dally’s muse is erratic.” He held it to the light, and deciphered:

*“I would rather be young than old,  
I would rather be warm than cold—  
Tell you a story than hear it told.”*

“Very true and practical. Is that a hint to you, sir?”

“Written it on a half sheet and forgotten,” said Colonel Hamilton. “I wonder how he will work in an office; he’s not much of a business man.”



“He’s a good fool spoilt by gleams of intelligence,” said Archie. And his uncle laughed.

Colonel Hamilton is not the hero of this story; middle-aged people like him and Mrs. Crawford are generally allowed to pursue their way unexamined by the novelist, though they may be none the less interesting for all that. He and his reflections may now be placed in the background. He rode away from Burrie Bush along with his nephew the next morning, going slowly past the house which they had visited the night before. The sun shone high and cheerful, the broad road ran before them, fair, open, and suggestive as far as the eye could see.



## CHAPTER VII

**A**LL the early part of the day they rode through the rolling open country that lay eastwards. It was late in the afternoon when they passed through the wide street of an old-fashioned county town. Colonel Hamilton waited by the post office whilst Archie went in to send off a telegram. He noted the transient charm the evening light gave to the grim walls of the castle that frowned above the little town. Descending twilight hushed some of the stir and clatter of the market-place; lowing cattle were driven away; the chaffering farmers turned to go home; the football players strolled up from the field; an Italian beggar with a barrel organ gave a grin to the silent horseman, and a final grind to the handle as he trundled his instrument away. Hamilton looked up at the placid sky, and along the homeward road that stretched out beyond the town, reflecting again upon that uncheerful resurrection of his past which he had known the night before. "You have a tendency to overweigh the occasion, like your mother, Archie," he observed, when Archie came out and they rode on together. "The way that you said 'A telegram' just now suggested nothing less than a death warrant."

"*You* looked solemn enough," said Archie. "Were you thinking about the meal that we had last night?"

They had left the uneven paved street behind them



now, and the horses struck into a sharper trot on the broad, close-shaded road that led to Linfield.

“I was thinking,” said Colonel Hamilton, “that our desire for anything is mostly a question of time. Ten years from childhood you scorn your toys; twenty years afterwards you despise what you wanted then, and so on. Some day, if we remember, we’ll look back on almost everything in the same way.”

“Find nothing worth caring much about, you mean?”

“No; I meant just the opposite of that.”

“I don’t quite understand.”

“*As planets when the moon appears,*” said Colonel Hamilton.

“Oh,” said Archie, “I see; the moon in this case appeared some time ago, I presume.”

“Many years ago.”

“Is she still there?” the young man asked, glancing at him curiously. Maurice lifted his hat and bent his head for a moment, making no reply.

They had reached the gate of the road to Linfield, a narrow avenue of Scotch firs, where rooks were cawing and making a great flurry as they passed. The house was a plain stone building with a high, pillared porch. A tall young woman stood on the doorstep, and waved her hand to them as they came up.

“Juliet is a very good person to come home to,” said Colonel Hamilton.

The last crimson light struck full on the row of flat windows in front of the house, making each of them



burn as if with fire inside; it struck, too, on the girl's figure at the door. She had on a pink dress, and her round cheeks had a lovely carnation of their own; drenched in the red light, she seemed to shine with color.

"*A red, red rose,*" said Archie in an undertone, as he answered her greeting.

"Dears, you're so late," she called, taking her uncle's hand in hers, while Archie followed them into the house. "Have you been to St. Fortunes to see poor Dally at the Brewery?" She turned back to speak to her cousin as she went in at the drawing-room door.

"We have not had that pleasure, but Uncle Maurice has a letter from him, inclosing some very touching lines that he will probably show you afterwards."

"You were always unjust to Dally, Archie," said the girl. "He can do quite good things at times."

"At times," said Archie.

The household at Linfield was governed by Juliet's mother, Mrs. Clephane, who had made her home with Colonel Hamilton ever since her husband's death. She was a kind, rather shallow-natured person, who doted on her only child, and made a very pleasant head to the household. She gave Juliet a great deal of her own way, and as Colonel Hamilton did the same, the girl had run a fair chance of being spoilt as a child. A naturally unselfish disposition, however, will save one from a good deal, and Juliet possessed that. She had grown up very sweet, in spite of beauty and overindulgence.

The two men followed her into the drawing room, where Mrs. Clephane sat with her sister-in-law, Lady



Agnes Hamilton. The red light struck in at the flat windows, lighting up the long row of pictures on the opposite wall. Lady Agnes had been writing at a table in the window. She turned to greet her son and Colonel Hamilton without a smile. Mrs. Clephane and she were women so curiously dissimilar that, seen together, they had almost the effect of ill-chosen colors. Mrs. Clephane's manner made Lady Agnes seem very cold as she stood in the red light and gazed at them with solemn, unflinching eyes.

It was difficult at first sight to judge of her age, the extreme gravity, the almost oppressive self-control manifested in her voice and expression, were somewhat contradicted by a face that did not show a single line in its smooth pallor. Her dress was of plain black cloth; she wore no ornaments, and her hair was arranged with ugly severity. A stern, perhaps a hard woman, you thought, till you looked into her eyes, that were soft and dark like unsounded wells.

She held Archie's hand in her own for a minute as he stood beside her.

"Did you come home by Hearnstead?" she asked.

"Yes, mother; the roads there were very bad."

"Did you remember my message?"

Archie shook his head, smiling irrepressibly. "I forgot all about it, mother. You know you only told me just as we were starting yesterday."

"Oh!" she said, and dropped his hand.

"I'm very sorry." He turned to Colonel Hamilton. "Can I send Jones with it now, Uncle Maurice?"



“Please go yourself,” said his mother softly, as Archie was about to turn away.

“It’s three miles, Aunt Agnes!” said Juliet. “Was it anything of such great importance?”

“It was not important,” she said, adding, with a look at her son, “but it is important not to forget messages that have been intrusted to one.”

The young man turned away and left the room without another word. Juliet tittered softly, and pinched her uncle’s arm.

“My dear Agnes,” said Hamilton, “to come under your displeasure is enough to make a man wish he had never been born.”

Lady Agnes answered only by a slight smile. She had put her writing away, and at once had begun to wind some wool that lay beside her.

“Did you ever do so, Uncle Maurice?” Juliet asked, regarding her aunt with amusement.

“Once, I think; I never did again.”

Lady Agnes did not look up or move a muscle of her face.

Archie returned just in time for dinner. He was a little late, and came into the dining room after they were seated at table. He paused behind his mother’s chair for an instant.

“I gave your message myself, mother,” he said.

“Thank you,” said she.

“Which means ‘it’s the least you could do!’” said Juliet, as he took his place opposite to her.

A family party, when it is harmonious (which it rarely



is), ought to be delightful. Between the painful friction of familiarity on the one hand, and the dullness of constraint on the other, there falls an occasional happy hour, and that evening the little family gathered at Linfield had found one. Juliet was always beautiful to look at, and made any table cheerful, whatever she said. Even Lady Agnes looked at her indulgently, as she sat leaning forwards a little with a line of light falling across her white neck, talking in an eager, charming way that was irresistible.

“Did you go to see your old friend, Uncle Maurice—the lady who lives at some place with a queer bushy name?”

He laughed. “Yes, Juliet, we went to Burrie Bush, and I saw my old friend. Archie came with me afterwards, and we saw the whole family. Do you remember Maria Simpson, Julia?” he asked, speaking to Mrs. Clephane.

“Oh, Maria Simpson! Of course I do. Yes, of course, she lives somewhere thereabouts—at Burrie Bush. I remember the curious name when she married. Did you see her yesterday?” said Mrs. Clephane.

“Yes, we saw her; we went to supper with her. Crawford is dead now—he died about four years ago, I believe.”

“What is she like now?” Mrs. Clephane inquired.

Hamilton sighed and looked at his nephew.

“A widow, with seven (weren’t there seven?) children, Aunt Julia,” said Archie.



“Poor thing! And very little to live upon, I suppose. What are the children like?”

“Very sweet children; I want you to ask the eldest girl here some day,” said Colonel Hamilton.

Juliet groaned.

“Very well, Maurice,” said Mrs. Clephane. “Juliet can amuse her.”

“I’m not sure about that,” said Archie.

“Why, what sort of person is she?” Juliet asked, leaning forward, with her arms on the table, pushing the candles aside so that she could see her cousin’s face.

“Something ‘quite simple, but very natural,’ as Coleridge says—something you won’t understand.”

“Am I not natural?”

“In quite a different way.”

Colonel Hamilton said, “Oh, my dear, you will get on very well. She will love you, as everyone does.” He was very fond of the girl.

“I had a letter from Darnley Stair,” he went on; and Juliet looked down at her plate and smiled, and then looked quickly up at Archie and grinned broadly.

“It seems,” said Archie, turning to his mother, “that our young friend Dally has lately been apprenticed to a brewer.”

“And why not?” said she, slightly raising her eyebrows.

Colonel Hamilton struck in from the foot of the table: “Well, Agnes, not having your pitiless views, I confess I’m sorry for him. Anyone less suited than Dally to be a brewer I can’t imagine.”



“He will aid the fermentation, I should think,” said Archie.

“Poor Dally! he’s got to try it, anyhow,” said Colonel Hamilton; “and I suppose he may be thankful to get it. Poor old Stair gets worse and worse, they say—he’s quite helpless now; and all those daughters—and in debt up to their chins!”

“It was judicious of Minna to marry,” said Lady Agnes.

“Yes, it’s a blessing that one of them did anything so sensible, as Dally says. We’ve seen them several times. Juliet and I have even dined with them twice when we were in Edinburgh. She ‘lives by bread alone’ as completely as anyone can.”

“The man is awful,” said Juliet. She paused. “He had a brother——” She stopped again. Oh, Uncle Maurice! if your little girl comes, we’ll ask him here. He is quite clever—an Individualist, or something or other. He has beautiful eyes. If he were only an inch taller, he wouldn’t be so bad.”

“You have a really amiable way, Juliet, of trying to dispose of your second-hand adorers,” said Archie.

Juliet flushed, and rose from the table, pouting. There were really tears in her eyes as she answered, “I don’t—I don’t; only it is because I hate to see people very unhappy.”

“Poor Maria! I always thought her rather foolish,” said Mrs. Clephane, recurring to the subject of Mrs. Crawford later in the evening. She drew from her brother some description of the household. “She was



so pretty when I saw her last. You remember, Maurice? William and you were both quite foolish about her."

"I remember—we both were," he admitted.

Lady Agnes raised her eyes for a moment at the mention of her husband's name. "Is the daughter pretty?" she asked.

"No, I do not think she is; but she is very good to look at—young and uncommon. The little girl is sweet."

"I should like to see them," said Lady Agnes. "I remember the mother quite well. She had a fine complexion."

"Yes—then," said Hamilton.

Juliet rubbed her damask cheek with her hand, and looked on the ground, as if she saw some shadow of the inevitable approaching years.

"You have some time before you still," said Archie, watching her face. She looked up and laughed, and forgot it in a moment.



## CHAPTER VIII

**B**REAKFAST at Mrs. Crawford's on a wet morning was not a pleasant meal. Mrs. Crawford, distinctly peevish, in an old shawl and a soiled cap, "asked a blessing"—but the request was uttered without diligence or cheerfulness.

*These Thy mercies* always in after-days suggested to Susan the look of their undesirable foods.

The older children had to be attended to first, as the boys went early to school. There was a good deal of hurry: Mrs. Crawford trying to cut bread with the blunt side of the knife; the children bickering amongst themselves; cracked china; sloppy tea; a tablecloth like a leopard skin; rain pattering on the dim windows. Susan saw the boys start off, arranged the little ones at table as they came in, and ladled out the porridge. Her everyday sweetness was unaffected by a wet morning.

After breakfast the work of her day began. It followed only the ordinary course of too many women's lives.

It had never occurred to Mrs. Crawford that any plan of life, any arrangement of the hours, beyond "doing all that had to be done" in the day was necessary. To say that she had never considered the different capacities of her children would be absurd; it is doubtful if she even realized that any such differences existed.



As long as they were at the nursery stage she had taken a certain amount of interest in the charge of their small ailments and so on. But as they grew larger, she ceased, like the female rabbit, to trouble herself much about them. The boys went to the nearest school; the girls picked up what learning they could from a half-educated governess.

The blame can scarcely be said to have rested with Mrs. Crawford. She had not the intelligence to do much better if she had tried, and she did not try. The lives which she had been the means of embodying in this dark world proceeded to strike out along their different directions, at least untouched by any influence of hers.

Susan being the eldest, most of what Mrs. Crawford called "the household duties" fell to her share. But whether these duties were such as she could best perform, or she alone could perform, or indeed whether they were duties at all, it had never occurred to Mrs. Crawford to question. "Duty" was a word whose meaning she thought she understood—perhaps she could scarcely have grasped the idea that it "preserved the stars from wrong," but she held inflexibly in her mind that it was Susan's duty to mend all the stockings. Mrs. Crawford had several of these main ideas which formed her theory of life; one of them was that she herself was a religious woman. Questioning to such a person on such a subject would have been cruel, and would only have confused her; but I think she had a simple theory that a great many other people were in the wrong, a few were very wicked, and a sad number were "unbelievers." What



she herself did believe she could hardly have said, but there was a good deal of it, and she was very conscious of believing it. She believed that she had been attached to her husband. Love was a word she was shy of using, as it might be foolish. She believed that she loved her children; she would have told you unhesitatingly that she believed a woman's first duty was at home. Susan had been taught this early, and as Mrs. Crawford was incapable of system, she found each day loaded with a mass of trifles which fully occupied her time, and yet gave her no chance of mental advancement. So after the children had gone to school, she first made out the washing list, then sat down with a great basket of clothes to mend. She used to toil away at the children's ill-made clothes of cheap material, trying to do it as well as she could, but the things were not worth mending, and labor on them was thrown away. She sewed till half-past twelve o'clock, then she had to go out with a message for her mother; then came dinner. Immediately after dinner she had to take the little girls out for an hour. When she came in she had to put a cupboard in order, and then hear Tommy his lessons for the next day. So the day went on until seven or eight o'clock (hours were not kept with any exactness in the Crawford household), when Susan helped to put the younger children to bed. Then she had some time to read.

On the evening after Colonel Hamilton and his nephew had left, she sat beside her mother with a book open on her knee. Once she looked up. In the unflattering glare of an unshaded lamp Mrs. Crawford sat reading



*The Sunday at Home.* It was not a Sunday, but she read the stories in the magazine during the week, as the other contents were "more for Sunday." The house was quiet, the children were in bed, and the older boys preparing their lessons in the schoolroom. From the kitchen came the distant sound of the little maidservant cleaning the knives. Taken as a whole, it was a scene exemplifying how dull and how ugly domestic life might be. Susan was vaguely aware of it, but she had never known anything else. Her inner and outer life were disconnected. With unquestioning patience she continued to perform all the unvarying duties of the day, whilst all the time her heart was busy with its own occupation—one which no one she lived with could share.

"See if it has stopped raining, Susan," said Mrs. Crawford at last. Susan went to the window to look out. She opened it, and the spring rain was blown in by the wind soft against her cheek. There came a scent of sweetbriar from the budding hedge; it called to her like a low voice from the delicate darkness of the garden. She had long been possessed by the idea that it might be possible to find out something intelligible from the sights and sounds of nature.

"I had almost caught it just now," she said half aloud.

"What?" said Mrs. Crawford, astonished.

"Oh, nothing, mother! I was speaking to myself," said Susan, as she shut the window.

"A bad habit. Ring the bell for prayers, please. I think the servants *must* be ready *now*," said Mrs. Crawford plaintively.



The cook and the little maid came in, the latter hurriedly drying her red hands on her apron at the back of the door.

Mrs. Crawford conducted the unintelligent service. When it was over Susan said good-night to her mother and went to her own room—a large room on the ground floor of the house which she shared with Emily. The windows looked into the orchard. The blind of the window by Emmy's bed was pulled up, and the faint light of the struggling moon, that was half obscured still by clouds, showed the little girl asleep, with her thin arm thrown out on the coverlet and her black hair half hiding her face. Susan bent above her for a moment, to be sure that she was sleeping, then drew down the blind, and, having lighted a single candle, she sat down at a table screened from Emily's sight by the high end of the wooden bed. There was no fire, and on a damp night the room was rather cold. Susan had thrown a jacket about her shoulders, tying it round the neck by the sleeves. Her eyes gleamed like a person who anticipates some great pleasure. The day was over; her own interest had begun. She took out from the table drawer a thick, shabby drawing-book that was filled almost from cover to cover with drawings—some in water-color, some only pencil sketches. Here and there along the edges of the larger pictures, in odd corners, on the back of other drawings, were sometimes very intensely colored scraps, packed together anyhow; there were buds, leaves, the heads of marsh rushes, a blue beetle, a snail-shell with its black whorl design, butterflies, a twig with the



purple of coming spring, sometimes a landscape so small that you could have covered it with a penny, a great initial letter, a train of miniature figures running up a narrow margin—it was as if the richness of her observation had overflowed its borders, and must decorate everything. The larger pictures showed more attempt at design—remarkable, to anyone who could judge of the work, from the total absence of hesitation. Out of drawing and almost grotesque as many of the figures were, they moved, they stood firm on their feet, they held out hands to one another with just that ingenuous power, that humble feeling after truth, recognizable everywhere as being lit by “that divine spark which no industry can ever kindle, which no neglect can ever quite destroy.”

Susan never showed her work to anyone. Mrs. Crawford (who, as a girl, had executed landscapes in chalk), had she ever noticed them, would have instantly dismissed them as childish absurdities. Susan had never spoken to a single creature who cared about art in any form. Her ideas on pictures were mostly taken from the things upon their own walls. She merely set herself to draw because she wanted to fix with greater intensity the impression that the outer world made upon her when it was translated by her imagination. She would never have thought of speaking about it any more than she would have thought of telling Mrs. Crawford how, to her, the white road was peopled with strange figures, the winds spoke, the scarlet of the evening skies had a meaning. She had read a great deal, but nothing modern, and the classics do not foster self-consciousness. No



idea that she was in any way different from other people had ever occurred to her. There was nothing of the self-pity or the self-absorption of young genius about her. She had a very simple heart.

She sat drawing steadily until the candle burnt low, and Emily awoke with a start. "Sue! Sue! What are you doing?" she called out. "Why are you sitting up so late?"

Susan looked up like a person only half awake. She threw off the jacket and came to Emmy, who sat crouched up in bed, clasping her knees with her hands, her black hair hanging on her shoulders.

"What is it, my darling? Lie down again. You are all right. What did you dream?"

"Horrid!" said Emily. She lay down, and caught at Susan's hand as she sat at the bedside.

"Tell Susan, darling," said Susan, bending down, her face brightened with a soft smile that seemed to reassure the child.

"I thought Janet was here," began Emmy, "sitting on the nursery chair darning stockings, and a squirrel came in at the window, a beautiful red squirrel, Sue. I was in bed, and he ran on the coverlet and let me play with him; he had such a fine tail, and I felt his clammy feet on my hand. Then he ran away, and, Susan"—she turned in bed with a contortion of fright—"I saw a black man, I think he was Satan" (she lowered her voice and glanced fearfully about the room). "He was sitting on a bench at the foot of your bed; he took up the squirrel and held it for a moment, and then it ran



back to me; but, oh!"—her voice broke with the reasonless horror of a dream—"its back was all covered with cinders. And Satan got up, and I think that he was coming over here to me, and I screamed to Janet, but somehow she didn't hear me, or had gone away, and then I saw there was a kind of light at the foot of the bed—there. And someone was sitting with His back turned to me—it was Jesus, Sue; and when I screamed He did not say anything at all, but just turned round a little and stretched out His hand. I did not see His face, but His hand was so kind, and I took it; and the other person went away, and I think the squirrel got out of the window. Then I wakened, and it was you."

Susan sat still, holding her hand and looking down at the child. At the moment, with that expression on it, her homely face was almost beautiful.

"Now, Emmy," she said, "you must be my good child and go to sleep. Think about the squirrel, and the kind hand that came to you, and do not be afraid."

"Do you think He was really there?"

"Who, darling?"

"Jesus."

"I think so, Emmy; what you mean by that, anyhow."

Emily looked puzzled for an instant.

"And Satan?" she said, with a quick, covert glance at the end of the room.

Susan did not answer, then lifted her bright eyes. "Good and evil are always with us, darling; let us keep near the good."



“And the squirrel?” said Emmy, who always accepted Susan’s explanations of everything.

Susan laughed at this—her low, merry laugh. “Oh, yes, yes, dear! I think the squirrel too—Nature, Emmy.”

“Where has it gone then?”

“I don’t know, away out of doors somewhere; perhaps he was entertaining the lark we heard on Thursday to a moonlit feast.”

“Oh, yes, Susan, please yes—a moonlit feast; go on. I’m quite wakened up. Mayn’t I just stay awake whilst you get off your things. Go on, please. Where was it?”

Susan rose to tidy up the litter she had left on the table. As she moved about the room and then began to undress, she kept telling scraps of detail to the excited child, who had already forgotten her terrors.

“But the lark was going up so high in the sky, Sue. What did she see? Did she get up as far as heaven?”

Susan paused, as she drew off her stocking, and looked up for a moment with a smile.

“Not quite so far as heaven, Emmy. She found that the door was shut.”

“Oh! Was she sorry?”

“I think she was.”

“But she came down again to a nice grassy nest.”

“A nice warm nest in the grass.” Susan brushed her hair.

“With eggs?”

“Yes, four eggs, Emmy.”



“ And another lark? ”

“ Yes, another very nice lark.”

“ And wasn't she happy? Did she mind about not reaching heaven? ”

“ Well, she *couldn't*, you see; she reached it in her heart.”

“ Oh! ” said Emmy. “ Well, about the squirrel? Quick, Sue, just before you put out the light. What had they to supper? ”

“ May-dew, of course; out of acorn cups.”

“ Where did they get the acorns? There are no oaks here.”

“ They had empty nut-shells, then,” Susan's voice went on in the darkness, “ from the nut trees we sat by last night—old ones.”

“ Did the lark tell them what she had seen, Sue? ”

Susan chuckled softly to herself.

“ No, Emmy. She had to look after the eggs when she got home.”

Emmy asked no more questions, and her gentle breathing presently told of dreamless sleep.



## CHAPTER IX

A FEW weeks later in the summer Mrs. Crawford again was stirred to vague reminiscence; this time by a letter from her old school friend, Mrs. Clephane, who wrote to ask that the girls might be allowed to come to Linfield, and added some kind expressions of pleasure in renewing her old acquaintance with Mrs. Crawford. "Auburn," said Mrs. Crawford, laying down the letter on the breakfast-table. (Susan was late that morning, and had only just appeared.) "Auburn. Some people called it red, but I never thought so. Of course, my own hair then was what I suppose you would call golden, but Julia Hamilton's was different—not red; just like a nice curry. Some people admired it very much; she was a handsome girl. I wonder if she wears a cap now."

"Who is it, mother? I don't know quite who you're talking about," Susan asked. Mrs. Crawford held out the letter to her. Emily, quite pale with excitement, took a great gulp of tea, and said solemnly:

"I am asked, Susan; I think they really do want me. I hope that mother will allow you to go too."

Susan began to laugh.

"Emmy is too young to pay visits," Mrs. Crawford objected.

"See, mother!" exclaimed Emmy, seizing the letter



and pointing to the underlined words with a trembling finger: “ ‘ My brother *particularly hopes* that you will allow Emily to come too. Juliet and I love children, and it will be a pleasure to us to have her.’ It’s *really* me they want,” she said, and a cloud gathered quickly in her eyes as she saw dissent on her mother’s face. She squeezed Susan’s hand tightly, urging her to plead her cause. After all, Mrs. Crawford was not hard to persuade, and Susan gained her consent to both of them going to Linfield in the following week.

Emmy subsided into a state of pale tranquillity during the rest of the meal. She pushed aside her untasted porridge, whispering to Susan, “ Tea and toast, *please*, this morning.” And Susan, humoring her childish sense of suitability, allowed her to breakfast in silence on grown-up foods.

Is it one of the reasons why most biographies are so hollow that the circumstance, the mere outward structure of life, does not always bear much witness to its real contents? You may live through an earthquake with a mind unchanged, and a stroll with a friend to the end of your own garden will send your soul out on a venture to find some new world. A fortnight spent in another person’s house seems a trifle—would probably be omitted in a serious biography; yet before Susan had been for a week at Linfield the whole complexion of her life had changed. There is no change of scene half so distinct as the utter difference between one mental atmosphere and another can sometimes be. Except for occasional visits to her mother’s sister, an aunt who lived at St. Fortunes, not



far off, Susan had never been away from home before. The country that they drove through was not altogether new to them. For many miles they followed the familiar road, and Emily could point out the landmarks that they knew. Then the character of the landscape changed, and Susan was well entertained in looking about her until the darkness fell, and she could see no more till they came to Linfield. A pale flicker of moonlight between the clouds was sufficient to show the straight stems of sentinel fir trees as the carriage turned in at the avenue gate, and Susan saw the house with lighted windows far away at the end of the long procession of black trees.

Emmy by this time was so tired with the excitement and fatigue of the day that she had buried her face in Susan's shoulder and fallen sound asleep. She woke with a start when the carriage stopped, and was nearly ready to cry. Colonel Hamilton lifted the child and carried her into the hall, where Juliet met them. Emmy looked about her, up at Juliet's smiling face, round the bright, unfamiliar room, then decided not to cry, and grasped Susan's hand, becoming suddenly wide-awake and chattering.

She demurred a good deal at being promptly sent to bed, but fell asleep before her head had touched the pillow.

Juliet took Susan to see her mother, who received her very kindly. "She is not in the very least like what Maria used to be," Mrs. Clephane remarked to her brother when the girls had left the room. "Maria was so pretty!"



“She is not pretty in that kind of way,” he answered; “but I think she has a face ‘that serves the ends of beauty,’ as someone puts it.”

This was a little beyond his sister’s comprehension, who thought Susan a very plain-looking little person, and saw absolutely nothing about her to admire.

Juliet observed Susan curiously, for this was quite a new specimen of womankind to her. In the brilliant light her little figure looked small and very shabby. She wore a dark round hat and queer calico dress, with an uncouth black jacket. Her eyes, bright and shy, glanced from side to side; she was quite absorbed in the pleasure of these new surroundings. For the first time in her life she found herself in a house that satisfied her sense of beauty. “There’s nothing ugly,” she thought, and whenever her eye lighted on anything she felt a little new soft shock of delight. Before she had been five minutes in the house her consciousness was sensibly enriched. There was nothing very unusual in the house or the company, but to Susan it was as if, after discord, life had suddenly glided into harmony. Her whole personality in a day or two began to unfold as a blossom opens in a blander air.

Juliet’s beauty was a new delight. The two girls looked very different as they sat together for a few minutes after Susan’s first arrival. To an observer, however, there was always something about Susan’s expression that made other things insignificant. She sat in perfect unconsciousness of any oddness in her own appearance. Even when she looked down and saw their



feet together it did not strike her to withdraw her own—a small foot, almost round in the heavy, country-made shoe.

This first evening, when Susan had gone to see if Emily was asleep, Juliet came into her uncle's study.

“She's a dear, queer little thing—I like her so much,” she said. He turned his gray head and looked at her meditatively.

“You like her, do you?”

“Yes, indeed I do; and the child's a darling.”

“Do you think we can make them happy?” he asked.

“I don't know about *you*,” said Juliet; “I think that *I* can.”

“But she is not interested in the same things as you are.”

“I don't quite know what you mean, but I think it was something unkind,” she said sweetly, with the assurance of a favorite. “However, I think I can.”

“I thought, when I looked at you together,” said her uncle, “that it was sometimes a positive misfortune for a woman to be pretty.”

“Do you think me so very unfortunate?” asked Juliet, lifting her face and showing her prettiest dimple.

“Time will show. You're a dear creature at times. Go away now, I'm busy.”

That night Juliet came and knocked at Susan's door. “Oh, you're in bed already! I came to see if you had everything that you wanted,” she said, coming in smiling, with a kind of gracious friendliness that Susan had never seen before.



She sat down beside the bed, and leant her head on her arm, and looked at her guest. Susan gazed at her too admiringly to speak, noting her color, her long, fair arm in its transparent sleeve, the unapproachable grace of her attitude.

Juliet, on her part, scarcely glanced about her; yet before she had been in the room for a minute she had become aware of the poorness and shabbiness of all Susan's belongings—the soda-scorched brush on the toilet table; the sixpenny blotting-book; the clumsy shoes. "She's a regular little anchorite," she thought, noticing the coarse cotton nightgown that Susan wore. But then she looked again at the speaking eagerness of the eyes, at the fresh lips and the quaint, unmodern face, and forgot, or was reconciled to, the ugly garment.

She began to ask Susan about her life at home. This was the first time that the girl had ever had the opportunity of looking at her own life from the outside at all. That view, seen for the first time, to an intelligent mind is surprising.

"Do you look after all the children without a nurse?" said Juliet; "it must give you a great deal to do."

"It does," said Susan. She thought for a moment and then added, "These are the occupations of my hands."

"Oh, I see," said Juliet doubtfully. But she did not see at all. "Are you fond of children?"

"What a question!" said Susan, with a sort of bright indignation. "Of course I am! Who is not?"



Juliet was silent. She asked Susan if she had found the long drive very tiresome.

“How could I?” said Susan, “when so much was beautiful.”

“Well, *I* don’t think this a very beautiful country.”

“Oh,” said Susan reproachfully, “and the lines of the land roll like the waves of the sea; and we passed such black bits of woods, and farms, and fields of green wheat!”

“Are you very fond of beautiful things?” Juliet asked.

Susan at first didn’t reply, then she glanced up half-archly, half-shyly. “Do *you* like to be so beautiful?” she said.

Juliet, though only too well accustomed to admiration, was so much surprised that she blushed brightly.

“I suppose I do. Oh, yes, *I do*,” she said, and laughed, showing all her white teeth.

“It must be wonderful,” Susan went on, still looking at her with bright, penetrating eyes. “Do you know what I thought when I saw you come downstairs to meet us to-night? I said, like the man in ‘Don Quixote’: ‘*I think I see her now—looking as if she had the sun on one side of her and the moon on the other.*’”

“Oh, oh! You will make me vain; but I believe I’m that already,” said Juliet. “I must not keep you awake.” She stood up, looking down at Susan with an instant’s hesitation. They looked into each other’s eyes, and then she drew the shabby little figure suddenly to her bosom and kissed her, so making one of those quick



friendships that are sometimes as true as any. On Juliet's part it was the half surprise of the younger girl's frankly expressed, innocent admiration; for a woman who is beautiful is always well aware that the generous acknowledgment of it by another woman is more than the praise of many men. Susan, on her side, always went straight, as it were, to meet anything that called to her heart—by beauty, or pity, or in any other way. She found nothing extraordinary in it, and went to sleep with the memory of Juliet's soft face against her own, and of how her gauzy draperies had brushed her cheek. This friendship was a new and beautiful possession indeed.



## CHAPTER X

**A**RCHIE HAMILTON had gone to rejoin his ship, but for a week after the Crawfords came Lady Agnes was still at Linfield. Both Susan and little Emily attached themselves to her at once. Mrs. Clephane's easy motherly smiles had no effect on Emmy compared with the other lady's deep, direct glance, and her low voice. From the first time that she saw Lady Agnes, Susan had surrendered to the recognition of a new personality. She was as different from other people as an aromatic plant from the common leaves of the wood. Susan found a shelter in her very presence. She wanted to sit near to her—to stay as close beside her as she could. Juliet watched them with great amusement.

“How do you like my Aunt Agnes?” she said one day. “Most people are so much afraid of her.”

“Afraid!” said Susan simply. “It would never occur to me to feel afraid of—anyone like her.”

“But I think she's decidedly frightsome. When I was younger I used to blush whenever she looked at me. All the same, I love her, and I think her tiny white house is the nicest place in the world.” Juliet sighed suddenly.

“What is her home like?” Susan asked.

“Just the funniest little tiny house you ever saw,



hanging like a swallow's nest above the water, with the little bedrooms pitch-dark, and so small you can't turn round, and the smell of the sea coming in at the windows——” Susan made a quick mental picture and wondered if she would ever be there, and why it was that Juliet liked it so much. “She is so poor,” Juliet went on; “but even if she were not, she'd be always denying herself everything for someone else.”

“I wish, please, to be just like that when I grow up,” said Emily, who had been listening to their conversation. Emmy was supremely happy at Linfield. She enjoyed every moment of every day, from the time she got up until she was sent unwillingly to bed.

Juliet had at first regarded Susan's garments with the tender dismay that a kind-hearted young woman always feels in seeing another ill dressed; but she soon found out, having made a few timid advances upon the subject to Susan, that she was not at all sensitive about it. She absolutely did not care one bit about her appearance. “If I were like you,” she would say, “I might feel differently.”

“But you would look so nice if you——” Juliet paused, afraid of hurting her. Susan laughed a merry little laugh.

“If my clothes were not so ugly; but somehow I can't see that they are. That is not an ugly color, now,” she pursued. She smoothed her gown as she spoke, and looked up at Juliet innocently. “It's just like a young green leaf.”

“Yes, green merino,” said Juliet; “but—but—don't



you see, Susan, that people just aren't wearing green merino."

"Why not? Don't you think it pretty?"

"Yes, I suppose it is; just as good as any other material in its own place."

"What is its own place?"

"Its own time, I should have said, or even," she added, "if it were a little differently made."

"You mean if it were made like your dress?"

"Oh, well, like other people's dresses—a little," suggested Juliet, crimson as she spoke. Susan eyed her gayly.

"I don't mind your thinking it ugly. I would put on anything to please you, but I do not understand about these things; they don't exist for me," she answered. They went together to buy one or two new things, but Juliet found it very hopeless.

"She will like one thing because it's like a leaf, and another because it's like a beetle's wing, or some such idea," she said to her uncle, after one of these days of effort. "Always something away from the matter in hand."

"And what is the matter in hand?"

"Why, to get her decently dressed, like other people, of course."

"She's so sweet as she is, I think."

"Yes, so she is; but she'd be much sweeter if she were just a little different."

"I wonder if she would."

"Well," Juliet went on, "she wanted to have a col-



lar to her dress of some dreadful plush stuff, because she said that it was like the silk fur of a mole. When it came to talking about moles in clothes I thought it was time to give it up."

"My child, I think I've seen you wearing a ferret about your neck not so long ago."

"Not quite that. But if it were," Juliet went on boldly, "I should wear it all the same. I'd wear a mole or a rat or anything else, only when other people were doing it too."

"Ah! I see. But I think I have heard you say that you must stop wearing something or other because everyone else was doing so too?"

"Yes, you're quite right," sighed Juliet. "It's a mystery. Fashion's like the moon; it's no sooner full than it begins to wane. But Susan will never trouble herself about that; perhaps she is wise. Why, the child is far quicker than she is; it ties its hair-ribbon now quite nicely, and it asked for a red one instead of a blue one with a red frock."

One day they went to Edinburgh to see a little loan collection of pictures. Juliet, who cared no more for pictures than she did for astronomy, merely went because other people did. She had scarcely got into the room before she found that she had lost Susan, not bodily, but the girl paid no heed at all to anything that she said. Crouched near the floor, to look at the low-hung pictures, rooted in front of others, she was blind and deaf and dumb to everything else. The severe early Italian art that Juliet, had she had the courage to own it, would



have described as hideous, was what attracted Susan most. Her face glittered with the intensity of her new joy. "See, see, Juliet, how the angels smile at one another! It's just like life, is it not!"

"Well, *I've* never seen them, if you have; and I hope they haven't necks like that."

"Oh!" Susan looked again, trying to see with Juliet's eyes.

"Well, what *do* you see in it?" Juliet asked.

"The intention," said Susan seriously. "Is it not that, after all, that makes everything good or bad?"

Juliet was puzzled. She was accustomed often to play with terms of which she very imperfectly grasped the meaning. She had always depended on her uncle for definitions of anything she did not comprehend, and very slightly considered any abstract question on her own account. Again she looked at Susan bewildered, again she envied her. Never in all her prosperous days had she known an hour of such pure delight as Susan was enjoying then; not even when she had realized the indescribable inward thrill of possession which is the secret joy of beauty. As she entered a room, conscious it was shining from her face, seeing it, as in a mirror, in the eyes of others—not even this had ever been to her like the joy Susan felt at that moment.

Colonel Hamilton joined them after a while. He came up to Juliet, who was sitting near the door. She silently directed his attention to Susan. He saw—even a man could not help noticing—how shabby she looked, the way that her black jacket bulged on the shoulders, the



badly hung skirt, and the clumsy shoes. Juliet crossed the room to stand beside her, and as she turned to speak he saw Susan's face uplifted, fresh, lighted with pleasure as if by some inward lamp, and it astonished him.

He went quickly up to them. "You understand, I see," he said; and Susan, a little shyly, answered:

"These are 'the indestructible joys forever' that you spoke of when we saw you at home."

Juliet turned away to speak to someone she knew. She had an uncomfortable feeling that here was a matter which she knew nothing about at all.



## CHAPTER XI

**T**WO or three weeks passed, and Mrs. Crawford wrote declaring that the girls must come home. Emily was very tearful. She did not want to leave. Lady Agnes Hamilton's youngest son, a boy about her own age, had come, and she considered him a perfect hero. After a fit of preliminary shyness and two or three quarrels they were now on the best of terms, and the little girl would have followed him about like a dog. One evening, two or three days before they had to leave Linfield, Juliet and Susan, who had been out together, found Emmy in tears, with scratched knees, at the bottom of a dry ditch. Jack Hamilton sat astride of the six-foot wall urging her to come up.

“I've tried three times, and I'm hurt so!” Emmy was saying. Her hero jeered. Juliet said that the child must come home with them. To Emmy the dignity of walking with grown-up people was great, so casting out three snail-shells and a handful of green gooseberries from her apron (judged by Susan as scarcely worth bringing home), she dusted her poor knees and was comforted.

It had been a sultry day—gray, without sunshine, but very warm. As they came slowly up the avenue a melancholy sunset burned low in the west, and the rooks cawed on the tree-tops. There was an ominous sadness



in the air that weighed upon Susan, who was curiously susceptible to those impressions. She had the feeling common to animals before thunder, that something she dreaded was about to happen. She thought perhaps it was because she was sorry to be going home so soon. Emily, too, was sobered, and walked between them in silence, only by a tug at her sleeve directing Susan's notice to the unfledged rooks, naked and purple, that had dropped dead upon the pathway from the high trees above.

The somber sky began to glimmer red between the trunks of the pine trees as the sun sank lower in the west.

"It's like the sky above Flodden Field, Sue," said the child suddenly, her face very solemn.

"Oh, you queer thing! What do you know about it?" called Juliet, and set off racing Emmy to the house. Her influence over the child was entirely wholesome. She would scatter her nervous terrors with a burst of laughter, and mock gayly at her strange notions.

They ran, laughing, to the door, and Susan followed them slowly, thinking to herself that the melancholy that hung upon her must have been caused by the unconscious feeling which Emmy had expressed when she saw in the angry red of the sullen skies memory of an old disaster. She shook herself, and tried to reason herself out of the causeless depression.

Colonel Hamilton was standing at the door as they came up. He gave Susan a rose that he had in his hand—an old-fashioned, cold, white rose with dull green leaves. Many a year afterwards, "when he was dead



and she was very old," Susan, seeing such a rose again, remembered that evening when the current of her life, unknown to herself, began to change its course.

She went into the house, holding the flower in her hand, "like a living pearl," she thought.

"Susan," called Juliet, "Darnley Stair is coming to dinner to-night, and Mr. and Mrs. Fraser, so you are going to let Parker dress you for once."

Susan submitted cheerfully. She was too much occupied with a new book that Colonel Hamilton had given her to care in the least who was coming or what she looked like. She sat reading intently all the time that Parker was dressing her hair, never once looking in the glass.

Emmy, silent with excitement, watched the proceedings and supplied the hairpins.

Juliet came in when the hairdressing was finished. "Well," she said, "you do look nice. I suppose you've never looked to see? What are you reading?" She glanced indifferently at the book.

"I was reading such a beautiful thing in this," said Susan, lifting her blue eyes, "about the Rose of Joy."

"Oh, yes! Very fine, no doubt; but I want to make you look at your own hair," said Juliet, laughing, and, pulling the book away from her, she looked at Susan with open satisfaction.

Few people are aware of the full power of clothes, because it is very seldom that those who know how to dress well ever forget to do so: and, more rarely still, that those who do not are ever seen at their best. When Susan's toilette was complete it was like a transformation. Juliet



had contrived to strike just the right note of color. Susan was charming in her own way, with the charm of expression, and coloring the most elusive of all.

“Look at yourself now!” said Juliet. “Look, Susan!”

Susan looked. “Yes, I believe I *am* better that way,” was all that she said, and would have walked off without another glance.

Again Juliet envied her. “Why can’t I be like that?” she thought.

“Do you like your hair that way? *Look* at yourself,” she said, giving Susan a little shake.

“I’d much rather look at you,” said Susan, laughing, and turning away from the glass.

“Well, do you think this dress is nice? It will make poor Dally very miserable, no doubt,” said Juliet thoughtfully, stuffing an end of lace down the front of her bodice.

“Who is he?” Susan asked.

“Oh, Dally? A second cousin or something—Darnley Stair—very likely you know something about him, they live not far from your home.”

“Yes, I think I’ve heard my aunt speak about them,” said Susan. “Stairs of Striven aren’t they?”

“Yes, that’s them; well, you’ll see him to-night. What’s that you’ve got, child?” said Juliet to Emily, who was looking into a drawing-book that lay open on the table. Juliet lifted it and turned a page. She was supremely indifferent to such things herself, but had acquired a certain superficial knowledge from living al-



ways with people who knew better. "Susan," she exclaimed, "who ever did this?"

"It's Susan's book that she draws for us," said Emmy.

Susan grew pale. She moved quickly forwards, and covered the page with her hand.

"It's—it's—a book of mine that I draw little things in for the children," she said. She looked pleadingly at Juliet. "You wouldn't understand," she added.

"Very well. I'll take it down to Uncle Maurice and see if he understands."

"I think he will," said Susan simply.

"Come along, we'll go down then." Juliet tucked the book under her arm, gave Emmy the kiss she had been waiting for, and drew Susan away.

"Let Parker put you to bed now, darling," called Susan, looking back again when she had left the room.

"You're just like a little mother, Susan, in spite of your mystic art," said Juliet.

Colonel Hamilton was alone in the drawing room when they came in. "See, Uncle Maurice, I want you to look at this," said Juliet, putting the little book into his hands. "Susan says *I* wouldn't understand."

He opened the book, and looked into it gravely. Susan stood on the rug before him with her fingers twisted together, and her arms hanging down. Her face had cleared.

"Tell me about this, my dear. Is it your work?" he asked.

"Yes," Susan answered, now quite readily. "They



are little pictures that I paint for the children—mostly out of the Bible. You will understand, if you look. That? Oh, that's just a little spring in one of the fields at home—it comes through the grass like that; and that's only one of Ezekiel's beasts," she said, speaking with utter simplicity.

"As if it were the cat!" whispered Juliet, who was looking over her uncle's shoulder.

"Go on—what's that?" asked Colonel Hamilton.

Susan went on. "You remember about the sea of glass mingled with fire?"

"Mr. Darnley Stair," was announced at this moment, and Juliet, brimming with laughter, went forward to meet him. Two or three other people came in almost immediately. Susan hurriedly closed her little book and laid it on a side table.

After dinner for the first time she found herself sitting alone, and her attention was drawn to Mr. Stair.

He was an ugly young man, with some distinction of manner. He stood leaning on the back of a chair, his white hands hanging over the top of it. His eyes were fixed upon Juliet Clephane; when she moved, he moved so as to have a better view of her; when she smiled, he drew in his breath with admiration. He seemed to gloat on her white shoulders. All this Susan observed from the corner where she sat. In spite of his carrot-red hair and his plain face, there was a kind of grace about the creature every now and then; there was both humor and feeling in his quick eyes.

"Do go away," said Juliet at length, turning her



head slightly in his direction. "I can't endure to have you standing there. Show Mr. Stair your pictures, Susan," she said, turning to Susan with a smile. "He will 'understand,' I think. Miss Crawford will show you something that you will like," she said to the young man, speaking exactly as one speaks to a child.

Susan tried to protest, for Mr. Stair looked so exceedingly blank that there was no misreading his dislike to the proposal. However, Juliet insisted, and, painfully conscious of his disinclination to look at it, Susan, because she did not know what else to do, opened one page of the book and held it out to him. He took it from her, thanked her, and turning a little away from his cousin, began rapidly to turn one leaf after another.

Suddenly he stopped, arrested; then turned back a page, then facing right round with his back to the other people, almost sprang forward, like a dog that catches the scent and strains suddenly at the leash.

"Come, Miss—Miss Crawford" (he made a dash at the name). "What's all this about? What is this—yes, yes, I see. Oh, Lord, it's good—good!" He sat down on the sofa by Susan, gulping with eagerness, his eyes glowing, his lips working, now turning back a leaf, now looking ahead, pulling at his red hair, running his hand back and forwards over his smooth chin, as he caught at the meaning of the picture, and endeavored to get Susan to explain her thought.

"Where's that? I should know that—that square thing. '*A strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe.*' I see exactly. I think I know it quite."



“That’s the old tower of St. Fortunes,” said Susan, “not far from my home.”

“What? Of course it is! How stupid of me! I see it every day, but you have made it alive. I shall always see it like that now. How do you know St. Fortunes? Do you live there?”

“I live at Burrie Bush; it is about fifteen miles away. I have sometimes been at St. Fortunes.”

“I live there—*there*,” said Mr. Stair plaintively. “It’s my beastly unfortunate fate to be a brewer. Do you happen to know people called Murchison?” He did not wait for her reply. “Do you know Mr. Murchison too? Isn’t he dreadful?”

“He’s my uncle,” said Susan. Her lips twitched and her eyes lighted up archly for an instant, as they sometimes could.

Mr. Stair looked confounded, but only for a moment. “It’s, alas! too true,” he said, with a kind of taking simplicity. “And the worst of it is, I feel I’ll just become the same after I’ve been a brewer for forty years.”

“Why do you think brewing so dangerous?” Susan asked shyly.

“Oh, because it makes people fat—feeds the body to kill the soul. See what it does to horses.”

“I know,” said Susan. “They are splendid. I’ve seen them with the heavy carts in these narrow streets; their necks are so thick and curved, they hold their heads so proudly; they *clutch* the ground with their great hoofs—it’s like the book of Job.”

Whilst they sat absorbed in this conversation the other



guests had gone. Juliet came round and stood beside Susan.

Mr. Stair started up. "It seems as if I were going to stay here all night. Thank you, Miss Crawford, thank you. I shan't forget." He turned to his cousin. "Oh, sir! I've had a good dinner, but my imagination has been fed, which is more."

He turned a rapturous gaze upon Juliet, who was stretching up her arm to put out a lamp, said good-night again, and went off, talking hurriedly to Colonel Hamilton as he crossed the hall.

Early the next day Susan and Emily left to return to Burrie Bush. Emily wept, and Susan could almost have wept along with her. Home had seemed so dim and far off amidst her vivid new impressions. When Juliet had waved a last good-by to them and turned away, she felt almost as if they were going into an unknown country.

It was late when they reached home. The boys ran out to the garden gate to meet them, telling all at once all that had happened to them and their rabbits since Susan and Emmy had left.

"And, Sue, you are different somehow; it's your hair."

"No, it's just her face; she *looks* different," they said.

She came slowly into the little ill-kept hall, where her mother was waiting for them.

There was something peculiarly joyless in Mrs. Crawford's greeting; it implied, if it did not say in so many words, "Yes, there you are; you've been away enjoying



yourself, whilst I was left alone." Enjoyment was a feeling that she was incapable of herself, and she resented any signs of it in other people.

"Well, Susan, I'm glad you've come home at last. Yes, we've all had bad colds, and it has rained the whole time you've been away."

Emily was peevish with fatigue. "I think everything seems so small and ugly at home, Sue, and I'm so tired, and I'm going to be sick, and I wish we hadn't left Linfield," she said, and would not eat her supper. The evening seemed very long to Susan, the boys very noisy, and she felt as if she had become suddenly possessed of a hundred eyes, that informed her of every scratch on the chairs, every stain on the paint, and every ugly thing in the room.



## CHAPTER XII

MRS. CRAWFORD'S only sister was the wife of a brewer at St. Fortunes Haven. Occasionally, on a fine day, a small closed carriage, drawn by a stout, purposeful horse, would stop at Mrs. Crawford's door. Then Mrs. Murchison, casting a severe glance at the slipshod maidservant, would walk heavily into the room.

"Well, Maria, I've come on business," she said, when she appeared one day soon after Susan had come home; "I wish you to let Susan spend the winter with me."

"Oh, but how could I do without her?" said Mrs. Crawford. "Emily can do nothing to help me."

"The sooner she learns the better. Dear me, Maria, you're not in your dotage. Surely you can get on without 'help' for six months? I don't see what you want it for."

"There is so much to do," said her sister.

"H'm!" Mrs. Murchison glanced about the untidy room. "What would you do if Susan married?"

"Susan married! I never thought of such a thing!"

"Why not? Our good mother was married, and had two babies by the time she was Susan's age."

"Dear me! So she had—but they were boys," said Mrs. Crawford.

"Well," said Mrs. Murchison, planting one broad foot



emphatically on the carpet to accentuate her words, "I think you'll be very foolish if you don't let her come. We want a young person in the house. What with people in to dinner, people coming and going, and all that, and young Mr. Stair always on hand, I cannot very well manage alone. My husband is fond of Susan. I'll take good care of her, she'll be well fed and decently dressed while she's with me, and though I don't say there are many chances in our neighborhood for a girl to make a good marriage, there are more than she's likely to have here, anyway. Unless she marries a milestone I don't see any hope of it."

"I'm sure Susan never thinks about marriage," Mrs. Crawford began.

"Tuts!" said her sister, "that's all very well. I dare say she does not, but a girl's a girl, Maria, and youth is youth, and everyone in this world should have a chance."

"When I married——" said Mrs. Crawford feebly.

Mrs. Murchison again tapped the floor with her foot, then she rose and stood looking down at her sister. She was a tall, heavily built woman, with a strong grip on life. You could see that in every movement she made, in everything that she wore; her handsome clothes were well made and well worn, her gloves were new and fitted her big hand, her rich bonnet sat at the right angle on her smooth hair. From her broad, flat face to her broad, flat feet she was the embodiment of common sense. Her strong, somewhat coarse philosophy of life she worked out steadfastly, unconfounded by any subtleties of feeling. She had not "made a good marriage," but she was



the plain one of two sisters, and she had never expected to do so. She made the best she could, and made the best of that. Down, far at the bottom of her heart, there was a feeling which had never seen the light. Long ago, when she and Maria had been girls together, and Maria's pretty face had won the young Irishman's easy affections, the older and plainer sister had wished that their lots could be changed. Now, when Susan raised her arch blue-gray eyes and looked at her aunt, Mrs. Murchison thought, "She is like her father"; but for all she ever said, Mr. Murchison himself might have always been her ideal of manly beauty. Susan, naturally ignorant of this train of thought, was always a little surprised that her aunt should have any patience with her at all. When Mrs. Crawford told her the proposal she thought at first that she could not do it; then, perhaps, some of the restlessness of youth that fancies any change will be better than none, or perhaps the sudden realization that home was intolerable, made her agree. She wrote to her aunt and promised to come in a week's time.

On the following Monday she arrived at St. Fortunes, somewhat weary from her long drive. As they came near the town the roads grew narrow, with high walls on each side. Susan had often been there before, but she never failed to lean forwards and catch a glimpse of the old square tower that raised its blind face above the orchard trees amongst which it stood. A stiff breeze was blowing from the sea—the bright line of water gleamed blue all along the low coast; the pale red roofs of the old houses that huddled along the shore made a mass of



warmer color in front. The old horse, knowing his stable was near, mended his pace, and the carriage came skidding round the acute corners of the high-walled lanes, down the hill, and drew up with a bang at the door of the long whitewashed house. Susan went in, and ran upstairs. There was a huge fire burning in the huge drawing-room, that was papered with a white paper spotted at intervals of half a yard or so with oblong blue spots, about the size of a child's head—it always made Susan dizzy to look at them. She came in, appearing very small at the far end of the long room. Her aunt was standing talking to Mr. Stair; Susan recognized him in an instant. It made her entrance more comfortable, for he came forward with a quick look of pleasure.

“Are you very cold? Are you very tired? Have this chair.”

Susan sat down and stretched her chilled hands to the blaze. Mrs. Murchison clapped her kindly on the shoulder.

“You shall have tea at once, Susan. Sit still and warm yourself. I'll see that your boxes are taken upstairs.”

She went out of the room, and Mr. Stair, who appeared very much at home, sat down again by the table and began to eat largely, talking all the time.

“Have you seen the Hamiltons again? My Cousin Maurice has been ill—poor Judy nursing him. I don't think a person as pretty as she is ought to do such a thing, do you? Spoils her bloom. Sick nursing is for quite another sort of woman—all the hard bit of it at



least. If I were *just dying*," he proceeded—"have some buttered toast—very good—if I were dying, I'd like her to sit by my pillow and give me spoonfuls of jelly—or, no, wet my lips with wine. Her eyes are so tender when she's sorry. You're not eating anything. Won't you have some of the plum cake? Mrs. Murchison's is final."

He came and stood in front of the fire and lifted his face, and looked about the room.

"Fine old room this," he said.

"Yes," said Susan, smiling, "only I sometimes wish that those spots——"

"I've counted them," began the young man eagerly, "counted 'em all. There are four hundred and seventy-eight, exactly, on that long bit of wall, each as big as a child's head, shaped like a powder-flask, and colored bright blue. A firm mind designed *that* paper. We couldn't do it now. Rather like it, though."

Here Mrs. Murchison came in and took Susan away to her room. When she came into the drawing room again just before dinner, Mr. Murchison was standing talking loudly to Dally Stair. Susan came up to her uncle and placed a timid little kiss upon his vast cheek, and received an affectionate squeeze from one of his thick hands. Mr. Stair, standing with his own white hands behind his back, watched the greeting with amusement.

"Kissing isn't quite in your uncle's line—he's not at his best at that sort of thing," he said, so loudly that Susan feared her uncle would hear. They were standing for a moment in the hall, while Mrs. Murchison and



a very fat man, who was dining with them, blocked the way. Susan looked up at Mr. Stair's ugly face, with the bright gray eyes and the lock of red hair on his brow, and gravely considered that it would not be much in his line, either. However, she caught one of his quick glances and changed her opinion.

There in the dark dining room down they sat at six o'clock to one of Mrs. Murchison's rich dinners. Susan and Mr. Stair were placed together on one side of the table. The fat man at the other side kept up a loud continuous conversation with his host. Susan contentedly noted the firelight twinkling on the brass grate, the golden pears, the graceful motions of Mr. Stair's hands, the very color of the wine in her uncle's glass. She had a power of sitting silent unobserved, because her face was so expressive that it seemed to speak for her. Mrs. Murchison looked at her, very well pleased with her appearance, for Juliet Clephane's efforts had not been entirely wasted, and the girl now possessed an occasional bit of clothing that was really becoming. That evening she wore something which suited her fresh young face very well. She also felt comfortable in Darnley Stair's society. He was unlike other people and did not make her feel herself hopelessly queer. After dinner, when she had to sit and try to make conversation which her aunt might approve, she had a harder task. Mr. Stair had gone—he lived in lodgings quite near at hand.

“He wastes a great deal of time in talking nonsense,” said Mrs. Murchison. “Don't pay any attention to what he says, my dear; he is a feather-headed thing.”



“I think he is kind and clever,” said Susan.

“Kind! Pooh! maybe; but certainly not clever. There is more hope of a fool than of him.”

“But everyone’s talents are not for business, aunt.”

“Well, to my mind,” said Mrs. Murchison, “a man that has talents makes them useful to him in his business—brewing, or baking, or anything else. But I’ll not deny,” she went on, more indulgently, “that he’s had a bad chance; and there’s something pleasing about him, after all.”

Mrs. Murchison cast no glamour over realities. She knew to a hair’s-breadth the value of money, men, and things, and her estimate of Dally Stair was not a high one; still, such as it was, she gave him his due. Her husband, on the contrary, was extremely fond of the young man, and made allowances for his rather unsatisfactory habits—sudden fits of work, and then spells of idleness, or rather of intense interest in some matter in no way connected with beer. Mr. Stair made himself wonderfully agreeable in the society of the little old town—at times. He was capable of flinging himself into the spirit of the hour until the most provincial party took on some of his infectious gayety. There was a tendency to the massive and solemn in the entertainments of St. Fortunes at that date. Each family in the small society had been long in the neighborhood, and each knew the other with an intimacy only possible to those whose interests were all bounded by the same small orbit.

“When I first came here,” said Dally to Susan, “I declare that they ‘counted my very bones,’ as the Psalm-



ist says. I used to pull the blankets over my head at night, and try to give myself some small feeling of being unobserved. It was awful. But you get to like it when you've become one of them. Then you can do it to the newcomers, you see; and it gives you such a sense of superiority. 'You're not citizens of the world here,' said a horrible man that old Mrs. Graham brought to one of your aunt's card parties once. 'We are citizens of *our own world*,' said Mrs. Murchison—and I admired her."

Mr. Stair had quickly grasped the fact that Susan always understood what he said, and he said many curious things to her in consequence. A community of feeling was established between them, and though the girl was not very fond of showing her work to anyone, she would, when he asked about her drawings, bring down the things she had been doing and let him see them. His quick admiration of all that was best in the work was unfailing, so that unconsciously she began to depend upon it. Mrs. Murchison left her very little time for her own pursuits. Life at St. Fortunes was totally different from her home life, but there were many things to occupy her. She wrote letters for her aunt, did some errands, went out every afternoon, read aloud in the evenings, and so on—a cheerful and healthy enough existence at her age. She saw a number of people, none of whom had the very slightest interest in anything that she cared deeply about, but life at home had accustomed Susan never to expect that. She was surrounded with comfort, almost with luxury, and Mrs. Murchison gave



her everything that she could think of as likely to make her happy. All the same, the one little thread of sympathy that there was between her and Darnley Stair on the point of the art that she loved made an intimacy between them quite apart from all the rest. The house seemed brighter when he was there. His ugliness was of such a different quality from that of her uncle and his friends; his follies and his enthusiasms were so unlike their faults or prejudices. His loves and sorrows he poured so freely into Susan's ear that in a few months' time they understood each other perfectly. Rather it was that Susan understood him, for all the deeper side of her nature was unknown to Dally.

At first she had missed the children very much, but her aunt often allowed her to have Emily for a few days at St. Fortunes, or drove Susan to Burrie Bush for the afternoon. Those were painful days: the peculiar difficulty of entering home for an hour made her rather dread them. Mrs. Crawford had always a string of complaints. Everything about the house seemed to want putting in order. The children clustered about her and tried to make her promise to stay; and then she had just to get into the carriage again and return to the greater comfort in her aunt's house. One frosty evening she came back to St. Fortunes after one of these brief visits to her home. She got out of the carriage at the station and walked down through the zigzag lanes, enjoying the clear wintry air, and noticing, with her usual keen delight, all the many things she was learning to love about the little town—the long line of sea; the



red-roofed houses; the church tower; the dear orchards, with branches matted together and queer, twisted stems; the high-walled roads; the silence; the echo of her own footsteps on the hard ground; the smoke that hung above the distant city like a red cloud. She went along slowly, feeling how glad she was to return there. Her afternoon at Burrie Bush had been particularly distressful. Mrs. Crawford had collected a perfect heap of grievances to relate to her; the children had all been ailing, and even Emmy was cross; the house looked more than usually forlorn, the food was specially nasty. She could not help feeling glad to get away from all that purposeless muddle and return to quiet and comfort at St. Fortunes, and—and she had done a new little bit of work she could show to Mr. Stair when he came in before dinner, and they were generally alone for a little while. Thinking thus, she turned a sharp corner and met him coming towards her. He gave her his hand in an absent way, looking all the time at the sky to the west.

“It’s adorable, isn’t it?” he said. “An ‘awful rose.’ Look at it over there. Do you see anything in it?”

“Yes, a great deal—a great deal,” Susan answered. He dropped his quick pace to suit hers, and they walked along together.

“I think that you have eyes like Blake,” said Dally at length. “Do you remember how, when he was asked if he saw the sun ‘a yellow disk, something like a guinea,’ answered, ‘Oh, no, no! I see an innumerable company of angels’?”



Susan smiled. "It was not an innumerable company of angels at all that I saw just now," she said.

"What? Who? Do tell me," said Dally, but Susan was silent; they walked on without speaking for a little. She was quite at ease with him now, and they were silent or spoke when they chose. "I've spent such an afternoon," began Dally at last, "shut up in that office with one of the usual fat men, and all the while I could see just the little slit of sky between the roofs opposite, getting more and more like a rose." He sighed at the remembrance of his toils, and Susan laughed.

A carriage had been coming slowly up the hill towards them as he spoke; as it came nearer Susan saw that it contained Lady Agnes Hamilton. They both stopped to speak to her, Mr. Stair somewhat reluctant, Susan's face sparkling with pleasure.

"I have been to see your aunt," said Lady Agnes to the girl; "I was very sorry not to see you too. You look very bright and well. Do you like living here?"

"Yes," said Susan, "in some ways I do." She looked up at Lady Agnes. "Oh, I wish that I had seen you!" she exclaimed, suddenly realizing there was something which she wanted very much to tell her. The older woman's mournful, impenetrable eyes seemed to meet hers, full of an unspoken sympathy.

"I hope to see you again. You will perhaps come some day along with Juliet, and stay with me," said Lady Agnes. She then turned to Mr. Stair. "I particularly wanted to speak to you, Darnley."

"Oh!" said Dally, looking blank.



Susan, observing his expression, bid Lady Agnes good-by, and walked on by herself, leaving them alone. Lady Agnes sat upright, resting one hand on the edge of the carriage; Dally stood beside her.

“I hope that Miss Crawford is happy with those people,” she said.

Dally shot an upward glance at her, and answered demurely, “She seems to be quite happy.”

“At present,” said his cousin. She went on, “I am sorry to hear that your father is so ill.”

Darnley’s face clouded. “Yes, he’s been very ill of late; things seem going from bad to worse at home.”

Lady Agnes looked at him as if she could read him through and through.

“You like your work here, I suppose?” she said.

“Do you suppose that I do?” said Darnley audaciously. “I just don’t. I think it quite as hateful as work can ever be. It’s not the *work*, you see,” he went on, sinking into his confidential tone, and leaning both arms on the door of the carriage, while Lady Agnes sat back and looked at him. “It’s the kind of it—the *food-someness* of it—the constant smell of malt and things; and all that labor going just to make fat men fatter and poor men more drunken.”

“There is that point of view.”

“Should you like to be a barmaid?” said Dally. He did not look up in her face as he spoke, but down at the rug.

“No,” said Lady Agnes quietly. “But if you are



looking at it from the moral standpoint, I understand you."

"What is the other?" said he.

"That your father is old, and ill, and poor; that you have five sisters and a mother, who will all one day be more or less dependent upon you," the low, steady voice went on.

"Oh, Heaven forbid!" said Dally, running his fingers through his red hair.

"It is better to look things in the face," said Lady Agnes. "But I came to speak to you about your sisters. I have not time just now, it is too late. Maurice told me to ask if you will come over to Linfield on Saturday till Monday; then we can discuss the matter."

Dally gave unwilling consent. Lady Agnes drove on, and he hurried after Susan. "I always feel as if I were transparent when that woman looks at me," he began; "like a clear gear-case, you know—everything working inside you visible."

"Don't you like her?" said Susan. Dally considered.

"My liking is tempered with awe. She makes me despise myself, and no one quite likes that. When she married my cousin she was in the undeveloped stage, I suppose, or else there's no accounting for it."

"Was she not happy?" Susan asked. She had a vague notion that there were such things as unhappy marriages in the world, but had had no personal observation of them.

"Happy!" Dally gave a short laugh. "She was about as happy as you would be if you were roasted at



a slow fire. Why, she wasn't five-and-twenty when my Uncle Maurice——” He stopped short, and walked on in silence, then broke out again, “Merciful Heavens! Why was such a bungle as marriage ever allowed? 'Pon my word, it's the worst thing in a bad world—except love—that's worse. . . . Take my word for it, Miss Crawford—I've been through it all—I know.” His face had turned almost green, and his lips twitched; he looked inexpressibly ugly, but Susan was touched by his emotion, yet inclined to laugh at the same time.

“Mr. Hamilton is just your age, isn't he?” she said, wishing a safe subject.

“He's two years younger—in spite of that nose. I hate him,” Dally went on, quickly going off on the new subject.

“Why?”

“Don't know—always did, and always will; he acts like sandpaper upon me. I stir up all the devil in him—there is a good deal, of rather a bad kind.”

“Oh, *no!*” said Susan indignantly, for though she remembered that her first impression had been one of dislike, she had too true an instinct for the meaning of a face to agree with Dally's remark. They came up to her uncle's door, and Susan stopped to bid Mr. Stair good-night. The church clock struck six—six slow, clear strokes, and Dally held her hand all the time, but Susan looked at him as unconscious as a child.



## CHAPTER XIII

**D**ALLY remained at Linfield for three days, and Susan found those days singularly dull, Sunday in especial very prolonged. It was Dally's custom to come in late on Sunday afternoon. Mrs. Murchison found the shades of the dining room more congenial on that day and generally sat there all the afternoon with a book on her knee; Mr. Murchison slumbered in his study. Susan was left by herself in the big drawing room, and when Mr. Stair came in he generally found her alone. He would then stand on the hearthrug and talk on, stumbling very often upon rather odd subjects, while Susan sat drawing by the window; or would come and sit very close to her, watching her work in an absorbed silence. Sometimes he went to church, and his ideas seemed more than usually freakish afterwards. That Sunday Susan had been twice to church alone, as her aunt was not very well. During the second service she looked up to find to her surprise that Mr. Stair had suddenly appeared and was sitting opposite to her. She had not expected to see him till Monday (this life is but a moment after all, but when we are young time is differently divided; three days exhaust one's patience then), and this was only Sunday evening. She smiled across at him, such a sweet greeting that Dally, who was what the Scotch call "quick at the up-



tak," looked down after meeting her glance, and gazed at the book board till the end of the sermon without once raising his eyes, lest the commoner faces about him might confuse the singleness of his pleasure.

He was very silent that evening, and did not come in so often as usual during the week. Susan supposed that he was working hard. But when he did come, there was a look of pain on his face that distressed her. Even Mrs. Murchison was sorry for him: "His poor old father's illness is worrying him," she said. Susan somehow did not feel this to be the explanation of it.

Winter came darkening slowly over the land; a long, severe winter it was. Susan had a room with two windows that looked out on the garden. She used to stand often looking at the bare trees, and the empty, frost-bound fields that stretched away behind, noticing a thousand delicate shades of color imperceptible at other seasons. When her aunt did not claim her time in some other way, she would walk by herself along the bare sea road that lay eastward from the town, when sometimes the raw, eager blue of the sea, and the laboring boats upon it, and even the chill salt wind would charm her. She looked so fresh and healthy "as to pass very well for pretty," thought Mr. Stair, meeting her one afternoon on the road, as she was coming home. Her slightly ruffled hair took off the somewhat prim look that she generally had; her cheeks wore a fine color, and her little figure took a graceful enough poise as she bent against the wind. Cold was unbecoming to himself; he verged on yellow in a northeast wind.



“A tolerable climate this, if we’d only just acknowledge it was Arctic,” he said, with a shiver, as he came up to her.

“I’m quite warm with walking,” said Susan, “and the sea is so curiously blue.”

“Yes, bitterly blue—I say”—he turned to walk beside her, as he generally did when they met—“does this sort of thing satisfy you, Miss Crawford? Are you not cold? Are you not—to put it plainly—dreadfully dull?—for I am. I’m sick of my work, and St. Fortunes, and the weather, and the people, and the whole of life just now in fact. You seem as if you made a meal off the color of the sea—as if the gulls amused you. Oh, hang it all, was there ever a man so unfortunate as I am?”

“Now,” said Susan, laughing, “it’s just because you have too little to do, because it’s Saturday afternoon, that you talk like this.”

“It isn’t—it isn’t!” said Dally; “it’s my broken heart!”

Susan thought that the pieces were not very small when she saw how much he enjoyed dinner that evening. His mood of misery had passed, and he laughed till he cried just because Mr. Murchison did not understand his jokes. He was going to London for a fortnight before Christmas, and Susan was going home at the end of December. Mrs. Crawford said that she could not get on without her any longer.

Susan hardly acknowledged to herself the blankness that she felt in the prospect. She tried to think of the pleasure it would give her to be with Emmy again, and



with the other children—she missed them constantly. But her mother had taught her to regard all the little household affairs as “duty,” and the work she loved as a mere indulgence, so that she still felt guilty if she gave up much time to it. Of course at home there were a hundred things to do; at St. Fortunes she had far more time, and no small worries. This, she persisted in thinking, was the reason why she wished to stay there.

She had got quite accustomed by this time to the society of the little town, and had made a place for herself in the regard of many of the people there. Mrs. Murchison would have liked a handsome niece to take about with her, who would have been generally admired, but she could not deny that there was something singular about Susan which made her very attractive, though it was hard to put into words. It was a presence very soft, and bright, so unassertive of self that it might be easily overlooked, yet no one ever had much conversation with the girl who was not glad to see her when they met again.

One night in December Susan went to one of their neighbor Miss Pringle's little parties. The brilliantly lighted rooms, the glittering holly on the table, and the whole informal entertainment amongst people all of whom were now familiar to her, had been pleasant enough. Even to move from a chintz-covered sofa and conversation on schools with a widow, to a straight-backed chair and conversation with an elderly maiden lady upon jam, proved in her contented state of mind quite sufficiently amusing. Hot tea from very thin cups,



black plum cake and almond biscuits, no one unamiable, no strangers, no excitement—many more ambitious forms of hospitality fail to give as much pleasure. Susan sat in a corner beside stately old Miss Pringle, examining some miniatures and feeling quite pleased with life, when she looked up and saw that Mr. Stair had come in very late. He stood on the hearthrug talking away at a great rate; she could hear fragments of it—nonsense altogether. Suddenly he met her eyes and gave a little nod of recognition; then in another minute his whole face changed, and he came and stood in silence behind her chair. Susan handed him the miniature she had been looking at without a word.

Miss Pringle was not an acutely observant person, but later in the evening she said to her sister-in-law, “It’s a great pity if that sweet girl goes and throws herself away upon Mr. Stair.”

“How can you say so?” replied the other lady. “He stood beside her for half an hour and never said a single word.”

Miss Pringle raised her black eyebrows. “Have you been wooed and married, Caroline, and don’t know that silence often means more than speech? Old maid as I am,” she added, giving a tolerably complacent glance at herself in the mirror, that reflected a still comely face and fine white hair, “I know better than that.”

And Miss Pringle was right, for as Susan stood at the hall door amongst the departing guests Mr. Stair, without a single word, took his place beside her. Susan, holding what he mentally called “a fearful white shawl”



about her head, looked at him, saying, "Are you coming home with me? Aunt Jane said she would send Wilson."

"I came instead," he answered; and when the other guests had walked off or driven away they stepped out into the dark night together. The clock sweetly struck eleven. "Yes," said Dally, "always reminding us that life is short; as if we didn't know that already. I think if I were not too busy to listen for it, that old clock would drive me mad. It's like a text always before one's eyes. Heigh-ho!" he sighed dismally. "Take care; there's a step there," he said, taking Susan's hand in his. He sighed again. "I'm the most miserable man alive." Susan laughed softly. The lane was pitch-dark between its high walls except for the twinkle of a lamp away at the far end. "Indeed, it's true. Oh, you can't imagine how horrible it was at the Hamiltons' the other day." Susan said nothing; and he went on, "Juliet was so beautiful. I shouldn't have done it; it was only knocking my head against a wall, but this time I couldn't help it. Oh, heavens! Why are the wrong people always in the wrong place? If I were Archie Hamilton now she'd marry me like a shot; I know she would."

"Indeed, you're quite wrong," said Susan. "Women are not like that."

"You know nothing about it," went on Mr. Stair, stumbling on a stone, and again taking Susan's hand as he spoke, though it was he that had stumbled, not she. "You're as different from a woman like that as soap is from cheese. No, I don't mean an ugly simile, but I



can't think of another—as oil is from vinegar. You don't understand them.”

“ I know she has a tender heart.”

“ Tender heart ! ” Dally echoed bitterly. “ Just like a peach—all pink plush outside, and hard as flint within.”

“ You are quite wrong,” said Susan, unconsciously speaking to him as if he were a child. “ She is not at all like that. Perhaps she does not like you.”

“ She thinks me a fool, and I dare say I am ; but if I were a duke she'd marry me all the same.”

“ I thought you said to me not long ago that you thought marriage one of the worst things in the world ? ”

“ Yes, I did ; so it is. And love is worse—the degrading agonies of it ! ” He gave a sort of gasp, between a sigh and a snort, and as they passed under the dimly burning lamp at the corner of the wall Susan saw his piteous face.

They stood for a moment at the door in the darkness, with the night wind blowing up from the sea, that plashed away against the moldering wall. The red windows, three in a row, were the only lights visible.

“ I think,” said Susan, “ we ought not to feel like that, surely.” She spoke in a gentle, detached tone, as if the subject could have no connection with herself. “ None of the great emotions of life can be degrading, if they're taken in the right way.”

“ Mine are, all of 'em—*very*,” said Darnley. Wilson opened the door, and the light streamed out. “ You're like a grave little old Italian Madonna,” he



exclaimed, as Susan turned on the lighted step to bid him good-night. "And, by Jove! without her cap Wilson would make a very tolerable Elizabeth. Hardly enough of the hag about her, though."

The door shut abruptly. "Hag, indeed!" Susan heard Wilson mutter behind her. She had no opinion of Mr. Stair.



## CHAPTER XIV

**D**ALLY was away for a fortnight before Christmas. Susan was very busy then, helping her aunt in various ways, and had little time for reflection. Still she hoped that he would return before she had to go home. He came back two days before she went. Susan had been sitting by herself that afternoon looking out on the black sea, that was visible above the line of snow-covered roofs. A gale had been blowing for some days, and the sea still heaved like an angry thing; boats with shreds of sail were scudding before the wind. The branches of the elm tree by the door were lifted (she thought) like pitiful hands to heaven. A winter sea, a terrible wind, a heavy sky, a cold and mourning land, it seemed. Suddenly she heard Mr. Stair's voice in the hall, and felt herself getting quite red with pleasure when he came in.

"You're still here," he said, coming up to shake hands with her. "Life is endurable, then, after all. I was afraid that you had gone home."

"I am going next Monday."

"For good?" he asked blankly.

"Yes—for the present, at least. Mother wants me."

"So do I," said Darnley, as if it were quite a natural remark. He noticed Susan's heightened color all the same.



She lay awake for a long time that night, hearing the town clock strike the hours, chiming through the noise of the wind and the distant growling of the still angry sea. At last she lighted her candle and tried to read a book, but one thought kept always recurring, as if with a little tug at her heart—the certainty that a crisis of some sort was creeping nearer in her life. She could not follow what she read. After a long time her eyes closed with sheer weariness, and she fell asleep. When she awoke the storm had subsided, and the morning was very bright.

Although the sea's voice was still rough, and spray fell in showers upon the streets, as waves broke against the walls, the sun shone out strongly, the air was brisk and refreshing.

Susan went out early. She thought the little town that morning seemed very picturesque and full of cheery life. The street was blocked by the great carts from the brewery; a smell of malt mingled with the brine of the spray that drenched the sea wall; the huge horses champed and scrambled up the hill; a boat with stripped masts rocked upon the waves close to shore. Susan watched the masts go up and down, thinking how cold the men must be that worked the ropes. Half-way down the street she found herself accosted by Mr. Stair. He wore a new coat, and his face was red with cold. Susan suddenly realized how dull the town had been without him, and she beamed with pleasure as they met.

“Let us go up the Red Lane, then we can hear our-



selves speak. Oh, confound it! There's not room to move here," he said.

He had to squeeze his slight person against the wall to let a cart pass as he spoke. They turned up one of the grotesque by-lanes that led off the main street, and then they both began to laugh, for as they entered the lane they saw at one corner a small, poorly clad boy, quite alone, and standing on his head. He turned a somersault as they approached, snatched up his basket, and scudded past them on his bare, red feet.

"There's *joie de vivre* for you," said Dally; "I feel just like that to-day. I can understand it perfectly, in this icy weather, all alone in a high-walled lane, just standing on one's head with pleasure. At my age it mightn't do."

"What did you do in London?" Susan inquired.

Dally walked her nearly into the ditch in his excitement. His gray eyes glittered. His shapely figure looked very well in the new coat.

"Oh, I've had such a wallow!" he began. "At least, you know, I mean I've managed to enjoy myself so much. I've heard music fit to break your heart, and gone to the play, and—and stood on my head, in fact, and it's blown away my cobwebs; but I'm so glad you're here when I've come back."

They walked on for a little way. A cart passed the opening of the lane, the driver singing lustily.

"Susan," said Dally suddenly, and Susan started, stopped, raised her eyes to his for a moment, and then backed against the wall, and stood stock-still with her



hands in her muff, her eyes on the ground, and her heart beating very fast. "It will be awful here without you," Dally went on. "The week you were away before was like a year. You're not going away again? Don't be frightened, there's a good girl: I'm not going to eat you. You see, Miss Crawford—Susan—my dear—the plain fact is that I have spoken to your uncle, who with his usual tact (you can fancy the way it was done, can't you?) said plainly that, if you'd marry me, he'd take me into partnership. There's my fortune made, you see. Do it for my sake—do, Susan, do. I'd be so happy—I'd be such a much better man if you'd do it. I love you so," he ended lamely, in a way that touched Susan's heart.

"But I don't," she began.

Mr. Stair interrupted her eagerly, "Now I know what you're going to say—you're not in love with me. Of course you aren't. Why should you be? I tell you it's not at all nice. I've been there—I know all about it, and it's just horrible, and it wears off too—like anything!" He sighed largely. "See, Susan, how well we get on. A woman ought to be better than her husband. Some day we'll have more money, and then we'll travel together and see all the fun in the world. I'll take you to Rome, and you can live there for a year, if you like, and grub in the galleries." He paused breathless, then went on again before Susan had time to speak, "But just one thing—before you answer me I want to tell you something about myself—it was something that happened years ago, when I first went to college."



Susan had walked on. She looked up at him: her face was pale and her lips trembled.

“Was it about a woman?” she asked, a sudden tide of crimson flooding her whole face up to the roots of her hair.

Dally looked at her wonderingly, forgetting for a moment the thread of his discourse. “Yes, of course; what else would it be?”

“Then,” said Susan, turning to look at him, “I’d rather not hear it, please—it will make no difference—at least I cannot explain to you what I’d feel about it, but I do not wish to hear it.”

“’Twas more folly, damned (I’m sorry!) boyish folly, than wrong. I got off easy, too, in the end, thank Heaven!” Dally mixed his words, took off his hat, and rubbed his hair on end in his agitation. They had reached the door by this time.

“Thank you,” said Susan, “thank you very much.”

“When will you answer me?” he asked.

“I’m going home to-morrow.”

“Will you tell me then?”

“No,” said Susan, “I can’t.”

“I shall come and see you at home.”

Susan was silent.

“When may I come? Next week?”

“Next week is Christmas. Come the week after that.”

“Very well, I will come then. Shake hands, won’t you?”

Susan hurried into the house, panting, afraid that anyone should see her face.



## CHAPTER XV

SUSAN went home two days before Christmas. The season was not kept as a festival at Mrs. Crawford's, but the children ate many oranges, and got a few cheap little presents. They were all very happy because Susan had come back again. Emily had grown into a tall girl, considerably older in manner, even in the few months of her sister's absence. She had, by nature, more of the household faculties than Susan, and helped her mother a good deal, looking after the two little ones with a funny air of a grown-up woman, part of her late acquirements.

The country at that season was indescribably bleak; the fallow fields covered with patches of half-melted snow. Susan felt the sadness of it weigh upon her heart—there was no light or color anywhere. Emmy found some subtle difference in her sister.

“You are thinking about something else, Sue,” she said suddenly, after she had given Susan a long description of the tiny events that had taken place during the winter.

Susan started and blushed, and shook herself. “Yes, Emmy, I was. It was very rude of me; please tell me again what you were saying.”

Emmy prattled on, unconscious that between her and her listener was an unseen presence—Mr. Stair, with his



ugly face and his quick eyes. Susan could not forget him as she had seen him last.

On Christmas Eve, after the house was quiet and the children all in bed, Susan went by herself and stood at the open door.

There the pure wind, blowing across miles of open country, stirred the orchard branches. She heard no sound, she saw no lights; all was vast, and dark, and lonely. Her imagination saw the dreary village street, with its miry roadway and little shuttered houses "asleep or dead," in the midst of this desolate country, without even a church to testify its part in the cheerful festival that the rest of the world was keeping then. For a minute she wondered to herself, as youth will, if she would live her whole life out in this dark and curious isolation, for she had tasted the pleasures of the sun. Everything in her nature ran to meet what was lovely, dignified, or touched with romance; when she found nothing without, she turned and found it within. But of late it had seemed as if something had been broken—the accord with nature, the easy access to a bright world of thought. Instead came only excited, weariful questionings about what reply she was going to give to Dally Stair. "I shall tell him to go away," she thought, "and be done with it all, and think no more about it." Then, again, she reflected on what it would be to "go on living always at home," as she expressed it, for she knew she could not go back to St. Fortunes if he were there. Yet not to go back, never to see him, to lose that bright companionship that had made the winter so pleasant. How



could she bear to do that? And he had said that he would come in three days. She wondered if she should speak to her mother. Then the absurdity of the thought made her smile.

“Mother, Mr. Stair is coming here on Wednesday, he said,” she remarked to Mrs. Crawford, as they sat alone together in the evening.

“Dear me, I saw him at your aunt’s in winter. He is very ugly,” said Mrs. Crawford, adding, “but he may be clever enough, for all that. Your uncle likes him.”

“Yes, he *is* very ugly,” said Susan, laughing and suddenly defending him in her heart.

Mrs. Crawford seemed unconsciously stirred to one of her vague reminiscences. “I remember, when I was young, a very ugly man who used to come about our house a great deal. He had a hare lip, but he played on the flute, and admired your Aunt Jane.”

Susan wondered if her mother drew any conclusions from what she had said. She could not nerve herself to say any more. Mr. Stair at any rate neither played the flute nor had a hare lip.



## CHAPTER XVI

**T**HERE are some states of mind in which those philosophers appear to be in the right who declare that we have no more power to choose which of two courses we shall follow, than a clock has power to choose if it will strike six or eight when its hands have crept to the appointed hour.

We may spend the whole night in an agony of indecision, and by morning find that we are no nearer a conclusion, although we know that before the sun has set again, act we must, in one way or another.

For two days Susan pondered the matter: one hour she could not, the next she would not. She turned from the thought of marriage with terror; knowing nothing about it, and having only a dim, romantic idea of what love meant.

On Wednesday morning she at last determined that she must speak to her mother. Mrs. Crawford was in her own room, and Susan sat down wondering how best to open the subject.

“Mother,” she began suddenly, “Mr. Stair has asked me to marry him.”

Mrs. Crawford, standing in front of the glass, was in the act of pinning on her cap. She was not easily surprised, but now she turned as quickly as she could turn, and said solemnly:



“Susan, you are a fortunate girl.” She held the cap in her hand as she spoke. Her head had the hair on it brushed as flat and smooth as possible; she was getting rather bald. “A most fortunate girl,” she repeated. Susan sat silent.

“What,” said Mrs. Crawford, laying down her cap and taking Susan by the hand, “is it possible, Susan, that you don’t know your own mind—that you could ever think—that you don’t realize what a good thing it would be for you? Why, it was only the last day she was here that Jane told me that her husband fully intended to make Mr. Stair his partner! Your uncle is very fond of the young man. He belongs to a well-known family, though they are poor. I must say I thought him remarkably pleasant the two or three times that I have seen him.” She spoke with some earnestness, and as near an approach to excitement as her torpid manner would allow.

“I don’t think I want to do it, mother,” said Susan.

“I hope,” said Mrs. Crawford, “that you are not thinking any nonsense about being in love, Susan. That is quite a mistake.”

Still Susan was silent.

“Don’t you like him?”

“Yes, mother, very much.”

“Dear me!” said Mrs. Crawford cheerfully, “what more do you want? I quite remember, when I was a girl, fancying myself in love several times. Indeed, I think ” (she said this with a smile) “I fancied myself in love



with two or three people before I met your father; but one soon forgets all that nonsense."

"I don't know anything about it," said Susan.

"Of course," said Mrs. Crawford, "I should never urge you, as some people would do, to marry Mr. Stair merely because he will be wealthy. You see so few young men. When I was a girl they were always asking me. Your father was the fourth—no, the fifth, I think; but then we lived in a garrison town, not in a place like this."

"And you were so pretty, weren't you, mother?" said Susan wearily. She began to feel as if she were choking in a fog.

"I was a good deal admired, I suppose," said Mrs. Crawford, with an expression of watery satisfaction at the remembrance. "But all girls fancy themselves in love. It's all nonsense," she concluded, with a comfortable return to the circle of her first argument.

Susan remembered Dally's more fervid warnings, but was not convinced by either of them. Somewhere in her own heart she felt conscious of a capacity for a feeling that as yet she knew nothing of.

All day she tried to busy herself about the house, but it was very difficult, and her heart leapt suddenly at the sound of Dally Stair's voice in the hall. She ran up to her own room like a frightened child. Emily was standing by the window. Her pinafore and her long hair gave Susan a sudden sense of hopelessness. A child like that could give her no assistance.

"Someone came in just now, Sue," cried Emmy. "Your cheeks are all red. Who is it? May I go down?"



Oh, please, I like Mr. Stair so *very* much." And she ran downstairs, to come up again in a few minutes breathless. "Oh, Susan, it's something dreadfully important! He asked to speak alone with mother; she sent me away!"

As the child was speaking, Mrs. Crawford came into the room. "Go away, Emily," she said; "I wish to speak to Susan."

This was indeed an event. Emily, awestruck, withdrew to linger on the landing.

"Susan," said Mrs. Crawford, consciously important, "Mr. Stair has spoken to me in a very suitable manner." Susan quickly reflected that "suitable" was not a word she could ever fancy applicable to any manner of Mr. Stair's. "I wish you to go down and see him yourself."

"Very well," said Susan. Her face was set and grave, but she had not entered the drawing room before she realized that Dally was much less terrifying to her than any discussion of the subject with her mother would have been.

"Well, well, well?" said he quickly, coming across the room to meet her.

"Oh, please," said Susan, taking the soft, warm hand, "I don't know what to say to you!" She looked up at him again like a frightened child, then a smile came into her arch blue eyes. It seemed so easy to make him happy.

"I—think—it's all right," she said. Dally put his arm about her, his face quivering with feeling, and did just the one thing that Susan would have liked best, for



he lifted her hands and laid them softly against his face, and said nothing. "I was afraid you were going to kiss me," said Susan, recovering her usual ease with him, and looking up at him very artlessly.

"Well, of course, a man can make but one reply to that," said Dally. But Susan drew back with such an expression of real alarm that he began to laugh.

She hardly knew after that what he went on to say, or what she said, and for once it was a relief to her when her mother came into the room. The situation seemed to be cleared up and simplified by Dally saying joyously:

"You must wish us happiness, Mrs. Crawford." Susan felt that anything that would come as an interruption or rescue her from that moment of helpless confusion of feeling was a relief; even though it fastened her in a tighter chain, it gave her time to breathe for an instant. Mrs. Crawford pressed Dally's hand, and proceeded to fold Susan in her arms, feeling this was exactly what she ought to do. She was vaguely surprised by the warmth with which the girl clung to her in response.

"You do love me a little then?" said Dally, as he stood with Susan by the door, before saying good-by.

"I hope so—I *like* you so very, very much," she answered. Dally stooped and kissed her, before he went away. Susan stood by the door in the twilight, after he had ridden off, and rubbed her face with her hand, but could not forget the strange feeling of the touch of his shaven cheek against her own, so different from anything



she had felt before. Nothing will so soon teach even the most ignorant the nature of love as being called on to pretend that they possess it. It is like being suddenly expected to act a scene when you have not learnt your part.



## CHAPTER XVII

SUSAN'S first waking thought the next morning was that the sun shone brightly and had thrown a beautiful shadow on the blind. A branch of the creeping plant that spread all over the front of the house had grown nearly across the window, and now the shadow of it, sharp and beautiful, fell upon the white blind, and Susan lifted her head from the pillow with a quick recognition of its beauty; the next minute she remembered that she had wakened to a new world, a bad world, a prison, it seemed.

“Well, Susan,” said her mother after breakfast, “you had better see to the mending to-day, and *try* to tidy the storeroom. You will soon be having a house of your own, I suppose, so you should attend to all those things.” Susan did not answer. She stooped as if to pick something up from the floor, and left the room as quickly as she could.

The children were delighted with the fine day. After the dark wintry weather, it was as if spring were coming before long. The patches of snow in the fields melted in the sun. The sparrows twittered in the bushes by the door.

“We are going for a long walk, children. Come, Emmy,” called Susan, going into the garden. The rab-



bits were instantly replaced in their hutches, and Emily walked with Susan, whilst the little ones ran in front. Emily wondered what made her sister so silent. She glanced up at her from under the torn rim of her old straw hat, and Susan read an unintelligent sympathy in the soft black eyes. How she wished that Emily had been a few years older!

“May we go to the Prince and Princess, please?” said Emmy, and Susan consented.

It was a favorite walk at all seasons; even on a winter day there was “nothing dismal about it,” the children said.

They went across several fields, past the thorn tree where they had gone with Colonel Hamilton to hear the lark sing, down a grassy dell, between two low ridges of land, till they came to a flat open space where a little stream made a pretty curve and return, leaving a green elbow almost surrounded with water. Where the stream was narrowest two low alder trees stood, one on each side of the bank. Their bushy heads, now bare and purple, mingled above the stream; each trunk leaned slightly to the other. The grass at their feet was short and full of moss.

Often in summer Susan sat here with the children for hours, plaiting rattles of rushes, watching the minnows in the burn. The children begged to be allowed to play at the edge for a little now; so Susan sat down on a stone, and spread out her skirt that Emily might sit at her side. The clear air was chill, and smelt of moss and water. The burn bubbled and gurgled, swollen with the



melting snows. Emmy leant her head against Susan's knee.

"Tell me again, just once, about the Prince and Princess," she pleaded.

Susan had made a tale for her of the usual fairy sort; of an unhappy Princess and a lonely Prince, changed by an Enchanter into two trees that grew forever leaning towards each other on opposite sides of the stream. She looked up at them now; their purple branches made a regal coloring against the faint blue of the winter sky. They *did* lean towards each other; their branches mingled overhead; they seemed to *want* to meet, she thought, as a sudden consciousness of her own feelings when Dally kissed her rushed into her mind. Her whole thoughts burned. What, what was this? She who knew nothing of love, to be suddenly spoken to by a tree? No, she didn't understand a word of it; she would not, she could not. Emmy's prattle, and the bubbling burn at her feet, grew like the noises in a dream. She sat up suddenly, indignant with herself and the unknown force that seemed to have enveloped her. The gates to her beautiful inner world were shut. Where was she? Awake, in a dreary place that she knew nothing about.

"Tell me again about the Prince and Princess," Emily went on, with a child's relentlessness, "and the dark wood, and the jeweled sword he wore that lighted them through."

"No, no, Emmy; I'm tired—I can't talk," said Susan, with an irritation unlike herself. The little girl was silent. A rook flew, slowly cawing, above them.



“ Could that be a rook from Linfield, Sue? Perhaps it’s the black knight—Jack Hamilton said there was one. Can it be, please? ”

“ Oh, don’t! ” called Susan, and ended by bursting into tears. “ I’m cross and tired to-day, dearest, ” she said. Emmy, awed, got up and walked beside her in silence. Susan could not look at those trees for another moment. She did not know the saying that “ Nature never yet betrayed, ” but she could have contradicted it then, if she had. Not “ betrayed ” perhaps, but she is implacable to those who have a divided heart. She has nothing to say to them. Susan felt herself shut out. Was she acting an untruth? She might perhaps love him in time. Did she love him? Oh, it would never do! How should she ever get out of this horrible entanglement—this invisible snare? Would Dally understand if she told him? Did she know her own mind? And so on—round and round, like a squirrel in a cage. Was it credible that she herself had done it? Surely she must waken soon, and find it all a dream? And marriage? The word choked her; she rubbed her cheek, and shrank from the very remembrance of his kiss, like a shying horse that sees some terror ahead. Only yesterday how free and happy she had been.

“ Is Mr. Stair a brave man, Sue? ” asked Emmy suddenly.

“ Oh, really, Emmy, I don’t know! I suppose so. All men are. ”

“ No, indeed; I’m sure they’re not. Lady Agnes told me a brave man was only afraid of himself. ” Susan



made no answer. Emmy, encouraged, went on: "And, Susan, when Mr. Stair came in the other day mother had let me turn out her mending basket, and there were stockings on *all* the chairs, so that he couldn't get one to sit down on, and he said it didn't matter, and he laughed."

That Susan could well believe, but she felt a sympathy with Darnley's amusement—doubtless his disgust. She was a traitor and a coward, and everything about her was all wrong, so surely a house like theirs was the fitting accompaniment for all that.

"I mean to be very tidy when *I* am grown up—indeed, almost immediately," Emmy went on. "Lady Agnes said an untidy woman was like a soiled book; but Miss Clephane puts pins in things often, all the same. I saw her pin her lace one day, and she said, 'Oh, it 'll do,' to Parker. When I am married, Susan, I mean to wear nothing but the richest black silk, and to be very calm." They entered the house, and Emmy flung her torn hat on the hall table and rushed upstairs, while Mrs. Crawford came out to complain that a hen had got into the dining room, and "*wouldn't go out.*"

"I'll put it out, mother," said Susan wearily. It all seemed as horrid to her as a distasteful joke. Did no one feel anything except herself? she wondered.

That evening Susan tried to occupy herself in vain. Would Dally soon come again? She hoped not, and yet could not help remembering how his manner had pleased her. What a refreshment his company would be! It was quite a relief when Mrs. Murchison unexpectedly arrived next morning. She came out of her little carriage well



dressed, with a cheerful, resolute manner that Susan found exceedingly soothing. Mrs. Crawford had written to her about Susan and Dally. Whatever her opinion was she said very little, only telling the girl that her uncle was very much pleased, and that he was going to make Mr. Stair his partner.

“And now you must just let Susan come back with me, Maria, for how in the world can she get anything ready up here?” she said, glancing at Susan, and noticing that she did not look so well as when she left St. Fortunes.

Mrs. Crawford protested, but after all she had to admit that Burrie Bush was not quite the locality in which to get a wedding outfit, and as Mrs. Murchison proposed to provide most of the things herself, she gave her consent to Susan’s going back with her.

“Shall I see him again?” was Susan’s only thought, as she returned to St. Fortunes with her aunt.



## CHAPTER XVIII

SHE did not, however, see Dally again for some weeks. He had to go away on business, during which time he sent her constant and very lover-like letters—a branch of art in which he rather excelled. There was a *naïveté* about his style and his expressions. Susan could never remain untouched by excellence in anything, and these epistles of Dally's, which to a coarser intelligence would only have given cause for laughter, were an intense pleasure to her. The sense of satisfaction they gave her set her heart at rest for the time being. She read and reread them, and persuaded herself that she was foolish to think she did not love him. Mrs. Murchison was not very well pleased about the marriage, but her husband was delighted. He said that there was no one he would have liked so much to take into the business as Mr. Stair. “And as for that old name of yours, Dally,” he said, with a chuckle, “it may be *infra dig.* to have it on bottles and casks, but it's not for nothing.”

So it was all arranged. The marriage was to take place early in April; Dally and Susan were to return to St. Fortunes and occupy the Murchisons' house for a while, when the old people went abroad for some months. Susan received rather a dry letter from Dally's mother, who regretted that, as the state of her husband's health made it impossible for her to leave home even for a day,



she would not be able to attend the wedding, but two of her daughters hoped to be there. In the meantime they would much like to meet Susan, if she could go into Edinburgh and see them there. Dally's married sister, Mrs. Bracebridge, also wrote a kind enough, prim letter, asking Susan to come and stay with them for a little, and make acquaintance with her sisters.

"Take my advice, Susan, and don't go," said Mrs. Murchison. "Carrie and Louisa Stair are well enough. Poor things! they've a hard time of it. I've often had them here to lunch—red-haired, thin, and prouder than they're poor. People like that will be fond of you when you're their own, but keep out of their way till then."

"I'm sure I don't want to go, but I do not want to be rude," said Susan, who was anxious only to do right. But Dally, on his return, declared that she must go into town, at least for the day, to see his people.

"They can't ask you to Striven, when my poor father is so ill," he said, "but Minna would never forgive you if you didn't go to pay your respects to her. You've no idea how dull Minna is! But so sensible. She just 'took' Bracebridge at once, though he's a face like a potato, and a mother like a feather-bed, and the strongest religious principles—and his grandfather kept a shop," said Mr. Stair (adding the true reason for his wonder, as Susan knew). "There's not one woman in twenty would have done it; they'd have been encouraged by his proposal to think that if they waited they'd get another, but Minna knew better—though she's not so ugly as the



others." He paused, adding reflectively, "If I were a woman I'd *far* rather be beautiful than good."

"Oh, Darnley," said Susan, "think what you're saying!"

"I do; I'm sure I would, and what's more, I believe almost every woman you mention would say the same. My sisters would, if their timid imaginations could extend so far."

"I am not at all beautiful," said Susan.

"Bread's not strawberries," retorted Dally, with one of his quick glances, "but it's the staff of life."

So they went into town together, and a very miserable day it was to Susan—a day of coarse east wind and violent showers of cutting rain. Her hair was all disheveled by the wind, her eyes smarted, and her hands trembled with agitation as they came up to Mrs. Bracebridge's door.

"Please, Dally, don't stay long!" she whispered as they crossed the hall.

They were shown into a room where three women all rose to meet them. One was young, comely, and richly dressed—only reddish in coloring; the other two older, very red and yellow, and very shabby in their clothing.

"They do wear such awful clothes, poor things!" said Dally to Susan afterwards. "I don't admire yours always, dearest; but, 'pon my word, they looked just as if they had trimmed their jackets with dead kittens."

Susan greeted them timidly. Mrs. Bracebridge gave her a seat facing the light, and began to talk to her in little stupid sentences, her quick eyes meanwhile noticing



every detail of Susan's appearance. Susan was very much embarrassed. She looked to Dally for assistance, but he was sitting sideways on a high chair, leaning his chin on the back of it, and gazing absently at the fire, paying not the slightest heed to anything that his sister said. The others sat stiffly, putting in an occasional remark in low, hesitating voices. Susan felt she liked both of them better than Mrs. Bracebridge.

Someone else came in, so Susan was released for a little. Dally pulled her sleeve. "See, Susan; look here," he said, and she turned round.

On the floor beside the window there was a low tub, or basket, of considerable size, entirely filled with moss and primroses. The spring at St. Fortunes had been late; Susan had seen very few spring flowers as yet. The suddenness, the richness of it, the unexpected call to her heart in the midst of alien surroundings, made her gasp with pleasure. She clasped both her little hands before her, almost in an attitude of adoration, and her whole face glowed with delight.

"Oh, Dally," she said, "what a gift of spring!"

"Aren't they sweet?" said Mrs. Bracebridge, who had come up behind him.

"It brings back the morning of the world," said Susan, raising her eyes, brimming with delight.

"H'm, yes," said Minna, turning slightly away.

"Minna wasn't there, you know," said Dally, grinning. "She can't remember like you."

"You are such a goose, Darnley," said Minna.

She then gave them tea, and three children of the



usual ages appeared, with nicely brushed hair and round, inexpressive faces. They all, somehow, very soon, found their way to Susan's chair. She felt happier as she talked on to their mother with her arms about the whole three.

"They are darlings," she said to Dally, when she and he were walking away from the house.

"Not at all, they are as dull as they can be; still, I'm surprised they're not worse," he went on, turning up the collar of his coat with a shiver, as they faced the icy wind. "I'd have thought that Minna would have had dolls, not children. Eh! it's an awful thing to be married. If it weren't just the *sweetness* of you, Susan, nothing would ever induce me to do it."

He looked very nice as he said this, laughing, and Susan felt her misgivings laid for the time. She breathed freely now that the ordeal of meeting Dally's sisters was over. The darkness was gathering about the little town as they drove home. Susan, chill and tired, got out at the door and gave Dally her hand.

"I hope I am doing right," she said.

"Pooh! Go in and have dinner, and don't talk nonsense," said Dally.



## CHAPTER XIX

**T**IME seemed to fly to Susan just then, and every morning she awoke to realize that the wedding day was nearer. At last it came to be only a fortnight, then a week.

She had allowed her aunt to choose most of her things, content only if Dally did not call them ugly, which he very often did, if she asked his opinion.

She got a few wedding gifts. Dally bought a necklace for her. It was very extravagant, of course, and Susan knew that he should not have done it, but it was a thing of intrinsic beauty, and he offered it in a way that was delightful.

Mrs. Crawford was pleased by the marriage, in so far as she was capable of pleasure. Before the day fixed for the wedding she made a few renovations in the house. A gardener was hired to tidy up the garden and mow the neglected grass. Little tracks showed across it much the same as ever in spite of this, and the spot where the rabbit hutches stood (they were removed for the time) had not the best effect from the drawing-room window. Mrs. Crawford had got an old silk dress made up by a local dressmaker, with a great deal of crape upon it, also a new cap with long streamers. She felt this wedding was a great occasion, in some way connected with the



funeral of her husband, and was stirred by the feeling to talk a good deal about that melancholy event.

“It will be the same horses, Susan,” she said sadly.

“What, mother? When?”

“Mrs. Reid has no other pair,” continued Mrs. Crawford. “One of them is quite gray now. I remember it was dappled even then.”

“Oh, mother, I think Dally will provide a carriage, if we have to drive to the station.”

Two Crawford relatives were coming from Ireland, and Susan had an instinctive feeling that they would not add to the harmony of the household. She remembered their having come to visit at Burrie Bush some years ago, and how with airs of strenuous elegance and great self-repression they had spent three days. That was during Captain Crawford’s lifetime, and Susan had a pathetic memory of how, ill though he was, her father had brushed himself up, and tried to be like his old self during their stay; also that one lady had said to the other, not supposing the children understood, “Would Monday do?” to which the other replied, “No, I think it *must* be Tuesday,” and at an early hour on Tuesday morning they had escaped. Now, pleased by the Stair alliance, they had of their own accord proposed to come to the marriage. Mrs. Crawford came in with the letter to the schoolroom, where Susan was writing notes. She had been knitting what was supposed to be a white sock, and had left the ball of wool in the other room, but trailed the thread along with her.

“Susan,” she said, “your grandaunt Crawford and



Mrs. O'Brien want to come to the wedding. Do you think, for once, they would mind putting up in the nursery, as we haven't a room?"

"I don't think that would do, mother. Ask Aunt Jane to take them and drive them up in the morning."

"Jane could never abide them," said Mrs. Crawford; "they were not quite polite to Mr. Murchison, and the grandmother was French, you know."

"Ask Miss Mitford then; she offered to take anyone."

"Well, we might do that," said her mother doubtfully, "but you see she is so strongly Protestant."

"But they aren't Roman Catholics, mother, are they?"

"No," said Mrs. Crawford, discovering that she had dropped her ball of wool and languidly pulling up yards of thread, "they are not, but everything Irish is apt to be like that."

"I will go this afternoon and ask Miss Mitford to take them," said Susan. Miss Mitford was an old friend of her mother's, who lived some three miles away in the direction of St. Fortunes.

"Oh, Susan, it's too far!"

"I should like the walk, mother; I am tired of being so much in the house," said the girl. She did look pale and worried. Mrs. Crawford was incapable of any arrangements; Mrs. Murchison, it is true, gave a good deal of assistance, was going to send over quantities of flowers and nearly all the food that would be required, as well as putting up Dally's sisters and Mrs. Bracebridge, but she was not on the spot, and Susan had no capacity for



such preparations. Colonel Hamilton and Juliet had written to her very kindly, saying that they two and Archie Hamilton would all come to the wedding. They would go to the inn for the night, Juliet said. Archie was staying at a house in the neighborhood (so Dally told Susan) "and came to see me in the office with his confounded airs."

"I did not quite like him when I saw him at home," said Susan, "but I do not think he has airs."

"He has, though! Airs of a subtle kind that tease me. My hair may be red, and I *am* a brewer, but he's a beast."

"Oh, Darnley, that's just about the last thing anyone could call him, I'm sure."

"Well, a very, very superior beast, and if you can't fancy what *that* is you've got no imagination," said Mr. Stair.

Susan mentally placed Archie along with the Irish relatives as people whom she would rather not have had at her wedding, but after all it was kind of Dally's people to be so good to her, and she was more or less indifferent to all the outside world, at that time feeling horribly isolated from everyone. She wished that Juliet had been coming sooner—perhaps she would have understood some things without explanation.

That afternoon Susan came down prepared for her walk to Miss Mitford's, with a sensation again of walking in a dream.

The wedding-cake, covered in a shroud-like sheet, was on the schoolroom table, and the rich faint smell of it



made Susan feel sick. Pots of greenhouse plants filled the lobby; Mrs. Murchison had brought them up the day before, and their scent too made the air heavy.

How time had moved on! The world would roll round, nothing could stop it for a moment. She felt as if she were being resistlessly borne onwards by some great wheel that she could not arrest. On Thursday—on Thursday, she kept saying to herself.

Emmy ran up to her with a note from Dally which had just come, and stood by on tiptoe to watch Susan read it.

Emmy's presence was the brightest thing about the house just then; she doted on Dally, and was wild with delight and excitement, varied by occasional weeps at the thought of Susan changing her name, for she rightly judged that no change would take place in Susan's love for them. She danced about the house with her long black pigtail hanging over her shoulder, her pale face lit with excitement, and glorying in the thought of being allowed to wear a *longish* skirt of white muslin at the marriage.

"Is there anything wrong, Sue?" she asked, watching Susan's face.

"No, darling—no, Emmy; only the friend whom Dally had asked to be his best man is ill, and can't come."

"Won't there be *any* then?" said Emmy dolefully. "I'm sure a best *boy* would do quite well; and Alec looks so big in his new suit."

"Dally has asked Mr. Hamilton if he will do it," said Susan.



“ Oh,” said Emmy, “ don’t you think that’s nice? ”

“ I don’t know him well,” said Susan.

“ I liked him ever so much, Sue—he looks so angelically fine and severe. I’m the only bridesmaid, so he’ll *have* to speak to me, and my skirt comes quite to the ankles, doesn’t it? ”

Refusing Emmy’s company, Susan set out to walk to Miss Mitford’s house, which was nearly three miles away. She was glad to escape from the bustle at home into the wide silence of the empty fields.

“ It will be all right when once I am married,” she kept saying to herself. “ After all, how could I just live on at home? I do love him—I must.”

It was a dull, cloudy afternoon as she went on slowly across the fields. The sky was dark and the roads heavy from recent rain. After walking about two miles, Susan stood still and looked down. She had reached the brow of a low hill. There the land sloped gradually and stretched away to the distant sea, that was partly veiled in fog. Behind a clump of elm trees in the distance rose the chimneys of Rexhill, the house where Archie Hamilton was staying. Susan remembered Dally’s note again with a twinge of dismay that she could hardly have explained, but she had an unacknowledged feeling that Dally’s frailties would not be condoned by his cousin. She gazed down at the fog wreaths that hid the sea, and saw for a moment a far-away white speck—a ship with outspread sails, struck by a gleam of sun, tracked suddenly out of the mist, and moved eastward into it again.

“ If I could but be on there! ” thought Susan, “ sail-



ing off into the distance, leaving everything behind me!" She let her thoughts run on for a minute like a child. "I'd have a rug and a little hard pillow on deck, and sleep under the stars, and sail and sail for days, for weeks, and hear the sails creaking above, and the wind on my face, till I got away from everything I knew or remembered, and saw wine-colored seas, and learned the meaning of life, and came to a new place with myself all different." She pulled herself together with a start, and turned in the direction of Miss Mitford's house, passing by the edge of a great field of turnips, along by an orchard wall, and then across another field, getting out at last on the road beside the avenue gate. It was a low old house, with a charming roof of red tiles, and a trim garden, with wide walks covered with white gravel made of crushed shells. Often as a child Susan had spent a day or two there, and loved the garden, where in June there were bushes covered with very beautiful dark-red roses. The spring flowers only were pushing up their leaves just now.

Miss Mitford was an old lady "with means," as her neighbors said, and a tender heart. She never saw a beggar without giving him a coin, yet her mind was so influenced by popular opinion that she never gave the coin without saying apologetically, "People nowadays say we ought never to give to beggars." Born in a generation that had a high standard of marriage, she had a way of looking up to all married people, and of alluding to herself as a spinster with something of apology also, "Old maids like myself," "A person of no im-



portance like myself," and so on. She would say of her nieces, "They don't come here much, but you know young married women have so much to occupy them."

Susan, who had not seen the old lady for some time, was shown into a drawing room with a great deal of china in it and no fire. She went and stood by the window that looked into the prim garden, where the leaves of early hyacinths were coming up green around the sundial. The door opened behind her, and Miss Mitford entered with outstretched hands.

"How kind of you to come, my dear—to spare time from all your interesting preparations to come to see me!"

Placing Susan on a shiny chintz sofa, that communicated a chill to the person who sat down on it, Miss Mitford took a low chair beside the girl, her face working with sympathetic feeling.

"You must be very busy this week," she said.

"Yes," Susan answered, "we are. It is rather dreadful."

She remembered all the fuss and muddle of home, and looked around Miss Mitford's parlor: its chilly quiet; the glittering, spotless, immovable ornaments; the blinds drawn half-way down; the inviolable, sacred propriety, the middle-class piety of it; its suggestions of a life long since sunk into a settled channel and untouched by change. And what a new, overpowering torrent of change was coming to her life! Miss Mitford suddenly acquired a new value, a new interest in her eyes. Miss Mitford was unmarried. She had lived to be sixty and



was still free; her life had never been broken into in this way. Susan's head throbbed, and her ears hummed, she looked wildly about her. The old lady went on speaking.

"A marriage!" she said sweetly. "I'm always interested in a marriage when there is true affection on both sides. I have always tried to prevent my lonely life shutting me out from wider interests." She paused.

A shaft of envy shot through the bride. "Her lonely life! Heavens! what should any woman want more than she has got—a home, a quiet life of her own where she can read Shakespeare and worship God in peace and freedom?" To her Miss Mitford's cold parlor took on an almost sacred air; so might some unhappy woman in ancient Rome have lingered to gaze in self-pity and longing at the vestal virgins' white-pillared porch.

"I have so little to do with young people now," Miss Mitford continued, "I'm sometimes afraid that I get out of sympathy with romance."

"Romance," echoed Susan blankly.

"Yes, we old maids must not lose touch with young people altogether."

"You have your nieces," said Susan.

"Ah, yes, I have! That was Laura, dear Laura, in *her* wedding dress." She handed it to Susan, who gazed at it with fevered interest. This then was how some other girl looked when just on the brink of the precipice.

"Was this taken before or after her marriage, Miss Mitford?" she asked.

"Oh, after; on her way home," said the old lady. Susan could discover nothing in the face except an



evident wish to keep hand and head in the right position. The downcast eye seemed to count the folds in the white satin train. She gave it back to Miss Mitford, and told her errand.

Miss Mitford was delighted. She had an old affection of an uncritical kind for Mrs. Crawford, and quite understood that it might be difficult for her to receive her husband's relatives. She also saw her own old china (the Crown Derby) in use and admired, and felt herself entirely equal to entertaining old Miss Crawford and "any number of Mrs. O'Briens," as she afterwards said to a neighbor.

Susan thanked her, kissed her tenderly, and said that she must go, or it would be dark before she got home.

"And I hear that Mr. Stair is always amusing," said Miss Mitford, following her to the door. "His poor father was a most charming man in my youth." She pressed Susan's hand. "Good-by, Susan Crawford; I will remember you in my prayers. I always ask for a special blessing on a bride."



## CHAPTER XX

“**A** SPECIAL blessing on a bride.” The words rang in Susan’s ears as she began to walk home. Thick, gentle rain was falling now, and her feet got clogged with the heavy clay on the footpath. She scrambled and half fell in trying to jump across a ditch in the field. Coming to a thorn hedge, her dress caught and tore into a great rent. Yet she went too quickly. Home would be reached too soon. Home, and all the dreadful bustle that was dragging her on, hour by hour, towards Thursday. She must get alone and think, so, instead of taking the usual road, she turned aside by the wall of the great orchard garden.

A little track led down to the gate of the orchard. The rain beat against her face, but Susan was oblivious of her surroundings. She sat down on an upturned cart at the angle of the wall, screened in a measure from the falling rain. The long ridges of the newly planted field stretched out before her. Beyond that, thick wreaths of floating mist covered the sea: it sounded like a hoarse voice in the far distance. There was no color except the gray sky and the wet brown earth; no sound except the drip of the rain, the calling sea, and the flutter of her own excited breathing.

“Oh, how happy Miss Mitford is! How I envied her! If I could only awake and find this all a dream. How



could anyone ever get married? Why did I ever promise to do it?"

Suddenly she heard a man's footstep coming tramping down the wet pathway behind her. Susan rose to her feet and pulled her hat low across her eyes, hoping that it might be no one she knew, but as the man came nearer she saw that it was Archie Hamilton. He carried a gun on his shoulder, and was wet and splashed with mud. When he stopped, astonished to see her there, Susan noticed how the neck feathers of one of the dead birds in his hand gleamed, the single point of brilliant green in the gray landscape.

Susan greeted him timidly. "Darnley told me that you were at Rexhill just now," she said.

Archie looked down at her with a good deal of interest. She had changed very much since he had seen her before. This, then, was Darnley's bride, who was to be married on Thursday. Susan had been almost a child when he saw her a year ago. She was almost a woman now, he thought. The "almost" was qualifying as he looked at her innocent, distressed face. A quick color had mounted to her cheeks. He thought again, as he had done before, that she reminded him of something—something contradictory. "A Virgin, painted by a Dutchman," he thought, unconsciously echoing an opinion of Colonel Hamilton's.

"I had a note from Darnley yesterday," he said; "there seems to have been some misfortune about his arrangements. He has asked me to take Graham's place on Thursday."



“Yes, he told me so,” said Susan. She did not say that she was pleased. Her eyes were fixed on the ground.

“I’m afraid I’ll do it very badly, not having the debonair manner that suits the occasion,” he continued. He looked down at the “poor little girl,” as he mentally called her, standing in the rain, with that look of childish distress, and wondered what she felt.

“Isn’t it very wet for you to be out?” he said. “Are you going home? May I walk back with you? It is getting late.”

“No, no, thank you. Please, I’d rather not. I mean it is not dark, and I know the way very well.”

“If you would really rather go alone, I shall go this way.”

He bade her good-night, whistled for his dog, and went off in the other direction. Susan walked slowly along the damp path through the long orchard. The wind had fallen and the rain ceased. Reaching the gate at the far end she found that it was locked, and had to retrace her steps the whole way, very tired and overcome with a sense of hopeless depression. She looked about her and could see no one. The gathering twilight seemed to make a soft protecting veil for her. She felt as if she would have liked to stay there in the dusk for hours, but knew that already it was late, and that her mother would be anxious about her. To her consternation she found that the second gate was locked also; the farmer must have fastened it when she was at the other end of the orchard and gone away. She shook the door and looked



about to see if she could climb the wall. It was high and smooth, and that was impossible; so she looked about for some shelter, and settled herself on an upturned hamper leaning against the door, to listen for the chance of someone passing by. For a long time there was not a sound. Susan began to wonder if she would need to sit there all night. She thought of her mother's futile agitation, and of how the whole household would be annoyed. For herself she did not much care. At least she was quiet and alone. By the glimmering light that still remained in the sky she could see the long, straight walk that led down the middle of the orchard, bordered on each side by dense shadow. Occasionally a bird uttered a single note from amongst the wet bushes, or some queer little noise about the ground spoke of small creatures moving there. Then there came over the girl once more, as she thought of the day before her, an agony of indecision that cannot be described in words. True, it was still possible for her to have drawn back even then, but only absolute loathing or the desperation of extreme misery could stir one up to that, she knew. She tried once again hopelessly to tell herself that she loved Dally, and it would be all right when they were married. Everyone, she supposed, felt like that. . . . Then above her, in one of the wet trees, where as yet the blossom was invisible, and the young leaves only half unfurled, a thrush sang loudly out into the cold, quiet evening sky.

Susan sat up straight and listened. She seemed to be on the verge of discovering something quite unknown to her before. But the song stopped abruptly as a footstep



was heard beside the wall. Susan thumped on the door and cried out.

“Is it you, Miss Crawford?” called a voice that she recognized as Archie Hamilton’s. “They have locked you in, I see. Can you wait for a few minutes? I will go back to the farm and get the key.” She heard him walk off quickly.

“Oh, if it had been anyone else!” said Susan to herself; she could hardly have said why. She was conscious now of being wet through, cold, and miserable, and of the lateness of the hour. Yet it seemed a long time until he came back, and she heard the key turn, creaking, in the rusty lock.

She looked a piteous little figure, cold and pinched, her dress soaked with the clinging fog, as she stepped through the doorway.

“Ah, you are cold—how cold!” said Archie, touching her sleeve. “And quite wet. See, have my coat; it will warm you a bit. Can you walk home?”

Susan was shivering with cold and misery. He took off his coat and insisted that she should put it on. The long sleeves fell over her hands; it reached nearly to her heels; it was warm, and a sudden comfort ran softly up her chilled body.

“I will wear it for a few minutes until I get warm,” she said. He stood leaning against the wall, with his arms folded, looking at her curiously.

“Are you able to walk home?”

“Yes, yes; of course I am. I am only tired and cold.” Her eyes fell under his look, and her voice



trembled. They walked side by side for a few minutes in silence, and then Susan made him take back the coat. She could go home alone, she repeated, but he quietly continued to walk by her side.

He began presently, without preliminary, "Darnley and I have always quarreled ever since we were boys. I think I envied him. He was always able to make" (with an irrepressible pause he added) "strangers like him; he is so unself-conscious."

"Oh, yes, he is," said Susan, with eager assent.

"He has the kind of tact that is spontaneous," Archie went on.

Susan looked up at him suddenly. "I wish you would not come on Thursday," she said, her voice shaking. "I know that you do not like him; he and you do not get on. One should not act friendship that they do not feel."

"No." Archie looked steadily ahead. Susan saw or fancied that his tone was disagreeable. "Let love be without dissimulation, I suppose; but having promised, I must keep my word, if Miss Crawford will tolerate my presence."

Susan was silent for a moment. Then she said, "I ought to ask your pardon; I think I said more than I meant to. I am tired and worried"—her voice sank almost to a whisper—"and afraid."

He said nothing for a minute longer, then began: "We always feel a shrinking from any great change in life." He spoke as if he were discussing something quite impersonal. Susan breathed freely again; he seemed



scarcely to have understood the rash impulse that had prompted her speech. "I remember feeling very uncomfortably afraid before I first went to school. It's all not quite knowing what is before you. My mother has so much courage that she is very tolerant. When I was a little boy I used to be very much frightened at night, and so she always made me go to sleep in the dark, but she made me understand that when I wakened I was at home with her."

They had reached the top of the long hill. Susan saw Mrs. Crawford standing at the gate, and divined that she was looking to see if she were in sight. She turned to Mr. Hamilton:

"I see my mother come out to look for me. She won't understand why I am so late. You must not come farther out of your way now. Good-night."

"Good-night, Miss Crawford; I shall see you on Thursday."

"Yes, Thursday," said Susan, with a dizzy sense of the look of utter compassion that softened all the severe lines of his face for a moment as he looked down at her. It was almost as if she heard him say, "Poor child!"

She turned hastily away to meet her mother.

"Oh, Susan!" wailed Mrs. Crawford, "where have you been? I got so anxious. Supper is quite cold, and there was soup. I couldn't think what had happened to you; there seems something so odd in your being out late. And who was that?"

"It was Mr. Hamilton, mother. You saw him before.



Dally has asked him to take Mr. Graham's place on Thursday."

"Yes, so you told me. I was so flurried I had forgotten; but isn't there something odd in your speaking to your best man on a wet night?"

Susan laughed, in spite of her depression. "Why, mother? And why a wet night?" She went on to explain how she had been delayed, and why Mr. Hamilton had come back with her, as they walked up the path to the house. Mrs. Crawford was still flurried.

"I'm very thankful that Miss Mitford will take your Aunt Crawford and Mrs. O'Brien," she said. "Your father used always to say that Irish people were indifferent to their food, but I can't say I saw any signs of *that* in them—they were both so fat—except that they left nearly the half of everything on their plates. I remember cook cried afterwards."

Susan escaped to her own room, now piled with dress-maker's boxes and new trunks.

She came down to a tepid supper with as great an indifference as Mrs. O'Brien could have displayed. The children clamored about her wedding presents, and Mrs. Crawford made solemn observations about the prospect of rain upon Thursday.



## CHAPTER XXI

**T**HE night before the wedding Colonel Hamilton and Juliet came to Burrie Bush and put up at the inn. Juliet said she would go along to the Crawfords' and ask if she could be of any use to Susan. Emmy, who had seen her approach, rushed to meet her at the door.

“We've got *pounds* of rice,” she said; “and I have two white shoes. And the Irish aunts are in the drawing room now.”

“Are they, indeed?” said Juliet, smiling. “And where is Susan?”

Susan came out into the hall at that moment. She wore an old gray dress. Her eyes seemed unnaturally bright.

“You see I've come in good time,” said Juliet; “and can I do anything for you? No, I'm not going in amongst the Irish aunts!”

“Come into the schoolroom,” said Susan, opening the door.

It had been their father's library, then had been used for years as a schoolroom. Some dusty foreign weapons still hung high on the walls. Battered schoolbooks filled the bookcases. There were almost obliterated Indian photographs in tarnished frames hung about the room, and a great school map.



On the table—a wooden table hacked by the boys' penknives and heavily spotted with ink—stood the wedding-cake covered with its muslin shroud. Some orange blossom sent by Miss Mitford added its scent to the heavy smell of the cake.

“How suggestive!” Juliet exclaimed, pushing up the veil from her little traveling hat and looking about her, smiling. Then when Emmy had left them she sat down by Susan and laid her hand on her knee. “I want you to tell me now exactly *everything* that I can do to-night or to-morrow. Now begin,” she said.

“I don't know that there is anything,” Susan began.

Juliet took quick note of her face. “Oh, yes! there is, I know; and you are too tired to think almost. I'd like to, dear Susan. Do let me; you'll never be married again—I hope.”

Susan looked at her steadily without a smile. She put up one hand to her head with a slight worried motion.

“I have had so much to do and to think of, and I am not good at that kind of thing,” she said, looking so very childish that Juliet's heart was sore.

“Well, I am, I think. Do, dearest, try to recollect everything, and tell me. Your own dress?”

Susan laughed a little. “Oh, that's right enough, I think. The dressmaker came and tried it on this morning. She's coming to put it on to-morrow.”

“What dressmaker?”

“The one from St. Fortunes, Miss Minks; she made it.”



“Oh! She ‘makes’ for all the farmers’ wives, I suppose?” said Juliet softly.

Susan laughed again. Juliet’s society was beginning to do her good already.

“Yes, I suppose she does. You can come and see it on to-morrow. You will think it dreadful, no doubt; but it’s white, and it doesn’t matter.”

“Doesn’t matter? Well, go on.”

“Emmy will require a little dressing.”

“Yes, yes! I’ll do that.”

“And mother——” said Susan doubtfully.

“I’ll send Parker to her.”

“No, please. I think that Aunt Murchison is coming early, and she will do that,” said Susan. “The boys will need”—again she brightened and laughed—“need to be brushed, probably.”

“Oh, I’ll do *that*—and tie their neckties, too,” said Juliet.

“There are the Irish aunts.”

“I will undertake the whole charge of them,” said Juliet, with the air of a solemn vow. She looked at Susan. “Why,” she said, “you look as if you thought no one had ever been married before or would ever be married again. We’ll all have to do it!”

“Wouldn’t you feel like that?”

“Not if I could help it! Not if it was most people——” Juliet caught herself up suddenly.

Susan did not look at her. She said, “Dally is very reassuring. Things seem all right when he is there.”

“Yes. He’s very sympathetic,” said Juliet. She



rose and took Susan's hand. "Come, now, and show me your mother before I go."

Mentally she was asking herself in a bewildered way how Dally would behave on the morrow.

She was all smiles to Mrs. Crawford and the Irish aunts, and sat talking with them for quite a long time before she left.

"The old lady is quite easy," she said to Susan at the door. "It's the Mrs. O'Brien one that will be a little difficult. Keep her near the Stairs," she added.

Susan walked down to the gate with her in the twilight. "You make me feel supported, Juliet. Thank you," she said.

Juliet walked slowly along the road to the inn. She was thinking so deeply that she did not notice her uncle and Archie Hamilton, who were standing together at the door. When they spoke to her she looked up in surprise. "Oh, Archie, you've come after all! I thought they would keep you at Rexhill to-night," she said to the young man.

"I believe I have to go to meet Darnley early to-morrow, to escort him, so I thought it as well to be on the spot. Have you been to see Miss Crawford?" he inquired.

"Yes, of course I have. I'm going to be very busy to-morrow. There will be a great deal to do," said Juliet. "Mrs. Crawford seems a helpless sort of person."

"Vague and gelatinous. I saw her when I came with Uncle Maurice, last year. You remember, sir?"



Colonel Hamilton sighed. "Oh, dear, yes! Of course I remember. And to think that Susan is now going to marry Dally Stair."

"I believe she is very fond of Dally," said Juliet, in her cooing voice. She stood with her hands behind her back, thoughtful, marking little prints in the dust with the point of her shoe. Then she added, still more softly, "And he of her."

Archie laughed. "You are not—voracious—Juliet," he said, bringing out the last words with the slow distinctness of utterance that often ended his sentences.

Juliet looked grieved.

"Oh, Archie! you say such unpleasant things."

"I mean that kindly."

"Well, it did not sound kind. Of course I was only too glad that Dally should like anyone else; he was often a great trouble to me," she added sweetly.

"No doubt he'll appear suitably ardent on this occasion," Archie went on. "He's probably composing his own Epithalamium at this moment on sheets of the brewery paper—blotting paper, likely. That's more like him."

"He wrote some rather thrilling verses, long ago, I remember," said Juliet, looking down.

"Oh, he's a style of his own, with lapses," said Archie. "Once, I remember, he had been staying with us. I found some lines—yes, it *was* on the blotting paper of my desk. I could not avoid seeing the first two—

*"And never again will I dare to complain,  
For I lay where her beautiful body had lain,"*



or words to that effect. He told me he had passed two sleepless nights in a room which, I suppose, had been occupied before his arrival by some reigning goddess."

"One of your little dark rooms?" said Juliet. "But wasn't it rather sweet of him to think of it?" She rubbed her hand hastily across her cheek. "Let us bring Uncle Maurice back now, and give him something to eat," she said.

Colonel Hamilton had strolled away while they stood talking at the door. It was a serene evening. The old sign hanging above them creaked slightly with the breeze. The village street was perfectly empty; only a very old, bowed man crept along it, tapping the flagstones at the doors with his stick. Above the gate of the Crawfords' house the children had erected a small arch of greenery, already nearly wilted. The birds sang loudly from the orchard. In the inn kitchen just behind them, through the open window, came the voice of Parker in subdued contention with Mrs. Reid.

"This is very agreeable," said Juliet, "and if I am ever married I shall go and stay at some dreadful, lonely, stuffy little inn like this."

She looked very happy and incredibly sweet. Archie considered her in silence, then they strolled off after Colonel Hamilton.

"I hope Susan will look pretty to-morrow," said Juliet. "She really *is* pretty sometimes—at least, you know what I mean."

"Oh, yes, I know exactly what you mean! Poor little girl!"



“ Oh, there are worse people in the world than Dally,” said Juliet.

“ He is not malicious, and he thinks himself sincere.”

“ He always feels what he says.”

“ And *always* says what he feels,” said Archie.

“ Oh, but he believes it!”

“ The chameleon, I’ve read, is really blue—until he becomes green, you know.”

“ You are very hard in your judgments, Archie, and I should not like you to be my judge, in my own hearing,” said the girl, in her soft, reproachful way.

The young man hung his head, his deeply cut features softened with sudden humility. “ I am,” he answered. “ It’s quite true, Juliet. No doubt some day I’ll be judged accordingly, but,” raising his head irrepressibly again, “ all the same, Dally is a fool, you know.”

They spent a very cheerful evening in the mothy inn parlor beside the stuffed hawk. Colonel Hamilton remembered his former mood of mind once more, as he saw it for the third time. He remembered, too, how he had first seen Susan step in at the door in the shining of the two candles, holding the little sister by the hand, and looking about her in her innocent fashion; and, thinking of the union he was to witness on the morrow, he strongly denied the time-honored aphorism about marriages made in heaven.

Susan, meanwhile, had listened to her mother’s buzzing the whole evening and endeavored to arrange everything as well as she could until she was entirely worn out. There came to her late in the evening a little note from



Dally. With a sinking heart and the listlessness of extreme fatigue she looked into it, expecting some final detail that had been forgotten. But that was not Dally's vein at all; he wrote about no business. It contained only a few lines in his big, scrawly handwriting, but when Susan had read it twice she got up and kissed her mother and said good-night with the color returned to her face, and the bright young look come back into her eyes. She carried the letter upstairs with her and put it away; she kept it all her life.

In the middle of that night Susan awoke with a start. Little Emily lay beside her sound asleep after the excitement of the day, her long black hair flowed on Susan's breast, her thin little arm was round her; the room was almost dark. Susan sat up and looked wildly about her. She could see through the window a bit of clear sky between the apple boughs, where hung and burned one brilliant star. It was like a bright, piercing eye that could read into her heart.

"Oh, Emmy—Emmy, darling!" she whispered, hugging the child with a passion of sobs that awoke her.

"What's the matter, Susan? Have you had a bad dream?" asked Emmy, putting her own simple construction on her sister's agitation.

Susan had controlled herself in a moment. "Yes, darling, yes; I'm sorry that I awakened you. Go to sleep again," she said, aware once more of the weary, uncommunicable distance between herself and Emmy. The child turned over and slept again, but Susan lay awake till dawn.



## CHAPTER XXII

“**S**USAN, the porridge is so singed we can't eat it, but mother says we may have a custard,” the children exclaimed, when Susan entered the dining room the next morning. There were indeed acrid fumes of burnt porridge mingling in the lobbies with the smell of wedding cake and the heavy scent of flowers. Mrs. Crawford, tremulous, was crumbling bread upon her plate, saying she was too flurried to eat any breakfast. The children, hurriedly dressed by the excited little maid, and completely demoralized by the license of the past few days, crowded their chairs together and snatched at the bread and butter, all talking at the same moment.

The homely squatter of the breakfast-table and the disaster to the porridge roused Susan to the everyday world in a moment. She quieted the little ones, coaxed Mrs. Crawford to eat, and promised some fruit, instead of the custard, to every child that had neatly eaten a small helping of the singed porridge.

The meal was nearly at an end when Juliet Hamilton came in, blooming and smiling, and so full of a soft, practical energy that Susan blessed her from her heart.

The Crawford household at that moment certainly presented a task that required the exercise of some delicate practicality. But Juliet, beauty though she was,



had the sort of worldly wisdom and quickness that often makes such a person far more valuable than the saint or the intellectual woman. She quickly reviewed the household. She even penetrated—forever after a bright vision to the little domestic—into the dark and disorderly kitchen, where Mrs. Crawford's slipshod cook was sullenly watching the preparations that Mrs. Murchison's cook, sent up for the occasion, was carrying on in her own domain.

The first thing was to get the sitting rooms put into order. Mrs. Murchison arrived richly dressed, and in a state of rather grim composure, bringing more maidservants and more flowers and food. Then the dressmaker came to put on Susan's dress. During this odd moment, before being called to give her opinion, Juliet managed to dress Emily and do her hair. She then summoned the boys for inspection; tied their neckties, brushed them all, warned them sternly away from the hen-house and the rabbits, ran back to Susan's room to give some final advice, glanced at the luncheon laid in the dining room, found Mrs. Crawford's eye-glasses and returned them to her; finally swept again into the nursery to look at the children and tell Jemima to keep them shut up till the last moment, then ran, laughing, back to the inn to put on her own wedding garment and be back at the house just in time to receive the Irish aunts, who, with the rights of relationship, had chosen to arrive half an hour too soon.

A wedding in a drawing room was quite a common occurrence in those regions at that time. Indeed, there



was no church suitable for the purpose near at hand. Although the guests were very few, the room was uncomfortably crammed before half of the thirty or so invited had got in.

Juliet left her post for a moment when she heard the bridegroom's carriage arrive, and ran into the hall to meet him. Dally, very white in the face, and notably red in the hair, was coming in at the door, followed by Archie Hamilton, who looked severely handsome.

"You're quite in time. Yes, go in there. Would you like a glass of champagne before you go in, Dally?" she asked in sympathy. Dally was not too forlorn to be roused.

"Champagne! In *this* house!" He gulped, and stared horribly.

"Well, there are bottles of something like it in the dining room," said Juliet.

"Gooseberry vinegar!" gasped Dally. He stood at the drawing-room door holding her hand, his face quivering.

"Go in, Darnley; go in, you donkey!" whispered Archie Hamilton. And Darnley pulled himself together sufficiently to make a very graceful entrance into the crowded little room.

Juliet ran upstairs to tell Susan to come down as soon as she could, but she found when she came back that her pieces had changed places, so to speak. The Irish Mrs. Crawford stood silent and critical between two of the boys, whilst Mr. Murchison, with an air of feeling his frock-coat uncomfortably tight, was largely making con-



versation to Mrs. O'Brien. The two Stair women, thin and rather tremulous, kept close to Colonel Hamilton. Mrs. Bracebridge, with her skirts very much spread, and a stony expression of being determined to do her duty, stood listening to Miss Mitford and another neighbor who were praising Susan.

Rice (curiously enough at this stage) seemed everywhere—grinding under the bridegroom's heel, causing Susan nearly to slip at the door as it was thrown open and she came in along with her mother.

A little, white, shabby bride in a local dress, and holding her white bouquet as if for dear life in her shaking hands. She stood in the doorway for a moment, and the hum of voices died suddenly away. Her face was so pale that her hair against it looked almost black, her eyes very blue. Her lips trembled, and she looked round appealingly till she caught sight of Darnley standing with Archie Hamilton at the end of the room. Then her eyes gave a sort of flicker and flutter, and a little color came into her face, and she moved up to the table that did duty for an altar. Just above it hung the portrait of her father. The arch, yet pensive eyes of the young face seemed to look down upon the little human comedy being enacted below.

The minister began to pray. The women's dresses seemed to rustle disproportionately. A Crawford child placed a hot hand in Juliet's, and she heard a whisper of "It's my pocket—a hole—the rice has all run out."

Then someone began to sing the usual paraphrase:



*"O God of Bethel, by whose hand."*

It went on, the company not fully joining until nearly the last lines:

*"Through each perplexing path of life  
Our wandering footsteps guide. . . ."*

Then a mumble from the minister.

"*I do,*" said Darnley Stair, very hastily emphatic. Susan's reply was scarcely heard. Then another prayer; a pause; more rustling; a sudden outburst of hand-shaking and kissing.

"For Heaven's sake, Juliet, don't let Mrs. Crawford kiss me!" whispered Dally, ducking behind his mother-in-law, to stand on Susan's other side.

The guests began to pour into the dining room, and Susan went away to change her dress.

There was considerable relief in the luncheon room, for Mrs. Murchison had provided almost all the food, and Juliet heard her whisper to Miss Mitford, "My cook was here till ten o'clock last night." Unfortunately, however, Mrs. Crawford's cook had placed the jellies in a hot cupboard, and they were merely glutinous; and Mrs. Crawford had ordered the cream, which was sour. As soon as the room was quite full there ensued a good deal of noise, for three hens, lured by tracks of rice across the lawn, had entered by the open window when the room was empty, and were pecketing under the table. Terrified by the people and the noise of voices, they now flew screeching and flapping across the table,



amongst the guests, and into the farthest corners of the room; a dish of custard was spattered profusely over Mrs. O'Brien's dress; two glasses fell in fragments; and the last hen was only captured underneath a chair, with hideous screams. It seemed to restore Dally's equanimity, or perhaps he had discovered that Mr. Murchison had supplied the champagne, for he got down on his knees to sop the custard from Mrs. O'Brien's silk frills with a table-napkin, in a manner that fascinated her. Indeed, she ever afterwards spoke of him with tolerance.

"Hens rush in where angels fear to tread, you see," he remarked quite blithely.

The eating only lasted only a very short time. Susan came down in a brown dress and an unnoticeable little hat. She was still trembling, and she had been crying, but she smiled like the April day as she hugged the children for the last time, and ran down to the carriage with Dally behind her.

Everyone had crowded to the door. Emily, in her first long skirt, resolved to be very grown up, stood farthest out on the door-step, choking her dignified sorrow.

"She'll come back again, little woman," said the best man, laying his hand on her shoulder. At this, from the person she so wanted to impress, Emmy's fortitude gave way, and, changing her note to an open, childish howl, she buried her face in her new handkerchief, and fled sobbing into the recesses of the garden. All the guests said good-by, and got themselves away. The Hamiltons departed a little later—they were driving back to Linfield.



“What a dismal little scene it was, to be sure,” said Juliet, sinking back beside her uncle.

“Well, we’ve seen the beginning,” he replied.

Susan sat up in the carriage that drove her away, looking about her with wide, tear-filled eyes. She saw dimly the little doocot at the garden wall. She saw Mrs. Reid standing, portly, by the inn door, waving a handkerchief with all her might. The old sign-board, with the Saracen emblems, shone in the sun. She drove along the street, every yard of which held a hundred memories of childhood for her. Then, when they were out of the little village, she sat back again with a sigh, and gave her hand to her husband, saying, “Oh, Darnley, I wish I was a little girl again. I have been so happy. I think I am afraid.”

“Ugh!” said Darnley, “I’m not an ogre, child, though my hair is red. You’ve the sweetest eyes in the world, Susan; but that is a direful hat!”



## CHAPTER XXIII

**D**ALLY and his bride had gone to the South of England. Susan had never been in Cornwall before, and there she saw places that attracted her imagination very strongly. She and Dally found infinite entertainment together for the first few weeks after their marriage, for, after all, without being in love with him, a dull man is just a dull man, and a man who is good company is an agreeable companion, whether you love him or not. Dally's worst enemies never accused him of being dull. Idleness did not bore him; in fact he was seldom idle, for always, like the Athenians, he went about for to see or to hear some new thing.

Susan had as much time to draw as she pleased; her little sketchbooks were filled from cover to cover. Dally laughed at the way that she forgot everything else, but he had a devout respect for the arts he could not practice, and Susan found him very sympathetic. The change to her was very great, from being with a number of other people, all demanding constant attention of one kind or another, to the society of one young man who just then had nothing to do but wait upon her. She felt as if she must be in some way very selfish, to give up hours to the work she liked without interruption, to be able to read, or go out, or sit still, just as she wished, instead of attending to the children, replying to her mother's con-



stant, aimless questions, or doing errands about St. Fortunes for her aunt.

Dally had agreed, not without a little demur, that they should go for two days to stay with Lady Agnes Hamilton before returning to Scotland. Susan wanted to go so much that he consented.

“It’s never a pleasure to me to go there, Sue,” he said, “but you seem to like them, so I’ll go—and be despised.”

The very morning that they meant to go Dally had a letter from Mr. Murchison, hinting that affairs at the brewery would make it desirable for him to return very soon. Dally gave the letter to Susan, and watched her read it.

“I think that we must go back to-morrow,” she said.

“Oh,” said Dally, “I knew perfectly well that you would say that. I’m afraid that I’ve gone and saddled myself with a sort of perpetual harassing conscience in you, Susan, that will run off like an alarm clock just when you least want to hear it.”

“You must go,” Susan repeated. “It’s your *business*, Dally.”

“Yes, unfortunately it is; we can’t go to Lady Agnes, then.”

“Oh!” Susan looked blank; it was her turn to be disappointed. Dally laughed.

“Of course we’ll go, child; two days won’t make any difference. We’ll get to Striven next week, and I’ll ride over to St. Fortunes the very next day, if you like.”

Mr. Murchison’s letter spoke of no great hurry, so



Susan admitted the two days, and they went to the Hamiltons' after all.

Archie was at home for three days, and Juliet Clephane was there too. On the afternoon of the day that Dally and Susan were coming they stood together on the narrow balcony that hung above the river.

"It's to-day that Dally and the little provincial bride are to appear, isn't it?" said Archie.

Juliet hung over the railing, and looked into the narrow, deep lane that lay between the house and the river.

"I don't see anyone coming yet. I won't soon forget the miseries of that wedding," she said, turning round to face her cousin again.

"Dismal enough," said Archie. "That brewess—the aunt, I mean—had a smiting way with her. She will keep a tight rein on Dally, I should think. They are going actually to live in her house."

"Poor Susan!" said Juliet. She pulled her hat farther down over her eyes, till her face was in shadow, all but the pretty, smiling mouth. Archie sat on the railing with the sun shining on his brown face, looking at her with great contentment. When she was there it seemed as if the girl bloomed out, as most people bloom when they are happy, into a new loveliness. True, she had a great respect and affection for his mother—chiefly respect, it must be owned—and she tried to make that suffice to explain the glamour in which to her fancy the place was steeped. Every inconvenience there was but an added attraction. What did it matter to her that the house was tiny and airless and dark—that even on a



summer morning she needed to light a candle to see to do her hair? It was all, she thought, delightful.

If Lady Agnes ever noticed this curious adaptability on the part of a girl who was usually given to a good deal of self-indulgence, she never said so. Certainly Juliet had arrived a fortnight before, when there was no prospect of Archie's return; but she bloomed and brightened none the less when he did appear. Susan, too, felt the charm of the place when she saw it first.

"Oh, how lovely, Dally! It's like the psalm," she said, as she and Dally came slowly up the narrow sunlit lane by the riverside.

"Which psalm? I don't quite know," said he, looking down with amusement at Susan's delighted face.

*"This is my rest, here still I'll stay,  
For I do like it well."*

"That's what I meant. Oh, there's so much light in the wide sky, Dally, and what a dear odd house!" she cried as they approached it.

Although the sun was now brilliant and hot, there had been rain through the night, and some fog still hung on the sea. The jumbled old town on the other side of the estuary shone white and romantic in the green woods. Through the wooded heights that opened seawards, the ships entered from the pale mists behind, timidly, almost as if seeking the right way.

As Susan and Dally came walking up the narrow lane, she saw the house, a tiny old cottage with a balcony across the front, built hard into the side of the cliff be-



hind. It faced the sun and hung like a swallow's nest above the narrow lane. From the balcony in front you could have thrown a stone into the water below. All day long the river sounds came in at the windows—the plash of oars, the pulling of ropes, or the rush of water at the prow of a passing boat. As Dally and Susan approached, Juliet came running down the steep outside stair to meet them. Susan looked very tired and dusty. In the warmth of her meeting with Juliet, any slight embarrassment on Dally's part passed unnoticed. He was subdued all evening, and made an effort to talk with Lady Agnes about brewing, while Susan, in an ecstasy of delight, sat by the long window that looked upon the river. She could scarcely be beguiled away even to eat.

“I want to look—to watch, and count them all,” she said. “Oh, it's so wonderful, and beautiful, and busy!”

“Dear me, child, you've seen ships before,” said Dally, laughing.

“Yes,” said Susan, “gray, weather-beaten sort of traveling ships, and business ships, and fishing boats, but not these magnificent . . . personages,” she added, shy of using the word.

“Dally isn't quite like himself,” Juliet remarked to Archie when they were alone together.

“Poor Dally! He feels that he must strike the attitude of a married man,” said Archie. “He'll have relapses presently.”

That evening they sat rather crowded at the narrow



table in the small, low-roofed dining room. The three windows were open to the river, and sounds came up from the boats below.

Archie Hamilton, looking at Juliet and young Mrs. Stair together, remarked to himself how little Juliet's beauty could abstract from the charm of Susan's face, although mere comeliness was all that she could strictly claim. She wore this evening a black dress which showed her smooth white throat and bosom to advantage, and there was always a look of health about her that was an attraction in itself; but the clearness of expression in her arch blue-gray eyes gave her face the look of having a soft lamp lit inside something almost transparent.

"There will be good-fellowship enough between them," Archie admitted, watching Susan and her husband together.

She sat with a slight, indulgent smile as Dally rattled on. Already Archie fancied she looked less girlish, had more self-assurance of a gentle kind.

Dally, after an afternoon of self-restraint, abandoned the part of a married man early in the evening, and hung around Juliet in a transport of his former adoration.

"It's quite a relief," said Archie to his mother; "he was so like a dog that had been told to sit up straight."

Juliet, accustomed to his admiration, scarcely noticed anything. But the others could not help observing it, and Susan suddenly, for the first time in her life, knew what it was to be jealous. She felt that she looked at Juliet's beauty no longer in delight, but comparing it with her own. The feeling struck her so suddenly that



it seemed to hurt her very body; her face dimmed; her pleasure departed; she was so much ashamed.

“Am I like this?” she thought, looking into her own heart with positive horror as she sat silent in a corner, hoping that no one would notice her face. “What am I doing that I can allow myself to feel like this about Juliet, whom I love? She is beautiful to-night. How Dally is adoring her, and Mr. Hamilton! I am quite ugly. The world is not just.”

Lady Agnes came up to the corner where she sat. “This little room is so hot,” she said. “Will you come out with me? The moon is rising now; it is beautiful on the river.”

Susan stepped out after her on to the balcony. The night air was cool and serene, and the moon rose behind the wooded hill in a warm, empty sky. They stood in silence, looking out. Then Susan very shyly ventured to touch Lady Agnes’ hand, as a timid child might have done. She was afraid of her own temerity, and felt, rather than saw, the way that the older woman turned her eyes upon her; the cool, white hand closed softly over hers.

“Things are sometimes so difficult,” said Susan.

“Always, when we are young,” said Lady Agnes, and Susan thought that she smiled.

“You were younger than I am when you married, were you not?” Susan ventured again.

“Yes, my dear.” This time she heard an unmistakable sigh. “But you have a much richer nature than I had,” Lady Agnes went on. “You will find so much to



enjoy in life; there is so much beauty in the world." She paused and went on, "If other people's sorrow and pain make us suffer, we ought to be able to enjoy their joy; one's own individual portion is generally small." She turned and looked at Susan cheerfully. "I hope you may have a large share."

Susan lifted the smooth hand, and laid it against her cheek. The contact with a stronger nature, the unexpressed sympathy, had made her feel quite different. She came into the room and smiled to see Darnley hanging over Juliet's chair.

"Ask Susan to show you her honeymoon sketches," he said to Juliet. Susan protested, but the Hamiltons asked her too, and she came back with the drawing books and gave them to Dally in her simple way.

"You see," said Darnley, "she has the happiest faculty of being able to eliminate. Not a trace of the big, new hotel at Tintagel, you observe. When we were *living* there, she just said she didn't see it."

"I did *not* see it when I saw that," said Susan gravely, looking up at him.

"Uncle Maurice says, Darnley, that you have spoilt the rarest thing in the world—a woman artist—by marrying Susan," said Juliet.

"I? Spoilt? Gracious! that *is* unjust. I want her to paint her little things. They interest me intensely; I'm awed by them," said Dally. "Am I not, Susan?"

"You don't show it in the ordinary way," said Susan, smiling at him.

"I hope and trust I haven't gone and married a



genius," Darnley said, with earnestness that was unmistakable.

They were going back to Scotland the next day. Dally declared he would not inform his family of their coming.

"We are going to take them by surprise," he said. "They don't expect us till Monday, but there's no time to write, and a telegram is brusque; besides, my sisters become so rigid if they're given time to expect anyone. Susan will see the full beauty of the family type when we are all together."

"Won't you find it dreadful to live at St. Fortunes, Susan?" Juliet asked. "Of course people like that are very good, and they have all sorts of nice feelings."

"'Little parochial moralities,' as Mr. Hamilton says," said Susan. She spoke the words thoughtfully as if she considered them. Archie started and stared at her for a moment in surprise.

"Did I say that?" he asked. The words sounded odd from her lips.

"Yes, you did. Shall you like that, Susan?" said Juliet, laughing.

"No," Susan answered, "I don't think I shall. I know what you mean, I think, but I do not feel things at all in the way that you would do. There are some beautiful things about St. Fortunes that are like daily bread."

"Beautiful!" said Juliet, whose one recollection of St. Fortunes was of a miry drive through a curiously



narrow street that resounded with the noise of hammering and smelt of beer.

“It all depends on what you see in a place, Juliet,” said Dally. “Susan had associations that make St. Fortunes pleasant.”

“Oh, yes, indeed I have!” said Susan gratefully.

“She even admires Mrs. Murchison’s drawing room with four hundred and seventy blue spots on the wall,” said Dally.

“I know what you mean,” said Juliet. She looked around the small white paneled room, and thought of the tiny dark bedroom where her trunk filled every available inch of space, the small dark passage, the noises from the kitchen next door; and, though she was not given to self-analysis, she smiled. Her cousin Archie sat cooped up in a corner by the window at that moment, the outline of his fine head showing dark against the sky. “This house is so nice,” Juliet went on, “though there is not much more room in it than a ship.”

“Pardon me—not half as much,” said Archie, cautiously stretching out his long legs in the allotted corner.

“I thought when I came here,” said Lady Agnes, “the house was so small that it would be impossible ever to have even one person to stay, but I find people seem to like it. It is the river, I suppose.”

“Of course, nothing but the river, Aunt Agnes,” said Juliet, laughing.

“I think I should like to stay here always,” said Susan in her grave, childish way.

Lady Agnes kissed her when she bade her good-night.



“ You will come and stay much longer some other time,” she said.

Dally and Susan left the next morning. She sat at the carriage window very grave and silent, till long after the train had passed through the wooded valley of the Dart. Dally profusely offered her two new pennies for her thoughts, but she shook her head, and would not tell him what they were.



## CHAPTER XXIV

“**T**HE home of my fathers, as you will observe,” said Dally, “is closely surrounded by turnips.” He waved gleefully to show Susan where the house stood. They had gone on to Striven the day after they came to Scotland, and arrived late in the afternoon at a small wayside station, where Mr. Stair had been warmly greeted by the porter. Dally said they would leave their luggage to follow and would walk to the house, so they set out down a wide high-walled road, past a row of small red-tiled cottages, then on for a long way, it seemed to Susan, through fields, before they came in sight of Striven. The house stood naked amongst these big fields; one field on each side was planted with turnips.

A row of old elm trees, very heavy-headed, with long branches that swept the ground and cast a deep shadow, shaded the front of the house, a plain, whitewashed building, with small windows flat in the wall, and a very low doorway that had a carved stone lintel above it. Owing to the shadow and dampness cast by the trees, one end of the long line of roof was covered with lichen; the other caught the sun, and pigeons sat puffing on the crow steps of the gable. An old dog lay on the wide white stone at the door. He raised himself, growling, as they came up.

“Jock, old boy, don’t you know me?” said Dally, and



as the beast lumbered forward, slobbering with joy, he threw his arms about it, and hugged it, and clapped it, and talked to it as if it had been his brother. Susan stood waiting while this greeting went on; when Dally raised his head at last his eyes were full of tears. "Go in—go in," he said; "straight on, Sue."

Susan entered a narrow hall that smelt of damp and matting. The house struck her as very silent, very gaunt, and very, very old. Every article of furniture was worn and bleached with age; a rut in the stones of the hall had been worn by the coming and going of many generations.

"Mother will be in the drawing room—in there," said Dally, pushing open a door to the right. "Go in." Just then he caught sight of a fat old woman servant crossing one of the passages, and he ran off to speak to her, so Susan found herself entering the drawing room alone.

It was a low-roofed room with many windows, the floor barely covered with a tattered carpet, and full of the same smell of damp and age that hung about the hall.

"Who's this?" said a harsh voice.

Susan looked round and saw a tall, elderly woman standing in the opposite doorway, looking at her with astonishment. A tall, thin, red-haired woman, with high cheek-bones, a dab of color on each, and bold gray eyes. Her dress was both torn and spotted. She wore a huge garden hat tied under her chin with a handkerchief, and she carried a basketful of radishes on her arm.

"I am Susan, Darnley's wife," said Susan at last, flushing under the hard stare.



“Dally’s wife, are you? I’m his mother, then.” She held out her hand to Susan in an indifferent sort of way. “How did you come here? We were not expecting you till next week. Just like Dally. Where is he?”

“He stopped to speak to someone he saw in the hall.”

“Yes, of course; always flying off about something. Sit down; I’ll call the girls.”

She laid down the baskets, and Susan heard her call aloud, in her harsh voice (with a fine enunciation, for all that), “Kate! Julia! come here! Dally has come, and his wife. She’s in the drawing room.”

Susan, blushing, her heart beating, and her hands cold with excitement, sat on an old yellow sofa in the echoing room, and wondered why she had ever been foolish enough to come unexpectedly to her husband’s home.

Presently the door opened, and two gaunt young women slipped in. She knew at once that these were the sisters she had not seen. They were less vividly red than Carrie and Louisa, but had the same peaked faces and the same timorous manners. They looked quite as much embarrassed as Susan. One of them gave her a cold little kiss that felt like a damp leaf on her face, and they both said with a tremble, “We did not expect you till tomorrow.”

Then came the sound of wheels along the passage, and Mrs. Stair re-entered, pushing a bath chair before her, in which sat a helpless old man.

“Here’s your daughter-in-law, John,” she said, stopping the chair with a jerk in front of Susan.

Mr. Stair raised his head, and held out his hand with



a kind of slow grace that was like Dally—a warm, soft, weak old hand. He looked at Susan and smiled as well as his twisted face would allow.

Susan was standing on the white skin rug by the fireplace. She wore a very dark blue dress that Dally, in an expansive moment, had bought for her, and had chosen himself, so that it became her very well. Her hat was slightly pushed aside by the wind, her hair far from tidy, but excitement had called up a carnation color to her cheeks, and her eyes seemed asking them all to like her, as she shyly glanced from one to another of her new relations. She made an effort to speak, and Mrs. Stair had just begun to say, “What is that boy doing?” when Dally returned. He kissed them in a perfunctory way all round, and wheeled his father’s chair nearer to the fire.

Then one of her sisters-in-law offered to take Susan to her room.

“I’ll give you the apple room,” said Mrs. Stair. “You can’t expect your wife to put up with that little pigstye of yours, Darnley.”

“Oh, very well!” said Dally, grinning. “Put her anywhere you like. She’s very good-natured; she’ll complain of nothing.” He wheeled his father’s chair with a sudden movement that was almost a pirouette. “You want to go back to the library now, sir!”

Susan was horrified, but the old man seemed rather pleased, and smiled as Dally ran him off through the narrow doorway, just shaving a collision with the paneling as they passed out.



“Hullo, Susan! Lost in admiration of your luxurious surroundings, are you?” said Dally, coming in a little later to the room that Susan had been conducted to. There was not much light, for the windows were small, with little panes of glass. A big square room with a rag of threadbare carpet in the middle of the floor; dark furniture; a four-post bed with slender pillows and old green linen hangings embroidered with a design of apples. Susan had taken hold of one of the curtains, and held it spread out.

“How admirable!” she said, with a sigh of contentment. “See the hard twist of the thread, and the bold design; and the labor in it all.”

She looked at Dally delightedly. It mattered nothing to her that she had scarcely the commonest comforts of life in other ways; that fierce draughts blew cold through every chink in the paneling; that the glass on the dressing-table was so blue and blurred she could hardly see her own face in it; that the boards of the floor were crumbling beneath her feet. She saw nothing to offend her, and the green apple hangings were all she wanted. “A continual feast,” she said to Dally, who laughed uproariously and kissed her, and told her to make that remark to his mother, and see what she said.

Susan was somewhat tired after her journey and reasonably hungry. They came down to dinner in a cold dining room, hung with a long row of portraits, some of which were very good indeed. The old dog sat beside Mrs. Stair at one end of the table, on her left hand; on the right was her husband in his bath chair,



with a table napkin tucked under his chin. Two gaunt daughters sat on either side of the table, and Dally at the foot. Susan at home had always been accustomed to hugger-mugger ways, but also to plenty. Here was desolation indeed: a few blue-looking potatoes in a cracked dish, a very small piece of mutton at one end of the table and some darksome hash at the other. The old man had a basin of thin broth. He looked up in graceful, helpless distress, because he had let some of it run down his chin. Susan turned (she sat next him), and with a bright smile arranged his napkin again in a moment.

Then came the next course.

“I prefer the *mustard* poultice,” said Dally in a low aside to Susan, as a gray bread-pudding was placed before his mother. One of his sisters heard; she glanced quickly at Susan, and her whole thin face flushed. Susan appeared to have heard nothing; she did hear, however, after dinner, her mother-in-law’s harsh voice saying to one of the girls, “She mayn’t be well born, but she is well bred.” She laughed to herself, wishing that the Irish aunts could have heard her.

“Dally,” she said to her husband afterwards, “how could you—how could you? I was disgusted—and surprised.”

Dally stared. “My dearest Susan, I don’t even know what you’re talking about.”

“This,” said Susan, laying her hand on his shoulder, “that you should make fun of poverty before me, a stranger to you all—poverty,” she went on, “that you



do not share and that, it seems to me, you do very little to help. Why, you will have quite a good income now, and surely your mother and sisters need not want." She paused, and Dally turned red.

"I didn't know that you added a temper to your other charms, Susan. I never saw you angry before," he said. "As to poverty, I've only just had enough to live on for a very little while; and I've my own debts to pay, and I'm married now, and——"

"Debts? Married! Why did you marry if you were in debt?" said Susan.

"To help to pay 'em," said Dally, turning away.

Susan lay long awake that night when Dally was fast asleep. She watched the shadows about the roof as the moonlight shone out now and then from the clouded sky. She heard the wind rise nearly to a gale, howl about the chimneys and shake the ill-fitting window frames.

"I cannot go back—I must go forward," she said to herself. The wind flew up from the sea, across the barren links and the long fields, shaking the green leaves off the elms and shrieking like a forsaken spirit as it passed. The old dog had followed Dally upstairs and lay upon the mat outside; Susan heard him in the pauses of the wind scratch and thud against the door. 'Twas a spring tempest, though quickly over, and before the early light came the vexed orchards were still again, and she heard all the birds begin to sing.



## CHAPTER XXV

**A**FTER a fortnight at Striven, Susan found herself upon better terms with Dally's family than she had ever hoped to be. Mrs. Stair was a grim woman, not given to testifying affection for anyone. Her whole life had been a struggle between pride and poverty. It was sorely against her will that Darnley had become a brewer, and at first she had received the news of his engagement to Susan with disgust.

“He'd better have done the whole thing when he was at it,” she said, “and married the daughter of a rich Jew, or something of that sort, instead of merely a brewer's niece.”

Now, however, she had changed her attitude. She would never, from one point of view, consider Susan as a suitable wife for her son, but in another she thought her a world too good for him, and said so, and Dally laughed. The poor old man had grown so fond of his daughter-in-law that he would scarcely let her out of his sight. Indeed, Susan had a happy nature towards the darker side of life. She did not view anything morbidly. She had no eyes for the horrible. “How lovely his patience is!” she would say, when Dally, perhaps, was shuddering under some of his father's infirmities. And as like draws to like, the poor sick old man turned to this sunny and gentle influence all that was left of life or



graciousness in him. The sisters too, accustomed to the superior standpoint of Minna, who considered them hopeless creatures, or the pity of young pretty cousins, who noticed their plainness, held up their heads a little under Susan's true admiration of their "beautiful red hair," and began to love her at once.

There was a degree of tension on social points, for in connection with the brewery Mrs. Stair was unbending, and Dally's jokes were very coldly received. One day Susan had a long letter from her mother, who mentioned that she had been advised to send one of the boys to be trained as a veterinary surgeon. In an incautious moment Susan read this aloud at the breakfast table.

"We blush *green*, you will observe," said Dally, bending to give a bone to the dog and treading on Susan's toes under the table, "but we are blushing all the same."

Poor Susan looked innocently about her, and then one of her sisters-in-law ("Call them 'the girls' for convenience," as Dally said) remarked timidly that "in some ways it must be an interesting profession."

"I must be off; will you come and meet me?" said Dally, who was going to ride to St. Fortunes that morning.

Susan promised that she would.

"You can wait for me at the Star Inn, Sue," he said. "There is a bit of pine wood there that would delight you, and we'll walk home together."

After he had gone Susan sat out beside old Mr. Stair, whose chair on fine days was wheeled into the garden. Her mother-in-law, in gloves and a garden hat, was



grubbing amongst the vegetables. Susan read aloud for a while, and then, thinking the old man was asleep, she laid down her book and sat in silence, looking across the little glade before them. The useful part of the garden stopped at the hedge under which they sat, and the ground ran off into a straggling bit of wood, just at that season all one sheet of wild hyacinths. Susan gazed and gazed, as if she had forgotten the present altogether.

“My dear,” said the old man; he lifted his soft, weak right hand (the other he could not move) and laid it on hers—“a penny for your thoughts just now.”

“My thoughts?” said Susan. She looked towards the flowers before them. “I was thinking that in garments of color like *that* the souls of the righteous will appear before God.”

“Dear me, dear me,” said Mr. Stair, with a sigh. “Very beautiful, my child, and very true, but will you let an old man give you a word of advice?”

“Oh, yes; please do, sir,” said Susan, smiling.

“It is this, my dear. My son can, in some measure”—he spoke slowly and painfully—“understand those things, too. But a man like my son,” he went on, “requires more than beautiful thoughts to keep him straight. He wants firmness. He is too easily led. His wife should be the one who rules.”

“I was not ‘born to rule’ anyone,” said Susan, shaking her head.

“Ah, I am not sure of that. You may rule by love. You may persuade him to do right.”

Susan wondered at this. She wondered if Mr. Stair



found much fault with Dally; he at least never expressed it openly, as his wife did. When her mother-in-law returned, Susan left the old man and started off to meet her husband.

It was one of the first hot days of spring. She climbed slowly up the long hill that led to the brow of the ridge of land, from the top of which you could look away over to the west as far as St. Fortunes Haven. On one side of the road was a little wood of black pines; the trees were planted so close together that it seemed as if it would be impossible to thread a way between them. All the brightness and stir of the merry May weather was shut out; perpetual night seemed to hang in there; so black was the shadow that the gnats and flies that flickered in the sunshine above the road showed like specks of light against it.

“Here,” thought Susan, “My heart can speak.” She looked up the long stretch of road. Dally was nowhere in sight; the little wayside inn showed no sign of life. She opened the gate that led into the plantation, and walked in farther and yet farther, her footsteps cracking on the dry floor; then she sat down in the dense shadow, breathed in the aromatic air, and heard the faint wash of the breeze in the boughs above.

She sat still for a long time, her hands clasped, her head bent half aside like one who hears the whisper of a friend. “I shall leave it all here,” she whispered, “before I go back.” First, there was her bitter envy of Juliet’s beauty, then at last she gave a little sigh of relief, for she knew that the remembrance of Dally’s eager



glances had power to hurt her no longer. Roused by the sound of a horse's feet, she moved forwards between the trees and stood where she was visible from the road. In a few minutes Dally came in sight, riding with a slack rein, sitting back in his saddle. Before the inn door the horse started at something, and in an instant his hand was on the beast's neck, and the odd, quick sympathy between them showed itself in a moment. He looked about, caught sight of Susan where she stood, and, tying his horse to the gate, came up quickly beside her and threw himself on the ground at her feet.

"Eh, this is refreshing! The sun is as hot as June to-day. Have you been waiting long?"

"For a little while. I liked it," said Susan.

"It was all so abominable to-day," Dally continued. "That old uncle of yours was ill-pleased because I had not come back sooner—made me promise we'd return on Monday. He's had a fit of gout, or something, and thinks I'm necessary to the business. I'm sick of the whole thing. That clerk makes me sick; he bites his nails the whole time he isn't spitting. Ugh, I'm hot and miserable." He closed his eyes and leant back his head against Susan's knee as she sat beside him.

"In mind or body?" asked Susan, smiling, touching his face with her cool finger.

"Oh, both—both, Susan!" he cried, seizing her hand and pressing it against his head. "How cool your hand is! It feels like cold water on my head. I say, it's dark here! Are shadows a 'twilight of the gods,' do you think? or the shadow of death? or the birthplace of



night? or the nest of sleep?" He looked up at his wife as he suggested the string of ideas. "Oh, I'm such an ugly brute!" he went on, looking at his own hand. "Isn't it horrid to be so ugly, Sue? If I were not so ugly now, and if I had a little of a fortune . . . Juliet Clephane would have thought me a very fine young man."

Susan laughed outright. She pulled the little lock of red hair that hung down on his brow. "And," she said, "if I had a white neck, and a face like a rose, and plenty of money. . . . perhaps someone would think me a very fine young woman, too!"

"*I wouldn't!*" said Dally, sitting up suddenly. "I like you just as you are. I wouldn't have you changed the least bit in the world—if only you dressed better, and were just an inch taller," he added. He stared again into the wood. "Did you find anything here, Susan?" he asked, turning to look at her eagerly. "What? what? what?"

Susan shook her head and smiled. "Nothing I can quite explain."

"Susan," said Dally, after a pause, "I wish you would allow me to tell you that old story I spoke of before."

"I'd rather not," said Susan. She added, "Was that why you were in debt?"

"Partly—that was long ago—but I borrowed money, and you know you pay in gold for every bit of silver you get in that way."

They had risen and were walking homewards, Dally



leading his horse. He seemed lost in gloomy meditation; did not even remark that he was hungry. At last he looked up suddenly.

“I’m afraid,” he said, very soberly, “if I ever have a son that he’ll be a prig.”

Susan burst out laughing. She colored, too, and looked up at him with her blue eyes, as she turned in to the gate, when they reached the house.

“I don’t think you need alarm yourself about that, Darnley.”

“These things always go contrary,” said Dally, and led his horse off to the stable. She heard him speaking to it very much as he had spoken to her, as they went away. The beast appeared to understand.



## CHAPTER XXVI

**A** MONTH later Susan returned to St. Fortunes, to be announced in its parlors as "Mrs. Darnley Stair," and to settle into her new way of life as best she could.

Darnley was very busy, for Mr. Murchison put things more into his hands now, and took an occasional holiday. Susan's gentle, accommodating nature found little difficulty in living in her aunt's house, but she felt that Dally could not stand it for very long. True, he quite appreciated the creature comforts with which they were surrounded. He had a keen appetite for all the lower pleasures of life, if for some of its higher ones too. When food that he liked was before him his lips glistened; he would shut his eyes in an ecstasy when he smelt a rose. But a corresponding keenness of annoyance was the balance of this. The sight of "old Murchison" (as he would call her uncle, rather to Susan's dismay), with a silk handkerchief over his face, snoring in an after-dinner nap, made him shudder. The six-o'clock dinners in the low-roofed, dark dining room; the mingled odors of the rich food; the unshaded lights; and the heavy conversation upset him altogether. He would start off on some subject of his own, freakish or altogether unintelligible to anyone but Susan, rattling away quite regardless of what he said, or of Mrs. Murchison's lower-



ing face, until some remark more than usually indiscreet brought her wrath down upon him, as he would say, "like a cart of bricks."

Shortly after their return to St. Fortunes, one evening two or three of Mr. Murchison's friends had dined with them—all business men—and the meal had been very prolonged. Susan was sitting alone in the huge drawing room after dinner. It was a warm August evening, the windows were open, and the smell of the sea and the voices of the little town came into the room.

The long line of sea visible above the red roofs of the brewery was scarlet—the sunset cast a glow on the white wall with four hundred and seventy blue spots. There was a jar of fresh roses on the table. Susan wore a lilac muslin dress. She sat knitting by the window when Dally came into the room.

"I *could* have taken more to drink," he said, glancing round to make sure that Susan was alone, "but one other story from that man with the waistcoat was more than I could stand."

"My uncle must give dinners to those people, you know," said Susan.

"Dinners! They're *feeds!*" said Dally, sitting on the old-fashioned piano stool as he spoke, and wheeling himself round and round. "Brewers and distillers, and, for all I know, graziers and cattle merchants—everything that tends to fat. I wonder that malt and oilcake aren't the viands."

"Oh, Dally! I'm afraid you are always looking at the wrong side of things."



“Indeed I am not. It’s not that I’m quite such an ass, Susan, as to think I’m better than my company anywhere. Lord knows, waistcoats and all, they’re better men than me! But I’ve been put to the wrong trade; I’m in the square hole, and I’m round.”

Susan laid down her knitting and looked at him in silence.

“Well, what is it? What are you thinking?” he asked, for he was always ready to listen to her.

“Who is happy? Who is satisfied with the circumstances of life?” Susan began. She spoke slowly, and she looked at Dally in a curious, grave way, like a person addressing a naughty child. “When I was young—I mean before I married you, Dally—I used to look forward in a vague kind of way to something, I don’t quite know what—like seeing the sun through a mist; all girls do, I think. Now I see that my life is going to be quite different from what I thought I should have liked.”

“What was that?” Dally asked curiously.

Susan’s eyes dilated, her voice trembled a little, she drew herself up and looked straight at him. “Do you think you are the only person in a square hole?—that no women feel like that? There is one thing in the world I should have chosen, ‘*one thing have I desired,*’ and that I cannot have. I should like to be able to give up *everything* else and follow it.”

“I know, I know,” said Dally, quickly catching at her thought. “Of course you do; it’s those little drawings of yours. But you know, my dear, no woman was



ever good for much at that kind of thing. Should you have liked to give up everything else for *that*?"

Susan was silent.

"Pooh! Art's a cold bedfellow," Dally went on. "Every woman ought to be married. You'd just have ground yourself all away into a regular grubby, paint-stained sort of creature. I've seen heaps of them. You never have, or you wouldn't envy them. They're not painters, and they've none of the common interests of women."

"You don't quite understand, Darnley," Susan said. "It's not for the sake of anything I could ever accomplish; I never think of that. I don't care though they should all be buried in my coffin, and nobody ever see a line of them except myself. All I care for is to try—and try." Her voice broke, but she controlled herself and continued quietly, "But that is all impossible. I'll do a little in a stupid way, because I can't help it, but the work of my life is all going to be in another direction. Pictures are just like a door to me that stands a little bit open and lets me see into another world—a world where Colonel Hamilton once told me are 'the indestructible joys forever.'"

"Dear me, Susan," said Dally, astonished, "I had no idea that you felt like that. I say now, what do you see in there?" he asked, sinking into a confidential tone. "Do you remember Rembrandt's 'Man in Armor' that we saw? It kept you dumb for half an hour. You told me it would be 'a perpetual reminder.' What do you see?"



“Oh, a golden world!” Susan said, letting her work fall on her lap; her eyes were fixed upon the blood-red field of the sky, visible above the long line of the brewery roofs. “A golden world, where sorrow is forgotten, where people talk one language and smile in each other’s faces, and work is finished without hurry, and labor never spared.”

“Very social,” said Dally; he looked at her critically. “You ought to be under a spindle-stemmed tree,” he said, “with an infinitely calm sky above you, and a baby on your knee, and an infant St. John on his knees at your feet.”

“But, oh, Dally!” cried Susan, “I could make a picture like that only with one of our own skies, and a tree that grows in Scotland—just one of those half-clad, white-kneed little trees that grow about grassy places by themselves; and it ought to be as full of the eternal calm as the old one; it is all there still if we could find it out.”

“Well, you and I aren’t likely to find it in St. Fortunes,” said Dally, returning with a sigh to the actual (his flights were short). “The brewers will be upon us immediately.”

As the lamps were brought in Susan rose to draw down the blinds, reluctantly shutting out the flaming sky that still smoldered in fiery lines above the distant city smoke. Every sunset to her meant an actual possession, as solid as any shilling in her uncle’s purse.

Dally sat staring at her, not offering to assist her, evidently lost in some new train of thought.



“Did you ever see anything so awful as old Murchison eating a peach?” he burst out, realizing that he should have drawn down the blind, and jumping forwards. “It’s a sight to disgust God.”

“Oh, hush!” said Susan. “Dally, don’t speak like that!”

“Well, you know what I mean—I don’t mean to be profane—but it *was*.”

“Do you remember about the ‘eating with unwashed hands,’ and what it was that defiled a man?” said Susan softly.

Dally stood rebuked like a child. When the other people came into the room he listened to old Murchison’s heaviest story with a look of reverent attention that was quite touching, till, struck by some absurdity in the narrator, he turned away abruptly to hide a smile.



## CHAPTER XXVII

**J**ULIET CLEPHANE and Colonel Hamilton drove over from Linfield one day to see Susan. Dally found them when he came in from the office, Juliet a seemly sight indeed in her summery clothes. Susan had drawn a little chair very close to her, and sat holding her hand, thereby showing, all unconsciously, the difference between her local clothing and Juliet's dress. Dally did not like to notice that, but it was the sort of thing that he always did notice in spite of himself.

Juliet looked up at him, and her color deepened slightly. There was something so curious in the sight of Dally married.

“Very much like seeing your own dog following a new master—mistress, rather,” Archie said to her, when she spoke of it afterwards.

Dally greeted his relatives, and, taking his stand on the rug, began to expatiate on dullness.

“I take it like an illness,” he said. “It comes upon me suddenly, perhaps in church, perhaps at the office, most often in the house, when I'm talking to somebody I don't like.” He paused and looked pensive, remembering a particularly bad recent attack. “When I'm taken bad with it, Juliet, I must go away. It just seems to strike into my very soul—what it means to be wasting good, short life in a place like this!”



“ My dear Dally,” said Colonel Hamilton, “ one place is just as good as another, to my mind. Is Susan afflicted in this way too? ”

“ Of course she isn’t, but that’s just because she’s no sense of the value of time,” said Dally. “ ’Pon my word, I often feel like a child at a school treat—just not able to eat all the buns in the given time—and one can’t put any in one’s pocket, dying,” he added sadly.

“ This is a morbid vein for you,” said Juliet, laughing. “ I thought when Susan and you were alone ” (the Murchisons had gone away for a fortnight), “ that you would never be dull.”

“ They’ll soon be back,” said Dally; he was gloomy that afternoon. He moved to the window and exclaimed, “ There’s my mother! She’s driven over with Carrie. Oh, Susan! ”

Susan laughed at him, and ran down to meet old Mrs. Stair, who very seldom came to St. Fortunes.

“ The oppressive thing is,” Dally informed the others in a whisper, “ that *Susan’s* mother is coming to-day too.”

Juliet rose. He grasped her arm passionately. “ Stay, like an angel, do, Judy. I can’t manage more than one of ’em.”

“ Shall I kiss you, mother? ” he inquired, bending above Mrs. Stair as she stalked into the room.

“ Certainly not. I don’t like it,” was the reply. “ Oh, are you here, Maurice, and you, Juliet? I’ll kiss you,” she added, looking at her.



“Most extraordinary taste,” muttered Dally, placing a chair for his mother.

Mrs. Stair wore, as usual, a very old dress, a poke bonnet, and a threadbare summer cloak. She looked about for Susan, who had left the room, and then began to talk family affairs with her cousin, while Dally drew Juliet aside.

“There’s Mrs. Crawford. I know the rattle of that fly,” he said. “Really, Susan might have arranged better. I’m not equal to it to-day.”

“Here is my mother, Mrs. Stair,” said Susan sweetly, entering at that moment.

Mrs. Crawford, too, had had a long drive in the heat. Her black clothing was much spotted and covered (by some mysterious process, probably from the cushions of the fly) with hay seed.

Mrs. Stair stood up and greeted her grimly.

“I was sorry to hear that Mr. Stair had been so ill,” began Mrs. Crawford. “I hope he is better. Is he here to-day?”

“He has not been beyond the garden for three years.”

“Dear me! How strange—I mean, how sad! Susan is greatly attached to Mr. Stair,” said Mrs. Crawford, vaguely amiable.

“And he to her,” said Mrs. Stair, softening for a moment to Susan.

“I meant to bring Emily,” Mrs. Crawford pursued. “But she has given her ankle a nasty sprain, and we had the doctor, quite a young man, though his name is Tollemache; and he says she must keep *perfectly* still, so



she hasn't moved a step, except just to chase the hens off the lawn, for two days."

"Now," said Dally, "if you tell Susan that Emmy is ill, she'll leave me at a moment's warning and fly to her."

"She is a good nurse," said Mrs. Stair. Susan sat between them, rather dismayed.

"Very," said Mrs. Crawford. "There was a time when Tommy was so ill. He had eaten nearly a peck" ("Oh, surely not quite," from Dally, who was beginning to be amused)—"well, a quart of unripe gooseberries, and he couldn't stop twitching for a moment, even to say his prayers, and Susan sat up with him all night. Mr. Evans, the veterinary surgeon, came over to see Dick last night," she began to Susan.

("Oh, hush!" breathed Dally.)

"He thinks he will do very well."

"Is a horse ill?" asked Juliet, wondering whose animal it was that Mrs. Crawford took such an interest in.

"No, it's my son—the second boy. He's not ill, I mean, but we hope to get him into Mr. Evans' surgery. He's so fond of animals, though rabbits are a little different from horses, of course, but they've had a Belgian hare for years."

Mrs. Stair got up grimly. "As you have so many people, Susan, I won't stay. I must be home early. I'll leave Carrie here for the night, if you like, as you ask her."

Dally looked piteous; Carrie, sitting silent, beamed with pleasure; Mrs. Stair departed, but Mrs. Crawford



made a prolonged stay. Dally and Susan both went to the door with Juliet and Colonel Hamilton when they left.

It was a breathless afternoon, when the sea looked like lead. A scanty shower had laid some of the thick dust on the roads, but the sky was lowering, and there was a sense of thunder in the air. Juliet turned and waved to them as they drove away. Dally stood on the doorstep, doleful.

“I *can't* go back and entertain Carrie and your mother after that,” he said.

“You don't need to; I will go,” said Susan. “Go out and walk or ride if you're not busy.”

“Life is oppressing me,” said Dally. “Let us do something wicked—couldn't we?—and get wakened up.”

“See!” said Susan, “how that boat comes in; it's just like a beautiful woman coming into a drawing room.”

“Just so,” cried Dally, charmed, forgetting his pettishness as he watched, along the strip of water that they saw between the crowding fisher houses, a boat, with white, new sails half furled, slip into the little harbor, with noiseless, incomparable grace.

“You're a darling, Susan; I'm a beast. I'll take your mother into the garden, if you talk to Carrie. But, mind, half an hour's all that I can do; I wander after that; besides, she came to see you.”

“Of course she did,” said Susan cheerfully, “and Carrie came to see you.”

“No, she didn't,” said Dally. “There's more variety



about your mother—to me at least. You take Carrie,” he entreated.

Susan laughed and put her hand on his shoulder, and they ended by going back to the relatives together.

Mrs. Crawford left at half-past six, climbing up into the vehicle with some difficulty, and (to Dally’s delight) unintentionally taking the box seat. She remarked that she had had such a pleasant afternoon. “I hope to find Emmy better, if she’s kept quite still.”

“If she has been chasing the hens all day, the doctor will be displeased, I fancy, though ‘his name is Tolle-mache,’ ” murmured Dally, obtrusively putting into the carriage a long end of loose braid that hung from Mrs. Crawford’s skirts, as he covered her with the rug.

“Dally, you are really naughty,” said Susan, trying not to laugh, when they turned back into the house together.

“Now for Carrie all evening,” said Dally. “I think I will be ill and go to bed. I *am* ill; you can tell her so, and she’ll feel so sorry.”



## CHAPTER XXVIII

**D**ALLY came in the next evening, quite animated with a new idea.

“Please get ready to come out with me, Susan,” he said.

“Where are you going?” asked Susan, smiling at his eagerness.

“To the mission meeting at the Haven, of course. All the people are crowding there every night. I’m going to see if I can get converted,” he said, with much zest. Susan looked grave. “Don’t be shocked, Susan,” he said. “It’s an experience: it happens to half a dozen people down there every night. Come with me, and we’ll see.”

Susan demurred, but Dally looked so crestfallen and disappointed that she went with him in the end.

They had some little way to walk. At all the street corners, in the warm evening air, stood groups of miners and fishermen, who looked after them kindly, for Mr. Stair was a favorite in the town. At the door of the little mission hall Dally stopped; the very passage-way seemed blocked with people. Susan would have turned back, but a man who stood by the door with a bundle of tracts in his hand motioned them to follow him through the crowd. He led them up through a room full of people, who sat crowded together upon narrow wooden benches. The air was thick and foul, the windows dim



with steam, the benches very hard. Susan made herself as comfortable as she could by leaning against the wall—she was at the top of the bench—and quietly resigned herself to patience for an hour. Such a service made absolutely no appeal to her nature at all. She did not understand it or the effect it had on others. Several times when she was a child her mother had taken her to meetings of a similar description which used to be held in the little schoolhouse near their home. Susan had never heard or taken part in an argument on religion in her life, but had quietly acquiesced in the form of Presbyterian worship in which she had been brought up. She was very humble and uncritical of others, and kept her own unshaken faith and preferences as to form entirely to herself. There are rare souls to be found sometimes who have from childhood an “inward liberty” that is unaffected by circumstances. “Of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

Dally, however, had active preferences and dislikes. He leant forwards at first, earnestly listening to all that the preacher said, but as the address lengthened and became reiterative, his interest flagged, and he began to look about him.

“I don’t feel *anything*, do you?” he whispered, smiling, leaning forward in one of his pretty attitudes to look at Susan. She shook her head, and Dally bent nearer. “Oh, look, Susan! Did you ever see anything so hideous as that fat woman with the three chins in the corner? Do you think that *she* could be converted now?”



“Oh, hush!” said Susan. “You must not speak so loud. • Do be quiet.”

Dally was now looking all about him. The air grew closer; the preacher waxed yet more vigorous. There came a pause, when he said, “If any soul here feels the power and conviction of sin, let him cast away all thought of man, and come forward and kneel down.”

Dally, who for the last few moments had been sitting with his red head bent, apparently hearing nothing, made a sudden movement. Susan quickly laid her hand on his arm.

“I’m sure I’m convinced enough of sin, anyway,” he whispered. “I’d like to go and kneel there and grovel, Sue. Perhaps I’d feel something then.”

“Don’t,” Susan entreated; he still would have risen. “Don’t. . . . my dear,” she added.

She rarely used any such expression, and it had the expected result of instantly checking Dally’s current of thought. He looked up at her and smiled, and then leaned back in his seat, watching the faces of the people.

As a noisy hymn was being shouted out from the platform, and the audience rose to sing, they managed to slip out.

Quite a crowd had collected in the passage and blocked the way out. A damp young man was offering hymn-books, and trying to keep order. The people parted a little to let Susan and Dally pass—he going first, looking back every now and then, holding his head high with the curious air of distinction he had at times.



“Faugh! How good the air tastes again!” he exclaimed, as at last they emerged from the crowd. “What’s that in ‘Coriolanus’ about their ‘stinking breaths’? Oh, smell the sea, Susan! How salt! How clean!” He took off his hat and turned to face the wind.

Susan as she stood by him observed a poor woman with a child beside her, sitting on a stone at the end of the meeting-house. Dally, too, noticed her in a moment, and pinched Susan’s arm.

The woman did not seem aware of their presence. She leaned forward with her elbow resting on her knees; her whole body shook with sobs; her hair, half unbound, fell across her face; with one hand she covered her eyes, with the other held that of the staring child who stood frightened by her grief.

“Quite a Magdalen,” said Dally.

“Come away,” said Susan, turning quickly to walk on.

“No, go and speak to her,” he urged. “Bless me, Susan! where’s the good of going to this sort of thing if you can’t say a word to a poor woman in such distress.”

Susan walked on for a few steps. Dally hesitated.

“Oh, confound it! Are you going to let her cry there until the other people gather about her to stare, or till that beastly man comes out to thunder damnations at her?”

He walked back and stood beside the woman, much embarrassed; then said in his most alluring way:



“Look here, if you’ll stop crying I’ll give you a shilling.” He fingered the coin as he spoke.

The woman panted a great sore sigh. “A shilling! Merciful God!” she said, raising a swollen face that struck Dally dumb.

“There’s my wife,” said he, turning helplessly to Susan, who was drawn forwards in spite of herself. She stooped over the woman and laid her hand on her shoulder.

“Why do you cry like that?” she said. “It will do you no good.”

“My sins! My red sins!” said the poor thing, with a shiver of fresh weeping. Susan bent lower; her voice was clear and sweet.

“What is making you so miserable? Are you very sorry for anything you have done wrong?”

The woman began to pour out a story. Dally, lingering by the wall, caught only a word or two—“Good situation;” “never thought any harm.” She sobbed and sobbed again.

“See,” said Susan gently, “your dear little boy is quite frightened.”

“He’s tired—the bairn—an’ hungry.”

“Where do you live?” asked Susan, smiling at the child.

“Down there”—she pointed to the squalid street.

“Have you no food? Have you any money?”

“Oh, aye,” the woman blurted, wiping her disfigured face on the corner of her shawl; “I’ve food an’ money; it’s no’ that.”



“Go home,” said Susan, “and give your child his supper, and care for him. God, who is our Father, will give food to your soul, and be kind to you, too, just like that, if you ask Him and are not afraid.”

The woman looked up at her fearfully. Something shone from Susan’s eyes straight into hers; the soft assurance of her voice, the deep conviction with which she spoke arrested her. She rose, with a final sigh and sob, replaced her tattered hat, and, drawing her shawl about her, took the child by the hand.

“Good-night,” said Susan; “do not be afraid.” She pushed her husband’s hand away. “Don’t give her money; it’s not that she wants,” she whispered. “If you show me where you live,” she said, “I will come to see you; perhaps I could help you to get some work, or help you in some other way.”

“Thank ye, mem,” said the woman, looking doubtful. She pointed to one of the houses midway down the street. “I’m in Jeanie Morrison’s the noo—No. 28.” Susan held out her hand. The woman hesitated, then humbly wiped her own hand upon her shawl before taking Susan’s. She burst into pitiful tears again at her touch, and turned weeping away.

Dally and Susan walked on in silence.

“Poor thing! Poor thing!” said Susan at last.

“What was it all about?” asked Dally.

“Oh”—Susan reddened—“it began with a gentleman at St. Andrews.” She sighed.

“Poor girl!” said Dally. He walked on a bit, then raised his head suddenly. “Have mercy upon me, for I



am a sinful man, O Lord! . . . A gentleman in St. Andrews! I could tell you things, Susan, but perhaps it would be more judicious not to. It's delicious, though, to make a 'clean shrift.' I'd like to; I said so once to Maurice Hamilton. 'You can enjoy that luxury in prayer,' he said; but you can't, for you get no reply."

Just then his eye was caught by the color of the sunset.

"Look, look, how splendid, Susan! It's lovely, and your cheek is just the same for a moment. I wish you always had a color like that. Lord! I'm hungry! Won't supper be good when we get home? Sometimes I wish I was a workingman; they must enjoy their food and sleep so much more than we do."

"Nobody could enjoy them more than you do," said Susan, looking at him with her tolerant smile.



## CHAPTER XXIX

**T**WO or three days afterwards Susan set out to find the woman they had spoken to after the meeting. She was timid about offering money to any of the poor around them, the old-fashioned half-crown system being the usual form of assistance given at St. Fortunes, but "they need other things so much more," said Susan, who had theories of her own which she did not attempt to express.

It was a very hot August afternoon when she started to walk to the other end of the village. The house she sought was half-way down the street—a side street of brick houses, erected not many years before.

By the time she reached it the sun beat down with intolerable force, and the double row of brick houses seemed to contain the heat of an oven. A clothes-line hung with shriveled cloths and garments made a partial curtain across the road. Susan stepped aside to avoid a heap of garbage on the edge of the footpath, and a swarm of flies rose from it as she passed.

The door of the house was shut: the windows closed: the door stone apparently unwashed for days: a cat sat on it, crunching the head of a bird. At sight of the intruder it left the mouthful and slunk away.

Susan knocked twice: there was no answer: she tried the handle of the door, and found it locked. As she



turned about to go away, someone called, "Hi, there!" and she saw a child about twelve detach herself from a group of children who were playing marbles at the end of the road.

"Here's the key; she's in bye; jest go in," she said, and, thrusting a key into Susan's hand, darted away.

Susan tried the key, the lock turned. She opened the door and listened. A weak voice called, "Come in bye." The small passage was so hot and noisome that she shrank from going in, then took courage, and walked up, and entered the room on the right-hand side.

At first she saw nothing but a heap of coarse quilts on the iron bed by the wall. Then the woman lying under them raised herself feebly. Her face was gaunt and frightened-looking, so that Susan scarcely recognized the same person she had seen the week before. All the freckles on her cheeks showed brown upon her pallor; sweat poured down her face and neck; her hair hung in wet slips, disordered about her brow.

"Eh, mem!" she exclaimed, in the same weak, throaty voice, "I'm feared to pit ma hand oot from under the claes. I was confined last night, an' I'm feared o' the cold."

The heat in the little room with closed windows was dreadful. Susan sat down by the bedside, horrified.

"But have you no one to take care of you? The heat is dreadful. Can I do anything for you?" She looked at the poor thing afraid to throw off one of her heavy coverings. A cup of some kind of gruel was on a chair by the bed, with a bit of thick, soft biscuit.



“ I’ll do fine—I’m better noo. It’s just the cold I’m afraid of,” said the woman again.

“ And your baby? ” asked Susan.

The mother turned painfully on her side, lifted just a corner of the quilt, and showed Susan the day-old child, sleeping in spite of the heavy coverings about it. Susan gave her a drink; warmed some water on the fire, and washed her hands; persuaded her to take off one of the coarse coverlets, shook up her pillows, and then sat still beside her, and listened while slowly the poor thing told a short story.

“ Ye’re merriit yersel’? ” she asked.

Susan nodded—she could not speak.

“ Will this be yer first, mistress? ” she inquired, glancing at Susan, who got rather pale and nodded again.

“ They’re a trouble too,” said the woman; “ but ye’ll have aw’ thing braw, an’ a man o’ yer ain. It’s no’ like the likes o’ me.”

“ I am so sorry for you. May God have mercy on us all,” said Susan. Her words failed her. She was not given to seeing anything in a morbid light, but sitting there, the poor, noisy, fetid room, with closed windows, and its outlook upon other brick walls, oppressed her. The untempting, scanty food, the sufferings, the helplessness, the whole doleful difference between rich and poor came over her with a wave of distress that took away her power of speech altogether. She just sat with tears gathering in her kind eyes, looking at the woman lying on the bed before her, but unable to say a word. There



was silence. The woman closed her eyes and seemed to sleep; the child's hardly audible breathing came and went; outside the noises lessened as the people came indoors for a meal. Then Susan heard a quick, loud step in the passage, and the door opened behind her. The woman opened her eyes and smiled faintly.

"It's you. I'm real well. It's a leddy come tae see us."

"Yer welcome! Sirs, but it's hot!" A great tall woman carying an armful of vegetables, and evidently just returned from work in the fields, came into the room.

Susan knew her well, and she half rose from her chair. In a little village common report is made of all things. Susan knew the history, recognized the broad, red, battered face, as shameless as an animal's, which belonged to Jean Morrison.

"It's Mistress Stair!" she exclaimed. Her voice was harsh and loud. "Sit ye doon, mistress. It's kind o' ye to luik in on the cretar. She's doin' fine noo. She's my dochter, ye ken," she added, with a sharp glance at Susan. "We maun a' tak' oor turn. Ye're lucky as wants the bairns. There's many comes when they're no' wantit." She laughed, a huge, shameless, not unkindly laugh, showing her full row of strong teeth, and stood by her daughter's bedside, looking down at Susan. Her dress was coarse, but very clean and tidy. She wore a raw blue ribbon at her neck; a sort of wholesome cheerfulness shone from her. She looked about the room. "She's needin' somebdy to pit things straight. I'll no' be long or'll I'll get the room cleaned. There's nane but



myself noo to do a thing. My ither dochter, *her as was Mistress Stair's laundry maid*," she said with curious emphasis, eying Susan, "she's been deed in Americka these seven years. A maist respeckable woman, she was."

Her daughter laid back her head on the pillow with a look of relief. Susan rose to go. She laid down some things she had brought with her on the table, feeling very uncomfortable under the older woman's hard stare. then said good-by, and hurried out of the house.

She did not slacken her pace until she had left the brick street far behind her. A wind had come up with the turn of the tide, and the freshened air was grateful. The town clock struck five. Shadows lengthened across the narrow, winding street. She came up to the door of their own house and passed through the hall into the garden. The turf was newly cut there, the walks swept, the air full of delicious scents. Dally was sitting smoking on the garden seat; he had come back early.

"What is the matter, Sue? You're as white as your gown," he said, taking her hand. "Why did you go out and walk and tire yourself in this heat?"

Susan sat down beside him and told him where she had been.

"Well?" said Dally, when she had finished. He smoked away and did not look up.

"I wish that I had died when I was a child when I see things like that, so that I should just have known the world, and seen the sun, and been alive, and never learned any more," said Susan more passionately than she ever spoke in general.



“Rahab hid the spies,” said Dally without looking up.

“Oh, it’s not that!” said Susan. “Don’t think I’m thinking we are better than they, but it’s all ugly and dreadful. Oh, the *poor*, poor, Dally!”

“It’s not so bad,” began he consolingly. “They’ve joys we don’t know, Sue. Well, ‘joys’ is too ethereal a word perhaps, but I’m sure they have. I understand some of ’em, too,” he added reflectively. “They eat, and drink till they’re drunk, and work, and sleep, and hunger, and thirst, and all the rest of it, and then they’re dead, and there’s an end of it, and none of the fears and scruples and splittings of hairs that we go on with.” He looked up suddenly at Susan’s pale face, set in thought, with dark circles under the blue eyes. “What are you thinking about now, Sue?”

Susan lifted her eyelids, then hid her face for a moment on his shoulder. “I was thinking about . . . your son, who is to be the prig, Dally,” she said.

Dally took her hands in his; he said nothing. They sat quiet for a few minutes.

“There is nothing new under the sun,” said Dally at last, raising himself with a sigh. “I suppose—well, I wonder if it’s possible that *my* father felt like this?” He sighed again, and then laughed.



## CHAPTER XXX

**T**HE winter seemed to pass very quickly to Susan. She was surrounded by an atmosphere of approval. Old Mrs. Stair became positively bland.

“Dally has good in him somewhere,” she said. “A child of his own will steady him more than anything.”

“Steady me!” echoed Dally, to whom she made this remark in a very slightly modified form. “I’ll never smile again, I believe; but it will please my poor old father.”

When Susan saw the intensity with which the whole Stair family desired that her child should be a boy she felt alarmed.

“Girls are all very well in their way,” said Dally. “But, dearest, you can’t get into your head how unnecessary it would be just now.”

Mrs. Stair’s whole soul was set upon one thing, by whatever sacrifice or painful economy. The old bleak house, the flat, unlovely lands she loved with a passion that seemed extraordinary to Susan. Even the brewery would be forgiven, if it became the means of paying off the encumbrances on the estate and enabling Dally, and his son after him, to keep Striven.

Of this tradition Mrs. Crawford’s guileless mind had no trace. “I’m sure,” she said, “you will find a girl less trouble, Susan. Boys are so expensive. Alec’s education has cost more than you and Emmy and the little



ones all put together; but red hair is always a drawback to a girl, you may say what you like," she concluded.

Emmy's sprained ankle, aggravated by her pursuit of the hens, had got so bad that the little girl was quite lame, so Susan took her down to St. Fortunes for a while. This appeared to Emily very gay and delightful. She had not yet made a practice of being tidy, but conclusive efforts every now and then seemed to promise amendment. Susan was very happy, sitting beside her in the garden, or as she lay on the square sofa in the long, blue-spotted drawing room when Mrs. Murchison was out.

"I think," said Emmy, "that nothing is quite right at home since you went away, Sue. Things are always in *such* a muddle. I wish you would soon come back again."

"But, love, when one is married, one can't go back—to anyone."

"Why not?" said Emmy.

"Because it's your duty to stay with your husband."

"But Dally doesn't seem to need you so much as we do, Susan?" Susan could not contradict this. "It does seem odd," pursued Emily, "that you should just in such a short time love Dally so much better than all of us."

"I don't, dearest," Susan began. "At least things are quite different. You ought to love your husband more than anyone else."

"Do you suppose now, Susan," the child went on, "that Aunt Jane just all at once loved Uncle Murchison better than anyone else in all the world?"



“ I suppose so, Emmy.”

“ Seems a little queer to choose *him*,” said Emmy pensively, “ and that nobody should have liked to marry Colonel Hamilton, who is so nice.”

“ But, Emmy, you don’t know that. People do not speak about these things.”

“ Well, he’s not been married anyway, and he is much nicer than Uncle Murchison. Did Aunt Jane know him, too, when she was young? ”

“ Yes, I think she did.”

“ Then why did she not marry him? ” persisted Emmy.

“ Oh, child! ” said Susan, laughing, “ you don’t understand these things. Anyone can’t just marry anyone else in that way.”

“ Why not, Sue? ”

“ Oh, so many things prevent it. Circumstances—and tastes—and fate,” Susan ended foolishly.

“ What’s fate? ” asked Emily, snapping up the new word.

Susan looked at her and sighed. “ I do not know, Emmy. Something that causes things to happen without our will.”

“ Oh! ” said Emmy. She reflected a moment, then said, “ Did you ever see anyone you would have liked fate to make you marry except Dally? ”

“ Emmy, you should not say such things.”

“ Well, you said so. I think Dally was quite delightful. I hope fate won’t make me marry anyone like Uncle Murchison—anyone with a beard at all,” she added.



## CHAPTER XXXI

“THERE’S too much fuss made about the matter now,” said Mrs. Stair in her harsh voice. “She’s well, of course, and the baby’s well. What else would a sensible woman be?”

“I wonder—I suppose Susan wouldn’t be able to see me, just for a moment? I am an old friend,” said Miss Mitford. She had driven over to Striven to inquire for Susan soon after the birth of her son. Mrs. Stair had received her grimly in the cold, half-furnished drawing room. Miss Mitford’s tender inquiries had been abruptly answered. “It was such a pity that *her own* mother couldn’t be with her,” continued Miss Mitford, with as near an approach to a snap as she was capable of.

“A great blessing, to my mind,” said Mrs. Stair, unabashed. (Mrs. Crawford’s presence at this juncture had been averted by an outbreak of measles at home.) Susan had come to Striven for the birth of the child rather against the wishes of her own people, but by so doing, although she would have been much more comfortable at St. Fortunes, she had gained her mother-in-law’s heartiest approbation. Dally had gone away on business. “You can’t see her,” said Mrs. Stair. “She’s seen no one yet.”

Miss Mitford was disappointed. She had risen to say good-by, when Kate, the eldest daughter, came into the room.



“ Susan has heard that you are here,” she said. “ She would like you to come upstairs for a moment. She wants to show you her baby.”

So the old lady was conducted upstairs into the “ apple ” room—just beginning to get dusk—where Susan lay in the four-post bed, and held out a thin, white hand to welcome her.

“ He’s my own. He’s asleep just now. He has bright red hair,” said Susan, turning the child on her arm and looking up at Miss Mitford, with no attempt to conceal the rapture of affection in her face.

The old lady was a little tearful. She blessed the mother, she blessed the child, and with kisses and fond speeches after a very few minutes went away. Susan lay still after she had gone. Again she saw herself hurrying out of the house on that misty, damp afternoon. Again she stood in Miss Mitford’s arctic parlor, and longed with an agony of longing for the safe harbor of old maidenhood that it all represented. She remembered that walk home, every step of it; the struggle against the wet wind; the fine rain blown up from the sea; the wet leaves glistening in the field; the raw odor of the turnips; the wild sense of something inevitable closing in around her; how she sat in the garden and wished the morrow would never come; how Archie Hamilton had looked standing in the dusk at the orchard door. Again she felt the gentle warmth that ran up her chilled body when she wrapped his coat about her; how he walked beside her through the long, miry lane; how piteously her heart had cried out for some help as he parted from her



at the gate. "Let love be without dissimulation," he had said. She turned and looked again at the little thing that lay beside her, listened to its tiny snortling breath, put a finger into its half-closed velvet hand, smoothed the soles of its soft feet, and hugged it against her heart, sighing with the burden of her love.

"There need be nothing but truth between us, my own," she whispered. "Nothing ever that is not true."

She looked up again at the firelight fluttering upon the apple-embroidered hangings and the fluted, slender pillars of the bed.

"They are like the stems of very straight young trees," she thought. "I shall put a bed in a picture with pillars like young trees."

The house seemed very quiet, till at last a door banged down below; then she heard the old dog's hoarse bark change into quick snaps of joy, and in a minute Kate opened the door again.

"Dally has come, Susan. Do you think you are able to see him now?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" Susan turned round, and lay looking at the door as Dally entered. He had been riding in the cold, and a breath of it seemed to follow him in. He bent down an icy cheek to kiss her, but Kate pulled him back.

"Don't, your face is too cold!" she cried. Susan laughed, and gave him her hands to kiss instead.

"I wish you would go away, Kate; you embarrass me," he said, looking over his shoulder. Kate smiled patiently and went away.



“Come round and look at him,” said Susan, moving the baby on her arm. Dally walked round to the other side of the bed, and stood looking, then touched it curiously with one finger.

“It isn’t at all so ugly,” he said. “It’s just sweet—such a newly-arrived just-beginning kind of thing. Oh, Susan”—tears started suddenly in his quick, gray eyes and choked his voice—“it’s made out of you and me, and it’s quite different from either of us. Susan, I wish I could begin to be good before it can understand.”

“Yes, Dally, we’ll both begin, and try hard,” said Susan, smiling at him, and holding out her handkerchief to wipe his eyes.

“Eh, gracious! How soft it is!” he called next minute, putting the palm of his hand on the baby’s head. “It’s just like velvet, Susan. Did you ever feel anything like it?”

“‘Say, have you felt the fur of the beaver,  
Or swan’s down ever?’”

He came and stood at the foot of the bed, with his hands hanging over the end of it, in one of his oddly graceful attitudes.

“You look sort of ‘newly washed in a shower,’ Sue—so interesting. Your eyes are quite dramatic. Did you feel very bad, my poor girl? I suppose it’s rather awful. Did you think you were going to die?”

“Your mother told me people made far too much fuss nowadays. I found her very bracing,” said Susan.

“What did you think about?”



“ Really, Dally, I don’t know. I was enduring, not thinking. I tried to be brave to please your mother. I did think about you.”

“ Oh, did you, you dear? ” He looked highly pleased, then continued, “ I had such a horrible dream that night in London. I dreamt it was a girl, and somehow things seemed to go on and on, more girls and more—you know the way they do in dreams—till I saw all my five sisters, and they were all my daughters too. I can tell you I wakened quite cold. What do they give you to eat? Nice food, I hope? ”

“ Yes, quite nice,” said Susan, smiling. “ They are very good to me.”

“ Well, I hope so. The fowls here are too muscular for me, but you’re very uncomplaining.”

Kate entered at this moment with a cup on a tray. Dally took it from her and peered at it.

“ What’s that? ”

“ Give it to me, Dally; I’m hungry,” said Susan, laughing.

“ Is it good? ” he asked. “ Looks so like the paste we use at the office.”

“ Go downstairs,” said Susan.

“ I met Archie Hamilton,” said Dally, standing in the doorway, turning back to speak. “ Heard him speak, you know, with Maurice Hamilton. He did look rather fine, like Milton’s Satan—before the fall, though.”

“ Go away, do, and leave Susan to eat her supper,” said Kate, pushing him away.



## CHAPTER XXXII

**W**HEN Susan was just beginning to go about again, one day Juliet Clephane came to see her. She was staying with other people in the neighborhood, and arrived unexpectedly one afternoon. Susan took her upstairs to see the baby, which was beginning existence in a bleak attic named "the nursery," under the charge of a grim old woman. Susan was longing to return to St. Fortunes now, but Mrs. Stair would not let her leave Striven till after Christmas, she said.

Juliet looked at Susan curiously, as she stood in the nursery with the tiny red-headed baby in her arms.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do, Susan, and it's entirely for your sake that I'm doing it. I am going to offer to come here for a week, if Mrs. Stair will have me."

"You—you won't be very comfortable," said Susan, smiling.

"Of course I won't! I know that only too well. I once stayed here when I was fifteen, and I had to put the hearthrug on my bed at night, and that wasn't enough, so I slept in an astrakhan jacket I had too. But I think you will be the better of a change of ideas, so I am coming, if they will have me."

"Oh, the sight of you, Juliet, and your pretty dresses, and everything about you, does me good—and Dally likes it so much, too."



“Don’t mind Dally,” said Juliet, looking at her curiously. “You haven’t known him as long as I have. He’s made like that, and he can’t help it.”

“I *don’t* mind—now,” said Susan. She flushed a little as she spoke, looking straight at Juliet. “At first, I think, I wished I were lovely, like you; but I got over that.”

Juliet came the following Monday—a frosty afternoon, when all the ground in front of the house was covered with white rime, and there was a sad, faint pink sunset above the turnip fields to the west. Dally had met her at the station. They walked together to the door, Juliet, holding up her skirts with both hands, stepping daintily on the slippery ground, Dally walking by her side, adoring. She came like a rose into the bare, cold apartment where the family were assembled. Her height, her plump face with its exquisite carnation color, her bright hair, her soft voice, even her clothes—the sweep of her hat brim, the furs she wore, the huge muff she carried, the glimpses of color like the inner petals of a flower, the faint scent of her garments—all combined to make her seem a denizen of another world altogether from her five bleak, shabby cousins. Susan sat beside her while she talked to old Mrs. Stair, and watched her with an expression of fond delight in her beauty.

Juliet’s teeth chattered with cold when she was left alone in one of the gaunt bedrooms, where the cold chimney sent down volleys of acrid smoke from a newly lighted wood fire, which diffused a scarcely perceptible warmth that could not conquer the icy draughts from the



floor and paneling. But she was a brave visitor, and came blooming down to dinner, and ate as if she enjoyed it, and smiled and talked and made the whole room bright.

Susan came into her room after the others had gone to bed. They heard in the distance the wheels of the old man's chair squeaking dismally along the uncarpeted corridor. Juliet had coaxed up the fire to a blaze. She knelt on the rug in her dressing gown, her long hair hanging over one shoulder.

"Come in, Susan; I'm warming myself a little now. I've got plenty of warm things, thank you. I made preparations as if for an Arctic winter—indeed, a sleeping sack would be the only thing one could be warm in here. Oh, you've got him with you! Give him to me, the dear sweet."

She took the ugly baby from Susan's arms, and rocked and fondled it, bending her laughing face above it, and kissing it till it crowed. "It's just a hideous darling, isn't it, with its little red, red head—such an ugly dear."

She stopped laughing and looked up at Susan, who was sitting rather wearily in the big chair at the side of the fire. "You're tired, Sue—or distressed?"

"No. I am so glad to see you. Oh, *so* glad!" said Susan, with a sudden foolish quavering in her voice.

Juliet jumped up and placed the baby on Susan's lap, then knelt in front of her, her rosy dressing-gown falling open, showing a confusion of frills and laces about her white neck, her eyes luminous with feeling.

"Of course, I know; yes, of course, I understand.



You are glad to see a girl again—someone from the ‘country you came from’ sort of thing, not one of those overly much married nine-and-ten-children-perpetual-nursery-talk sort of women that have been with you all this time. If I were you I would leave the whole thing—baby and all—and go away and get some new clothes, and forget, and enjoy myself.”

Susan shook her head with downcast eyes. She watched the child, then answered gravely, “Clothes are of no use to comfort me, Juliet. They are a talent by themselves—that I have not got. Perhaps when we go back to St. Fortunes I may be able, if my baby is quite well, to arrange my days a little better, so that I have time for the things I wish to do, so that I can paint a little.” She spoke the last words very low.

“Paint!” echoed Juliet, wringing her long hair through her hands, and looking at it as it shone in the firelight. “Well, I envy you if that would make you happy; but it wouldn’t,” she added, looking up.

“What would your idea of happiness be?” asked Susan, smiling indulgently at her.

“Mine? Oh, you wouldn’t believe it!” said Juliet, suddenly turning her face away as if it were scorched by the fire. “It’s too unsuitable, too unlike me. Besides, Susan, he will *not* care for me a bit. I know that quite well. I do not know why I mind; it’s a sort of Naboth’s vineyard business. I have so many . . . lovers, but I just want this one because he does not want me. Besides, people shouldn’t marry their first cousins, I believe.”



By the time the speech was ended her face was hidden on Susan's knee. Susan put her thin, white hand on the soft hair, and stroked it without speaking. Her face was painfully strained; her eyes were full of unshed tears.

"I think it is late; I must go. You will catch cold sitting up here," she said, recovering herself with an effort. "I must take my little son back to the nursery; he is sound asleep."

"Well, I'm not able to talk about art to you, Susan, but at least I haven't had ten children, and I don't speak about babies all the time. Do resist that; it grows so on people that are good in country places."

Susan laughed, and went away looking bright enough, but Juliet, as she went shuddering about her toilet in the cold room, remarked to herself, "How could she do it? It's only a woman with that sort of goodness that would ever have married Dally—*married* Dally Stair."



## CHAPTER XXXIII

**D**ALLY had to go to St. Fortunes every day, returning to Striven in the evening. One day he had been in Edinburgh, and came back rather later than usual. He walked up to the house, briskly whistling as he went. The old dog lumbered up to meet him, shaking with joy. They made a great noise together—the grunts and barks of the dog, Dally whistling and clapping him, and Dally's footsteps crunching cheerily on the frozen gravel. Suddenly, out of the house—the door stood open—came Juliet, bareheaded, with only a cloak thrown across her shoulders, with her white hands stretched out, and her face all pale and tender. She was so beautiful and so grievous-looking that the man stood still in astonishment.

“Hush! oh, do hush, Dally, dear! Down, Jock, be quiet.” She laid her hands on Dally's arm, and with tears and a choking voice said to him right out, “Oh, Dally, it's so sad! Your poor little baby is dead.”

The young man stood still and looked at her, his face taking on its green, unbecoming pallor, his voice gone.

“Come,” said Juliet gently, leading him forwards, “you must come and see your wife. Susan *loved* it so, Dally. Oh, think about her—you must help her. It got ill in the morning,” she went on, still urging him towards the door, “and we sent to St. Fortunes, but you



were gone to town; and we got the doctor and did everything, but it just died in about an hour. Susan is in the nursery now. Go up, Dally.”

“Won’t you come? I don’t know what to say,” said Dally helplessly.

“*Say, man! Say to your own wife about your own child! Oh, Dally, you’re——*” began Juliet, then turned suddenly, and left him alone without another look.

Dally walked slowly along the darkened passage. He stood at the door for a moment and listened. There was no sound. He opened the door timidly and went in; there was a light in the room and a fire. Susan sat beside the child’s cot. It struck him as strange that she was sewing something—just as she usually sat there and sewed. She turned just a trifle when he came in, and let her hands fall on her lap. Dally was acutely sensitive. He winced before the dry pain in Susan’s eyes, as before a sight too horrible for him.

“My poor darling!” he said, coming up, and putting his arm about her.

Susan made no response. She leant forwards slightly, and uncovered the child’s face.

“It’s dead, you see,” she said.

“Oh, dear!” sighed Dally, tears running down his face.

He stood and held her hand, and looked down at the little cot. It was an ugly little baby—dead—with its red hair and its twisted face—old now with the wisdom of a thousand ages in the stamp of death. Susan looked



down at it, dry-eyed. Dally tried to comfort her; she listened to him in silence. He coaxed her to come downstairs, and eat, and rest. She just looked at him, and shook her head.

“Can’t you leave me alone?” she said at last, in a tone that no one would have known for hers.

Dally dropped her limp hand and went sorrowfully out of the room. Susan refused to see anyone all the next day.

On the morning of the melancholy little funeral she sat in the nursery alone. She held the coffin—not a yard long—on her knees. She was not crying wildly, but large, slow tears fell on it one by one. Dally came and looked into the room, and went away again without speaking.

“I can’t do it,” he said, hiding his face with his hand.

Then Juliet came in by herself, in a black dress, with her sweet face pale with sympathy. She stood beside Susan and held out her arms.

“Won’t you give him to me, Susan? I’ll carry it down myself. I will be very gentle—as if it were my own.”

She smiled through her tears, holding her arms out like a mother to a child, and Susan rose, placed the little coffin in her arms, and then flung herself down across the empty cradle without another look.

“Leave her by herself—do not go again till it is all over,” said Juliet.

She herself was very silent, sitting in the carriage with Kate and Dally. When it was all over and they



had come home, Dally sat down by the library table and leant his head on his arms and wept. Juliet brought him some tea. She stood beside him and coaxed him to drink it. She had taken off her hat, and stood with her long coat thrown open, her face still pale and charming in its sweetness. Then Dally bent his head, and rubbed the hem of her coat with his lips; life was beginning to return to him.

“It comforts me,” he said, “to think that I ever loved a creature as beautiful as you.”

Juliet did not move or draw herself away. She stood looking down at him.

“I think,” she said at last, “that there must be something very bad about me. I seem to make other people so foolish.”

Dally flushed to the roots of his red hair.

“I—I must go and see poor Susan,” he said, rising.

“Poor Susan!” repeated Juliet softly, looking at him.

But when he went upstairs Susan lay still on her bed with her face hidden. She held out a cold hand to him and thanked him for coming, and asked him to go away again. The food that had been brought to her was untasted on the table. She wanted nothing, she said—she was not cold. Dally threw a covering over her and went downstairs disconsolate. His mother, who had been all day with her husband, met him and asked how Susan was.

“She will not speak to me, or eat, or cry,” said Dally. “I do not like to leave her, but she told me to go away.”

Mrs. Stair marched up to Susan’s room. She came



in and stood by the bed and looked at the figure huddled upon it, with hidden face.

“Have you had nothing to eat all day, Susan?” she said at last.

“I’m not hungry, thank you.”

“Oh!”

Susan raised herself at the sound of the dry, harsh voice. She turned on her pillow and looked up at her mother-in-law’s gaunt, stern face.

“Susan,” said Mrs. Stair—she was a woman who never used an endearment—“be thankful if you never have more to sorrow for than you have to-day.” She paused, and a glitter came into her faded gray eyes. “You never saw *my* eldest son—Dally’s brother. I was proud when he was born.” Her voice failed for a moment. She coughed and went on: “I lived to wish he had never been born. Woman,” she said, speaking with a sudden desperate passion that made Susan thrill, “the tears you weep to-day are as different from those *I* have wept as drops of balm from tears of blood. . . . He died at twenty-four; and see what his father is now.”

Susan put out her hands and took Mrs. Stair’s hand and held it close.

“Come, get up and dry your eyes,” said Mrs. Stair. “I will come to the nursery with you now—to-night—and help you to put away the child’s things. Don’t put it off till to-morrow. Bless me, my girl! I know what you feel. Come, come with me now.”

Susan rose to her feet, pale and faint with grief and want of food. They went together to the nursery.



She came downstairs that evening and had dinner, and sat with the others afterwards. The next day she went about as usual.

“There will be another some day,” said Dally to her by way of simple comfort.

“Perhaps, *another*,” she answered; and Dally needed not to be told that he had said the wrong word.

He found her working away at a little picture in her own room soon afterwards. Susan covered it up and would not let him look. He saw it later. It was a sad Madonna, sitting enthroned amidst a waste of snow. Her head was bent, and the shadow of her hood hid the face, but she held on her lap a little, ugly baby, with red hair. There was a terrible love in the way her arms were about it; and a leafless tree behind, from its bare arms, stretched a shadow like a cross upon the snow.



## CHAPTER XXXIV

**D**ALLY, for a while, was really sad. He tried his every art to console Susan. He went and came from St. Fortunes dutifully as long as she remained at Striven, and Mr. Murchison was even heard to exclaim, "We'll make a business man of him yet." Towards the end of April, however, this fit of virtue began to pall. He told Susan that he must have a little amusement.

"As much, that's to say, as a wretched beast of a brewer, who hasn't a penny in the world, and has a wife and five sisters dependent upon him, can have," he said.

He begged Susan to come with him to London, to Paris, were it even for a fortnight; but Mr. Stair was very ill, and Mrs. Stair getting worn out with nursing, so Susan would not leave them, and Dally persuaded Mr. Murchison to grant him a brief reprieve and went off by himself.

"You can forget in six weeks," said Susan, allowing herself a moment of bitterness.

"It's nearly *ten* weeks, Sue," was Dally's reproachful reply, and she was sorry that she had spoken. Habit was teaching her (as it always does) when to ask Dally to understand her and when never to expect it. She was touched by his tenderness to her, and angry with herself for having asked for what was not in his nature.



Old Mrs. Stair had felt the baby's death more than anyone. It made a bond between her and Susan that, without words, was very strong. "It meant so much to me," was all she said to her daughter-in-law, but that little sentence meant more to Susan than all Mrs. Crawford's facile tears.

Dally stayed away more than a fortnight, and, Mr. Stair having revived again, Susan returned to St. Fortunes. Mrs. Stair stood in her coal-scuttle bonnet and waved a grim adieu from the doorway as she drove away. On the road to the station they passed by the church. Carrie had gone with Susan, and at the corner of the road she noticed her bend forward and look back.

"What is it, Susan?" she asked.

Susan pointed mutely to the churchyard wall, and Carrie's tender spinster heart was wrung.

"Life is so strange, Carrie," said Susan, after a minute, speaking low between the rumbling and jolting of the old carriage. "I came here with so much hope, and now I leave it all behind."

Carrie simply murmured something about "Loved and lost."

"Oh," said Susan, "not quite! It seems to me just a false venture of the soul, Carrie. One thinks always 'in this or in that I will find happiness.' I've thought it about other things before . . . and then one sets sail towards it with such a cargo of hopes, and has just to come back again foiled. I thought, I hoped, that in my love for my son——" She paused and looked away past Carrie, out across the bright spring fields towards



the long narrow line of the sea that lay bright as a drawn sword in the distance. "Oh, I hoped so much. I thought he would be such a brave man, and do so much in the world, and make some woman so happy some day . . . . my soul went on such a long voyage then, and came back with nothing."

This was a little beyond Carrie, who listened with tears of sympathy gathering in her inexpressive eyes. She did wonder how, after this, Susan, as they stood together waiting for the train, could find such a keen delight in the purple on the necks of the station-master's pigeons, and why she looked back with a very bright smile to her as the train left the platform. Carrie on her way home reflected on these things. "Minna says all artistic people are so volatile," she thought, sensible that the word was not descriptive of Susan, but she could find nothing better.

"Well, Susan, I'm glad to see you back again," was Mrs. Murchison's greeting. "You look all eyes and mouth still, but you'll soon lose that. There's a letter from Dally for you upstairs."

Mrs. Murchison made no allusion to the child's death. Her cook was making marmalade, and she immediately took Susan downstairs to help. In the unromantic occupation Susan for the moment forgot her cares. She read Dally's letter by snatches, amidst the smell of bitter oranges and boiling sugar.

In Dally's absence she had more time to herself, and she spent the most of the day painting in the orchards. As the spring advanced the merry, beautiful, blossoming



time made every morning a sort of paradise to Susan. Then, for a brief season, the bleak landscape about the little old town was flushed with an unearthly beauty. Pink and white are difficult things to deal with, and Susan, who executed a great quantity of work, and looked back on it very little, found that the difficulty imperceptibly drew her away from her own sad thoughts. She had been working for more than a week at one picture—scarcely even caring to eat, so anxious was she to catch and express her thought before the whole thing vanished. In her queer holland overall she sat all day long, under a very thick black holly tree, in the inner garden, and painted as if for her very life. Mr. Murchison was much distressed, and would fain have got her away; offered daily to do anything he could, take her into town.

“Go to any hotel you like, my dear; I’ll take you to the theater every night,” he would say encouragingly, and Susan would lift blue, dreamy eyes to him, and smile her kind, bright smile, and shake her head.

“Don’t you see, it’s her way of consoling herself? Just let her alone,” said her aunt, who understood better. “Her poor father was just that kind of person too, in his own way,” she added.

In the early morning, before the dew was dry, when she went out into the spice-scented air, and heard the merry, shouting birds, and fancied that a new inspiration waited for her amongst the shadows in every alley of the orchards, Susan lifted up her eyes again to the light. To every heart its own bitterness; also its own path of



recovery. The spring season came to her like a god-send—as new and fresh as if she had never been alive in May before.

She was sitting one afternoon laboring away as usual in her usual place, her face flushed with heat and streaked with blue paint, her hair very untidy, and an old hat drawn over her eyes, when her aunt brought out Colonel Hamilton and another elderly man whom Susan did not know.

She hurriedly covered up her picture and turned to greet them.

“I have brought a friend of mine to see you, Susan,” said Colonel Hamilton. He mentioned a name that Susan knew quite well. It made her look at the little shabby-looking man with childlike respect. “I want you to show him some of your pictures.”

Susan demurred for an instant, and then very timidly moved aside and let him look.

“H’m, yes,” he grunted, and made one or two observations about it, looking up every now and then at the young woman as he spoke.

They sat on the garden bench for some time afterwards, talking about other things. When Colonel Hamilton rose to go, the other man came round by Susan’s work.

“How much would you take for this, Mrs. Stair?” he grunted suddenly.

“I don’t quite understand,” said Susan, startled.

“I want to buy it—I mean that. Will you sell it?” he said, looking at her quickly again.



“ I? I never thought of such a thing! ”

“ More fool you, Mrs. Stair. Will you do it? ”

“ Oh, no, thank you! I couldn't. My husband would not like it, I think, ” said Susan; then she looked up at him frankly. “ I never thought my work was worth anything at all. I do not think it is. ”

“ So much the better. Well, tell me if you ever do, ” he grunted, turning away.

When Susan told Dally on his return he roared with laughter.

“ You may do it if you like, of course, but I do not fancy myself supported by my wife. Do, dearest, if you want to, and buy yourself a necklace. ”

“ Oh, Dally! your one idea of a woman is a necklace! ”

“ Well, yes, of some women. I suppose you'd rather give it to your mother—not the necklace, the money, I mean. ”

“ Yes, much rather. I'd like to give her—— ”

“ Some new hair? ” suggested Dally softly.

“ I'll give it to Alec—he needs some money so much, ” said Susan.

This sudden intrusion of a pleasant and practical thought brightened her up very much. It was not the money, but the miracle of the touch of her thought turning into gold that attracted her. She felt like someone who handles a new weapon for the first time.



## CHAPTER XXXV

**I**N the course of the summer it was suddenly announced that Carrie Stair was going to marry a curate.

“That’s just the flat fact, Susan,” said Dally, “and you needn’t try to be mystical over it; it’s not romance, nor love, nor anything interesting, but just marriage. Carrie is not you; he’s a little crawling thing; but she’s going to *marry a curate*, and for my part I think she’s quite wise.”

He stood looking at Susan with great amusement. She had just received Carrie’s letter and sat on the garden bench with her hands folded on her lap. Dally regarded her with pleasure. The blue cotton frock she wore suited her very well. He thought she was really a very pleasant person to look at now. His admiration for Susan was of a curiously mixed quality; at some points it approached almost to awe, as he would have expressed it.

“Well,” he continued, “can’t you understand it at all? Have you lived to be twenty-five, is it, and don’t grasp the fact of marriage yet, Susan? You’re not expecting passion between Carrie and a curate, are you?”

“Oh, Darnley!”

“‘Oh, Darnley!’ Whenever I come near the truth about anything, Susan, you sheer away and say, ‘Oh,



Darnley, you shouldn't speak like that.' Marriage, my dear, is a matter of arrangement; love is—well, I don't pretend to know quite; passion's the very devil," he added, grinding his heel into Mr. Murchison's carefully kept turf as he spoke; "not that you know anything about it, dearest," he continued.

Susan looked up at him steadily. "How do you know that?"

Dally was alert in an instant. He sat down beside her, sinking to the confidential. "Do tell me, Susan, When? How? I should so like to know."

"We are probably speaking of different things, Dally."

"Oh, very likely; but you have such an imagination, Sue; everything you touch is illuminated; that's why I want you to tell me—only don't expect it in Carrie and the curate."

Two days later Carrie arrived in person. Susan ran down to meet her when she saw the carriage come up the hill. Carrie had got a new beige dress and a cheap hat, rather raucous in coloring. ("It made her suggest a flamingo," Dally whispered hurriedly, as he glanced at her from the window.) Her thin face was flushed with excitement.

"I felt I must come to see you, Susan; you are always so sweet," were her first words, from which Susan gathered that some of the Stair family had not been sweet to her.

Susan took her out to sit in the garden, gave her a chair in the shade, with a cushion and a footstool, and



talked a little about other matters, leaving her to cool down. Darnley came out—it was Saturday afternoon—and sat on the grass at Susan's knee, knocking the heads off the black "soldiers" that grew by the hedge, and putting in a word chiefly when it was not wanted.

"Mr. Pewlitt wished to have come with me to-day," Carrie began shyly. Dally gave a faint shudder, perceptible at Susan's knee.

"I wish that you had brought him," said Susan.

"He is not very good-looking," Carrie went on. "You must not expect too much; he is not quite so tall as I am."

"My dear Carrie, no one expected you to marry an Apollo," put in Dally.

Carrie laughed nervously. "No, of course not, but Minna seemed to think him so *very* small."

"Bulk is Minna's ideal, you must remember."

"Be quiet, Darnley," said Susan, tapping his shoulder; "you are interrupting Carrie."

"Oh," said Carrie, "I'm sure that you would like him, and get on with him, Susan; he has such a beautiful mind. To him every item of the service is a symbol with a wonderful meaning."

"Very good; go on," said Dally.

"Of course we won't have very much money, but he says that he thinks a priest ought to be poor," said Carrie, blushing.

"Curate," said Dally, rising, "I can stand; when it comes to priest, I'm obliged to leave."



“Dally doesn’t quite understand,” said Carrie, as her brother disappeared; “I felt sure that you would, Susan,” and she squeezed Susan’s hand, with eyes full of happy tears.

“Do I understand?” thought Susan, as she sat and looked at her sister-in-law. Carrie, ten years her senior, made her feel so very old. Indeed, she looked very matronly and sweet beside the thin-faced, flurried woman. Carrie thought her fat, but she was only becomingly plump in reality. Did she “understand,” she wondered again, as after she had bidden Carrie good-by she watched her sink back in the carriage with faint, self-absorbed smile, doubtless to think about Mr. Pewlitt all the long way home.

After Carrie’s departure Susan walked slowly along one of the orchard paths to meet Dally, who said he would return that way. It was a hot July day without any sun. In the gardens and the orchards all the season of blossom and stir had gone past; a great rampart of elms, heavy with innumerable leaves, rose up against the placid dove-colored sky. The gardens before her were green: the grass was green: the young crops green in the summer fields: the hedges: the bushes on the walls—the whole world seemed steeped in one even, soft tint of color. Not a leaf flickered. There was hardly a variation in the low tone of the whole; the great trees almost courtesied to the earth under the weight of their green crown. It was all quiet, satisfying, complete; it entered Susan’s heart like a whisper at her ear. Could she fulfill her destiny in the world? Could she give her-



self up to life in that way, and somehow realize in herself that placid growth and accomplishment, like those green apple trees beneath the tender sky. Their time of blossom was over; their fruit was not ripe—might still be blasted before its time; but in the green, uneventful monotony of summer she read a lesson of something quieter than patience—of a larger acquiescence in the laws of life. She looked long till the harmonious monotony of the scene before her had soothed her very brain. Then she got up and went slowly on to meet Dally, holding her hand tightly closed, in a childish way she had, as if she had caught something very precious in it: the thought of the green gardens.

“Marriage? Love? Carrie and her curate?” She turned the thoughts slowly over in her mind. “Was it marriage, and not the man, that made Carrie’s happiness? Could it be that she found in him all that she imagined? What had her own marriage been? If she could go back and begin afresh, not for a thousand worlds would she do it over again, and yet what sort of an existence would she have had at home? Was not life with Dally better far than that? Is it all—all just entirely a delusion about love? she wondered. Wasn’t her feeling for her husband just as good as anything anyone ever got? How rich life would have been if her child had lived! If she had another child would she have the same hopes, and then just live to find that her child was no better than other people, and that ‘the glory and the dream’ had faded from that, too? Could she push aside her self, her own narrow circumstances, and



enter into something large and placid like the life of nature? ”

She thought how she had grown older and changed since those days at Linfield, when she first met Dally. How then she used to have so much time, it seemed, and room to think. Bewildering thoughts came over her, then, images so vivid that they seemed to be painted on the very walls of her room—sudden inquiries of the mind that seemed for the moment like bright tracks leading far into the infinite ignorance; but then her untrained intelligence, having no system or sequence of thought, would fail as suddenly, and all would be blank again. Here she was now surrounded with a network of new duties, and would she ever make anything out of that. . . .

The sound of a step at her side startled her, and a hoarse voice at her ear said, “ Mistress Stair, Mistress Stair, will ye speak a minute? ”

Susan turned abruptly. She had been thinking so deeply that she was unaware of any presence near her. A barefooted woman had crept up the side of the wall on the pathway behind, and now stood close beside her. Susan gazed at her, startled and half afraid. The poor thing had a bundle in her hand, a child trotting behind her, a baby tied into a shawl at her back. The freckles all over her sunburnt face showed suddenly in its pallor. Susan recognized her in a minute.

“ Did you want to speak to me about something? ” she asked pleasantly, turning to stand in the roadway and holding out a cool hand to the little boy, who came



up and gazed at her. "You are the woman I went to see one day in Brick Street?"

"Yes, mem, jest that," said the other woman softly. She sniffed and wiped her face with the corner of her shawl, glanced up the road and then down, then said in a hurried whisper, "I thocht maybe I'd let ye know aforehand, Mistress Stair, she's coming hame; *she's no deid ava.*"

"Who? I do not know what you are speaking about," said Susan.

"*She's no deid*; she's my good sister. Ye'll maybe no have heard of her," she went on; "she that was away, ye ken, in Americka."

"And you thought that she was dead, did you? Are you not pleased to see her again?" Susan inquired.

"Mem," the woman whispered, "it's no that. I thocht ye'd maybe like to know." She paused.

Dally at this moment came sharply round the corner of the orchard, walking towards them.

The woman hitched the infant on her arm. "I'm off the day," she said. "She'll no keep me any mair. I'm off to a fairm place oor yonder."

"And do you take the children with you?" Susan asked.

"What else wad I do, mem? Thank ye kindly," she said, as Susan gave her some money.

Dally came up, looking curiously at both of them. The woman pulled the child beside her and turned away.

Susan stood looking after her. "She is that poor thing we saw before, Dally. Do you remember? She



kept telling me something about someone that was coming home whom she had thought was dead. I couldn't make out what she meant at all."

Dally was indifferent. He ran off upon Carrie and her hat and her curate till Susan forgot all about it too.

"I think that I found something beautiful here to-day, Dally," she said, pausing again to look into the green garden.

"I should like," said Dally, "just to be an old maid like Carrie for one week to see how it feels. Perhaps I may try it in the next transmigration. Bah! there's no fun to be got out of making jokes about a curate. It's too common; it's so wearying of even Carrie to take one."

"*Peace wears a green gown,*" said Susan to herself. She was not listening.

"She does, does she? Yes, I believe you're right. I see it, too," said Dally, standing beside her looking at the trees. "Mercy on us! What would old Murchison and your aunt say if they could hear us just now?"



## CHAPTER XXXVI

**M**EASLES in the Crawford household (as unfortunately in many others) was a prolonged ordeal. Although the first child had sickened early in February, it was the end of May before the last one finished with it. As she announced each fresh case Mrs. Crawford took a doleful pleasure in predicting the next.

“I should think that the very hens had had it by this time,” said Dally towards the end.

Emily had it last of all. She was very ill, for she was growing fast and did not seem to gain strength. She was turning into a very pretty girl. With her soft dark eyes, her white skin, and long hair, she had a budding beauty far beyond Susan's humbler charms. In autumn she caught cold again, and was so ill that Susan went back to Burrie Bush to nurse her. Dally had gone away on business, so she stayed for some time with her mother. It was very curious to be at home again, to listen to Mrs. Crawford's vague remarks, dress and feed the children, and move about the house as she used to do. Alec, the eldest boy, was in Edinburgh at work in a lawyer's office, and Dick had got the coveted appointment with the veterinary surgeon that so dismayed the Stairs. The younger children seemed to be growing like weeds—strong and uncared for—but Emily was developing into



a much more capable young person. She went off by herself to stay at Linfield when Susan had to return to St. Fortunes, and soon began to write very cheerfully, and then, the best sign of all, ceased to write altogether, and Juliet reported that she was getting quite well again.

Susan was startled by Dally's appearance when he came back, a few days after her return. To her he looked five years older than when they had parted a few weeks before. He declared that he was not ill, and told her that he was "worried about business." For a time he plunged into his work with a fervor that delighted Mr. Murchison, then seemed to do nothing but idle about—go off to Edinburgh for the day, and come back looking yellow and haggard. One evening in November Susan expected him back from town late in the afternoon. Mrs. Murchison was out, and Susan sat alone in the firelight that only illuminated a section of the big room. Her back was to the door, and she leant her head against the back of the chair, calling out, "Is that you, Dally?" as someone entered behind her.

"No, Mrs. Stair; may I come in?" said Archie Hamilton, who had opened the door, and stood at the end of the room in the shadow.

Susan watched him with a quick appreciation of the effects of firelight on his face as he came up into the glow beside her. He had come from Linfield, and she wanted to ask him about Emily, so the slight difficulty that she always found in speaking to him wore quickly away. Perhaps the quiet of the hour, the sweet household suggestiveness of Susan sitting alone in the firelight there,



made it easier. They talked for a long time, Susan feeling vaguely surprised at herself. She had never spoken quite in that way to anyone before. He lost his usual gravity, and she wondered that she had ever thought him hard and disagreeable. "How one misjudges people if they do not exactly hit our own note," she thought, and repenting of her uncharitableness, she was wonderfully gentle and sweet. Dally appeared in the middle of this after a wet walk from the station. He was very pale, his eyes gleamed in his face, and his coat was all wet.

"Where have you been, Darnley? I expected you an hour ago," said Susan.

He hardly made any reply, greeted his cousin only with a grunt, and came and stood in front of the fire, holding up his head so that his face was in shadow.

This was so unlike his usual behavior that Susan was startled. "We have been talking about very interesting things, Dally," she began.

"Very likely," said Dally without moving.

"Are you going to dine with Minna on Christmas Day?" asked Archie.

"Yes, I believe we are," said Susan.

"I suppose we must. Life's bad enough without that," groaned Dally.

"Why, what's wrong with life to-day?" asked Archie, as he rose to go. "Does it not come quite up to your expectations?"

Dally murmured something almost inaudible, then he broke out, "Oh, it's a vile, wretched, bad business alto-



gether, and the sooner we're dead and the worms have eaten us the better. But, of course," he added, stretching himself up involuntarily, as he always did when they stood together, to reach his cousin's extra half inch of stature, "of course, superior people like you, Archie, 'with clean hands and a pure heart,' find things right enough."

Susan looked at him in surprise. Archie only laughed, and in a few minutes took his leave. Dally went down to the door with him and came back again into the half dark room in silence.

"Your cousin was so interesting to talk to, Dally; I forgot that I had ever disliked him," said Susan.

"I never liked him, and I never will," said Dally, sitting down and taking Susan's hand. "Oh, Susan," he said, "why did you go and waste yourself upon a fool like me?"

"You are in a very distressed mood to-night, Dally. What is the matter?"

"Everything," said Dally. But when Susan asked again "everything" had declined into "nothing particular." "Just the old woe o' the world," he said, trying to laugh her questions aside.

Mrs. Bracebridge was having a family party on Christmas Day, and with great difficulty Susan had persuaded Dally to go. They went in to Edinburgh two days beforehand. The Hamiltons were all in town too, so Susan was very happy to meet them again. Old Mrs. Stair was staying with her daughter, and Carrie and Mr. Pewlitt were coming to dinner. Susan was a very



solvent to a family party, and though Minna took a rather contemptuous view of her as being a person without either wealth or position, she acknowledged that she was sweet and sensible and had "improved Dally a good deal." This probably was because Dally, being in such abnormally low spirits, was much less talkative than usual. So Susan had to listen to Minna's doubts about Carrie's marriage, Mr. Pewlitt's income, and their probable money difficulties; then to listen to Carrie's complaints about Minna's irritating, unasked advice, her rude behavior to old Mrs. Pewlitt, and so on—all round each member of the family in turn.

"Artistic people never realize the common-sense view of things," said Minna. "Still, Susan, you must see——"

And, "Of course, Susan, you with your artistic nature cannot quite understand—but——" said Carrie. And Susan sat meekly under the artistic accusation, and listened to both sides of the question, making peace as well as she could.

"Artistic!" said Mrs. Stair. "I wish, Minna, that you were half as sensible."

"You poor little mortal! It's well we're only going to stay for two days; all those dull women would choke you," said Darnley. He stood watching Susan just about ready to go downstairs to dinner on Christmas Eve. She was fastening the necklace he had given her on their marriage, and the clasp had stuck.

"Do it for me, Dally," she said, bending her head. He stood for a moment with his hands about her pretty



throat, looking over her shoulder into the mirror in front of them.

“If I were . . . say, hanged, Sue, would you come to the gallows with me? I believe you would.”

“You goose!” began Susan, then raised her eyes to see a face in the mirror that she would scarcely have known was his.

She turned back her head and looked up at him for a moment with her sweet eyes full of tears.

Dally drew her face against him and kissed her again and again. “Bless you, you sweet woman!” he said, and snapped the clasp of her necklet shut.

“We’re late; come, Dally. Are you tidy?” said Susan, conscious that an emotional moment was not suitable just before Minna’s dinner party.

“Ugh!” said Dally. “How dull it will be! I *would* rather be hung!” and they went downstairs together.



## CHAPTER XXXVII

**I**T was a family party such as eat together by the hundred at Christmas-time. Perhaps a trifle above the average in some parts, but ill-assorted for all that, as such gatherings must be when relationship, instead of inclination, has brought people together.

Minna was richly dressed, prim, and smiling. She had Colonel Hamilton at her right hand. Old Mrs. Stair sat beside Tom Bracebridge at the foot of the table. She wore a very old gown—old silk, shiny at the seams, pieced in the skimpy skirt, trimmed with darned lace, the only handsome jewel she now possessed carefully disposed upon her bony neck. Her face, strongly lined, thin, with harsh features, and crowned with scant red hair, had yet a kind of dignity about it that made the featureless fatness of old Mrs. Bracebridge look common. That lady—gentle, pompous, and dull—sat beside Dally, who paid very little heed to her, it must be said. He had Minna's two round-faced little girls beside him—they came down to dessert—and was cracking nuts for them, and gazing across the table at Juliet Clephane, who sat opposite to him. Susan sat next Archie Hamilton, and endeavored to encourage conversation between him and Carrie's curate, who, though he might have been called the origin of the feast, was treated with distinct coldness by Mrs. Bracebridge. Carrie probably was the



happiest person present. She looked across the table at Mr. Pewlitt, listening to his every word, and, wrapt in a happy dream, made no attempt to speak to Colonel Hamilton at all, except when he asked a question about the parish, when her face brightened in a moment.

A servant, coming hurriedly into the room, said something to Mr. Bracebridge in a low voice. He turned to Susan.

“Your uncle, Mr. Murchison, is here,” he said, looking a little surprised.

“Oh, bother!” said Dally, who heard.

“My uncle here! I hope that there is nothing wrong,” said Susan. “Shall I go and speak to him?”

“He wishes to speak to me, it seems. I’ll go and bring him in,” said Tom Bracebridge, rising.

There was a lull in the conversation. Susan explained her uncle’s appearance to Minna.

Dally sat back in his chair, and began to cut out a set of false teeth from an orange skin to the delight of the children. Minna looked on with disapproval.

The silence grew oppressive. There came a great sound of voices from the hall.

“What on earth is the matter?” Darnley began, pushing back his chair. Then Tom Bracebridge came in and stood at the foot of the table, with a strange face.

“Children, leave the room at once,” he said. The awe-struck little things slid from their places and went silently away. “Darnley,” said Mr. Bracebridge, “will you come and speak with me in the library?”



Just at that moment the door opened, and Mr. Murchison came into the room along with a tall woman in a red hat.

Tom Bracebridge turned in horror. "Oh, I say, not before the women!" he began. But the old man pushed him aside. He was deadly pale, and his voice shook when he tried to speak. He had the air of a stupid man excited, of a kind man driven into a sudden fury.

"Stop!" he began, motioning to Dally. "Stay where you are, Mr. Stair! Stop, all of you; I don't care who hears." He turned on Dally. "Do you know this woman?"

Darnley, standing up, faced them both. He crushed his table-napkin in one hand, his face grew gray as ashes, his eyes glittered in his head.

"He knows me very well," began the woman. She crossed her hands in front of her, and raised her voice a little. She looked round the table with a hard eye, till she caught sight of old Mrs. Stair. "You know me too," she said. "You remember Mary Reed?"

"She was my laundry-maid," said Mrs. Stair. She looked down at her plate, not a muscle of her face moved. The other woman flushed with anger at the scorn in the light, dry words.

"I'm your son's wife for all that, madam!" she cried out. "I was married to him, as fast as you were ever married, fourteen years ago."

Mrs. Stair rose slowly to her full height, in her shabby



silk and mended lace, with her head held high. She leant one bony hand on the table and looked across at her son.

“Darnley,” she said, “is this true?”

“Yes, mother,” said Dally, “it is.”

For a moment there was no sound in the room, till the woman by the door gave a short and ugly chuckle. Susan had half risen from her chair, but the room swam around her. Then with a soft rustle Juliet got up before anyone spoke. She had more presence of mind than the whole of them put together. She paused an instant behind her cousin Archie’s chair.

“Look after Susan,” she whispered, and in another moment had swept down to the woman at the door. “I remember you quite well when you were Mrs. Stair’s laundry-maid,” she said. Her voice was perfectly sweet and matter-of-fact. “It must be trying for you to come here amongst us all. Please come into another room with me, and tell me all about it.”

The woman eyed her.

“You’re not Mistress Stair?” she asked, with bitter emphasis on the words.

“Oh, dear, no! Only his cousin,” said Juliet cheerfully. “Come this way, please. Mr. Stair will speak to you presently.”

It was a cruel little scene; the easy insolence with which she did it. Her height, her beauty, her station, her wits—the whole armory of weapons she possessed—all turned to account in one moment. The other woman hesitated; her battered, clumsy person seemed to show more plainly.



She let her arms fall by her sides, drooped her head, and allowed Juliet to lead her to the door. Juliet followed her. At the door she turned back for an instant and glanced up the table. Her part was to get the woman out of the way.

“Please, all of you others come, and leave them alone,” she said. She gave one long look at Dally; he winced like a man that is stabbed.

Carrie and Mr. Pewlitt and old Mrs. Bracebridge left the room in hurried disorder. Archie Hamilton laid his hand over Susan’s as it rested on the edge of the table, and drew her gently back to her chair. He stood behind her. Dally made a choking noise in his throat, and advanced a step towards his mother, but Mr. Murchison went on hoarsely:

“Stand where you are; I’ve more to say yet. I want them all to hear it.” He looked at Susan’s white face, and trembled in his anger. “I took you into my business as a favor, Mr. Stair. You know your fine gentleman airs were no great help. I allowed you to marry—*marry! good God!*—Susan, and this roguery is how you’ve paid me for it, and you’ve swindled me out of a thousand pounds.” He turned to old Mrs. Stair with the grotesque, piteous anger of a stupid man. “Madam, your son is a liar and a thief!”

“Sir, sir!” gasped Dally. “Susan, mother, all of you, listen—won’t you? *Can’t* you listen to me for half a minute?” He grasped the back of the chair with hands that were clenched like iron. “It’s true about that woman. I did marry her—fool that I was—when



I was still a boy—just when I went to college. I paid, and paid, and paid.” He looked across at Colonel Hamilton. “You helped me, sir; I dare say you all thought me a dissipated wretch. Then she went off to America; she stopped writing; I thought she’d gone off with some man or other. I wrote and heard nothing. Then her people told me she was dead. I made all the inquiries that I could—everyone said the same.” He gasped again. “That was nine years ago. I thought I was free at last—I swear that I did—and now she comes back. What could I do? How could I tell anyone *that*—for Susan’s sake? She wanted a thousand pounds, she said, and promised to go away forever if she got it. How could I raise *that* all of a sudden without making you all talk? How could I get it? Of course it was all madness, and worse, but what would you have done, any of you, in my place? I meant to pay every penny of it back by degrees. I—O God! *will no one believe me?* ”

“The best thing that can be done for everyone,” began Tom Bracebridge in his thick, matter-of-fact tone, “is to get you out of the country at once. We’ll pay back the money, sir.”

“Tut! The money’s nothing—it’s the disgrace,” said the old man. He turned again fiercely upon Dally.

“Go then! get off! get away with you to-night! I’ll pay your passage to New Zealand myself to get you out of my sight. Take *your wife* with you!”

“Ah!” said Susan faintly.



Dally pushed the others aside, and crossed the room to where his mother sat rigid in her chair. He threw himself down beside her and grasped at her dress. "Mother, mother, help me!" he said hoarsely.

"Oh, come away!" cried Minna, shuddering, pulling her husband's arm.

"Mother!" Dally called again.

Mrs. Stair got up, pulling her skirt from his hand, her face set like flint. She gave him a little flip with her finger and turned away after Minna.

"I am the mother of no thief!" she said.

Susan rose, steadying herself for a moment by leaning on the table, then with one long sobbing sigh she put her hand through Dally's arm. He had risen to his feet and stood as if stupefied. Susan looked up at Archie Hamilton, who stood leaning against the wall, just under a lamp. He crushed a wreath of Christmas greenery behind him. The light fell full on his face: it was, as Emmy had called it long ago, "like an avenging angel."

"Please," she said, "will you help us? Go and send that woman away—get her to go just now. Dally will see her and arrange things with her afterwards, won't you, Dally?"

She put her hand over Dally's hand and stroked it as if he had been a child.

"Now, Susan, go away and let us settle this," began Mr. Murchison.

"Go away, my dear, for a little while. I will bring



Dally to speak to you afterwards," said Colonel Hamilton.

"Go, Susan—go!" said Dally hoarsely.

Susan let Colonel Hamilton take her hand and lead her from the room. She sat she did not know how long alone. There was only one light in the room, half turned down. She did not raise her head or turn it up. Then she heard voices at the door—Archie Hamilton and Mrs. Stair.

"Let me go," he said; "I will tell her." He came quietly into the room, shut the door, and bending down laid his hand on Susan's shoulder as she sat with her face hidden. "Susan," he said—he had never called her so before—"your uncle and Uncle Maurice have arranged that Dally goes away at once. It's better so, believe me. Can you get some of his things packed for him now? Mrs. Stair said she would do it, but I told her that you would rather be alone."

"I will do it—now," said Susan, uncovering her face and rising to her feet. "Is that woman gone?" she asked.

Archie nodded. "She is."

"Will Dally go—with her?"

"Yes. She is his wife, Susan."

"Oh!" said Susan, "I forgot." She moved unsteadily forward. "Ask Dally to come and tell me what he wants with him—now."

Archie went away. Susan began to move about the room, opening drawers and collecting Dally's things and putting them into his dressing-case. She did not move



when Dally came into the room, except to hold up something she had in her hand, and say, "Do you want this, Dally?"

Dally stood looking at her. She repeated the question. He did not answer. Then Susan turned to him and flung her arms about his neck; her tears rained down on his shoulder.

"You *must* think," she said; "I want to do it for you."

Dally drew a long breath, then said in his strange, broken voice that she did not know, "Yes, yes; put in all my things. Be quick, Sue; they're waiting."

She packed his things, and just as she was done he lifted a little book from the table and shoved it in. It was her own little drawing-book, Susan saw.

A few minutes later Susan walked with him softly through the hall. She held his hand like a child. At the door she stood still and lifted her face to him. He looked out into the dark street. The servants had put the box on to the cab and gone away. The whole house seemed hushed. In the wet street the cabman was walking to and fro, slapping his arms to keep himself warm. The rain had blown over for a bit, but the lamps shone dimly reflectedly on the wet flags.

"Now go. Good-by, Dally," said Susan.

Dally did not speak, but bent and kissed her hands again as he had once kissed them long ago.

"Bless you—God bless you forever!" he said. "I'll never see you again!"

"Will you write to your mother, Dally?"



He shook his head.

“What are you going to do?”

He shook his head again; great, quick tears were gathering in his eyes.

“Where are you going?” Susan asked piteously.

Dally tore his hand away. “To my eternal misery,” he answered, and turning from her went out into the night.



## CHAPTER XXXVIII

**S**LOWLY, the next afternoon as the winter dusk closed in, Susan came out of her own room and crawled downstairs. She looked like some homely little flower beaten to the earth by a heavy storm. The Stair women had done the best they could—almost the best that could have been done—they left her alone at first. Minna, ever practical and kindly enough, had come up and told her she would find the library empty if she came downstairs.

“We won’t expect you to appear at dinner, you know,” she said, looking at Susan. “But you’ve scarcely eaten anything to-day. Do you think a little minced chicken——”

Susan gave a faint smile. She would try to eat anything that Minna liked to send her, she said. She had wanted to leave the house that morning, but Minna would not consent.

“I will go home to my own mother,” said Susan in a toneless voice that expressed nothing. She was very gentle and silent during Minna’s long colloquies, and, in spite of all that she could say, wrote to tell Mrs. Crawford she would go home in two days. She had a note from her mother that afternoon, and carried it down to the library to read. She could hear voices as she passed the drawing-room door, and judged that some members



of the Stair family were holding a council there. "Let them talk," she thought, "if it does them any good. I must get away from it all." She had seen no one since the night before. Carrie and Mrs. Stair were still in the house, she knew. The library was already half dark. She sat down beside the fire to read Mrs. Crawford's letter. It began without date or heading.

"MY DEAREST SUSAN:

"*I am quite stunned by the terrible blow*" (this word had been crossed out and "news" substituted, that again deleted and *blow* once more selected) "*that your uncle came up to give me this morning.* It made me so ill that I was obliged to go to bed, and unfortunately poor Tommy caught his hand in the mangle at the same time and squeezed it terribly. There is no consolation for such a sorrow, but the wound will heal in time. You must come home quietly, and we will try to bear it together. Your uncle tells me that Colonel Hamilton is sending Mr. Stair to Australia. Although I knew that he called himself an Agnostic, I never could have imagined anything so terrible as this. Emmy is quite broken-hearted. We will expect you home on Thursday evening, my poor child—Your loving

"MOTHER.

"P. S.—I really do not know how to address your letter now—so terrible!—so I just put '*Susan*' on the envelope and sent it addressed to Mrs. Bracebridge."



Susan read the letter, and then leant back in the great armchair, and let her head fall back against the cushion as she sat and looked into the fire. The library in Minna's house was a useful room, although books or reading were not considered there. On all solemn family occasions, or even in the case of minor scenes such as the dismissal of a servant, the library was used for the purpose. There Minna interviewed her very "family" doctor; there she conferred with the governess; there kept her account books; there, had there ever been a funeral in the prosperous household, the funeral guests would have assembled—but that is going too far afield. The defense of a recalcitrant housemaid had been the limit of its drama, until the evening when Dally and his accusers had wrangled out their hour there together. None of the family had entered the room since. The blinds had been drawn down, and Minna had told the servants that Susan wanted to be alone.

She sat very still, so hidden by the great chair that Archie Hamilton, coming in an hour later, at first supposed that the room was empty. He hesitated for an instant when he saw who it was, and then quietly came forward and spoke to her.

"Minna tells me you are going home to-morrow," he said.

"I am quite well enough to go home," said Susan. "I want to go."

He stood by the fire and looked at her in silence. She sat there, an image of perfectly hopeless, unspoken sorrow, with the simplicity of misery that you sometimes



see in children, or amongst the poor, that says nothing, does nothing, has no hope. Her face was white and changed, her eyes red with weeping, but her mouth was firm. She had on a dull, ugly, tidy dress. Her hair was brushed smooth; her little feet, in the curiously clumsy shoes that she always wore, were crossed on a footstool; only her hands, the quick, practical hands of the artist, her wedding-ring still on the right one, hung listlessly on the arms of the chair.

She might have been alone for all the notice she took of Archie's presence. She lifted one hand and drew it wearily across her eyes.

"'Curse God and die!'" said he, looking at her curiously.

"Yes," said Susan, without looking up. "Do you think that I have not said that often to myself since Monday night? But it was my own fault."

"Your fault—how?" he asked.

"To marry him at all. It was all wrong from the very beginning, and now I am punished."

"Yes, *you* are punished."

"Think what it means to him," said Susan.

"Ah!" said Archie dryly.

"I don't even know where he is going to," she said in a slow, hopeless voice. She never looked up as she spoke, so she did not see the unmirthful smile that flickered on his mouth as he replied:

"You will hear from him, I believe, when he wants a little remittance."

Susan raised her head quickly. She got up and stood



before Archie for a moment with a red spot on each pale cheek. ‘How can you feel such things? How can you say them? Oh, I’m glad I cannot understand! I would rather be what I am now than be like you with such a bad, hard heart.’”

She spoke with a bitterness that he had never heard in her voice before—that he had not believed her capable of feeling.

“Mrs. Stair,” he said, boldly using the name she was accustomed to, “I beg your pardon. I ought not to have spoken so.” He bent his head and turned aside, fingering some little thing on the mantelshelf as he spoke. “I had a dog once—a good dog, too, that loved me. He was caught in a trap, and I bent and touched him, and he bit my hand.” His voice sank very low.

Susan did not answer. The little object he had been fingering slipped from the mantelshelf and fell at her feet.

It was a small pencil-case of Dally’s that he used constantly. The night that he had stood there, he too had been playing with it as he spoke, and had left it on the mantelpiece. Archie stooped and picked it up.

“Please give it to me,” said Susan, holding out her hand.

“Oh, is it yours?” he said.

“It belonged to Dally,” Susan answered, and then, as she took it, she threw herself back in her chair, covering her face with her hands, and wept. The young man went silently away.

Presently old Mrs. Stair came into the room. She was



dressed in her old cloak and bonnet. Her thin hands trembled, but she still held her head high, and stalked in as usual.

“Susan,” she said in her harsh voice, “I am going away. I came to bid you good-by.”

Susan raised herself and looked at her without a word. Mrs. Stair pushed the black-knitted veil high off her face; it was ghastly. She held out her thin, hard hands to Susan.

“He’s broken my pride, Susan—and that has broken my heart.”

“Mother,” said Susan softly—she had never called her that before—then she flung herself into the old woman’s arms and sobbed again. What they said to each other Susan never told to anyone, or Mrs. Stair either, but Dally got a letter from his mother before he sailed.

“Good-by—*my dear daughter*,” said Mrs. Stair, turning abruptly away.

Susan went out to find Minna. “I must go home tomorrow afternoon,” she said; “I am only a trouble to you here. I want, please, to go home and be quiet.”

Minna did not know very well what to say. In the overwhelming catastrophe that the whole thing meant to them all, Susan’s presence in the house was undoubtedly a torture. They had talked in pairs, in threes, in fours, in family council; they had argued, discussed, quarreled and marveled, always coming round again to the irremediable fact that the thing had happened, and nothing more could be done. They wanted to make



Susan an allowance, but Mr. Murchison instantly and heavily refused.

“The thing’s done,” he said; “I never want to hear his name again. Let the matter be hushed up now for Susan’s sake, as soon as may be. The disgrace is on *your* side,” he went on unsparingly, “but the suffering’s for her, and the less she has to do with you now the better.”



## CHAPTER XXXIX

**E**DINBURGH is a beautiful city, but, oh! it is an inclement spot in which to meet with adversity. Susan insisted on going out alone the next morning. She said she had some little things to do before going home, and declined any company. As she hurried along the empty streets the cold seemed to pierce to her very bones, the icy wind drove against her face like the breath of some pitiless pursuing fiend, her feet fainted with the weariness of misery as she struggled along through the wet slush. She went but a little way, posted a letter (to Dally), and came back. It was one of those days in the Scottish winter when the weather is so horrid that anyone whose vitality is at all low feels as if the elements could murder with almost purposeful force. She came in chilled, and in order not to give trouble she told Minna that she would appear at luncheon. There was no one there but Minna and the children and Carrie and her curate. The children could not help staring at Susan, for her face was pale and strange, and Minna had carefully instructed them beforehand not to make any remarks about her.

“ Will Uncle Dally soon be back? ” asked one of them in a shrill, loud voice. Carrie’s curate upset the water bottle—he was a shy little man, and it required nerve to do it, at Minna’s well-regulated table, but in the fuss



that ensued the remark passed unheeded. Carrie declared, and he insisted, that he should accompany Susan to the station. She could not decently object, but it seemed to add an unnecessary touch of grotesque irritation to the whole thing that the little man, nervously anxious to be of some assistance, and who was almost a total stranger to her, should drive the whole way with her. He went off to get her ticket, and on the platform she met Juliet and Archie Hamilton. Juliet just took her hand, as if she had been a child; she waved off the curate in some benign way on his return; she found an empty carriage, she talked on softly all the time, requiring no reply, saying nothing that could hurt even Susan, getting Archie to bring her wraps, and guarding her from other people. She kissed her, and even smiled as she took a stand by the carriage door, unnoticeably preventing the entrance of a woman with a baby and a dog.

Susan had a last glimpse of her and Archie standing together there, young, handsome, and kind—a sort of signal to her that the world was not quite empty, after all.

There was a long drive from the nearest station to Burrie Bush. The hired fly that had been sent to meet her was damp and smelt of straw. Susan sat back and looked idly out of the window at the familiar country as she passed. Something about the lazy, continuous motion lulled her feelings for the time; she felt as if it might go on forever. There was still a little daylight left when she reached home. She became instantly



aware of the chill silence that fell upon all the children as she came into the room, so different from the yells of joy with which they usually greeted her return. Mrs. Crawford rose with a tearful wail of, "Oh, Susan!" She appeared to be the one who needed comfort instead of her daughter. Susan tried to steady her voice, and speak as usual before the children, but when they were alone together Mrs. Crawford altogether broke down and wept and wailed and worried, until Susan was nearly frantic. With the usual stupidity of weak and selfish natures, she seemed to consider only her own part in the affair. You would have thought all the trouble lay with her instead of Susan.

"Now," said Susan at last, "we have talked enough, mother. I cannot speak any more about it to-night. Let me go to my room."

"Oh, I didn't know where to put you," wailed Mrs. Crawford. "Will you just share Emily's room as you used to do?"

"Oh, yes, oh, yes!" said Susan listlessly. A terrible weariness had begun to oppress her. If she could just crawl away into any hole and die, she felt it would be a rest. There was something about this melancholy return to the comfortless home that was worse than she could have ever imagined. The very untidiness of the room; the litter of schoolbooks left upon the sofa by the boys, who had gone out to feed their rabbits; the unswept hearth; the worn, dusty carpet; the heap of purposeless sewing by her mother's chair; each added a tiny grain of discomfort to her misery. It seemed unbe-



lievably horrible that she had come back with that scene of two days beforehand printed as it were inside her eyelids forever—come back not even to quiet and peace, but to the shallow racketing of a noisy house and all the foolish sordidness of this ignoble existence. Emmy came into the bedroom to help her to unpack her trunks. She knelt before an open box, taking out the things and handing them to Susan, who mechanically put them away, scarcely knowing what she did. Emmy was awe-struck; she spoke in a curious, solemn little voice, and was half afraid to look at her sister, yet could not quite conceal a child's interest in some of Susan's new possessions, which she had not seen before. Suddenly she stopped short and lifted her face, pushing the slips of black hair away from her eyes.

“What shall I do with these, Susan? Shall I leave them here?” she asked.

“What is it?” said Susan wearily.

The child stood up, with her arms full of some of Dally's clothes that Susan had packed in her trunk before they went into town. The socks fell on the floor. Susan gave a wild look at the things, then seized them from Emily, and pushed the child to the door.

“Go, go! Leave me alone; for Heaven's sake, *leave me!*” she cried, changing her tone in an instant as she saw Emmy's frightened eyes. “Go, darling, I am very unhappy, Emmy. I will be better quite alone for a little,” she said gently, leaning against the wall as she spoke, struggling against the overpowering sickness of soul that swept down upon her. Emmy, child though



she was, had more sense than her mother. She stole away without another word, said to Mrs. Crawford that Susan "wanted to be left to arrange things by herself," and sat down, pretending to read. She listened all the while for any sound from Susan's room, her little heart beating painfully, taking, in her funny, childish effort at calm and concealment, the first step towards the woman's part of caring for another.

Meanwhile Susan sat alone in the disordered room. She had locked the door, and crouched down on the ground, leaning against her trunk. She held some of Dally's things on her lap. There was still a faint and dismal glimmer of light, so that she could discern the outline of the bed against the wall—the bed she had slept in as a child. The same text still hung above it. She remembered how she had wakened there the morning before her wedding and seen the sharp shadows thrown upon the white window-blind. How all the world had changed since then! Yet it was not two years ago. Sitting there in the half darkness, she met the full consciousness of her misfortune, and realized it all.

"And that was the dreadfulest fight that ever was seen," says Bunyan of the conflict with Apollyon. Sooner or later most of us meet the enemy alone—and those are terrible hours when the soul, like some frenzied thing that beats itself against a wall, is thrown back again and again upon despair, only to realize afresh the same facts, immutable as before.

An hour later Emmy crept to the door and knocked. Susan answered in her usual voice, "Come in, dearest,"



and the child entered timidly. Susan had washed away the traces of weeping from her face and had brushed her hair. She had put the room tidy, and folded all her things away. When she saw Emmy's white face she came up and put her arms around her.

"You are too young to understand, Emmy; some day I will tell you things. I have got you always."

As Emmy clung to her, and covered her face with kisses, Susan felt a glimmer of comfort at her touch.

Late at night Emmy whispered to her sister, "Are you sleeping, Sue?"

"No, Emmy."

There was silence; then Emmy said carefully, "Where is Dally, Susan?"

"I do not know; I think he is going to Australia."

"Won't you ever see him any more?" said the child, with a pitiful catch in her voice. Dally had been a hero to her. All her early romance had centered itself about him. She had just worshiped him for those very qualities that sensible people despised. A hundred romantic scenes she had pictured to herself. His bright disconnected talk, his red hair, his white hands, his ancient name, his poverty, his very foolishness, all appealed to the child's imagination, and she considered Susan as more than fortunate to be this gifted creature's wife. Now it was all smashed like an eggshell, and Emmy had a terrible suspicion that this might happen to much of life as you grew older.

"Will you never see him any more?" she said.



“Never,” Susan answered in a voice that silenced Emmy’s questionings.

But the child fell asleep soon and forgot it all. She wakened with a start to see Susan standing at the window. Emmy stole from her bed and stood beside her. The window looked out over the rolling stretch of upland that lay beyond the house. A solid bank of white vapor covered the land, but above that the sky was quite clear, without the shadow of a cloud, and right in front of them hung the moon attended by five splendid stars.

“I got up to look out,” said Susan. “I expected to see nothing but fog, and I found this.” She put her arms about the child. “Don’t forget it, Emmy; look at it, and remember.”

And the child, who did not care to read the heavens, saw that her sister smiled again; so she crept back to bed and went to sleep content.

“Things *can’t* have been so very bad after all if *that* can please her,” thought innocent Emmy.



## CHAPTER XL

**T**HE most appalling catastrophe in any of our lives is nothing but a nine days' wonder to our neighbors. For Susan the foundations of existence had been shaken; it was as if some mighty flood had swept her out of house and home, and she was drifting she knew not where. But after the first days of wonder and comment had gone by, the small section of the world who knew anything about her affairs ceased to be interested in her or in them.

As the season advanced she found life more tolerable, for she could take the two younger children and go to spend the day out of doors. Perhaps the flat unemotional landscape around Burrie Bush was as consoling as any surrounding could have been. It made no demand for comment and admiration, and at first Susan had none of either to give. The joy of life, the taste of life, the relish for it had left her completely. Indoors, in the shabby, ill-conducted house, with the noise of the children and her mother's unexhilarating company, she was very miserable. Mrs. Crawford was, of course, the sort of person who could never let a thing alone. She kept always reminding her daughter by some feeble tactless speech of her unfortunate situation. She would say:

“Will you not come with me to Miss Mitford's, Susan? Oh, you would rather not! Well, of course, as a widow—at least, as something of that sort—you would



rather not ”; or else she would repeat dismally, “ Well, I’m sure, Mrs. Stair may be to be pitied, but I am more so, for it’s so difficult to know what to call you ! ”

“ Oh, mother, as if *that* mattered,” said Susan, flushing.

“ It does matter; it’s extremely awkward. I don’t even like to call you ‘ Miss Susan ’ to the servants,” said Mrs. Crawford, with a plaintive note. She had already heaped upon Susan all the trifling household duties that used to occupy her before her marriage, but Susan was thankful to have them to do. It was a pleasure to look after the children and make the house as orderly as she could, and Emily, who was growing up very fast, was her one delight. The long months passed slowly; at first she hardly knew how, only that one day succeeded another. At night she was surprised to find that each had gone. She was left without any stay or comfort, for Emmy was too young for that, and her mother’s wailing was not sympathy, but irritation, to her. She would go out as the summer came on and sit for hours, while the children amused themselves. The low green knolls, with shadows dropped on them for a moment as the clouds hid the sun; the bare slopes, with the open road running on and on across them; the familiar, almost featureless, country that her eyes had known since childhood soothed her unconsciously. But something seemed to be altogether gone from her. It was as if her sense of beauty had been entirely lost; nothing delighted her any more.

“ Look, Susan, how lovely,” the children would say, bringing her their little treasures—snail shells with black



whorl designs, butterflies or bits of moss or blossom, all the things that she herself used to teach them to admire; and she would look at them, answering absently:

“ Oh, yes! very pretty.”

“ Just like other people,” thought Emmy, who was quick to notice the change.

One day she and Emmy had taken a short cut through the fields, and they came to a place where two low hazel trees were growing, one on each side of a little brook.

“ There’s the prince and princess, Sue, that we used to make stories about,” called Emmy. “ See, their arms are quite close together now.”

“ Yes, yes, I see,” said Susan, and turned away her head. Emmy saw her whitening cheek and wondered, but was silent.

So the whole summer passed, and winter came on again. One day Susan got a note from Lady Agnes Hamilton. Juliet (she said) was coming down to visit her, and would Susan not come too?

“ I think,” she wrote, “ that you will find the change will do you good. Juliet tells me you have refused to go anywhere. If I may offer any advice, I should say to you, ‘ Have courage and begin again.’ ”

Susan sat for a long while with the letter in her hand. She wanted to go, yet she had not the courage, she felt, to go on with life, or to make any movement of her own will any more. The letter called to her like a voice from some walled garden to one toiling on a long road. There was a world, after all—a beautiful world, as she had once imagined it, where sorrow was forgot; where there were



books and pictures, philosophy and friends. "The indestructible joys forever," as Maurice Hamilton had told her. All that evening she was very quiet. Mrs. Crawford was sleepy and peevish, and the fire smoked, making the room more uncomfortable than usual. There was the distant sound (invariable at that hour) of the little maid cleaning knives in the pantry; then her mother told her to "ring for prayers." The boys came scuffling in from the schoolroom, and subsided into quiet for a few minutes. The pale-faced, untidy cook and the little Jemima took their places by the door. The well-known phrases of Mrs. Crawford's prayer followed—so far away from her destitute heart. All was so much the same as it had always been—an hour instead of four years might have passed since she was a girl, before she had ever seen Dally Stair. Only, the older boys were gone, replaced by the younger, and Emily was nearly seventeen now. Susan had been quite surprised to find Jemima still there when she came home—still a young, slipshod, smiling girl. She felt as if her hair should have been gray. The gulf that had opened under her feet had made her lose all sense of time at first. Everything was so curiously unchanged, and yet the days before her marriage seemed so long ago. Perhaps, she thought (looking at her mother), if she could get away from this life for a little while, from its obscurity and mental indigence, she would find "courage to begin again." She read Lady Agnes's letter once more, and then sat down and wrote a reply, saying that she would go.

It was a help to have made a resolution at last, but it



is difficult to face the world for the first time after the heart has lived alone with sorrow. It comes trembling out of the darkness, like a prisoner who has been long in a dark cell.

Susan would fain have turned and gone back again when she had once started on her journey. Juliet met her in town, and they traveled after that together.

“You look so thin, Susan; I think that being at home is not good for you. You must stay with Aunt Agnes for a long time,” said Juliet.

Susan smiled faintly, a sort of ghost of her former brightness. She looked so faded and pitiful when they arrived that Juliet wondered if she had been mistaken in urging her to come.

It was dark when they reached the little station. Archie met them, and they walked up to the house together, a very short way, up the steep, narrow lane where Susan and Dally had once walked together. Susan heard again the plash of oars, the cries and noises from the ships, and saw how the river twinkled with a hundred lights, but it made no impression on her. She felt as if she were walking in a dream. Lady Agnes met them in the little doorway, impartially welcoming them both. She scarcely looked at Susan before she led her away to the same tiny bedroom that she had occupied before. When she was left alone she began to unpack some of her things, but then her courage failed her suddenly, and she huddled herself up in a chair and allowed wave after wave of depression to sweep over her.

“I was a fool to come,” she thought; “I am half-



dead, and blighted, like a green thing by frost. I cannot revive, and I shall only be a trouble to them all."

Archie went into the drawing room and stood by his mother's chair.

"What have they been doing to that poor girl?" he began. "It's horrible. She looks like something that has been starved in a cellar."

"You have seen her home?"

"Oh, yes, indeed I have, but she looks worse than I expected."

Lady Agnes was knitting. She counted her stitches, and replied in a low voice, "There are subterranean depths in that kind of life, I suppose."

Susan came slowly into the room a few minutes later. She had on an unusually ugly dress, a fussy thing made by the local dressmaker, of the ugliness of which she was well aware. Had not Dally told her once that it "was the sort of dress that makes a man admire a courtesan?" She remembered the speech as she looked with dull eyes at her own graceless reflection when putting it on. What did it matter to her, or to anyone else now, what she looked like? At the same time she remembered that she was ugly as she came into the room. Her hands were red and cold, her eyelids also somewhat red, and her eyes blurred with weeping. She was so incapable of the elasticity that in youth will sometimes carry off such an appearance that her feet felt quite heavy as she crossed the floor.

"It seems 'the ages of ages' since we last met," said Archie.



He stood looking down at her. He had the same power that his mother possessed of imparting a quick strong impression without the use of words. Susan had to hold back her head a little to look at his face. She saw herself as in a mirror in the compassion that fell from it—was aware in a moment of her own sad little history, the shabbiness of her dress, the patience and sorrow in her face.

Lady Agnes meantime went on talking quietly. Susan gave her very brief assent. She remembered how Emily used to try to get as close to Lady Agnes as she could. There was a sudden shelter in her very presence. How delightful it would be, thought Susan, to have those white hands laid upon her hot eyelids, or to be allowed to bury her face on that bosom. Lady Agnes continued her work, looking as if no one had less invited such tenderness.

The room brightened in a few minutes when Juliet entered with a rustle and a flutter and a strand of hair falling over one ear, declaring her room was so dark and her candle gave so poor a light that she could not see to dress properly.

“Your candles have the effect of glow-worms, Aunt Agnes. How you ever do that dreadfully glossy hair, or how Archie achieves these velvet-shaven cheeks, I don’t know. Oh, Susan, you dear thing! I am so glad to see you again.”

She began to play with a little heart that hung on Susan’s chain, and opening it, caught at something that fell onto her lap.



“Here is something precious for you, Susan. I nearly lost it just now. What is it?” she began, and then she saw it was a little lock of red hair.

Susan said nothing, but replaced it, and spoke of something else. Juliet got painfully red, and bit her lips in vexation.

“How could I! How could I be such a cruel idiot!” Juliet said, when after dinner Archie found her standing alone in the drawing room. She leant her pretty head on the mantelpiece and groaned.

“What have you done?” he asked, indulgent, as most people were to Juliet.

“Oh, didn’t you see that little locket thing, Archie? Fancy keeping the creature’s hair!”

“Was that a lock of Dally’s hair?”

“Indeed it was—as red as red. Oh, I am miserable; I have hurt her. I am a senseless, selfish goose.”

“You don’t often err in that way,” said Archie. He reflected for a minute, and then he said, “I suppose she cared for him.”

“Do you think she did?” said Juliet, raising her head with interest.

“Well, that looks like it. If you were to carry a lock of my hair, for instance.”

“I will, I will if you will give me that thick little one that always falls down on your brow.”

He rubbed it hurriedly aside and laughed, and the question about Susan’s affections remained unsolved.

The first two days seemed very long to Susan, so that she wondered why she had come at all—away out



amongst strangers in her humiliation, with her bleeding heart. Gradually this feeling wore off. Food began to have some taste to her again, and one day, for the first time, she found some interest in a book. She sat in the window-seat that looked to the river and read for nearly two hours without raising her head.

Juliet, coming in to ask her to walk with her, found her still reading. "Is it very interesting?" she asked, coming up beside her.

Susan started. "Is it? I don't know. I was interested. I understood what I was reading; for a long time I have not done so."

"Oh, Susan," said Juliet, "how dreadful it has all been!"

"Yes, dreadful," said Susan. Her voice was dry and cold. And Juliet hurried to change the subject.

The next morning, very early after breakfast, Susan went out by herself. It was quite warm, even in January, for the sun was very bright, although frost lay thick upon the ground. She wandered up the precipitous little road that led to the top of the promontory, and, leaning on the wall, looked down upon the river. The milk-white mists were opening and dissolving upon the radiant sea; the air, salt and mild, felt like cold water against her face as she looked to the west. In the tranquil winter sunshine the wooded heights and the ancient little town below were reflected again in the water. There was a world of ships, a hum of faint sounds and calls. Between the sides of the hills the river broadened slowly to the open sea that shone as if mingled of milk



and fire. The sky was wide and without a cloud. The whole bright landscape seemed alive with joy. There was something unearthly in the beauty of the brilliant winter morning and the melting mist. She stood still, looking at it breathless, and something descended like healing upon her mind; her eyes were opened once more to the beauty of the world.

Juliet came out and stood beside her. Susan had not heard her approach. When she spoke Susan turned with a sudden exclamation:

“*Oh, I see him again!*” she said.

“What do you mean?” Juliet asked in perplexity. Susan turned to her with the first smile that Juliet had seen on her face since she came.

“Have you ever read ‘Pilgrim’s Progress,’ Juliet?”

“I suppose I have, but I forget.”

“Do you remember how Christian called out when he rose again after he had almost sunk in the river, ‘Oh, I see him again?’”

“Oh,” said Juliet. Then she laughed her pretty frank laugh, showing three dimples. “Do you? I’m very glad that you do.”

She related the incident to Archie Hamilton later in the day.

“She’s almost cracked—the sweet thing—and she’s been very, very miserable, but I think she’ll get better with us.” Then she asked him:

“*Who* do you suppose she meant?”

“Perhaps it was Dally Stair,” said Archie, with bitterness unusual even for him.



## CHAPTER XLI

**W**EEKS of quiet lived chiefly in the open air, the society of people who were entirely congenial to her, a fresh current of thought, new and beautiful scenery—all these causes, Susan told herself, were doing her good. Then she began to think about her return—going back to St. Fortunes and to her uncle and Mrs. Murchison.

“Why am I so happy here?” she wondered, and then suddenly with a start she realized that she had begun to know something of the tenderness of a companionship of heart that she had never even dreamt of before. What would life be like without it? Archie Hamilton’s thin brown face with the deeply sunken eyes seemed always before her. Without any effort, almost without any consciousness of it, she felt as if she had come quite near to a nature that was hidden from most of the outer world. The man’s strength and uprightness of character, his real humility and kindness were always visible to her now under the thin covering of his bitter speeches. She wondered sometimes why it was that she could understand all this suddenly, as if at the bottom of her heart she had known it from the first. “I shall go home soon,” she thought, “before it becomes more difficult to go.”

The day after Susan had taken this resolution, she was late in coming down to breakfast. Juliet came into



the room first; Archie lifted a letter and placed it before her.

“Do you see that?” he said expressively. He had picked it up as if he could scarcely bear to touch it, his face was dark and angry. It was an envelope that had been readdressed several times “Miss Susan Crawford”; then followed two addresses, from which it had been forwarded, St. Fortunes and Burrie Bush. In an instant Juliet recognized the sprawling, legible hand. Her face grew white as she looked up at Archie.

“It’s from Dally,” she said.

He nodded. They could hear Susan coming downstairs. With an expression of extreme repugnance he put the letter into his pocket.

“Let her have breakfast in peace,” he said quickly; “I will give it to her afterwards.”

He found Susan alone after breakfast and brought it to her.

“A letter for you, I think,” he said, not affecting any unconsciousness of what it was. He saw her sudden pallor and the sickened way that she turned it round in her hand without breaking the seal. He was going away, but Susan put out her hand and stopped him.

She opened the letter and gazed at it for a minute, and then she turned to him piteously.

“Oh, I can’t read it—take it.” He took her hand and held it in his own. Susan felt how cool and strong it was.

He glanced over the letter, then said quietly, “Dally is anxious to let you know that, in his opinion, he is free



from all ties to the woman he married; she is now living with another man." He stopped for a minute, then went on with a low, unshaken voice, "I think, if you read the letter quietly, you will see that it is very characteristic."

"I will read it," said Susan. "What shall I do then?"

"Burn it, and make no reply—if you ask me."

"Oh, I could not do that!" said Susan.

"No, I suppose you could not. Shall I answer it?" he asked. "You might allow me to do that for you, without harm."

"Oh," said Susan in a little low voice, "I wish I was dead."

Archie said nothing. In his presence she often felt herself weak and foolish. This was what had made her dislike him at first.

"You cannot understand what I feel," she said at last. "You would not believe me or understand, and if I were to try to explain it would only make matters worse."

"Please, 'try to explain.'"

"I am not free to listen to you. I do not want to hear what you say. I am afraid—I——"

"You mean, in short, that you are Dally's wife," he said in the bitter tone that made Susan feel foolish.

"I meant something which you could not, or would not understand. Can't you let me bear my sorrow in peace? Have I not had enough to bear without this?"

"Ah, my dear!" he said, and turned his face away



for a moment. "I can't agree with your views of righteousness."

"With what you call my little provincial moralities," said Susan.

"Did I say that? I shall be silent. It seems I only offend you by speech."

"You do," said Susan passionately. "All I not miserable enough without this? I cannot—I will not listen to you. I don't even understand you—I don't want to."

"I'll make you understand, then," said Archie, "at the risk even of making you more unhappy, of making you more angry with me than you are at present. You must hear me say it once. You are no more Darnley Stair's wife now than I am. He has no claim on you whatever. He deserves nothing from you but to be forgotten. Your circumstances are very difficult. Marry me, Susan. The word is ugly to you, I dare say. Come to me, and let me take care of you. I love you far better than you know, for it began when I had no hope at all."

He sat and looked at her, but did not take her hand again. Susan's head was bent. Dally's letter lay on her knee, and her large, slow tears were dropping on the cover and blotting the address.

"There's only one life for each of us, Susan," he went on; "it just remains to decide what to do with it. There is the one side—I hardly need to speak of it; my own heart tells it to me in the night. I dare say that yours has done the same. Then the other—the higher moralities and all the rest of it; but in the end could



*anything* make up for the loss of the one thing we desired?"

"You don't understand," repeated Susan slowly.

"I understand very well indeed," he answered, "that you will let your whole life, and mine, be spoilt for the sake of a man who has deceived you and broken your heart."

"He did not deceive me; he was mistaken."

"He behaved like a scoundrel and a fool."

"Don't!" said Susan; "it hurts *me*."

"Did you love him?" asked Archie suddenly.

Susan's voice shook.

"No."

"Do you love him now?"

"No," said Susan in an almost inaudible voice. She added quickly, "Not in the way that you mean."

She dried her eyes and looked up at him, composed again.

"I am going home to-morrow."

"Will you let me come and see you?" he asked.

"I would rather not," said Susan.

"Will you write to me sometimes?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Will you let me answer that letter?"

"I will answer it myself."

He gave a little shiver of impatience.

"If I can ever help you, will you ask me to do so?"

"I do not think that I will," said Susan. She took Dally's letter in her hand, and without another look at him went out of the room.



The next morning, when she emerged from her tiny dark bedroom, the sun was striking full on the front of the house. She had some little time to wait before going to the station, and she stood with Juliet looking out across the river. The folds of distant country lay clear in the winter sun. The fields were red, the bare woods almost purple, and the whole soft landscape full of warm color.

“ Oh, merry England ! ” said Susan, with a sigh. “ It will be so different at home.”

Juliet eyed her. “ Why are you going back so soon, then ? ”

“ Because I must,” said Susan. “ I am going to try to begin again.”



## CHAPTER XLII

“COME down and live with me again,” said Mrs. Murchison. She sat looking at Susan, her broad feet firmly planted on the carpet, her square sensible face softened by an unwonted look of compassion.

It was nearly two months since Susan had returned from the Hamiltons'. She was getting very thin, her aunt noticed. There were dark patches under her eyes, and her lips seemed tightened. She had the look of a person taxed beyond power of endurance, who would soon break down.

“Come back and live with me, Susan,” her aunt repeated. “I need you: your mother doesn't. It's time that Emily stood on her own feet.”

Susan looked up, then looked down; her lips quivered.

“Dear me! I know what you mean. Yes, it 'll be a wrench for a day or two, I dare say, but you'll soon get over that. Oh, yes, you would!”

“But there is Emmy, and mother,” said Susan.

“High time Emmy learned to stand on her own feet! Your mother did without you before; she can do without you again. Your mother's not the person for you to lean on now, Susan.”

“Perhaps she is not,” Susan admitted, being conscious



that Mrs. Crawford had never been the person to lean upon at any time.

“You’re neither maid nor widow,” went on Mrs. Murchison. (Susan winced under this remark.) She continued, without noticing, “What you want is a quiet, comfortable home, where you will be taken care of, and you’ll get that with me, I think. Just say you’ll come, and your room will be ready for you on Monday.” Mrs. Murchison paused, and added, in what for her was almost a shamefaced way, “There’s the breakfast room you can have to yourself, now. There is plenty of light in it; you can paint there as long as you like. It’s not *my* idea of amusement for a young person, but it seems to be yours, and you shall do it as much as you like.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you!” said Susan, putting out her hand and taking hold of her aunt’s hand impulsively. “You are good and kind, aunt. I will only be a trouble to you—at first, at least—but I will come. I never seem to have any time to myself here,” she added. “Of course there is so much noise in a house with children—a great deal to do.”

“It’s not that,” remarked Mrs. Murchison, as she rose to go. “It’s just because there’s little to do that nothing is ever done, and you have no time to yourself. You’ll come on Monday, then?”

So Susan went again to St. Fortunes early in the next week. The carriage came skidding rapidly down hill between the narrow high-walled lanes. She sat forwards mechanically, as she always used to do, and saw the square tower rising from the bushes at its knees. She



got out at the door of the old white house, and even on the doorstep a keen stab of memory recalled to her the last time she had stood there with Dally beside her. From that door she had gone out after her wedding. Her eyes were dim as she crossed the big dark hall and mounted the low stair. She almost expected to see Dally standing with his back to the fire as she came into the huge drawing room. Every one of its four hundred and seventy blue spots had a tongue and called out his name for a moment as she first glanced about the room. But her aunt received her with a total absence of all emotion; asked her if she was cold; gave her a seat by the fire, and then went on to talk over all the tiny events of the neighborhood as if she had never left it.

It was nearly two months later that Susan one morning came into the low-roofed sunny room that looked out on the garden. She shut the door stealthily, as if half afraid. She looked round the room, hesitated; her face grew pale, then grew red; at last she moved to the table, spread out her materials, and began to draw.

At first everything went wrong. She stopped and looked at what she had done: its lifelessness and weakness were self-evident. A rush of blinding tears filled her eyes, and she covered her face and wept. An hour afterwards she was still busy, bending over her work, the traces of tears still on her face, her hands trembling, but her soul set free once more. She tasted the joy of life again. She returned to the land of the living, and got out of her own grief into the golden world of Art once more—a world where she had a corner of her own, an aim,



a certainty of vision, a joy that such natures as hers alone possess, and which the world can neither give nor take away.

It seemed to her in the quiet months that followed that she had wakened out of a long sleep; still wearied she awoke, but the healing of her soul had begun, and all through these unnoticeable days and months she was slowly "waxing her well of her deep wound."

It was an inner change entirely, and the circumstances in which it took place were not circumstances of any excitement or romance. Slowly to live through the changes of the soul in an obscure little country town, partaking of its lilliputian interests and amusements, is not outwardly interesting, but in looking back on these three years that she lived at St. Fortunes, it seemed to Susan that she had found the right way then. She surrendered herself to the beauty of the world. Not that there was much of it at St. Fortunes to anyone that had an ambitious heart. She shut out the thought of the past, and she knew of nothing in the future that seemed to offer any prospect of change.

Humbly, with all her senses, she allowed herself to gather in all the impressions that she could. After that dreadful numbness she had felt at first, that want of taste in the whole of life, it seemed almost satisfaction enough to be alive to the beauty of the world once more. Every detail of place and people, the changes of the seasons, the whole life of the little town sank into her heart, as a deep impression sinks into soft wax: In winter the frozen roads, between high old walls; the long line of ancient



fisher houses with pale red roofs; the salt gray sea forever splashing below them; the gayety of moonlight on frosty nights; the moon riding high, and looking down upon the little lives being lived out in those little houses on that sad, bitter coast, looking down upon their labors, their fires and lighted windows; Susan learnt to know all the sounds of the narrow streets, the roaring from the taverns, the squeaking of boats that rubbed sides in the harbor; the clock from the church tower measuring out their time—on winter nights it spoke like a low, clear voice, uttering a few short words. Even indoors everything was stamped upon her mind: the way that the quiet long passages of the old house suddenly re-echoed to the postman's knock; the worn steps of the winding stone stair that led to the back of the house; the great drawing room, hideous with its acres of dark green carpet ("It's almost like crossing a meadow to reach the fireplace," Dally used to say); the bright fire sparkling in the old brass grate; all the windows on stormy days splashed with spray, looking out on the steep and narrow lane under the brewery wall, where lorries drawn by powerful horses went up and down; . . . always the line of the restless sea and the long low shore beyond. The island, that floated like an anchored ship, and seemed to change its position with the waning of the day; the blaze from the revolving light almost before the dusk had gathered. Then the long nights, when Susan lay awake, and heard the town clock still marking the dark hours—heard too the stamp, stamp of the old white horse impatient in his stable; then the clatter of the first passing



carts in the morning, and gradually all the merry voices of day began once more.

The changes of the seasons out of doors were painted like a picture on her heart. The early sunshine of spring; the chorus of larks hanging in the sky; a spring flower appearing here and there; then the orchards, the beautiful orchards, with their low, twisted trees, their enlaced branches, their alleys filled with purple shadows; pink spreading amongst tender green till all the world was a fairyland of blossoming trees; apple trees heavy with bloom, satisfying the last wish of the heart for beauty; pear trees all white and drooping to the ground; birds singing like angels everywhere for one ecstatic hour; then silence and more sleep; the great lilac tree at the garden door, fine as a court lady with "green heart-shaped leaves" and spikes of purple blossom; the thin long rods of cherry bloom against the black holly trees. As summer advanced, the way the garden grew and grew, pushing out weeds and flowers alike; the rank lush borders crowded with singing bees; the heavy boughs with green fruit forming on them; the deep shadow; the blinding sun (the clock striking always the hot, short hours); the hoarse birds that flew off with a caw and a cackle when disturbed amongst the fruit; bunches of currants like rubies under the leaves; fields of poppies and corn; the gay, curious coloring of turquoise-blue sea; red roofs; yellow fields dashed with scarlet.

The mild, long autumn evenings, veiled in slight mist from the sea; when village people turned out of doors to loaf and gossip in the dusty street; the indescribable



autumn sunsets setting the heavens on fire; fishing smacks steering in and out of the haze with long reflections quivering below them; the sudden sharpness of a breeze from the east; scents of the sea, of malt, of new bread from the bakehouse; the lines of elms along the fields; flights of rooks and gulls; stacks in the quiet harvest-fields; and then the sudden reappearance of color in the orchards—crimson pears, scarlet apples, orange and purple plums; the smell of fruit, the vivid autumn leaves; the fatigued, overripe sensation of the whole land, as if its work was done; the mild large moons; the gardens smelling of marigolds and wood smoke; earwigs; glistening cobwebs on the hedges; swallows beginning to move their little blue-coated families; fires beginning indoors as the evenings grew cold; robins singing from the thorn trees; frost at night; the clock always striking the hours away, until once more autumn dew on to the long Scotch winter, and the fields lay sad and sallow; the days grew cold and short; the long dark nights were squally with wind and rain; the laggard morning gave scarcely light enough to work in; and the storm wind blew the reeling, screaming gulls about the sky.

Susan observed, listened, learned, till all this had been gathered into the chambers of her brain; after all she lived once more. She had her share again in the sweet occurrences of the revolving year. Was any life quite poor that had such an appetite for beauty? Was any heart quite empty that could understand all this? A new nature, it seemed, was woven to her slowly, out of a thousand sights and sounds.



## CHAPTER XLIII

CARRIE STAIR was now Mrs. Pewlitt, living perfectly satisfied with her small husband, in her small house, on her very small income. She came often to see Susan, for whom she had a great affection. When Minna scorned the rather pallid infant that Carrie produced in course of time, she drove over to St. Fortunes with it and feasted upon Susan's admiration. Her absorption in her own affairs was now so complete that she seemed to regard her former home, her parents, and her sisters as distant figures in a dream.

Susan had never gone again to Striven, nor had she seen Mrs. Stair, who could not leave her husband. He lingered on half alive for many months, with sufferings that wore out his poor daughters' little strength before the end. When Susan heard of his death at last she felt as if she wanted to go to see Mrs. Stair, but did not like to offer a visit.

But Carrie came the day before the funeral to ask if Susan would go to Striven. She could not go herself because her child was ailing, and she would not leave it. "Mother says she would rather have you than anyone else, Susan. Kate and Ellen are worn out."

Mrs. Murchison objected strongly, but Susan took her own way, and they went.

"How well you are looking!" said Carrie involun-



tarily, glancing at her with admiration. Susan had gained very much in a sort of gentle dignity; her face had recovered its wholesome color, and her eyes were quiet and bright.

No one had come to meet her at Striven, so she walked to the house alone, along the road that once had been so familiar to her. It was a day in early autumn when the curious gay coloring of the pale fields, the turquoise-blue sea, and the red roofs of the houses in the village gave no suggestion of decay. But the trees were beginning to fade, the gravel in front of the house and even the very doorstep was covered with sere leaves drifted from the elms by the autumn wind.

Mrs. Stair met Susan without any embraces. She was become as thin as a skeleton, her yellow face was harsh and drawn, and her eyes seemed set in scarlet rims. But she still held herself upright, and did not shed a tear. The house looked even more dilapidated and poverty-stricken than before. Kate told Susan later in the evening that recently they had parted with all the servants except an old housemaid, who would not go, and one little girl. Kate and Ellen, poor things, did the best that they could, but they were perfectly unpractical women, and their mother had the heavy end of everything.

It made a lump rise in Susan's throat to notice, as they sat down to a meal, that Mrs. Stair herself must have helped to prepare it. Her thin hands were dirty, and her rusty black dress spotted with sauce.

"Archie Hamilton is coming to-night," she said as



they rose from the table. "He will be hungry after a long journey; I must see that he gets some food, and that your room is ready. Janet told me his was all right."

She was leaving the room when Susan went up to her. "You shall do nothing of the kind," she said. "I promise you that I will give him everything that he wants. Do, dear mother," she said, with a sobbing breath on the word, "go away and rest."

"Rest! rest!" said Mrs. Stair in a dreary voice. "Child, it will do me no harm to be busy. How can I rest to-night?"

Susan took her hand and led her away. She persuaded Kate and Ellen, too, to take some rest, and then with a sort of shudder she found herself alone. The house was still as death. The old housemaid sat upstairs in the room where Mr. Stair lay in his coffin; the little maid had escaped out of doors, frightened by the gloom within. The house door stood wide open and some of the drifted leaves lay in the hall; beyond, through the open door, Susan could see the "happy autumn fields" and the blue line of the sea. She stood for a moment looking about her with a shuddering sensation of dread, then went softly along the corridor to the apple room—the room that she had shared with Dally on her first visit there. The blinds were half down; her little box lay on the floor; evidently no preparations had been made for her reception.

She stood in the doorway half unwilling to enter, then opened the window, letting the air blow in—the brisk



wind of autumn that came rustling across the empty, harvested fields. Leaning her two hands on the sill of the window she looked out, and the pure blue line of the sea called to her like a clear voice, "a plain word" and her heart answered.

She turned away after a moment, and began to arrange the room for the night. She found her way to Mrs. Stair's linen cupboard and got sheets. How well she remembered the thin, fluted pillars of the bed, and the faded hangings with the design of green apples on them. There she had lain awake by Dally's side and heard the brief spring tempest beat against the walls and shake the window frames; there she had lain with her child in her bosom, dreaming her dreams about her son.

She wondered if she would be able to sleep that night at all. "Who knows what dreams might come?" she thought; then, hearing someone stirring in the house, she went downstairs to find that Archie Hamilton had arrived. Susan explained the silence and emptiness, and then she told him what Mrs. Stair had said about their affairs.

"My uncle will buy the most of the things for them—without Mrs. Stair's knowledge, for she wouldn't consent if she knew," said Archie. "I will stay and see that it is all right. I have five days' leave just now."

He had returned from a long cruise, and was burnt by the sun, and looked thinner than ever. He spoke to Susan without constraint, and with no allusion to what had passed between them at their last meeting. Susan asked him if he was hungry.



“Mrs. Stair will be so vexed if you do not eat,” she said. She was leaving the room to get him some food, when she turned to him with quite a childlike smile. “I am going down into the kitchen to make you some tea. Have you ever been there? You may come too.”

He looked at her admiringly, as Carrie had done, noticing the new peace and brightness in her face. “How well you look!” he said. “I think that the life at St. Fortunes agrees with you.”

“I have been very busy,” said Susan, hanging her head a little. “I have been able to paint all day, and it has come to something; it has surprised myself. The things are really not entirely bad.”

They found the great old kitchen empty and silent, with the fire almost ashes in the wide fireplace, the door open to the bright sunshine that flooded the paved back yard. Far off, out of doors, regardless of the stiff and straight form that lay upstairs, enjoying all the more keenly the contrast of her escape from the chill silence of the house of death, the little kitchen maid was being courted by the plowboy behind the garden walls.

There is in the best of us, on such an occasion, when standing by a sorrow that had not nearly touched ourselves, the involuntary sensation of relief. “This time the blow had not fallen upon *us*,” we say. As Susan and Archie Hamilton talked together there near the shadow that was all over the house; unacknowledged between them was the sense that the bitterness was not their own. It lent, quite unconsciously, a sort of cheerfulness to their



conversation, as a storm without makes us draw closer around the fire.

Susan asked Archie about his mother, about Colonel Hamilton and Juliet, who were abroad at the time.

“I had a letter from Juliet the other day,” he said. “She writes very sweet letters—like herself.”

“Archie,” said Susan, using his name for the first time—she crouched near the hearth and shielded her cheek from the fire that she had been stirring up again—“why do you not marry her?”

“Oh!” said the young man—he turned and looked up at the ceiling, down at the floor. “Oh!” he said again; then answered, “You know, I think.”

“She is beautiful and good and sweet, and I love her with all my heart,” said Susan.

He did not answer. A long silence fell between them, the only sound the flutter of the fire, that drew itself up in the grate like an indrawn breath. Then in the stillness outside from the sunny courtyard there came a great cackling of geese, and the sound of a footstep on the flags. A shadow fell across the bright doorway. Susan rose hurriedly from her knees.

“There is someone there,” she said. “That noise will disturb Mrs. Stair.”

She went to the door, and caught a glimpse for an instant of a man’s figure, that glided round the corner of an outhouse. She paid no attention to it, but drove the noisy birds away and came softly back again, closing the outer door. The wind was chill; she re-entered, shivering a little; her momentary cheerfulness was gone.



“Horrid, noisy things!” she said. “No wonder they saved the Capitol. Let us go upstairs now. Mrs. Stair will have come down; she wants to speak to you about a number of things, I know. I will go and tell her you are here.”

Archie followed her through the silent house.



## CHAPTER XLIV

**T**HE sunshine clouded over, and a mist rolled up from the sea. In half an hour the sun had disappeared altogether and the sky had grown dark. Mrs. Stair sat in the library with Archie Hamilton, a mass of papers before her. Slowly and unflinchingly she had gone into the details of the breaking up of her home, of the sale, of the dreary future before her and the daughters.

“For me it’s nothing,” she said; “my day’s done, and my heart was broken long ago; but poor Kate and Ellen!” Her voice trembled for a moment, and she went on: “Dally must get something to live on—he can’t starve. A brewer, I dare say, will buy the place—they’ve got everything nowadays.” Archie found the old undying grudge pathetic now.

Susan went about helping Kate and Ellen. A man from the village had come to speak about the funeral, and she found that some arrangement had been forgotten, so she walked herself to the little post office to send off a message about it. All the brightness of the day was swallowed now in mist, and the early twilight had begun to gather. As she went on the mist thickened fast into a soft rain that brought out the raw odor of the turnips in the field. Susan had sent her message, and



was on the way back when she saw Archie Hamilton coming towards her.

“Kate told me where you had gone,” he said. “I thought I would come to meet you. What a sad evening! I have sat with poor Mrs. Stair till my head aches. It’s all a melancholy business.”

“They were poor enough before,” said Susan, then hesitating a little, she added, “I suppose that something must go—to Dally.”

“Yes, while his sisters starve!”

They passed along the path by the edge of the garden wall. The great field of turnips stretched out before them; above the wet leaves dripped and rustled, the rainy darkness seemed to gather close about them. A solitary light shone from one of the upper windows of the house, but all the front was dark. Archie halted suddenly, and turning to Susan took her hands in his.

“I did not come here to speak about the Stairs,” he said; “I wanted to speak again to you, Susan. You are going to-morrow when the whole thing is over, and I may not see you again.”

Susan, seeing him stand there, remembered how that evening just before her marriage she had stood with him in a wet twilight and wondered at the look of pity in his face. How is it possible, she thought, that life can be so short, and yet that a few years can seem so long? She drew her hands away.

“I have told you before,” she said, “that you must not speak like that. I have no more part nor lot in these things, even did I feel myself free to do it.”



He gave a sigh of impatience, and she went on, "I will not—I never would while Dally was alive, but even if I could the whole thing is gone out of my life. I want no more of it. Can you not understand?"

Archie bent his head. "I am rebuked," he said in a low, cold voice. "I'm not worthy to have anything to do with one so pure and holy. My perceptions are not fine enough to see the distinctions you make. I will go away and 'evermore be silent,' and the consciousness of virtue will, of course, be enough for you."

The watery light shone out again as the clouds parted for a moment, and showed him standing before her with bent head. He lifted his severe, singular face.

"Good-by to that, then. I shall never speak of it again. Will you not shake hands with me? Is *that* allowable?"

Susan stood staring at the ground, heedless of the soft rain falling thick about them now.

"Well?" he said again.

Susan looked up suddenly with a sort of gasping sob.

"Oh," she cried, "do you not—*will* you not understand me? Do you think I am like that? Oh, Archie!" She flung herself into his arms; she pressed her soft face against his cheek. She hung and wept upon his breast. Her coldness melted as a frozen river breaks up utterly with the tides of spring; she kissed his shoulder, his hands, his sleeve.

The man stood still and silent, raising his face a little, with one arm thrown about her, touched to his heart with



so exquisite a joy that he could neither move nor speak. After a minute Susan drew herself away. She stood and looked up at him with her candid eyes.

“Now,” she said, “I have told you the truth, and you will always know it, and understand I can never marry you. I will never marry you, if you should wait for a thousand years, and you must never speak about it again!”

“But, Susan——” he began eagerly. She turned and walked forwards to the house.

“I will not speak to you any more about it,” she said. “My heart is like a harried nest; I have no more part in that side of life. My sorrow is my own, and I can only live my life in my own way. In time you will forget—men always do.”

He bent his head and followed her in silence.

The house was dark and silent as they came in. Kate and Ellen were in the library. Susan sat with them for an hour or two before they went to bed, then went upstairs to bid Mrs. Stair good-night. She stood at the door of the room where the coffin lay and lifted her tearless eyes to Susan’s face.

“You are pale, Susan. This has been too much for you. Go to bed now.”

“I was going to sit up,” said Susan.

Mrs. Stair stopped her. “Archie Hamilton is there,” she said. “He will sit up. I would have done it myself,” she went on, “but what is the use of that now?” She bade Susan good-night, and went slowly down the corridor with a heavy, listless tread.



Susan lay awake for a long time. She heard the clock strike twelve, and two, and three. The fire burnt down in the grate, casting the shadow of the slender, fluted pillars of the bed low down upon the wall. There was not a sound in all the silent house. Susan lay with open eyes watching the flickering light that went and came again, and she wondered at herself and the brief moment of abandonment she had experienced only a few hours before. Thoughts larger, higher than the poor passions of a day, seemed somewhere above her—if she could only grasp them, she thought. She remembered her own poor little tragical story as if it had reference to someone else. “ ‘ *As we forgive them that trespass against us,* ’ ” she whispered to herself. “ Oh, I did forgive it long ago.” Her eyes were closing, the light died out, and she dropped softly asleep to dream that she lay there again with her baby in her arms.

She wakened, all of a sudden, broad awake, in the gray light of morning. Something, she scarcely knew what, made her turn round, raise herself on one elbow, and look towards the door. She heard the old boards of the flooring outside creak under a light, slow step. Then the handle of the door was turned; it opened noiselessly, and Dally stood there, looking straight at her.

His face was pale and old and haggard; he looked thin and weary. His quick, bright eyes met hers, but he did not speak a word. Then he came into the room and knelt down beside her; he buried his head on her pillow, and Susan felt him sobbing like a child.

“ Dally,” she said softly, bending over him, “ Dally,



“speak to me. Why did you come here?” But he would not speak to her, or lift his head. She slipped one soft hand under his brow and laid the other on his shoulder, and waited till his breath grew quieter. At last he raised his face.

“I did not know you were here,” he said. “I came to look into this room again, Sue—we were happy here. I should not have come back at all, but when I heard about my poor old father, I thought I must see it all again before everything was changed. Don’t tell any of them you saw me; it would only vex the poor things.” He rose and stood beside the bed, holding Susan’s hand in his.

She began to recognize him better; his face was more natural now, and she knew something of the old grace of manner in the way that he held her hand. She looked at him, and he at her; they found nothing to say. She could hear her watch ticking and her heart beating in the long silence.

The morning brightened fast, till the moon grew full of light.

“I must go before anyone sees me,” said Dally at last; his face worked piteously. “Bid me good-by, my sweet Susan; I suppose I shall never see you again.” He dropped suddenly into his old confidential tone. “Susan, dearest, tell me, are you happy? Where do you live? Do they take good care of you now?”

Susan told him.

“Do you still paint your little pictures?” he asked, lingering, as if he could not go.



“ I still paint my little pictures, Dally. They mean a great deal to me. Some of them are good, people say.”

“ Yes, yes, I read about them. Kate wrote to me. They help you? They console you? ”

Susan almost laughed, and shook her head.

“ Ah, I understand; I always did. You are an angel, Susan; you look like one already—as if you had gathered the Rose of Joy. Do you remember what you wrote on the outside of your little book—one that I took with me? ”

“ I remember,” said Susan.

There was a sound of someone stirring in the house below.

“ I told old Janet to let me out quietly,” Dally said. “ She will not tell my mother. Susan, I must go.” Again he asked her, “ Are you happy? ”

“ Oh, Dally, what does that matter? Life is so short for all of us! ”

“ It is, it is,” he assented eagerly. He stood looking at her with his old inquiring expression. “ Do you think you can make anything of it yet? Have I spoiled it altogether? And I loved you, Susan.” He paused, then added suddenly, “ *Ars longa, vita brevis*. I never read it anywhere without thinking of you. Life’s too long for some of us.” He laid her hand against his lips, and then caught her in his arms and kissed her. “ Good-by, you dearest among women.” He was gone before Susan could say a word.

She sat up breathless, pale, hardly knowing whether



it had not been all a dream. But now the broad morning shone outside, a clear September day. Susan went to the window and looked out at the pale fields and the glittering line of the ancient sea. It had been true, after all.

He was gone, and she had to face the new day. That whole morning she went about as if in a dream. When the funeral was over she was going to return to St. Fortunes. She said good-by to Archie Hamilton alone in the library, where the table was littered with papers, and the old man's wheel chair stood empty in a corner.

He looked into her white face as she said good-by, and said with a queer little smile:

“ I bade Dally a tender farewell about five o'clock this morning.”

“ Ah!” said Susan, as if she had been hurt. “ You saw him, did you? ”

“ Yes. It was an inappropriate place to meet in the room I sat in last night—I went with him down to the road.”

“ What did you do? What did you say to him? ” said Susan.

“ Ask Dally—if you ever see him again. He would tell you, I am sure.”

“ Good-by,” said Susan. She turned from him and went away. Mrs. Stair came with her to the end of the avenue. They stood at the gate together in silence, and Susan looked back at the old house behind the circle elms. A twittering crowd of swallows had alighted



the telegraph wires overhead; they were just preparing for their long flight.

“They will be back again next spring,” said Mrs. Stair in her harsh voice. She closed the gate after Susan and went slowly back to the house—a black solitary figure on the broad white path.



## CHAPTER XLV

FIVE years later Juliet and Archie Hamilton were married. "I have forgotten, you see—all men do," he wrote to Susan when he announced his marriage. The five years had passed quickly enough to her, for they had been filled with the work she loved, and "the little pictures" that Dally had inquired about had brought her a certain repute, as well as the more material results which astonished Mrs. Crawford. The outside world, seeing only the results, probably wondered why she did not do more, "something on a larger scale." She did not know their opinion or care about it. In the single devotion with which she followed the art that she had chosen, her heart was satisfied without fame, and when it seemed to her that she had expressed any of her thought correctly that was reward enough. Mrs. Crawford was plaintive on the subject; she considered her daughter's drawings little short of grotesque (as indeed they sometimes were), and why a certain public admired them and bought them eagerly was a mystery to her. "I have had some trouble with poor Susan all along," she would say. "First that dreadful unfortunate marriage, then all the annoyance about knowing what to call her, and now her painting such *singular things*. If she would choose something more in the usual style, some pleasant subject—a sweet-faced girl, or even a landscape with



Highland cattle, you know, but angels and circles and moons, and fiends even, and all so lightly clad, it's quite distressing."

Susan's old friend, Miss Mitford, had died some time after old Mr. Stair's death; and not without some remonstrance from Mrs. Murchison and her mother, Susan had taken the little old-fashioned house and got Ellen Stair to live with her.

The prim garden was full of flowers. On the red roof edges a row of pigeons sat preening their blue breast feathers and gurgling in the sun. Two or three of them were pecking about on the gravel as Susan sat with Carrie Pewlitt in front of the house one hot July afternoon. The women's voices were low, and the gurgling pigeons on the roof seemed almost to join in their conversation. Carrie had come with her little boy to spend the afternoon.

"I am expecting Emmy to-day," said Susan. "She has something very important to tell me, she says, so I must take her into the house when she comes, and hear it alone." She did not know in the least what it was, or that the week had been a very exciting one for her sister. She had grown into an extremely pretty girl by this time, but Mrs. Crawford, poor woman, was destined to have little comfort in her, either. Emmy had "only just begun to help her with the household," she would have said, when she began to be disturbed about her.

There was no plethora of men in the neighborhood, and one would have supposed that she might have been Mrs. Crawford's right hand for years to come. Much



to her mother's surprise, however, the young doctor who had attended the family during the prolonged visitation of measles had declared his affection for the girl. It was a solemn occasion. On the whole, Mrs. Crawford, after the first shock of the affair, was gratified. She wrote a note to Susan, which Emily took with her.

She arrived, looking very pretty and very solemn. Susan left Carrie and the child in the garden and took Emmy into the little drawing room, so changed since Miss Mitford's time. The windows were open, the blinds drawn down halfway; the scented air and murmurs from the garden came into the room. Susan took her mother's note and read it with some surprise. "He is not a rich man," wrote Mrs. Crawford, "but very solidly religious, and I believe him to be a thoroughly good man, although a little stout. He has the deepest affection for Emily, and after our past experience as a family I would *welcome* him as a son-in-law." "Though his name is Tolle-mache," Susan whispered to herself with a sudden irresistible smile as she folded up the note; then she turned to Emmy in dismay.

"Emmy—Emmy, darling, do you really think seriously of promising to marry this man?" she asked.

Emmy was a good deal hurt. She drew herself up.

"You *will* always consider me as a child, Susan; you forget I'm nineteen now—almost as old as you were when you married."

Susan's bright face overcast suddenly as if a cloud came between her and the sun.

In quick penitence Emmy seized her hand. "Dearest,



I forgot; I did not mean to vex you, but——” She drew herself up and looked very solemn. “I am determined to be wise—to have someone *stable* when I marry, Susan.”

Susan began to laugh and kissed the little brown hand. “Wait for a little, Emily. Perhaps you may find someone quite as *stable* whom you like better in a short time.”

“He’s not at all reliable,” said Emmy, becoming red, and pulling her hand hastily away. “He’s not much older than myself and ever so much more foolish.”

“Who—who, Emmy?” Susan asked, bewildered.

“Jack Hamilton,” said Emmy, turning her face away. “He won’t be able to marry for about thirty years, he thinks, Sue—a middy can’t—and that is a long time.”

“Yes, love, it’s a long time,” said Susan cheerfully. “By the time you have waited for fifteen years, if you are both tired of it, you may marry someone else. Suppose you try that, and do not think any more about Dr. Tollemache just now.”

Emily felt that she was not being treated with sufficient solemnity. She said she would think about it, but Susan noticed a tone of relief in her voice, and in ten minutes she was racing Carrie’s little boy about the garden as if she were still a child.

Susan stood at the window, looking into the garden. She remembered how she had stood in that same room years before, looking out at the crocuses and tulips that were peering above the ground, the garden now full of roses and humming with bees. Carrie came softly into



the room behind her to say that she must soon be going home. They talked about Juliet's marriage, which had taken place a few weeks before.

"Do you like Archie Hamilton?" asked Carrie—who did not.

Susan made no answer for a minute. She looked out at the red roses blooming on their standard bushes, at the sunshine, at the smooth sward; then let her glance travel beyond the garden to the distant ridge of land where Striven lay behind a belt of trees. When she turned again to speak, Carrie was astonished by the bright, arch expression in her blue eyes. "Susan is really pretty now," she thought.

"Yes, Carrie," said Susan. "I love Juliet so much that I must like her husband too." Carrie accepted the explanation easily.

"How different this room looks from what it did in Miss Mitford's days!" she went on. "Poor Miss Mitford!" Susan looked at her.

"Poor Miss Mitford! Carrie, I remember envying Miss Mitford once more than I ever envied any other woman" ("almost," she added under her breath).

"Why? How extraordinary you are, Susan!" said Carrie.

"Oh," said Susan, "I envied her at the moment; she was so free, she had no ties in life."

"I suppose," said Carrie thoughtfully, "people are different. Do you find other things satisfy you, Susan?" She looked at Susan with pity in her eyes as she spoke.

"See, Carrie; read that," said Susan. She opened a



book that lay on the table—a little worn book that Colonel Hamilton had given her years before, when she first went to Linfield. She had read it for the first time the evening that she first met Darnley Stair. There was a mark against the passage that she asked Carrie to read.

“Here in the actual—this painful Kingdom of Time and Chance—are care, canker, and sorrow; with thought, with the ideal, is immortal hilarity, the Rose of Joy; round it all the muses sing.”

“Oh!” said Carrie. She read it twice over—“*Immortal hilarity—the Rose of Joy.*” She closed the book. “That’s beautiful, Susan, of course . . . but do you think after all,” she paused and looked at her curiously, “that anything would make up for a husband and a baby?”

Susan stood in the doorway when Carrie had gone. She looked at the soft landscape and up into the unclouded evening sky, still flushed from the setting sun, slowly fading to the short, bland summer night. There to the east, behind that belt of wood, lay the home of her troubles, the grave of her past. Behind the orchard trees, as she stood looking, the great white moon of summer stole majestically into the empty sky. Like a faint murmur in the distance she heard the voice of the sea that beat so fiercely in winter against the walls at St. Fortunes Haven—the sea that girdles the world.

Who knows? Perhaps Carrie’s was the true *summum bonum*, after all. There are two sides to every question, but in the brief hour given each of us in this vast and



interesting world we have time only to make a quick decision and abide by that.

Each finds happiness in a different form—if finding it at all. Some in “home in another heart”; others—Susan had gone with them—having looked on the face of Love, have turned away to follow after Knowledge or the Arts instead, and aiming at Perfection, with an undivided purpose, shoot their feeble arrows that come never near the mark.

THE END

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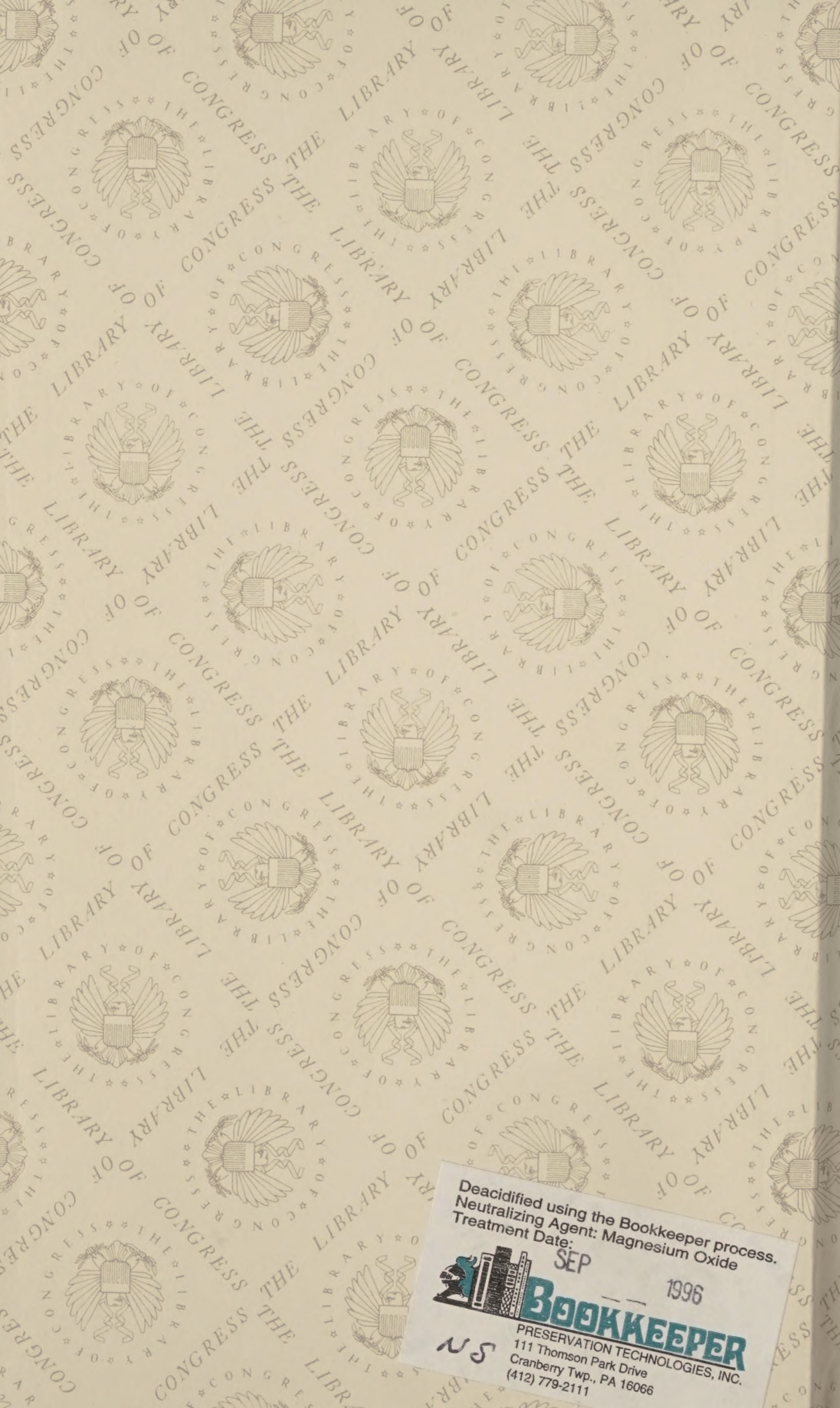












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