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TREASURE VALLEY

BY

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TREASURE VALLEY

CHAPTER I

THE HERMIT THRUSH SINGS

Then twilight falls with the touch
Of a hand that soothes and stills,
And a swamp-robin sings into light
The lone white star of the hills.

Alone in the dusk he sings,
And the joy of another day
Is folded in peace and borne
On the drift of years away.
—BLISS CARMAN.

Other years, by the time the mid-June days were come, the little brook that sang through John McIntyre's pasture-field had shrunk to a mere jeweled thread of golden pools and silver shallows, with here and there only the bleached pebbles to mark its course. But this summer was of a new and wonderful variety. Just two or three brilliant, hot days, and then, as regular as the sun, up from the ocean's rim would rise dazzling cloud-mountains, piling themselves up and up into glorious towers and domes and battlements; and when the earth had begun to droop beneath the sun's blaze, with a great thunder signal they would fling their banners to the zenith, and pour from their dark heights a rain of silver spears, till the thirsty hills were drenched with bounty, and the valleys laughed and sang.

And so there had never before been such a June, not even in Acadia: such lavish wealth in orchard and garden, such abundant promise of harvest in fields choked with grain. And that was why John McIntyre's little brook ran brimful to the clumps of mint and sword-grass, high up on its banks, so content that it made no murmur as it slipped past the Acadian orchards to the sea.

John McIntyre leaned against the fence that bordered his hay-field, his feet deep in the soft grass at the water's edge. His straw hat was pushed back, showing the line where his white forehead met the tan of his face. His hands were in his pockets, a sprig of mint in his mouth; his eyes were half closed in lazy content.

Away down yonder, where the little stream met the ocean, the sun was sinking into the gleaming water, a great, fiery ball dropping from an empty sky. Far over in the east one lonely cloud reflected its glory, blossoming up from the darkening hills like a huge white rose, flushed with pink.

The fiery ball touched the ocean's rim, and the whole world kindled into a glory of color. The

fading green fields brightened, quivered and glowed, as over them fell a veil of lilac mist. Through them wound the little river, a stream of molten gold. Just at John McIntyre's feet it passed lingeringly through a bed of rushes, where the dark green of the reeds turned the golden water to a glittering bronze. Their shadows wrought a marvelous pattern on the glossy surface, a magic piece of delicate bronze filagree such as nature alone could trace. Above it the swallows wheeled in the violet shadows, or soared up, flashing, into the amber light.

John McIntyre's eye followed their dizzy curves into the vast crystal dome. Yes; to-morrow would surely be a fine day. For to-morrow he was to take Mary and the children away down to that dazzling line of jewels on the horizon, where the winds and the waves of the Bay of Fundy tumbled about and buffeted one another joyously in the coolness of the ocean spray. It was their one great day in the year—the anniversary of their wedding. They had never missed its celebration in their eight happy years of married life. And there would be six altogether in the party to-morrow, besides Martin. How a man's family did grow, to be sure! The smiling content in John McIntyre's eyes deepened. He turned toward the white house on the face of the rising slope, half hidden in a nest of orchard trees. A woman's figure swayed to and fro beneath the vines of the veranda. The sunlight glanced on her fair hair and her light gown, as she swung from the green shadows into its golden pathway in time to the sweet notes of his baby's lullaby. The words came faintly across the hay-field:

"*Abide with me, fast falls the eventide,*
The darkness deepens, Lord with me abide;
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me!"

Down the dim lane that led to a farther pasture-field a boy was driving a slow-moving line of cows. Around them a frisky terrier darted here and there, barking encouragingly. The boy was whistling gaily. He, too, knew that to-morrow promised to be fair.

A little breeze stirred the reeds in their bronze setting, and brought up a tang of the sea. The man slowly turned, and, skirting the edge of the hay-field, walked toward the house. His pathway ran parallel to the public highway, and from it there arose the clatter of a wagon approaching through a clump of woodland. John McIntyre waited, smiling.

Down the road it came, bumping noisily. The driver was a young man, with a dashing air and a merry, kindly eye. He was sitting on the extreme edge of the wagon-box, his feet swinging in the dust, and his hat stuck rakishly on the side of his head, and was giving forth to the echoing landscape a long, tragic "Come-all-ye" in an uproariously joyful voice:

"*Come all yez true-born shanty byes,*
Whoever yous may be,
I'd have yez pay atten-ti-on,
To hear what I've got for to say,
Concerning six Can-a-jen byes,
Who manfully and brave,
Did break the jam on the Gar-ry Rocks,
And met a wat-e-ry grave!"

"Whoa! Hold up!" shouted John McIntyre, as the horses' heads appeared beyond the line of timber. "What do you mean by making such a row on the road at night and disturbing peaceable citizens?"

The driver pulled up, and the two eyed each other with that air of severity which men affect when they are afraid of displaying the fact that their love for each other is deep and tender.

"And what do you mean by holdin' up a peaceable citizen on the Queen's highway like this?" demanded the younger man, threateningly.

"You seem to be mighty gay about something. Another letter from Annie Laurie?"

"Aw, go an' choke yourself! No, siree. It'd be more like it if I was weepin' instead o' singin'. I bet you'd have been, if you'd heard the news I did to-day. Who d'ye suppose is to be your next-door neighbor?"

"I don't know."

"Satan Symonds—no less!"

John McIntyre's fine, gentle face expressed only surprised interest. "Well, let him come. He won't eat us."

"Won't he, though?" cried the young wagoner, vigorously. "He's got his eye on your farm, John McIntyre; yes, and one claw, don't forget that! I'd rather have the devil himself runnin' the next farm to me."

The man in the field leaned his bare, brown arms on the top of the fence-rails and surveyed his friend with an indulgent smile.

"I'm afraid he's closer than that to most of us already, Martin," he said, shaking his head. "Don't you worry about Joe Symonds. Why, we were boys at school together. There's no harm in him."

The younger man looked at his friend with mingled admiration and impatience in his eyes. "Lookee here, John, you're far too easy. You take a warning in time, and don't let that sneak get his claws any further into your wool than you can help. I'd shut off every bit of dealings with him. He's as sharp as a weasel. Don't you forget that he's got a hold on you already."

"Tuts! That's nothing. I'll pay that next fall, if the crops turn out only half as well as they look now."

The other shook his head. "John McIntyre," he said, with affectionate severity, "you're too honest for this world. Symonds belongs to a crooked stock. His father before him was crooked, and his grandfather was crookeder, and he's the crookedest o' the whole bunch. I—I"—he hesitated, boyishly—"I hate to go away thinkin' he's livin' next farm to you—that's all."

"Well, then, why don't you rent the River Farm yourself," said John McIntyre, banteringly, "instead of running off West like this? You and that little Ontario girl would run things just fine down there, and show Mary and me how to do it right."

A warm flush mingled with the tan on the younger man's cheek. "Maybe we will, some day," he said, with a wistful note in his voice, "but I'll have to wait till that kid is on his own feet. That won't be long, either. I bet he'll plank down all the money I've lent him before he's through college. And then I'll come scootin' home, an' there'll be a lot o' things happen all at once, 'round about that date."

"I hope so, Martin; I hope so. It's a big thing you're doing for that boy. I hope he'll never forget it."

"Not him! Bless me, it was a bigger thing he did for me. When he gets to be an M.D. I'll go back to Ontario and get little Annie Laurie, and we'll run Symonds into the river, and set up housekeeping on his tombstone. Well, so-long, John. We're goin' to have a bully day for your honeymoonin' to-morrow. Tell Mary to put up a clothes-basket o' them lemon pies, 'cause I'll be holler 'way down past my boot-soles. Good-night, John."

He started off noisily, but turned to shout back through a cloud of dust: "Mind you don't let that snake come any o' his monkey-shines over you, John! Good-night!"

The wagon rattled away down the lilac road, the driver's voice rising gaily, if jerkily, above its clatter:

> "*O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o! They broke the jam on the Gar-ry Rocks,*
> *And met a wat-e-ry grave!*"

The other man was still smiling as he turned and made his way along the edge of the wood. Good old Martin! Where was there another such a friend as he? When John McIntyre's spirit rose in thankfulness to his Maker for the many temporal blessings lavished upon him, he never forgot to say, "And I thank thee, Lord, most of all, for Martin Heaslip!"

The fiery ball had sunk beyond the rim of the sea; the earth was still darkly radiant, pulsating with the thought of his departed glory. The great rose on the eastern horizon was fading to a tender mauve. The wooded glen was dark and silent. From its warm depths arose the perfume of the young, green earth. John McIntyre stood for a moment on the pathway, where its shadows met the lights of the open fields. He threw back his head and looked up into the quivering deep of the heavens. Involuntarily his eyes closed against their glory. He was overcome, too, with the glory of a sudden devout thought. God, away up there, encompassed by ineffable light and beauty, was like His own abiding place—too blindingly radiant to be gazed at by mortal eye, and therefore inscrutable and mysterious, but all-bountiful, nevertheless, sending down each day His largess of blessings, just as the heavens sent down their life-giving rains. At the thought John McIntyre took off his hat.

And as he stood, out of the hush of the woods there stole the last wondrous miracle of the departing day. The spirit of the twilight took voice, a marvelous voice, indescribably sweet. Away in the depths of the forest there arose a strain of music, the hermit thrush, in his woodland sanctuary, raising his hymn to the night. Calm and serene, carrying an exquisite peace, it floated out over field and hill and river, until the very heavens seemed flooded with its harmony.

> "*O hear all! O hear all! O holy, holy!*"

That was what the voice seemed to say to John McIntyre as he stood in the lush June grass,

just on the borderland between the purple and the amber, and held his breath to listen. God had sent more than one prophet into the wilderness to prepare His way, he thought in reverent awe. For this voice spoke to him of all his Maker's goodness. What more could a man desire than he possessed, he asked, in a rush of gratitude; to live out his life of healthful toil in God's free sunshine, with the happy home nest, holding Mary and their little ones safe under his eye; with a friend's strong arm to help when the day's burden grew heavy; with the world a garden of beauty and light, and at night the solemn voice of the hermit; calling him to prayer?

Once more the strain poured forth, pure, celestial:

"*O hear all! O hear all! O holy, holy!*"

John McIntyre turned and went up the hill, smiling, his face to the light.

CHAPTER II

AN ADVENTUROUS EXPEDITION

Sing a song of loving!
  Let the seasons go;
Hearts can make their gardens
  Under sun or snow;
Fear no fading blossom,
  Nor the dying day;
Sing a song of loving
  That will last for aye!
—ELIZABETH ROBERTS MACDONALD.

The village of Elmbrook had the finest situation for seeing what its neighbors were about of any place in the Province of Ontario. It stood on the crest of a high ridge, from which the whole earth fell away in beautiful undulations. From almost any house in the village one could see for miles down the four roads that wound up to it, and there was always a brisk competition in progress as to who should be the first to spy an approaching traveler.

Mrs. William Winters, who was the smartest woman in the township of Oro, made it her boast that many a time she had sighted a buggyload of her Highland relatives coming down from the MacDonald settlement above Glenoro, when there wasn't a bite to eat in the house, and she had fried the liveliest rooster in the barnyard and slapped up a couple of pies before they drove up to the gate.

For many years she easily maintained first rank among the Elmbrook sentinels, and might have done so to the end of her life had not one family taken an unfair advantage by calling in the aid of machinery. Silas Long, the postmaster, was a great student of astronomy, and could talk like a book on comets and northern lights, and all other incomprehensible things that sailed the heavens. So no one objected when he bought a telescope—in fact, the minister had advised it; but before long every one knew that while Si studied the celestial bodies at night the female portion of his family kept the instrument turned on objects terrestrial during the day. Old Granny Long, Silas' mother, was the one who put Mrs. Winters in the background. She was a poor, bedridden body, but lay there, day after day, happy as a queen, with her bed pulled up to the window, and the telescope trained on the surrounding country; and there was little went on between Lake Simcoe and the northern boundary of the township that she did not see. She knew the precise hour of a Monday morning at which the family washings were hung out, and which was the cleanest. It was she who made truancy an impossible risk, for no matter in what out-of-the-way place one might go nutting or swimming, Granny Long was sure to see, and report to the schoolmistress. It was from her, also, that her grandson received the heart-breaking intelligence that young Malcolm Cameron had kissed Marjorie Scott, the minister's oldest girl, at the jog in the road, on the way to prayer-meeting one evening, and if it had not been for her vigilance probably no one would have discovered that Sawed-off Wilmott, who managed the cheese factory down on the Lake Simcoe road, allowed his pigs to run in and out of the factory at will. Indeed, as the deposed and indignant Mrs. Winters often declared, a body didn't dast blow their nose inside the township without Granny Long hearing it through that everlasting spyglass.

But on this particular early May morning a hostile army might have marched up and seized Elmbrook unobserved. For there were great doings inside the village that demanded concentrated attention. All the bustle and activity of the place seemed to be gathered at one small house. In the lane, by the side door, stood a team of farm horses hitched to a large double buggy. A big, lumbering lad of about fifteen, half asleep, on the front seat, was holding the reins

in his limp hands. But he was the only creature on the premises, except the horses, that was not acutely awake and supremely busy. Even the hens and geese, scratching and squawking about the garden, seemed to know that something unusual was in progress, and gathered about the door in excited groups. Inside the house there was a tremendous clatter; dishes rattled, feet ran hither and thither, voices called frantically. Every few moments a woman would dart out of the doorway, sending a startled whirl of chickens before her, deposit something in the back of the vehicle, and dash back again.

There seemed to be but one man on the premises, a big, benevolent-looking fellow, whose placid face wore an unaccustomed expression of nervous tension. He came stumbling out of the house, and walked abstractedly around the horses. He was making strange motions with his head, strongly indicative of a tendency to strangulation, and ever and anon he clutched his white collar and looked toward the house with an air of desperation. He made three aimless pilgrimages around the equipage and then paused, and addressed the goose and gander that had been following him: "We'll miss that train as sure as blazes," he remarked, stonily.

A slim little woman, in a faded lilac gown that matched her fading beauty, came staggering down the steps with a heavy basket. The big man put out one brawny arm and lifted it, without an effort, into the back of the vehicle. "We'll miss that train, Arabella, just as sure as blazes," he repeated.

The sound partially awoke the young man on the front seat. He turned and contemplated the basket with an injured air. "What in thunder are they taking a set of dishes for, Arabella?" he asked, wearily.

"It's jist a basket o' things Hannah put up. She's afraid the orphan might get hungry on the road home; and besides, she wanted to take some cookies an' cheese to Jake's folks in town."

The man was making another circuit of the buggy, followed closely by Isaac and Rebekah, the pet goose and gander. They came to a standstill in front of the steps, and he raised his face to the morning skies and shouted, as though invoking some higher power, "Hannah! Hannah! Are ye 'most ready?"

A woman's face shot out between the starched lace curtains of an upstairs window. It was a perfectly circular face, framed in thin, fair hair, which was parted in the middle, and brushed down so smooth and shiny that it looked like a coat of dull yellow paint. The face had the same good-humored, benevolent expression as the man's, mingled with the same strained air of desperate resolve. "'Most ready, Jake!" she mumbled through a mouthful of pins, "'most ready! Arabella! Arabella! Did you put in the bottle of raspberry vinegar?"

"Yes, yes, Hannah! Don't you worry?" cried the little faded lilac woman, reassuringly.

"An' the cookies, an' the pound cake, an' the home-made cheese?"

A third woman bounded down the steps, and charged through the chickens with a bundle of wrappings. She was a smart, tidy little body, with a sharp face and a determined manner. At the sight of her the big man's gloomy face took on an expression of hope.

"Susan! Susan Winters! D'ye think you could get us off?" he implored. "We'll miss that train as sure as blazes!"

She paid not the slightest attention. "Ras'berry vinegar!" she shrieked. "Hannah Sawyer, don't you know that there orphant may be an infant in arms, an' if it is, it'll die of colic on the road home if you fill it up with such stuff!"

The face which had disappeared from between the curtains came into view again, red and alarmed. "Mercy me, Susan! I didn't know. I'll give it to Jake's cousin. Arabella, did you put in the pound cake and the home——" The words died away amid the curtains.

"Couldn't you get us off somehow, Susan?" besought the big man again, looking down, helplessly, at the small woman, much as a becalmed frigate might at a noisy little tug.

"Well, Jake Sawyer, if half them trollops o' weemin in there would clear out and leave me alone, I'd 'a' had you at the station by this time. Hannah!" she addressed the window peremptorily, "you hurry up there an' come down, whether you're ready or not! I never agreed to this wild-goose chase after an orphant, but now that you're half ready you've got to go!"

There was another fleeting vision of the face between the curtains, and a choking voice gasped something about being "jist ready."

"What that orphant's got to have is a bottle o' fresh milk!" cried Mrs. Winters, darting back into the kitchen. A tall young lady, with a high pompadour, was striving to squeeze two large lemon pies into a small basket. She glanced up half apologetically as the village martinet entered.

"Hannah said last night she didn't know whatever she'd do if it cried on the road home, so ma thought I'd better bring over these pies. They keep awful well, and the basket'll easy slip under the seat in the train. When our Wes was a baby there was nothing would quiet him like a piece o'

lemon pie."

"Well, Ella Anne Long, there won't be no orphant to bring home if you folks has your way!"

The exasperated little woman darted down the cellar steps, her voice coming up from the cool depths, indistinct, but plainly disapproving: "Lemon pie an' ras'berry vinegar! If Providence hasn't given folks children, it's a sign they didn't ought to have any! An' it's jist goin' clean against nature for them to go an' adopt one, that's what I'll always say!"

The young lady with the pies glanced irresolutely toward a stout woman who had just entered the back door, carrying a crock of butter. "You put them pies in, if Hannah wants them," whispered the newcomer, looking apprehensively toward the cellar, "an' say no more about it. Half the mischief in the world's done by talking about things." She hurried out to the vehicle and planted her contribution beside the bundle of wrappings.

"That there butter's for the children at the Home, Jake. Don't forget to give it to them poor things. Like as not they give 'em lard or someth'n'."

"Davy!" she called to the young man on the front seat.

"What, maw?"

"For pity's sake don't forget to call us when the train hoots for Cameron's Crossin'. 'Cause they've jist got to start then."

The boy in the buggy opened his eyes, stretched and yawned.

"I will, if it hoots good 'n' loud," he remarked, indifferently.

The maelstrom of hurry and bustle surged around Master David Munn, leaving him placid and undisturbed, but to the rest of the gathering the affair was of no small moment. Had the Sawyers been setting out on a polar expedition it is doubtful if Elmbrook could have been more exercised. For ten years, ever since their only baby had brightened their home for one week, and then gone back to heaven, Jake and Hannah Sawyer had wanted to adopt a child. That they had not done so long before was not their fault, but because the village in general, and Mrs. Winters in particular, who ruled the village, could never be brought to consent. For already the Sawyers were about as great a burden as Elmbrook could shoulder. They were the orphan children of the village themselves, and needed to be perpetually adopted. They were as good-hearted and lovable a pair as it was possible for man and woman to be; all the stray dogs and hungry cats and needy tramps found their way to the Sawyer house by unerring instinct, and Jake was never to be seen on his way to or from his mill without a troop of children climbing all over him. Nevertheless, he and his wife were a great care to their neighbors. Not once had Hannah Sawyer got through her spring house-cleaning or her fall pickling and preserving without help. Never yet had the two arrived in time at church or prayer-meeting, and they could not even go to town of a Saturday to do a half day's marketing without Mrs. Winters' eye on them. As for Jake's flour mill, if his partner, Spectacle John Cross, hadn't been a capable man, and an honest one, every one declared it would have gone up in smoke long ago.

So, naturally, the village was reluctant about adopting a third orphan; but Jake and Hannah had pleaded so, that the minister had advised Mrs. Winters to yield. And so the day had arrived when they were to take the train to a neighboring town, near which was an orphan home, and there they were to secure their long-yearned-for prize.

Of course, it was out of the question to suppose that the Sawyers could get up and catch the six-thirty train without assistance; so the Camerons had loaned their team, and the Longs their buggy, to take them to the station; Davy Munn was detailed to drive them, and all the rest of the village to get them ready.

Jake had just returned from a despairing march to the gate. "We'll miss that train, Harriet Munn, as sure as blazes!" he cried, with the air of one who has a disagreeable formula to recite at stated intervals, and is relieved to get it off his mind. He tramped back again with an agonized glance at the upstairs window.

The boy in the buggy stirred to life once more.

"Say, maw!"

"What, Davy?"

"What on earth's Hannah scratching 'round upstairs so long for? That orphant'll be growed up before they get it."

"She's jist ready," remarked his mother, hopefully, "an' there's no use talkin' about it, either. It jist wastes time. Jake!" she called, anxiously. "Are you sure you're all ready now?"

The man turned a desperate face toward her.

"I think so, Harriet. But if this collar don't bust soon an' give me a breath, I'll choke."

"Did you find your pipe?"

Mr. Sawyer dived absently into his coat pockets. "We'll miss that train as sure as—— Where in the nation's that pipe o' mine got to?" He rummaged despairingly. "Oh, I forgot! Susan Winters said I wasn't to take it, for fear the smoke might be bad for the orphant's eyes. D'ye think it would, Harriet?" he inquired, wistfully.

"Tuts!" she cried, disdainfully, "not a bit. Davy, there, was brought up on smoke. You go and get that pipe and put it in your pocket."

Mr. Sawyer started hopefully for the kitchen door. Davy Munn might not be exactly a bright and shining example to set for the bringing up of the orphan, but at least he looked healthy, and Jake was even more than usually helpless when bereft of his pipe. He paused on the way indoors to make one more despairing appeal to the power above. "Hannah! Aren't you 'most ready?"

Hannah's face, round and red, like the full moon, appeared for an instant from its cloudy curtain. "Harriet! Harriet Munn!" she called, "and you, Arabella, could you run up here a minit an' pin on these blue cuffs o' mine? An' I can't find my Sunday gloves, high nor low, nor my——"

The rest was lost in the curtains, but the two friends had already disappeared inside, and were charging up the stairs. Mrs. Winters, who was emerging from the kitchen door with the bottle of milk, turned and darted after them. "She ain't goin' to put them blue cuffs on that black dress!" she screamed.

"Ella Anne," whispered Jake, sidling up to the young lady with the high pompadour, "could you take a look 'round, and see if you can find my pipe? I can't seem to think where I've laid it."

Miss Long strolled around the kitchen, casting an absent eye here and there.

"Davy!" called a sharp voice from the upstairs window. "Davy Munn! Don't you dast to forget to call when the train hoots for Cameron's Crossing!"

The only calm person on the premises glanced up with half-closed eyes. "Hoh!" he ejaculated, planting his feet upon the dashboard and expectorating disdainfully in the direction of Rebekah's head, "Gabriel's trump'll hoot 'fore this shootin' match goes off! Gosh blame, if here ain't another one!"

A tall woman was coming up the lane. She was a stately, severe person, with iron-gray hair and a stern gray eye, behind which a kindly twinkle hid itself carefully from view. She had a commanding way, which, combined with the fact that she had taught the Elmbrook school for twenty years, and was the only woman in the village who neither feared Mrs. Winters nor regarded Granny Long's telescope, had earned her the title of the Duke of Wellington.

"Are you not away yet, David?" she demanded; and the boy sat up as though he had received an electric shock.

"N-no, but we're jist startin'," he said, apologetically. She passed him to where Mr. Sawyer stood in the doorway wrestling with his collar.

"Do you remember this, Jake?" she asked, holding up a baby's rattle. "I bought it for your little Joey, and put it away in my desk till he would be big enough to use it, and it's been there ever since. Maybe the new baby'll like it."

The man's eyes grew misty as he took the little toy and gazed at it tenderly. The woman's face had lost all its sternness; her gray eyes were very kind.

"Well, well, well," he stammered, with masculine dread of giving expression to anything like sentiment. "It—it looks quite—new." He hesitated, then his face brightened as he found himself once more on familiar ground. "Say, d'ye think you could help them weemin folks in there to find my pipe? It seems to have got laid away somewheres, an' I'm afraid we're goin' to miss that train as sure as—anything." He ended up lamely, making the polite alteration out of respect for the Duke's dignity.

Miss Weir marched into the kitchen. It was a scene of wild disorder.

"Hello!" giggled Miss Long. "We're having an awful time. Hannah ain't ready, of course."

"*Isn't* ready, Ella Anne."

"Well, isn't or ain't, it's all the same; she's not started yet. An' mind you, Mrs. Munn's upstairs helping, too, and her expecting the new doctor any minit. Say, Miss Weir, when she comes down, ask her whether he's married or not, aw, do. She's the closest creature. I can't get anything out of her."

Before the schoolmistress could rebuke Miss Long's undue curiosity regarding the young doctor Mrs. Winters came flying down the stairs, having successfully routed the blue cuffs.

"Good-morning, Miss Weir. We're here yet, you see. If these folks ain't a caution, and no

mistake! Davy! Davy Munn! Are you listening for that there train?"

"Did ye look on the pantry shelf?" whispered Jake, cautiously, putting his head in at the door, and avoiding Mrs. Winters' eye. "Sometimes I leave it there."

"Just like you," grumbled the tidy schoolmistress, rummaging among the cans of spice and pickle bottles.

"Perhaps it's in the sewing-machine drawer," suggested Mrs. Munn, who had come panting down the stairs. "Hannah's jist ready, Jake," she added, hopefully.

"What'll you do if the new doctor comes on this train?" asked Miss Long, peeping at her pompadour in the little mirror above the sink.

"I dunno," answered the new doctor's housekeeper. "It's no use talkin' about it, anyhow. There's more harm done by talkin' over things than anything else in the world."

Miss Long shrugged her shoulders impatiently. That was Mrs. Munn's invariable answer. She had been old Dr. Williams' housekeeper for ten years, and had met all questions regarding his private affairs by the vague formula, "I dunno." A close woman was Mrs. Mum, as the village called her; a treasure of a woman, old Dr. Williams had said, when he recommended her to his young successor.

Ella Anne sighed. "That pipe must 'a' fell down the well," she remarked, with an accent of despair that was not all caused by the supposed catastrophe.

"Is he going to have them three downstairs rooms for his offices, or only two?" she ventured again.

Mrs. Munn stared vacantly. "I dunno," she said. "Mebby he is."

"There! If there isn't that troublesome pipe right under your nose, Ella Anne!" cried Miss Weir, pouncing upon it where it lay on the window-sill. "Your head is so full of the new doctor you can't see straight. Here, Jake!"

She started for the door, but before she reached it a great many things happened. First, Mrs. Sawyer, gowned, bonneted and shawled, though the sun promised to be blazing hot before it set, came down the stairs at a reckless pace. She was followed by Miss Arabella Winters, half hidden beneath a bundle of coats and wraps suited for children of all ages. As the two ran for the door, Mrs. Winters with a bottle of milk, Miss Long with a forgotten pie, and Mrs. Munn, who had snatched up a basket of newly laundered clothes, under the mistaken idea that they, too, were for the orphan, all rushed at the same instant for the same portal, and jammed together between the door-posts. The Duke of Wellington, still grasping the rescued pipe, threw herself upon the human wedge and drove it, helter-skelter, down the steps; and simultaneously there arose, loud and clear, not from Cameron's Crossing, some miles distant, but just from the ravine bridge, scarcely a quarter of a mile away, the shrill whistle of the train.

The six women turned and looked at each other in an instant's paralyzed dismay. Jake Sawyer opened his mouth and gave forth a slight variation of his despairing motto, "We've missed that train, as sure as blazes!"

No one had courage to deny the assertion. When the Lakeview & Simcoe Railroad Company laid a line across the township of Oro they had treated Elmbrook in a shabby fashion by placing the station a mile from the village. The inconvenience of this arrangement was largely obviated, however, by the obliging ways of Conductor Lauchie McKitterick. For if any one in the village was late in starting for the station, all one had to do was to wave a towel at the back door as the train slowed up over the ravine bridge, and Lauchie would wait at the station. Of course, it was understood that the belated traveler was already on the way thither, taking the path across McQuarry's fields. But of what use to wave all the bed-sheets in Elmbrook this morning? For though a delay of half an hour or so was neither here nor there to the Lakeview & Simcoe Limited Express, it was impossible to expect even so neighborly a body as Lauchie to wait until the big, heavy buggy and Cameron's farm team should be driven along the cross-road and down the concession. And as for Hannah Sawyer's 185 pounds being transported across the fields and over the fences in less time—not to speak of all the orphan's clothes and the pies and the pound cake and the crock of butter—well, there was no use thinking about it!

But Mrs. Winters, the indomitable, rose to even this emergency. She sprang to the buggy and began dragging out the baskets. "We'll stop him at the bridge!" she screamed. "We can run down the back lane! Davy Munn, you jump out of that rig an' run ahead! No—Miss Weir, you go! Lauchie'll have to stop if you tell him!"

It was the first time in her life Mrs. Winters had ever paid a tribute to the Duke of Wellington's power. Though it was wrung from her by the exigencies of the case, the schoolmistress accepted it. She snatched a white garment off the clothes-line, darted through the barnyard, and ran at top speed down the back lane toward the track, waving it on high, all unconscious that it was Jake's white mill overalls. Close upon her flying footsteps came the orphan-adopting expedition: Mrs. Winters, the bottle of milk leaving a white-sprinkled trail

behind her; Jake, dragging the heaps of wraps and the basket of provisions, with which little Miss Arabella was vainly trying to assist him; Ella Anne Long, the basket of pies on her arm, the forgotten one in her other hand; Mrs. Munn, with the crock of butter; poor Hannah herself far behind; and lastly, Isaac and Rebekah, their necks outthrust, their wings wide, streaming along like a pair of comets, with a long, spreading tail of hens, all noisily hopeful that this unusual commotion meant an unusual meal.

Down the lane zigzagged the swift procession, Hannah floundering farther and farther in the rear. She raised her voice once in a despairing protest: "Oh, Jake! Jake!" she wailed, "I've forgot my false teeth!"

Her husband, desperately intent on his destination, did not hear the appeal, but the little woman who was generaling the flying column did, and realized that this sign of giving way must be peremptorily crushed.

"You'll jist have to gum it, Hannah!" she shrieked relentlessly over her shoulder. "Come on, come on!"

Master Davy Munn, still enthroned calmly upon the front seat of the useless vehicle, contemplated the tumultuous line with supreme contempt. Mr. Munn never hurried. Should all Elmbrook have risen up one morning and gone hurtling down to Lake Simcoe, it would have left him seated alone, undisturbed, on its vacated ridge.

He turned leisurely and chirped to the horses. "Jim Cameron lent yous to haul that outfit to the station," he complained, as they lumbered out through the gateway, "but I'll be darned if I promised to run 'em there, so yous kin git home."

Meantime, the vanguard of the Orphan Rescue Expedition had reached the railroad track. Just on the outskirts of the village lay a deep ravine, spanned by a bridge. Over this the train moved slowly, and here, with his eye on the lookout for white signals, the conductor spied the Duke of Wellington in the middle of the track, waving a white banner. Being an Elmbrook man, Lauchie took in the situation at once. Jake and Hannah were late, of course; too late even to run across the fields while he waited at the station. He gave the signal, and the train slowed down, the snorting engine coming to a standstill within a foot of the flaunting garment.

Engine Driver Nick Boyle, who would have willingly stopped at Elmbrook every day in the week, to talk over the back fences with the pretty girls, but who objected on principle to all that his chief did, poked his head out of his black box, grimy and disapproving. "What in thunder's Brass Buttons up to now?" he demanded. Miss Weir, who had thrashed Nick times without number in his youth, fixed him with her steady gray eye.

"He stopped because I signaled him to, Nicholas Boyle," she said tartly.

The Duke was still standing in the middle of the track, waving the overalls, as though the train were a wild animal to be kept quiet by having its attention diverted. The sight tickled the engineer.

"Golly, it must be a weddin'," he remarked, facetiously. "Who's gettin' hitched? You, Miss Weir?"

"Hold your tongue!" she commanded, and the abashed young man collapsed into his box.

By this time Hannah had arrived, and was being helped aboard. The wraps, the pies, the bottle of milk, the crock of butter, the basket of provisions, and her husband, were bundled after her. The group of friends stood waving good-by with sunbonnets and aprons, the schoolmistress, still holding Jake's forgotten pipe, and still faithfully brandishing the overalls, stepped off the track to let the train start, and the expedition was just drawing a breath of relief, when they were suddenly thrown back into their former state of consternation. Conductor Lauchie leaned down from the platform, and, with his thumb pointing over his shoulder, announced in a loud whisper, "Losh keep us, I would be forgetting! He'll be aboard, Harriet Munn! Your new pill-mixer'll be aboard!"

Mrs. Munn stared at him in dismay. "Not him! Not the new doctor!"

The conductor looked abashed, as though he had brought the wrong parcel from town. "Och, he would be as fine a lookin' young man as you'll see in Oro!" he whispered, apologetically. "Will I jist be puttin' him off here?"

"Don't you dast to do such a trick, Lauchie McKitterick!" cried Mrs. Winters, shaking her fist in his face. "Harriet's been up helpin' Hannah all mornin', an' she ain't ready for him. Take him on to the station, an' we'll run up an' help her red up before he comes. An' mind you go slow!"

The conductor hastily acquiesced. He was a native of Elmbrook, and knew his place when Susan Winters was giving orders. "Awl aboard!" he shouted.

The group gave one final, farewell flourish toward the train, and then turned and sped up the lane to meet the new emergency. Jake and Hannah, their faces settled once more into their

accustomed expressions of good-humored placidity, leaned from their windows and waved their hands. Hannah smiled a toothless but happy smile, and Jake's eyes beamed a great content as he sat back in his seat, and, holding the rattle between his teeth, fumbled happily for a match. He looked across at his wife, and their eyes met in a rapturous smile; for at last, after years of striving and longing, they were on their way to the fulfilment of their great ambition; they were to have a child of their very own!

And so, as the train sped in one direction, and the group of women in another, no one noticed the stooped, gaunt man who dropped from the rear end of the baggage car, and, creeping down the bank of the ravine, disappeared into the green tangle of underbrush.

CHAPTER III

HIS FIRST PATIENT

Oh, the dainty, dainty maid to the borders of the brook
Lingered down as lightly as the breeze;
And the shy water-spiders quit their scurrying to look;
And the happy water whispered to the trees.
—C. G. D. ROBERTS.

Dr. Gilbert Allen, gold-medalist of the Toronto School of Medicine, and just home from a post-graduate course in London and Edinburgh, had his coat off, his sleeves rolled up, and was busy arranging bottles on the shelf of his tiny dispensary. He was whistling cheerily. It was young Dr. Allen's nature to be cheerful even under adverse circumstances, and this morning all his prospects were bright. For after years of spending money—and largely another man's money, too—he was at last on his feet. His college life had been a very happy one, it is true; so, also, had been the years since his graduation, the first two spent as house surgeon in a Toronto hospital, the last, and best of all, in the Old Land. They had given him breadth and experience; but though Gilbert was willing to concede that experience teaches, he was equally assured that she does not pay bills. Now he was a free man, and master of his profession. He used the last phrase modestly; he was ready and anxious to make the mastery more complete, and at the same time to win a name for himself and a home and a fortune for Rosalie.

As he stacked the bottles noisily in their places he glanced around the little room, and wished he might turn a handspring, just to let off steam and be able to write to Harwood and the other fellows to say his office was big enough to admit of the feat. He wisely crushed the desire, for he recognized the fact that he was under surveillance. Just outside the windows stretched a little lawn, with a star-shaped flower-bed in the middle. Up and down this green space, following a leisurely and devious course, journeyed a lawnmower, propelled by a long-limbed youth. His straw hat hung limply from his head, his coat flapped limply from his shoulders, and his trousers bulged limply from his big top-boots. Nevertheless, he had a certain lumbering airiness of movement, and such a mien of lofty indifference to his surroundings that the beholder was impressed with the idea that he was a very sprightly gentleman indeed, and need never work unless he was so minded. Just why he should spend a whole morning cutting a few square yards of short May grass was a problem the doctor had not yet solved. But even in his brief acquaintance, Gilbert had learned that the actions of this young man, who had entered into an important relation to himself as groom and general factotum, were not to be measured by any rational standard.

The slow clatter of the lawnmower grew louder, and finally ceased beneath the window. The doctor turned, a bottle in each hand. The open sash was filled by a straw hat which formed the frame for a broad, smiling countenance.

"Want any help?" the visitor inquired, genially.

"No, thank you," answered the doctor, adding, pointedly: "You have other work to do, you know."

"Oh, I ain't worryin' about that," responded his man-servant, reassuringly. "Old Doc. Williams uster say he'd make kindlin' wood o' me, when I didn't hustle round, but it never fizzed on me." He hung himself over the window-sill with a sigh of satisfaction, and gazed admiringly at his employer.

A wire door, leading from the veranda to the main portion of the house, swung slowly open, and a woman, wearing a big, blue-checked apron, and carrying a long pewter spoon, looked out anxiously. "Davy!" she called in a loud whisper, "why don't you get on with your work?"

"I'm helpin' the doctor with his mixtures," he answered, in a tone of remonstrance.

The woman's tight mouth closed emphatically. "Well, hish!" she said, raising her spoon warningly. "Susan Winters is sittin' on her porch, an' she'll hear if you don't look out. It's no use talkin' about things, anyhow."

The wire door creaked again, Mrs. Munn sailed away, and her son hung himself farther over the window-sill. Evidently he had inherited none of his mother's reticence.

"Say," he ventured, confidentially, "Elsie Cameron's home; came yesterday, the very day you came. Ain't that funny?"

The young doctor did not seem to see anything humorous in the coincidence. He glanced meaningly toward the lawnmower.

"I bet she thinks it's a kind of a come-down to come back an' work on the farm after doin' nothin' but sing for so long. She's a bully singer, I tell you, only she's got red hair."

He waited for some comment, but as there was none forthcoming, except a louder clatter of bottles, he continued: "Everybody thinks she's so awful good-lookin', but I don't think she's half as pretty as Jean—that's her sister. Say"—his voice sank to a whisper—"did anybody tell you about her sister yet?"

There was a note of strained anxiety, almost amounting to terror, in the boy's tone, that commanded Gilbert's attention. He looked around. Perhaps it was some serious illness, and the new doctor was badly in need of a patient.

"No. What's the matter with her?" he asked, interestedly.

Davy glanced about him fearfully, as though he were about to disclose the young woman as the author of a deadly crime. He leaned still farther into the room. "She's—*she's my girl*!" he exploded, in a loud whisper.

The new doctor turned his back suddenly. There was a long pause. "I must congratulate you," he said at last, in a smothered voice.

Davy gazed at his broad back uncertainly. He had heard that formula before, but it had always been delivered to the newly wed. He was afraid the doctor was under a pleasant misapprehension.

"We're jist kind o' keepin' company—yet," he explained carefully. "An' Jean, she's an awful girl to laugh. An' then there's old lady Cameron—that's her mother. She's a blasted bother. There's never a fella' goes to see them girls but she has to sit 'round an' do all the talkin'. It ain't fair." His tone was deeply aggrieved. "You won't like it any better'n' me if you keep company with Elsie," he added, after a pause.

The doctor turned, and his expression was so alarming that the youth slipped back several feet into the garden. "That's what everybody's been sayin'," he stammered, in self-defense. "All the folks was sayin' you'd be sure to keep company with Elsie when she came home. I thought it would be kind o' handy 'count o' me goin' to see Jean. We'd be company home, nights."

The indignation that had been rising in the young doctor's gray eyes vanished. He turned quickly to his bottles and indulged in a spasm of silent laughter. But his face was very grave when he looked around again. "Look here, David," he said firmly, "I'd advise you not to discuss my affairs. Neither you nor the rest of the village had better even speculate upon them. You're almost dead sure to be wrong. Now go on with your work."

The boy slowly and reluctantly detached himself from the window-sill, and set the lawnmower on another zigzag journey. His hat, his coat, and his trousers hung limper than ever. He moved wearily, and at the end of the garden he sat down under a cherry-tree to muse on the strange, sad fact that his new employer promised to be not one whit more companionable than old Doc. Williams.

The young doctor finished his work, and went up the stairs three steps at a time, making a commotion that brought Mrs. Munn from her pie-baking in hurried alarm. He washed his hands, resumed his coat, and, leaning out of the window, wished with all his might that he had something to do. He was seized with an honest, pagan desire that some one would get sick, or that there might be an accident in the mill—-just a mild accident, of course; or, better still, that that queer specimen of humanity sitting under his cherry-tree, down there, should be smitten with paralysis. He confessed that this last seemed the most hopeful outlook, then laughed at himself for his monstrous wishes. He seized his hat and ran downstairs. He would go out and explore the village. He must do something, he warned himself, or he would be in danger of rushing into the street and lacerating the first man he met, just for the sake of sewing him up again.

He passed out to the gate. The long, shady village street, bordered by tall, swaying elms, stretched away on either hand, peaceful and deserted. To the new doctor the place looked half asleep, and uncompromisingly healthful. The clear May morning air was filled with a chorus of robins and orioles. A bluebird in the orchard bordering his lawn was singing ecstatically. Far up

the street the musical cling-clang of the blacksmith's anvil, and from the depths of the ravine, in the opposite direction, the hum of the sawmill, served only like a lullaby to make the silence more dreamy.

He stepped out upon the boardwalk that ran along the street. Overhead the maples and elms met, making a cool tunnel. In this green canopy nest-building was being carried on, on a great scale and with tremendous commotion. The doctor picked his way carefully along the undulating surface of the sidewalk, for the boards were damp and rotten, and liable to fly up at one end and break a limb; and though he was anxious for a patient, he did not fancy serving in that capacity himself.

The quiet houses, surrounded by their demure gardens, gave no indication that he was being watched from behind many a window-blind. Neither was there any stir to give hint that from the upstairs window of the village shop at the end of the street a telescope was pointing at him, while Granny Long informed the breathless circle about her bed that his necktie was of blue-gray satin, and that his hair was thick and wavy.

Quite unconscious of the sensation he was creating, the new doctor walked on. He passed a tiny white house set in a square garden bright with early blossoms. A little woman, in a faded lilac gown, sat sewing on the porch, and a green parrot, in a cage at her side, stalked to and fro on his perch, muttering sullenly. At sight of the stranger the bird gave an indignant stare, then swung, head downward, from his perch and shouted, "Oh, Lordy, ain't we havin' a slow time!"

The remark so exactly coincided with the new doctor's sentiments that he looked over the cedar hedge at the speaker with a feeling of friendly regard. But the little lilac lady seemed quite of another mind. She sprang up in dismayed haste, scattering thimble and scissors out on the pathway, and, seizing the cage, fled with it indoors.

Gilbert passed on, feeling that there was one creature, at least, in this new place who was in sympathy with him. His eye traveled with satisfaction along the double row of trim houses and neat gardens; they spoke of thrift and prosperity. There was only one exception, the place next to the home of the ennuied parrot. Hens scratched merrily in the midst of desert flower-beds, or nested under the lilac bushes, a handsome goose and gander passed in stately promenade up and down the front veranda, and the whole place had a happy, go-as-you-please air.

The last in the line was the schoolhouse, a big, square building, scarred and worn, standing in the middle of a yard trampled bare of grass, and surrounded by the forlorn skeleton of a fence. From the battered pump in one corner, to the dilapidated woodshed in the other, the whole premises had the appearance of having just weathered a long and terrible siege. The commanding voice of the Duke of Wellington coming through the open windows added to its military suggestiveness.

When he had passed the school the stranger found himself at the end of the village. The row of houses stopped at a rustic bridge spanning a ravine. Away up this valley he could see the tall smokestack of the sawmill, with its waving plume of smoke coming up out of a fairy mass of delicate May foliage. The mill-pond gleamed, green and golden brown, between the willow clumps along its margin. From the dam a stream issued in a little, noisy, silver waterfall. It babbled across the road, under the old bridge, among bracken and mint, and wound this way and that through the deep valley until it lost itself in a swamp far to the south. A hard, beaten path led from the street down into the gold and green depths. It was an alluring path, and Gilbert stepped into it. He slid and stumbled down the steep bank, catching at blossoming dogwood bushes and fragrant cedar boughs. A boyish light came into his eyes as they caught the flash of the tiny river; here green under an overhanging willow, there snow white under a rain of cherry blossoms, now silver as it ran around a shallow curve, and again gold in the sunlight filtered through a tangle of elm boughs and bitter-sweet.

The little valley was as level as a floor at the bottom, carpeted with vivid green grass spangled with dandelions, and intoxicating with the perfume of the wild-cherry blossoms. A cow stood knee deep in the stream, and another was feeding off the underbrush half way up the bank. At a sudden curve in the brook a great elm stretched up from a bank of blue violets. On its topmost limb, swinging gaily, an oriole was blowing gloriously on his little golden trumpet.

Gilbert flung himself down on the violet bank. He had been born and bred a country boy, and now, after years of city life, the old charm of the free open spaces of earth and sky came over him stronger than ever. He wondered if Rosalie would not be happy, too, if she were to come down into this green-and-gold Paradise with him, and listen to the brook babbling along over the pebbles. And yet, how could he ask her to leave the wealth and ease of her city home and come to this dull village? He reflected, with a deep sigh, upon the humiliating fact that Rosalie would not consider the proposition for an instant, even if he had the courage to make it. Well, he would work hard, and by and by he would go back to the city, and then she would listen—she must listen. He leaned back against the elm and dreamed of that day. He could see the light in Rosalie's eyes as he had seen it that last day in Toronto. He would have been happier to-day if they had not been so bright and merry on the occasion of his departure. But what beautiful eyes they were! Blue—so blue; as blue as—he was gazing at something the exact color—a spot of vivid azure that had appeared from among the trees at the top of the opposite bank. It moved, and Gilbert saw that it was the figure of a girl in a violet gown. She made a pretty rural picture as she

stood for a moment poised upon the fence-top, a white sunbonnet on her head and a basket on her arm. She descended sedately, holding her basket with great care, and tripped down the zigzag path to the edge of the stream. Here some big, white stones, peeping from the golden pools, made a passage to the other side, and the trim lassie began to pick her way daintily across. Gilbert watched her with amused pleasure. He seemed to have stepped into some old rustic ballad. What was that song the boys used to sing at college? Something about the pretty, dainty maiden, going a-haying, or a-Maying, or a-something, all of a bright May morning, tra la la! This one was just like her, only she should be in her bare feet, and carry a pail and a stool, and be coming down to milk that cow standing so placidly in the stream. He felt an almost irresistible desire to sing out, "Where are you going, my pretty maid?" If he were only a gallant youth, in a velvet cloak and silken hose, he reflected, instead of a commonplace nineteenth-century young man in gray tweed, he would go down the bank and assist her over. The situation absolutely demanded it.

Suddenly he arose, with a smothered laugh. He would have to take a part in the pretty comedy, after all, for the dainty damsel was in distress. She stood poised on a stone in midstream, like a bird desiring, yet not daring, to fly. A long leap was needed to land her on the next stone, and she paused, perplexed, evidently mindful of her eggs. Gilbert came quickly down the bank, his eyes twinkling.

"May I help you across?" he asked, coming toward her, hat in hand. He felt that the words fell into a sort of jaunty rhythm of their own accord.

The girl looked up quickly, startled at his sudden appearance. The movement caused her sunbonnet to slip back, revealing her face, and Gilbert felt suddenly and unaccountably abashed, for the girl looked straight into his amused face with a glance of grave and unapproachable dignity. He did not even notice, at first, how pretty she was. He saw only those serious eyes. They were wonderful eyes, too; deep, and of a strange, elusive amber, like the water at her feet. They held the mystery of its deep brown pools, and the light of the golden flecks upon its surface. There were the same brown shadows and golden lights repeated in the masses of bronze hair piled like a crown on the top of her shapely head.

From some impulse he did not understand, Gilbert felt a vague desire to apologize for his very existence. It seemed as though that searching glance had read the frivolous thoughts in which he had been indulging. He wondered, in deep mortification, if she had noticed any faint tinge of familiarity in his manner.

"I—I beg your pardon. I hope I did not startle you," he said, half stammering. "I hope you will let me help you across."

"Thank you, you are very kind." Her voice was low, and very musical, her manner was dignity itself. "I did not know the spaces were so wide." She spoke with a frank simplicity, looking at him very honestly and very gravely, and Gilbert felt tacitly rebuked. He was struck by the fact that this country girl, in the coarse dress and sunbonnet, whom he had whimsically likened to a rustic lass, to be helped across a brook for a kiss, had instantly, by a mere glance, clothed the situation in an impregnable mantle of conventionality. He took her basket and held out his hand, feeling as though he were about to assist a princess from her carriage. With a touch she sprang past him and stepped quietly up the bank. "Thank you," she said, sedately, as she took the basket from him. "I think it is Dr. Allen to whom I am indebted, is it not?"

Gilbert clutched his hat again. "Yes, I am very fortunate to have had the privilege," he said, feeling with relief that he was beginning to recover.

"I am Miss Cameron," she said, with a stateliness that seemed to convert the sunbonnet into a crown, and the basket of eggs into a scepter.

Gilbert's mind dived back into the remembrance of his stableboy's remarks of a few minutes earlier. What had he said? He could not remember, except that the village had designated some one of that name as the object of his future attentions, and there was something, too, about red hair. He thought her hair beautiful—quite wonderful, indeed, in its bronze splendor.

He murmured some polite remark, and was wondering if he might ask to be allowed to carry the basket of eggs up the hill, or if he would be committing an outrage by so doing, when he was saved from making a second mistake by a shout from the opposite bank:

"Elsie! Elsie, lassie! Would yon be the new doctor body ye've got there?"

The voice came from a little old man, hobbling, with the aid of a stick, along the water's edge. His small body was almost bent double, and his whole person seemed engulfed in a huge straw hat, from under which appeared his only prominent feature—a long, wispy, red beard.

The girl gave a little inarticulate sound, and Gilbert glanced at her. Her stately gravity had vanished, her face was lit with a radiant smile. She ran down to the brink of the stream.

"Yes, Uncle Hughie," she called, in a clear, silvery tone, with a new caressing quality in it, "it's Dr. Allen. Do you want to speak to him?"

"Yes, yes. Oh, yes, indeed. Come away across, man! Come away! There's a poor, sick body lying down the glen a wee bit. Come away, man, and try your hand on him whatefer."

Gilbert glanced at the girl again, half doubtfully. This was so unlike the first call to a patient which he had so often pictured that he was taken unawares. She seemed to divine his thoughts.

"Will you go?" she said gently. "It is my uncle. He is always helping some one in trouble. Perhaps there has been an accident in the mill."

"Of course, of course, I shall be glad," he cried, filled with compunction; and with a word of farewell he sprang nimbly across the stepping-stones.

"Do you need my help, Uncle Hughie?" called the silvery voice behind him.

"Och, it's the good lassie you will be!" came from under the straw hat. "No, no. It is jist a poor tramp body, and the doctor will be curing him."

Gilbert reached the other side, and the queer little figure hobbled toward him with outstretched hand. He took off his hat and made a stately bow, and the young man looked at him with pleasure and surprise. The little old man's face was wrinkled and brown, and bore the marks of pain, but his eyes shone out with a warm, kind brilliancy that went straight to the stranger's heart. They were the girl's eyes, exactly, but with none of her lofty reserve.

"Ech! hech!" he cried, disappearing once more within the hat. "Indeed and indeed, and it's the new doctor! Hoch, yes, yes, it is welcome you will be to Elmbrook. Eh, and we would not be expecting such a fine-looking one. Indeed, no! And it would be a fine Scottish name, too, oh, a fine name indeed, Allen. And—you would not be hafing the Gaelic, I suppose?" His eyes gleamed wistfully from between the hat and the whiskers.

"No," said Gilbert, smiling. "My mother spoke it, but she did not teach us children."

"Och, och, well, well," he said, reassuringly. "It will not be the way of the young Canadians, and perhaps it is better. Come away, now, come away! I would be finding a poor tramp body down the glen here, ech, ech, the peety of it! The peety of it!"

He hobbled away ahead, talking volubly. Gilbert glanced back as he followed, but the princess in the violet gown had disappeared.

"Eh, now, it would jist be the good Lord that would be sending him to me, indeed. Eh, the Almighty would be giving me everything in the world that I could be wanting. But I will jist be an awful complainin' body, and sometimes I would be saying, if I would only have the chance to help some one. That's it!" he cried, turning a flashing eye upon Gilbert. "That will be the only thing worth while in this world. Eh, it is you that will be finding that out, Dr. Allen, and a happy man you will be, oh, yes, indeed. It is the doctor bodies that has the chance." He stopped and turned again. "Eh, did ye ever think He would be a doctor Himself?" he added, in an awed whisper. "Yes, yes, most folks now would be thinkin' He would jist be a preacher. But I would be rastlin' things out sometimes at night, when the rheumatics would be keeping me awake. The rheumatics would be a fine thing to make a body think, doctor, oh, yes, a fine thing, and I would be wishing one night that old Dr. Williams would be curing me, and then I would be rastlin' it out that He would jist be a doctor Himself. Oh, hoch, yes, yes, indeed it would be wonderful; yes, yes, wonderful!"

The young man regarded him curiously. Some strange emotion stirred in his heart: a memory of those days when his mother made the Great Physician a very real person to him. It seemed so long ago that he had almost forgotten, and yet he experienced a feeling as though he had suddenly come face to face with a long-lost friend.

"I am afraid such rheumatism as you must endure would keep me from thinking of anything but myself," he said, his professional eye taking in the signs of the painful disease in the old man's crippled frame.

His companion gave a joyous laugh. "Hoots! It will jist be a wee tickle sometimes. But I will be an awful complainin' body, doctor. Old Dr. Williams could be telling you I would be a terrible burden to him, indeed; and you will be finding me a bother. Yes, oh, yes. That is why I would be so pleased that the Almighty would be sending me a chance to help. For I would jist be grumblin' and a burden all the days—eh, yes, yes, och, hoch!" His voice suddenly dropped to a pitying, caressing tone, such as one might use to a hurt child. "Here he is," he whispered. "Eh, the peety of it!"

A man was half sitting, half lying, on the grassy bank of the stream, supported by a pile of balsam boughs. His long body, in its worn, patched clothing, was pitifully emaciated. His face was ghastly, and deeply marked with the sad lines that grief alone can trace. His hair was white, and yet, somehow, he did not seem aged, except by suffering. He opened his eyes as the young doctor bent over him. There was the pathetic look in them of an animal that had received its death-wound. But as the light of consciousness returned there was resentment in his glance as well as pain. He looked like a man who had been pushed to the edge of despair, but who could still fight, not in hope, but in fierce anger against his lot.

"He must be moved to some house at once," the doctor announced after a brief examination. "He seems to be suffering from exhaustion and hunger."

Old Hughie Cameron was fussing about him, making inarticulate, pitying remarks. "Oh, yes, yes, he will jist be coming with me, then," he cried eagerly. "The Cameron door will always be on the latch indeed! Oh, yes, the folks will be real pleased, whatefer."

The sick man looked up suddenly and spoke with unlooked-for strength. "I will accept charity from no living man," he said curtly.

"Hoots, toots!" cried Uncle Hughie, in gentle remonstrance. "Charity! It would jist be a bit of a neighborly act, man! Come away, now, come." His voice was coaxing. "Here is the doctor, now, waiting to help you. Yes, yes, a fine new doctor, indeed," he added enticingly.

"Come," said Gilbert authoritatively. "You must have food and shelter at once. You can't stay here."

The man opened his eyes again. "I haven't a cent of money," he said weakly, but defiantly. "But if you will take me to some place I can rent, I will earn money and pay for it after. But I will enter no man's house. I will stay here and die—it would be best, anyway." He closed his eyes indifferently.

Old Hughie suddenly plucked the puzzled young doctor's sleeve. "There will be an old shanty down the glen here, a wee step," he whispered, "jist by the Drowned Lands. It belongs to Sandy McQuarry, but he would be giv——" He paused, for the fierce eyes opened upon him—"renting it," he substituted hastily.

"I will go there," whispered the sick man, and Gilbert stooped and raised him gently.

"And what will your name be?" asked Uncle Hughie, striving in his pity to say something friendly which this strange man would not resent.

"My name," said the man slowly, "my name"—he stood and looked about him in a dazed way —"yes, yes, it's McIntyre—John McIntyre." He wavered a moment, then fell, fainting, in the young doctor's arms.

CHAPTER IV

THE ORPHAN ARRIVES

O little wild feet, too softly white
To roam the world's tempestuous night,
The years like sleet on my windows beat,
Come in and be cherished, O little wild feet.
My heart is a house deep-walled and warm,
To cover you from the night and storm.
—C. G. D. ROBERTS.

Miss Arabella Winter and her parrot lived alone in a tiny house, next door to her brother's home, and were "managed," in company with the rest of the village, by her smart sister-in-law. In all Susan Winters' realm there was no more obedient subject than the meek little lilac lady.

She had been very pretty in her youth, and much of her girlhood's beauty lingered yet in the faint pink of her cheeks and the droop of her long lashes. Her golden-brown hair was still abundant and wavy, though in accordance with her sister-in-law's instructions she pulled it back so tightly that its undulations were quite smoothed out. And just so Miss Arabella tied down and smoothed out all the beauty curves of her life to suit the rigid lines of Susan's methods. That she ever longed for more breadth and freedom could never have entered the head of any one in the village. But then the village did not know the real Miss Arabella.

She was hurrying through her morning's work, for a column of smoke curling up from the other side of her next neighbor's orchard told that the Sawyers had returned; and if Susan did not mind, she hoped she might run over and see what kind of baby Jake and Hannah had brought home.

She shook the breakfast tablecloth out at the back door, and the hens came running to pick up the crumbs. Like all houses in Elmbrook, Miss Arabella's front door looked out upon the narrow confines of the village street, with its double row of elms and maples; but her back door commanded a view of a whole world of sky and field and wood. High up in an apple-tree of the

Sawyers' orchard a bluebird was caroling joyously. Miss Arabella had never heard of the man who said that the bluebird carried the sky on his back, but she involuntarily glanced from the brilliant azure dot in the tree-top to the vivid blue of the heavens. "They're awful alike," she whispered, with a smile; then she glanced inside, "and it's the same color, too! I've a good mind"—she paused guiltily and glanced toward her brother's house. "I'll just take one glimpse," she added hurriedly. She put the tablecloth away in its drawer and ran into the little sitting-room. The old floor, under its gay covering of rag-carpet and home-made rugs, sank and creaked with even her light weight. At the sound a querulous voice from the veranda called "Arabella, Arabella!"

Miss Arabella looked severe. "Polly!" she cried, appearing at the door. "Now, Polly, be good. You were jist awful yesterday, when the doctor was passing. You'll try not to say that awful thing, won't you, Polly?"

"Oh, Annie Laurie, Annie Laurie, Annie Laurie!" gabbled Polly, walking along her perch head downward. "I'll be good, I'll be good."

Thus assured, Miss Arabella slipped into her spare bedroom. It was a tiny room, with a close, hushed air. Most of the space was taken up by a huge feather-bed, whose white surface bulged up like a monstrous baking of bread. Against the crinkly spars of the low headboard two stiff pillow-shams stood erect, like signboards, each bearing the legend, worked in red, "Sweet Dreams." The floor was covered with a home-made rug, displaying a branch of yellow roses, upon which stood a mathematically straight line of purple-breasted robins. The one window was draped in stiff, white lace curtains that fell from the ceiling in a billowing cascade and flowed out into the middle of the room. Here the flood was dammed, very appropriately, by two large, pink-tinted seashells. In one corner stood a high, old-fashioned chest of drawers, covered with a white cloth worked in red to match the "Sweet Dreams" on the pillows. It held a small looking-glass flanked by a couple of china figures; a gay Red Riding-Hood, with a pink wolf, set primly opposite a striped Bo-peep and a sky-blue lamb. There were pebbles and shells and pieces of coral, and baskets of beadwork, and many other ornaments dear to Miss Arabella's heart. She closed the old, creaking door, placed the one chair against it, and trembling as though she were about to commit a burglary, she stealthily opened the lowest drawer of the dresser and took from it a large parcel. She sat down on the low rocker and carefully untied the string. Her breath was coming fast, her eyes were shining. The stiff paper opened, and revealed a roll of bright blue silk, just the tint of the May skies. Miss Arabella touched it lovingly.

"You're the very color," she whispered; "you've never faded a bit, and it's been such a long time—oh, an awful long time!" She sighed deeply; her little face looked wan and old.

"But you haven't started to ravel yet." Her fingers had been running carefully up and down the silk, and she stopped with a start of dismay. She hurried to the low window. Yes, there along several of the folds, the blue fabric was showing signs of wear! Miss Arabella sank back into her chair and sat motionless, gazing at the bright heap in her lap. Slowly two big tears gathered, and slipped down her cheeks. She hastily covered the precious silk from possible damage, wiped her eyes with her apron, and replaced the bundle in the drawer.

"It must be a sign," she whispered tremulously. "It 'ud never 'a' begun to wear if it was goin' to be any use to me. It's a sign!" She locked the drawer, and went out slowly. Her little figure had a more pronounced droop, her eyes were very piteous.

She went back to her tasks in the tiny kitchen with a dull, hopeless air. She had just set a pail of soapy water on the back doorstep, preparatory to scrubbing the porch floor, for Susan insisted that this must be done once a week, no matter how clean it might be, when Polly's voice reached her. It was raised in uttering that shocking phrase which her mistress had forbidden, and which Polly refused to unlearn. Miss Arabella hurried out to the front veranda, fearful lest the minister or the new doctor might be within earshot.

"Good-morning, Arabella!" called a sweet voice from the other side of the cedar hedge.

Miss Arabella ran joyfully to the gate. "Oh, Elsie, is it you? Come away in and sit a minute; do, now."

"No, thank you, Arabella; not this morning. Mother sent me up to see what sort of baby Jake and Hannah have adopted. Come with me."

"I'd like to." Miss Arabella glanced wistfully across the orchard, but the vision of her sister-in-law hoeing in the garden quenched the light of hope in her eyes. "I can't go for a little bit," she added. "I haven't done the back stoop yet."

The girl stood looking down at her, a splendid contrast, in her strong, erect beauty, to the little, drooping figure. Miss Arabella looked up at her with adoring eyes. There was a strange comradeship between these two.

"Oh, Arabella, dear," cried the girl, half pityingly, half laughingly, "why don't you run away?"

Miss Arabella looked up with a sudden fire in her eyes and a flush on her cheek. "Oh, Elsie! You don't mean it—really?"

"Of course I don't really mean it, Arabella," she answered, half alarmed at the unexpected effect of her words. "Where would you run? Only I do wish you didn't have so much managing."

Miss Arabella's head drooped. She seemed ashamed of her sudden outburst. "Oh, I'm all right," she said, in some confusion, and then, to hide it, added: "It seems awful nice to have you back, Elsie. I missed you dreadful."

The girl patted her hand affectionately. "Well, you're not likely to miss me any more for a long time," she said, with rather a forced smile.

"I s'pose you've learned near everything there is to know about singing now, anyway, haven't you?" asked Miss Arabella comfortably.

Elsie Cameron laughed. "I feel as if I'd just begun to get the faintest notion of it."

"Well, well, well! Music must be awful slow work. Is that why you got tired of it?"

"Tired of it?"

"Yes; your ma was saying you didn't want to go back, though they'd all coaxed you."

The girl looked down the long, elm-bordered street; her golden-brown eyes had a hurt look, but her mouth was firm. She turned again to Miss Arabella with a faint smile. Her answer was apparently irrelevant.

"Don't you remember how Uncle Hughie used to be always telling us never to 'rastle' against the place we're put in?"

Miss Arabella looked at her, uncomprehending. In contrast to her narrow experience, Elsie Cameron seemed to possess all that heart could desire.

"Your Uncle Hughie's a wonderful wise man, Elsie," she said vaguely; then, with a deep sigh, "I suppose it's wicked to be always wantin' to do things you ain't doin'; but—I—it ain't very bad to pretend you're doin' them, so long as you do the real things, is it?" Her color was rising, and the girl looked at her with a kind curiosity. Even she knew little more of the real Arabella than the rest of the village did.

"Do you know, Arabella," she cried merrily, "I've long suspected you of leading a double life. And why shouldn't you? Why, Uncle Hughie says it's one of his greatest blessings. When he gets tired or racked with pain, he just pretends he's a chieftain of the Clan Cameron, living on his estates, and he says he's far happier than if he really were."

Miss Arabella smiled almost tearfully. It was the first time in her life she had heard her romantic day-dreaming condoned.

"Now I must run, Arabella. Good-by, Polly. Are you good to-day?"

"Oh, Annie Laurie, Annie Laurie," cried Polly, "I'll be good, I'll be good!"

Miss Arabella stood gazing after the trim figure. She sighed enviously. "She's the lucky girl," she whispered, "but it's awful queer she don't want to go on with her singin'."

A smart vehicle turned out of a gate farther up the street and came whizzing past. The young man driving raised his hat with an air of deference as he passed the girl by the roadside. Miss Arabella leaned farther over the gate.

"He looked at her awful pleased like," she said; and then her face grew pale with a sudden thought. "I'll give it to her," she whispered, choking down a rising sob. "He'll marry her, I'm sure he will, and if he does I'll give it to her, and I won't be foolish any more, so I won't." The prospect of speedy wisdom seemed a very doleful one, and Miss Arabella's figure drooped and shrank as she moved indoors.

"Arabella!" called a sharp voice over the fence, "have you got your place all red up yet?"

"Not quite, Susan," was the apologetic answer. "I've jist to do the back stoop."

"Well, don't be so long, for pity's sakes. I'm goin' up to see what sort of a baby Jake and Hannah's got, and you can come along jist as soon as you're done."

"All right, Susan." The little woman returned to her task meekly. Her small, slim hands and her frail body did not look at all suited to heavy toil, yet no one in the village worked harder than the little lilac lady. For when her own house was set in order, and brushed and swept and scrubbed, exactly as Susan demanded, Miss Arabella crossed the orchard and washed and baked, and sewed for her brother's children.

She had just finished the lowest step of the porch when she was startled by a tremendous uproar in the Sawyer orchard, and the next moment something came hurtling over the fence and landed with a splash in the pail at her feet. It was a round object, brightly colored and shining.

"Oh, Lordy, ain't we havin' a slow time!" screamed Polly, most inappropriately.

"Save us!" ejaculated Miss Arabella.

The Sawyer orchard was separated from Miss Arabella's garden by a high board fence, further fortified by Miss Arabella's long, neat woodpile. Hitherto, the place had been used exclusively as a parade-ground for Isaac and Rebekah, and the Sawyers' hens; but now it seemed to have been suddenly populated by all the children in the village, shrieking, scolding and laughing. Could the orphan be big enough to run at large? And had the McQuarry and the Cross and the Williams children all met to celebrate its arrival?

"Save us!" ejaculated Miss Arabella again, "they must 'a' got a noisy one!"

There was a scrambling, tearing noise on the other side of the fence, and a head arose above it, followed by the figure of a boy. It was a queer, wasted, tiny figure, with one shoulder higher than the other. The face was pinched and weird-looking, with that strange mixture of childishness and age that is seen in the countenances of the unfortunate little ones who are called out too early into the battle of life. A long, claw-like arm reached out, and a finger pointed at the object in Miss Arabella's pail.

"That there's our ball!" said the elf sharply. "Give us a throw!"

Miss Arabella stared, motionless.

"Are—are you Jake Sawyer's orphant?" she asked incredulously.

The boy grinned, a queer contortion of his wizened little face with more mischief in it than mirth.

"Naw, I'm just the tail of it," he answered enigmatically. "Say, when did the folks in that there house adopt you?"

Miss Arabella was too much astonished and abashed to reply; and just at that moment a second object appeared on the woodpile. It arose from the Sawyer orchard like the first, swinging itself up feet foremost in some miraculous fashion. This time it was a girl, larger and more robust than the boy, but plainly younger. Her eyes were wild, her face was bold, and she had a mad mop of bushy black hair. She perched herself astride the top board of the fence and gave back Miss Arabella's stare with interest.

"Where on earth did you come from?" cried Miss Arabella.

"None o' your business!" was the prompt retort. "Hand over that there ball!"

Miss Arabella had no time to obey, for a third apparition arose out of the Sawyer orchard, feet first, and perching itself astride the fence, commanded, "Histe over that there ball!" It was another girl, exactly like the first, except that her mad mop of hair was yellow instead of black. Miss Arabella rubbed her eyes, and wondered, in dismay, if she had been gifted with a new kind of double vision.

"Oh, my land alive!" she whispered. "Has Jake Sawyer been and gone and brought home all the orphant asylum? Mercy me! Is the yard full o' ye?" For still another head was struggling to make its appearance above the fence-top. It was a fiery red head this time, covered with crisp little curls. It belonged to a very small boy, the youngest of the quartette. His round, impish face was full of delighted grins. His dancing eyes radiated laughter and good-nature.

The four surveyed Miss Arabella's evident consternation with great enjoyment, while that startled lady stood and stared at the array with something of the feelings that Cadmus must have experienced when he beheld the fierce warriors rise from the planting of the dragon's teeth.

"We're the Sawyer orphant," said the eldest imp, with apparent relish. "An' if you don't hand over that there ball mighty quick we'll all come after it."

Galvanized into action by this threat, Miss Arabella flung the toy far among the orchard trees, and with shrieks the four small figures disappeared. Miss Arabella darted around to the front porch in a panic, and carried her parrot into the comparative safety of the house. Fortunately the noise had scared the bird into silence. But if those four wild things should once get into her garden, she reflected, what ever would become of Polly?

She ran out again, but there was no sign of the newcomers, and the noise was retreating in the direction of Jake's stable. She flung off her apron, and running to an opening in the woodpile, proceeded to climb the fence. She must go over to Hannah's immediately; yes, even if Susan objected, and see what was the meaning of this sudden inundation of orphans.

She was balanced on the top of the fence when the doctor's landlady appeared, walking leisurely up the street to buy a pound of butter at Long's store for the doctor's dinner.

Any other woman in the township would have expressed surprise at Miss Arabella's remarkable position, and evident perturbation, but the silent Mrs. Munn looked at her

unconcernedly.

"Somethin' awful's happened, Harriet!" cried Miss Arabella. "Hannah's got her orphant, an' what d'ye s'pose it's like?"

"It's got red hair," ventured Mrs. Munn, undisturbed.

"Red hair! It's got red hair, an' three other kinds. An' it's got four heads!"

"What!" shrieked Mrs. Munn, shaken out of her accustomed indifference. "Arabella! You don't mean——"

But here Miss Arabella's hold on the fence relaxed, and she disappeared into the orchard. Mrs. Munn turned her back on Long's store and hurried up the street in the same direction. New doctor or no new doctor, this crisis must be met at once. The innocent and facile character of the Sawyers had long been a problem in Elmbrook, but who could have dreamed that, even in their weakest moment, Jake and Hannah could have been decoyed into adopting a four-headed monster!

Mrs. Munn's heart was heavy with dread as she hurried up the lane. Miss Arabella had already arrived, and nearly all the other women of the village were there. As she reached the door a chorus of shouts and screams broke from the enclosed yard at the back of the house. Mrs. Munn shivered. They had evidently tied up the fierce creature in the stable, where it was exercising its four pairs of lungs all at once!

But the next Instant the stable door flew open, and four figures, two mop-headed little girls in abbreviated skirts, a small, red-headed toddler, and a queer, limping boy, the fleetest of all, were precipitated into the yard. They flung themselves over the fence and went, shrieking, away across the field. Mrs. Munn drew a great breath; there was relief in it, and yet terror. It was not quite so bad, but bad enough. What was to become of Elmbrook if the Sawyers had adopted four orphans?

Mrs. Sawyer was sitting in the middle of a wildly disordered kitchen, surrounded by her neighbors. She had the air of a child who has done wrong, and knows it, but hopes for mercy. Evidently the orphans had refused to be displayed to the visitors, for their foster-mother was apologizing for their non-appearance. "They're kind o' wild yet," she explained meekly, "not ever bein' out of a big city in their lives. But Jake says jist to let them loose, an' they'll kind o' tame down all the sooner. There ain't no use callin' after them," she added resignedly, as Mrs. Winters made a threatening movement toward the door. "It jist makes them run all the harder, an' mebby they'll get as far as the pond. We'd better jist let them be."

"Well, go on wi' your story, Hannah," said old Miss McQuarry. "What possessed ye to take all the bairns, wumman?"

Mrs. Sawyer folded her hands in her lap and continued:

"It kind o' came on us gradual like. Jake an' me jist couldn't help it. Ye see, his idea was always for a little boy with red hair, like our Joey would 'a' been, an' I was always wantin' a little girl with yellow curls. Well, Jake, he knowed what I wanted, and he said if we seen a nice little girl with curly hair we'd take her; but I knowed his heart was set on a red-headed boy all the same, an' I stuck out for a boy. We talked about it so hard all the way there that we near forgot to get off when we got to the station, an' only that Minnie Morrison's aunt was there, we'd 'a' never moved. As it was, we forgot the basket with the pound cake and the cookies and the home-made cheese—and—and the crock o' butter," she faltered, with a contrite glance toward Harriet Munn.

"Oh, my, what a pity!" groaned Miss Arabella, remembering all she had suffered in toiling down the lane with the basket.

"It don't matter much, though," continued the narrator placidly. "Jake said somebody'd get them that likely needed them worse than Minnie Morrison. Well, in the afternoon, after we'd visited a while, Jake hired a livery rig an' we drove out to the orphant home. We talked quite a while to the lady that's head over all—the matron they call her; an' then she took us into a room near as big as our mill, an' there was about two dozen or more children playin' 'round. And the very minit we got inside that door Jake he hollers out, 'Oh, geewhittaker!' An' I seen his eyes were shinin' like a cat's in the dark. An' there he was, starin' as if he'd found a gold mine, at the wee, red-headed fellow we've got. An' no wonder, either; for he's as like our Joey would 'a' been as two peas. The matron she saw Jake was took with the wee fellow, an' she calls him over, an' Jake says, 'What's your name?' An' he says, as cute as cute, 'It's Joey.' An' with that, Jake grabs him up, an' the little fellow climbed up to his shoulder an' crowed like a little rooster, an' Jake looked near ready to cry, he was that pleased. 'Well,' I says, 'I guess we've got our orphant all right,' an' Jake says, 'Oh, Hannah, but your girl!' 'Never mind the girl,' says I, 'this one was made for us, an' his name, too.' Well, we jist turned 'round to tell the matron, when I sees a wee girl, with curly hair, standin' straight in front o' Jake an' starin' at him, with her lip quiverin'. That's the fair one o' the twins. An' she says in a wee, wee voice, as if she was tryin' fearful hard not to cry, 'Are ye goin' to take our Joey away?' she says. 'Is he your brother?' says I. She jist nods her head. An' she says again, in a whisper, 'Are you goin' to take him away?' Well, Jake he looked at me, an' I looked at him, an' we could both see we were thinkin' the same thing. 'She's the kind of a girl you want,' says Jake, 'an' mebby she'd help take care o' the wee chap.' 'D'ye think we can

afford it?' says I; an' then she kind o' sidles up to me, an' says she, 'Aw, you won't take Joey away, will you?' An' then the matron says, 'She's a good little girl, Mrs. Sawyer; you won't ever regret it if you take her.' An' I thought how lovely I'd make her hair curl, an' tie it up with a pink ribbon, an' jist then she ups an' puts her two little arms around my neck, an' she whispers, 'We couldn't get along without our Joey,' jist awful pitiful like. An' I looks at Jake, an' Jake looks at me, an' he nods, an' I says, 'All right.' It was the only thing to do, now, wasn't it?"

Hannah paused, and gazed around appealingly.

"She got me 'round the neck, an' I couldn't no more make her let go than I could fly," she added, as an unanswerable argument.

"Well, we jist got up to go, when there was the most awful racket started up you ever heard tell of, and that other girl, the one with the black head, comes runnin' up an' starts to dance 'round an' yell an' scream. An' at that, my girl she ups an' hollers, too, an' I never heard such a bedlam, each one screamin' they didn't want to leave the other. Jake he shouted out to a big girl standin' there to know what was the matter, an' she yells that they was twins an' hadn't never been apart. An' then I seen that they were jist as alike as two peas, except for the hair. Well, the black-headed one was makin' such a fearful holler that the matron she says to the big girl, quite sharp like, 'Take her up to the ward,' whatever place that may be. An' the big girl she grabs the poor child by the arm an' begins to haul her to the door, an' the tears streamin' down her little face.

"Well, with that, Jake he puts the red-headed one down with a bang, an' he makes one leap for that big girl. I never seen Jake look like that before, only once, and that was when Joel McMurtry kicked his dog an' broke its leg, thirteen years ago next twenty-fourth. It was an awful look. An' he jist grabs that child away from her, an' he says—he says—oh, I'd be ashamed to tell you the dreadful bad word he said! I wouldn't have the minister hear about it for all the earth, for Jake's been a member of the church ever since before we were married, an' never used a bit o' bad language in his life, to my knowledge. An' then he says, in a ter'ble voice, 'You leave that child alone, she's goin' with me,' he says. An' with that she puts her arms 'round his neck an' hangs on, an' calls him all the sweet names you ever heard.

"Well, that was bad' enough, but it seems we weren't done yet. We were jist beginnin' to get collected to start again, when one o' the twins commenced to yell again. It was the black-headed one, but I ain't sure o' their names. One's Lorena, an' the other's Lenora—ain't they awful pretty names? But I think they must change them 'round, 'cause I can never remember which is which, nor Jake, neither. Well, anyhow, the black one starts to holler louder'n ever, an' she kept screamin' in between hollers, 'I don't want to leave Timmy! I don't want to leave Timmy!' An' with that, the other girl starts up the same, an' the wee red-head he gets at it harder'n the rest, an' there was the three o' them cryin' an' takin' on, 'Oh, let Timmy come, too! Let Timmy come, too!' 'Who's Timmy?' says Jake to the matron. 'Is he their dog?' says he. 'No,' says she, 'he's their brother,' says she. 'Lord 'a' mercy!' says I, 'don't tell me there's another one!' 'Yes, there he is,' says she, an' she points to him. He was settin' on the edge of a long seat, all humped up, an' queer, watchin' everything, without sayin' a word, but if I live to be a hundred I'll never get the look o' that child's face out o' my mind. It was so kind o' awful lonesome an' forsaken an' hungry-lookin', an' so fearful old, an' him not quite ten."

Hannah paused to wipe her eyes.

"I knew, the minit I seen him, we'd jist got to adopt him, or I'd wake up nights seein' his poor little face lookin' at me with them terrible eyes. But he never asked to be took. He jist looks at the others, an' he says, kind o' gruff like, 'Go on, yous; don't you mind me.'

"Well, it was my turn this time, an' I jist bust out louder'n the twins. An' I says, 'Oh, Jake,' I says, 'he'll die if we don't adopt him, too, an' so'll I!' I says. An' Jake, he jist snaps his fingers at the little fellow, an' he says, 'Come along, then, little shaver, we'll take you, too.' An' he gives one spring off the bench an' catches Jake around the legs like a big spider, an' mind you, all the three others was hangin' on to him already like leeches, an' Jake, he looks 'round kind o' helpless like, an' he says to the matron, 'There ain't any more belongin' to this family, is there?' says he. 'Cause you might as well trot 'em out.' But the matron she laughs, an' says that was all, and were we sure we could adopt so many. Jake says, 'I dunno, I'm sure,' says he, 'but it seems as if they'd adopted us, and we can't help ourselves.' That set everybody laughin', 'stead o' cryin', an' we picked up them four orphants an' brought them home last night, an' here we are."

She stopped, and looked around anxiously at the circle of neighbors. "I know it was awful of us to do it. But I hope you won't mind, will you? We jist couldn't help it."

"Well, yen's true, Hannah," exclaimed old Miss McQuarry emphatically. "It was jist the Lord's wull, wumman."

Every one looked at Mrs. Winters for her verdict.

"It's a pity to part flesh and blood, that's a fact," she admitted reluctantly. "But how you an' Jake is ever goin' to tame down them four wild things is more'n I can tell."

"You send them to school," said the Duke of Wellington, as she arose to start for that

institution herself, "and I'll answer for them the biggest part of the day."

Mrs. Sawyer's face lightened. "Indeed we will, jist as soon as we can get them to settle down a bit. An' Jake says the boys'll help him in the mill, an' the girls'll help me in the house, an' we'll get along somehow."

"Well," said Mrs. Munn, rising, and forestalling any further discussion, "there's no use talkin' about things, anyhow; that does more harm than good."

The company arose and drifted toward the door.

"D'ye think they'll be awful hard to bring up, Harriet?" whispered Mrs. Sawyer tremulously, detaining the doctor's landlady for a moment behind the others.

Mrs. Munn looked steadily into Hannah Sawyer's kindly eyes. These two had been stanch friends since the days when they had sat together in school and shared dinner-pails. Only to this old comrade did Harriet Munn's reticent tongue speak out the deep thoughts of her heart. She laid her hand on Mrs. Sawyer's shoulder.

"It's jist the Lord's hand that's led you, Hannah," she said quietly, "that's what it is, and you don't need to be afraid o' nothin'."

Hannah Sawyer's homely face grew radiant. "That's jist what the minister said last night!" she exclaimed. "We'll jist do our best, an' I'm sure, with Jake an' the Lord to look after us, we ain't likely to come to want."

CHAPTER V

THE MILKSTAND CLUB

> He that sees clear is gentlest of his words,
> And that's not truth that hath the heart to kill.
> —ARCHIBALD LAMPMAN.

The Cameron homestead could scarcely be said to belong to Elmbrook, but formed a suburb all by itself. It was a comfortable-looking red-brick, set away back in its orchards and fields, and was further cut off from the village by the ravine where the mill-stream ran.

Perhaps this was partly the reason why the Cameron family seemed a little exclusive. There was a deep suspicion throughout Elmbrook that old lady Cameron, as she was called, thought herself above ordinary folks, and unconsciously Elmbrook thought so, too. The father had died when the children were all little, but she had kept them together through poverty and hardship, imbuing them all with her splendid, self-sacrificing spirit, until now the elder ones had each taken an honorable position in life. James, the eldest, lived on the farm, and had lately paid off the mortgage and built a new house and barn; Hugh was a lawyer in a neighboring city; Mary was married to a minister—the greatest achievement of all; Elsie promised to be a singer, and by making special sacrifices the family had succeeded in giving her a year's training under the best teachers in the land; Malcolm was going to be a doctor, had finished his second year with honors, in fact; and Jean and Archie were still to be given their chance.

Old lady Cameron's brother-in-law, Uncle Hughie, was the best-known member of the family. He was the village philosopher, and spent his time hobbling about the farm, doing such odd jobs as his rheumatism would permit, and "rastlin'" out the problem of human life. He was sitting on the milkstand just now, his small, stooped body almost covered by his straw hat, his long beard sweeping his knees. He was swinging his feet, and singing, in a high, quavering voice, his favorite song, "The March o' the Cameron Men."

When Sawed-Off Wilmott started a cheese factory down on the Lake Simcoe road each of his patrons had built, just at the gate, a small platform, called a milkstand, from which the cans were collected. The Cameron milkstand had a flight of steps leading up to it, and a grove of plum-trees surrounding. It was a fine place to sit, of an evening, for one could be isolated and yet see all that was going on up in the village. Here Uncle Hughie regularly gathered about him a little group of friends. Next to the minister, he was considered the most learned man in the community, and the Cameron milkstand was a sort of high-class club, where only the serious-minded were admitted, and where one heard all sorts of profound subjects discussed, such as astronomy and the destiny of the British Empire.

To-night the club was to assemble for a special purpose. Uncle Hughie had promised the minister that they would all accompany him down the ravine to give a welcome and a kind word

to the poor tramp who had come to live in Sandy McQuarry's old shanty by the Drowned Lands. So the philosopher was waiting for his friends, and as he sang he gazed expectantly up the village street.

From across the ravine, growing purple in the evening shadows, came the sound of children's voices at play, and the joyous bark of a dog. Down in the river pasture hoarse shouts, mingled with a dull thud, thud, told that the young men were playing football. Women could be seen gossiping across from their home gates, for while the men might gather in groups at the store or the post-office, Elmbrook was not sufficiently advanced to have yet felt the woman's club movement. The soft, plashy sound of the little waterfall, pouring down under the bridge, made a charming accompaniment to the mingled harmony.

"*Oh, there's many a man o' the Cameron Clan,*"

sang Uncle Hughie.

There was a ring of triumph in his voice, for he had finished the whole line with one start, a most unusual achievement. He generally started on a high key, and as the tune climbed up the word "Cameron" was far beyond the range of human voice. He would make a shrieking attempt at it, collapse, and start again, quite cheerfully. But by some strange misunderstanding between his ear and his vocal cords, no matter how deep he might lay the foundations of his song, he would raise upon it such a lofty structure that the pinnacle was sure to be unattainable. He always saw the heights ahead, and made a gasping effort to gain them, his voice strained to its utmost, his face wearing a look of agony. He failed many a time, but invariably succeeded in the end, and with a broad smile of triumph would sweep into the refrain:

"*I hear the pibroch sounding, sounding,*
Deep o'er the mountain and glen."

Old Uncle Hughie's whole pain-racked life had been like that song. He was always striving for the heights, often slipping back, frequently failing just as the top was reached, but ever starting off again with renewed hope and faith, and in the end always attaining.

There was a wild patter of feet down the lane, and a harum-scarum girl, half woman, half child, came scrambling recklessly over the fence, and tumbled upon the ground at his feet. She sprang up and tossed her hair back from her handsome, mischievous face.

"He's coming!" she announced tragically. "Where'll I hide? I saw him paddlin' across the creek like a silly old gosling!"

Uncle Hughie's golden-brown eyes danced with laughter.

"Hoots, toots! Och, hoch, but it is the foolish lass you will be! Poor Davy, ech, poor lad! When I would be going sparkin' the lassies, it wasn't running away they would be."

"Oh, but then you must have been so handsome and so fine, Uncle Hughie," said the girl diplomatically. "If I go up into the village will you tell mother you said I might?"

Uncle Hughie was not impervious to flattery, but he looked doubtful. Running up into the village in the evening was strictly forbidden to the younger members of the Cameron household.

"I'll jump into the pond if he comes," she declared. "Go on, Uncle Hughie. Aw, haven't you got some errand for me?"

"Well, well," said the old man indulgently, "let me see. Oh, yes, now. You might jist be stepping up to Sandy McQuarry's and tell him not to be forgetting that this is the night to go and see poor John McIntyre."

"Goody! You're a duck, Uncle Hughie. John McIntyre—isn't that the tramp you found in the hollow?"

"Yes; but indeed I will be thinking that it's no ordinary tramp he will be, whatever. Poor man, eh, eh, poor buddy. If ever the Lord would be laying His hand heavier on a man than He did on Job, that man's John McIntyre, or I will be mistaken. Ay, and it would be a fine Hielan' name, too —McIntyre."

The girl danced away up the street, dodging skilfully from tree to tree, and keeping a sharp eye on the figure climbing leisurely up the bank of the ravine.

"Don't be forgetting, Jeannie, child," the old man called after her, "not to let Sandy know the minister will be coming."

The girl nodded over her shoulder, and Uncle Hughie continued his talk to the milkstand.

"Ay, yes, oh, yes indeed. The peety of it, the peety of it. Well, well. Hoots! The Almighty will be knowing all about you, John McIntyre. Oh, yes, indeed, never fear. I will be thinking He will be

meaning you some good yet. Oh, yes, yes, never you fear——

"*'Oh, there's many a man o' the Ca——*"

His voice broke on the high note, and he did not start again, for a figure was coming down the street toward the bridge. It was Silas Long, storekeeper, postmaster and astronomer, with his telescope under his arm. He paused on the bridge, where he was joined by several others. They came straying down the street in aimless fashion, hands in pockets, shoulders drooping. It was the custom to assemble in the most casual manner, for it would never do to confess, even to oneself, that one had started deliberately to spend an evening in idleness.

The group straggled slowly forward, Silas Long, William Winters, the blacksmith, Jake Sawyer, and a new member of the club, a very small person, whose red, curly hair shone like a halo in the light of the evening sun. Holding this little figure by the hand, Jake Sawyer walked along with a tremendous swagger, the proudest man in the county of Simcoe.

Another man was strolling toward them across the golden-lighted pasture field. It was John Cross, Jake Sawyer's partner, called Spectacle John, to distinguish him from a half dozen other John Crosses who didn't wear spectacles. At sight of him Uncle Hughie sniffed, and ejaculated "Huts!" Spectacle John was an Irishman, of a rather frivolous turn of mind, and the philosopher disapproved of him, and discouraged his attendance. Moreover, he and Silas Long were always at variance, and when the two met the milkstand lost its dignity and became a center of futile argument.

One by one they arrived, and dropped upon the steps of the milkstand or the pile of stones by the gate, with a casual remark about the weather. In Elmbrook one did not say "Good-morning" or "Good-evening," in greeting; but "Fine day," "Cold night," as the case might be. So as each man sank into his place, with a sigh for the long day's toil, he remarked "Fine night," looking far off at the horizon, and Uncle Hughie also examined that boundary, and remarked "Fine." As Jake Sawyer seated himself, and raised the youngest orphan to his knee, he added proudly, "An' a fine boy, too, eh, folks?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! And indeed, yes!" cried Uncle Hughie, patting the little, curly head, and resorting to the Gaelic for terms sufficiently endearing.

"And how many are there in your family now, Jake?" inquired Spectacle John facetiously. "Got another carload shipped since I seen ye last?"

The company laughed heartily. The women of the village regarded the Sawyers' large family as a serious problem, but the men treated it as a huge joke.

"Aw, I bet my head any one o' yous would be glad to own a family half as smart," remarked Jake proudly. "Golly, Miss Weir says that oldest boy kin go through the 'rithmetic like a runaway team; an' as for the girls, well, sirs"—Jake slapped his knee—"there jist ain't anythin' they can't' do 'round the house, an' Hannah'll tell you the same."

"There don't seem to be much they can't do 'round the mill," grunted Spectacle John, whose days were made weary routing his partner's family from his place of business. "You won't raise that oldest boy if he shows his face to me 'round the mill again, I promise you that."

"Speakin' o' mills," said William Winters, "when I was at Neeag'ra Falls I seen a mill that you could put this whole village into an' never notice it, an' it run by electricity, too."

The population of the milkstand settled more firmly into its place. When the blacksmith got started on his favorite topic there was no knowing when he might stop. He had visited the Toronto Exhibition and Niagara Falls one autumn, and ever since had lived in the afterglow of that achievement. Not the most astounding phenomena that the milkstand could produce, either in song or story, but he could far surpass from the wonderful experiences of that visit. The Niagara Falls mill was only half finished when a new arrival interrupted.

"Fine night," said a voice with a deep Scottish burr.

"Fine," acquiesced the milkstand.

"Oh, and it will be you, Sandy?" said Uncle Hughie, making room for the newcomer beside him. "Come away, man, come away."

Sandy McQuarry was a thick-set man, with a face like a Skye terrier. He stood looking down at the contented, round-shouldered assembly, with little columns of smoke curling up from pipes of peace, and his disapproving brows bristled as though he were about to burst into loud barking.

"Jeannie said ye wanted me," he remarked, by way of explaining his presence. Sandy McQuarry was a busy man, and a great money-maker, and did not want any one to think he could afford to spend his evenings in idle gossip on a milkstand, as some folks did.

"Oh, yes, indeed, it would be very kind of you to be troubling. You must jist be coming with us

to see that poor McIntyre body now, down in your shanty. And what would you be thinking of him?"

"He's a dour body. Ah couldna git a ceevil word oot o' him."

"He would mebby be a good workman, for all?" said Uncle Hughie insinuatingly.

"Ah dinna ken. He's got a bad e'e in his heid, yon man."

"Hoots! It's not wicked the man would be!" cried Uncle Hughie indignantly. "It's a broken heart that ails him, or I'll be mistaken."

"That's jist what I say," agreed Jake Sawyer. "I jist got one squint at him yisterday, when I was down at the Drowned Lands, huntin' our oldest"—Jake tried in vain to keep the quiver of pride from his voice—"an' he looked to me like a dog that was meant to be good-natured, but had jist been kicked straight ahead till it turned surly."

"I'm thinkin' ye could surely give him some light job, Sandy," continued old Hughie. "Night watchman, now—it's the only job he could be doin', he's that sick, poor body."

Sandy McQuarry looked obstinate. "I was thinkin' o' settin' our Peter at that job this summer."

"Eh? But you could be helping the Lord to give the poor man better days, Sandy, and that would be grand work, whatever. Eh, indeed, indeed, we can never tell, when we do a kind act, how far it will reach." Uncle Hughie began to grow philosophical. "Here would be Jake, now, taking all these lambs into his home, and the Lord only can tell how much good it will do to other people he will be knowing nothing about. Oh, indeed, when we would be giving the Lord a helping hand, it would jist be starting all the machinery in the world, and mebby beyond it."

"That there's true, 'Ughie, that's true!" cried Silas Long, laying down his telescope. "Wen you're doin' the right thing by your neighbor you're jist 'elpin' along the turnin' o' the earth."

There was an impatient movement from Spectacle John. Silas had touched their chief point of dispute. The shape and motions of the planet they inhabited had long served as a fierce battle-ground between these two. The astronomer held the generally accepted opinion on these matters, and could prove Columbus' theory beyond gainsaying. But, whether from honest disbelief, or a stubborn resolve to disagree with his adversary upon all subjects, Spectacle John scouted his arguments as moonshine.

"The turnin' o' the earth!" he repeated scornfully. "You'll never catch me takin' a hand at anny such fool chore as that!"

Uncle Hughie gazed indignantly over the golden mill-pond and hummed "The March o' the Cameron Men."

"Well, sir, that McIntyre man has a hard row to hoe," said Jake Sawyer, wisely steering away from the dangerous topic. "It's a caution now, ain't it, how some folks seems to have everything they want in this world, an' others gets all the things nobody wants?"

"Man, did you ever think what a queer, botched-up world we live in, anyhow?" inquired William Winters, who, whenever he found himself beyond the influence of his well-managed home, was always in a rebellious state. "The minister, now, 'ud like to make ye believe everything's ordered for our good, but it don't look that way to me. Gosh! Sometimes, when I'm patchin' up somethin' at the shop, I think I could take my hammer an' bang things up into better shape myself than the Almighty's done."

"Lord love ye, William!" cried Silas Long in alarm. "Take care wot ye're sayin'!"

"Well, when I was at Neeag'ra Falls," persisted the blacksmith, "there was a man preachin' there on the streets that said he didn't believe there was any God at all——"

'"Ere, William," interrupted the astronomer, shoving his telescope into Winters' hand, as one would give a new toy to a complaining child, "you take a squint through this 'ere spyglass, an' if you ain't convinced in five minutes that there is a God, well, sir, you can smash it, that's all."

Sandy McQuarry regarded the blacksmith sternly. For sufficient reasons of his own, he never entered the Elmbrook church, but for all that he was as strict in religious matters as he was at gaining a penny in a bargain.

"Ye've no right to creeticize the Almighty yon way, Weeliam," he admonished. "If He wishes to make one vessel to honor, and another, such as this MacIntyre, to dishonor, it is the Lord's wull, an' we maun jist abide by it."

The blacksmith, one eye inside the telescope, paid no attention.

"That's so," agreed Spectacle John, with suspicious cordiality, "especially as He's made an occasional vessel jist to hold money."

"That's better than bein' a bag to hold wund, like some folks you admire, John," said Sandy McQuarry with deep meaning.

"Lookee 'ere, Sandy," said Silas Long solemnly, "criticizin' the minister is next thing to criticizin' the Almighty. You'd better take a warnin'." His voice dropped to a whisper. "It ain't safe, Sandy, now, that's wot it ain't."

Sandy McQuarry grunted scornfully. "Ony man," he announced darkly, "that's so licht in his heid that he doesna ken ony better than to liken the land o' Burns to a few miles o' barren stones, is no a fit person to expound the Word o' God."

The milkstand began to look uncomfortable. There had been a day when Sandy McQuarry was an elder in the church, and as stanch a friend as the minister possessed. But just the summer before he had been grievously offended. Mr. Scott had gone on the annual excursion of the Sons of Scotland to Muskoka. Here the endless chain of jeweled lakes, the fairy islands floating on the dark waters, the rugged, barren rocks set in masses of soft greenery, and above all the wild spirit of freedom that pervaded this new beauty land, had enchanted the minister's tired soul. So, upon his return, he had declared in a tea-meeting speech at the church that Muskoka reminded him of Scotland. The next Sabbath Sandy McQuarry drove past the Elmbrook church and worshiped, fifteen miles away, with the Glenoro congregation, and there he had worshiped ever since.

"Och, well, indeed," remarked Uncle Hughie, wisely reverting to an earlier subject, "it will be a question that puzzles the greatest men in the world, why some people must suffer. But, indeed, it is our own selves that will be responsible. And as long as there will be one man sinning in this world the race must suffer. Oh, yes, we will not be beginning to learn that lesson yet, but will be fighting against each other! Och, hoch! it will be a peety, indeed. But it will all come out right in the end, never you fear. He came to show us how it's done, oh, yes. The Almighty will be knowing what He is about, indeed."

"It's my opinion that the Almighty lets things go pretty much as they please," grumbled the blacksmith. "When I was at Neeag'ra Falls——"

"Hoots!" cried the philosopher impatiently, "that would be jist child's talk, William. There will be an unerring law governing everything man does, jist as there's a law governing——" He hesitated for a comparison.

"The movements o' this 'ere ball that we're standin' on," finished Silas Long, with marked emphasis, and a meaning glance at his unbelieving enemy.

"Standin' on a ball!" repeated Spectacle John wearily. "We'd better all go an' join a circus, an' be done with it!"

"Well," said Jake Sawyer reasonably, "most o' the eddicated folks'll tell you that's what the world is. Miss Weir, now, was tellin' that to our twins jist to-day."

Spectacle John sniffed. "Huh! That young Graham, that teached here before her, was loony on the same notion. He's sit up half the night argifyin' with me that the earth was spinnin' 'round like a dog after its tail. I uster ask him how it was we didn't tumble off when we was danglin', head downward, in the dark, an' that uster to give him the blind staggers every time. He was a terror for argifyin', though, that chap; an' one night he got me to give in that it was mebby round like a cheese and us livin' on the flat top. It was in Sawed-Off Wilmott's cheese factory he was shootin' off that time. Well, I went that far, but further than that there's no livin' man'll get me to go."

A tall figure had crossed the bridge and was nearing the group. There was a perceptible stir, and all conversation ceased. "'Ere's the minister," said Silas Long. "We'd better get started."

"Mr. Scott's been tryin' all day to get a light job for that McIntyre," said Jake Sawyer innocently, "but he don't seem to've got anything easy enough yet."

Uncle Hughie darted a warning glance at the indiscreet miller, but it was too late.

"He'll be well looked after, then, I'm thinkin'," said Sandy, promptly rising. "There'll be no need o' me goin' with ye the night, Hughie. Maister Scott'll likely give him a job in"—he paused to let the heavy weight of his sarcasm fall resoundingly—"in Muskoky!"

He tramped away, and, climbing the fence, strode across the fields in the direction of his mill.

"Ain't 'e a caution, now?" asked Silas Long in a tone of fear. "You mark my words, now—jist mark my words—that man's goin' to meet a judgment some day. It ain't safe to act like that to the minister, that's wot it ain't."

"Fine night," the assembly remarked unanimously. Mr. Scott was a good-looking man of middle age, tall and straight, with a massive head, covered with thick iron-gray hair. He had deep blue eyes, with little lines at their corners showing they were prone to kindly laughter.

"What's the question to-night?" he asked, the lines around his eyes deepening. "Have you

found a new star, Silas?"

"Eh, eh, mebby, mebby," answered Uncle Hughie. "If it is, it seems to be a fallen one, whatever. We would jist be talkin' about yon poor body we're goin' to see. Come away, now."

The milkstand arose leisurely. Silas Long shouldered his telescope, Jake Sawyer slung his orphan over his back, and the group turned up Cameron's lane, crossed the orchard, and went down the winding pathway into the ravine.

The little stream danced along at their side, touched here and there with the gold of the sunset, the vesper sparrows had gathered for their twilight chorus, and the valley was vibrating with music.

No matter at what hour of the day, or season of the year, it might be viewed, the ravine where the mill-stream ran was a treasure-house to any one who had the seeing eye. Long before, when Elmbrook was merely a "Corners," with one or two houses, there came to the place a queer Englishman, who wandered all day about the fields, and painted pictures and read strange, dry books by a man named Ruskin. He first entered the valley on an October morning, when it was all gold and crimson, and lay shrouded in a soft violet mist. The man had sat for hours gazing down the winding stream, and afterward he had said it was the Golden River, and that the place should be called Treasure Valley. But Sandy McQuarry's father, who was living then, said that onybody with a head on him could see that it was clean ridic'l'us to give a place such a daft name. McQuarry's Corners it had been called for years, and McQuarry's Corners it would stay. The queer Englishman left, and was never heard of again, and old Sandy died, and when the post-office came old lady Cameron named the place Elmbrook; but Treasure Valley still remained with the little Golden River flowing through it, showing new beauties with every recurring season.

About a mile below the village the walls of the ravine disappeared, and the brook was lost in a deep swamp, a maze of tangled foliage and deep pools and idly wandering streams. As the water advanced the forest became submerged, and formed a desolate stretch known as the Drowned Lands. Its slimy, green surface was dotted with rotten stumps and fantastic tree-trunks, pitched together in wild confusion, and above it rose a drear, dead forest of tall pine stems, bleached and scarred, and stripped of every limb. Around this silent, ghostly place the swamp formed a ring through which it was dangerous to pass, for near the edge of the Drowned Lands it was honeycombed with mud holes, into which it was sure death to slip. Terrible tales were related of lives lost in this swamp. Folks said that a banshee or a will-o'-the-wisp, or some such fearsome creature, wandered to and fro at nights over the surface of the desolate waters, waving her pale lantern and calling for help, or in other ways enticing unwary travelers to their death. Some had been lured into the depths by her voice and had never returned.

It was in this drear, lonely place that the tramp had taken up his abode. Just where a corduroy road, now abandoned and grass-grown, passed out of the ravine and along the edge of the swamp, stood Sandy McQuarry's old lumber shanty, and here Uncle Hughie Cameron and the doctor had taken John McIntyre. Before it lay the swamp, and through occasional gaps gleamed the still waters of the Drowned Lands.

As the visitors emerged from the valley there was a loud hallo from the hill-top, and a small, limping figure came hurrying down the slope. The little fellow perched upon Jake Sawyer's shoulder gave a squeal of welcome, and Jake's face lit up.

"Hello, you, Tim!" called the big man cordially, as the youngster came limping toward him, "what you been up to now?"

The boy glanced around the group and placed himself as far as possible from Spectacle John. "Jist been fishin'," he remarked vaguely; "and I'm goin' with you," he added, with that mixture of defiance and appeal which the orphans had already learned was sure to move their foster-parents.

"Ye'd better watch out! The banshee'll git ye," threatened Spectacle John.

"Speakin' o' a banshee," put in the blacksmith, "when I was at Neeag'ra Falls——" By the time the story was finished the company had come in view of the old shanty.

The sick man was seated in the doorway. His figure had a despairing droop, his eyes were fixed on the forest of dead tree-trunks. There was something of a corresponding dreariness in his whole attitude, as though the waters of tribulation had gone over his life and left it a veritable Drowned Land, its hopes engulfed, its greenness dead.

The company fell silent as they passed through the bars that served as a gateway and went up the slope to the shanty door. So absorbed was the man in his reflections that he did not notice any one approaching until the minister's foot struck a stone. He turned sharply and arose.

Mr. Scott had visited him twice as he lay in bed, and the man recognized him with a brief word. But there was no cordiality in the way he put out his hand to meet the minister's proffered one, and he took no notice whatever of the others.

"Good-evening," said Mr. Scott pleasantly. "Some of the neighbors thought they would like to

drop in and give you a word of welcome to the village. I'm glad to see you are looking much better."

"I am quite better." The man's answer was curt and dry.

He did not offer his visitors a seat, nor ask them to enter, but stood there, bent, shabby and forlorn, and looked at the minister with haggard eyes that besought him to go. But the look only made him more anxious to stay.

"Do you mind if we sit a moment?" he asked, glancing at an old log near the doorway.

The man hesitated. "It is a poor thing to refuse a welcome to any man," he said at last, with a quiet dignity, "and in the years that I had a fit roof to my head none was turned away; but"—he paused, as though he disliked to say the words—"but I have spent my life alone these last few years, and I find it better. So I am afraid I cannot offer you a seat, sir."

The minister was as much surprised by the stately manner in which the words were delivered as by the astonishing declaration itself. Yet he could not feel angry at his dismissal; the man's eyes awakened only compassion.

"But it is not good for us to shut ourselves away from our fellow-men," he said gently. "We miss much happiness and kindness."

"And cruelty," added John McIntyre, with sharp bitterness. "And as to its being good for me, or otherwise, that matters nothing to any one."

"Ah, but that is where you are mistaken," said the minister eagerly. "It matters very much to our Father. We are very precious in His sight. The Almighty——"

He was interrupted by a harsh laugh.

"Hoh!" cried John McIntyre derisively, "what is the use telling that to a man who knows the world? That's a tale for children and old women! What do you know about the Almighty's care?" His eyes ran fiercely over his visitor. "You! Because you are well fed and well clothed, and prosperous, you think that all the world is the same, and that your God is a miracle of kindness. He may be to you. But there is another side. Your God causes the wicked to prosper, and sees the innocent trampled upon, and never puts forth a hand to help. And you call Him the Almighty! If there is an Almighty, then He takes pleasure in the pain of His creatures. He gives them the good things of this life only that He may take them away and enjoy their suffering. And because your turn hasn't come yet you would make me believe that every one is as well off as yourself. Hoh! Lies! Old women's lies!"

The minister stepped back in shocked amazement. He had lived his life among a prosperous, God-fearing people, where such blasphemous words, if ever uttered, were never allowed to reach his ears. Nothing aroused his righteous indignation like a slighting reference to the Master whom he served, and in his quick resentment he forgot the suffering written on John McIntyre's face.

"How dare you speak so of your Master?" he demanded hotly.

The man laughed again, and the minister broke forth in stern rebuke.

People said that when Mr. Scott denounced sin there was something of the fearless candor of the ancient prophets about him. But in this instance he forgot that the greatest Prophet was always gentle and tender in the presence of pain. He denounced John McIntyre roundly for his irreverence, showed him plainly the appalling evil of his ways, and quoted Scripture to prove that he was hastening to everlasting perdition.

At the mention of his inevitable destiny John McIntyre interrupted.

"Hell!" he shouted. "I've been there for months already!" As he spoke he turned swiftly and caught up an old spade lying by the doorstep. "Get out of my sight!" he hissed fiercely, holding the weapon aloft. "Leave me, or I'll send you where I'm going! Go!" His voice was almost beseeching. "Go, before I do you harm!"

The Rev. James Scott was afraid of no living man, but there was a terrible gleam in John McIntyre's eyes that hinted of insanity. He looked at him a moment and then, with a motion as though washing his hands of him, he turned away. The rest of the company had fallen back from the doorway, and now followed the minister in speechless concern. They tramped along the old grassy road, followed by the call of the whip-poor-will from the darkening hillside above, and the lonely cry of the loon floating across the Drowned Lands. Uncle Hughie was the first to break the dismayed silence.

"Well! well! well! well! Ech! hech! Hoots! toots!" he ejaculated incoherently, quite unable to express his feelings.

"Man, ain't he a caution?" whispered Jake Sawyer fearfully.

"Gosh! now there's some truth in what he says," remarked the melancholy blacksmith in an

undertone.

"D'ye think he would be right in his mind, poor body?" asked Uncle Hughie, searching for some palliation of John McIntyre's outrageous conduct.

"Mebby he's had notions about the earth spinnin' 'round like a top, an' they've drove him loony," suggested Spectacle John. "That often happens, they say."

But Silas Long was too deeply concerned over the tramp's wickedness to pay any heed to this frivolous remark.

The minister was walking ahead, in gloomy silence. His heart was still full of hot indignation, but it was mingled with regret and deep disappointment. He had wanted to do this lonely, sad man good, and in his haste, he feared, he had done him only harm.

But there was one pair of eyes that had regarded John McIntyre's action with perfect approval. Those eyes were now looking up at Jake Sawyer, alight with unholy joy. "Say," whispered the eldest orphan, jerking his foster-father's coat, "I like that man. He's awful bad, an' I think he's just bully."

The next day the tale of the tramp's outrageous treatment of the minister flew through Elmbrook like the news of a fire in the mill. Sandy McQuarry had been away in Lakeview all day, and did not hear it until he was seated with his family and the mill-hands at the supper table.

Miss Euphemia, his sister, who had been his housekeeper since Sandy's wife, as folks said, worked herself to death, was the first who dared to broach the subject, any reference to Mr. Scott being rather hazardous.

"Yon's a fearfu' buddy ye've got in yer shanty doon yonder, Sandy," she began solemnly. "Ah'd no let him sleep there anither nicht."

Her brother was busy distributing the fried pork around the table, a performance at which he was an adept. In spite of a keen desire for money-making, Sandy was a generous man at his own table, and he had a way of serving his family that was the admiration of the whole mill staff. If a man but held up his plate as a slight indication that he was ready for more, the host could flip him a slice of beef or pork with the dexterity of a sleight-of-hand magician. At his signals, "Here, Bob, mon!" "Hi, Peter, lad!" "Look oot, Sam!" away flew each man's portion, hitting his plate with unerring precision. He had never been known to miss anybody in his life, not even Miss Euphemia, away at the other end of the table.

He paused now, his fork suspended, and looked at his sister from under his bristling brows. "What's he been doin'?" he demanded.

Now that the ice was broken, every one was ready with a different version of the tale. John McIntyre was an infidel and an outcast, and had spoken blasphemy and driven the minister and old Hughie Cameron and a half dozen others away from his door, threatening them with violence.

The company waited, expecting to hear an order summarily evicting the tramp from his refuge by the Drowned Lands. But the mill-owner made no comment. "Huh!" he remarked, an enigmatic ejaculation that left all in doubt as to his feelings. But the next night the village knew how deep was the elder's resentment against the minister, for early in the evening Sandy repaired to the Cameron milkstand, and, to the philosopher's joyful amazement, announced that he had decided, after all, to hire John McIntyre as night watchman.

CHAPTER VI

A FAMOUS PRACTITIONER

But dere's wan man got hees han' full t'roo ev'ry kin' of wedder,
An' he's never sure of not'ing but work an' work alway—
Dat's de man dey call de doctor, when you ketch heem on de contree,
An' he's only man I know—me, don't get no holiday.
—WILLIAM HENRY DRUMMOND.

When the new doctor's horse arrived, and he began to drive about the country, even the outrageous conduct of Sandy McQuarry's new watchman, and the antics of the orphans, became matters of secondary interest to the village. When he drove away of a morning, every one ran across to every one else's house to debate the question as to whether he had gone to see a patient or only to exercise his horse. Of course, when some one came for him the problem was

solved; but sometimes he went off on an independent excursion, and that was always puzzling. Miss Weir had once known a doctor who used to drive like mad all over the country, with his satchel set up on the seat, where every one could see it, and never go to see one solitary patient for weeks at a time. Ella Anne Long was sure the new doctor wasn't that kind; and anyway, Davy Munn had told Jean Cameron that the doctor often told him, when he drove away, that he was just going to give his horse some exercise.

Of course, it was no use asking Mrs. Munn. As usual, she "didn't know." Even when some one called for the doctor, in his absence, and had every legitimate right to be apprised of his whereabouts, it was with the greatest difficulty that any hint of it could be extracted from his housekeeper. She always spoke in broad generalities. Yes, he was gone away. To see a patient? Well, likely. Mrs. Munn couldn't tell. Where? Oh, out in the country. It might be up Glenoro way, or down by Lake Simcoe. She was not sure, now, but that she had seen him drive out east, or was it west? She hadn't remembered right. When would he be back? How could she tell? She didn't know how fast he was going to drive, that is, if he was driving at all. Mebby he was walking. People knew Mrs. Munn of old, and did not waste much time on her. They passed the office door and went on to the stable, where information, though often highly colored, and tinged with the product of David's imagination, was at least easily procured.

Granny Long was the one reliable source of supply. As soon as the doctor drove out of the gate the telescope was turned upon him, and bulletins as to his movements issued at various intervals. He was sighted turning the corner at Cameron's Crossing, and was likely going down to see old Mrs. McKitterick; or he had turned around at Long John McLeod's old clearing, and would be back in fifteen minutes, maybe less, at the rate he was going; so it was only a drive. And one morning, when he started off early and drove so swiftly down the Lake Simcoe road that every one was sure some one must be dying, public opinion was much relieved when Granny Long sent Ella Anne out with the news that it wasn't a patient, after all, but that the doctor had just been down to Lake Simcoe, and was coming back. And she could not be quite sure yet, but his hair looked damp and shiny, and she suspected he had been in swimming; she could tell for certain in a few minutes.

And while the village discussed him, Dr. Allen drove up and down the Oro hills to exercise his horse, and wished with all his heart that he had more to do. One evening, when time was hanging more heavily than usual on his hands, he went for a stroll down the village street. As he passed out to the gate Davy Munn was mowing the lawn. His groom's assiduous attention to this one branch of industry, to the exclusion of all other labor, still remained a mystery. "He's got a dark-blue necktie on this time," was the whispered remark made in Granny Long's bedroom, "and it looks as if he was growing a mustache. He's comin' this direction."

"Sakes alive! I wonder if he's comin' here!" cried Ella Anne's mother, all in a flutter.

Ella Anne flew down the stairs. She softly opened the front door, and seating herself at the organ, pulled out all the stops. Miss Long was organist in the church, and had the loudest voice in the township of Oro. She had a favorite solo, which she had sung at three tea-meetings the winter before.

> "*Oh, meet me! Oh, meet me!*
> *When you hear the first whip-poor-will's song!*"

Here was a splendid chance to let the new doctor hear her sing. As the musical invitation came pouring through the Longs' parlor door, the innocent cause of it stopped for an instant on the unsteady sidewalk, overcome by the deluge of song. Then, full of alarm, he turned off the street, and made his escape up the willow-bordered path that ran along the edge of the mill-pond, where the sound of the waterfall, as it poured in a silvery cascade beneath the bridge, alone broke the silence. Looking back past the bridge, Gilbert caught a glimpse of the valley, with its fairy windings, where he had met his first patient and the princess in the milkmaid costume. The pond lay like a colored mirror in its frame of feathery willows. As he advanced the trees disappeared, and his footfall was muffled in the soft sawdust. The sweet, clean scent of the newly sawn lumber mingled with the cool breath of the water.

The big mill, so noisy and busy in the daytime, was silent and deserted, except for the watchman. He was seated in the wide doorway of the engine-room. Behind him, in the warm darkness, shone a red line from beneath the furnace door. Gilbert had not seen him since his illness, and was struck with the man's expression of utter dejection.

"Good-evening," said the young doctor cordially, stopping in his walk.

The man looked up with a curt response.

"I was just strolling about, viewing things," continued Gilbert. "You are night watchman here now, I believe?"

"Yes."

"I hope you are feeling better?"

The man looked up into the speaker's face, and seemed to recognize him. "You are the doctor?" he said, half inquiringly.

"Yes. I came to Elmbrook lately, like yourself. My name is Allen—Gilbert Allen."

"Allen!" repeated the dark man. He arose, and gave the other a searching look. "Are you the Gilbert Allen who saved the life of a man once in Nelson Mills?"

"Yes," answered Gilbert, surprised; "that is, I helped to, somewhat. Do you know——"

The man interrupted with a harsh laugh, such as had startled the minister. It was as unmirthful as a cry of pain. "Yes, I know more than you think. I know *you*, Gilbert Allen!" His voice was harsh with scorn. "Many, many a time I've heard your name—spoken with the highest praise—oh, the very highest. But you are like all the rest of the world. You would let your best friend starve. Selfishness and dishonesty!" he cried, clenching his hands, "selfishness and dishonesty! Those are the commonest things in this world—the only things!"

He picked up his lantern, and turning his back on his astonished visitor, disappeared into the dark recess of the engine-room.

The young doctor stood staring after him, undecided whether to follow or not. Was the man mad? There was a wild gleam in his eye, but Gilbert's professional knowledge told him it was rather a gleam of anguish than insanity. He took a step forward, then turned and walked away, wondering, and hotly indignant. He was filled with rage that any man should dare to speak to him so, and wished with all his heart that John McIntyre's hair had not been so white, nor his shoulders so stooped and thin.

But with his amazement and indignation there was struggling a new feeling. The May night was cool, but he felt suffocatingly hot. He shrugged his shoulders. Nonsense! The man certainly was mad. How could any sane person accuse him of leaving his best friend to starve? And yet—

A figure in white was coming down the village street. It was the princess of the ravine. She was dressed as suited her now, in a long, white, filmy gown, which she held up daintily. She wore no hat, and the bronze hair crowning her shapely head caught the sunset light and shone like gold.

She spoke to him, with a stately sweetness that recognized their previous acquaintance, but invited no further advance. The deep, searching look in her eyes, the same as in her old uncle's, made Gilbert feel uncomfortable. It seemed as if she knew, and every one knew, that he had been guilty of "selfishness and dishonesty."

He did not worry long over the strange man and his stranger accusation, for his fortune took a sudden happy turn.

Down on the Lake Simcoe road, about a couple of miles below the village, lived old Mrs. McKitterick, the mother of Conductor Lauchie. For years she had been an invalid, and a great sufferer, and poor Lauchie had spent half his earnings on doctors' bills; but still she lay in her bed weary month after weary month. They called in the new doctor, and he tried a new form of treatment, a simple operation, and before a month was gone the old lady walked to the barnyard gate and waved her shawl at Lauchie's train as it came puffing out of the swamp. And the conductor blew her such a joyous salute that folks thought there must be an accident, and Jake Sawyer stopped his mill and ran up the track to see if any of the orphans had been run over.

The real cause of the uproar was soon proclaimed from Long's upstairs, and with it went ringing over the countryside the fame of the new doctor.

Gilbert awoke one morning to find himself the most important man in the township of Oro, and the busiest. Patients came from all directions, and Speed, his trim little mare, went flying over the hills and dales as though she, too, were heartily glad that work had begun. Lauchie McKitterick advertised him at every station along the line, and when the doctor wanted to go anywhere on the train Davy Munn needed only to brandish his mother's sunbonnet from the window of the stable loft, and the Lakeview and Simcoe express stopped just below his back gate. He was soon so busy that Granny Long had to give up her afternoon nap to keep track of his swift movements. There was always something doing in the village, too. There was often an accident in the mill, and there was always an accident at Jake Sawyer's. The eldest orphan fell into the mill-pond, and was nearly drowned; the twins took a dose of Paris green just to see if it really would turn their hair into grass; and Joey ate all the early green apples off a Duchess tree. Then there was Granny Long's neuralgia and Uncle Hughie Cameron's rheumatism; and Mrs. Winters declared she believed folks got sick on purpose, for the sake of calling the doctor in.

There was some shadow of truth in this, for as the young man came and went among the people's homes their admiration for his skill was soon mingled with a warmer feeling. He had such a "takin' way" with him, old Granny Long declared, that a body just couldn't help being glad to see him; and old Mrs. McKitterick said the sight of his face was like a dose of medicine, a compliment the young doctor accepted gratefully in its true meaning. Even Mrs. Winters, and all the other famous nurses of the district, who, over an afternoon cup of tea, would give him full instructions upon how to treat this case and that, agreed that the doctor was generally right. And

then, though he always had his own way in the end, he took their advice with such good humor, and never scoffed, the way old Dr. Williams did. He would walk into the house and order things in a way that commanded the admiration of even the Duke of Wellington. He scolded the mothers roundly whenever he was called to see a sick baby. He denounced pork and pickles as a child's diet, and made such a fuss about air-tight bedrooms that Jake Sawyer, who, in company with his wife, lived in terror lest a draught of night air should blow on the orphans' precious heads, was forced into the patient complaint that though the doctor was a fine young man, and their eldest was just crazy over him, still he believed, if he had his way, he'd turn folks out of house and home, to live in the road, like tinkers.

The busier Gilbert became the happier he grew. Elmbrook stood, in the center of a rich agricultural district, his patients were mostly wealthy farmers, and he began to feel that he was not so far from his ambition, after all. He would be well enough off at the end of two years to set up a city practice and make a home for Rosalie.

Among the doctor's first social appearances was tea at the manse, where he met again the beautiful Miss Cameron. She came with her brother Malcolm, who was Gilbert's assistant since he had returned from college. When he was not too busy in the fields, or in dancing attendance on Marjorie Scott, the young man rendered the doctor considerable help.

It was a warm evening, and when tea was finished the company sat out on the veranda. The manse and the church were in full view of the village, half a mile distant, and a fine target for the telescope, as the minister's wife well knew. But here they were screened from observation by the vines.

"You have never heard Miss Cameron sing, have you, Dr. Allen?" asked the minister's wife. "Then there's a treat in store for you. Run in and give us a song, Elsie, dear."

Gilbert murmured something polite. He was quite sure Miss Cameron's singing would be very sweet and pretty, like herself; but he still had tingling recollections of the whip-poor-will song, and his anxiety to hear more Elmbrook talent was only mild.

The girl arose from the steps and returned to the twilight of the parlor. "Give us 'Abide with me,' Elsie," called the minister, leaning back in his worn armchair with a contented sigh.

"That's the one father always asks for," said his wife, with a smile. "He says he'd rather hear your Elsie sing that, Malcolm, than listen to the best minister in Canada preach."

Young Malcolm turned reluctantly. He was seated on the bottom step, engaged in an absorbing conversation with the minister's eldest daughter, and did not like to be interrupted; but he knew better than to neglect Marjorie's mother.

"Yes, Elsie whoops it up not so badly, sometimes," he remarked with brotherly candor not unmixed with pride. "I like to hear her, all right, when she's singing an out-and-out song that's got a head and tail to it. But when she gets on to those hee-ha, hee-ha Italian fireworks things, away up in G, I generally cut for the barn."

"Hush!" said the minister gently. The first notes of the prelude came floating out of the dusk, and then, soft and sweet, and uttered with a perfect enunciation, the words:

"*Abide with me! fast falls the eventide;*
The darkness deepens: Lord, with me abide!
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!"

The voice was pure and full, and as clear as a bird's; but there was something deeper in it than mere beauty, some subtle, compelling quality that made the tears rise unbidden, and that forced the heart to join in the prayer it uttered.

No one moved until the last line rang out triumphantly.

"*In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!*"

When she had finished, Gilbert spoke no word of admiration. It had been so much better than he had dreamed that words seemed inadequate.

She sang again and again; now the song was gay, now grave, and she ended with an ecstatic spring song that had in it the sparkle of the stream, the song of the robin, and all the glorious delight of earth's resurrection.

When she came out to them again and her audience expressed their pleasure, Gilbert looked at her with a sharp feeling of pity. They had enjoyed her singing, no doubt, but they had no idea how wonderful it was. And to be able to sing like that, and not be appreciated, was tragic.

"I suppose you are going back to Toronto to study, next autumn?" he said, when she was seated again on the veranda steps.

"No, I think not," she said, with what seemed to him shocking indifference. "Not for some years at least, if ever."

"Why—you—you are surely not going to give up studying music!" he cried bluntly. "You, with a voice like that!"

His tone was unconsciously flattering. The girl smiled gratefully. She looked at him very gravely, as though about to speak, when she caught her brother's eye upon her, and paused with an embarrassed air.

"That's just what we're all saying to her, doctor," he said. "She ought to go, but she won't."

"Oh, I may, some time," she said lightly, "but I have had enough lessons for a while. Now, Marjorie, aren't you going to play for us?"

Gilbert went home, wondering over this strange young woman, and feeling toward her a strong impatience. Either she did not know the magnitude of the talent she possessed, or she was wofully lacking in ambition. With that voice, and a little spirit, there was nothing she might not accomplish; while here she was, content to feed chickens, and carry eggs to the corner store, with the placid assurance that she "had had enough lessons for a while." If she had not been so stately, he felt he would like to shake her.

He did not meet her again for some time; for even when he found leisure to attend a social gathering, she was seldom present. But he was on the lookout for her. He determined that the next time he met her he would give her some much-needed advice. She ought to be stirred up. These country folk had no ambition.

Her brother seemed to have no lack of it, he discovered. He took young Malcolm with him to see a patient occasionally, and on one long drive the boy confided in him something of the struggle it had been to give them all an education. It was a lucky thing that Elsie didn't want to go on with her music, he said, for the expense of her training would be so great that both he and Jean would have to stay home for some years, and Jean was dying to go to the high school in the fall. Both Uncle Hughie and mother had declared that Elsie must have first chance, but Elsie didn't want to go, and it certainly was lucky, though they were all sorry, of course, that she wasn't going on.

Gilbert wondered a little over the lad's remarks, but forgot them until the next occasion when he met Miss Cameron.

He had been up to see a patient among the Glenoro hills, and was driving homeward. The road was a narrow, lonely one, winding here and there through the dense wood. On either side the trees and underbrush made a towering green wall. Through it the eye could catch occasional glimpses of the flower-spangled earth, or a vista of splendid trunks with the sunlight making golden splashes on their spreading boughs. Gilbert pulled up Speed and drove slowly. Her hoofs made but a smothered pad, pad in the soft leaf-mold. The air was cool, and laden with the delicious scents of moss and bracken and leaf-strewn earth. Far away in the green depths a whitethroat was sending forth his long, clear, silvery call, in endless praise of "Canada! Canada! Canada!" As Gilbert turned a curve in the road a figure appeared ahead, a figure that seemed to add the finishing touch to the almost perfect scene—a girl, her arms full of marigolds, walking along the flower-bordered pathway.

She wore a pale-green gown, her bronze hair was shaded by a big straw hat, and she seemed a harmonious part of the gold-and-green picture of the summer woods.

The young doctor drew up at her side. She was a little pale and weary-looking from her long, hot walk, and she gladly accepted his invitation to ride. Jim had needed another man for the haying, she said, and she was the only one who could be spared to go and seek one; she was very fortunate to get a ride home.

As Gilbert helped her into his buggy he looked at her wonderingly. Was she really content with her homely tasks, or could it be possible that she was making this sacrifice voluntarily?

"Can you be quite content to settle down here in Elmbrook, when you might be making fame for yourself in a big city?" he asked. "I don't believe you realize that you might some day move throngs with your voice."

She smiled, with a tinge of sadness. "Well, you see, I am quite sure of my work here," she said half playfully, "and one could never be certain of a steady supply of 'moved throngs.'"

"You could," he cried earnestly. "You are wasting your talents."

She shook her head. "It is better to waste one's talents than something better."

"What, for instance?"

"One's life."

"How could it be better employed, in your case, than by giving the world your voice? You need to be more ambitious," he added bluntly.

She turned upon him that steady, scrutinizing glance that, from the first, had made him conscious of inner unworthiness. Her eyes were bright, and had lost the tired look; the cool breeze had brought back the rose-leaf tints to her face, and had blown one bronze curl across her forehead.

"You ought to hear Uncle Hughie on that subject," she said, with apparent irrelevance. "He is always 'rastlin'' out some problem for other people. One cannot live with him and be in doubt of one's duty."

"And he has taught you that it is your duty to remain at home?"

"Perhaps," she said, looking away into the mass of greenery by the roadside. It was evident that she did not care to pursue the subject.

"Duty is generally the thing a fellow doesn't want to do," he remarked, by way of making the conversation less personal.

"It's Uncle Hughie's pet hobby. He lost the chance of a college education, and many other privileges, through adhering to it, and says he has never regretted his action for a moment."

Gilbert was silent. The unbelievable thing must be true, then. This girl was sacrificing her own chance of advancement for the sake of her brother and sister. He looked at her with a feeling of reverence. To give up so much was commendable, but to give it up quietly, without a murmur, without even the chance of commendation—that was splendid.

"'You are in line with the universe,'" he quoted.

She glanced at him as if in alarm, and quickly changed the subject. Gilbert understood; he was tacitly informed that her sacrifice was to remain a secret.

He stifled a sigh. He could not help remembering, just then, that he had acted quite a different part when duty had called to one path, and ambition and pleasure to another. He had merely postponed the duty, of course; that was not really shirking it, for he intended to perform it to the last jot. Nevertheless, he wished that it had been done years ago; and then he recalled the words of the dark watchman, and felt himself grow hot again.

They turned another curve, and came out of the cool, green silence into the hard, white, sunlit road that ran straight up to Elmbrook.

"I wonder if the telescope's on us!" cried the doctor, with a boyish desire to get away from his uncomfortable reflections. He checked himself, abashed, and glanced at his companion. Her stately gravity made him half afraid of her. He thought of Rosalie's irresistible gaiety, and longed for her radiant companionship. To his surprise, Miss Cameron's eyes twinkled. Apparently, she had a sense of humor, after all.

"That shows how thoroughly un-Elmbrooked you still remain. It's been resting in the northeast window ever since you drove away, and Granny Long has been wheeled in there to watch for your return." Gilbert felt vastly more at his ease.

"You make me feel as if I were a new constellation."

"Or a rising star—I hope you are."

"Thank you. When you get to be the second Albani——"

"And you the greatest consulting physician in Canada——"

"Of course I shall remember that you encouraged me."

"It isn't really a joke, you know," she said with sweet seriousness. "I don't think—I know you don't realize how important you are in the eyes of the people about you. It is an"—her eyes were very grave—"an exacting position, Dr. Allen."

They had reached her gate, and Gilbert was assisting her to alight. He understood. She was paying him a delicate compliment, and with it was the hint that he must line up to the Elmbrook ideal.

"I feel overcome with humiliation at the thought," he said, standing before her, hat in hand, "when I consider my shortcomings."

She shook her head. "You ought to be glad. One can scarcely help attaining to an ideal that is set before one so persistently every day."

Gilbert drove away humbled. This girl, with her splendid talent, had quietly laid aside her chance of a great career because the road to fame deviated from the path of duty. And she had done it without a word or hint of martyrdom. And he—what had he done? How much thought had he spent in the past ten years on the man who had given him his chance in life? Suppose he had been to him all that he should have been? Then he would have lost Rosalie and the two years abroad that had brought him nearer her social level. Gilbert saw that there had never been a moment when he had met the issue squarely. He had merely put it aside, saying "Next year, next year." Well, what did it matter, anyway? Martin was not in want. If he had needed the money it would have been quite different; and when the time came he was going to do something splendid for him. And he was doing so well now that the time was not far off. But Gilbert was honest with himself. He knew well that when the two years' work which he had laid out for himself in this little backward place were ended it was not the neglected duty he would consider, but a city practice, and a fine home worthy of Rosalie. For the first time in his life the prospect brought him no pleasure.

CHAPTER VII

THE TRAINING OF THE ORPHANS

Off on de fiel' you foller de plough,
Den w'en you're tire' you scare de cow,
Sickin' de dog till dey jomp de wall,
So de milk ain't good for not'ing at all—
An you're only five an' a half dis fall,
Little Bateese!
—WILLIAM HENRY DRUMMOND.

In Elmbrook, parental discipline was simple and direct, and consisted of but one method of procedure: when the rising generation departed from the ways of its mothers it was promptly spanked back into the path of rectitude, and no more about it.

But when the Sawyers found themselves possessed of a large and lively family, all methods of discipline, whether sanctioned by long custom or invented on the spur of the moment, through the extreme urgency of the case, alike failed.

The orphans presented an entirely unique problem in the rearing of children. In the first place, the community was completely taken aback by their unexpected character. Not one of them at all conformed to the picture of a forsaken child, as conceived by the village. The Elmbrook ideal was the sort that languished on the front page of the Sunday-school library books. It was quiet and pensive and hungry, and gave all its meager earnings to a small invalid brother or drunken father. But the Sawyer orphans were neither pensive nor appealing. There was a defiant belligerency about them that stifled the avenues of pity and put one on the defensive. They were wild and gay, and uproarious, too, and with the exception of Tim, the eldest, they were strong and robust. He certainly looked as though he had been starved, body and soul; but his other unorphan-like qualities were so obtrusive that he was looked upon as the biggest counterfeit of the crowd.

During school hours the three eldest were kept in some sort of conformity to law and order by the strong hand of the Duke of Wellington; but at home and abroad they were a law unto themselves, and kept the whole community in a state of apprehension, like people living near the crater of an active volcano.

Their life had been largely spent in the slum district of a crowded city, and the change to the freedom of the Oro fields and woods was almost too much for the orphans. After school hours they all, with one consent, went mad, and ranged far and wide over hill and dale, until Granny Long's old hands grew weary readjusting the telescope. Then when she did catch sight of them it was only to be grossly insulted; for whenever the small scalawags guessed they were within range of the spyglass they would stand in line, and go through frightful contortions of the face and body, expressive of contempt for the instrument and everything behind it.

Wherever the orphans went, depredations of all sorts followed. They chased the neighbors' cows from the fields out to the road, and the pigs from the road into the fields. They climbed trees and stole birds' nests. They dammed the creek and flooded Cameron's pasture. They teased Sandy McQuarry's old ram until it was mad with rage, and butted the ex-elder all over the barnyard. They smashed windows, and broke down fences, and, in fact, were a caution, and no mistake.

But in spite of all, their foster-parents lived in happy unconsciousness of their imperfections. For they were so wonderfully clever that Jake and Hannah were lost in admiration.

Certainly they worked a reform in the slow-moving Sawyer household. They started with the garden, and even Mrs. Winters had to admit they made an improvement there. Jake and Hannah had long felt the humiliation of their scratched and scarred front yard, in such ugly contrast to its trim surroundings, but they had never been able to better matters. Hannah had received a present, some years before, of twelve new fowls, which, as was their pious custom, she and Jake presented with Bible names, calling them for the twelve sons of Israel. And now each, like its namesake, had many descendants that had multiplied upon the face of the garden, and turned that promising land into a desert. Every year Jake faithfully dug flower-beds, and Hannah as faithfully planted seeds; but, just as regularly, they were scratched up by the Twelve Tribes.

But when the orphans arrived the marauders were taught their true place. Though it was late in the season, the twins planted a half bushel of flower seeds, and dug and raked enough for a plantation. Then, the first time the Twelve Tribes emigrated from the back yard they were promptly shooed across the street and over into the doctor's garden. Davy Munn, indignant at this unsolicited presentation, as promptly shooed them back again, and war was declared. Tim had hitherto looked upon the gardening enterprise with contempt, but now he entered heartily into it, and the battle raged tumultuously. Each side was bombarded with sticks and stones and clods of dirt and hysterical hens, until Granny Long sent word to the doctor that if he didn't want to be buried alive he'd better do something to the orphans, and that right speedily. So the young man marched into the field, routed both sides, and chased the Twelve Tribes back to their own country. For a long time the eldest orphan felt the terrifying strength of the arm that had lifted him from the ground and shaken him till his teeth chattered. Thereafter he had such a profound admiration for the doctor that his viceroy, Davy Munn, was allowed to rule his own yard in peace.

But the hens had still to be conquered, so the orphans set to work and built around the back yard a lofty fence of wire and laths, borrowed from the sawmill when Sandy McQuarry was away. Inside this the Twelve Tribes were shut up in Egyptian bondage until the garden was in bloom. Even Isaac and Rebekah were permitted to promenade in the barnyard only, among the dogs, cats and rabbits with which that interesting place swarmed.

Within the house, too, the children accomplished a revolution. The girls did nearly all the work, Hannah declared, and did it so swiftly they left her in a state of dazed admiration. Of course, they were liable to drop an unfinished task and take a sudden excursion to field or wood, but, on the whole, even Mrs. Winters was forced to confess that they were a caution, and no mistake, and might be smart housekeepers some day, if Hannah would only make them behave.

Sometimes a doubt of their absolute perfection would darken, for a moment, their foster-mother's placid sky, but even then her blame was tempered with praise.

"Well! well! well!" she remarked one evening, "yous youngsters is awful smart, that's a fact; but I'm 'most scared you're too smart."

This confession was wrung from her by the black-haired twin's dexterity in catching a plate that the fair-haired one had let fall, and at the same instant administering a sharp slap to the delinquent's ear.

Hannah was preparing the evening meal, with spasmodic assistance from the family. She stood over the stove, frying pancakes, while the orphans darted about her like swallows. Tim, always the swiftest, in spite of his lameness, was rushing about in his usual capacity of superintendent, cramming more wood into the already red-hot stove, tasting the pancakes to see if they were just right, and rapping Joey over the head with the dripping batter-spoon when he attempted to follow his example. At brief intervals he would dart into the dining-room to settle a dispute between the belligerent twins.

The latter were setting the table with the best china teaset, a precious relic handed down from Jake's grandmother, and used only when there was distinguished company. No visitors were expected to-night, but the twins loved variety, and had arrayed the table in its best as a pleasant surprise for daddy. Joey was busiest of all. He had wailed loudly for a task, and Hannah had given him permission to fill the woodbox and the water-bucket. He was diligently carrying out her instructions, with one slight variation that showed him to be a true orphan. He filled the bucket with sticks, and then went paddling to and from the water-barrel, leaving a wet and muddy trail behind him, and gleefully deposited dipperfuls of water into the woodbox. He was finally discovered by his brother, promptly cuffed, and set to reverse the order of his going.

The arrival of Jake from the mill was the signal for a shrieking exodus in his direction, and soon afterward they were all seated around the table. The twins were placed opposite each other, to prevent hair-pulling—making faces did not cause much disturbance—and Jake and Hannah sat at either end, gazing at the array with much the same air as that with which a pair of good-tempered, puzzled hens might regard a swarm of agile ducklings.

After Jake had rapturously praised the fine appearance of the table, the orphans were, with some difficulty, prevailed upon to sit still while the blessing was being asked; and then the pancakes and the hot biscuits and the maple syrup began to disappear in an amazing manner.

"Well, an' how's daddy's little woodpecker?" asked Jake, passing his big hand fondly over Joey's red curls. "Been a good boy to-day?"

"Yep," answered the baby in muffled tones. He looked up at his foster-father cunningly. "You won't t'rash me w'en I been a good boy, will yeh?"

"Bless the baby's heart! Who'd talk o' thrashin' you?" roared the big man. "If any fellow lifts a finger to you, you let daddy know—an'—an'—he'll bash their heads in for them!" he added explosively.

The elder boy glanced up at the man with an admiring flash in his old, weary eyes. "Ole Mis' Cummins uster lambaste him when she came home at night," he said in a hard voice. "That's what's made them marks on his legs."

Jake Sawyer set his teeth and Hannah sighed and shook her head. Any mention of the old drunken woman with whom the children had lived, before the Home rescued them, the orphans well knew always stirred their foster-parents' tender hearts.

"Tim uster throw stones at her, an' stick pins into her when she was drunk!" cried the black-haired twin, in shrill triumph. "An' she uster pull my hair, too, an' Lennie's, an' we stole her scissors an' cut it off awful short. But it didn't do no good, 'cause she uster whack us over the heads with her walkin'-stick."

"Well, there ain't nobody goin' to whack any o' yous any more," said big Jake Sawyer grimly. "'Ceptin' it's me, when you're bad," he added warningly.

This awful threat was received with loud laughter, and Joey hammered the table with his spoon and shouted joyfully, knowing there must be a grand joke somewhere.

Hannah looked across the table and nodded to her husband; it was a good time to disclose an important secret.

"Now we want yous to be awful good kids to-night," said Jake, pushing back his plate, and taking Joey on his knee, "because the minister's comin' to see you."

"The minister! Why, he's been here already!" cried the black-haired twin indignantly. "What's he comin' again for?"

"That was jist a call," said Hannah. "This is different. It's a pastoral visitation this time," she added solemnly. The orphans looked at each other apprehensively.

"What's that?" demanded Tim.

"It's when he comes to hear you say your verses an' your catechism," explained Jake soothingly; "and you'll all show him how much you know; an' then he prays, and you must be awful good and quiet. Eh, little woodpecker?"

The black-haired twin looked across the table at the fair-haired twin, and each read aright the other's rebellious thought; one sharp glance from Tim, and the matter was settled. The minister might make his pastoral visitation, if he wanted to, but if he thought they were going to stay home to say verses, and be quiet, he was mistaken.

The Sawyer parents were dreading signs of rebellion, and Hannah now added enticingly: "We're goin' to pass 'round the gingerbread and the ras'berry vinegar, and Susan Winters said yous girls could dress up in your new plaid dresses."

The twins looked doubtful. Gingerbread and their new frocks! This gave the pastoral visitation a festive aspect. They slipped away from the table, and followed their elder brother out to the back yard.

"Whatter ye goin' to do, Tim?" asked the black-haired twin, divided between dread of what the pastoral visitation might bring forth and a natural curiosity to sound its unknown depths.

"Mammy says we can wear our Sunday dresses," said the fair-haired one weakly.

Tim was drifting slowly, but surely, toward a hole in the back fence.

"Yous can stay, if ye wanter, but you bet I don't!" He wagged his head ominously.

"Why, what'll he do?" The black-haired twin balanced herself miraculously on the edge of the water-barrel and stared.

"He'll ast ye"—Tim's voice was sepulchral—"he'll ast ye if ye're saved."

"If ye're what?" cried the twins, in alarm.

"If ye're saved. Preachers always does that. It means if ye're goin' to the bad place."

"Well, I ain't," said the black-headed twin stoutly.

"Me neither," promptly echoed her sister.

Their brother regarded them darkly. "You can't never tell," he answered ominously. "You'd better look out, when the minister's 'round. He ast Billy Winters if he'd got his soul saved."

"His sole?" The fair-haired twin looked down at the flapping and worn foundation of the shoes so lately purchased, and then at the family oracle.

"Aw, it ain't your boot-sole," he said disdainfully; "it's somethin' in your insides; an' if ye don't get it fixed up, an' saved, the minister'll send ye to the bad place, sure. He'll ast ye about it," he added threateningly.

This was too much for the courage of the twins. Even the charms of the gingerbread and their new plaid dresses could scarcely compensate for the terrors of that occult something concerning whose mysteries the minister would be sure to inquire.

Their brother was backing through the hole in the fence. "He'll tell ye ye've gotter to be awful good, too," he added, more explicitly.

That settled it. This was something one could understand, and was not to be tolerated for a moment. The twins made a dive after him, and the three did not stop running until they began to roll down the bank of the ravine. When they were safely hidden in the green depths Tim delivered his ultimatum. "Yous two kids ain't goin' to tag after me, mind ye that," and swaggered away.

The black-haired twin stood for a moment glaring after him, in dark rebellion. She opened her mouth to scream imprecations, but thought better of it. Tim had a long memory, and an uncomfortable way of exacting penalties for any such indignity. She soothed her outraged feelings somewhat by throwing a stone after the little, limping figure, her erratic aim saving her from discovery.

"Le's go an' play lady," said the fair-haired twin comfortingly. "I bar be Elsie Cameron."

"No, you don't!" cried her stronger-minded sister. "I'm goin' to be Elsie. You can be old Arabella Winters, an' you can have Rebekah for your parrot," she said derisively.

But the fair-haired twin, though of a yielding disposition, was subject to stubborn fits. "I won't play, then," she said, sitting down heavily upon a stone.

Her sister understood the sign, and compromised.

"Well, we'll say 'Eevery ivery,' an' see who's to be her," she suggested.

"All right." The answer was delivered in a weary tone and with a total lack of interest.

The black-haired one mounted a stone, and pointing her finger alternately at herself and at her sister, went through the incantation:

"*Eevery, ivery, ickery Ann,*
Fillacy, fallacy, Nicholas Dan;
Queevery, quavery,
English navy,
Come striddle, come straddle, come out!"

The last word was uttered as she pointed at her sister, and the fair-haired twin sprang up in triumph. "It's me!" she chanted, "it's me! I'm to be Elsie Cameron!"

Her sister succumbed to the inevitable as good-naturedly as possible. No one ever dreamed of calling into question the final decision of the mystic rhyme. They flew down the bank to a green bower which had been their playhouse ever since their arrival, and soon were amicably engaged in a charming drama, in which Lenora was Miss Cameron, and Lorena Dr. Allen, who, mounted upon a barrel-hoop, dashed gallantly up to the door to take the young lady for a drive.

Meantime, Tim was still hurrying up the ravine, fired with a new purpose. Ever since the day he had seen the strange, dark man of the Drowned Lands defy the minister, the eldest orphan had regarded the offender with worshiping interest. Among the other peculiarities of the child's queer, twisted nature, was a feeling of comradeship with the wicked and outcast. He had belonged to that class all his life, and as public opinion grew in strength against John McIntyre, in like proportion grew Tim's admiration.

To-night he was resolved to visit him. It was a fine opportunity, for he could let the man see that he, too, was frightfully wicked, and despised ministers—in fact, had left home that night because one was coming.

As he scrambled along beneath the bridge he heard footsteps and voices above him. He crouched down among the bracken. Billy Winters and the other fellows might be there, and he did not want them when he went to visit a man like John McIntyre. The voices passed, and he peeped out. It was only Dr. Allen and that Cameron girl who sang. Tim decided not to throw a stone, after all. The girl had come over and sung Joey to sleep when he was sick, and the doctor

was an uncomfortable sort of person to hit with a rock.

He limped along the bank of the pond, dodging behind the willows, until his feet sank in the soft sawdust. Then he paused behind a heap of logs to reconnoiter.

Yes, there was the man sitting in the doorway of the engine-room, and looking as dark and wicked as he had done that night when he had thrilled Tim's heart by his shocking conduct. The boy drew slowly near, half fearful of his own daring. What if the dark man should not at first recognize him as a kindred spirit, and should leap at him with a hand-spike? John McIntyre looked up.

"What do you want?" he asked harshly. "You'd better go home."

This was not a propitious beginning, and the visitor squirmed around in embarrassment. His pride was rather hurt at the man's failure to recognize him, and he could scarcely announce, just at the outset, that he had run away from the minister and had come to him as a companion in iniquity. Suddenly he thought of a remark that had hitherto never failed to arouse the liveliest interest in a new acquaintance.

"I'm one o' the Sawyer orphants," he announced proudly.

The dark man looked no whit impressed. He made no reply, and Tim gained courage to sidle up closer, and finally seated himself, in an insinuating manner, on the extreme end of a piece of timber that lay before the door. He turned cautiously and peered with absorbed interest into the engine-room. The great black monster lay there, dimly outlined in the warm darkness, giving forth a hissing sound, like a giant breathing heavily in his sleep. The man arose and opened the furnace door. That was like the giant's mouth, and he was eating his supper of porridge, Tim thought, as the watchman shoveled in the sawdust. The red glow lit up the dark man's face and arms, and the boy's small, pinched countenance, and sent a red splash out on the surface of the pond. The door slammed, and again only one bright line beneath the damper showed against the darkness. The man came back, and in silence resumed his seat. Tim was vastly interested in all machinery, and Spectacle John, knowing the eldest orphan's peculiar propensity toward accidents, had ordered him, on pain of sudden death, not to show his face in the flour mill. Now, here was a chance to examine a far bigger engine than Spectacle John's. There was another charm besides his wickedness in this strange man. Tim became very ingratiating.

"Who made that engine?" he asked in a friendly tone.

There was no reply. The man seemed unaware of his presence.

"Must have been somebody awful smart," added the visitor insinuatingly.

Still no answer.

"Mebby God made it," he ventured, just to see what effect this pious remark would have on such a wicked unbeliever.

The man turned and looked at him. "You know better than that," he said sharply.

Tim felt ashamed. John McIntyre would think him young and innocent, like Billy Winters and Johnny McQuarry, who believed everything their Sunday-school teacher said.

"Huh! I bet God ain't smart enough to make an engine like that," he said profanely. He waited for the effect of this, but there was apparently none; so he proceeded to give forth some more of the unorthodox views that never failed to shock pretty Miss Marjorie Scott, his Sunday-school teacher. "I don't believe half folks tell about God, 'cause I'm a—I'm a——" He hesitated, rummaging through his memory for that terribly wicked name that Silas Long had given the new watchman. It came to light at last. "I'm a infiddle!" he burst forth proudly.

He waited, but even this tremendous disclosure called forth no remark. Probably the man had consorted with infidels and such like all his life, and thought nothing of them. Tim drew a deep breath. It gave one a feeling of ecstatic fear to be able to utter such statements unrebuked. He tried another.

"Miss Scott says—she's my Sunday-school teacher, only I don't go to Sunday-school much, you bet—she says God made everybody, but I told her if He made Spectacle John Cross He'd orter be ashamed. An' I bet the devil made ole Mis' Cummins. She was the woman that brought us up, an' I say, she was a corker!"

The man slowly turned his weary eyes and fixed them on the child's face. The reflected light from the glimmering pond lit up the small, wizened countenance, and for the first time he noted the signs it bore of cruel suffering and ill usage.

"Another," he said, half aloud.

"What?" asked Tim, glad to have elicited even one word.

The man did not repeat it. "Where do you live?" he asked.

"Up at Jake Sawyer's. I'm one o' the Sawyer orphants, I told you."

It was impossible for even John McIntyre, living a life apart, though he did, not to have heard something of the Sawyer orphans' fame. He nodded.

"Are they good to you?"

Tim hesitated. He would have liked to tell a tale of woe and terrible tortures, but his genuine regard for his foster-parents forbade. "Yes, course," he answered shortly. "Only they tried to make me stay home to-night 'cause the preacher was comin'. But I cut out, you bet; I can't stand preachers."

The man made no comment. His sudden interest seemed to have as suddenly vanished. He arose and took up his lantern.

"You must go home now," he said. "I have work to do."

He spoke in a voice that the child understood must be obeyed. Tim arose and moved away, slowly and reluctantly.

"I'm comin' another night," he called back, in a voice half appealing, half threatening. The man took no notice, and accepting this as permission, the boy limped away, whistling gaily.

Meanwhile, at home, dire events were pending for the orphans. When the minister arrived, and Jake and Hannah could produce only Joey as the sole representative of their large family, they were covered with humiliation. Never before, except in cases of severe illness, had it been known throughout the whole Elmbrook congregation that the family had failed to appear in full force at an official visit from the minister. The visitor himself did not treat the matter lightly. He hinted that Jake and Hannah had better keep a firm hand on their children, if they intended to do their duty by them, and that obedience must be exacted, at all costs. When he was gone the husband and wife sat despondently in the empty parlor, while Joey ate the remains of the gingerbread and drank all the raspberry vinegar, unnoticed. This was a serious problem. The orphans had really disgraced themselves this time, and something must be done.

"Let's go and ask Susan Winters; she'll know," suggested Hannah. "Mebby hers might 'a' run away once when the minister called."

Jake shook his head mournfully. He was quite sure such a thing could never have happened in the Winters' well-managed family. Nevertheless, he shouldered Joey, and they went down the street to consult the village oracle. The Duke of Wellington had dropped in for a chat, and the two vigorously took up the case of the absconded orphans. Mrs. Winters, backed up by the schoolmistress, declared that the family's only salvation lay in a thorough, all-around thrashing; and after much scolding, and dire prophecies of the gallows as the termini of the orphans' careers, Jake and Hannah, like two frightened children, were driven to make the desperate promise that as soon as the culprits returned they would administer to each a severe castigation.

When the stern parents returned home, and sat on the front step to consider what was before them, they were filled with dismay.

"If the little woodpecker'd been into it I wouldn't 'a' promised—no, not even for Susan Winters," announced Jake gloomily, as he watched Joey tumbling about the grass with Joshua, the dog. "Spankin' kids ain't a man's work, anyhow," he added, glancing meaningly at his wife.

"Oh, Jake!" she cried tremulously, "you wouldn't think o' makin' me do it? I—jist couldn't!"

"Well, somebody's got to," said Jake, setting his teeth, "'cordin' to Susan an' the Dook. What does an old maid like her know about bringin' up kids, anyhow?" he added rebelliously.

A scrambling noise, and the sound of smothered giggles, floated from the back yard.

"That's them!" cried Jake in a terrified voice. "You go and order them to come 'round here, Hannah," he added, with the air of one who is putting off the day of execution, "an' I'll get the gad."

Hannah arose and slowly passed out to the back door. The three truants were trying to make themselves invisible behind the pump.

"Come on 'round to the front, children!" called their foster-mother, in a voice that trembled. "You've been awful bad children, so you have!"

With this bold statement Hannah's courage vanished. She turned and fled indoors to find refuge with Jake. But, alas for the poor wife! In the most trying ordeal of her life her husband had basely deserted her. Neither Jake nor Joey was to be seen. The instrument of execution, a small, twig-like branch from the lilac bush, was lying upon the doorstep. Mrs. Sawyer took it up with a Spartan air. If Jake could so meanly fly from his duty then she must so much the more face hers.

"Yous youngsters has been awful bad," she reiterated, returning to the back door, and shaking the innocent-looking branch menacingly, "an' you've jist got to be—to be—whipped," she

ended up faintly.

The orphans stared at her for a moment in open-mouthed amazement; then, with shrieks of hysterical laughter, the twins bounded off the veranda and scrambled up to the safe sanctuary of the woodpile.

Tim alone stood his ground. He surveyed the meager weapon in the woman's hand, contempt in his wise old eyes. "Ye kin lick me, if ye like, for the hull o' them," he said, with weary indifference. "I don't care. I'm used to it."

At this pathetic confession, Mrs. Sawyer threw down the disciplining rod and sank upon the doorstep. She buried her face in her apron and burst into sobs. At the sight of her grief, so inexplicable, so terrifying, the twins pitched themselves off the woodpile and flung themselves upon her. They wound their arms chokingly about her neck; they petted and caressed, and besought her not to cry; they bewailed their own shortcomings, and made unconditional promises of perfection in the future. And even Tim sidled up, and volunteered a vague hint concerning contemplated reformation.

So Hannah dried her tears, and lighting a lamp, fetched more gingerbread and raspberry vinegar from the cellar, and they all repaired to the parlor to celebrate the family reunion. They were in the midst of the feast when there came a stealthy movement at the back door, and Jake crept sheepishly in, leading Joey by the hand. He looked at his wife with an expression of mingled contrition and frightened inquiry. Hannah beamed back perfect forgiveness and assurance, and in his overwhelming relief Jake caught up the twins and swung them over his head. The whole family immediately gave itself up to riot, and when the Duke of Wellington and Mrs. Winters came over to see if the orphans had been properly subdued they found the undisciplined household, Hannah included, engaged in a glorious game of blind man's buff. Even while the two officers of the law were peeping through the kitchen window, Jake upset the water-pail, and the twins broke a glass pitcher, all unheeded.

Mrs. Winters and the Duke turned, and marched indignantly homeward.

"Well!" exclaimed the exasperated village manager, as she stumbled through the Sawyers' lumpy garden, "what we've got to do 'fore we can raise them orphants, is to raise them two old fools they've got for a father and mother, and I guess it's about fifty years too late!"

Not till the still unchastened orphans were in bed and asleep did Jake again broach the subject of corporal punishment. For some time he walked up and down the kitchen, scratching his head, as he always did when worrying out a mental problem.

At length he gave a sigh of satisfaction, and paused before the table where Hannah sat mending Tim's riven trousers.

"We ain't a-goin' to try that Winters dodge no more, Hannah," he announced firmly, "an' that's all about it."

Hannah looked up joyfully. "Oh, Jake, I'm awful glad! I couldn't do it—I jist couldn't!"

"Of course you couldn't," he cried sympathetically, "An', what's more, you don't have to try any more. We'll do our best by them kids other ways, an' the good Lord'll see they don't turn out bad. But there's one thing dead sure, an' you can tell Susan Winters, and the Dook, too—I ain't a-goin' to raise my hand to no motherless child; no, not if they burn down the mill; and may the Lord help me so to do!"

CHAPTER VIII

A STRANGE COMRADESHIP

O wind of death, that darkly blows
Each separate ship of human woes
Far out on a mysterious sea,
I turn, I turn my face to thee.
—ETHELWYN WETHERALD.

In spite of the excitement attendant upon the orphans' waywardness and the doctor's growing practice, Elmbrook did not lose sight of the new watchman in the mill.

Since the minister's rebuff, the village generally had ceased all advances; but they watched John McIntyre from a distance, with deep interest, not unmixed with fear. There was something

in his whole conduct to arouse apprehension. Every evening at dusk he came stealing up the valley from the Drowned Lands, and every morning, in the gray dawn, he stole away again. Silent and morose, avoiding all contact with his fellow-men, he came and went with the darkness, until he seemed a creature of night and shadows. One or two of the more kindly souls of the village still made vain attempts to be friendly. Old Hughie Cameron visited the mill several evenings, and Silas Long carried his telescope down to the engine-room door, and strove to introduce the strange man to the joys of star-gazing. Even the minister, grieved at his former harshness, paid him a second visit. But all alike were repulsed. John McIntyre would accept kindness from no man, and one by one they were forced to leave him to himself. Some of the women, too, tried to pierce his reserve, with as little effect. The Longs lived near the mill-pond, and Mrs. Long had been in the habit of sending Jerry Coombs, the former watchman, a nightly lunch. So one evening she borrowed Davy Munn, and sent him down to the mill with a strawberry pie and a plate of cookies that would have tempted any living man. They were returned with dignified thanks, and Silas and his wife sat and exclaimed over the strange man's obstinacy, while Davy Munn and the eldest orphan despatched the despised viands. Mrs. Long told her story the next afternoon at Miss McQuarry's, where the village mothers had met to make a quilt for the Sawyer twins' bed. Every one agreed that John McIntyre certainly was a caution, and the hostess declared, with a sigh, that she was jist terrible feared he would bring retribution upon Sandy for his treatment of the minister.

Ella Anne Long remarked, between stitches, that his house was a sight to behold, and no mistake.

"Did you see into it with the spyglass?" inquired Mrs. Winters, from the other end of the quilt, glad to get a slap at the mischievous instrument.

"No, I didn't!" said Miss Long indignantly. "It was when Arabella and me were down there, pickin' strawberries in the old clearin'. You can ask Arabella, there, if you don't believe me."

Miss Arabella, with an apologetic glance at her sister-in-law, corroborated the statement. They had seen inside the door that day quite by accident, and the place was a dreary sight: a broken-down old table, and only a piece of a log for a seat, and a heap of rags and straw in an old bunk for a bed.

"Eh, poor man! poor buddy!" cried old lady Cameron pityingly. "An' him with such a fine Hielan' name, too!"

Mrs. Winters suggested that they make a raid upon the place some evening after he had left for the mill, and scrub and clean up. It was a disgrace to the village to have such conditions not a mile from your very door!

But old lady Cameron did not quite sanction such extreme measures. A man's home was his castle, her brother Hughie always said, and no one had any right to enter without his permission. So the quilting-bee ended in a great deal of talk, and John McIntyre's condition remained unbettered.

The Elmbrook Temperance League next took him up. Spectacle John Cross was president of the society, and was assured that it was drink that ailed John McIntyre. No one had ever seen him overcome with liquor, neither had he ever been known to go to Lakeview, where was the nearest point at which it could be obtained. But Spectacle John said you could never tell. He might run a private still in that old place away back in the swamp, and he just looked like the kind that could carry a gallon and yet walk steady. Spectacle John had met that sort often on his temperance campaigns.

So they sent invitations to John McIntyre to join their ranks, all of which he emphatically refused. Spectacle John received little encouragement from the milkstand. Old Hughie Cameron was of the opinion, having rastled it out one evening to the tune of "The Cameron Men," that to ask that poor buddy to join his bit of a society was like asking the folks at a funeral to come and play hop-scotch. Likely, the man never touched liquor; and, anyway, his trouble was a sad one, whatever it was, and needed a remedy that would go deeper.

While the village thus pondered over John McIntyre's case, there was one person who was slowly, but surely, piercing his armor of reserve. Ever since his first visit, the eldest orphan had felt the fascination of the wicked watchman growing, and gradually he fell into the habit of paying him a short visit every evening. He had various reasons for going. First, he really felt a strange affinity for this outcast. John McIntyre was very bad, he hated good people and law and order, and Tim was convinced that he also was the enemy of all such. Then, too, when the boys at school learned that he was McIntyre's intimate it threw an evil glamor over him. He added to it by dark hints of the plots he and the watchman were hatching; the breaking of the dam and the burning of the mill being among the smallest. Then there was that wonderful engine he was free to examine. And last of all, Tim noticed a strange and delightful circumstance that often attended his visits to McIntyre. When he had been spending an evening at the mill, old Hughie Cameron was often on the bridge as he came down the willow path; and he never failed to pat him on the head and slip a cent into his hand.

At first, Jake and Hannah were greatly exercised over the growing intimacy between their

boy and the wicked man who had defied the minister. They even had horrible visions of resorting to Mrs. Winters' extreme measures once more to keep their eldest away from the mill; but old Hughie Cameron allayed their fears. John McIntyre would never harm a child, he declared firmly. So, much relieved, the Sawyers let the boy have his way.

At first the man merely tolerated the child's presence in silence; but as he grew accustomed to it he sometimes caught himself glancing down the willow-bordered path to see if the little, hobbling figure, in the scant trousers and the big straw hat, were yet in sight. All conversation remained, for a time, one-sided. It consisted chiefly of a string of questions on the boy's part, interspersed with reluctant answers from the man. Sometimes, weary of seeking information unsuccessfully, Tim would deliver it himself, and would talk all evening about his past hard life. After some of its sad disclosures he noticed that his companion was less taciturn, and he seized such opportunities for wringing from him something of his views on religion.

"Who made this pond?" he asked one night, when the water was a radiance of golden ripples.

"I don't know," answered his companion shortly.

"But who d'ye s'pose made it?"

"I suppose it was Sandy McQuarry, when he put the mill here."

"How did he do it?"

"He dammed the creek."

"Oh, and who made the crick?"

"It was always there."

"Yes, but who made it in the first place?"

No answer.

"Was it God?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Oh, ain't you dead sure? Who could it 'a' been, then?"

Still silence.

"Was it God?"

"Yes."

Tim looked surprised. "Miss Scott, she says God made everything, but she never knew ole Mother Cummins, or she'd never 'a' said that. She don't know much, though," he added, with a sigh for the narrow experience of his Sunday-school teacher. "You don't s'pose God would 'a' let anybody like ole Mother Cummins live if He bothered much about things, do you?"

The man flashed a look of sympathy into the child's old, pinched face. This boy's problem was his. How could the Almighty care, and yet permit such things to be? John McIntyre had answered that question for himself by saying that the Almighty—if there were an Almighty—did not care; but when he looked into the child's hungry, questioning eyes his unbelief seemed inadequate.

"D'ye think He would?" persisted the boy.

John McIntyre hesitated. For the first time he recoiled from expressing his contempt for God and humanity. "Most people are bad, but——" He paused. Then, to his own surprise, he added: "There's your new father and mother, you know."

"Yes, God must 'a' made them, all right," agreed Tim emphatically. "Mebby he couldn't help folks like ole Mis' Cummins an' Spectacle John. Ole Hughie Cameron said Spectacle John was a son of Belial, an' I bet that's right, 'cause he won't let us go near daddy's mill. Say"—he looked up, and put the question in an awed whisper—"are you a son o' Belial, too? Silas Long said you was."

There was no reply to this, and the boy sat regarding John McIntyre thoughtfully. He was beginning to fear he was not so gloriously wicked as the village believed.

"Say, you ain't a—a infiddle, after all, are you?" he added, in a disappointed tone. And John McIntyre did not deny the charge.

Little by little, the man was inveigled into conversation. At first, his few remarks were merely about the engine or the lumber, as the boy followed him on his rounds through the mill. But the field gradually widened, until one night he was led to speak of his past—those days of love and peace, now separated from him by years of bitter sorrow. It was a little bird that opened the door into those golden days. The two incongruous figures were sitting, as usual, in the wide, dark

doorway. In front lay the shining water, in its feathery willow frame, and still rosy with the last faint radiance of the sunset. As the pond slowly paled to a mirror-like crystal, the moon, round and golden, rose up from the darkness of the Drowned Lands. It sent a silver shaft down into the shadowy ravine, and a gleam from the brook answered. Just as its light came stealing on through the willowy fringe to touch the waters of the pond there arose, from the dark grove opposite the mill, a rapturous song.

"What's that?" cried Tim, in startled joy.

"A catbird," answered John McIntyre.

"Oh, say! That's the little beggar that was meyowing jist now, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Billy Winters always said it was a wildcat, and was scarder'n a rabbit. Hello! There he goes again! Say! ain't he a little corker, though? Did you ever hear him before?"

"Yes."

"Any other place than here?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Far away."

"Where you uster live 'fore you came here?"

"Yes."

"Were there Canada birds an' blue jays there, too?"

"Yes."

"Any other kinds?"

"Yes."

"What were they?"

The man's face betokened a deep pain and reluctance. He sat for a moment, staring ahead, and then answered in a hushed tone, "There was one they called the hermit thrush."

"The hermit thrush," repeated Tim. "I've never sawn him. What does he say?"

"He says," began the man dreamily, "he says—'Oh'——" He stopped, as though afraid of what he had done. "I—I forget what he said," he added confusedly.

"Do you?" The boy's tone was disappointed. "Mebby if you think hard you'll remember it," he added encouragingly. "What color was it?"

"Brown."

"Did it sing like a robin?"

"No."

"Can't you remember one little, teenty speck of it?" incredulously.

"No."

"Aw, think hard. That's what the Dook tells me in school, and then it comes to me. Ole Mother Cummins uster lambaste me with a stick when I forgot things, but she jist walloped it all out of me. The Dook gives me a whackin' sometimes, too, but she can't lick for sour apples 'longside o' ole Mother Cummins. What did ye say was the bird's name?"

"The hermit thrush."

"Doesn't it ever sing here?"

"I don't think so, I've never heard it."

"If you could mind what it sings like I could listen for it."

The remark was broadly insinuating, but elicited no response.

"Where did you hear it?"

"Far away from here."

"In another country?"

"I guess so—yes."

"In Nova Scotia?"

The man turned sharply. "What made you say that?" he cried.

"I—we came from there," whispered the boy; "but you won't tell, will you?"

"No."

"Only Daddy an' Mammy Sawyer knows. Our father he was a bad man, so we don't tell. The kids don't mind him, but I do. He wasn't bad to us, but he done somethin' awful, an' then he ran away, an' our mother died, an' he sent us miles an' miles away to a city, an' we lived with old Mother Cummins. But I mind the ocean—it smelt like—ok, it smelt awful good! Did you ever smell the ocean?"

The man was supporting his head on his hand; his face was turned away.

"Oh, say! it's bully! It's somethin' like the smell o' the crick, jist below the falls, on a hot day—only—only different. That's why I play hookey so often down in the holler, 'cause it smells like the ocean."

Tim made his statement proudly. It was a wonderful privilege to boast of how bad you were, and be sure you would be unreproved.

"We had good times when we lived there, but when ole Mother Cummins got us it was different. She wasn't so awful bad at first, 'cause our father uster send money; but he stopped. I guess he must 'a' died, or run away farther. An' after that, say! didn't our ole woman uster hammer us? She'd get drunk an' sleep on the floor, an' I uster pinch her black an' blue an' stick pins into her for poundin' Joey!" His small, withered face was fierce, his old eyes were cruel. "An' one day she cut Lorry's head open with her stick; so we all lit out. I carried Joey for miles an' miles, an' then some folks took us to the Home, an' then Daddy an' Mammy Sawyer came. Do you s'pose God sent them for us? Miss Scott said He did. Did He? Eh?"

"I—I suppose so."

"You ain't dead sure about anything God does, are you?" asked Tim sympathetically. "Ain't you remembered about the harmless thrush yet?"

John McIntyre did not answer. He sat still so long, with his face in his hands, that the boy grew weary, and rising, hobbled homeward.

The man's gray head sank lower. His thin hands, hard, and worn with heavy toil, were trembling violently. His stooped shoulders, in their poor, thread-bare covering, heaved convulsively. For the first time in years he had dared to look back into the blossom-strewn past, and the sight had been too much for his strength.

His misfortunes had come upon him in a way that, at first, had left him no time to reflect. His home had gone, and then his friend, just at the time when he needed his help. Then had come greater trials. Sickness stalked hand in hand with poverty. One by one his children were laid away in the earth; and then toil and want and grief had at last taken her, his best beloved, and in her grave John McIntyre had buried happiness and hope and faith.

What had he left in life? His home, his loved ones, were gone—even Martin must be dead, or he would have come to him long ago. Nothing remained but misery, and distrust of his fellow-men—and hatred—hatred of the man who had defrauded him, and who was now, no doubt, living in wealth and prosperity.

And what had he done to deserve it all? That had always been John McIntyre's cry. Why must he and his be singled out for such suffering? Why should his innocent loved ones be the victims of a villain's rapacity?

And how he had worked to save them from want! Oh, God! how he had toiled, until his back was bent and his health broken! And it had all been of no use—no use!

He clenched his shaking hands, striving to gain control of himself. In the early days of his misfortunes the necessity for straining every effort had kept him from brooding upon his losses, and finally a numbness of despair had seized him. But to-night the child's artless talk had brought back vividly the old home scene. He could see it now, as he had seen it so often in the light of a summer evening. The sparkling sea, with the tang of salt water wafted up over his fields; the rippling stream, winding like a thread of gold down to the Bay of Fundy; his cozy home peeping from its orchard nest, and Mary at the doorway, singing their baby's lullaby; Martin's gay voice passing down the road; and in the purpling woods the tender song of the hermit thrush:

"*O hear all! O hear all! O holy, holy!*"

A wave of desperate longing for the old days swept over him; a very passion of loneliness and homesickness shook his desolate soul.

Why should he struggle against it? he asked himself. Why live on in misery, only to die in misery at the end? Why not end it now? There was no God, at least none that cared; and as for the future—he had laughed when the minister mentioned hell. What profounder wretchedness could it hold than all he had already endured?

He rose to his feet stealthily. His eyes were burning in his white face. He stepped cautiously along the bank of the pond to a place where the water was deep. He glanced about fearfully. His only feeling was one of dread lest he be intercepted. He slipped into the shadow of a pile of logs, then crept to the edge of the dark water. Suddenly he paused, startled. Something had rustled in the willows. It was only a muskrat; but as he stood, listening, another sound fell upon his ear, the sound of a voice singing a familiar hymn. There was something in the singer's tone, a compelling sweetness, that made John McIntyre pause on the brink of death to listen.

CHAPTER IX

THE SONG IN THE NIGHT

Though strife, ill fortune and harsh human need
Beat down the soul, at moments blind and dumb
With agony; yet, patience—there shall come
Many great voices from life's outer sea,
Hours of strange triumph, and, when few men heed,
Murmurs and glimpses of eternity.
—ABCHIBALD LAMPMAN.

Miss Ella Anne Long was busy "reddin' up" the parlor, for to-night the young people of the village who were musically inclined—and, for that matter, who wasn't?—were to hold a final practice for the Temperance Society's concert.

The Longs' home was the musical center of the village, the organ being kept as busy as the telescope, and Miss Long was the leading musician. Even Elsie Cameron could not compete with her, for Ella Anne was organist in the church, and had a voice that, when she wished, could drown out all the rest of the choir. Every one in Elmbrook was musically inclined, irrespective of talent. To "play a piece" or sing a solo at a public gathering was the great ambition of every young lady in the place. Masculine performance on any instrument, except a mouth-organ or a fiddle, which last was distinctly worldly, was regarded as rather inclining to effeminacy. But the men all sang, for, of course, it went without saying that every one could sing bass. Tenors were scarce, there being only one at present—a young Englishman who had come out to learn farming at Sandy McQuarry's, and who suffered from chronic huskiness.

Each of the sopranos had an attendant swain in the basses. That was a necessity to any smallest hope of enjoyment when the choir went abroad. To have a sweetheart who could sing alone in public was to be distinguished far above one's fellow-songstresses. Bella Winters once sang "The Larboard Watch" with Wes Long at the Glenoro Dominion Day picnic, and until this was transcended she was the envy of one and all. Ella Anne Long, of course, was the one who achieved even greater heights. She and Mack McQuarry sang "The Larboard Watch" at the next Elmbrook harvest home, while at one and the same time she played the accompaniment. No one had ever before conceived of such a triple triumph, and it was felt by all that Ella Anne would surely experience some disciplining misfortune to balance things. So, every one nodded her head and said, "I told you so," when Mack went off to Athabasca, or some such out-of-the-way corner of Canada, and married a half-breed, when Ella Anne had her wedding clothes all ready. And now she was no longer quite one of the young people of the village, and, besides, was receiving attentions from Sawed-Off Wilmott, a little widower, who ran the cheese factory, and who could not have sung even bass if he had had all his teeth.

Nevertheless, as Miss Long went about her duties she was watching eagerly for Mr. Wilmott's buggy. It was not for the reasons why a maiden usually looks for her lover, but because Davy Munn and the oldest orphan were sitting on the sidewalk at the doctor's gate, with mischievous designs upon her middle-aged admirer. As she stood on the porch, shading her eyes from the slanting rays of the sun, Sawed-Off's buggy came whizzing down the street, and Miss Long modestly withdrew. Two or three of the earliest arrivals had already entered by the store door, and Mr. Wilmott soon joined them. He had safely passed Scylla and Charybdis at the

doctor's gate, but a worse fate awaited him, for the Sawyer twins were there, and his youthful spirits proved so attractive that they appropriated him as their own, and kept him from even speaking to Ella Anne all evening.

On practice nights the whole village gathered at the Longs', the company dividing itself into three parts. Ella Anne's friends assembled in the parlor, Mrs. Long received the mothers in the kitchen, and Silas entertained on the store veranda.

The Elmbrook kitchen was a fine place to receive one's friends; it was not the tiny workshop now in fashion, but a big, roomy place, where the homemaker sacrificed to the household gods, with the stove a sort of shining high altar in the center, and the incense from the merry kettle curling up to the ceiling.

The frequenters of the milkstand got on the nail-kegs and packing-boxes of the veranda, and discussed astronomy and enjoyed the music. It was a fine situation for studying the stars, for the house stood at the end of the village, opposite the school, and commanded a view of the pond and the valley and a great stretch of sky.

The planet Mars, and its possible inhabitants, was under discussion when Spectacle John Cross came up the steps with a bundle of hymn-books under his arm.

"Ye see," Silas was explaining, "it ain't one o' yer ordinary stars. Lord love ye! it's a 'igh sight better'n that. It's a planet, that's wot it is, like our own world, an' it keeps a-spinnin' 'round the sun like our earth, too." He ended up with a descriptive sweep of his arm, and gazed triumphantly at his enemy.

"Did ye ever hear the likes o' such balderdash?" sneered Spectacle John, appealing to Jake Sawyer.

Jake passed his hands, in some perplexity, over the youngest orphan's curls. "Most folks'll tell ye the same, John," he said, regarding his partner doubtfully. "The doctor, there, now—look at the eddication he's had!—an' he says the same."

"It's my opinion," said the miller, "that the more book learnin' a man crams into his head the more common sense gets squeezed out. It stands to reason that there couldn't be room for everything unless his head was to swell like a punkin."

"Huh!" cried Sandy McQuarry impatiently. "Ony fool can see the world's round; but when folks go far enough to tell a body that pin-points like yon are as big as this world, that's jist clean ridic'l'us."

"Well," exclaimed Spectacle John, "if ye once get it fixed in yer head that this world's bumpin' 'round through the air like a football, there isn't anny fool yarn you're not ready to believe." He stopped suddenly. The Duke of Wellington was coming up the steps, and his remarks trailed off into coughs and incoherent murmurs about the weather. Spectacle John knew better than to air his scientific theories before the Duke. She gave a contemptuous sniff and passed into the parlor.

Silas Long chuckled. "John knows w'en to shut his mouth, don't ee, now, John?" he asked facetiously.

Sandy McQuarry grunted scornfully. "Losh! afore Ah'd be scared by a wumman!" he exclaimed witheringly.

Spectacle John looked sheepish. "There's weemin an' weemin," he announced meaningly. "I'm no more afraid of the ordinary run o' them than you, Sandy. I got a wife that can hold her own with annybody, and my word's law at home. But I'm not ashamed to say that woman's one too many for me. I've been a trustee," he ended up feelingly.

"Sandy thinks he's a mighty hand at managin' folks," put in William Winters, happy to second any one who lived in fear of the gentler sex. "But I'm willin' to make a bet right here that if he was to run again' the Dook she'd come out ahead."

"Ah'm willin' to take ye ony day, Weeliam. Ah'd like to see the wumman that'd get the upper hand o' me. Jist name yer bet, man."

"Hoots! toots!" cried Uncle Hughie in his stateliest manner. "Indeed, it is surely not making a bet on a lady you will be, whatever!"

"I'll tell ye!" cried Spectacle John, his eyes twinkling. "If you an' the Dook gets to argifyin', or gets into any difference, an' she gets the best o' the bargain, you'll promise William and all of us here that you'll go back to church and tell the minister you was a darn fool for the way you acted."

Sandy McQuarry's bristling brows came together, "Ah'll take ye!" he cried, slapping his knee fiercely. "Ah'd be a fool onyway, if Ah let a wumman scare me the way you did, John. Ah, ha! Here's his reverence now, comin' to tell ye about Muskoky, very like. Ah'll jist be biddin' ye a good-evenin'." He tramped down the steps as the tall form of the minister came into the ring of

light.

"Fine night," remarked each of the company in turn.

"We would jist be talkin' about the play-net Mars a minute ago, indeed," said Uncle Hughie Cameron, striving to cover Sandy's retreat.

"Yes, yes," said the minister with a sigh. "Astronomy's a wonderful subject—wonderful. The more we learn of the Creator's works, the more we wonder at His greatness and goodness."

"Eh! eh! it will jist be fearsome, indeed!" cried Uncle Hughie. "How far, now, would you be saying the sun is from us, Silas—ninety—now what would it be?"

"Ninety-five million mile!" declared the astronomer impressively. "There's a fine day's walk for ye!"

"Ninety-five million!" cried the blacksmith, astounded. "Are ye sure it's not feet ye mean, Si?" he asked hopefully.

"No—miles," was the inexorable answer. "Lord love ye, man! it's a good thing. If she was any nearer she'd burn us all to a frazzle!"

"Eh, now, ain't that a caution!" cried Jake Sawyer, with the air of one who has just had a narrow escape from destruction.

"Astronomy's a orful subject," continued Silas. "I sometimes wish I 'adn't meddled with the thing. It makes me feel like nothing—like a worm o' the dust."

"'When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers,'" quoted the minister, "'the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him or the son of man that Thou visitest him?'"

"That's it! that's jist it!" cried Silas. "The Psalmist knew! 'E must 'a' 'ad a telescope. D'ye think 'e 'ad?"

"Hoots!" cried Uncle Hughie. "How could the buddie? an' he would be livin' away back in the times when nobody even knew"—he added in a loud tone—"that the world was round." But Spectacle John had disappeared indoors, and the minister added:

"Yes, we have a great many advantages that the Psalmist never had, and the greatest is the knowledge that we need not be afraid. For He became flesh and dwelt among us, you know, Silas." A reverent silence fell over the little group.

At the farther end of the veranda a door led into the lamp-lit parlor. It was open, and from it now burst the opening notes of a rousing chorus. In Elmbrook there were fashions in songs, just as there were in the sopranos' hats. The former varied, not with the season, but with the sentiments of the people. One winter the Methodists held revival meetings for two months in the schoolhouse, and for nearly a year after it was considered very worldly to sing anything but hymns. The other extreme was reached one fall when Hank Winters came home for a visit from the States, and set all the village singing "coon songs."

This spring, and during the past winter, the rousing, Salvation Army variety of hymn was greatly in vogue. The opening chorus for the concert was of this kind, a stirring sort of semi-religious song, called "The King's Highway." It was with this the chorus now burst forth into tumultuous harmony:

"*Wherever you may be,*
Whatever you may see,
That would lead you into evil,
Say you nay, say you nay,
Be sure you take no heed,
They're trying to mislead;
Just keep along the middle
Of the King's highway!"

The verse was no extraordinary feat, but in the chorus the bass singers had a part calling for marvelous dexterity and tremendous speed. For, while the ladies sang leisurely, "Just keep along the middle of the King's Highway," the gentlemen were expected to get over about four times the space in the same time. They had to repeat the self-same warning a half dozen times, with sundry advices and variations concerning the turning to the right of the King's Highway and the left of the King's Highway, so many, and so complicated, that they arrived at the end gasping for breath. Spectacle John warned the sopranos again and again to go slowly, so as to admit of their overworked followers getting in all their parts about the middle, left and right. But Ella Anne Long was the real leader, and would wait for no man. She hastened along the King's Highway at such a pace that it was beyond the powers of human breath to keep up with her. Pete McQuarry declared that it kept a fellow puffing just to stay anywheres on the King's Highway, without

bothering about the middle; and Davy Munn did not even attempt the feat, but sang the air an octave lower.

They were scampering through the song for the third time when there was a stir at the door, and a group of four entered: Elsie Cameron and her brother Malcolm, with the minister's daughter and—actually—the busy doctor himself. It was the first time Elsie had attended one of the musical gatherings since her return, but she took her old place as simply and naturally as though she had never left it. Malcolm went over to the corner where the husky young Englishman stood, alone and unheard, and gave him some assistance with the tenor, while the doctor joined the other young men, and sang bass like a native.

They weathered through "The King's Highway" again, and sang a temperance anthem, and several other choruses, and then they all sat around the room, on the red and green plush chairs, and took a rest while Ella Anne and her mother passed around raspberry vinegar and layer-cake.

Spectacle John was just calling them all to order again for another chorus when the minister put his head in at the door. Marjorie was to get her hat, as they must be going in a moment, he announced, happily unconscious of the scorching glance from the region of the tenors, and would Elsie sing "Abide With Me" before he left?

The girl arose and went to the organ. Since her home-coming she had been regarded with some disapproval in Elmbrook social circles because of the promptness with which she answered an invitation to sing. It was considered much more genteel and modest to at first disclaim positively all musical ability, and to yield only after much importuning. Every one felt that, though Elsie had been away in the city, she ought to show a little backwardness.

"*Abide with me! fast falls the eventide,*
The darkness deepens. Lord, with me abide."

She sang, as she always did, with her heart as well as her voice. The song hushed the gay chatter in the room; it passed out to the group on the veranda, and their conversation ceased; it floated through the open windows and rang across the darkly luminous water of the pond. And there it reached the ear of a man with whom only despair and loss had been abiding, and who was fighting a losing battle with these dark companions. The sound of the old hymn, that had been his children's lullaby, arrested John McIntyre on the brink of self-destruction:

"Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day,
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away,
Change and decay in all around I see,
O Thou, who changest not, abide with me!"

A trembling weakness seized him. He shrank back against the heap of logs. He seemed to have no power against the imperative sweetness of that voice. It called him away, it called him up. He clutched the rough bark of a log, and stood listening till the song swept on to its triumphant ending:

"*Heaven's morning breaks and earth's vain shadows flee,*
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!"

The last echo died away in the shadow of the willows. John McIntyre stood a moment, dazed by the glimpse into the depths to which his despair had brought him. He glanced down at the dark water and shuddered, then staggered weakly to his old place at the mill door, and sank in the sawdust. Something, not a prayer, but nearer it than anything he had uttered for years, burst from him—the name of his Maker, spoken unwittingly, in an abandon of weakness. "My God!" he whispered shakingly. The strength of desperation which had driven him on was gone, but his despair remained. And so he lay, spent and weak, in utter blackness of soul, not knowing that the prayer of the song had been answered, and that, though he knew Him not in the darkness, his Father was abiding with him still.

CHAPTER X

THE SECRET OF THE BLUE SILK GOWN

O love, can the tree lure the summer bird
  Again to the bough where it used to sing,

When never a throat in the autumn is heard,
And never the glint of a vagrant wing?
—ARTHUR STRINGER.

The autumn days came, and all the landscape within the range of Granny Long's telescope turned golden with its wealth of harvest. The apples dropped, rosy-cheeked, from the orchard trees, the corn and the pumpkins ripened in the garden. All day the binder sang in the yellow fields, and at night a great harvest moon hung alone in the violet heavens. As soon as the first blue haze of autumn settled over the ravine the mill closed, and the men scattered to work in the fields, or at threshing-bees, or went farther north to the winter lumber camps.

John McIntyre did not leave, as people had expected. He remained in his old shanty by the Drowned Lands, harvesting his little crop of potatoes, or laying up his stock of winter wood from the adjacent swamp. The village saw him only on the rare occasions when he came up to the flour-mill or store for provisions. But he did not live a solitary life, for the eldest Sawyer orphan had now become his chum and confidant, and would have gone down to visit him almost every evening, even if old Hughie Cameron had reversed proceedings and paid him to stay away.

When the silent, dark man was removed from the village, and there was no likelihood of encountering him on the street in the evening, Dr. Gilbert Allen experienced a feeling of relief. Every time he met the man's disdainful gaze, the remembrance of his accusation returned, and with it a feeling of self-abasement. He longed to vindicate himself, to put it beyond the range of possibility that any man could say he had been dishonest. But that meant a great sacrifice, one that Gilbert was not yet prepared to make.

When the first chill of the waning year came the doctor had a new patient. All summer Miss Arabella Winters' health had been steadily failing. She never complained, nor did she seem to have any disease, but just pined quietly away. Susan scolded and petted and doctored her, and made her wear flannel on her chest, but all to no avail. Miss Arabella, in her gentle, unobtrusive fashion, grew steadily worse. She seemed to have lost not only the power, but the desire, to get better.

Elsie Cameron had long noted the change in her friend, and strove in every way to arouse her. One day she organized a nutting party down into Treasure Valley, a still, smoky autumn day, when the rainbow leaves floated down and rested lightly upon the earth with a fairy touch. The orphans came, of course, and they flew up and down the hill, gathering hazelnuts and red berries and scarlet leaves, while Miss Arabella strayed here and there, her arms full of purple asters, until the look of hopelessness left her eyes and her face took on a pretty pink flush. But the twins strayed away, and before they were found the amethyst mists of the autumn evening were filling the valley. Miss Arabella took a severe cold, and the next day she went to bed.

Mrs. Winters scolded the whole picnic party, Arabella most of all; and having used all her medical skill upon her to no avail, she grew alarmed, and called in Dr. Allen.

He came to see the quiet, patient little woman nearly every day for a week, and at the end of that time was forced to confess that she was growing steadily worse, and that there was something wrong with her that quite baffled his skill.

He left her house one afternoon, and went slowly down the walk with a very grave face. Polly called after him from the veranda that times were still very slow, but he did not hear, and he almost stumbled against Elsie Cameron as she came through the gateway carrying a covered bowl.

"Ah, you are the very person I want to consult," he said, his face brightening. "I wish you would do something for my patient in there."

"Is her cold worse?"

"No, it isn't a cold that ails her; I confess I don't know what it is. There seems to be some secret trouble weighing on her mind. I wish you could discover what it is, and see if you can help her. I am doing her no good, and there's no doubt that she is steadily growing weaker."

His manner was very serious, and Elsie entered the little house with a foreboding at her heart. He was right. Some strange trouble had been pressing upon Arabella's mind all summer, she felt sure. She passed through the house and placed the bowl on the kitchen table.

Mrs. Winters was there, and the place was dazzlingly clean. "There!" she exclaimed, with a sigh of satisfaction, "I've polished the stove and scrubbed the floor, an' put up five quarts o' pickled pears, an' to-morrow I'm goin' to house-clean the front part. Arabella always kept things kind of in order, but she was never anything of a manager. If you were thinkin' o' stayin' a little, Elsie, I'd run over an' look after my bread, an' then give Hannah a hand with her sewing. It's a caution how them twins get through their clothes. They ought to be well whipped for it. Now, that soup's just awful nice, Elsie. It was good of your ma to send it, an' it's only slops like that Arabella'll take. No, she ain't a bit better, the doctor says; an' I say it jist looks like as if she was too stubborn to quit bein' sick, now she's started. If yous folks hadn't gone gallivantin' off down

the crick that day this would never 'a' happened. Arabella's too old for such foolishness, anyhow. Well, I'll run home. Tell her I'll be back in an hour or so an' shake out the mats."

Elsie went into the spare bedroom, where Miss Arabella lay, propped up on pillows. Her little, wan face brightened at the sight of her visitor.

"Oh, Elsie, is it you? It's good o' you to come." She looked anxiously past her. "Where's Susan?"

"She's gone home, and I'm going to sit with you till she comes back."

Miss Arabella tried not to look relieved. "D'ye think it would hurt me much to have the curtains put back, Elsie? I'd love to see out."

"Of course not. You shall have the window taken right out if you want it." The girl rolled up the green paper blind, pushed back the stiff lace curtains, and opened the window from the top. It was a perfect October day, and Miss Arabella felt the gentle breeze, and saw the sumach at her gate, a patch of vivid scarlet against the deep blue of the sky. At a corner of the window the boughs of an old apple-tree, still green, looked in and nodded in a friendly manner. The invalid looked bright and interested for a few minutes, then sighed and grew wan and listless again.

Elsie pulled her chair up close to the bedside.

"Arabella, dear," she said earnestly, "what is the matter with you?"

"I—I—guess it's jist that cold I caught, hangin' on. Susan says it is."

"Dr. Allen doesn't think so. He says he doesn't know what is making you ill, and Susan doesn't know, and I don't know. But you do, Arabella, and, oh, I wish you'd tell me!"

She put her two strong, young hands over the thin little one lying on the coverlid. Her deep eyes were full of sympathy. A slow flush rose into Miss Arabella's face. She turned away from the girl's steady gaze.

"Elsie," she whispered, "he's right. There—there is something the matter with me, and I—I think—I'm pretty sure—I'm going to die."

"No, no, Arabella! You mustn't say that—you really mustn't!"

The invalid was perfectly calm. "I think I am, though," she said quietly. "It's about the best thing I can do now, since——" She paused and turned away her head again.

Elsie slipped to her knees by the bedside. "Won't you tell me what is wrong, Arabella?" she whispered. "Something's been troubling you all summer. I've noticed it ever since I came home."

"Yes, it's jist about that time. But it can't be helped now. And it won't be long till it's all over. And, Elsie"—she glanced around, as though fearful of being overheard—"I'm goin' to leave you something!"

"Oh, Arabella! don't!" cried the girl, tears rising to her eyes. "I can't bear to hear you talk like that. You'll be better in a day or two."

Miss Arabella shook her head firmly. "No, Susan says I've got stubborn, an' I guess she's right; because I don't seem to want to bother about getting better. But I'd like you to have something to remember me by, Elsie. You were always different from the other girls, an' never acted as if I was old an' queer, an' I'm goin' to leave you—something."

She lay still for a few moments while her companion regarded her with sorrow-filled eyes. "Elsie," she whispered suddenly, "if I tell you something—something awful, mind you, will you promise never, never to tell it to a living soul? Not even after I'm gone?"

Elsie looked at her half alarmed. "Oh, Arabella!" she stammered, "of course I wouldn't tell—if you—that is if you'd really like to tell me."

Miss Arabella's cheeks were growing pale. "Yes, I'd better tell you. I'll have to if I—I leave it to you. Run out an' lock the door, Elsie—the back door, too, and bring Polly in. Somebody might come in an' see it."

Elsie obeyed, with a feeling of growing apprehension. She had evidently stirred up depths of which she had never dreamed. When she returned the invalid was half sitting up in bed, flushed with excitement. She pointed to the gay Red Riding-Hood upon the dresser. "There's a key behind her, just inside the wolf," she whispered. "It unlocks that bottom drawer, an' you hand me out what's there."

Elsie opened the drawer and took out a large parcel, done up in brown paper. Miss Arabella took it tenderly, and for a few moments lay smoothing it gently. Then, slowly and tremblingly, she untied the string and let a billow of sky-blue silk roll out upon the bed.

Elsie gave a little exclamation of admiration. "Oh, Arabella, what a lovely thing! It looks as though it had been intended for an old-fashioned wedding dress."

"That's just what it was for," whispered Arabella, with drooping head.

The girl looked at her for a moment, and then, with a woman's intuition, she divined the secret. She sank upon her knees again and put her arms about the shrinking little figure.

"Yours, Arabella?" she whispered. "Was it intended for you?"

Miss Arabella nodded. Her head went down on her friend's shoulder. The girl patted her lovingly, as though she had been a hurt child. "There, there, dear," she said soothingly, "tell me all about it. I won't tell, you know I won't."

"Do you promise, sure and certain, Elsie?" came the frightened whisper.

"Yes, sure and certain."

"I don't think I could stand it if Susan an' Bella were to know. Even after I'm gone I'd like it kept a secret. I guess I'm foolish, an' Susan says there's no fool like an old fool, but I jist can't help it."

She lay back again on her pillow, her thin fingers passing caressingly up and down the shining folds of silk. She was silent for some minutes, and at last, with much halting, she began the story of the blue silk gown. She told in a shy whisper of the lover of her girlhood days. She had met him a long time ago, while on a visit to an aunt, away over in Bruce County. He was foreman in the mill there, and he was—well, she couldn't exactly tell what he was like, he was so awful nice. Through the sentences Elsie Cameron could make out a picture of him: big, handsome, honest, whole-hearted, and as tender as a woman with his shy little sweetheart; but in Miss Arabella's worshiping eyes he was a very demigod.

His home was down in Nova Scotia, the story went on, his father and mother lived there alone on the home farm, and some day he was to take her there. And then she had come home, and her mother had helped her make her clothes for her wedding day. And once he had come to Elmbrook and had taken her to a circus at Lakeview, and they had seen this piece of silk in a store window. He had said it was just the color of her eyes—Miss Arabella blushed and hung her head at this confession—and he had gone right in and bought it, in spite of her. He was just that kind, always giving other folks everything. He had given her Polly, too, had sent her all the way from Halifax after he went back. He had taught her to say "Annie Laurie"—that was the name he always called her. But he had not taught Polly that other dreadful thing she said; she learned that from the men on the ship.

It was while he was still working over in Bruce County that the day was set for their wedding, and she and her mother were planning how she should have the blue silk made, when he wrote that he had had an accident. He had been almost killed by the saw in the mill, and he would have died only that a boy who worked there saved his life. "Bert" was the boy's name; she did not remember his last one. He set a great store by that boy after that, and helped to send him to school, and to put him through college to make him a doctor. That took a lot of money, of course, and she said they had better wait until the boy was old enough to help himself. Martin didn't want to, but Susan said they must; and while they were waiting he went back to Nova Scotia to take care of the old folks. Then they both died, and he found that his father didn't own a cent; everything belonging to him was gone. A man had cheated the old people out of it. So now he had nothing to offer her, he said, and so he started away West to make a new home. He had wanted her to come with him then, but her mother had died the summer before, and Susan managed her affairs. And Susan said no, she was not strong enough to go away out West and rough it, and she had bidden Arabella write him a letter saying she would wait till he had a proper home ready. Susan was always a great manager. Here Miss Arabella sighed deeply. So she had let him go away alone, and for a long time she heard from him regularly; then only at long intervals, and at last not at all. He had taken up land in Alberta, but everything seemed to go against him. The crops were frozen the first year and the next year his cattle died. Then just about this time he heard that his best and oldest friend, away down in Nova Scotia—old John, he always called him—was in great trouble, had lost everything through the same man that had got his own property. Old John had left the place and gone away, no one knew where, and he was writing here and there hunting him. At last he got word that his friend had gone to the Klondyke. He thought he would be far more likely to make money there, so he sold his ranch and went away north to find John and make a fortune for her. That was five years ago last spring, and she had never heard from him since. But she had never quite given up hope until this last summer. She had always kept the blue silk, hoping that she might even yet wear it some day. But last May she had noticed it had begun to ravel; see—she held it up to the light—that was a sure sign. Something told her, the minute she saw it, she would never wear it. Likely he was dead; and she was going to die very soon herself. Yes, she was; and she knew Dr. Allen thought so, too.

She stopped, and closed her eyes to hide the rising tears. A secret of so many years' growth could not be uprooted without some pain.

There was a moment's silence. Polly craned her neck to see into the room, and murmured,

"Oh, Annie Laurie! Annie Laurie!" in a melancholy tone.

Elsie drew a deep breath. "How long ago is it since you first met him, Arabella?" she whispered.

"Fifteen years, an' I never told a soul I was waitin' all this time. Susan never said anything about him, and everybody thought he was dead."

"And this boy that he educated, Arabella—what about him? Didn't he help when his friend needed it so badly?"

"No; he kind of forgot about it, I guess. Young folks is often like that, you know. You see, he jist put him through high school an' helped him some, at first, in college, an' learnin' doctorin' seems to take an awful long time. But I guess the boy must 'a' forgot about him, or he'd 'a' been able to come back before this. You won't ever tell, Elsie, will you?"

"No, no, Arabella! Never!"

"Mebby I'm foolish, but I can't bear to think o' Susan knowin' I was waitin' all this time, an' Bella would laugh, an' William, too. But I told you, 'cause when I die I want you to have this dress to wear on your wedding day. I intended to give it to you, anyway, jist as soon as I found out I wasn't ever goin' to wear it."

"Oh, Arabella!" There was a choking lump in Elsie's throat. "You must not talk like that! You must not! You don't know that he's dead. He may be on the way home now, for all you know. No! no!" she added, pressing the blue silk back into the owner's hands, "I won't take it! I just won't! You just cheer up, and wait a little longer, dear, and who knows but you may hear any day that he's coming?" She was growing radiantly hopeful.

Miss Arabella looked up with hopeful eyes, but shook her head. "No, it's no use, Elsie. It's awful good o' you, and I used to feel like that, too; but I've waited too long. I guess I'm jist tired," she added pathetically.

"Arabella," whispered the girl, with heightening color, "have you—don't you ever pray about it?"

"I used to, but lately—ever since that dress gave way—I—I kind o' gave way, too. An' it seemed wicked, anyhow—like prayin' for dead folks, the way Catholics does, and I knew Mr. Scott would think it was awful of me."

The beautiful eyes looked at her despairingly.

"Oh, Arabella! Don't you care about me? Think how lonesome I'll be without you—— What's that?"

She was interrupted by a scrambling, tearing noise in the region of the old apple-tree. For an instant a strange object outside darkened the window, there was a shriek, a splintering crash, and down from the apple boughs, breaking a window-pane in its head-long descent, and landing upon the veranda floor with a terrible bang, came the black-haired twin of the Sawyer orphans!

Miss Arabella sat up with a cry of alarm. Polly gave a long squall, and shouted out that times were very slow indeed, and Elsie sprang up, and, unlocking the door, ran to the rescue.

The black-haired twin was scratched and torn and disheveled, and was howling lustily, but the young lady who picked her up showed her small sympathy. "Lorena Sawyer," she demanded solemnly, "where did you drop from?"

"I was sittin' up in the apple-tree," roared the fallen one, "an' the mean ole thing busted, an' I—I—tu-m-bled!"

"You were up at the window, listening to what Arabella and I were saying! You know you were!"

The child nodded. "O' course," she answered innocently. "An' say, Elsie"—she began to wipe away her tears—"if Arabella's fellah doesn't come back, will you give me an' Lenny a bit o' the silk for our dolls' dresses?"

Elsie caught her by the arm and shook her.

"Hush!" she cried, glancing toward the open window in dismay. "Arabella'll hear you, and if you tell—if you breathe a word of it, she'll get sick and die; do you understand?"

"But will y' give us some of the blue silk?" asked the black-haired twin, with orphan-like persistence.

"Elsie!" It was Miss Arabella's voice. "Elsie, come here quick!"

With a parting warning to the culprit, the girl ran back to the bedroom in deep concern.

Surely this shock would be too much for the invalid, and now she certainly would die.

"Arabella!" she cried in amazement, as she reached the bedroom door, "what are you doing?"

For the sick woman was sitting on the edge of the bed, dressing herself in trembling haste. She turned upon the alarmed girl, the fire of resolution in her eyes.

"I'm going to get up," she answered firmly. "I ain't going to die. That child heard every word I said."

"But, Arabella," began the bewildered nurse, "I——" She stopped, unable to divine the connection between Lorry's eavesdropping and this sudden determination to live. "Don't be frightened. I'll make her promise she won't tell."

"She might keep her word, an' she mightn't; an' if Susan an' Bella was to find out I'd died because he never came back an' left me an old maid, I couldn't rest in my grave. I jist couldn't! An' she might let it out, Elsie, now mightn't she?"

Elsie paused a moment. She was about to reassure her, but checked herself. Evidently soothing was not what the invalid needed.

"Yes, Arabella," she said honestly, "she might."

CHAPTER XI

THE COMING OF ROSALIE

Silvery soft by the forest side,
Wine-red, yellow and rose,
The Wizard of Autumn, faint-blue eyed,
Swinging his censer, goes.
—ABCHIBALD LAMPMAN.

As the tenth of October approached, there was but one subject of interest in the township of Oro—the Elmbrook fall fair. "The show," it was called, the name indicating that there could be only one. It was as much a social as an agricultural function. Oro was largely a Scottish township, and on show day there was a gathering of the clans from far and near. Old friends who never saw each other between fairs, met on that day, and had a grand review, both in Gaelic and English, of the year's doings, and the alien who did not "have" the former language missed half the benefit of the institution.

On the evening before the fair, Gilbert was surprised by a visit from Malcolm Cameron. The boy had left for college only two weeks before, but, like many other sons of Oro, he had come back for "the show."

"Say," he began, balancing himself on the corner of the doctor's desk, "I'm going to ask you a most awfully big favor."

"Ask away," said the other, smiling; "it's granted, if I can do it."

"Oh, say, you're the best chap in the country. Elsie would kill me if she knew, but you won't let on, will you? I've got to take her to the show in our single buggy. Jim's taking mother and Uncle Hughie in the double rig, and all our truck has to come home in it, and you know—well—Marjorie's going with her father and mother, and I might drive her home if Elsie had some one to go with, and I thought—if you hadn't made any other arrangements, I thought, perhaps——"

"That Miss Cameron might come home with me?" interposed Gilbert, coming to his aid. "Why, I'd be delighted; that is, if she wouldn't mind."

"Oh, Elsie'd be tickled to death!" cried Elsie's brother, growing reckless in his gratitude. "Say, doctor, it's awfully decent of you. You see, I won't see Marjorie again till Christmas, likely—and—you know——"

"Yes, yes, I understand," said Gilbert sympathetically. "I wonder if I might ask to take your sister there, and you'd have two drives with Miss Scott," he added, with wonderful generosity.

"I thought of that myself," said Malcolm ingenuously, "but mother wouldn't let Elsie do that, and it would just be like Mrs. Scott to object, too; but they won't say anything about just driving home. You'll ask Elsie at the show, will you? You're a brick; and don't give it away, or she'd pull all my hair out when we got home."

The Elmbrook fair was held in the Agricultural Hall, about two miles from the village. Those who had no horses started off on the happy means of transportation called "chancing it." This consisted in walking along the highway for a short distance, on the sure chance of being picked up by some passing vehicle, for an Oro buggy was like a city street car, and always held one more.

Gilbert started out alone, and overtook Hannah and Jake Sawyer straying along the dusty roadside, early for once in their lives, having been spurred to the unusual achievement by the energy of the orphans.

Little Joey trotted between them, but Tim had gone to the show in the morning, with Keturah, the cow, and Isaac and Rebekah and the pumpkins; and the twins were far ahead, their parents knew not where. Gilbert took Hannah and Joey in with him, and they joined the long line of vehicles that had already formed and was winding swiftly down the highway.

Overhead the sky was deeply brilliant, and near the horizon a tender, misty blue. The golden landscape was lit with patches of gay woodland, and here and there by the roadside a scarlet maple, a clump of flaming sumach, or the blood-red vine of the woodbine. High up on the top of a dead tree-trunk, in the center of a smoky hollow, a flicker was shouting out derisively, "Tut, tut, tut, tut, tut!" in scorn of all this frivolous humanity gone a-fairing.

The procession crossed the railroad track just as the afternoon express went thundering past. The conductor caught sight of the doctor's buggy, and blew him a salute that set all the horses upon their hind legs in indignant alarm.

A smart vehicle dashed past in a cloud of dust. It was Miss Long, driving her own horse, with Sawed-Off Wilmott by her side, his chestnut driver having been sent on ahead in charge of a friend.

"Ella Anne's goin' to show her horse," said Hannah admiringly. "She's took first prize every year for ever so long. She's a wonderful driver."

"Dere's Lorry!" screamed Joey, pointing to a little tousled black head peeping from between Malcolm Cameron and his sister, just a little in advance.

"Elsie's awful good to her," said Hannah gratefully. "Her an' Arabella Winters jist makes a pet o' that child. Lorry says they've got a secret, the three o' them, and she feels that big about it you never saw the likes! Why, that's Lenny's voice, ain't it?"

From a buggy a little farther down the line greetings were being shrieked back to the black-haired twin. Hannah drew a deep sigh of content.

"Well, now, there's every single one o' them settled," she exclaimed happily. "If Jake jist gets a chance, now, an' Timmy gets a prize for his pumpkins, we jist won't have anythin' more to ask."

The Elmbrook fair ground was a long field, with a big, barn-like building at one end. Gilbert had often passed the place before, and found it silent and grass-grown; but now it was thronged with people, and resounding with a joyous bedlam of all the noises that all the farms in Oro, joined together, could produce. Horses neighed, cattle bawled, sheep bleated, hens cackled, babies cried and boys shouted. A merry-go-round, that charged only five cents for a horseback ride, was whirling giddily to the tune of "The Maple Leaf Forever." As the doctor guided his horse carefully through the thronged gateway Joey spied the twins, already mounted astride the largest team, and spinning around with joyous shrieks. A man with a wheel of fortune was shouting to the passers-by to come and take a turn, and make money enough to buy a farm. A row of tents, each with its roaring proprietor in front, held all sorts of wonderful spectacles, from a three-headed pig to a panorama of Queen Victoria's Jubilee. In front of a large tent, set off in one corner, a solemn, stout man, wrapped in a white winding-sheet, was marching to and fro, ringing a funereal bell, and calling out in melancholy tones that this was the last chance for dinner.

But above all the various clamor one sound arose, penetrating, triumphant, the sound that was the true voice of the Elmbrook fair, and without which it would surely have died away in silence—the high, thrilling skirl of the bagpipes. The piper, splendid in kilt and plaid and bare knees, was marching magnificently from the hall to the racing track. Lesser beings had to push and jostle through the throng, but he had a long lane sacred to his own footsteps, and no matter what new attraction appeared, he always had his following of gaping admirers.

Young ladies, with their attendant swains, in holiday attire, wandered about arm in arm, eating peanuts. Some lovers, of the old-fashioned type, who plainly knew very little of the requirements of fashion, went about hand in hand, and were the object of many witty remarks on the part of those who followed the more up-to-date method. Farmers with long beards, their backs bent with honest toil, collected around the show horses, or sat in the high buggies, round-shouldered and content, and smoked and chewed and spat, and were, withal, supremely happy. Whole family circles, the young father proudly carrying the baby, the mother holding as many as possible by the hand, revolved in an aimless but joyous orbit. Old women in plaid shawls gathered in groups near the piper's avenue, and talked a continuous stream of Gaelic.

The hall, containing the product of the women's deft fingers, stood near the gates. At one side

was a long shed devoted to the display of farm produce, and the homely place was beautiful with scarlet apples, golden pumpkins, cabbages opening like great, pale-green roses, and heaps of purple grapes and plums. Opposite this, in a corner, the cattle and sheep, and other farm stock, were herded, each living creature lifting up its voice in protest against the sudden disturbance of its hitherto even and well-ordered life. At the end of the field, opposite the gate, a rocky and uneven road, in the shape of an ellipse, served as the race track. A grand-stand, formed by nature from a grassy knoll, covered with sweet-smelling pines, rose at one side, and made a convenient and delightful resting place.

Having handed Hannah and Joey over to Jake, who arrived in a neighbor's buggy, just behind them, Gilbert tied his horse and wandered about, shaking hands and looking at the prizes. He was captured by Tim and Davy, the former in a state of wild excitement, because his pumpkins had taken first prize, and Davy's only second. On the other hand, Keturah, his cow, had taken only third; but old Sandy McKitterick had said that Spectacle John was judge, and that he didn't know a cow from a giraffe. And Isaac and Rebekah had taken first, anyhow, and the doctor must come and see the red tickets on them. Gilbert started off through the crowd, but fell a captive by the way. As he passed a Gaelic-speaking group of checked shawls he was grasped violently by the sleeve and forced into the circle.

"There she will be now. Jist be takin' a look at her, whatefer. Och, hoch! this is what you would be doing!" And the young doctor smiled radiantly and blushed like a schoolboy, for there was Mrs. McKitterick herself, surrounded by an admiring crowd, and enjoying her first show in ten years! The hero was petted and praised in two languages, and clapped on the back and admired, until he was overwhelmed with confusion. He was rescued from his embarrassment by the impatient orphan and dragged off to witness the triumph of Isaac and Rebekah. When the geese had been sufficiently admired, and even poor Keturah's small achievement duly noted, the doctor escaped, and making a wide detour of the tartan shawls, found his way to the grand-stand. Here, seated on the dry pine-needles, under a spreading tree, was a group of three: Malcolm Cameron, with his sister and the minister's daughter.

"Hello, doctor!" cried the boy joyfully. "I've been looking all over for you. Come along. We're going to the hall."

"What's to be seen there?" asked Gilbert, helping the ladies to rise.

"Well, for one thing, there's your new mitts."

"Hush, Malcolm!" cried his sister. "Mrs. McKitterick wanted it kept a secret."

"Great Caesar! Would you let a pair of shackles like that be sprung on an innocent man without a moment's warning?"

"What's this?" asked Gilbert, in the alarm that the name of old Mrs. McKitterick always raised in his breast. "What's going to happen now?"

"It's only a pair of mittens, Dr. Allen," said Miss Marjorie. "Mrs. McKitterick knit them, and if they take first prize they are to be given to you."

"It was too bad to tell," said Elsie.

"No, it wasn't!" cried her brother. "They're to be presented to him at Christmas, and he'll need three months to get resigned. Come along and see them."

As they threaded their way toward the hall Malcolm glanced at the other young man significantly. Gilbert understood.

"Miss Cameron," he said, "I am all alone in my buggy. Won't you drive home with me?"

She glanced up at him with one of her swift, searching looks. "Did Malcolm ask you to relieve him?" she whispered. This strong, grave girl did not often laugh, Gilbert had noticed, but when she was amused her eyes danced. They were sparklingly radiant now.

He felt his face growing hot. "I—I——" he began.

"Oh, never mind," she cried, and this time she permitted her lips to join her eyes in a smile. "Don't apologize. I know why he did it. He's so transparent, poor lad. I knew last night, when he went over to see you, that he had some tremendous scheme on foot."

"But you are not going to punish me for his sins, surely?" said Gilbert, recovering. "If you knew with how much pleasure I grasped the opportunity you would come. Won't you?"

"Oh, yes," she answered frankly. "It would be too bad to spoil poor Malc's happy day; and besides," she added, with a return of her grave dignity, "I am sure I shall enjoy the drive, thank you."

Gilbert felt strangely grateful. The girl always made him feel as though she were immeasurably above him. "Because she really is, I suppose," he concluded, as he watched her, and thought of all she was sacrificing, silently, for the careless, happy boy walking so gaily ahead.

Yes, she was very noble, he confessed. And then he sighed, he did not know why.

They squeezed their way into the building and passed slowly around. The long tables were piled with every sort of work that a woman's needle might encompass, and while the two girls examined each exhibit minutely, going into raptures over this or that, the two young men gazed vacantly about in weary bewilderment. There were doilies and tidies and pillow-covers of all patterns, crocheted lace and knitted lace and lace made every other way. There was painting on china and satin and velvet and silk and every other known fabric, and the walls were hung with homespun blankets, quilts and floor rugs.

Notwithstanding the growing display and keen competition that each successive fair brought, there were those who had been winners of first prizes ever since the Elmbrook show was instituted, and would probably always be. The Elmbrook prize-list was a stable institution, and if any one but Ella Anne Long should have taken first for managing a horse, or Bella Winters for painting apple blossoms on white velvet, or old Miss McQuarry for bread and butter, all Oro would have felt uneasy, and folks would have begun to doubt the stability of the British Empire.

For example, there was Mrs. Spectacle John Cross's quilt. It had taken first prize for the last ten years, and was likely to do so for as many more. It hung resplendent now, like a triumphal banner, the conqueror of yet one more campaign. It was a remarkable quilt, to be sure, and no wonder all competitors faded before it. It was composed entirely of small pieces of silk and velvet, sewed together in that style known as crazy patchwork. Nevertheless, there was nothing haphazard about their arrangement. The colors were put together so as to represent a landscape. A large round sun, of pumpkin-colored silk, with rays of red satin flying from it, arose from behind a mountain of green velvet. The sky was of blue silk, with white plush clouds, and in the foreground bloomed a flower garden of such various colors that the eye grew dazzled in contemplation.

"Here's your Minjekahwun, doctor," whispered Malcolm, grasping Gilbert's arm. "Ain't they lurid? Oh, crickey! they've got first prize! You're in for it! You'll look like the prize quilt when you get inside 'em."

The future owner of the mittens surveyed them in some dismay. They were long and roomy, even for his brawny hands, and of many and vivid colors. He looked around appealingly. Elsie Cameron's face was grave, but her eyes were laughing, while little Miss Scott was in a fit of merriment.

"Cheer up," cried Malcolm encouragingly. "They're the very thing to catch the public. You've got the purple and the orange, and that'll suit Spectacle John's crowd; and the green'll appeal to the Catholics over on the flats; and the whole thing looks like Highland tartan. Why, there isn't a nationality in Oro that'll be able to resist you when you wear them."

They emerged from the crowded building into the brilliant light of outdoors, and Gilbert had just helped his companion down the steep, rickety steps, when a new sound arose above the babel of the fair, and quenched for a moment even the scream of the bagpipes. It came from the highway, a hoarse "honk, honk," strange, and yet, to Gilbert, familiar. An astonished stillness fell over the group around the gate. The whole show, in fact, stood wide-eyed and agape with wonder, for what should be coming up the road, moving entirely of its own accord, without horse or other visible means of locomotion, but a huge red double buggy, with wheels like a stone-crusher, and the appearance of a threshing-machine! It paused at the gate, and a clear, gay voice called, "Good-afternoon, Dr. Allen!"

With a hasty word of apology, only half uttered, Gilbert was down the steps and standing by the motor-car. When the best thing possible happens to a man, the thing far too good to be dreamed of, it is at first unbelievable. But there she was, surely, Rosalie, her very self, in a long tan motoring coat, with a filmy scarf tied under her dimpling chin, her cheeks pink, her blue eyes dancing!

"Oh!" cried Gilbert, too overcome with joy for coherent speech, "it can't be you!"

"Yes, it's me," trilled Rosalie, laughing at her own lapse of English. "Here's Aunt Eleanor, and Maud, and all the rest of us!"

He greeted them in a half-dazed manner. He could see no one but Rosalie, could realize nothing but the dazzling joy of her coming.

He scarcely listened even to her explanation of their appearance. They had started north on a short tour, but had never dreamed of going so far. They had spent the night at a friend's in Lakeview, and thought they must run out here and see him and his practice in their primitive state. Would they come in? Why, of course they would! She wanted to get nearer to that gorgeous piper, not to speak of the hens and ducks and pigs. And did he raise geese and turkeys himself? And had he taken a prize?

Gilbert helped the ladies to alight. He was well acquainted with Rosalie's aunt and sister, and shook hands with the elder woman warmly. She had ever been a good friend to him, and had helped him many a time when Rosalie had contrived to make him miserable. The two young men he had met before. He recognized the owner of the car as an old rival, and looked at him with

dark suspicion. His name had been coupled with Rosalie's during the past season oftener than he liked.

As the party of strangers entered the grounds they caused more excitement than the piper and the merry-go-round combined. Such a piece of mechanism as a motor-car had never before come within the range of Granny Long's telescope. Folks who had been fortunate enough to attend the Toronto Exhibition came home with great tales of having seen just such machines shooting around the city streets without any aid, and Bella Winters and Wes Long had even had their pictures taken together in one for twenty-five cents. But to most people this great red monster, looking, for all the world, as Spectacle John said, like a live threshing-mill, was an astounding sight. When the party left, a crowd of men gathered about it, keeping carefully out of its track, for William Winters had seen one at Niagara Falls that ran backward as well as forward, and you could never tell when such uncanny things might shoot off in any direction. The women were more interested in the rustling silks and veils of the ladies of the party, and formed a silent and admiring lane for them as they passed to the pine knoll.

As Gilbert walked by Rosalie's side his tumultuous joy gradually became mingled with other feelings. He wanted, more than anything else in the world, to get a word with her alone, and Blackburn was walking at her other side, with a maddening air of proprietorship. He was a genial, harmless sort of young man, but he was wealthy, and the sight of his prosperous complacency made the impecunious young doctor long to do him some bodily injury. And all the while Rosalie laughed and chatted as though every one in the world was as happy as herself. She went into fits of merriment over young Blackburn's facetious remarks, for, as they walked through the crowds, that gentleman was making presumably witty comments upon all he saw, from Piper Angus down, and Gilbert wondered drearily if even he, himself, thought he was saying anything funny.

"I say, Allen!" he cried, "you've got a fine collection for the zoo here. If Barnum had only lived to see this day! I—oh, I say! Look there!" He stood still, and gazed ahead of him in genuine admiration. "Say, there's somebody that doesn't look as if she belonged to this menagerie. The Queen of Sheba, all right. Who is her royal highness? Know her, Allen?"

Gilbert looked in the same direction, and became possessed of an unreasoning anger. Elsie Cameron was standing by her brother's side, under a spreading pine. Her trim, dark-green dress and hat, the soft rose-leaf tints of her face, and the rich bronze gold of her hair, made a picture so perfect that he might easily have excused the stranger's outburst. But he longed, more than ever, to knock him down.

"Yes," he answered shortly, "I know her."

"You do! Oh, come, now! You've simply got to introduce us. Hasn't he, Mrs. Windale? Do make him."

"I should like to meet the young lady," said Rosalie's aunt graciously. "She is very beautiful. Don't you think so, Rose?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose so, rather," said Rosalie dryly. "But it's the piper I want to meet."

"Mrs. Windale and I will go up to the throne and present ourselves, if you don't, Allen," Blackburn cried.

"Dr. Allen," exclaimed Rosalie's sister, with laughing impatience, "do introduce us. Guy will rave about her all the way home, and bore us to death, if he doesn't get his own way."

Without a word, Gilbert led his party up to the pine knoll and presented them to his three friends.

He was conscious of a feeling of relief that they were such as could not possibly provoke the visitors' mirth. As he introduced Blackburn he was forcibly impressed by the sudden change in the young man's manner. His flippant gaiety vanished before Miss Cameron's stately candor, and he addressed her with the greatest deference.

Now was Gilbert's chance. He turned from the group for a word alone with Rosalie. She seemed quite eager for it herself. She had such heaps to tell him, she declared, that she never had time to put into a letter. She had had the most gorgeous summer at the seaside, and had been on two motoring tours since her return, and they were planning for the gayest winter. She chatted away, but with never a word for him; not a question as to his welfare or his work, and though she spoke to him alone, her eyes kept darting annoyed glances toward the two under the pines.

Gilbert's heart sank. "And where do I come in, Rosalie?" he asked pleadingly.

"You," she said, pouting, "you simply refuse to come in. Why don't you leave this dreadful place and come to the city? It must be like living in a graveyard to exist here."

"I have told you often that I can't yet, Rosalie," he said humbly. "But you promised not to forget me in the meantime, don't you remember, dear?"

She turned away that he might not see her eyes, for her better self—the real woman that cared for him, and knew his true worth—was looking from them just then. And there was another Rosalie that cared, oh, so much, for wealth and social position.

"You know—I—I've told you," she said tremulously, "what I want you to do."

"I know, and I will settle in Toronto just as soon as I possibly can. You have my promise. But I cannot come just now."

"When, then?"

"Perhaps at the beginning of the new year. If I——"

A frightened look came into her eyes, and she interrupted him.

"If you don't come at the beginning of the year it will be too late," she said breathlessly.

"Rosalie! What do you mean?"

"Hush! I—oh, I can't tell you," glancing apprehensively toward Blackburn. "We are going on through Elmbrook when we leave," she whispered hurriedly, "and you may drive me as far as the village, and we can talk over—things."

Gilbert felt a chill at his heart. Here, indeed, was the irony of fate.

"I—oh, I'm so sorry," he stammered, in blank dismay. "I've promised to drive some one else back." The confession was out before he thought.

"It's that Miss Cameron with the red hair!" cried Rosalie, with startling suddenness.

Gilbert's face grew hot. "Well, and what of that?" he asked reasonably.

Rosalie held her pretty head high. "Tell her you must take me," she said firmly.

"Rosalie!" cried Gilbert, "you couldn't ask me to do that. Miss Cameron is a lady, and she is proud, and——wait. Come for a little drive now. We can be back before the others are ready to leave."

"I will, if you promise me you will not drive her home afterward."

"Surely," he cried in dismay, "you wouldn't want me to be rude to her?"

Rosalie stood for a moment looking searchingly at him. He was changed. He was not the boy who for three years had been ready to do her slightest bidding, no matter what the consequences. Just because she had condescended to become engaged to him he was assuming airs of authority. Well, their engagement was a secret yet—she had insisted upon that—and she could soon find a way to frighten him into submission.

"It's the only favor I've asked of you for six months," she said coldly, "and if you do not want to grant it I shall never humiliate myself by asking another."

"Rosalie!" cried Gilbert desperately, "if you only understood——"

"I understand only too well," she flashed back. "Are you coming, or are you not?"

"I am very sorry," said Gilbert, politely but stubbornly, "but I cannot be rude to a lady even for your sake."

She turned her back upon him without another word, and walking straight up to Elsie Cameron, began to talk to her in the friendliest manner. Gilbert stood watching her, puzzled and dismayed, and wondering desperately what he should do, when the attention of all was called by a singular proceeding on the race track.

An interesting display, the chief number on the program, had just closed—the exhibition of ladies' horsemanship, and, as usual, Ella Anne Long had carried off the palm. After the prizes were awarded it was the custom for the winners to drive around the ring several times, each lady bearing with her some highly-favored youth, somewhat as the conquering Romans attached their most distinguished captives to their triumphal car. While Miss Long, flushed with victory, was holding her horse till the judge fastened the ticket to his tossing head, Sawed-Off Wilmott stepped forward, feeling sure that the place of honor by Ella Anne's side would certainly be his. But just as he came sidling up, with a boyish step, a stalwart young farmer, one of the Highland Scotch giants from the Glenoro hills, elbowed his way up to the buggy. He had been casting admiring glances at Miss Long all afternoon, and now, without permission or apology, he sprang into the seat beside her.

"Thanks, awful much!" he cried jovially. Then in a lower tone, half humble, half daring, "You're going to take me around, ain't you?"

Miss Long cast him a disdainful side glance. "Well, you are a cool one!" she exclaimed

haughtily. Nevertheless, she did not order him out, but touched her horse with the whip, and away they sped.

Poor Sawed-Off stood for an instant, glaring after them; then, at a laugh from the bystanders, he turned swiftly and leaped into his own conveyance. His horse was all ready to go on for the next exhibit, and a few of the men were already ambling around the ring in their two-wheeled vehicles. Mr. Wilmott gave his steed a cut with the whip and dashed fiercely into the ring after his faithless lady and her impudent Lochinvar. He would pass them, and humiliate her before the whole crowd. He came thundering down the track, his feet spread out, one on each side of his horse's flanks, his little two-wheeled sulky bobbing up and down over the rough road, his coat-tails flying, his whiskers parted by the breeze and streaming behind, and a forgotten bundle of hay, he had brought to feed his horse, sticking out rakishly from under his seat.

Sawed-Off was a caution of a driver, every one admitted, and in a few minutes he had all but overtaken the truant pair. Miss Long turned and took in the situation. She sat just a shade straighter, grasped her whip more firmly, and urged her horse to the utmost. Around and around the ring flew the runaways, and around and around behind them, gaining at every leap, bounced the sulky, the hay, and the angry pursuer.

They had just passed the grand-stand for the second time, and the crowd was beginning to cheer, when a third competitor joined the swift procession. The eldest Sawyer orphan had been herding his third-prize cow in an ignominious corner, which properly belonged to the pigs and sheep; but growing weary of his task, he had given Davy Munn half a liquorice stick and three walnuts to whack [Transcriber's note: watch?] Keturah just long enough to admit of his taking one ride on the merry-go-round. Davy had consented; but as the orphan had remained away long enough to ride through all the money Jake Sawyer had upon his person, Mr. Munn calmly left Keturah to her own devices and swaggered leisurely away. The cow wandered off, and making her way behind the pine grove, arrived at the race course just as the bundle of hay in Sawed-Off's sulky shot past. Whether Keturah saw a good meal disappearing, and wisely made after it, or whether the enraged shriek of her young master, who just then discovered her position, frightened the gentle animal into flight, no one will ever know. Whatever the cause, Keturah threw up her horns, her tail and her heels, and with her third-prize ticket dangling in view of the whole township, she scampered into the ring in the wake of Sawed-Off's flying coattails; while after her, mad with rage that she should have dared to advertise her shame, and shrieking most un-orphan-like anathemas, came her young keeper.

Now, poor Sawed-Off Wilmott, being only a maker of cheese, was naturally considered slightly beneath his farmer neighbors in the social scale. His employment had a touch of effeminacy about it, and gave a man the air of being merely an assistant to the cow. And now, at the sight of this animal pursuing him relentlessly, as though to claim him for her own, the whole of Elmbrook fair burst into a thunderous roar of laughter. Sawed-Off glanced back to see the cause, just as his horse's head passed the front wheel of his lady's buggy. With a start of chagrin he realized his ignominious position. To go around the track again in the face of that jeering crowd, with the cow close at his heels, was impossible. He pulled up sharply, jerked his horse aside, and drove off behind the sheds. Miss Long and Lochinvar made one more triumphant circuit, and disappeared in another direction. Tim succeeded at last in forcing Keturah to dodge into a path that led to her corner, and the unique race ended.

Gilbert's visitors were laughing heartily; Rosalie had completely forgotten her ill-temper, and danced about consumed with merriment.

"Oh, I say!" cried Blackburn, leaning weakly against a tree, "that's better than the king's plate!"

"Oh, if Piper Angus had only got in behind the kid!" cried Malcolm Cameron. "There's never anything in this world so good but it might be a little better."

"Well, this comes as near perfection as anything I ever saw," said Blackburn's friend. "Come, ladies, this makes a splendid finale; we must be getting on our way."

Gilbert walked by Rosalie's side to the car. She was radiantly good-humored now, but not a word could he get from her of the subject nearest his heart. Of course she forgave him, she declared, choking back her laughter to say it, but oh! oh! did he ever see anything so frantically funny as that outrageous cow and that mad youngster after her? Gilbert felt almost as much resentment against Keturah as poor Sawed-Off must have experienced. Fate had always used him thus in his dealings with Rosalie. Whenever he wanted her especially to be serious, then something invariably occurred to set her laughing; but how charming she was, to be sure, when she laughed, with her little head thrown back, and the tears in her dancing eyes!

He tried to join her, with poor success. He was consumed with anxiety to know what the secret was she had intended to confide in him, and had almost made up his mind to obey her, and offend Miss Cameron and Malcolm and everybody. What did it matter when it meant Rosalie's favor? But she gave him no second chance. She sprang gaily into the car by Blackburn's side, and waved her hand in farewell. She was still laughing as they moved off, and he could hear her saying between ripples, "Oh! oh! and to think I didn't want to come, and I might have missed that race!"

CHAPTER XII.

A RUSH FOR THE GOAL

The shorelark soars to his topmost flight,
Sings at the height where morning springs,
What though his voice be lost in the light?
The light comes dropping from his wings.

Mount, my soul, and sing at the height
Of thy clear flight in the light and the air,
Heard or unheard in the night, in the light,
Sing there! Sing there!
—DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT.

Elmbrook felt keenly disappointed that the red threshing-machine did not pass through the village on its return journey. Though no one guessed it, Dr. Allen was the most deeply disappointed of all. Indeed, such was the effect upon him, that he packed his suitcase the next day, Davy Munn hung his mother's sunbonnet upon the top of the stable, and the doctor boarded the train at the back lane and went to Toronto.

Elmbrook literally sat up nights, speculating as to the possible reasons for his sudden departure. Mrs. Munn hadn't the faintest idea. She even wasn't sure of his destination, had forgotten whether he took many clothes or not, and was perfectly at sea in regard to his possible return. Her son was more explicit, if more imaginative. He bet that the doctor had gone to see the swell young lady that came in the threshing-mill; he was quite sure he would get drunk and show people a few things when he came back, for he was a very wild and fierce young man, and nobody in the place, except Mr. Munn, knew just what awful things he could do.

Fortunately, people paid no heed to Davy, and when the doctor returned the following day, looking his usual self, no one suspected him of riotous conduct. Mrs. Munn kept her own counsel, of course, but she wondered secretly what had happened to make him so quiet, and why he did not run up the stairs three steps at a time, whistling loudly, as he used to do.

And yet, according to his own view, there was really no reason why Gilbert should have been less happy. Everything had turned out just as he had wanted. First, Rosalie had forgiven him—that was just like Rosalie, he reflected fondly—and, moreover, had promised—yes, promised faithfully this time—that if he would come down to her New Year's party she would that day announce their engagement. There was another provision attached, however; he must, yes, must, come to the city in the spring; no, not a month later. There was no use in his thinking she would live anywhere else, because she simply would die; and if he wanted to kill her, why, she would just marry Guy Blackburn, and go motoring over a precipice. Surely, when he saw that she was giving up so much for his sake, he might make a little sacrifice for her. And Gilbert had declared, with a rush of gratitude, that he would do anything she asked.

So there was surely no good reason for his apparent lack of spirits. There was every prospect of his being successful in Toronto, and Harwood, his old college chum, had assured him there would be a fine opening in the spring. Nevertheless, Gilbert Allen was not as glad at heart as might have been expected. For Rosalie had been right in her judgment; he was changed. Several influences had been at work to make a new man of him. Hitherto his life had been unconsciously selfish. It had been all getting, and no giving. That had seemed inevitable in his college days; but when they were over, self-interest had still remained the strongest force. To attain, to gain what he desired most for himself, had brought him to this country practice, and for a while he was in danger of quenching finally the generous impulses that were a part of his nature. But until Gilbert Allen had almost reached man's estate there had been a good mother in his home, one who had never failed, day and night, to lay her boy's highest welfare before her God. So it was impossible that he should go very far astray, and now, all unknowing, he was turning into the path where that mother had always desired he should walk. He had set himself the task of reaching the shining mark of success, all for his own ends; but he found the road to it so absorbing, the daily duty demanding so strenuously the obliteration of self, that, little by little, he was losing sight of his own interests and living primarily for the people that needed his help. He smiled at himself in surprise one day, when, after an unusually busy fortnight, he found that he had forgotten to keep any account of the money owing him. That was not the Gilbert Allen who had sat down, in the first days of his career as a physician, to calculate carefully just how much each mile would bring. He found it was hard for a true physician to be selfish.

And as he went about his task of relieving pain, day by day, unconsciously he was trying to live up to the high ideal that Elmbrook had placed for him.

"Give a dog a bad name and you can be hanging him," quoted old Hughie Cameron one evening when the doctor had joined the company on the milkstand, and the talk was more than usually profound. "That will be a true saying, indeed. But, hoots! toots! it will be working the other way, whatever. Give him a good name, now, and——"

"And he'll git up on his hind legs and walk like a man," said Spectacle John Cross, much to Uncle Hughie's disgust.

Dr. Allen had merely laughed, and forgotten the remark soon after. Nevertheless, the underlying truth was working out in his own life. He was being made a better man because he had been given a fine name and reputation. He had no petty conceit to be fed by his patients' adulation. It brought him only a saving sense of his own shortcomings and an honest desire to be more worthy. And there had been still another influence at work, one of which he was entirely unconscious—the quiet life of noble self-sacrifice lived by the girl on the other side of Treasure Valley was a constant source of reproach to him, though he recognized it not.

So, being the man he was, Gilbert could not be happy in view of what he had promised to do. Even Rosalie's smile was scarcely compensation for the pang he felt when he reflected that the splendid Christmas present he had in store for the man who had given him his chance in life must be used for selfish ends, and Martin must wait. That was the sting; Martin was always waiting, and when would the waiting end?

But he soon lost sight of the future, its joys, as well as its pangs, in the imperative call of the present. When the winter set in he discovered that, hitherto, his work had been but child's play. The high ridge of Elmbrook offered a splendid battle-ground for all the opposing winds. Here they met in furious combat, filling the air with the white dust of battle, and piling up their ramparts of snow until roads and fields and fences were blotted out, and the whole earth lay one dazzling waste.

With the opening of winter came an epidemic of grip [Transcriber's note: grippe?], and other seasonable maladies. The orphans went sliding on the pond before the ice was as thick as window-glass, and broke through and got severe colds; Mrs. McKitterick fell ill of pneumonia, and all the children up among the stormy hills of Glenoro took the measles. So the young doctor learned all that it meant to be a country physician during an Ontario winter. An early December storm made some of the roads impassable, and he often had to leave Speed, or the new horse he had lately bought, at some wayside farmhouse while he made the rest of the journey on snowshoes. Often he drove home in the gray winter dawn staggering for want of sleep, only to change his horse and start off in another direction. But he never shirked. His troubled conscience drove him to a vigorous fulfilment of the duty at hand. He had a vague notion that in this way he was atoning for the neglect of the greater obligation.

His capacity for toil won the admiration of the hard-working people among whom he lived. Often, as they watched his lonely cutter moving down the road, like a little ship in a stormy sea, now rising high on a snowy billow, now almost disappearing in the hollow, as he fought his way against the bitter blast to relieve some one's pain, they unanimously voted the doctor a man.

And the cures he worked! They talked them over around the kitchen fire at night, never wearying of the theme. There was Mrs. McKitterick—everybody knew about her, of course. And there was Arabella Winters, who was in bed and like to die, one day, and the doctor had her sitting up and going around the next. And as for Jake Sawyer's orphans—well, there was no knowing how often he had saved their lives. Yes, the doctor certainly was a caution.

As he worked the days flew past, and Rosalie's New Year's celebration, which was to bring him such happiness, was fast approaching. He had all the arrangements made for his holidays several weeks before. Harwood was coming to take his work for a week, and everything promised to turn out exactly as he had hoped.

On the last night of December he drove down the Lake Simcoe road to pay a farewell visit to Mrs. McKitterick. Harwood had arrived the day before, and the next morning Gilbert was to take the early train for Toronto. Lauchie had promised to wait at the back lane for him, and Davy had shoveled a path down to the railroad track.

Gilbert wore his first-prize mittens under his fur gauntlets, and Mrs. McKitterick praised him for the wonderful care he was taking of them. She was better, quite herself again, but she warned him to be back in less than a week, for how could she get on without him? He had not the heart to tell her that he would not likely be with her much longer. He had to wait for a cup of tea, and by the time he had made another call it was getting late.

As he was hurrying homeward he bethought himself of a short road to the village, a winter highway, that went up the ravine, past the Drowned Lands, following the old abandoned corduroy track. It had been made by Sandy McQuarry's teams hauling logs up to the mill, and being sheltered, was comparatively free from drifts. The doctor turned into it, and passed into the breathless silence of the cedar swamp. His horse's bells sounded startlingly clear in the tense Stillness. To his right lay the cold, drear stretches of the Drowned Lands; the gaunt tree-trunks were but dimly discernible against the gray landscape, and looked more ghostly than ever, standing there, stark and silent, like an army of the dead. Not a light could be seen, nor a sign of

human habitation. Above stretched the illimitable blue of heaven, steely cold, like the frozen earth, and spangled with glittering stars. For several nights Gilbert had had very little sleep, and as he moved on through the unbroken silence his head drooped forward on his breast, the lines hung loosely in his limp hand, and he swayed from side to side like a drunken man. Speed trotted steadily onward, picking her way carefully, like the wise little animal she was. She seemed the only living thing in all the ghostly stillness.

Suddenly the horse stopped, and her sleepy driver lurched forward and almost fell over the dashboard. He sat bolt upright and stared stupidly about him. Then he guessed that something was probably wrong with the harness. Speed was a dainty little animal, and always refused to move when her attire was not in perfect order. She had once cleverly forestalled what might have been a serious accident, by standing stock-still when a strap gave way. Gilbert stumbled out and went around to her head. Sure enough, a buckle had broken. He patted the little mare affectionately.

"Ah, Speed, you're a finicky old girl," he grumbled. "If you were as dead for want of sleep as I am you wouldn't know whether you had any harness or not."

Speed rubbed him ingratiatingly with her nose as he strove, with numb fingers, to repair the damage. The bells were still, and the silence of the winter night was oppressive. The dry rustle of some dead leaves that still clung forlornly to a ghostly beech by the wayside sounded loud and startling. All at once the doctor was conscious of another sound, one that appealed to his professional ear—the sound of a smothered, strangling cough. He looked about him wonderingly, and found that he had stopped just in front of the old shanty where John McIntyre lived. He had seen the man only once or twice since the mill closed, though he often heard the eldest orphan talk about him. But Tim had been confined to the house for the past week, the result of his premature skate on the pond, and the village had heard nothing of the watchman for some time.

Gilbert stood a moment, doubtful as to what he should do. The coughing began again, with a sound in it, this time, that told the physician he must hesitate no longer. He drew his horse up to the old tumbled-down bars, tied and blanketed her, and taking his satchel, plunged through the deep snow to the shanty. He drew off his fur gauntlet and knocked on the shaky door, but the moment he had done so he recognized the futility of the act. He tried the latch, it lifted, and he stepped in. The place was in utter darkness, and bitingly cold, a chill dampness that struck the heart. The man's strangled breathing came from a corner of the room. The doctor spoke, but there was no answer. He hastily struck a match and looked around. The little flickering light showed a rickety table, an old stove red with rust, and a dark object in a far corner. It showed, also, a lantern on the floor. Gilbert lit it, and going to the corner, bent over the sick man. John McIntyre lay stretched on a low straw bed, covered with a ragged quilt and a heap of nondescript clothing. His breath was coming in choking gasps, and he gazed up at his visitor with staring, but unseeing, eyes. The doctor felt his burning forehead and his leaping pulse, and uttered a sharp exclamation. John McIntyre was sick, so sick that relief must come speedily or it would not come at all.

Gilbert was wide awake now. The weary man was lost in the alert physician. He forced some medicine down the man's throat, found some kindling-wood in the shed, and soon had a blazing fire and a boiling kettle. Then he flung aside his cap and coat and went rummaging in the meager cupboard; he must have something—anything—for poultices. He gave a relieved whistle as he stumbled upon a can of linseed meal, and reflected, with some amusement, upon how approvingly Mrs. Winters would have regarded the homely treatment. When he had adjusted the hot poultice he ran out and led his shivering horse around into the shelter of the old shed behind the house. Then he hurried back to John McIntyre's bedside and took up his night's work. A hard battle he knew it would be, with, as yet, almost even chances for life and death. He went into the struggle eagerly, with not only the strong desire to relieve pain and save life, which is part of the true physician, but with his fighting instinct keenly aroused. The battle was on; there was only his strength and skill against the dread specter, and he was determined to win.

All night long he hung over his patient, watchful, careful, seizing every smallest vantage ground, swiftly changing his tactics when he sighted defeat ahead. Once or twice he sank into the single chair the place possessed and snatched a few minutes' sleep; but when the instant came to administer medicine or change the poultices, he was wide awake again. So completely was he absorbed in his task that he lost all consciousness of time and place, until he noticed a sickly appearance in the lantern's light, and glancing at the little frosted window-pane, he saw the ghosts of the Drowned Lands standing out plainly against the dawn. Gilbert drew a deep breath. The night had ended, and with it the struggle. The doctor bent over his patient, pale and worn-looking, but his eyes aglow with the light of conquest. For he had won the battle. John McIntyre lay there, spent and white, but he was saved.

When he had made his patient as comfortable as possible with his inadequate means, Gilbert prepared to go home. He left reluctantly, but he promised himself he would send Harwood back immediately. He hurried out to the cutter, and sent Speed spinning up the road toward the village. As he faced the brightening horizon it came to him with a leap of his heart that it was New Year's Day! He would barely have time to catch the train! He drove swiftly into his own yard and dashed in at the kitchen door.

"Is Dr. Harwood up?" he demanded, coming suddenly upon Mrs. Munn, and paralyzing her

preparations for breakfast.

Had he not been in such a hurry he would have known it was too much to expect his silent housekeeper to vouchsafe, all at once, the amount of information required to answer that question.

"Dear! dear!" she cried, in consternation, standing with the dripping porridge-stick held over the hot stove. "I dunno. There's a letter on your desk," she added reluctantly.

Gilbert darted into his office and tore open the note. Harwood had been called out in the night to an urgent case, fifteen miles away, and would not be back till the afternoon.

The young doctor walked slowly to the frosty window and looked out upon the white lawn, the paper crushed in his hand. He stood there, motionless, for fully a minute, and when he turned away his face was very stern. He walked upstairs and knocked peremptorily on the door of Davy's room.

The high, falsetto squeak of a gramophone was coming gaily through the portal, and without waiting for an answer Gilbert impatiently put his head through the doorway. Since the lawnmower had gone to its well-earned rest Mr. Munn lived only for this other instrument, the sound of whose music he found similar to that of his lost treasure.

He was sitting up in bed now, shrouded in blankets, a smile of content illuminating his face, while the buzzing little machine on the table at his side was grinding out a Sousa march.

The stern look on the doctor's face startled the young man. He stared in perturbation.

"Is anybody dead?" he whispered.

"Jump up quick," said the doctor sharply, "and run down and feed Speed right away; I want her again in a few minutes, do you understand? Then go down to the track when Lauchie stops, and give him a telegram I want sent on. Tell him I'm not going to Toronto."

On the third day of the new year, when John McIntyre was quite out of danger, Gilbert went over to Mrs. Winters' to ask if she could do something to make the man's surroundings more comfortable. This was just the opportunity for which the village manager had been longing ever since the watchman had taken up his residence at the Drowned Lands. She organized a housecleaning brigade, and every woman in the place joined the ranks. Old Hughie Cameron drove them down the ravine in Sandy McQuarry's big sleigh, and they descended upon John McIntyre's establishment, and soaked and washed and scrubbed until there seemed no small danger of the little shanty's joining the Drowned Lands under a deluge of soapy water. They brought all sorts of comforts, too. Miss Arabella donated her bedroom rug with the purple robins. Miss McQuarry brought bedclothes, Mrs. Winters a feather mattress, and the Longs cooking utensils; and they made beef-tea and chicken broth and jellies, until, from fearing that his patient might die of neglect, the doctor changed to apprehensions lest he be killed with over-attention.

When the rush and excitement of it was all over Gilbert felt as though he had fallen from some great height, and was not yet certain how badly he was hurt. That he had grievously offended Rosalie this time he was assured. She would listen to no explanations. He might have come if he had wanted, she declared; and when he humbly asked if he might not come yet, he was answered by a newspaper with a paragraph in the society column marked. Miss Rosalie Lane, it stated, was visiting friends in New York.

Harwood went back to the city, and, left alone, Gilbert was too busy to speculate much upon his wrongs. He put them behind him manfully, his indignation at the unfairness of Rosalie's treatment helping him to bear them. But he wrote to her again, very humbly, as usual, and repeated his promise to come to the city in the spring. She condescended to answer, but her brief note was all about the fun she was having, and she made no allusion to his future plans. And with this he was forced to be content.

He was passing John McIntyre's shanty one dazzling mid-January day, and, tying his horse, ran in to see how he was faring. He found his patient, dressed in one of his own warm bathrobes —a present from Mrs. Munn—sitting in a cushioned rocking-chair by the fire. The place was exquisitely clean and tidy, and there was a subtle touch here and there—a blooming geranium in the window, a smoothness of the feather bed—that showed the recent mark of a woman's hand. Seated in the most comfortable chair, behind the stove, was the eldest Sawyer orphan, happily devouring the remains of a boiled chicken, and talking fast and furiously. John McIntyre was pale and haggard, as usual, but his air of fierce reserve had changed to a dreary toleration of the companionship of his fellow-mortals. He was still reticent and silent, but in a helpless, broken-hearted way.

Since his recovery the young doctor felt constrained in his presence. He could not forget their first interview; so he confined his remarks and questions to strictly professional matters, and made his visits as short as possible.

"And how are you feeling to-day?" he asked cheerily, as he removed his coat, and stood warming his hands by the shining stove.

"Oh, better—quite better." It was John McIntyre's unfailing answer. The doctor slipped his fingers over his pulse, and nodded in a satisfied way.

"I don't know that it's very wise of you to be out of bed yet, though," he said. "You must not sit up too long."

He placed a bottle on the table, gave a few instructions concerning diet, and then turned to go. John McIntyre had been regarding him as though he wanted to speak.

"Sit down a moment, I would like to say something," he said suddenly.

Gilbert took a chair opposite, and looked at him inquiringly.

"They were telling me yesterday how you saved my life that night you found me here," he began slowly.

"Oh, never mind that. It's nothing. Any doctor would have done the same."

"I am not thanking you for it," said John McIntyre, in his old hard voice. "I would much rather you had left me alone. But you did what you thought best, and you have been very kind since." He paused a moment, then went on slowly: "I once said something to you, it is likely you have not forgotten. I would like to take it back. I know now I must have been mistaken."

Dr. Gilbert Allen arose. The room felt stifling. "Will you tell me exactly what you meant? Who was the friend you mentioned?" he asked in a low tone.

The man shook his head. "No; what is the use?" he asked wearily. "He is dead and gone, long ago. I was mistaken, that was all."

Gilbert went away puzzled. The "friend" was dead? Then the man had not meant Martin, after all. It was a case of conscience making a coward of him, he reflected. And so the two parted, all unconscious of how near each had come to giving an uplift to the other's life.

Gilbert drove up the glittering road, following the fairy windings and turnings of the valley. Down in the shadows the bare trees were vivid blue, up on the heights the snow was a blinding silver. He was meditating deeply on John McIntyre's words. They had hurt him more than his angry accusation that evening in the mill. How he hated himself! Why not plunge in and do the right thing now, whether Martin needed it or not, and then, after that, let the future bring what it would?

A woman's figure appeared on the road ahead of him, carrying a basket, and explaining by her presence the immaculate state of John McIntyre's home. Gilbert recognized the shimmer of Elsie Cameron's deep gold hair with renewed feelings of compunction. If he had only had the calm courage to walk the path of duty as this girl was doing! He touched his horse and drew up beside her. The keen air had given her cheeks a deeper tint, her hair was glorious in the sunlight, and her eyes were brilliant.

She thanked him smilingly as he helped her into the cutter. He could not help remembering the last time they had ridden together, and the disastrous consequences.

They spun along the smooth road, and just as they were rounding a turn in the winding valley a heavy sleigh, with a load of wood, came out of the forest and moved slowly along in the track ahead. Gilbert uttered an exclamation of impatience. "Now we shall have to crawl," he said. "Sandy might have let us pass."

"Perhaps he didn't see us. He looks preoccupied."

"Likely he's concocting some scheme for sending the minister to Muskoky for the rest of the winter."

"I really believe he'll drive him away from here some day. No one knows how much Sandy's conduct has made poor Mr. Scott suffer."

"Well, the end is near, according to Silas Long's predictions. He prophesies sure retribution, and it's not far off now, he says. Such a learned astronomer ought to know. Hello! what's the matter?"

The sleigh ahead had stopped, and its driver was haranguing some obstacle in his pathway. The two in the cutter leaned out and gazed forward inquiringly.

Right in the middle of the highway, facing Sandy McQuarry's team, stood the schoolmistress. She had a basket on her arm, and was bound for John McIntyre's place with a mold of jelly, but she was really bent on finding out if that eldest orphan-imp had been spending the day with that dreadful old man instead of coming to school.

The ravine road was narrow, and on either side the deep, untrodden snow made it impossible for a sleigh to turn out without risking an upset. It was an unwritten law of the winter highway that pedestrians must give the right of way to vehicles, particularly those that bore loads. But the Duke of Wellington was subject to no law she did not wish to obey. To turn off the road meant plunging into the deep snow, and that she had not the smallest intention of doing.

"Ye'll hae to turn oot!" shouted Sandy McQuarry peremptorily.

"Do you think I'm going to flounder through that snow to my waist?" demanded the Duke indignantly.

"Move aside and let me pass!"

"Ah canna move oot, wumman!" he cried, with truth. "Ma load'll upset!"

"What are you going to do about it, then?" Sandy McQuarry glared. "Ah'm goin' to drive on," he declared grimly.

"Indeed!" Miss Weir placed her basket exactly in the middle of the road, carefully adjusted her shawl over it, and, with perfect deliberation, sat down upon it.

"Hoh!" Sandy McQuarry grunted disdainfully. He could soon scare even the Duke of Wellington out of such an untenable position. "Ma conscience, but ye'll no sit there lang!" he muttered. He urged his team forward until the nose of one of his grays was right over her head. But he had not calculated on the immovability of the Iron Duke. She did not stir a muscle, but sat, with a calm, meditative face, gazing across the valley. The grays tossed their heads, puzzled and indignant, and then stopped.

Sandy McQuarry was red with rage.

"D'ye want me to run over ye, ye thrawn piece o' humanity, ye?" he shouted.

The Duke did not appear to hear him. He rose to his feet, whip in hand.

"Jemima Weir!" he thundered, "will ye, or will ye no step off that road and let me drive on?"

"I will no!" answered the Duke, with unkind emphasis.

The man raised his whip over his horses' backs and then paused. Plainly she intended to be slain rather than yield, and though murder was in Sandy's heart he hesitated to commit it. He glanced about him with a movement of impotent rage. Never before had he been balked in his will by man, nor had he ever met the woman who had dared to cross him. And here he was, held up in his own particular saw-log road by one of the despised sex! He remembered, in choking wrath, that he was a pillar of the Glenoro church, that before him was the schoolmistress, and behind the doctor and old Hughie Cameron's niece, and he dared not give adequate expression to the rage with which he was being consumed.

In a voice inarticulate with anger he opened a parley. He declared that he would have the law, that he would publish her high-handed act from one end of the county of Simcoe to the other, that he would get himself elected for trustee and drive her out of the section. He blustered, he threatened, he scolded, he argued. And through it all the obstacle sat on her basket, in the middle of the highway, not deigning him even a glance. But as the maddened man foamed on, there arose once to the surface the lurking twinkle in the Duke's gray eyes. For there was no doubt Sandy was weakening. He had even stooped to reason with her now.

"The snow's no more nor a half fut deep!" he was bellowing.

The Duke caught the first symptom of yielding, but was too wise to make answer.

"Yon's the doctor back there," he cried, with a great show of righteous concern, "he'll mebby be in a hurry."

There was no sign of impatience from the two, choking down their laughter, in the cutter behind; and though she could not see them, well the Duke knew they were enjoying themselves. Nevertheless, she condescended to answer.

"You'd better not keep him waiting, then," she advised.

The man darted one more glance around, the glance of an imprisoned lion which suddenly realizes its position. Slowly, his brows erect, his face dark, he descended from the sleigh and walked around to her side. He stood for a moment regarding her, with a dawning expression of something like respect struggling with the gleam of his fierce eyes.

"If Ah tramp ye a path 'round the sleigh will ye walk in it?" he asked, his voice tremulous with wrath.

The Duke weighed the proposition with great deliberation. She would have died there under the horses' feet rather than show the slightest interest in it. "Well," she admitted indifferently, "I

can't say. If I don't get my skirts snowy, I might. You tramp the road, and then I'll see."

With smothered imprecations, Sandy plunged into the snow.

Dr. Allen, quenching his unseemly mirth, sprang from the cutter and came to his aid. There was something to arouse pity in the downfall of the man of strength. Neither by word nor sign did Sandy recognize either his or Elsie Cameron's presence. The atmosphere was too highly charged to admit of ordinary courtesies. When the two men had trampled a wide pathway, and made it sufficiently smooth and firm, the Duke of Wellington condescended to march out of her citadel. There was no smallest sign of haste in her movements; she stood and eyed the track critically, as if doubtful as to whether she would use it, after all. Her hesitation proved the last straw to her enemy's endurance. With an inarticulate cry of rage Sandy McQuarry sprang toward her. The Duke was tall and stately, and of no light weight, but he caught her up as if she had been a child, and with a few mighty strides bore her along the pathway. Reaching the road, he planted her in the middle of it with a violent thud.

"The Lord Almighty peety the man that gets a wumman like you!" he exclaimed with vehement solemnity. He strode back to his sleigh, leaped upon his load, and lashed his horses into a gallop.

The Duke was perfectly calm. She bowed in her stateliest fashion to Elsie and the doctor, but the twinkle in her eye answered the laughter in the girl's. Then, arranging her basket more carefully on her arm, she passed on her way as if nothing had happened.

Gilbert sprang into his cutter, and the two witnesses of poor Sandy's Waterloo followed his tumultuous retreat up the valley. They were young and light-hearted, and what wonder if one put aside her gravity and the other his troubles, and both laughed all the way to the village?

It was not until they had gained the main highway, and Sandy had disappeared, that they recovered their composure and could speak of other things.

"And you did not get away for your vacation at New Year's," the girl said. "That was too bad."

"No," said Gilbert, suddenly growing somber at the recollection. "Everything conspired against me, it seemed. I couldn't get away."

"Uncle Hughie would say that everything had conspired for you. His theory is the happiest one. He would tell you that if you had gone probably some disastrous circumstance would have followed."

"Perhaps he is right," said the young man meditatively. He could not yet regard his failure to meet Rosalie's demands as anything but a misfortune. And yet, there was that money still in the bank that Martin might have. That was surely a satisfaction.

"Oh, everything seems to me to be guided by the merest chance," he said half bitterly.

The girl shook her head. "I think it seems so only on the surface. There can be no hazard about one's duty. The results are as sure as cause and effect. You know that, Dr. Allen."

"Yes, I know it," said Gilbert as he assisted her to alight at the door. "I am aware of it, I mean, but I don't act upon it."

He looked up at her, standing on the steps above him, and felt again that longing her presence always inspired within him to do something good and great. Why was he such a sham? John McIntyre's words of praise returned, with their weight of humiliation, and he drove away in utter self-contempt.

At college, the boys always said that generally Easy Allen, as they called him, was only a very ordinary football player. He ambled cheerily about the field, and seemed to enjoy the game so much that he did not bother trying to do anything remarkable. But let something arouse him to a sense of responsibility, a goal for the other side, a knockdown that stirred his temper, then look out! He would put his head down and pitch himself into the fray, and then something had to give way, and the boys knew it wouldn't be Easy. To-day, something of that old conquering mood had come over him. He was possessed with a rage against his former dilatory self, and a fierce desire to win, to do the clean, square thing, no matter what the consequences. He had done it that New Year's morning, when John McIntyre's life lay in his hand. The call of duty had been imperative then. He had not even considered the possibility of shirking it, and in spite of all the disappointment and sorrow his action had brought, he had never once viewed it with regret. And now, once more, he had his head down, in fierce determination, and cared for nothing but to score and feel himself a man.

He marched straight past a group of patients waiting in his office and sat down at his desk. What a long time since he had written to Martin! He had almost forgotten his address. The letter was short and humble, and inside it he slipped a check. When he left it at the post-office, half an hour later, he was a poor man, and his prospects of starting a city practice in the spring were of the slimmest sort; nevertheless, he walked very straight, and held up his head with an air of pride, as though he owned the whole earth.

But his exultation did not last long. The next morning Miss Ella Anne Long handed him a letter; it was in Rosalie's handwriting. He tore it open on the street, not being able to wait till he reached home. It was merely a note, very short and very merry, telling how she had just returned from New York, and in a brief postscript, crowded in at the bottom, she announced her engagement to Guy Blackburn.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TREASURE-BOOK

And yet, O God, I know not how to fail!
  Within my heart still burns an unquenched fire,
Like Israel of old I must prevail,
  Or failing, still reach on to something higher.
    They counted *Him* a failure when He trod
    The slopes of Calvary that led to God!
      —HELENA COLEMAN.

All winter the eldest orphan's reformed conduct had been the subject of joyous wonder on the part of his parents. Hannah was of the opinion that the boy had been converted at Mr. Scott's series of special meetings at Christmas time, but Jake, having been a boy himself, shook his head, and said it was likely just a spell he had taken with the cold weather, and it would work off when the summer came, like Joey's whooping-cough. But, strange to say, Tim went no more abroad with Davy Munn on lawless expeditions. Sawed-Off Wilmott and the young Lochinvar from Glenoro came regularly, on alternate evenings, to see Ella Anne Long, and never found ropes tied across the gate, nor whips nor lap-robes missing, as in Tim's unregenerate days. Even Miss Weir testified that sometimes he would not do anything particularly outrageous in school for a week at a time. The truth was that the eldest orphan had neither time nor inclination for childish mischief. Mentally, he had grown up. He dwelt no more in the common walks of humanity, but in the land of romance. For one who consorted with heroes, fought great battles, and performed mighty deeds of valor, childish pranks had no interest. He cared now for nothing in the world but to read all day long, and half the night; to read anything and everything, from the hair-raising cowboy tales Davy Munn loaned him, to the ponderous histories from the minister's book-shelf. Through this selfsame book-shelf the minister had become one of Tim's closest friends, and might have made a pastoral visitation every day in the week and been welcome. He had almost got ahead of the doctor in the eldest orphan's regard; for while the doctor had plenty of books, whole shelves of them, they were queer, stupid things, full of long, hard words, and never a battle or a shipwreck from one cover to the other.

At first, the boy's greedy desire to devour a story at one sitting filled him with impatience at his own slowness. He found, to his chagrin, that he could not read the "Waverley Novels" with the swiftness the course of events demanded. He tried having them read aloud by his father, but though Jake was always willing, he stumbled and spelled his way through the battles and adventures with a laboriousness that nearly set his young listener mad.

But one winter night Tim discovered a royal road to learning. The minister had called, and left "Quentin Durward." It was an evening the boy had been in the habit of spending with John McIntyre, so he slipped the volume inside his coat and sped away with it down to the Drowned Lands.

And wonderful good fortune, John McIntyre proved a splendid reader. Not only that, but after his first reluctance had been overcome, he seemed to like the task.

That was the beginning of a new life for both of them. The boy came almost every evening now, and as John McIntyre grew stronger he often read on, as absorbed as his listener, until the hour was late. Then, instead of going home, Tim would curl up snugly in bed behind his friend, and sleep until he was awakened in time to start for school.

One evening, when the sick man had almost recovered his wonted strength, Tim came hobbling down the road with a large volume bulging out the front of his coat. John McIntyre sat before his fire, looking through his little frosted panes at the beauty of the winter sunset, and something of the sadness in his weary eyes vanished as the little figure appeared against the filmy rose mists of Treasure Valley, and came trotting down the glittering road. There seemed to be a reflection of the sunset glow in the man's face as the boy bounded in.

"Hello!" he shouted, pitching his snowy mittens under the stove and his cap upon the bed. "I've got a new story." He struggled to extract the book from his coat. "Old Hughie Cameron gave it to me. Hech! hech! hoots! toots! indeed and indeed!" he added, hobbling about the room, and imitating the old man's caressing manner to perfection.

No one in Elmbrook had ever seen John McIntyre smile, nor did he do so now; but as he watched the absurd attempts of the youngster to portray the queer gait of the village philosopher there came into his eyes a look as though there had passed before them the ghost of the days when he, himself, was young and light-hearted and full of boyish pranks. He arose, and lighting the little lamp, placed it upon the table.

"It's a bully story," went on the boy. "Old Hughie started to read it to me an' the twins las' night, but they got to scrappin', an' I had to lambaste 'em both, an' so he didn't finish. He said mebby you would. It's about an old guy who was rich an' had chunks o' money, an' a big family, an' all the rest; an' the devil got after him an' busted up the whole thing. He got all his cows an' his horses an' things struck with lightning, an' his boys an' his girls were all at a swell birthday spree, an' the house up an' fell down, an' smashed every bloomin' one o' them—oh, say! it's a dandy!"

He placed the book on the table and shoved it toward John McIntyre. The man reached for it, but quickly drew back.

"It's—the Bible!" he said sharply.

"Yes," said Tim, "'course. Did ye ever read any of it?" He paused in embarrassment. John McIntyre, being such a particularly bad man, a fact he was prone to forget, would naturally scorn to read the Bible. He felt ashamed of himself. "It's got a whole lot o' bully yarns in it," he added apologetically.

The man was looking at the Book as though he were afraid of it.

"This man's name was Job. D'ye ever hear about him?" continued Tim insinuatingly.

"Yes, I've read it."

"Oh, have you? Well, read it again. Aw, go on. It won't hurt!"

He shoved the book into the man's hands. He had learned, long ere this, that John McIntyre was his obedient servant. "Begin at the beginning, 'cause I kinder forget how it starts."

So, for the first time in many long years, John McIntyre took into his hands the Word of God—the Book he had been wont to read every evening, so long ago, in the light of his happy home circle.

"There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil."

Tim snuggled down on Miss Arabella's rug, close to the stove, his chin in his hands, and stared up with eager, devouring eyes. At first, John McIntyre read in a strained, hard voice, but soon he seemed to forget everything but the absorbing tale—the tale of his own life—a man's struggle with overwhelming sorrow; and yet how different from his own. For Job had not sinned, nor "charged God foolishly," while he, in his bitterness, had thrown the blame of his evil case upon his Maker, and declared that He knew not compassion.

Throughout the early portion of the story Tim listened with eyes and ears, but when they entered upon the long discourses of Job's friends he grew restless. There was not enough action here. Thunder and lightning, sudden deaths, and overwhelming catastrophes were exactly suited to the orphan's taste, but theological controversy was a weariness to his soul. He wriggled around impatiently, counted the purple robins again and again, and gouged holes in the single eye each possessed. But still the dreary talk went on.

"Say! ain't that coon ever goin' to get done shootin' off?" he broke in wearily, in the midst of a long speech from Eliphaz the Temanite.

John McIntyre did not hear. He had come to the answer of Job, words that found an echo in his own bitter heart:

"I was at ease, but He hath broken me asunder; He hath also taken me by my neck and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for His mark. His archers compass me round about. He cleaveth my reins asunder, and doth not spare."

The anguish in the reader's voice, conveying the strength of the man's mighty grief, made itself felt in the child's soul, and stilled him. He gazed up into John McIntyre's haggard face with a strange heaviness at his heart. Through chapter after chapter he waited, silent and subdued, but at last his weariness overcame his fears. He rolled over on the rug and yawned loudly.

"Aw, shucks!" he muttered; "they're as bad at gassin' as Ella Anne Long!" He waited through another chapter, and then broke in once more.

"Say! couldn't you skip all that blather, an' tell us what happened next? Didn't the devil get after him again?"

The reader paused, and gazed down at the boy in a dazed fashion. "What do you want?" he

asked vaguely.

"I wish them fellows would hustle up, an' quit chewin'. Did Job get all right again?"

John McIntyre mechanically turned the leaves. He experienced a grim satisfaction in the boy's complaints. What did these wordy friends of Job know of sorrow and despair? As though they were conditions that could be explained away! He turned almost to the end of the story, and there he paused. A new actor had entered the sorrowful drama. Out of the whirlwind there came a Voice—the voice of the Infinite—and before its thunder the souls of Job and his friends bowed in self-abasement.

The reading went on again, continuing uninterrupted to the end. The man closed the Book, dropping it heavily upon the table.

"Is that all?" demanded Tim, fearing to be cheated out of one word of the story.

"That is all," said John McIntyre in a whisper. He shaded his eyes with his hand. What long, weary days and nights had passed over him since he last looked into that Book! He had thought never to look into it again, and yet its pages held their old convincing power. There was still that magic touch that went straight to a man's heart, as only God's word can. Job had suffered, had been bereft of all that made life worth the holding, and yet he had garnered from the seed sown in anguish, not bitterness and despair and hatred of God and man, but a golden harvest of divine revelation, a wealth of eternal hope and joy: "I know that my Redeemer liveth!"

When the eldest orphan started out for the Drowned Lands the next evening he sighted the minister on the village street ahead of him. He was about to hasten his footsteps to overtake him, when he noticed Mr. Scott pause and speak to some one.

As the boy drew slowly near, he was amazed to see that it was Sandy McQuarry. They seemed to be talking in quite a friendly tone, too, while over at Long's store Tim's foster-father, and his enemy, Spectacle John, and the blacksmith, were craning their necks through the doorway, and apparently enjoying the scene. Sandy did not speak long, but they parted with a hearty handshake.

"Hello!" cried the boy, coming up alongside the tall figure. The orphans could never be accused of stiffness or formality.

"Hello!" cried the minister, with equal cordiality. His eyes were shining, and he looked as though he had just received great and good news.

"Ain't he mad at ye any more?" asked Tim, jerking his thumb over his shoulder to indicate Sandy McQuarry, the way he had seen his father do.

The minister's eyes grew brighter. "No, Tim, he's not mad at me any more, and, please God, he never will be."

"Did you take it back, what you said about Muskoka?"

"Well, yes, partly; but it wasn't that." The laughter lines were deepening around the minister's eyes. "When you grow older you will understand better. And how are you feeling to-night? Cold better, eh?"

"Oh, I'm fine and dandy. How's yourself?" He was prancing along by the man's side, with a gait peculiar, even to himself. The orphans all had a curious, orphan-like habit of rendering pedestrianism as difficult as possible. The twins would stagger around for a whole day tied together at the ankles, and Tim now displayed this family peculiarity by hirpling along, one foot up on the smooth, hard roadway, the other plunging far into the deep snow.

"Very well, thank you," said Mr. Scott. "Where are you going?"

"Down to see John." His tone revealed his pride in the daring confession. It was a splendid thing to have such a wicked man for a chum, a man whom folks said even the minister feared.

"Ah! What are you reading now?"

"'We haven't got anything new for to-night. I was wishin' I had a book." He looked up slyly, to see if the hint had taken effect.

The minister fell easily into the trap. "Dear me! I'm sorry I didn't know that. You might have had 'Nicholas Nickleby.' I'll send it to school with Tommy to-morrow, if you promise you won't read any of it in school, eh?"

"All right; 'course not," cried Tim righteously.

"And what have you been reading since you finished 'Pilgrim's Progress'?"

The minister looked down enviously at the small, hobbling figure. If he had only been wise enough, he reflected, to go to that man with this child's faith and good-fellowship, they might

have been on such terms of intimacy now, and he might have helped to cure that look of pain in John McIntyre's eyes.

"We've been readin' about a chap named Job. It's in the Bible. Ever read it?"

"The Bible!" The minister paused in the road. What miracle had led the child thither? "Did McIntyre read Job to you?"

"Yes."

"Every bit of it?"

"Yes—all but a lot o' mushy talk in the middle. Them jiggers had such an awful lot to say we skipped some of it. But we read the end."

"Ah, you've got a fine story-book now, Tim! You'll not find such another. Ask McIntyre to read you some more of its stories. They're better than 'Nicholas Nickleby.'"

Tim looked dubious. With the exception of Job, and Daniel in the lions' den, and extracts from one or two thrilling tales like that, he considered the Bible rather tame. His foster-father read a chapter to them every night before they went to bed, but the eldest of the family was generally too much occupied in pinching the twins, or keeping them in order, to give the reading anything better than a very desultory attention. But Jake's slow, droning voice was not calculated to arouse interest. "I dunno," he said, glancing up sidelong at the man. "Mebby he—I don't think he likes it —much."

"Oh, you set him at the right stories, and he will. Don't you like stories of shipwreck?"

"You bet!"

"Well, get him to read to you about Paul; he had some wonderful adventures on the sea. And there's a better story than that there, about some people who were nearly shipwrecked, and a Man on board saved them. And how do you think He did it? Why, He got up and stopped the storm and the waves."

The child nodded. "Daddy read us that one night," he said.

So the Book remained in John McIntyre's shanty, and often, when some other story was finished, the boy would bring it out. The books of Esther and Daniel, the tales of Samson and Gideon, and the wonderful stories of the Savior Himself, all had to be gone over again and again. And one night John McIntyre read of love's great sacrifice, when the skies grew dark and the earth trembled with the agony of Calvary.

Tim lay on the floor, staring up at the reader. John McIntyre's sorrowful voice had brought home to him some inkling of the stupendousness of that tragedy.

"What did they kill Him for?" he demanded sharply. "He never did anything bad, did He?"

"No." John McIntyre's voice was almost inaudible.

"Couldn't He have stopped them if He had wanted to?"

"Yes," hesitatingly.

"Why didn't He, then?" scornfully.

Why? There had been a day when John McIntyre could have given a ready answer. He would have told the boy it was God's love and man's great need that held the Savior there; but he had long ceased to believe in that love, and he was silent.

Tim waited a while, and then tried another question. "Where is Jesus now? Is He in Heaven?"

"I suppose so—yes."

"That's where our mother is—an' your boys, too, eh?"

"I suppose so," faltered the man.

"Were they very bad boys?" asked Tim in an awed whisper.

"No." The answer was almost fierce.

"Oh, then they'll be in Heaven for sure, won't they?"

"Yes."

"Are you *dead* sure?"

"Yes, sure." The man drew a deep breath as he answered.

The boy lay silent, evolving a new question. It came at last.

"Say! all boys and girls have to have mothers, don't they?"

"Yes."

"Then your boys must 'a' had one, too, eh?"

"Yes."

"Is—is she in Heaven, too?"

"Yes, she is." John McIntyre spoke with a defiant firmness that startled the boy.

"You're dead sure about that, ain't you?" he inquired, half admiringly.

"Yes. If there's a heaven, she's there, even if no one else is."

"But ain't there one?" cried Tim eagerly. It would be rather nice to shock Miss Scott on Sunday with the news that there was no such place, backed up by an authority like John McIntyre.

"Yes, there is." The answer was long in coming, but when it did come it sounded final.

Tim was slightly disappointed. "Well," he argued at last, "I guess there oughter be, anyhow, for good people like Mammy and Daddy Sawyer and Dr. Allen and Mr. Scott—eh?"

"I suppose so."

"Why, daddy read about it one night in the Bible. It was a city, he said—aw, shucks! I'd rather it was the country. But it had gold streets, and was all pearls and diamonds and things. Say! find it, will you?"

So the next reading was of the New Jerusalem, the city that had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb was the light thereof.

"For there shall be no night there." When John McIntyre came to those words his voice broke, and he closed the Book quickly, as though it hurt him. He had not shed a tear since that day when he and Mary laid their last child in the grave; and a far deeper sorrow had come upon him since; but something shone in his eyes now as he turned his back to the light.

For some minutes Tim lay staring into the fire, and wondering. It was a wild winter night, and the storm came wailing across the Drowned Lands, and shook the old door of the little cabin. But its sorrow-laden notes, that always found an echo in the winter of John McIntyre's lonely heart, spoke to him of something new and wonderful—of that other land where there would be "no more death, neither sorrow nor crying."

"It must be an awful pretty place," Tim ventured at last, rather wistfully. "Say!"—he looked up eagerly—"d'ye s'pose it 'ud be nicer'n Nova Scotia?" His companion did not answer, and he went on: "Our mother's there, 'cause she was good; but if our father's dead, he ain't."

John McIntyre looked down at the child, and Tim nodded his head emphatically. "Oh, but I know he ain't," he said with firm conviction. "He was so awful bad. Don't you mind I told you? He cheated a lot of other folks, an' got all their money, an' then he ran away, for fear they'd put him in jail. The last time I seen him he come to give ole Mother Cummins money for keepin' us. She was drunk that night, and I sneaked out o' bed an' listened, an' he didn't give her 'nough, an' she yelled at him, an' she says, 'Joseph Symonds, you're a——' Wha—what's the matter?"

John McIntyre had leaned forward in his chair and was glaring at the boy. "That name!" he cried. "What was your father's name?"

"Symonds—Joseph Symonds," repeated the child, staring. "That's our name, too, an' Joey was called after him."

"Was Fair Hill the place you were born in?"

"Yes. How did you know? It was right beside the ocean——" He paused. The look in John McIntyre's face alarmed him. "Ye—ye ain't goin' to get sick again, are ye?"

He arose and came nearer, and the man drew back, with a gesture of loathing. "Your—father—was Joseph Symonds!" he repeated, dazed.

Tim had a fashion, when he was very much interested in anything his friend was saying, of seizing a button of the man's coat and twisting it. He took hold of it now, and turned it around and around, gazing at him wonderingly.

"Yes; did ye know him?" he asked, innocently eager.

John McIntyre's clenched hands relaxed. His first impulse had been to hurl far from him the

offspring of the scoundrel who had been his ruin. But one look into the boy's inquiring eyes, gazing at him in perfect faith, rendered him powerless. He let his hand fall heavily upon Tim's shoulder, and holding him back, stared into his wondering face. Line by line he traced resemblances, hitherto unnoticed, to the man he had hated. There was the same pointed chin, the same cunning droop of the eyes. And yet, oh, miracle of love! those very hated features now formed the one thing in the world to which his heart clung. He was overcome by a feeling of utter impotence. Hitherto, his strength had lain in his relentless hatred; and now, what had become of it? It was gone—transformed into another feeling infinitely more potent. Something of the all-conquering force of love—the impossibility of escape from it—was borne in upon John McIntyre's soul. For an instant the veil of mystery that shrouded human suffering seemed to grow transparent, and behind it shone Divine Love in the agony of Calvary. Inevitable, all-pervading, like the voice of the Apocalypse thundering from heaven, it spoke: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending."

The man placed his hand on the boy's head in a helpless fashion.

"Are ye sick?" whispered Tim.

"It's nothing," he faltered weakly. "I—I was just feeling weak. Come, it's time you were in bed. It is too stormy for you to go home."

And that night John McIntyre slept with a protecting arm placed around the son of the man who had ruined his life.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HERALD OF SPRING

Pale season, watcher in unvexed suspense,
Still priestess of the patient middle day,
Betwixt wild March's humored petulance
And the warm wooing of green-kilted May.
—ARCHIBALD LAMPMAN.

All day the rain had poured, a real March rain, descending in chill, driving torrents. Now and then bursts of wavering sunlight broke through the storm, but the next moment the patch of blue sky was shut out by rolling gray clouds, and followed by another downpour.

In one of the brief sunlit intervals, Miss Arabella threw a shawl over her head and ran down to Long's store for a pound of tea. She was still pale and wan, as she had always been since her illness last fall; but there was a light in her eyes and an expression of quiet determination about her mouth, telling that the little lilac lady's spirit was still on guard over her secret.

It was the hour when Silas Long and his son were having their early supper, and Ella Anne kept shop. As the sharp ring of the little bell announced a customer, she came from behind the pigeon-holed partition that served as a post-office. "Oh, I say, Arabella!" she cried, turning back at the sight of the little wind-blown figure, "mind you, there's a letter for you! Who'd ever 'a' thought o' you gettin' a letter?"

Miss Arabella's sensitive face flushed. "I guess it's a boot advertisement again," she ventured. "I got one year before last."

"No, it ain't." Miss Long reappeared with the missive, examining it minutely. "Them advertising things are open, and this one's sealed. It's got writing on the inside, too, 'stead o' print; I can make that much out through the envelope, only I can't read a word of it. It's from a place called Nugget Hill. Who do you know there?"

Miss Arabella took the letter, her reticent soul shrinking from the frank inquisitiveness. "I don't know anybody," she said honestly. "I never heard of the place."

"Miss Weir was in here, a minit ago, an' I showed it to her, an' she said that was the name of a place in the Klondyke. Who on earth would be writing to you all the way from there?"

Miss Arabella suddenly crushed the letter into her pocket; her face turned white. "I—I want a pound o' that green tea, Ella Anne, please," she stammered hurriedly.

"Aren't you goin' to read it?" asked Miss Long, reaching for the tea-scoop.

"I ain't in any hurry," faltered Miss Arabella, "but I want the tea—quick!"

"Well, if you ain't a caution! Here, give it to me. I'll read it for you, if you like."

"Oh, no, thanks, Ella Anne, I'd rather wait." There was panic in the little woman's voice. "I—I *always* wait quite a *long* while before I open my letters."

"Well, my gracious!" grumbled Miss Long. As she measured out the tea, and bound it up, she kept an inquiring eye upon her customer, and could not help seeing that she was greatly agitated.

"Well, sakes! I could no more do that than fly. Why, mebby some one's left you a fortune."

Miss Arabella made no reply. She hurriedly tucked the parcel under her shawl, and forgetting to pay for her purchase, made for the door.

"Likely Wes an' me'll be over to William's to-night for a sing, so you can run in an' tell us all about it then," Miss Long called after her.

Miss Arabella paid no heed. Just now she cared not what the future might hold, she must get beyond all prying eyes immediately, and see what that letter contained. She ran along the sodden pathway, splashing unheedingly through the mud and snow, and repeating to herself, over and over again, that he must be living, he must be, after all. Without waiting to take off her wet shawl, and all unheeding Polly's loud and profane complaint that times were dull, she fled to the safety of her spare bedroom. She pulled down the window-blind, till the place was all in darkness, dragged the chair against the door, sat upon it, and with shaking hand drew the letter from her pocket. Her cheeks were pink, her eyes were shining like stars, and she was trembling from head to foot. She opened the envelope with tender care and unfolded the well-filled sheets. Her devouring eyes seemed to take them all in at a glance.

No, he was not dead, and he had not forgotten her. But he had long ago given up hope of ever seeing her again; he had felt he had no right to trouble her—such a useless chap as he was. He had never found poor old John McIntyre, nor had he succeeded in anything else, for he had been sick, and had lost all his money, and had years of poverty that made him ashamed to think of her. But his luck had taken a wonderful turn. He had made his pile. He was just on the verge of losing everything again, and going to the dogs last winter, when a fine old chum of his sent him a haul of money. It came just in the nick of time, and not only saved him, but made his fortune. Yes, that friend was a bully old chap, but he wasn't going to tell her anything about him just now; there was a big surprise in store for her. And he was a rich man now, and she might wear silk dresses all the rest of her life if she liked. And he was coming home in June, just as fast as the train could carry him, and if it didn't go fast enough he would get out and run ahead. That is, if she wanted him still. Did she think she could forgive him? Forgive him! Miss Arabella wiped her eyes to read that again, wondering dimly what it meant. Or had she forgotten him in these long years, or was she still waiting? Somehow, he couldn't help thinking it would be just like her to wait. And was Polly living yet? And could she still say "Annie Laurie" as he had taught her? And had she kept the blue silk, as she had promised? She must answer right away, and if she did not want him he would not come; but if she did—well, look out—there would be a wedding along about the first of June.

Again and again Miss Arabella read the letter, trying to convince her dazed senses that it was real. When she had succeeded in grasping something of the joyous truth she arose dizzily and went to the dresser drawer. Very carefully she took out the roll of blue silk, and laying the letter between its shining folds, she sat down and cried over them.

"You didn't wear out, after all," she sobbed, running her fingers gently over the blue folds, "no, you didn't."

She was roused by the clicking of the front gate, and peeped fearfully under the window-blind. Susan was coming! She had paused for a moment to harangue the orphans, who were splashing up and down the middle of the road, knee deep in mud. Miss Arabella sprang up in a panic. Susan would find out. There would be no use trying to hide from her that something tremendous had happened, and she and William and the children would laugh at old Aunt Arabella's foolishness. And Susan would step in, with her strong will, and turn poor Martin away, as she had done so long ago. She must get away; she must find some hiding place for her secret. She snatched up the blue silk in frantic haste and bundled it beneath her shawl. Like a refuge to a pursued hare, came the thought of Elsie Cameron. She would run to Elsie. A glance at the window showed Susan still in violent dispute with the orphans. There was yet time to escape. Miss Arabella darted for the kitchen, frightening Polly into incoherent squalls, tore open the door, and dashed out into the storm. She splashed through the back garden, scrambled recklessly over the fence, and went staggering along the soft, yielding field behind the line of houses. The rain beat in her face, the wind flung her shawl over her head and twisted her thin skirt about her, and she knew, if Granny Long's telescope spied her, as it was almost sure to do, the whole village would be sure she had gone mad. But she was reckless. The chance of happiness had come with dazzling unexpectedness, and she was like a drowning man, who forgets all else but, the life-line thrown to him. On she ran, like a little brown leaf driven by the wind and rain, her head bent, her shawl clutched closely around her precious bundle.

She was plunging down among the dripping cedars of Treasure Valley, when she noticed,

with dismay, that the stream was flowing high above the stepping-stones. It came roaring out from under the bridge, swift and swollen, with clumps of ice and snow whirling down its oily surface. Not a moment did she hesitate, but turned and scrambled up the bank again. She would likely be seen as soon as she crossed the bridge, but she must get to Elsie, no matter what the consequences. As she reached the bridge the doctor's buggy came splashing down the street behind her. He smiled, and pulled up beside the little wind-blown figure.

"May I drive you to your destination, Miss Winters?" he asked.

Miss Arabella, without a word, scrambled in. The sudden and unexpected relief almost took away her breath. If she had eluded the telescope so far, she was comparatively safe. She gave her rescuer a grateful glance as he tucked the rubber lap-robe about her. Then a pang of remorse seized her in the midst of her joy. She had intended the blue silk for Elsie's wedding day, and his wedding day, too, of course. How selfish she was to have forgotten! She glanced up at him timidly, feeling as if she were defrauding him of his rights. She remembered, regretfully, that he had looked overworked and very much older during the past few months. Her anxiety for him helped to calm her own agitation.

"You must be all wore out, doctor," she said sympathetically. "You've had such an awful winter's work."

Dr. Allen looked embarrassed. It was not the hard toil of the past winter that had so often made him feel weary. "Oh, I'm all right," he said evasively. "And you—the winter seems to have benefited you, Miss Winters," he continued, looking kindly at her shining eyes and flushed face. "It's a pleasure to see you looking so well, when I remember how ill you were last fall."

The little woman blushed guiltily. "It's—it's the spring, I guess," she stammered; and she was right, for Miss Arabella's long winter was over, and for her the birds had already begun to sing.

The young man smiled as he helped her out at the Camerons' gate. He could not help seeing that she was concealing something beneath her shawl, and was as frightened as though it had been a dynamite bomb. He was amused, and wondered, as he always did when he met Miss Arabella, what the queer little body was thinking about. He never dreamed that his conduct could have had the smallest effect upon her odd behavior, so blind was he to the far-reaching influence of all human action, good or evil.

Her heart once more in her mouth, Miss Arabella sped up the Camerons' lane to the back door. Old lady Cameron was seated by the sitting-room window, knitting. She wore her best black dress and her lace collar with the big cairngorm brooch; for the minister and his wife were expected to tea. She tapped upon the window-pane with her knitting-needle, and smilingly beckoned Miss Arabella to come in by the front way. But she shook her head and sped on. She darted up the steps and into the kitchen, without knocking. Elsie, in a trim cotton gown and a spotless white apron, was setting the tea-table; and in a warm corner behind the stove Uncle Hughie, crippled with a bad attack of rheumatism, was rocking in his old arm-chair, and singing the "March o' the Cameron Men."

"Hoots! toots! Come away, Arabella! Come away!" he cried. "Eh, hech! And would you be coming over in all the rain? Well! well! well! and that would be kind, whatefer."

Elsie put down the pitcher of milk she was bringing from the pantry and came forward to remove the visitor's dripping shawl.

"Don't, Elsie, don't!" whispered Miss Arabella, clutching it tighter. "Come on upstairs. I want to tell you something—something awful."

Elsie's big eyes opened wide. "Is anything wrong, Arabella?" she whispered.

"I—I don't know. No; but somethin' awful's happened, or goin' to happen—I don't know which."

Without another word the girl opened the door leading to the hall. She looked in at the sitting-room door as she passed.

"Mother, Arabella's coming upstairs with me for a few minutes," she called. "We'll be down soon."

She said no more until they were in the privacy of her own bedroom. She placed the trembling visitor in a chair by the window, where occasional bursts of sunlight came through the soft muslin curtains. Then she drew up another chair and sat close beside her.

"Arabella," she said, "you've heard from him?"

Miss Arabella hung her head like a schoolgirl caught in a naughty prank. "Yes," she whispered guiltily.

Elsie flung her arms about the little wet figure. "Oh, Arabella, dear, I'm so glad! I'm so glad! Now aren't you glad I wouldn't let you give me the dress? Is he coming home?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Next summer—in June."

"Oh! And is he well? Where does he live? And why didn't—oh, tell me all about it!"

The sympathetic joy was bringing the tears to Miss Arabella's eyes again. "Oh, Elsie, you're so awful good! I—would you—would it look kind o' foolish if I was to let you read his letter?"

"Not a bit, if you don't mind, you know. I'd really love to see it," she confessed honestly.

Miss Arabella threw back her shawl and carefully unrolled the blue silk. She took the letter from its folds and then hesitated. "Mebby," she began breathlessly, "I—perhaps I'd better read it to you, Elsie—because there's parts, you know, that might sound—foolish." She looked at the girl apologetically.

"Of course, Arabella, I understand." Elsie pushed the letter back into her hand. "After all, no third person ought to see a love-letter, you know."

Much assured, and still blushing and stammering, Miss Arabella read aloud a few of the more practical details of the letter. She passed tremulously over the tender passages, and she also omitted the part about Martin's receiving help from a friend. Somehow, her jealous pride in him forbade that another should know he had not succeeded unaided.

"Poor little Arabella," whispered the girl when it was finished. "And it's coming true at last. And what a nice name he's got—Martin—what's the rest of it?"

"Martin Heaslip," whispered Arabella, as though afraid to utter it.

"Martin Heaslip—I like the sound of it. And he's rich, too. Why, it seems too good to be true."

Miss Arabella glanced up quickly, and a look of apprehension came over her radiant face. "That's just what I can't help thinking, Elsie. Don't it seem too good to happen to me?"

"Pooh! Nonsense!" laughed the other, with the sure hopefulness of youth. "Of course it'll happen. You must take your dress to Mrs. Long right away, and she and Ella Anne——"

"No! no! *no*!" Miss Arabella sat up straight, her eyes dilated with fear. "No, nobody's to know a whisper about it. Not anybody! Mind, Elsie, you promised. Oh, Elsie, you did!"

"Yes, yes, Arabella!" cried the girl, alarmed at the agitation she had aroused. "But who's to make your dress and give you a wedding? They must all know some time."

"No, there's nobody to know until it's all over. Once, just after he went West, he wrote and ast me to come out, an' he sent the money, an'—an'—Susan wouldn't let me go! She made me send the money back. She said I wasn't strong enough to go out and live there, and—she—meant it for kindness, you know, Elsie, but—he—I guess he felt bad." Miss Arabella carefully covered the blue silk from harm, for the tears were dropping again. "Anyhow, it, made him think he'd got to get things fixed up awful grand for me, or else he'd 'a' sent for me long ago. And Susan wouldn't let me go this time—I know she wouldn't. She'd say I was too old for such foolishness. Do you think I look awful old, Elsie?" she asked piteously.

"Oh, Arabella, dear! No! no! You look young and as pretty as a picture!" she exclaimed, truthfully. "But, Arabella"—her brow puckered worriedly—"if no one knows, how are you going to do it?"

"I'm going to write and tell him to come for me, and never let on to any one, an' we'll—we'll—what do you call it when they run away?"

"Not elope, Arabella!" cried Elsie in dismay.

"Yes, that's it. We'll elope," said Miss Arabella calmly.

The girl looked at her, and for an instant the vision of the shy, drooping little woman figuring in a runaway match filled her with a desire for laughter. But it was quenched the next instant by the gravity of the situation. What did Elsie know of this man, after all? What if the innocent little child-woman were being deceived! That feeling she often experienced, of being far older than Arabella, took possession of her.

"Arabella," she said gravely, but gently, "are you quite, quite sure that he is kind, and—and—good, and all you could wish him to be?"

Miss Arabella looked at her in childlike wonder, and then her face lit up with a heavy smile. "Oh, my! there's no fear of him!" she cried radiantly.

Elsie was silent. She dared not disturb her beautiful faith. "But, Arabella," she pleaded, "even

if you told Susan and Bella and all, when he came they would have to let you marry him. And I think it would be better, much better, than to elope. It looks as though you were doing something wrong—and you're not."

Miss Arabella's head drooped again. She nervously fingered a corner of the blue silk. "It ain't exactly that," she said shyly, "but I kind of feel scared about it, Elsie." Her voice sank to a whisper. "You see, I've got so used to bein' disappointed that I guess I can't stand anything else for a while," she added, with unconscious pathos. "And I ain't dead sure that it'll happen, you know. It seems as if it was too good to be true, and if it didn't"—her face looked suddenly old and gray—"Susan and William and Ella Anne, an' all the folks, would talk and *talk*." She shivered. "I can't stand to be talked about, Elsie. It was just because I was so scared o' bein' talked about that I got better last fall. And, oh, I want you to make Ella Anne keep still about my letter, won't you, Elsie, please? And you'll not tell, will you?"

"No, Arabella, not a soul." She sighed in perplexity. To assist in an elopement! The staid, earnest upbringing of the country girl, coupled with her high sense of duty, made her shrink from the very word.

"And the dress, Arabella? Shall I help you make it?"

"That's what I was jist thinkin' about. I can't have it made at home, 'cause Susan an' Bella's in an' out every day. An' you can't have it here, for Jean an' the boys'll be home soon, an' they'd find out, an' if Lorry Sawyer was to get a sight of it, she'd remember all she's forgot. I was thinkin' on the way ever there's jist one woman in the village would make it an' never tell a soul, an' that's ——"

Elsie nodded. "Mrs. Munn."

"Yes. Harriet dressmaked for a long time before Munn died; he wasn't no more use than Davy. An' she'd make it an' never tell. An' you'd help a little, wouldn't you, an' see that she made it—kind o'—jist a little—fashionable, Elsie?"

"Yes, Arabella; oh, yes." The answer was absently given. The girl's eyes were troubled. But Miss Arabella gazed at her in perfect faith, feeling sure she was evolving some new style for the fashioning of the blue silk gown.

"Elsie, my girl!" Old lady Cameron's soft voice, with its Highland Scotch accent, came from the foot of the stairs. "The minister's jist driving across the bridge. Come away down, and bring Arabella with you."

Elsie went into the preparations for Arabella's elopement with something of the feeling that she was assisting in a bank robbery. She suffered from a very anxious conscience the day she took the blue silk to Mrs. Munn. No need to tell that silent lady that the affair must be kept a secret; Mrs. Munn guarded everything that came her way as if it were a deadly crime in which she was implicated. She seemed not a whit disturbed by the astonishing fact that Arabella was going to elope. Such a method of getting married quite coincided with her general belief that things should not be talked about. She asked no questions concerning the prospective bridegroom, but promised to make the wedding gown entirely on faith, and if Granny Long found out she was making anything—well, she'd have to get a spy-glass as long as the sawmill smokestack!

Elsie had expected some advice and help from the elder woman, and felt disappointed and worried. The burden of the secret was beginning to weigh on her. Suppose she was helping Arabella to take a step that would end in life-long unhappiness!

She went slowly homeward, and sat down alone in her little room, sorely perplexed. She was gazing with troubled eyes down the lane, when a light came into them, and a little flush mounted to her cheek. A smart horse and buggy had turned in at the gate, and was passing below her window. The next moment Archie came up the stairs with a message. Dr. Allen wanted to know if she would like a drive.

She came down the steps clad in a long, brown coat, and a little toque with a coquettish bronze wing on it, the color of her hair. Dr. Allen looked at her approvingly. He had no smallest notion of the details of a woman's dress, but he knew that this one always seemed a wonderful harmony of color.

They sped down the lane and out upon the open, smooth highway. The roads were almost dry now, and in the dun-colored fields and the purple-gray woods there was an air of expectancy, as though the earth knew that a great change was near. It was a glorious, blustering spring day. The wind was working strenuously to keep the sky clear of clouds, and a time of it she was having. A hard-working, tidy body she was, this April afternoon, but she did not go about her work systematically. For no sooner had she swept her great floor a clear, gleaming blue, than, with a careless flourish of her broom, she scattered great rolling heaps of down all over it, and had to go frantically to work and brush them together again. Nevertheless, the wind and the clouds, and indeed the whole world, seemed to be having a grand time. The trees swung giddily before the gale, the bare, brown fields were smiling and tidy, and as clean as a floor, and the little streams by the roadside leaped and laughed at the sunlight. Only the birds seemed to be in trouble. A

gasping robin clung for a moment to an unsteady perch in a lashing elm, and tried his poor little best to get out a few notes. But the frolicsome wind slapped him in the face, and choked him, and he fled before it to the shelter of the woods. Everywhere was tremendous rush and bustle and glad hurry, for was not all the world preparing for the arrival of Summer? She might come any day now, and the earth must be tidied and swept and washed and dried, to make ready for the glorious paraphernalia of green carpets and curtains, and flower cushions, and endless bric-a-brac, that grand lady was sure to bring.

Even Gilbert felt the joy of the spring day, and behaved quite cheerfully for a young man who had had his heart broken only the winter before. The two had not driven together since the day they had witnessed Sandy McQuarry's Waterloo, and they recalled it with laughter, and discussed, with even more merriment, the wonderful sequel. For since Sandy had fulfilled his wager, and come back to Elmbrook church, and had apparently decided to go softly all the rest of his days, the gossips had noticed patent signs of a strong inclination on his part to go even deeper in his humility, and make a life treaty with his conqueror, and Elmbrook was all agog over the unbelievable prospect. Since that last drive Elsie Cameron had dropped some of her reserve, and Gilbert felt they were on a friendly footing. He was not so afraid of her now, since he had done his duty, and he found her a most pleasant comrade. They talked of many things, grave and gay. They exchanged reminiscences of schooldays, for they were both Canadian born and country bred, and had a wholesome, happy past to recall. In the talk of his boyhood days Gilbert was led to tell of his early ambitions, and of the struggle he had had to get an education.

"I went to the public school until I was fourteen, and I always cherished dreams of one day being a doctor. But our farm was small, and our family large, and when father died we older boys had to turn out to earn our living. I got a job that first summer working in a sawmill near home, and there I met my fortune. There was a big, warm-hearted, rollicking chap there, who was foreman, and I thought he was the most wonderful man alive; and upon my word, I rather think so yet. He was just the sort of fellow to be a tremendous hero in the eyes of a youngster of fifteen. He could walk the logs on the river any old way, and could jump and run and throw the shoulder-stone, and do all manner of stunts, away ahead of everybody else. We kids thought he was the greatest thing outside a dime novel; and I tell you, he was a fine chap all through. I've met a good many people of all sorts since those days, but I've never seen the equal of Martin Heaslip."

"Who?" His listener whirled around in her seat, her eyes startled, her lips parted.

"Heaslip—Martin Heaslip. You don't happen to know him, do you?"

"Oh, no; not at all!" The answer came in hurried confusion. "I—it was the name—I—please go on. I beg your pardon for the interruption."

"He was a Bluenose—one of those Scotch-Irish Nova Scotians, the best kind going; but he had lots of relatives over in Bruce County; perhaps you knew some of them?"

"No, oh, no! I—it was a mistake."

"Well, one day the poor old chap met with rather a serious accident. He was walloping around the mill, as usual, singing a crazy old lumberjack song about 'six brave Cana-jen byes,' who broke a lumber jam. Martin was always whooping away at that dirge, I think I can hear him yet. I'm not up in musical terms, but I think the tune was a kind of Gregorian chant, and as mournful as a dog howling at night. It goes something like this:

> '*They broke the jam on the Garry Rocks,*
> *And they met a wat-e-ry grave.'*

Martin could sing about as well as I can, so you may imagine what a continuous performance of that sort was like. He was bellowing away at this, as usual, never looking where he was stepping, when he stumbled, and fell against the big saw, and the mill going at top speed. I happened to be standing right behind him at the time, and I managed to jerk him back before he went right over; but he cut his foot badly, as it was, poor chap. I had always loved to tinker away at cuts and bruises, so I managed to patch him up a bit, and stop the bleeding, till the doctor came. It was nothing, any one could have done it, but poor old Martin made a great fuss over it; and he literally dragged me out of the mill and shoved me back to school. Paid every cent of my expenses until I was through my first year at college. After that I got on my own feet. I taught school for a while, and paid my way; but I'll never forget that Martin Heaslip was the man that gave me my chance. I just fancy I see him now, sailing down the river on the slipperiest log in the bunch, and roaring out his song about a 'wat-er-y grave' as gay as a lark."

The doctor paused, in happy reminiscence. There was a tense silence. At last his companion spoke.

"Where is he now?" Her voice trembled; she had turned away, and was looking far off over the clean brown fields.

"He was a wandering sort of chap. He went back to Nova Scotia; then West, somewhere, and the last move was to the Klondyke. He's been there for several years now, I fancy; hoping to make a fortune, no doubt."

Gilbert paused, slightly confused. He was ashamed to discover how little he really knew about Martin. There was no remark from his companion. She could not help noticing his evident embarrassment, and the poverty of his knowledge regarding his old friend, and she was drawing her own damaging conclusions. As the silence continued he glanced at her half inquiringly. There was a look of distress in the golden-brown depths of her eyes.

"Are you cold?" he asked, with hasty compunction. "I've been yarning away and forgetting time and place. Go on, there, Speed! You are not cold?"

"No, not at all, thank you." She answered absently. Her mind was busy running over Arabella's story, and putting the two tales side by side. So this was "the boy," who had been so generously treated and been so selfish in return; the boy who had repaid Martin's generosity with forgetfulness, and had helped to lengthen poor little Arabella's years of waiting. Her anxiety for Arabella had been swept away. She was telling herself that she should be relieved and thankful for that, but, strange to say, her feelings were exactly the opposite.

When Gilbert helped her out at her own door she bade him a hurried farewell, and ran up the steps. There was something in her movements like a hurt fawn running for cover. Her uncle sat in his accustomed corner by the window, where the sunlight came through a little green hedge of geraniums. His stockinged feet were on the stove damper, his weekly newspaper in his hand.

"Ech! hech! Elsie, lass!" he cried. "Look ye here, now! Here's the finest receep for trouble ye ever heard. Jist listen!" She paused by his chair and smiled wanly. "There's a long bit in the newspaper here that would be telling that wherever a poisonous weed grows, jist right beside it, mind ye, you will be finding the herb that cures the poison. Eh! eh! wouldn't that be jist beautiful, whatefer?" His golden-brown eyes were radiant. "Och! hoch! but it takes the Almighty to be managing things, indeed! Now, last night I would be rastlin' away when the rheumatics wouldn't let me sleep—the rheumatics would be a fine thing to make a body think—I would be rastlin' away about the poison o' sin an' trouble that would be in the world; and here, jist to-day, I would be reading this piece—and hoots! there it is, ye see! Yes, yes, it takes the Almighty to manage things, indeed! And ye mind He would be coming and living among us, ye see. There it is again: He would jist be the cure planted right among the poison! Oh! hoch! Yes! yes!"

The girl laid her hand for a minute on his rough shirt-sleeve. "And the rheumatism is bad again, is it, Uncle Hughie?"

"Hoots! not much, not much. It will jist be the April wind—and the doctor would be giving me a fine liniment last time. Oh, it is the fine young man he will be, indeed. And you would be out for a drive with him?" he added, in kindly interest.

"Yes, uncle." Her face flushed, and she moved toward the door leading to the stairs. "Yes, I was out for a little drive with Dr. Allen." She passed out, and closing the door behind her, added softly to herself, "For the last time."

CHAPTER XV

THE ELOPEMENT

For Law immutable hath one decree,
"No deed of good, no deed of ill can die;
All must ascend unto my loom and be
Woven for man in lasting tapestry."
—ISABELLA VALANCY CRAWFORD.

In the middle of May Miss Arabella's wedding gown was completed, and presented a blue cascade of frills and flounces that delighted the owner's beauty-loving soul. Just once had she tried it on, and then only in sections, for Mrs. Munn said it was dreadful bad luck to wear your wedding gown before the day. So at one time Miss Arabella had put on the billowy skirt with her lilac waist; and at another the blue silk blouse with her old gingham skirt, and even then she had been seized with such a fit of trembling that Elsie Cameron had to hold her up.

The dressmaking had been carried on in a large empty room above the doctor's surgery, and when it was finished Miss Arabella left the gown there. She dared not take it home, for fear Susan would discover it. So Mrs. Munn wrapped it carefully in a sheet and hung it behind the door. There were bunches of dried sage and mint and lavender hanging along the low rafters above it, and just to move the wedding dress gave one a whiff as sweet as a breath from all the spices of Araby.

Often, when Dr. Allen drove away, Miss Arabella would run over to Mrs. Munn's, and up the

back stairs, for a look at the gown, just to convince herself that it had not been merely a beautiful dream. It was something tangible, the outward and visible sign that her happiness was real. For hours afterward she would go about her work in a kind of blissful daze, until Susan declared it was a caution how Arabella forgot things, and she wondered what on earth was the matter with her. She looked well enough, but sometimes her appetite was bad, and she, Susan, had a good mind to take her over to Dr. Allen, and see if he couldn't cure her up in a day, the way he did last fall.

Arabella had another mysterious source of forgetfulness. When Susan's watchfulness kept her from visiting Mrs. Munn's lumber room, she would slip away into her spare bedroom, shut the door, and taking out two letters from her top drawer, would sit down and read them again and again. The last letter was always convincing; it breathed Martin's strong, joyous spirit from every line, and drove away all fears. It had come promptly in answer to hers, and had been sent under cover to Mrs. Munn, for fear Ella Anne's curiosity might again be aroused.

Martin evidently retained his old rollicking spirits, for he fell in most cordially with the plan for eloping. It suited him down to the ground, he declared. He would come to Lakeview on the last night of May, and early in the morning of the first of June he would drive out in the finest livery rig the place possessed, and away they would fly, without a howd'ye-do to any one. But they must come back for a little visit after their honeymoon, for there was a certain old friend of his in Elmbrook he must see. He was not going to tell even her about him, because it was to be a big surprise. He felt like going out and shooting up the town when he thought about it all.

Miss Arabella had taken the letter to Elsie soon after its arrival, and had read parts of it aloud. Whom did Elsie suppose he meant by an old friend in the village? She couldn't remember that he had known any one here very well, except William. Martin and William had taken to each other from the first. Yes, likely he meant William.

Elsie was fashioning a white lace ruffle for the collar of the blue silk gown, and bent her shining head lower over her work. Here was another proof of Martin's whole-souled generosity. There was not a hint of blame for his ungrateful friend.

"D'ye know, Elsie," said Miss Arabella hesitatingly, "it jist makes me feel bad to see you sewing anything for that dress, because—because—it was to have been yours, you know."

"But, indeed, Arabella, you know I'd far rather see you wear it. When should I ever put on such a grand dress as that, with all the work I have to do?"

"Oh, but I Intended it for your wedding dress! You mind, I told you?"

"Wedding dress!" Elsie laughed. "Why, Arabella, it might have been worn into rag-carpet strips before I'd need it!"

"But I thought—it seemed to me, he—he always acts as if he liked you so awful, Elsie."

"He? Who? Do you mean Lauchie McKitterick or Sawed-Off Wilmott, or Sandy McQuarry, or whom do you mean, Arabella Winters?"

"Oh, dear me, Elsie!" Miss Arabella gave a half-distressed little laugh. "You know they wouldn't, one o' them, dast look at you. You know right well I mean the doctor."

The girl bent lower over her work, and a flush crept over her face. She shook her head decidedly. "Oh, no! no! Arabella. You are all wrong. Dr. Allen has no more idea of caring for me in that way than I of caring for him. Come, let me see if these wrist-bands are large enough."

Miss Arabella felt the gentle rebuke, and sighed. It was really too bad, because they were both so good-looking, and so well suited, and so young. And the faded little lilac lady thought regretfully of her lost youth.

The second letter allayed any lingering fears Elsie had felt regarding the elopement. According to Dr. Allen, she might safely trust Arabella to Martin Heaslip, and his own words went to prove the same. So if they wanted to run away, let them; they would run back in a few days, anyway, and then what would happen? Would the young man have the grace to be ashamed of himself? Martin, she was sure, would never blame him; his letter had breathed nothing but heartiest good-will. But Martin's generosity only made the other's ingratitude the blacker.

Meanwhile, the first of June was fast approaching, and as yet no one had a suspicion of the treasure hidden away in Mrs. Munn's lumber room. Even that lady's talent for keeping a secret might have been rather severely taxed had it not been that those around her were absorbed in other interests. There were Davy and his bosom comrade, the eldest orphan. They certainly would have divined that something unusual was transpiring in the old storeroom; but just now they had no time for such trivial things. For the race between Sawed-Off Wilmott and young Lochinvar, begun on the last show day, and continued hotly all winter, was fast reaching a culminating point. The boys were vastly interested in it, and since the long evenings had passed Tim had discarded books and fallen back into his old evil ways. So between them and Ella Anne, life was made a thorny path for the rival lovers.

Then the shrewd Mrs. Munn had noticed that lately the doctor seemed to be absent-minded. Indeed, he was very much worried over a problem of his own that had nothing to do with his patients. The question was, what had he done to offend Miss Cameron? Why she should have suddenly changed from warm friendship to cold avoidance of him he could not understand. Whenever he called, she was out, or overwhelmingly busy, or just about to fulfil another engagement, until he understood, and ceased calling. Her conduct hurt him more than he could have thought possible. He had long known and admired her profoundly. He cared much for her good opinion; but that her disapproval could wound him was something he had not suspected. He had supposed that Rosalie had made anything like that quite impossible for him forever.

So, in the midst of these abstractions, Miss Arabella's wedding gown hung, all unnoticed, in the fragrance of lavender and mint, until at last the end of May arrived, the eve of the day set for the elopement.

Dr. Allen had been driving Speed all day, and his other horse was out in the pasture-field; so, early in the evening, he walked down toward the Drowned Lands to see a patient, taking the pathway through the ravine. He had not been down there since the winter road had broken up, and he found Treasure Valley all a wonder of purple and gold—where the violets carpeted the banks and the marigolds choked the stream. Down in the fragrant stillness the sounds of the village grew faint and far away. Here was only the murmur of the water over the white stones, or the even-song of the vesper sparrows in the sumachs along the banks. As Gilbert came down to the water's edge he spied another figure approaching from the opposite bank, a slim figure in a white gown, with a crown of hair that rivaled the golden blossoms in the stream. He hesitated a moment, then crossed over to her.

"May I help you across?" he asked with a stiff formality he would not have used a few weeks previous.

The minds of both recurred to their first meeting in this very spot, a little more than a year before.

"I hope you will not object to my company for that length of time," he added, finding it impossible to keep something of his grievance out of his voice.

"Oh, no, certainly not," she stammered, not knowing how to truthfully refute his implied charge.

There was that look of distress in her eyes that filled him with compunction. When they reached the other side he stood and looked down at her with the old feeling that, somehow, he was all in the wrong, and she entirely right.

"Won't you tell me what I have done to offend you?" he asked abruptly.

A deeper rose color came to her cheeks. This was just the question she was dreading. "I—I—nothing," she stammered incoherently.

"Then won't you tell me why you treat me so?" His indignation had vanished; his tone was very humble. "I cannot help seeing that you have changed, and I have done nothing, I *could* do nothing, wittingly, to hurt you."

"You have not done anything to offend *me*," she said in a low tone, with a slight accent on the pronoun.

"Then what has changed you? We are not good friends any more?" His voice was inquiring.

She would have given much to contradict him, but her nature was essentially honest, and she breathed the low answer, "No."

"I feared it, I knew it; but don't you think you might, at least, tell me the reason?" He was surprised at his own meekness.

The girl looked down into the murmuring, brown Water. Something arose in her throat and threatened to choke her. If he would only not be so humble. If he were haughty and indignant, her task would be much easier. And then, might she not be wrong? Oh, if he would only tell her she was mistaken! She struggled for some words by which she might avoid telling him the truth, but she was a country-bred girl, all unused to the small equivocations of social usage, and the uncompromising integrity of her nature forbade trifling.

"Dr. Allen," she faltered at last, "I—perhaps I have judged you harshly. Please do not ask me the reason. I would rather not talk about it."

"But I do ask you," said Gilbert determinedly. "Is it quite fair to condemn a man unheard?"

"I may have accused you wrongly," she said, the necessity of the case driving her again to speech, "but I—we all"—she plucked a feathery spray of the long-stemmed water-grass and examined it minutely—"everybody thought you so good and kind—and I learned something—accidentally—that disappointed me."

She glanced up with a mute appeal; but his looks were uncompromising. "Well?" he asked quietly.

She looked up and down the shadowy ravine as if seeking help. Why not tell him? There could be no harm to Arabella. He would know soon, anyway, and she need not mention the wedding, and perhaps he might vindicate himself. So, with her eyes on the golden-brown pool at her feet, she told him the story, simply and sorrowfully, and as gently as possible, of Miss Arabella's years of patient waiting, of the blue silk gown laid away so long, of all Martin had suffered from poverty and sickness, unhelped when he needed help so badly; and then of the sequel of the story which he himself had told.

She looked at him when she had ended, and Gilbert could not help seeing that the telling of it had hurt her almost as much as it had hurt him. And how it had stung him! Martin starving in a mining camp while he spent his money on roses and theater tickets for Rosalie Lane! Martin, sick, poor, and struggling to make a home for the woman he loved, while he—the man he had made—spent all upon his own pleasures and ambitions! He was aghast at the far-reaching power of his fault. He had selfishly neglected a man away off in the Klondyke, and had hurt a frail little woman at his door, whom every instinct of his manhood called upon him to protect.

His sorrowful-eyed accuser was looking at him, in the eager hope that he might deny the charge. But he did not attempt the smallest palliation. He scorned to make the paltry plea that, at the eleventh hour, he had paid the debt of so many years' standing. As if he could ever pay Martin!

"I must, at least, thank you for your candor," he said at last, a little unsteadily.

Her eyes grew dark with disappointment. Her suspicions had been only too well founded, then! She spoke no word of blame, there was no righteous indignation in her face, only a cutting disappointment; and there Gilbert felt the greater sting. He had not offended her personally, it seemed; he had merely fallen wofully short of her standard. There was no more to be said. He bade her a courteous good-evening, and she turned slowly and passed up the hill, while he followed the path down the stream. One of old Hughie Cameron's philosophic remarks, which he had heard one evening on the milk-stand, was sounding in his ears: "The Almighty would be laying his bounds about every one of us—the bounds of His righteous laws. We may be dodging them on one side, oh, yes; but they will be catching us up on the other."

The girl climbed slowly up the bank. Her head was bent, and could Gilbert have seen her face he would not have been quite so sure that his shortcoming was to her such an entirely impersonal affair. With her usual self-effacement, she made a brave attempt to put aside her grief. She had promised to spend this last evening with Arabella, and she must be cheerful and comforting. As she neared Mrs. Munn's house, Davy and Tim were sitting on the sidewalk before the gate, talking so volubly that they did not notice her approach.

"Yessir," Mr. Munn was saying, in a voice muffled by a mouthful of chewing-gum, "they're goin' to do that thing—what d'ye call it when two folks that's sparkin' run away?"

"Elope," said the orphan, from the depths of a profound experience of the world.

"Yes, elope. Don't you ever tell, Tim; but I bet that's what Jeannie an' me'll do some day; only I wish she wasn't such an awful girl to laugh!" He sighed deeply, and the orphan grunted disgustedly.

"Aw, g'wan, ye silly duck! Say! le's set up all night an' watch. They'll be goin' 'fore daylight, I bet——"

Elsie Cameron's light footfall sounded on the sidewalk, and the two suddenly fell silent. Their shoulders sagged, and they sat gazing vacantly across the street, as though life were a deadly bore.

The girl regarded the two curved, inscrutable backs in dismay. How on earth had those two scamps penetrated Arabella's secret?

"Oh, boys!" she cried, coming up to them in hurried distress. "Hush! How did you find out? Promise me you won't tell."

The two stood up and looked at her sheepishly. "We ain't tattlers," said the eldest orphan haughtily. "How'd *you* find out?" he added indignantly.

"Are you sure you've neither of you told anybody?" she asked, fixing her searching eyes upon each in turn.

"Sure! Cross my heart!" declared Tim; and Davy nodded agreement.

The wire door of the doctor's house swung open creakingly, and Mrs. Munn came slowly down the garden path. "Listen," whispered the girl hurriedly, "I'll give you each a quarter to-morrow night if you'll promise faithfully you won't tell, and that you'll do everything you can—everything, mind—to help. Now, you will, won't you, boys?"

It was impossible to resist such an appeal to their chivalry. Tim became a man on the spot. "Don't you worry," he declared with a grand air. "We'll look after things. Me an' Dave here'll not squeak, you bet."

Mrs. Munn opened the gate. "I'm goin' along with you to Arabella's for a minit," she said. "Davy, don't you go away from the house while I'm out, mind ye."

"How long'll ye be?" Inquired her son, in a tone that showed he was prepared to argue the question.

"Jist a minit. If anybody comes for the doctor, jist say he's gone away."

"I know he walked down the holler to see John Cross's kids."

"Hish!" she cried, looking about in alarm, as though the doctor had gone off on a murderous expedition. "You can jist say he won't be home till it's late. I guess there'll be no harm in them knowin' that. Now mind."

Elsie gave a parting glance full of warning, and Tim answered with a solemn wink.

The two boys watched the retreating figures until they disappeared into Miss Arabella's gateway. Instantly Tim's languid air changed to keen alertness.

"Say!" he exclaimed, "Ella Anne must 'a' told her! Lookee here! We've gotter help them to 'lope now, or there's no quarter. What'll we do?"

Davy humped his shoulders rebelliously. "I ain't stuck on helpin' that MacDonald coon to 'lope with nobody," he grumbled. "Don't you mind the time he took after us?"

The orphan chuckled. "Cracky! he did lambaste you, though, didn't he? Sawed-Off told the doc on us, though, the time we took the wheel off his buggy. We've promised, anyhow," he continued righteously.

"Yes, an' I'd have to help Elsie anyhow," added Davy, with an air of crushing responsibility. "Ye see, she's a sort o' a sister, ye know, Tim, 'count o' Jean."

Tim made a horrible grimace. "Well, come on! Let's think o' somethin' good an' awful to do to Sawed-Off!" he cried, anxious to change the subject.

All winter the double wooing of Miss Long had caused great excitement in the village. Folks declared it was scandalous the way Ella Anne carried on with those two fellows of hers, never giving either one more chance than the other, and it would be a caution if she wasn't left again, the way she was when young McQuarry married the squaw.

Ella Anne's conduct caused consternation in the Long family, too. The young lady was suspected of favoring young MacDonald, while her parents strongly encouraged Mr. Wilmott. Sawed-Off was decidedly "well fixed," with his cattle and his cheese factory, while the young fellow from the Highlands was a gay lad, with never an acre to his name, and no match for a girl who had had a year's music lessons, not to speak of all the other attainments of Miss Long.

So far, Davy and Tim had been quite impartial, and had strewn both suitors' paths with such difficulties that the younger man had finally laid violent hands upon them; and Sawed-Off had complained to the respective authorities set over each. The latter treatment had not troubled the mischief-makers much. Mrs. Munn declared that talking always did harm, and talking to boys was worse than useless. Jake and Hannah bewailed their eldest's sudden fall from grace, and wondered if his growing intimacy with John McIntyre was having an evil effect upon the child. And there it ended. The boys still continued their attentions to the rival lovers, and so closely had they watched the proceedings that on the last night of May they were in possession of a secret plot for the morrow, which the lovers fondly believed to be their own.

Hidden behind the Longs' cedar hedge one night, the eldest orphan had overheard some whispers between Ella Anne and the young Lochinvar. They were going to run away, Tim had gathered—have a regular elopement, like Evelina and Daring Dick, in the book he and Davy had just read. "The night before the mill starts," young MacDonald had whispered, "everybody'll be too busy to notice." Well, the mill started to-morrow! And besides that, Davy, who had been on the lookout while his fellow conspirator lay beneath the hedge, had spied Sawed-Off Wilmott come crawling from behind the lilac bushes at the Longs' gate, and go sneaking down the road. So the boys were anticipating high times. Sawed-Off would certainly be along to prevent the elopement, and they had determined to be on the watch, and miss none of the sport. And here, like two chivalrous knights, at the request of a distressed damsel, they had pledged themselves to help the lovers! Elsie was evidently in the plot with Ella Anne, and evidently neither girl guessed at Sawed-Off's perfidy. Tim jumped up in excitement and began to swagger up and down, his hands in his pockets. It was as good as Daring Dick's dilemmas, this situation. Elsie would certainly admire him, and consider him the cleverest young man in the village. They must perform some glorious deed that very night.

"What'll we do?" asked Davy. He was a ready helper when Tim was on the warpath, but the

orphan's more fertile brain always supplied the material for their misdeeds.

Tim's eyes grew luminous. "Say! he's scared stiff about the banshee that yells down in the Drowned Lands. He'll be comin' up that way soon's it gets dark. If he seen a ghost there, he'd cut an' run, an' never come back."

Davy's languor dropped from him like a garment. "Come on!" he whispered, his eyes shining. "You scoot home an' git that last year's punkin skin, an' I'll sneak some white duds out o' maw's bureau. Golly! Ella Anne an' her feller'll be back from their weddin' tower 'fore Sawed-Off quits runnin'!"

Meanwhile, in a little house farther up the street, the three people concerned in another runaway match were sitting in the twilight. No one would have guessed that the forlorn, drooping little figure by the window was the bride of the morrow, and the idea of an elopement was as far removed from her as from a Jenny Wren. For, as the crucial moment approached, poor Miss Arabella's small courage had dwindled away. To get married would have been a tremendous undertaking in itself, but to elope! For the first time, she realized the magnitude of the enterprise. To get away from Susan's rule back into the joy of girlhood dreams, had seemed, at first sight, like escaping from prison; but now Susan and her laws seemed her only support, and Martin seemed strange and far away.

"I don't know what makes me feel so queer," she faltered, "but ever since that dress was finished I feel jist as if I'd been finished, too."

"Oh, you're jist nervous, Arabella," said Mrs. Munn, while Elsie patted her hand soothingly. "It ain't no use talkin' about it now, anyhow. It jist makes you feel worse. I tell you," she said, suddenly rising, "let's go over to my place, an' I'll get you a drink o' my last year's alderberry wine. The doctor's away, an' nobody'll see."

Elsie acquiesced, glad to second anything that would distract Arabella's mind from her fears. She would go in with them for a few minutes, and then slip away before Dr. Allen came back.

"No sign o' Davy," sighed Mrs. Munn, as they entered the dark and deserted house. "Well, I s'pose it's no use talkin' to boys, talkin' only makes things worse. Come in, an' I'll get a light."

She groped her way through the parlor, and lit the lamp that stood on a yellow crocheted mat in the middle of the table. "Now, we'll go an' have a drink o' that alderberry," she said cheerfully.

Miss Arabella touched Elsie's arm timidly, "Couldn't we have jist one more look at the dress, first?" she whispered. "I feel as if the sight of it would do me more good than a dose o' medicine. I know I'm an awful goose, Harriet," she faltered.

Mrs. Munn smiled indulgently. "Come along," she said, "we'll go right up now, an' you can slip it home in the dark, an' it'll be ready for to-morrow."

She led the way upstairs, and along the creaking floor to the back hall. As she opened the door of the lumber room a little breeze, bearing the scent of lavender and mint, met them, and made the lamp flare.

"Goodness me!" said Mrs. Munn in surprise, "how on earth did that window come to be opened?"

Miss Arabella uttered a cry. She clutched Elsie's arm and pointed to the wall. Mrs. Munn set the lamp down upon the bare pine table and stared. There was the hook where the dress had so lately hung, in its winding-sheet; there on the floor were great muddy tracks across to it from the doorway, and where—oh, where—— The three women turned and looked at each other in speechless dismay. The room was empty; the wedding gown had eloped!

CHAPTER XVI

THE CALL OF THE BANSHEE

The sunset has faded, there's but a tinge
  Saffron pale, where a star of white
Has tangled itself in the trailing fringe
  Of the pearl-gray robe of the summer night.
    —JEAN BLEWETT.

By the time Gilbert had attended to his patients, and was returning along the old corduroy

road, the night had long fallen. The bird chorus of the swamp had died away, and only the sweet note of the little screech-owl awoke the echoes of the dark woods. Now and then a gleam of spectral light through the trees showed where lay the waters of the Drowned Lands. The young man tramped moodily along the pathway, following the strip of pale sky between the black lines of trees. He was thinking of Martin's last letter, in answer to the money he had sent. It contained only the humblest thanks, with never a hint of past suffering. He could see before him his old friend's honest, generous face, with no reproach in it, and beside it another face, with its golden-brown eyes full of sorrowful accusation.

He was aroused from his painful reflections by the appearance of a point of light far down the dim roadway. It was not so much the light itself that attracted his attention, as its strange movements. It darted hither and thither, crossing and recrossing the road; now it disappeared among the trees, now reappeared, and swung wildly to and fro. Gilbert was reminded of the ghostly tales of the will-o'-the-wisp, and the banshee, and other terrifying creatures, which, village gossip said, inhabited the Drowned Lands. But he had a more practical explanation of the strange phenomenon.

"If it isn't some other infernal agency," he said to himself grimly, "I'm willing to take my oath that it's Jake Sawyer's eldest orphan that's performing those queer dodges."

As he drew nearer, the light stood still, and he could discern two forms, Tim, of course, and equally of course, his companion in mischief, Davy Munn. They stood in the ring of light and gazed apprehensively toward the approaching figure. "Hello!" called the young man. "What are you two scamps doing down here at this hour of the night?"

The boys' expression of fear changed to relief, and then to sheepish apprehension. "Jist walkin' 'round," replied Davy vaguely, making a poor attempt at his usual leisurely indifference.

"You've got a mighty queer method of taking exercise," said the doctor, coming to a standstill in front of them. "Come, you might as well tell me right out what you're up to."

"We—we lost somethin'," stammered the eldest orphan.

"What is it? Yourselves?"

The boys glanced at each other interrogatively. Should they make a clean breast of their plight and enlist the doctor's help, or would it be quite safe? Davy nodded acquiescence, and Tim burst forth:

"Aw, say! It ain't no joke. Somethin' fearful's happened. Me an' Dave we rigged up a ghost down here to scare Sawed-Off when he was comin' to stop—to see Ella Anne."

"He played lots o' mean tricks on us, you bet," put in Davy, for his own safety.

"He didn't scare, though, worth a cent," complained the orphan, "an' he saw us hidin' behind it, an' put after us"—in spite of his perturbation the boy grinned at the remembrance of the exciting chase—"an' we lost the ghost somewheres 'way back here, an' when we got home, Dave's maw an' old Arabella Winters an' Elsie Cameron was all over to your place, chewin' away like wildcats, 'cause it was Arabella's weddin' dress we'd took for a ghost. Dave's maw'd been makin' it. An' Elsie Cameron said we'd gotter find it, or when Arabella's fella'd come he'd bust up somethin'!"

The doctor uttered a sharp exclamation.

"When is he coming?"

"I dunno," answered Tim wonderingly. "She never told us. Elsie Cameron needn't 'a' got so mad, either," put in Davy aggrievedly. "It was her put us up to it in the first place, 'cause Sawed-Off——"

"Shut up!" hissed his accomplice in his ear. "Don't you go an' blab it all, now."

The culprits were anticipating at least a vigorous shaking for their misdemeanor, and were filled with amazed relief when the doctor grasped the lantern. "You two will end on the gallows yet," was all the censure he vouchsafed. "Come along! We must find it! Now tell me exactly where you started on this idiotic business."

The boys led the way with grateful alacrity. Fortune had indeed taken a wonderful turn.

"My! Elsie Cameron was mad!" complained Davy, encouraged by the doctor's cordial assistance. "An' she needn't 'a' been. It was all her own fault. An' she up an' told maw that me an' Tim knew all about old Arabella goin' to get married, an' that's a whoppin' lie, 'cause——"

"Hold your tongue!" cried the doctor, so fiercely that Davy collapsed in scared silence, and gave his undivided attention to the trail of the lost ghost.

They led the way through the tangle to the stump where the specter had been enthroned. Some matches and a half-burned candle, dropped hastily upon the moss, testified to the

correctness of their discovery. Then, taking the lantern, Tim led on through the dense underbrush, past black pools of water, over fallen logs, and back to the road again, whither they had fled from Sawed-Off's swift vengeance.

But the ghost had apparently vanished in true ghost fashion. Gilbert took the lantern and carefully went over the ground again. With the two boys close at his heels, he scrambled about, here and there, pushing through the cedars, clambering over rotten tree-trunks, and leaping pools of black water. They were soon deeper in the yielding swamp than was quite safe, and the leader was forced to suggest returning without their prize. He climbed upon a mossy stump, and swung his lantern in a circle for a last survey. The light flashed far into the wild, tangled wilderness, and revealed a white object hanging over a low cedar. Tim gave a whoop of joy and pounced upon it.

"It's him! It's Mr. Ghost!" he shouted jubilantly. The rustle of silk proclaimed that the specter still contained the wedding gown. The doctor glanced over it in the light of the lantern; it was apparently undamaged, except for a few spots of mud. To the boys' surprise, he rolled it up with great care and bundled it under his arm.

"Come, now, let's get back," he said, with a look of pleased relief. "And look out where you jump. If either of you young Turks tumbles in, I'll leave you for the banshee, and serve you right!"

They were standing for a moment, looking for the best way to retrace their steps, when out of the black silence behind them there came a faint, far-off cry.

Tim clutched the doctor's coat. Davy turned white.

"Wha'—what's that?" they whispered together.

The three stood motionless, listening, and again the sound arose. It came from the far-off edge of the Drowned Lands, faint, and full of agony, like a human voice calling for help.

"The *banshee*!" whispered Tim in terror.

"Oh, Lord save us!" groaned Davy.

In spite of his concern, Gilbert laughed. "It's somebody caught in the mud, you young idiots!" he cried. "Listen!"

Once more the cry came floating out, terrible in its appeal. "Help, h-e-l-p!" it called faintly.

Davy gave a leap. "That's her! That's the banshee!" he gasped. "Come on! *Run*! It always calls folks like that—into the Drowned Lands—an' they never come back! *Run*!"

"Shut up, you fool!" cried Gilbert sharply. "Listen to me. You two get back to the road as quickly as you can. Come! I'll show you out with the light."

"Are—are you goin' after her?" whispered Davy, horror-stricken.

"Of course! Look here! I thought you two fellows had a little more snap in you than to get scared at a man calling for help."

"I'll go with you an' pull him out," cried Tim, stung into valor by this crushing remark.

"Me, too!" cried Davy with a gulp. It was awful to contemplate following that ghostly voice away into the death trap of the Drowned Lands; but it was worse to remain there alone.

"No; you'd likely get mired, and cause more trouble. Get back to the road, quick, and wait for me there. If I need your help, I'll call."

The cry arose again, this time fainter and more agonized. "Hurry!" cried the young man. "Here, Tim! Take this, and don't lose it again, for the life of you!"

He handed the boy the wedding dress, and hurried them forward until they were beyond the perilous area of the swamp. There he left them, and turning, plunged back into the woods.

Through the dense tangle, leaping from moss-clump to fallen log, he forced his way, the lantern, like a swaying will-o'-the-wisp, now casting a red splash on the surface of a pool, now leaving it in blackness, to light up a new circle of vine and stump and riotous undergrowth.

The two left behind stood for a moment gazing after him in terrified dismay. While he was with them his scorn of their fears, and his practical explanation of the dread sound, had acted like a stimulant; but now that they were left alone in the darkness they gave way to their worst apprehensions. He was gone! Gone straight to his doom, at the call of that luring voice, as so many before him had gone! And no one ever came back! Davy sank to the ground in a sobbing heap. Tim, more inured to disaster, stood silent, his small face white and fear-stricken.

Suddenly he flung himself upon his companion and clutched him by the hair. "Le's tell the folks! They'll save him! Le's tell daddy an' Spectacle John an' John McIntyre! They'll come an'

bring him back!" He was already tearing up the road in the direction of the village, and all his languor put to flight by his fears, Davy came flying after him. In an incredibly short time they burst upon the Cameron milkstand, gasping out the appalling news that the banshee had got the doctor, and he was being murdered in the Drowned Lands!

CHAPTER XVII

THE DAWN

Then in the darkness came a voice that said,
"As thy heart bleedeth so My heart hath bled;
As I have need of thee
Thou needest me."
—FREDERICK GEORGE SCOTT.

All evening John McIntyre had been sitting alone in the doorway. He was to resume work in the mill to-morrow, and as it was his last night at home, he had half expected his boy to spend it with him. But Tim had not come, and as he sat waiting, John McIntyre had picked up the Bible. It was the first time he had opened it of his own accord, and he had intended merely to glance into it to pass the time. But he had read on and on, till now the light had faded from the evening skies, and the bare phantom trees of the Drowned Lands had vanished in the night. The whip-poor-will that all evening had been mourning on the hillside, and the loon that had called across the water, were hushed. The faint stars looked down on the silent blackness of the woods and the gray mists of the water beyond. But in those mists the lonely man at the doorway could discern a picture—a scene the Book had just now revealed to him. It was a weary group of Galilean fishermen approaching the shore, after a night of fruitless toil, while on the sands, shrouded in mists, stood One waiting for them in the dawn. One man in the little boat, straining his eyes to discern that mysterious Figure, suddenly felt his heart awake. He uttered in a thrilling whisper, "*It is the Lord*!" And without waiting for a word of reply, Peter, the disciple, who had so lately denied that One with curses, flung himself headlong into the sea and swam straight to Him.

John McIntyre's heart swelled. Well he understood the feeling that prompted Peter's act, for there was in his own homesick soul a longing to do the same, to plunge through the sea of loss and disappointment and go back to his denied Master. For this man's long night of storm and stress and fruitless toil was almost over, too. All unknown to himself, he had been slowly nearing the shore. The companionship and artless devotion of the boy—his enemy's child, but his now by all the rights of love—the kindness of the village folk in spite of rebuffs, the young doctor's care, and, above all, the tender message of the Book he had been constrained to read, had combined to guide him to the harbor. Yes, he was nearing the shore, and though he had not yet been able to discern Him through the night mists, there stood One waiting for him just behind the dawn.

Long into the night he sat, filled with a feeling of expectancy. He was half-consciously waiting for something, he knew not what. Supposing that same One had been watching for him to return, all this weary time of sorrow and rebellion? The thought made his breath come quicker. Could it be possible? Could it be that the same Man who stood that morning on the shore of Galilee was waiting for even him—waiting with no rebuke for the curses and the denial, but only with outstretched, crucified hands, and the tender question He had put to that other faithless disciple, "Lovest thou me?"

A tear slipped down John McIntyre's hollow cheek, the first tear he had shed since he and Mary had laid their last baby in its little grave. It fell upon his toil-hardened hand unnoticed, for a resolution was forming in his heart. He arose, stumbled hurriedly indoors, and lit his lamp. He must look once more into that Book. He must find out at once if this wonderful thing could be true, if life and happiness might still be his. With trembling hands he took up the Bible, as though it held for him a sentence of life or death, and turned over the leaves in a groping way. His movements were like those of a man in darkness, fumbling for a door that he hopes will lead him out into light and freedom. He stopped and gazed at the open page with a great wonder in his eyes. Perhaps he had been searching haphazard, or perhaps, under Divine guidance, his fingers, so long familiar with those pages, had gone unerringly to that marvelous story of the Fatherhood of God. For this was the message:

"*And while he was yet a great way off his Father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.*"

The Book dropped to the floor; John McIntyre sank to his knees beside it, his gray head bowed to the ground. He uttered an inarticulate cry. It was like the sound a babe utters when first it sees its mother's face after a day's absence—a cry that contains both the anguish of their separation and the joy of their reunion. He could form no coherent prayer, but the supreme thought of his homing soul burst from him: "My Father!" he sobbed, "my Father! I've been away! I've been away!" How long he knelt thus he had no idea. But in that meeting with his lost Master he lived through a supreme joy that far outmeasured all the bitterness of the past. He was aroused by the sound of footsteps near his door. Two figures were coming slowly up the pathway. Half dazed, John McIntyre arose and went forward with the lamp. As the light fell upon the two men he uttered an exclamation of concern. Dr. Allen, pale and exhausted, and splashed with mud, was standing there, supporting a staggering, half-drowned man.

"I found an old friend caught in the swamp," faltered the young man weakly. "May I bring him in for a minute, Mr. McIntyre?"

"Yes! yes! Come in! come in!" cried John McIntyre, setting down the lamp and hurrying forward with a chair. "I'll fix up the bed——" He stopped suddenly and gazed stupidly at the stranger. His eyes dilated, his face became overspread with the awe and wonder of some discovery too great to be grasped. The chair fell from his hands with a crash. He uttered a single word, and in it there was a world of unbelieving joy and fear.

"Martin!" he whispered.

The stranger raised his drooping head. He stared in turn at the stooped shoulders, the drawn face, and the white hair of John McIntyre, and his strength seemed suddenly to return. He pushed Gilbert aside as if he had been a child, and caught the man's shoulders in a mighty grip. He held him away from him for a moment, and then broke into a great sob:

"John! My God! old John! Have I found you?"

With a face of deep wonder, Gilbert slipped softly outside, closing the door behind him. And as he looked toward the place where he had so lately had a desperate struggle with death, he saw that the night mists were slowly vanishing. The whole dark earth was awakening in one grand bird-chorus, for the dawn was breaking over the Drowned Lands.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE END OF THE WAITING

Blue on the branch and blue in the sky,
And naught between but the breezes high;
And naught so blue by the breezes stirred
As the deep, deep blue of the indigo bird.

Joy in the branch and joy in the sky,
And naught between but the breezes high,
And naught so glad on the breezes heard
As the gay, gay note of the indigo bird.
—ETHELWYN WETHERALD.

Miss Arabella's wedding day was a perfect rose of June as it dawned over the hills and dales of Oro and waked the robins in Treasure Valley to ecstatic song. The date was two weeks later than that set for the elopement, for the bridegroom needed some time to recover from his injudicious attempt to cross the swamp and surprise his little bride by arriving a day earlier.

Then the doctor was in almost as bad a plight, with a wrenched arm and a great gash in his forehead; and in any case, the wedding must needs wait until he could make a respectable appearance as best man. Mrs. Winters, too, declared she must have a few days to recover her breath and get used to the idea of Arabella getting married, not to speak of all the preparations for the grand wedding she had decreed they must have.

And besides, the village needed two weeks, at least, to settle down after the memorable night when they had almost lost their doctor. When the boys arrived with the terrible news that he had been decoyed into the Drowned Lands, every man in the community, and most of the women, too, headed by Susan Winters, set off to his rescue. They found their fears happily disappointed, however, and they carried him home in triumph, and with him the man he had saved at the risk of his own life. And the wonderful discovery that the stranger was Dr. Allen's oldest and dearest friend, and that he was coming, all unknown, to marry Arabella Winters—well! well! it was a caution if the foundations of the village didn't give way altogether, and everything and everybody

go toppling over into Treasure Valley!

As if this were not excitement enough for a lifetime, right on top of all that night's adventures came another shock. When the population of Elmbrook returned, after the rescue of the doctor, Sawed-Off Wilmott rushed through the village, wild-eyed, with the astounding news that Ella Anne Long had disappeared with the ne'er-do-weel from Glenoro! Granny Long lifted her voice above the general family bewailment to declare that it was all Si's fault, for taking the spyglass with him when he went to hunt the doctor; for if she had had it, Ella Anne would never have got away without her knowledge—no, not even though it was black midnight!

So there was a runaway match from Elmbrook on the first of June, after all, even though little Miss Arabella was to be married in the proper fashion. She was thankful for all the excitement and the talk and the running to and fro, for they made it possible to keep her own proposed elopement a profound secret. That Arabella should be preparing, all unsuspected, for her wedding day was a surprise, of course, to every one, especially Susan; but deep secrecy in such affairs was the general rule, and caused no especial comment.

These two weeks before her marriage were magic days for the little lilac lady. She found herself in a new atmosphere. From being of no consequence at all to anybody, she had suddenly become the most important member of the family, and she almost lost a sense of her own identity when Susan consulted her as to the number of eggs to be put into the wedding cake.

Susan, indeed, was deeply impressed. For was not Arabella going to marry a rich man, and the doctor's bosom friend, at that? To be sure, she could not help wishing he wouldn't spend so much of his time with that queer old John McIntyre, but there was no denying his wealth, and the way he did spend money was a caution. On the whole, he was quite a wonderful match for Arabella, much better than he had been ten years ago, and almost all Mrs. Winters could have wished for Bella herself. So the wedding must be in keeping with his position, and the preparations for it were put forward on a grand scale.

And through all the bustle and activity Miss Arabella moved in a happy daze, conscious of one thing only, that Martin had come back, and, under the love and appreciation, growing more beautiful every day. The rose tints crept into her cheeks, and her eyes shone like the blue of the June skies. Elsie Cameron took advantage of Susan's relaxation, and puffed out the little bride-elect's pretty hair, and decked her with ribbons and lace, until Martin declared she wasn't a day older than when he went away, and twice as pretty.

Quite irrespective of his wealth, Martin, himself, took the village by storm. The orphans adopted him as their very own, and moved over in a body to the doctor's house whenever he was staying there. The men in the mill stopped work the moment he appeared, and all the women in the place, from Susan Winters down, fell in love with him. Every eye watched him admiringly as he moved about, here and there, during those two weeks. Folks said you could hardly tell whether he thought most of Arabella or the doctor or old John McIntyre. Certainly he spent much of his time with the dark watchman, and it was beautiful to see the light his presence brought to John McIntyre's deep eyes. But he did not by any means neglect Arabella. Two or three times a day he would come rollicking up from the doctor's house, loudly chanting the praises of the "brave Canajen byes" who had met a watery grave; would swing open Miss Arabella's little gate with a force that nearly wrenched it from its hinges, and after teasing Polly into saying all the naughty things her mistress had hoped she had forgotten, he would bid little Annie Laurie put on the faded lilac gown he admired so much, and they would go off for a stroll through the village, the admiration of every one in the place. They always walked down along the green-and-gold floor of Treasure Valley, because Martin said it reminded him of home; and always, before they returned, they went up the willow path to the mill, or down to the shanty at the Drowned Lands, for a visit to John McIntyre.

But while Miss Arabella walked about idly in her radiant dream, Susan was slaving day and night. For the wedding she and her eldest daughter were planning was to be no small affair. Bella wanted her aunt to be married in the church. She knew just how a church wedding should be conducted, and Wes Long had promised to write a piece about it and have it printed in the Lakeview papers. One sentence was already composed, "The happy party then repaired to the house of the bride's brother, where a sumptuous *recherché déjeuner* was served." Bella was almost alarmed at the high-sounding words, but Wes said they were used in all accounts of high-class weddings. There were two obstacles, however, in the way of a church wedding. One was the bridegroom, and the other the bride's brother. Martin announced that if Bella came any such tall doings as that over her old uncle, he'd kick over the traces, and he and Arabella would elope. Here he winked solemnly, and inquired if she didn't suppose Arabella was just the sort that would run away; and the little lilac lady hung her head and blushed, and Bella wondered why Elsie Cameron should laugh so. Then there was the blacksmith himself. Like most yielding husbands, he was subject to unaccountable fits of stubbornness, and seized this inopportune occasion to indulge in one. He positively refused, he announced dourly, even in the face of Susan's demands, to make an Uncle Tom's Cabin parade of himself and Arabella by going trolloping up the church aisle with her. He regarded the whole scheme as one of the many indications of feminine folly, and confided mournfully to the bridegroom that he might as well give up, for Susan's latest dodge was to make them have their dinner out in the yard, like the pigs. Why folks that had a decent roof over their heads should turn themselves out of house and home to eat like the tinkers, was past his knowledge. But you could never tell what weemen would be up to next. Why, when he

was at Neeag'ra Falls——

But while he poured out his complaints his wife went on with her preparations, all unheeding. Though the church parade had to be given up for a house wedding, she saw to it that its grandeur was no whit diminished. The ceremony was to be performed in Arabella's own little parlor, while the grand wedding dinner was to be served—not till two o'clock, the blacksmith learned with dismay—at her brother's house, under the orchard trees.

Only one thing more troubled the mistress of ceremonies. As the doctor was to be best man, and Elsie Cameron bridesmaid, and since the groom was rich, the Winters would have preferred to ask only the more genteel folks of the neighborhood—the minister's family, and a few of their Glenoro relatives. But Martin spoiled it all by asking John McIntyre and Davy Munn and the eldest orphan. Susan tried to object, but Martin declared that Tim and Davy had helped to bring about the wedding; for if they had not been obliging enough to steal Arabella's dress, and lose it in the swamp, he argued, he would be there yet; so the boys deserved all the fun that was going. When the twins heard that an exception had been made in favor of Tim, they raised their voices in shrieking protest, and would have gone to the wedding willy-nilly, had not Mrs. Winters interviewed them, promising them unlimited bride's-cake when the affair was over, if they remained out of sight, and dire retribution should they disobey.

So the matter was finally settled by asking every one, irrespective of social position, and when the evening of Miss Arabella's wedding day came around once again everything was in readiness. Elsie Cameron came over in her white bridesmaid's gown, to see how Arabella liked her, and the doctor dropped in to show Martin how to stand up and behave himself, for once in his life. So when the time came to go home—for Mrs. Winters sent them away early, declaring she couldn't get a hand's turn done in such a crowd—what was more natural than that the groomsman should walk with the bridesmaid? He did not ask if he might; there was no need, for they were very good friends now. When he had returned that night from the rescue of Martin, all mud-splashed and exhausted, he had read, with a glad leap of his heart, the message in her eyes and in her faltering words—he had vindicated himself.

By tacit consent they left the street and followed the path down into Treasure Valley. And as they went, Gilbert told her more fully the story of his relations with Martin; how his friend's heroic silence and his own selfish ambition had made him forget his duty. He did not spare himself; but he could afford to be severe, for Martin had told her everything, and she was full of contrition for her late blame.

They strolled through the rose-tinted mists of the valley, the perfume rising from the scented grasses and flowers at their feet. She looked like a tall June flower herself, Gilbert thought, as she walked ahead of him in the narrow pathway, slender and erect in her clinging white gown, with her delicately poised head like a golden blossom on its stem. As they left the violet-carpeted bank and crossed the white stepping-stones, an oriole, swinging far up on the topmost branch of the elm-tree, just where his golden wing caught the slant rays of the setting sun, suddenly burst into joyous, bubbling song. The ringing notes followed them even after they had climbed the hill and were passing up the shadowy avenue of the orchard. And though they were neither aware of it as yet, he was singing the opening strains of that harmony that was some day to fill their united lives.

"*Oh, there's many a man o' the Ca——*"

Uncle Hughie came hobbling down the orchard path. His voice had an unusually joyous ring, therefore he reached a tremendous altitude, and the song ended abruptly in a husky shriek.

"Huh! huh! hoots! toots!" he was muttering to himself disgustedly, as he came upon the pair. "Och! hoch! yes! yes! indeed and indeed!" he remarked, with a significant smile that brought the color to Elsie's cheeks. "And is the arm better, doctor?" he asked, stopping, and patting the young man's injured member tenderly.

"Oh, yes; it's nothing. I'm in fine shape for the wedding to-morrow."

"Eh! eh! yes! yes!" The old man's face was alight with joy. "Eh! it takes the Almighty to be managing things, indeed. But, mind ye this! I would be finding out something about how He will be managing." His voice sank to a mysterious whisper. "I would be rastlin' it out last night, an' thinkin' how He'd been workin' an' turnin' an' twistin' things for the good o' the poor McIntyre body, an' the poor bits o' things Jake Sawyer adopted. I would be rastlin' it all out, an' mind ye—listen to this—He wouldn't be doin' it by Himself." His eyes shone like living amber. "Oh, no, indeed. He would be handing over the job to folks—jist folks, mind ye! Eh! eh! wouldn't that be wonderful? An' it will jist be because we are such poor potterin' bodies, that we wouldn't be having the world patched up an' fixed right long ago. Och! it would be a great thing, indeed, that we would be having a hand in making the earth! And some day we will all be learning to do our part, jist as He wants it, and then that will be a fine day for the world, oh, a fine day, I tell you!" He started to move away.

"Where are you going, Uncle Hughie?" asked his niece. "The dew is falling, remember."

"Och! hoch! it is the troublesome lass you will be!" he cried, looking at her fondly. "I will jist be away a meenit. The minister and me would jist be goin' up to the mill for a word with John McIntyre. He's come home again—eh! eh! yes, he's jist come home. The dew! Hoch!"

"*Oh, there's many a man o' the Ca——*"

He hobbled joyfully away, and the two moved on up the green orchard aisle.

Early the next morning there was a tremendous rushing to and fro between the bride's house and her brother's. Everything in the village took on a holiday aspect. The orphans were up at dawn, and, decked in their best, flew hither and thither, keeping things stirred up and lively. The school children had a holiday, because the Duke had to go to the wedding early, to help Mrs. Winters set the tables. The mill did not exactly stop running, but nobody settled down to work, for Wes Long, who left at ten o'clock to run home and put on his Sunday clothes, came tearing back in his white shirt-sleeves and with his hair all soapy and wet, with the news that Sandy McQuarry was already at Winters', dressed in his Sabbath blacks, and fetching and carrying for the Duke like a trained poodle. Whereupon every man in the mill threw up his job and went down and walked the logs in the pond, and danced, and shoved each other into the water, and behaved in a way that, as Granny Long reported afterward to Sandy, was nothing but defying the Almighty.

When the time set for the ceremony approached, Miss Arabella, arrayed in her blue wedding dress and a long white veil, stood in the little spare bedroom, surveying her trembling image in the mirror, between Red Riding-Hood and Little Bo-peep. She dared not sit down, for Susan said she would crush her flounces, and she stood clinging to the bedpost for support, looking like a little, frightened gray sparrow that had somehow got into a bluebird's feathers. Her bridesmaid stood by her, cheerful and encouraging; Bella was giving pulls and jerks to her aunt's gown and veil, and Susan was hurrying in and out, breathless and anxious. The guests had already begun to crush their way into the parlor, and their subdued voices came through the door.

"There's all Aunt Christena's folks jist drove up, maw," whispered Bella, rustling to the window in her stiff pink silk. "Cousin Martha's got the book with the wedding march under her arm. Goodness! there's the minister! Arabella, are you sure you're ready? An' there's Martin and Dr. Allen comin' down the street!" The bridesmaid came and peeped over her shoulder. "An' there's Marjorie Scott, Elsie! She's got her new blue dress on, and she said she was going to wear her old white! I bet that's because your Malcolm's home!"

The handle of the door rattled loudly. "Arabella!" hissed a deep voice through the keyhole.

"Yes, William?" whispered his sister faintly.

"Here's the preacher. You'd best come on out."

"Hish, William!" commanded his wife, on the other side of the keyhole. "She'll come out when I say so. He's a caution," she continued, straightening up, and looking at the drooping bride as though her brother's untoward conduct were all her fault. Miss Arabella drooped farther. She slipped her arm inside her bridesmaid's.

"Elsie, if anybody else comes, don't—*don't* let them tell me," she whispered piteously. "It makes me feel awful!"

The bridesmaid took her hand and patted it soothingly. "I won't," she promised cheerily. "Don't listen to a word any one says. I'll tell you when it's time to go out, and there's nothing to be afraid of. Why, you look just lovely! And think how proud Martin will be! You mustn't get nervous, for his sake, you know."

"Arabella!" The keyhole once more gave forth a hissing whisper. "We've all been waiting half an hour."

Mrs. Winters tightened her teeth. "He'll spoil everything!" she declared. "It's awful old-fashioned for the bride to be on time, but you can't knock that into William's head. You might as well go, Arabella; and for pity's sakes, stand up straight, an' don't look so scared!"

She pushed the trembling little blue figure toward the door. "Elsie, you go first, and walk slow; no—wait! Bella, open the door and nod to Cousin Martha to start playin'."

Bella's head shot out and in, the door slammed again, and there arose from the other side of it faint, squeaky sounds from the organ.

"Goodness me! you can hardly hear her!" cried Mrs. Winters. "I told Christena Martha'd spoil it! My sakes! I wish Ella Anne Long hadn't run away so soon! Now open the door, Bella, awful slow. Now, Elsie, go on. Arabella, hang on to your flowers! It's a perfect shame your brother ain't

with you! For goodness' sake, stand up straight, an' don't look as if you was goin' to be hung! Go on, Elsie!"

But the bride was clinging desperately to her maid's arm, and refused to let her go. "I—I can't go, Susan!" she whispered.

"Oh, mercy me! Everything's goin' to be spoiled!" wailed her sister-in-law.

"Arabella's going to walk out holding my arm," said Elsie firmly, seeing that the little bride's condition demanded immediate relief.

"Well, go on, then," said Mrs. Winters, with a gesture of despair. "It'll be a fool of a thing, anyhow. Now, Bella, open the door, slow—slow!"

The door swung gradually, but when it was half open Mrs. Winters slammed it again.

"Arabella," she cried, in a panic, "did you shut Polly up?"

The bride stared at her, uncomprehending.

"No, she never, maw," whispered Bella hysterically, "an' she'll be sure to come right out with them swear-words in the middle of everything."

Once more the bridesmaid met the emergency. "It can't be helped now," she said. "Please don't bother her. Open the door, Bella."

The door swung back for the third and last time, and the little blue figure and the tall white one walked slowly up to where Martin and the doctor stood before the minister. The distance from the spare bedroom door to their destination was a matter of about three yards, and Mrs. Winters had overlooked the fact that it was out of all proportion to the wedding march. Cousin Martha from Glenoro, in a panic of nervousness, was laboring hard to get to the end of it, but long after the bridal party was in position the faint, jerky sounds still wavered on, now vanishing altogether in a dumb show, now, just as the people were hopefully thinking the ordeal over, becoming huskily audible. There seemed enough of the thing, Mrs. Long said afterward, to give Arabella time to walk over to the next concession to get married.

The minister put on his glasses, took them off, fumbled with his handkerchief in his coat-tail pocket, and cleared his throat. The groom shifted from one foot to the other. Over in a corner, behind the sofa, Davy Munn and the eldest orphan ducked their heads and giggled. Bella rattled her pink silk nervously; Mrs. Winters frowned at her husband.

Cousin Martha from Glenoro turned another page, the wedding march took a new start, and grew stronger; and the blacksmith's small remnant of patience vanished. He leaned over the heads of half a dozen guests, and said in a loud whisper, "For the Lord's sake, Marthy, hold up a minit an' let 'em get hitched!" The wedding march ceased abruptly; the guests drew a sigh of relief, and the ceremony began.

A deep hush fell over the crowded little room. To several there, besides the bride and groom, this ceremony was especially impressive. The groomsman felt a lump in his throat as he looked at Martin, and thought of all the years his little bride and the blue silk gown had waited, and how he had helped to lengthen the time. And over in a corner, sitting beside Tim, John McIntyre gazed at his old comrade's radiant face, and raised his heart in reverent thankfulness that they had been spared to see this day together.

The ceremony ended in a hushed solemnity, and when the minister pronounced them man and wife, and all bowed in prayer, even Tim, touched by the signs of emotion in John McIntyre's face, was quiet and well behaved. But, unfortunately, the house was too near the Sawyers' household to long enjoy peace and prosperity. Jake and Hannah, of course, were among the guests, and, the evening before, Mrs. Winters had secured a promise from Uncle Hughie Cameron to take the youngest orphan under his care during the wedding, and had wrung from the twins a solemn promise that they would neither be seen nor heard until after the dinner had been served. Faithful to their contract, the two had lain concealed beneath the lilacs, watching Arabella's home, and talking in breathless whispers while the guests were arriving. But when every one had disappeared indoors, and silence settled upon the village, time hung heavily upon the orphans' hands. They crawled out from their ambush, and simultaneously their fertile brains were possessed of a scheme for enlivening the dull hours. They would have a wedding themselves! They had witnessed a ceremony at the Orphans' Home, when one of the maids was married, and knew exactly how it should be conducted. There were Isaac and Rebekah strutting about the back yard; they would serve as the bridal couple, and the twelve tribes would be guests. No sooner said than done; the twins set vigorously to work. The first and most important consideration, of course, was the bride's toilette, and there was that remnant of blue silk Miss Arabella had given them from her gown. The twins ran upstairs for it with screams of delight. It would fit beautifully around Rebekah's shoulders, and the smart tan shoes Nature had bestowed upon her would look perfectly elegant with a blue silk dress. They tore down the little lace curtain from the kitchen window for a bridal veil; and the next thing to be done was to catch Rebekah and dress her.

Now, the Sawyer cat, and the dog, yes, and even the pig, had at various times been arrayed in human apparel, but never yet had Rebekah been forced into the habiliments of civilization. She showed, from the first, a decided distaste for them. The twins struggled and panted, while the unwilling bride dodged and squawked and disarranged her toilet again and again, and the alarmed bridegroom flew hither and thither, with widespread pinions, uttering loud protests.

But in spite of her struggles, Rebekah was at last made ready, and then arose the question of Isaac's dress. The black-haired twin, being the more venturesome of the two, suggested dressing him up in Joey's Sunday suit; but he was even harder to manage than the bride, and as he was just now showing an inclination to be violent, the breathless modistes decided, after the fashion of the day, not to bother about the bridegroom's clothes. So the fair-haired twin held Rebekah in a tight grip while her sister hitched Joshua to Joey's little cart, and placed him ready at the steps, to be used after the ceremony. Next, the black-haired twin took her turn at holding the protesting bride, while the other proceeded to dress up the veranda as a church; for this was to be no common home wedding like Arabella's. The parlor chairs were the pews, the sewing-machine was the organ, and Hannah's best red-and-white bedspread made a beautiful carpet for the aisle. The only thing needed now was a pulpit, and soon Lenora appeared in triumph from the kitchen, dragging an old wash-stand. It had a round opening in the top, in which the wash-basin fitted, and when she climbed up and let herself down into this aperture she looked as like Mr. Scott in his pulpit, her admiring sister declared, as two peas.

When everything was in readiness, and the fair-haired twin was setting out to capture the bridegroom, there arose an unfortunate dispute.

"I bar be the minister," said the black-haired twin.

"No, you don't! It's goin' to be me! I thought of the pulpit!"

"I don't care! I barred it first. You can play the organ."

"I won't! An' I can't, anyhow; somebody's got to hold Rebekah."

"Well, I'm goin' to be Mr. Scoot, so there!"

"Ain't!"

"Are so!"

The two would-be divines made a simultaneous dash for the place of honor, and scrambling upon it, crushed their way, side by side, into the hole, which was scarcely large enough for one. In the struggle Rebekah gained her liberty, and with a loud squawk she leaped down the steps, her blue gown and her bridal veil streaming behind. She flopped right on top of Joshua, who had lain down in his harness, and rudely broke his slumber. Now, Joshua was a wise dog, who knew his own household, and would no more have thought of barking at Rebekah than at Hannah. But when this madly struggling bundle of clothes dashed over his nose he saw in it no smallest resemblance to anything he had ever permitted to pass his gateway. So, hampered though he was by Joey's cart, he made a dash at his disguised friend, and, barking madly, chased her out through the gate. The two rival clergymen, nearly squeezed to death within the narrow confines of the pulpit, screamed, and struggled for liberty, and called on Joshua to come back, but to no purpose. Down the street he clattered, snapping at Rebekah's flying veil. The runaway bride dodged this way and that, and finally darted in at Miss Arabella's gate, Joshua following fiercely. Miss Arabella's door also stood open. Rebekah dashed up the walk and into the house.

All had been very still in the crowded little parlor. The ceremony was over, and the bowed heads had just been raised from prayer, when into the reverent hush there penetrated from the kitchen a loud, complaining voice: "Oh, Lordy! ain't we havin' a slow time!" An electric current quivered through the room, the two boys in the corner writhed in a spasm of giggles, and the minister said sternly, "Hush!" But the next instant the necessity for constraint was over. A tremendous uproar burst from the front doorway, and into the midst of the wedding guests there dashed an astounding pair—a small, turbulent creature, dressed exactly like the bride, in blue silk and a streaming white veil, followed fiercely by a dog, dragging the remnants of a shattered cart. Around the room they leaped in a mad circle, upsetting everything in their way. Then the blue-robed creature, with a scream, rose above the heads of the astonished guests, and landed in the kitchen, with a deafening crash of breaking dishes. The rest of the disturbance followed, barking madly; Tim and Davy arose, and went bounding after them with whoops of joy, and above the din arose Polly's loud squall, in a most unseasonable complaint about the dullness of the times.

Everybody declared afterward that no woman in the county of Simcoe could have brought order out of that chaos except Susan Winters. She drove out the noisy intruders with the broomstick, silenced the two uproarious wedding guests with the same instrument, and brought the hilarious company to something like decorum by ordering them to form in procession for the wedding dinner. A slight delay occurred when it was found that Jake and Hannah Sawyer were missing. Attracted by agonized shrieks from the direction of their home, they left precipitately, and several of the wedding guests, unacquainted with the orphans' ways, followed them in consternation. They soon returned, however. Jake had liberated the twins by sawing the

washstand asunder, and the parents brought the two unfortunates with them. Even Mrs. Winters made them welcome when she saw their tearful faces, and they joined the procession, profoundly thankful for the untoward circumstance that had produced such joyful results.

But the little episode had another happy outcome that made the bridegroom's eyes shine with something deeper than even his own joy. Just as the fantastic figure of Rebekah had disappeared into the kitchen, the groomsman touched Martin's arm gently, and whispered, "Look at McIntyre!" The bridegroom turned; his grave, silent friend had been watching the grotesque little creature with a smile slowly breaking over his face, and when Tim arose, with a yell, and bounded after her, John McIntyre threw back his head and laughed. Yes, the repellant, dark-faced watchman laughed, a deep, hearty, joyous laugh, and the sound of it brought a smarting mist to the kindly, watching eyes of his friend.

The procession was soon formed, and it slowly moved out through the front door, across the tiny garden, and down the shady avenue of the orchard. Very proudly the big bridegroom walked with his little bride on his arm. She was no longer drooping and pathetic-looking now, but erect and radiant. Behind came their two attendants, Gilbert's wondering eyes watching the changing bronze and gold of the bridesmaid's hair, as the sunlight and the green shadows alternately played over it. The minister and the triumphant mistress of ceremonies came next, followed by the blacksmith, leading the minister's wife, and growing more cheerful each moment as he neared his dinner. The rest had arranged themselves as best suited their inclinations, and not far down the line moved a happy quartette—Marjorie and Malcolm, oblivious to everything but each other, and behind them Sandy McQuarry and the stately Duke; and a glance at the faces of the four would have puzzled an observer to guess which pair was at that moment experiencing more of the joy of youth and love.

Down the grassy aisle the happy procession passed, through the flecking light and shade, where the long, white tables were laid beneath the apple boughs. And as they moved, a bluebird, swinging far above them in the sunlight, caroled forth a joyous marriage hymn. And down below, the little blue silk gown, of the same shade as his dazzling plumage, covered a heart just as happy.

CHAPTER XIX

THE HERMIT SINGS AGAIN

Then twilight falls with the touch
Of a hand that soothes and stills,
And a swamp-robin sings into light
The lone white star of the hills.
Alone in the dusk he sings,
And a burden of sorrow and wrong
Is lifted up from the earth
And carried away in song.
—BLISS CARMAN.

John McIntyre, still dressed in the fine black suit Martin had given him for the wedding, was slowly walking up the old swamp road toward the ravine. The festivities of the day, and the gracious manner of the Duke, had so wrought upon Sandy McQuarry that he had, in a moment of reckless extravagance, bidden his watchman take a rest that night, instead of returning to the mill. So Tim and he were going off on an important expedition. They had promised Martin that before he and Arabella returned they would walk down past the Drowned Lands and take a look at the fine new farm he had bought, and which they were all three to work together. And Tim's impatience demanded that they go this evening, for he had already laid great plans for sowing the entire three hundred acres with prize pumpkins, to be raised for the show.

John McIntyre moved along lingeringly, watching for the little, limping figure of his boy. He could see far up the green vista of the ravine, where the shades of evening were gathering. He smiled as he thought of the name the queer Englishman had given it; a Treasure Valley, indeed, the place had proved to him, for here, after long groping in darkness, he had found again the treasure of life.

He turned and looked back, his eyes following the course of the little stream. It wound past his old cabin, lost itself in the green wilderness of the Drowned Lands, and passed on again through the open fields to that rose-colored line on the horizon, where Lake Simcoe smiled responsive to the glow of the western heavens. He gazed at it earnestly, and was struck with the strange feeling that he had seen it all before, long ago. The slow music of a bell from a cow feeding far down the corduroy road echoed musically up the wooded aisle. Far off in a clover meadow a clear "cling-cling" floated up, where young Donald McKitterick stood sharpening his

scythe. Some subtle influence seemed to have transported him into the past. He looked at the darkening purple of the woods, on one side, and at the sunny undulations of the fields on the other, and the feeling of familiarity grew stronger. This strange spirit of peace, this sense of tender associations, what was causing it? Then a little breeze, laden with the clean scent of running water, came dancing through the long grass, and all at once John McIntyre understood. In his blindness, he had not noticed it before—it was his old home come back to him! Here at his side ran the river that passed his farm, there was the strip of woodland; and yonder, on the horizon, not Lake Simcoe, but the dazzling stretches of the Bay of Fundy! And how wondrously like it all was, this evening, to that last peaceful night he remembered so well, just before the shadows of distress had begun to gather.

Over there, to the west, the sun was slipping down to the earth, a great fiery ball dropping from an empty sky. It touched the earth, and kindled the fields to a glory of color; the woods took on a deeper purple tone, and the little river ran into its depths, a stream of molten gold. Just at John McIntyre's feet it passed through a bronze fretwork of reeds, and above it the swallows wheeled, flashing, up and up into the amber light.

The man stood, with a rising mist in his eyes obscuring the dear familiarity of the scene. Yes, he was home again truly; and up there beyond the glowing heavens, safer and happier than they had ever been in the home nest among the orchards; they waited for him, Mary and their little ones.

And still he stood, waiting, in the long, scented June grass, with a feeling of further expectancy. This was home truly, but there was something wanting—some subtle touch, half remembered, half forgotten.

And then from the shadowy hush of the woods the answer came. Away in the darkening depths there arose a strain of music, serene as though the spirit of the twilight had taken voice:

"*O hear all! O hear all! O holy, holy!*"

John McIntyre's heart gave a leap of joy that was almost pain. The hermit thrush! *His* thrush, singing in the Ontario woods! The song floated out, filling the purple valley, sweet, tender, celestial, speaking perfect peace and tranquillity, and calling to his soul to bow in thankfulness before his Maker. The man took off his hat, and stood with bowed head. Perhaps it was a miracle, part of the miracle of love, that had recreated his old home about him. And why not? For was there anything too wonderful to happen to one who knew that his Father ruled, and was a Being whose very name was Love? Perhaps the hermit thrush had been sent to him, a special messenger to remind him that He was with him still, and would be to the end—that One who had spoken to him out of the dawn mists of the Drowned Lands, the One who would walk with him through the lonely years till he joined Mary in the Home above, the One from whose tender care he could never be separated, either by sorrow or death.

A long, clear call from the hilltop behind, and Tim's little figure came scrambling over the fence. The man did not move, for once more the song arose, and poured forth a strain of purest melody:

"*O hear all! O hear all! O holy, holy!*"

It died lingeringly away. The woods were dark and silent. John McIntyre turned and went up the hill, smiling, his face to the Light.

THE END

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