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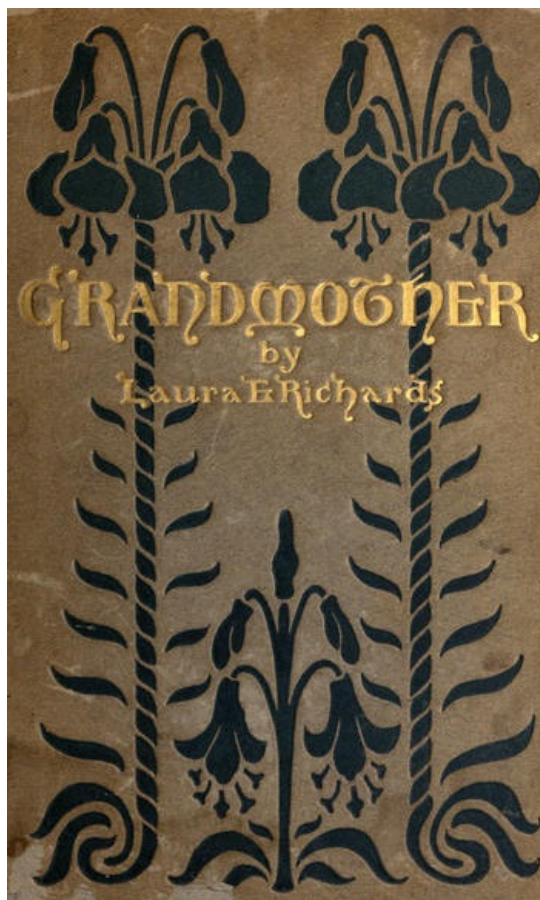
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GRANDMOTHER

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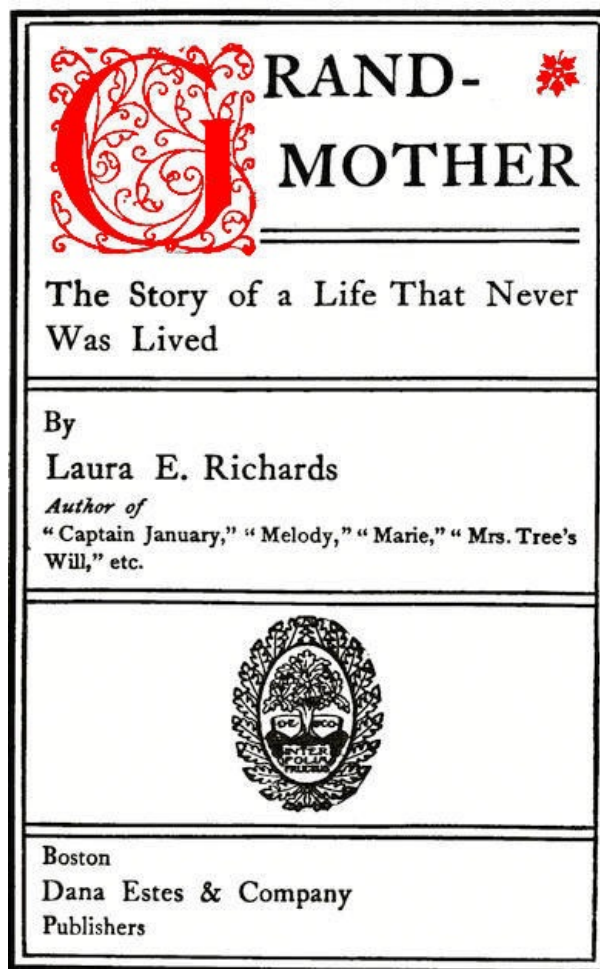
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**"GRANDMOTHER KNELT DOWN BESIDE
HIM, AND TOOK HIS HAND."**

(See page [62](#))



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GRANDMOTHER

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TO
MY DAUGHTER
Elizabeth

I heard an angel singing
When the day was springing,
"Mercy, pity and peace
Are the world's release!"

—WILLIAM BLAKE.

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GRANDMOTHER



CHAPTER I HOW SHE CAME TO THE VILLAGE

SHE was a slip of a girl when first she came to the village; slender and delicate, with soft brown hair blowing about her soft face. Those who saw her coming down the street beside Grandfather Merion thought he had brought back one of his grandnieces with him from the west for a visit; it was known that he had been out there, and he had been away all summer. [2]

Anne Peace and her mother looked up from their sewing as the pair went by; Grandfather Merion walking slow and stately with his ivory-headed stick and his great three-cornered hat, the last one left in the village, his kind wise smile greeting the neighbors as he met them; and beside him this tall slender maiden in her light print gown that the wind was tossing about, as it tossed the brown cloud of hair about her cheeks.

"Look, mother!" said Anne Peace. "She is for all the world like a windflower, so pretty and slim. Who is it, think?"

"Some of his western kin, I s'pose," said Widow Peace. "She is a pretty piece. See if she's got the new back, Anne; I was wishful some stranger would come to town to show us how it looked." [3]

"Land, Mother," said Anne; "her gown's nothing but calico, and might have come out of the Ark, looks 's though; not but what 'tis pretty on her. Real graceful! There! see her look up at him, just as sweet! I expect she is his grandniece, likely. There they go in 't the gate, and he's left it open, and the hens'll get out. Rachel won't like that! She keeps her hens real careful."

"She fusses 'em most to death!" said Mrs. Peace. "If I was a hen I should go raving distracted if Rachel Merion had the rearin' of me. Why, Anne! why, look at Rachel this minute, runnin' down the garden path. She looks as if something was after her. My sakes! she's comin' in here. What in the—" [4]

Rachel Merion, a tall handsome young woman with a general effect of black and red about her, came out of her door and down the path like an arrow shot from a bow. At one dash she reached the gate and paused to flash a furious look back at the house; with a second dash she was across the road, and in another instant she stood in Mrs. Peace's sitting-room, quivering like a bowstring.

"Mis' Peace!" she cried. "Anne! he's done it! he has! he has, I tell you! I'll go crazy or drown myself; I will! I will!" [5]

She began beating the air with her hands and screaming in short breathless gasps. Mrs. Peace looked calmly at her over her spectacles.

"There, Rachel!" she said. "You are in a takin', aren't you? Set down a spell, till you feel quieter, and then tell us about it."

Anne, seeing the girl past speech, rose quietly, and taking her hand, forced her to sit down; then taking a bowl of water from the table, wet her brow and head repeatedly, speaking low and soothingly the while: "There, Rachel! there! You're better now, aren't you? Take a long breath, and count ten slowly; there! there!"

The angry girl took a deep breath and then another; soon the power of speech returned, and broke out in a torrent. [6]

"I always knew he would!" she cried. "I've looked for it ever since Mother was cold in her grave and before, you know I have, Anne Peace. I looked for it with Aunt 'Melia till I routed her out of the house, and I looked for it with Mis' Wiley till I sent *her* flying. I wish't now I'd let 'em alone, both of 'em. I'd sooner he'd married 'em both, and been a Turk and done with it, instead of this."

Mrs. Peace looked over her spectacles with mild severity.

"Rachel Merion," she said, "what are you talking about? If it's your grandfather, why then I tell you plain, that is no proper way for you to talk. What has happened? speak out plain!" [7]

"He's married!" Rachel fairly shrieked. "Married to a girl of eighteen, and brought her back to sit over me and order me about in my own house. I'll teach 'em! I'll let 'em see if I'm going to be

bossed round by a brown calico rag doll. They'll find me dead on the threshold first."

"*Married!*" cried Mrs. Peace and Anne. "Oh, Rachel! it can't be. You can't have understood him. It's one of his grandnieces, I expect, your Aunt Sophia's daughter. She settled out west, I've always heard."

"I tell you he's married!" cried Rachel. "Didn't he tell me so? didn't he lead her in by the hand (she was scared, I'll say that for her; she'd better be!) and say 'Rachel, here's my wife! here's your little grandmother that's come to be a playmate for you.' Little grandmother! that's what I'll call her, I guess. Let her *be* a grandmother, and sit in the chimney corner and smoke a cob pipe and wear a cap tied under her chin. But if ever she dares to sit in my chair, I'll kill her and myself too. Oh, Mis' Peace, I wish I was dead! I wish everybody was dead."

[8]

So that was how Grandmother came by her name. It seems strange that it should have been first given as a taunt.

And while Rachel was raving and weeping, and the good Peaces, who tried to live up to their name, were soothing her with quiet and comfortable words, Grandmother was standing in the middle of the great Merion kitchen, with her hands folded before her in the light pretty way she had, listening to Grandfather; and while she listened she looked to and fro with shy startled glances, and seemed to sway lightly from side to side, as if a breath would move her; she was like a windflower, as Anne Peace said.

[9]

"You mustn't mind Rachel," Grandfather was saying, as he filled his long pipe and settled himself in his great chair. "She is like the wind that bloweth where it listeth; where it listeth. She has grown up motherless—like yourself, my dear, but with a difference; with a difference; neither your grandmother—I would say, neither my wife nor I have ever governed her enough. She has rather governed me, being of that disposition; of that disposition. Yes! But she is a fine girl, and I hope you will be good friends. This is the kitchen, where we mostly sit in summer, for coolness, you see; Rachel cooks mostly in the back kitchen in summer. That is the sitting-room beyond, which you will find pleasant in cooler weather. That is the pantry door, and that one opens on the cellar stairs. Comfortable, all very comfortable. I hope you will be happy, my dear. Do you think you will be happy?"

[10]

He looked at her with a shade of anxiety in his cheerful eyes, and waited for her reply.

[11]

"Oh—yes!" said Grandmother, with a flutter in her voice that told of a sob somewhere near. "Yes, sir, if—if she will not always be angry. Will she always, do you think?"

"No! No!" said Grandfather; "very soon, very soon, we'll all be comfortable, all be comfortable. Just don't mind her, my dear. Let her be, and she'll come round."

He nodded wisely with his kind grave smile. By and by he bade her go out in the garden and gather a posy for herself; and then he took his hat and stepped across the road to Widow Peace's.

Grandmother started obediently, but when she came to the garden door she stopped and looked out with wide startled eyes. Rachel in her scarlet dress was down on her knees in the poppy bed, the pride of her heart, and was plucking up the poppies in furious haste, dragging them up by the roots and trampling them under her feet.

[12]

"It seemed the only thing to do!" said Grandfather Merion, absently. "Wild parts, Susan; wild parts, ma'am! Her parents dead, as I told you, and the child left with the innkeeper's wife, who was not—not a person fitted to bring up a young girl; no other woman—at least none of suitable character near. It seemed clearly my duty to bring the child away. Then—my search led me into mining camps, and often I had to be off alone among the mountains, as a rumor came from here or there—the marriage bond was a protection, you see; yes, I was clear as to my duty. But I confess I forgot about Rachel, Susan, and Rachel is so ungoverned! I fear she will not—a—not be subject to my wife—whose name is Pity, by the way, Susan; a quaint name; she is a very good child. I am sure you and little Annie will be good to her."

[13]

Good Widow Peace promised, and so did Anne, her soft brown eyes shining with good-will; but when he was gone back, the old

woman shook her head. "No good can come of it!" she said. "I hadn't the heart to say so, Anne, for poor Grandfather must have a hard time, searching them cruel mountains for his graceless son; but no good can come of it."

"But we can try!" said Anne.

[14]

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CHAPTER II

HOW THE FIRST LINE CAME IN HER FACE

RACHEL did not kill herself, nor go crazy; nor did she even go away, as she threatened to do when she wearied of announcing her imminent death. She stayed and made things unpleasant for Grandmother. She was barely civil to her in Grandfather's presence, for she dared not be otherwise; but the moment his back was turned she was grimacing and threatening behind it, and when he left the room she would break out into open taunt and menace. There was no name too hateful for her to call the pale girl who never reviled her in turn; but Grandmother's very silence was turned against her. [16]

"You needn't think that I don't know why you're dumb as a fish!" raved the frantic girl. "You know what I say is true, and you darsn't speak! you darsn't! you darsn't!—" She stopped short; for Grandmother had come and taken her by both wrists, and stood gazing at her.

"Stop!" she said quietly. "That is enough. Stop!"

They stood for some minutes, looking into each other's eyes; then Rachel turned her head away with a sullen gesture. "Let me go!" she said. "I don't want to say anything more. I've said enough. Let me go!" [17]

These were bad hours, but there were good ones too for little Grandmother. She loved her housework, and did it with a pretty grace and quickness; she loved to sit by Grandfather with her sewing, or read the paper to him. She could not be doing enough for the old man. She told Anne Peace that he had saved her life. "I should not have gone on living out there," she said, "it was not good to live after my father died. I had one friend, but he left me, and there were only strangers when Grandfather came and saved me. It is a little thing to let her scold"—it was after one of Rachel's tantrums—"if only she will be quiet before him, and not make him grieve." [18]

But her happiest hours were in the garden. It was a lovely place, the Merion garden; not large, only a hundred feet from the house to the street; but this space was so set and packed with flowers that from a little distance it looked like a gay carpet stretched before the old red brick house. Small lozenge-shaped beds, each a mass of brilliant color; sweet-william, iris, pansies, poppies, forget-me-nots, and twenty other lovely things. Between the beds, round and round like a slender green ribbon, ran a little grassy path, just wide enough for one person. Grandmother would spend her best hours following this path; pacing slowly along, stopping here to look and there to smell, and everywhere to love. She was like a flower herself, as she drifted softly along in her light dress, her soft hair blowing about her sweet pale face; a windflower, as Anne Peace said. [19]

One day she had followed the path till she came to where it ran along by the old vine-covered brick wall that stood between the garden and the road. You could hardly see the wall for the grapevines that were piled thick upon it; and inside the vines tumbled about, overrunning the long bed of yellow iris that was the rearguard of the garden.

Grandmother was talking as she drifted slowly along; it was a way she had, bred by her lonely life in the western cabin; talking half to herself, half to the long white lily that she held, putting it delicately to her cheek now and then, as if to feel which was the smoother. [20]

"But Manuel never came back!" she was saying. "I never knew, white lily, I never knew whether he was alive or dead. That made it hard to come away, do you see, dear? Whether he was lost in the great snow up on the mountains, or whether the Indians caught him, —I can never know now, lily dear; and he was my only friend till Grandfather came, and I loved him—I loved Manuel, white lily! Ah! what is that?"



**"THE LONG WHITE LILY—PUTTING IT
DELICATELY TO HER CHEEK."**

There was a smothered exclamation; a rustle on the other side of the wall. The next moment a figure that had been lying under the wall rose up and confronted Grandmother; the figure of a young man, tall and graceful, with the look of a foreigner. [21]

"Pitia!" cried the young man. "It is you? You call me?—see, I come! I am here, Manuel Santos."

Yes, things happen so, sometimes, more strangely than in stories.

He stretched out his arms across the wall in greeting.

"Are you alive, Manuel?" asked Grandmother, making the sign of the cross, as her Spanish nurse had taught her. "Are you alive, or a spirit? Either way I am glad, oh, glad to see you, Manuel!" [22]

She drew near timidly, and timidly reached out her hand and touched his; he grasped it with a cry, and then with one motion had leaped the wall and caught her in his arms. "Pitia!" he cried. "To me! mine, forever!"

He lifted her face to his, but in breathless haste little Grandmother put him from her and leaned back against the wall, with hands outstretched keeping him off.

"Manuel," she said. "I have a great deal to tell you. I thought—you did not come back. I thought you were dead."

"Yes," said the boy. "No wonder! The Apaches got me and kept me all winter with a broken leg. What matter? I got away. I found you had come east. I found the man's name who brought you—found where he lived. I followed. I come here an hour ago, and lie down, I think by chance, beneath the wall to rest. That chance was the finger of Heaven. You see, Pitia, it leads me to you. I take you, you are mine, you go back with me, as my wife." [23]

The little windflower was very white as she leaned against the wall, still with outstretched pleading hands; whiter than the lily that lay at her feet.

"Manuel," she said; "listen! I was alone. Father died. There was no woman save old Emilia—" the lad uttered an oath, but she hurried on. "I could not—I could not stay. I meant to die; I thought you dead, and I—I was going up into the great snow to end it, when—a good old man came. Old, old, white as winter, but good as Heaven. He saved me, Manuel; he brought me here to his home, and it is mine too. I am his wife, Manuel." [24]

"His wife!" The young man stared incredulous, his dark eyes full

of pain and trouble. "His wife—an old man! You, my Pitia?" Suddenly his face broke into laughter.

"I see!" he cried. "You punish me, you try me—good! I take it all! Go on, Pitia! more penance, I desire it, because at the last I have you—so!"

Once more he sprang towards her with a passionate gesture; but the slender white arms never wavered. [25]

"I am his wife," she repeated; "the good old man's wife. See—the ring on my finger. They—they call me Grandmother, Manuel dear."

She tried to smile. "And you are alive!" she said. "Manuel, that is all I will think of; my friend is alive, my only friend till Grandfather came."

Alas! poor little Grandmother, poor little windflower; for now burst forth a storm beside which Rachel's rages seemed the babble of a child. Cruel names the boy called her, in his wild passion of love and disappointment; cruel, cruel words he said; and she stood there white and quiet, looking at him with patient pleading eyes, but not trying to excuse or defend. [26]

"Ah!" he cried at last. "You are not alive at all, I believe. You have never lived, you do not know what life is."

That was the first time she heard it, poor little Grandmother. She was to hear it so many times. Now she put her hand to her heart as if something had pierced it; a spasm crossed her smooth forehead, and when it passed a line remained, a little line of pain.

But she only nodded and tried to smile, and said, "Yes, sure, Manuel! yes, sure!"

Then they heard Grandfather's voice behind them, and there was the good old man standing, leaning on his stick and looking at them with wonder. [27]

"What is this?" said Grandfather. "I heard loud and angry words. Who is this, my dear?"

"This is Manuel, Grandfather; my friend of whom I told you. He is angry because I am married to you!" said Grandmother simply; "but I am always so thankful to you, Grandfather dear!"

Grandfather looked kindly at the boy. "I see!" he said. "Yes, yes; I see! I see! But come into the house with us, sir, and let us try to be friends. Sorrow in youth is hard to bear, yet it can be borne, it can be borne, and we will help you if we may."

And Grandmother said, "Yes, sure, Manuel dear; come in and eat with us; you must be hungry." [28]

A great sob burst from the boy's throat, and turning away he flung his arm upon the vine-covered wall and wept there.

"Go you into the house, my dear," said Grandfather; "and be getting supper. We will come presently."

Grandmother looked at him for a moment; then she took his hand and put it to her heart, with a pretty gesture, looking into his face with clear patient eyes; he laid his other hand on her head, and they stood so for a moment quietly, with no words; then she went into the house.

And by and by Grandfather brought Manuel in to supper, and Rachel was wonderfully civil, and they were all quite cheerful together. [29]

Manuel stayed, as we all know, and worked for Grandfather on the farm, and boarded with the Widow Peace across the way; and he and Grandfather were great friends, and he and Rachel quarrelled and made up and quarrelled again, over and over; and always from that time there was a little line on Grandmother's smooth forehead.

CHAPTER III

HOW SHE PLAYED WITH THE CHILDREN

I ASKED Anne Peace once, when we were talking about Grandmother (it was not till the next year that we came to the village), how soon it was that the children found her out. Very soon, Anne said. It began with their trying to tease her by shouting "Grandmother!" over the wall and running away. She caught one of them and carried him into the garden screaming and kicking (she was strong, for all her slenderness), and soon she had him down in the grass listening to a story, eyes and mouth wide open, and all the rest of them hanging over the wall among the grapevines, "trying so hard to hear you could 'most see their ears grow!" said Anne, laughing.

[31]

"It was wonderful the way she had with them. I used to wish she would keep a school, after she was left alone, but I don't know; maybe she couldn't have taught them so much in the book way; but where she learned all the things she did tell 'em—it passes me. I used to ask her: 'Grandmother,' I'd say, 'where do you get it all?' And she'd laugh her pretty way, and say:

"Eye and ear,
See and hear;
Look and listen well, my dear!"

[32]

That was all there was to it, she'd say, but we knew better."

I can remember her stories now. Perhaps they were not so wonderful as we thought; perhaps it was the way she had with her that made them so enchanting. I never shall forget the story of the little Prince who would go a-wooing. His mother, the old Queen, said to him:

"Look she sweet or speak she fair,
Mark what she does when they curl her hair!"

"So the little Prince started off on his travels, and soon he met a beautiful Princess with lovely curls as white as flax. She looked sweet, and she spoke fair, and the little Prince thought 'Here is the bride for me!' But he minded him of what his mother said, and when the Princess went to have her hair curled he stood under the window and listened.

[33]

"And what did he hear, children? He heard the voice that had spoken him sweet as honey, but now it was sharp and thin as vinegar. 'Careless slut!' it said. 'If you pull my hair again I will have you beaten.'

"Then the little Prince shook his head and sighed, and started again on his travels. By and by he met another Princess, and she was red as a rose, with black curls shining like jet, and her eyes so bright and merry that the Prince thought, 'Sure, this is the bride for me!'

[34]

"The Princess thought so too, and she looked sweet and spoke fair; but the Prince minded him of what his mother had said, and when the Princess went to have her hair curled he listened again beneath the window. But oh, children, what did he hear? Angry words and stamping feet, and then a sharp stinging sound; and out came the maid flying and crying, with her hand to her cheek that had been slapped till it was red as fire. So when the Prince saw that he sighed again and shook his head, and started off on his travels.

"Before long he met a third Princess, and she was fair as a star, and her curls like brown gold, and falling to her knees. She looked so sweet that the Prince's heart went out to her more than to either of the others; but he was afraid after what had passed, and waited for the hour of the hair-curling. When that came, he was going toward the window, when there passed him a young maiden running, with her face all in a glow of happiness.

[35]

"'Whither away so fast, pretty maid?' asked the Prince.

"'Do not stay me!' said the maid. 'I go to curl the Princess's hair, and I must not be late, for it is the happiest hour of my day.'

"'Is it so?' said the Prince. 'Then will you tell the Princess that when her hair is curled I pray that she will marry me?'

"And so she did, children, of course, and they had a happy day for every thread of her brown-gold hair, so I am told, and there were so

[36]

many threads, I think they must be alive to this day."

And the bird stories! and the story of how the butterfly's wings were spotted! and the flower stories! I don't suppose there was a child in the village in those days who did not believe that at night all the flowers in Grandfather Merion's garden were dancing round the fairy ring in the home pasture.

"And Sweet William said to Clove Pink, 'How sweet the fringe on your gown is! Will you dance with me, pretty lady?' So they danced away and away, and they met Bachelor's Button waltzing with Cowslip, and young Larkspur kicking up his heels with Poppy Gay, and Prince's Feather bowing low before sweet white Lily in her satin gown, and Crown Imperial leading out Queen Rose—oh! but she was a queen indeed! And the music played—such music! the locust went tweedle, tweedle, tweedle, and the cricket went chirp, chirp, chirp, and the big green frog that played the bass viol said 'glum! glum! glum!' And they danced—oh, they danced!

[37]

"Whirl about, twirl about, hop, hop, hop! till—hush! something happened. Oh! children, come close while I whisper. The green turf of the Ring trembled and shook—and opened—and—oh! off go the flowers scampering back to bed as fast as they can go; and in their places—oh! hush! oh, hush! I must not tell.

[38]

"Green jacket, red cap, and white owl's feather!

Little lights that twinkle, little bells that jingle, little feet that trip, trip—

"Hush, children! we must not look. Home again, we too, after the flowers!"

And she would catch their hands and run with them round and round the field till all were out of breath with running and laughter.

The Saturday feasts were begun, Anne Peace reminded me, for the little lame girl who lived a mile beyond the village. The poor little soul had heard of all the merry play that went on at Merion Farm, and had begged her father to bring her in. So one day a long lean tattered man came to the gate and looked wistfully in at Grandmother, who was making daisy chains against the children's coming.

[39]

"Mornin'!" he said. "Mis' Merion to home?"

"Yes," said Grandmother; "at least I am here. Would you like something?"

"I swow!" said the man. He looked helplessly at the girlish figure a moment. Then—"My little gal heard tell how that you told yarns to young 'uns, and nothin' to it but I must fetch her in. She—she ain't very well—" his rough voice faltered, and he looked back to his wagon.

"Is she there?" cried Grandmother. "Oh, but bring her in! bring her in quickly! why, you darling, I am so glad you have come."

[40]

A poor little huddle of humanity; hunchbacked, with the strange steadfast eyes of her kind,—wise with their own knowledge, which is apart from all knowledge revealed to those whose backs are straight,—lame, too, drawn and twisted this way and that, as if Nature had been a naughty child playing with a doll, tormenting it in sheer wantonness.

A piteous sight; and still more piteous the shrinking look of her and of the poor gaunt wistful father, watchful for a rebuff, a smile, some one of the devilishly cruel tricks that humanity startles into when it touches the unusual.

[41]

But Grandmother's arms were out, and Grandmother's face was shining with clear light, like an alabaster lamp. Oh, one would know that her name was Pity, even though none used the name now, even Manuel, even Grandfather himself calling her Grandmother.

"Darling!" she said, and she hugged the child close to her, as if she would shield it from all the world. "Here is a daisy chain for you. See! I will put it round your neck. Now you are mine for the whole afternoon. Good father will go—" she nodded to the man; "go and do the errands, and see to all his business, and then when it gets toward supper-time he will come back and pick you up and carry you off. And now we'll go and make some posies for the others; my name is Grandmother; what is yours, darling? whisper now!"

[42]

The man turned away, and brushed his hand across his eyes. "Gosh!" he said simply. "I guess you're a good woman."

"I'm just Grandmother," said the girl; "that's all, isn't it, Nelly?"

Good-bye, father!"

"Good-bye, father!" echoed the child, clinging round Grandmother's neck as though she feared she might vanish suddenly into thin air.

"Sure she won't pester ye?" said the man, timidly. "She's real clever!"

"You won't pester me, will you, Nelly?" said Grandmother.

[43]

"Nelly Nell, Nelly Nell,
Come and hear the flowers tell
How they heed you,
Why they need you,
How they mean to love you well."

And off they went together, little Nelly nodding and waving her hand, with a wholly new smile on her pale shrivelled face.

"Gosh!" said the father again; he had not many words, and only one to express emotion.

When the other children came, they found a little girl with a radiant face, crowned with a forget-me-not wreath, and with the prettiest pale blue scarf over her shoulders, all embroidered with butterflies. She was sitting in a low round chair with cushioned back, and chair and cushion and child were all heaped and garlanded with flowers, daisies and lilies, pink hawthorn and great drifts of snowballs.

[44]

Grandmother called to them, "Come children, come! here is the Queen of the May. Her name is Nelly, and she has come to stay to tea, and you shall all stay too."

The children came up half shy, half bold.

"What makes her sit so funny?" asked a very little boy.

"You be still or I'll bat your head off!" muttered his elder brother savagely. No one else made any mistake, and most of them were careful not to look too much at Nelly; children are gentlefolk, if you take them the right way.

[45]

Then they listened to the story of the princess in the brown dress; how she came into the town, and no one knew she was a princess at all, but every one said, "See the poor woman in the tattered brown gown!" But the princess did not mind. She went hither and thither, up and down, and whenever she met any one who was in need, she put her hand inside the folds of her gown, and brought out a piece of gold or a shining jewel, and gave it to the poor person. So when this had gone on for some time, people began to talk one to another. One said, "Where does this beggar woman get the gold and the gems that she gives?"

[46]

"She must have begged them!" said another.

"Or stolen them!" said a third.

Then all the people cried out, "She is a thief! let her be stripped and beaten!"

So they brought the princess to the market-place; and cruel men seized her and pulled off her tattered brown gown; and oh! and oh! children, what do you think? there stood the most radiant princess that ever was seen upon earth; her dress was of pure woven gold, and set from top to hem with precious stones so bright that the sun laughed in every one of them, and her hair (for they had pulled off her cap too) was as fair gold as the dress, and fell around her like a golden cloak. So she stood for a minute like heaven come to earth; and then all in a moment she vanished away, and only the tattered brown dress was left for them to do what they would with.

[47]

"So, darlings, be very careful to be nice to everybody, especially to anyone in a shabby brown dress, for there may always be a princess inside it."

"Did you ever see a princess, Grandmother?" asked a child.

"Oh, I so seldom see any other kind of person," said Grandmother, "except princes. You have no idea how many I know. No, I can't tell you their names; you'll have to find them out for yourselves; and now it is time for a game."

[48]

They were quiet games that they played that afternoon; but as the children said afterwards, some of the best games are quiet. And then came the Feast; a wonderful feast, with a great jug of creamy milk, and all the bread and honey that any one could eat, and little round tarts besides.

"Look at that!" said Rachel to Manuel. They had been for a walk,

and came back through the orchard, where the feast was held. "We were going to have those tarts for tea, and she has given every last one to those brats. That's all she cares for, just childishness. She's nothing but a child herself."

"Nothing but a child!" echoed Manuel, and he added, "She has never lived; sometimes I think she never will."

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CHAPTER IV

HOW SHE SANG GRANDFATHER TO SLEEP

GRANDFATHER began to fail. He complained of no pain or distress; but his stately figure seemed to shrink, and his head that he used to hold so high was now bowed on his breast, and he began to creep and shuffle in his walk. Widow Peace said the change had begun when he came back from the vain search for his graceless son, and I think it was true. "He won't more than last out the winter," said Mrs. Peace, "if he does that. The Merions don't run much above seventy." [51]

"Don't, mother!" said Anne.

"Don'ting won't stop the course of nature," said her mother, "nor yet is it proper you should say 'Don't' to me, Anne Peace."

"I beg your pardon, mother; I meant no harm."

"No more you did, daughter. You may hand me the tape measure. Anne, if you can tell me how to cut this dress so as to make Mis' Broadback look like anything besides Behemoth in the Bible I shall be obliged to you."

"You're real funny, mother!" said Anne, who never quite understood her parent.

"Fun keeps the fiddle going!" said Mrs. Peace. "You may cut them gores if you're a mind to, Anne. There's Rachel and Manuel goin' off again. S'pose they're goin' to make a match of it?" [52]

"Oh, mother!" said little Anne.

"'Oh,' said the owl, and set up a hootin',
But Jabez kept still when he done the shootin'."

What does Grandmother do these days? I haven't seen her go out of the gate for a week and more. You were over this morning, wasn't you?"

"Yes," said Anne. "Oh, mother, she just sits by Grandfather all the time—when her work is done, that's to say; Grandmother never slights anything; sits by him all day, reading to him when he's awake, or talking, or singing those little songs he likes; and when he drops off asleep she just reaches for her sewing and sits and waits till he wakes up. And she's growing so white and thin—there! it just makes me ache to see her. I said to her 'Grandmother,' I said, 'when he drops off asleep that way, you'd ought to slip out into the garden for a mouthful of air, even if you don't go no further. Rachel can stay round,' I said, 'case he should want anything,' I said. But she just shook her head. 'No, Anne!' she says. 'I must be here,' she says. 'He has been so good to me; so good to me; he must always find me here when he wants me.'"

"And sure enough, mother, directly he woke up, before he opened his eyes he says 'You here, Grandmother?' kinder restless like, and she says 'Yes, Grandfather, right here!' and laid her hand on his and began to sing, and he smiled real happy and contented, said he didn't want anything except just to know that she was there. But, mother, 'tis a sweet pretty sight now, to see them two together. Of course he's an old man and she's a young girl, but yet—well, they aren't like other folks, neither one of them. What makes you look like that, mother?" [53]

"Nobody ever was like other folks that ever I heard of," said Widow Peace rather grimly. "Now you be quiet, Anne Peace. Here comes Rachel." [55]

Rachel Merion came flying in, splendid in her scarlet dress. "How do, Mis' Peace?" she said. "Anne, will you lend me that mantilla pattern? I want to make one out of some of that black lace Grandmother Willard had. Will you, Anne? hurry up, I can't wait."

Mrs. Peace looked at her with mild severity. "Rachel," she said; "sit down a spell. I want to speak to you."

"Oh, I can't, Mis' Peace!" said Rachel. "Manuel's waiting for me outside."

"Manuel *can* wait," said Mrs. Peace. "It'll do him good. Sit down, Rachel!"

"I'd full as lives stand, thank you," said Rachel sullenly. [56]

"I asked you to sit down," said Mrs. Peace quietly; and Rachel sat down with a flounce on the edge of a chair, and listened with

lowering brows.

"I want to speak to you about Grandmother," said the little widow. "She isn't well; Anne sees it, and I see it. She's outdoing her strength, caring for Grandfather all day long, and I think you'd ought to help her more than what you do."

Rachel's eyes flashed under their black brows.

"She wanted him," she said, "and she got him; now let her see to him. I don't feel no call to take care of Grandfather; he isn't my husband."

Anne's soft eyes glowed with indignation. She was about to speak, her mother motioned her to silence. "Rachel Merion," she said. "You'd ought to be slapped, and I've a good part of a mind to do it. You're careless and shiftless, and heathen; and you'll neither do good nor get it in this world till you get a human heart in your bosom. Grandmother is worth twenty of you, and I pay her no compliment either in saying it; it shows what she is, that she has put up with your actions so long. I wouldn't have, not a single week. I'd have drove you out with a broomstick, Rachel, and give you time to learn manners before I let you in again. There! now I've said my say, and you can go."

[57]

As Anne said, it was a pretty sight there, in the Merion kitchen. The good old man sat in his great armchair, dozing or dreaming the hours away, less and less inclined to stir as the weeks went on; and always beside him was the slight figure in the clear print dress, watching, waiting, tending; yes, it was pretty enough.

[58]

"Sing, Grandmother!" he would say now and then; and Grandmother would sing in her low sweet voice, like a flute:

"Sweet sleep to fold me,
Sweet dreams to hold me;
Listen, oh! listen!
This the angels told me.
Fair grow the trees there,
Soft blows the breeze there,
Golden ways, golden days,
When will ye enfold me?"

[59]

Or that quaint little old song that he specially liked:

"As I went walking, walking,
I heard St. Michael talking,
He spoke to sweet St. Gabriel,
The one who loves my soul so well,
'Oh, brother, tell me here,
Why hold that soul so dear?'
'Because, alas, since e'er 'twas born,
I feel the piercing of its thorn.'"

Or it would be the song of the river, and that she loved to sing, because Grandfather would fall asleep to the soft lulling time of it:

"Flow, flow, flow down river,
Carry me down to the sea!
Ropes of silk and a cedar paddle,
For to set my spirit free.
Roll, roll, rolling billow;
Smooth, smooth my sleepy pillow:
Silver sails and a cedar paddle,
For to set my spirit free!"

[60]

"Long, long work and weeping,
Trying for to do my best:
Soon, soon, time for sleeping;
Cover me up to rest!
Roll, roll, rolling billow,
Smooth, smooth my sleepy pillow,
Golden masts and a cedar paddle,
For to set my spirit free!"

One day she was singing this, softer and softer, till she thought Grandfather was fast asleep. Lower and lower sank the lulling voice, till at length it died away in a sigh. Then she sat silent, looking at him; at the good white head, the broad forehead, with its strong lines of toil and thought, all the kind face that she knew and loved well now. She sighed again, not knowing that she did; and at that Grandfather opened his eyes without stirring and looked at her—oh, so kindly!

[61]

"Little Grandmother," he said. "You know I am going soon?"

"Yes, Grandfather!" said she.

"You have been a good, good child," said Grandfather; "a good and faithful child, and when I go my blessing stays with you. You are young, and I want you to be happy. Perhaps you will like to marry Manuel, my dear?"

Grandmother lifted her clear eyes to his.

"Yes, Grandfather!" she said.

"He is not good enough for you," said Grandfather, "but—well! well! you are both young, both young, and youth is a great thing. I was young myself—a long, long time ago, my dear." He was silent.

Grandmother knelt down beside him, and took his hand in her own two, stroking it and singing softly.

"Silver sails and a cedar paddle,
For to set my spirit free."

Presently he looked up, and spoke hurriedly, in a strange, confused voice.

"Mary!" he said. "Are you there?"

Now Mary was the name of the wife of his youth. Grandmother was silent.

"Are you there, Mary?" asked the old man impatiently. "'Tis so dark I can't see you."

"Yes, I am here!" said Grandmother.

"'Tis time to light up!" said Grandfather. "We mustn't sit here in the dark like old folks, Mary. Let me get up and light the lamps."

The afternoon light fell clear on his face with its open sightless eyes, and on the angel face turned up to it in faithful love.

"Wait just a little, John," said Grandmother. "I—I love the twilight; 'tis restful. Let—let me rest a bit before we light up, won't you?"

"Surely, Mary; surely, my dear. We'll rest together then; I—I am tired too, I—think."

There was a long silence. The light was growing softer, fainter; the old clock ticked steadily; a coal tinkled from the fire.

"Mary—you are there?"

"Yes, dear!"

"Song—the sleepy song; I think I shall sleep."

Hush! rest, dear white head, on my breast; close, poor eyes that cannot see the light. Rest, rest, in the quiet twilight!

"Roll, roll, rolling billow,
Smooth, smooth my sleepy pillow,
Golden mast and a cedar paddle,
For to set my spirit free!"

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[63]

[64]

[65]

CHAPTER V

HOW THE SECOND LINE CAME IN HER FOREHEAD

IT was when Grandfather died that the second line came across Grandmother's clear forehead. Sometimes—when she was playing with the children, for example—it was so faint one hardly noticed it; but again it would be deep, a line of thought—or was it pain?—drawn straight as by a ruler. Manuel noticed it one day, and spoke of it.

"You look troubled, Grandmother. What is it?"

"I have lost my best friend, Manuel," said Grandmother. "I may well look troubled; yet it is not trouble either, only sorrow, for missing him, and for wishing I had done more for him." [66]

"No one could have done more," said Manuel; "you were an angel to him." He was silent a moment; then he said, "You used to call me your best friend—once. Shall I call you Pitia again, Grandmother?"

Something in his tone—or was it something *not* there?—drew the line deeper across the white forehead. She waited a moment before she spoke, and then answered carefully, keeping an even tone:

"Perhaps 'Grandmother' is better, Manuel; we are all used to it, you know. Why should we change?" [67]

"As you please!" said Manuel; and whether there was more regret or relief in his voice, who shall say? He lingered a moment, hesitating, with words on his lips which seemed to hang, unready for utterance; and Grandmother stood very still, only her breath fluttering a little; but he need not see that, and did not.

Suddenly from the garden came a voice, clear, shrill, imperious; Rachel's voice. "Manuel, where are you? I want you! come, quick."

Manuel gave one glance at the still face; hesitated a moment; then muttering something about "Back soon!" he went out.

Little Grandmother stood very still. Sounds crept through her ears,—the clock ticking, the old cat purring on the hearth, the song-sparrow singing loud and clear in the apple-tree outside the sitting-room window,—but she did not heed them. Her eyes were wide open, fixed on the door through which Manuel had gone. It formed a lovely picture, blossoming trees, waving grass (winter had come and gone since Grandfather died), gay flower-beds; but she did not see them. Only when two figures crossed the space, a girl in a scarlet dress, a man at her side, looking down as she laughed up in his face, Grandmother shivered a little, and went over to where the great work-basket stood, and caught up her sewing with a kind of passion. "I have you!" she said. "You are mine, good little stitches dear, kind, good little stitches!" [68]

If I have not said much about Manuel, it is because there is not very much to say. He was a handsome lad, and a merry one. His laziness did not show much till after Grandfather's death, for he feared and loved the old man, and did his best to please him. How he should have made the effort to cross the Continent in search of Grandmother was one of the things that could not be understood. It was like a fire of straw, as Mrs. Peace said; it burned up bright, but there were no coals left. [69]

Mrs. Peace had little patience with Manuel. He had been boarding with her now for two years, and had never once, so she said, wiped his feet as they should be wiped when he came into the house. Also she pronounced him lazy, shiftless, careless, and selfish. [70]

"If he marries Rachel," she said, "there'll be a pair of 'em, and a precious pair, too. I'm going to give him a piece of my mind before I sleep to-night."

"That's a real pretty skirt of Rachel's, mother," said Anne. "Don't you want I should stroke the gathers?"

"You may stroke the gathers, Anne, but you can't stroke me," said her mother gently. "I tell you I am going to give that fellow a piece of my mind. Yes, it is a pretty dress, and it's the third Rachel Merion has had this spring, and if you'll tell me when Grandmother has had a new dress, I'll give you the next ninepence that's coined." [71]

"Grandmother always looks like a picture, I'm sure," said Anne.

"I've no special patience with Grandmother," said Mrs. Peace, "nor yet with you, Anne Peace. If the Lord had meant for us to be

angels here, it's likely he would have provided us with wings and robes, 'cordin' to. When I see an angel in a calico dress goin' round askin' folks won't they please wipe their feet on her and save their carpets, I want to shake her."

"Shake Grandmother?" said Anne, opening great eyes of reproach.

"There's Manuel now!" said Widow Peace. "You might take this waist home to Mis' Wyman, if you've a mind to, Anne." [72]

It is not known precisely what Mrs. Peace said to Manuel Santos. Anne, on her return from Mrs. Wyman's, met him coming out, in a white flame of rage. He glared at her, and muttered something under his breath, but made no articulate reply.

"Chatterin' mad, he was!" Mrs. Peace said calmly, in answer to Anne's anxious questions. "Fairly chatterin' mad. I don't know, Anne, whether I've done harm or good, but something had to be done, and there's times when harm is better than nothing."

"Why, Mother Peace!" exclaimed Anne, aghast. "How you talk!" [73]

"It don't sound pretty, does it?" said the widow; "but I believe it's a fact. Something will happen now, you see if it don't."

Something did happen. Manuel, still white and inarticulate with rage, met Rachel in the garden, on his way to the house; Rachel in her red dress, with scarlet poppies in her hair and hands. She was waiting for him, perhaps; certainly, at sight of him, the color and light flashed into her face in a way that might have moved a stronger man than Manuel.

"Manuel!" she cried. "What's the matter? what makes you look so queer? are you sick, Manuel?"

"Yes!" cried the man roughly. "I am sick! sick of this place, sick of these people. I am going away, back to the west, where a man can live without being watched and spied upon and stung by ants and wasps." [74]

"Going away! Manuel!" the poppies dropped from the girl's hands, the rich color fled from her cheeks. "If you go," she said simply, "I shall die." Rachel had never learned to govern herself.

Well, after that there was only one way out of it—at least for a man like Manuel. Among all these cold, thin-blooded Eastern folk, here was one whose blood ran warm and swift and red like his own. No satin lily that a man dared not touch, but a bright poppy like those in her hair, fit and ready to be gathered. Yet when he passed the white lilies, with his arm round the girl, his promised wife—even while he looked down at the rapture of her face and thrilled at the thrill in her voice—the fragrance of the lilies seemed a tangible thing, like a thorn that pierced him. [75]

At the garden door they parted. He had to see to the stock, he said; would Rachel tell Grandmother?

Rachel ran into the house, calling Grandmother. There was no answer; but listening she heard the sound of the wheel in the big empty chamber overhead. She ran up-stairs, still calling. Grandmother was spinning wool—she loved to spin—at the great wool-wheel, stepping lightly back and forward; but at the first sound of Rachel's voice below she stopped, and put her hand to her heart. She was standing so when the girl rushed in, panting and radiant. [76]

"Grandmother! why didn't you answer? didn't you hear me?" She never waited for an answer but ran on in a torrent of speech. "Grandmother, I've been hateful to you, and I'm sorry. Do you hear? I'm sorry, sorry; I'm so happy now, I mean to be good, good all the time. Do you know what's going to happen, Grandmother? guess! I'll give you three guesses—no, I won't, I won't give you one! I must tell you. I am going to marry Manuel. Grandmother, are you glad? You are so good, I suppose you'll be glad. I should hate you, I should kill you, if it were you who were going to marry Manuel. Do you know"—she caught her breath a moment, then laughed on, the laugh rippling through her speech—"do you know, Grandmother, I have been jealous of you. I've always been jealous I guess; first because of Grandfather—poor old Grandfather, what a pity he isn't alive to know!—and then—and lately—oh, Grandmother, I didn't know—I didn't know but he might care about you. Are you laughing? it is funny, isn't it?" But Grandmother was not laughing. [77]

"I might have known!" the girl went on, "I needn't have been afraid, need I, Grandmother? You aren't like other folks, you've never lived; you don't know what life is, do you, Grandmother? I'd be sorry for you if I wasn't so glad for myself, so glad, so glad! Do [78]

you think I'm crazy? I want to kiss you, little Grandmother! What's the matter? did my pin scratch you?"

Grandmother had given a cry as the girl flung her arms round her; a little low cry, instantly silent.

"Yes—dear," she said quietly, but with that little flutter in her voice that one who loved her might have noticed; "I think it must have been the pin. Oh, Rachel," she said, "I hope you will be so happy, so happy! I hope there will never be anything but happiness for you and Manuel, my dear."

[79]

Rachel opened her dark eyes wide. "Why, of course there won't!" she said.

"Grandmother's all right!" she said an hour later, when she had run to meet her lover in the dewy orchard, and they were coming home together in the sunset light; "she's all right. She didn't say much—I don't know as I gave her a chance, Manuel. I had so much to say myself; but she was real pleased, and wished me joy. She's good, Grandmother is. I mean never to be hateful to her again if I can help it. How sweet those lilies smell, Manuel!"

[80]

"Is she happy, do you think?" said Manuel; it seemed to say itself, without will of his.

"Who? Grandmother? of course she is! You don't expect her to cry all her life for an old man, do you? She's as happy as a person can be who has never lived. Hush! hear her singing this minute!"

Yes! hear her singing, in the quiet twilight garden where she walks alone.

"Oh! brother, tell me here
Why hold that soul so dear?
'Because, alas! since e'er 'twas born,
I feel the piercing of its thorn.'"

[81]

CHAPTER VI

HOW SHE WENT VISITING

IT was after Rachel's marriage that Grandmother first began to go about in the village. Till then she had always kept pretty much within the four walls of the Merion garden, and people thought she was proud, until they came to know her. But now a restlessness seemed to come over her, and she was away from home a good deal. She did not go to "circles" and meetings—one would as soon have expected to see a white birch walk into the vestry—nor did she make what we loved to call "society calls;" but she found out the people who were sick or sad or lonely—the Peaces always knew—and she went to them, sometimes with Anne to introduce her, oftener alone, making some errand, taking a flower, or a pot of jelly or the like. Old Aunt Betsy Taggart was living then, the white old woman who had taken to her bed so long ago that none of us young folks ever knew why she had done it. Indeed, I think Anne and I rather supposed she had always been there—grew there, perhaps, like some strange old white flower. She was the most independent old soul, Aunt Betsy. It seemed terrible for her to live there alone, but it was the only way she would live. Her niece, Hepsy Babbage, came in morning and evening, and "did for" the old lady, but she was not allowed to stay more than an hour at a time. "My soul is my own," Aunt Betsy used to say, "and I like to be able to call it so, my dear!" Hepsy was a great talker, certainly; and Aunt Betsy did her own cooking over a lamp that stood on the table by her bed, and actually made her own butter in a little churn that Wilbur Babbage made for her the winter before he died. (Anne Peace never would let me say that Wilbur was talked to death, but she could not prevent her mother's saying so.)

[82]

[83]

Well, Grandmother and Aunt Betsy took to each other from the first moment, and never a week passed that Grandmother did not spend an afternoon with the old lady and take tea. Aunt Betsy seemed to know all about her at once, which Anne and I never did, though we adored her.

[84]

"Come here, child!" she said when she came in with Anne, the first time. "I've heard of you, and I'm glad to see you. Come and let me have a look at you!" She took Grandmother's hand in hers, and the two looked at each other, a long quiet look. "Ah!" said Aunt Betsy at last. "Yes, I see. The upper and the nether millstone, my child!"

Grandmother nodded simply; then in a moment she began to talk about the flowers she had brought, and how Anne had helped her pick them, and what a comfort Anne and her mother were to her.

[85]

"Such good neighbors!" she said. "Such dear, good, kind, neighbors! This place is so full of good people, Miss Taggart."

"They call me Aunt Betsy," said the old lady, "and they call you Grandmother, I'm told."

"Yes," said Grandmother laughing; "that is my name, isn't it, Anne?"

Anne says that she had really forgotten that she had ever had any other name.

"We shall be friends, you and I!" said Aunt Betsy; "and you will find good people wherever you look for them, my dear."

"Oh, yes, surely!" said Grandmother; and they looked at each other again, that quiet understanding look.

[86]

I don't suppose Anne was very much younger than Grandmother, but she felt a whole lifetime between them, and worshipped the older girl with a very real worship. Grandmother took it sweetly and quietly, as she took everything. When Anne brought some offering, the first bride-rose from her bush, or a delicate cake, or a sunset-colored jelly in a glass bowl, Grandmother would thank her affectionately, and admire the gift, and then would say, "But it is too pretty for any well person, my dear. Let us take it quickly to little Kitty who is so suffering with her measles! or to poor old Mr. Peavy, whose rheumatism is bad this week."

[87]

Anne confessed to me that she sometimes wanted to say, "But I made it for you, Grandmother, not for Mr. Peavy!" but I have often thought that Anne was in a manner serving an apprenticeship to Grandmother, and making ready, all unawares, for the life of love and sacrifice that she too was to lead.

Another of Grandmother's friends was Parker Patton. He was bedridden, too—I think we were rather proud of our two stationary (I cannot say helpless) people; he had fallen from a haystack—a strong man he was, in the prime and pride of life—and injured his spine so that he could never walk again.

[88]

He was not a pleasant man, most people thought; he had a crabbed, knotty disposition, and who can wonder at it? The first time Grandmother went to see him he snapped at her, like some strong surly old dog.

"Who are you?" he said, bending his bushy eyebrows over his bright dark eyes. "Who is it?" to his wife, who was hovering with anxious civility. "Gran'ther Merion's widdier? humph! you don't look like a fool, but no more did he. What ye want, hey?"

"Oh, father!" said poor Mrs. Patton. "Don't talk so! Mis' Merion's come to visit with you a spell. I'm sure she's real—"

"Get out!" said Parker. "Get out of the room, d'ye hear?"

[89]

The poor timid soul backed out, murmuring some apology to the visitor, whom she expected to follow her; but Grandmother stood still, looking at him with her quiet sweet eyes.

"You can follow her!" said Parker. "She likes to see company; I don't! I speak plain, and say what I mean."

"I'll go very soon!" said Grandmother. "I'd like to stay a few minutes; may I?"

"If I'm to be made a show of," growled the cross old man, "I shall charge admission same as any other show. Think it's worth a quarter to see a man with a broken back? If you do you can stay."

"I haven't a quarter," said Grandmother, "but it's worth something to sit down in this comfortable chair. Were you ever at sea, Mr. Patton?"

[90]

"Ya-a-ow!" snarled Mr. Patton. It sounded almost as much like "no" as "yes," but Grandmother did not heed it much. She had dropped lightly into the chair, and was looking at a picture that hung opposite the bed; a colored lithograph of a ship under full sail. The workmanship was rough and poor, but the waves were alive, and the ship moved.

"I like that!" said Grandmother softly. "I never saw the sea, but I knew a sailor once." She began to sing very softly, hardly above her breath.

[91]

"There were two gallant ships
Put out to sea.
Sing high, sing low, and so sailed we.
The one was Prince of Luther and the other Prince of Wales;
Sailing down along the coast of the high Barbarie;
Sailing down along the coast of the high Barbarie."

"Who taught you that?" growled Parker Patton.

"A sailor; his name was Neddard, Neddard Prowst. He came—" The sick man started up on his elbows.

"Neddard Prowst! he was a shipmate of mine; we sailed together three years, and if I hadn't come ashore like a grass-fool we might be sailing yet. Where did you see Neddard, young woman?"

[92]

"In the mountains. He came ashore; he thought he would like mining, but he didn't. He was always longing for the sea."

"Ah! I'll lay my cargo he was. All seamen have their foolish times. I thought I was tired of the sea; all I wanted in the world was to lay under a tree and eat apples, day after day. Well—here I lay, and serve me right. What about Neddard, young woman?"

"He was very good to me," she said. "He liked me to sit with him when he was sick; he died a little before I came here. He taught me all the songs. Do you remember, now, this one?"

[93]

"Hilo, heylo,
Tom was a merry boy,
Hilo, heylo,
Run before the wind!
Heave to, my jolly Jacky,
Pipe all for grog and baccy,
Hilo, heylo,
Run before the wind!"

"Ay! many's the time! did he learn you 'Madagascar'? hey, what?" Grandmother, for all reply, sang again:

"Up anchor, 'bout ship, and off to Madagascar!
Cheerily, oh, cheerily, you hear the boat-swain call.
Don't you ship a Portagee, nor don't you ship a Lascar,
Nor don't you ship a Chinaman, the worst of them all!

[94]

"Up foresail, out jib, and off to Madagascar,
Call to Mother Carey for to keep her chicks at home.
Ship me next to Martinique, or ship me to Alaska,
But Polly's got my heart at anchor, ne'er to roam."

By and by when poor Mrs. Patton ventured to put her timid head inside the door, she kept it there, too astonished to move.

Parker lay back on his pillows with a look such as she had not seen for many a long day. His thin hands were beating time on the coverlet, and he and Grandmother were singing together:

"Silver and gold in the Lowlands, Lowlands,
Silver and gold in the Lowlands low;
On the quay so shady
I met a pretty lady,
She stole away my heart in the Lowlands low.

[95]

"Di'monds and pearls in the Lowlands, Lowlands,
Di'monds and pearls in the Lowlands low;
Daddy was a tailor,
But I will die a sailor,
And bury me my heart in the Low lands low!"

When the song was finished the old sailor looked up and saw his wife gaping in the doorway.

"Great bobstays! 'Liza," he said, "Ain't you got a drop of cider for Mis' Merion to wet her throat with? You'd let her sing herself dry as pop-corn, I believe, and never stir a finger."

"Oh, *Mr.* Patton!" said the poor woman, and went to fetch the cider, a great content shining in her face. It was a good day when her husband said "Great bobstays!"

[96]

Meantime Grandmother was not much missed at the Farm. Manuel indeed seemed more at ease when she was not there; he did not look at her much in these days, nor speak to her except when need was. She never seemed to notice, but was quiet and cheerful as she always had been.

As for Rachel, she saw nothing, heard nothing, but Manuel. She seemed all day in a kind of breathless dream of joy. But she meant to be good to Grandmother. She was glad that Grandmother had given up her room to them, and taken the little back one; she gloried in sitting at the head of the table once more, and ruling all like a queen. Manuel said she was a queen; "Queen Poppy" he used to call her; and Rachel thought it quite true; if only she had had the luck to be born a princess, and Manuel a prince! Yes, she meant to be good to Grandmother.

[97]

"Why, Grandmother," she said one day at table, "your hair is beginning to turn! Look, Manuel! see the white hairs!"

Manuel looked, and his face darkened, but he said nothing.

"I declare," said Rachel, "that's queer enough. I'd like to know what care you have, Grandmother, to turn your hair gray. I expect it's not having any that's done it."

[98]

"Yes, Rachel," said Grandmother; "perhaps that is it."

[99]

CHAPTER VII

HOW THE LIGHT CAME TO HER

ALL this was before the child came. With the coming of that little creature the world changed once more for Grandmother. It was in the early autumn; the cardinal flowers were past, but the St.-John's-wort was in its bloom of tarnished gold, and the fringed gentian, too, was beginning to open its blue eyes. Anne Peace remembered this, because she had just been out gathering gentians, and was coming home with her hands full of the lovely things, when she saw her mother come to the door of Merion House and wave a white apron. Anne dropped the flowers. "Oh! Rachel!" she said; and came running over. The white apron meant that it was a girl; if it were a boy the blue tablecloth was to be waved.

[100]

"Doing well!" said Mother Peace. "Grandmother has the baby in the back chamber; you can see it, if you like, Anne, only go quiet."

As if Anne were ever anything but quiet! Noiselessly she sped up the back stairs, and opened the door of the little bedchamber. There she saw—Madonna!

Grandmother was sitting in a low rocking-chair, with the baby in her arms, bending over it with eyes of worship.

[101]

"Hush, Annie!" she said softly. "Come and see a piece of heaven!"

Anne thought the heaven was in Grandmother's face; she never saw, she said, such an angel look. She came nearer, and looked at the tiny creature nestling in its blankets. One little pink fist was waving feebly. Grandmother lifted it and laid it against her cheek.

"Little velvet rose-leaf!" she murmured. "Look, Anne! see the perfectness of this! The little pink pearls of nails, the tiny precious thumbkin. Oh, wonderful, wonderful! How good God is, to let us begin in this heavenly way. How can we ever be anything but good and lovely, when we begin like this?"

[102]

"Some of us can't," said little Anne shyly. "She is a darling, Grandmother. Has Rachel seen her?"

A shade passed over Grandmother's rapt face. "Not yet!" she said. "She ought to. If you see your mother, Anne, you might tell her that baby is washed and dressed. Darling, your gown should be made of white rose-leaves, shouldn't it? and you the little blush-rose heart? Oh, little piece of heaven, how could they let you go?"

Anne stole away; looking back at the door, she saw that Grandmother had forgotten her and all the world except the child; again it seemed Mary that she was looking at; Mary in adoration, as she had seen her in an old engraving.



**"GRANDMOTHER HAD FORGOTTEN ALL
THE WORLD EXCEPT THE CHILD."**

With the awe and wonder of this still on her, she crept along the passage, past the door of Rachel's room, which stood ajar. A fretful voice was speaking. "No, I don't want to see it. I never wanted any at all, but if I had to have one I wanted a boy; I don't want a girl. I won't bother with it. It's hard enough to have to be one, and go through what I've been through—and then to have a girl! it ain't fair; it's real mean!" An angry sob followed, and Mother Peace's calm voice was heard.

[103]

"You want to be quiet now, Rachel, and try to get a nap. You'll feel different when you've seen your baby. Shut your eyes now and mebbe you'll drop off, while I go and get you some gruel."

[104]

"I hate gruel!" said Rachel; "I won't touch it, Mis' Peace, I tell you!"

Mother Peace came out quietly and drew the door to. Seeing Anne she nodded, and beckoned her to follow down-stairs, but did not speak till she had gained the kitchen.

"Anne," she said. "You needn't tell me. There's mistakes made up yonder sometimes same as other places; maybe some of the angels is young and careless. But that baby'll soon find out who its real mother is, you see if it don't."

"Why, Mother Peace," said Anne, "how you talk!"

"Some one has to talk!" said her mother kindly. "You are little better than a dumb image, Anne, when a person wants to free her mind. You might stir this gruel if you've a mind to, while I go up and take a look at those two lambs, and I don't mean Rachel Merion by neither one of 'em."

[105]

Strange and terrible as it seems, Rachel did not grow fond of her baby. She had made up her mouth, she said, for a boy; she had never liked girl babies, and she wasn't going to pretend that she did.

"You needn't look like that, Grandmother, as if you expected the sky to fall on me. I'm one that isn't afraid to say what I think, and I think it's real mean, so now, and I never shall think anything else."

[106]

Manuel too was greatly disappointed. Rachel had been so absolutely sure, that he too had counted on the promised boy, feeling somehow that she must know. They had named the child—Orlando Harold was to be his name. He was to have Manuel's eyes and Rachel's hair, and was to be President or Major-General; this

was the only point that was not settled. And now—still Manuel felt a stirring at his heart, when he saw the little fair creature in Grandmother's arms. "After all, there have to be girls!" he said.

"I didn't have to have one," said Rachel, flouncing away from him.

Mother Peace, while she nursed Rachel faithfully and sturdily, grew more and more rigid with indignation. [107]

"Take this broth!" she would say. "Yes, you will; take every sup of it; there! If 'twasn't for my living duty I'd put whole peppercorns into it, Rachel Merion. Such actions! what the Lord was thinking of I don't know." For Rachel was not nursing the baby; said she could not, she should die.

"I want a free foot," she said; "and they do just as well on a bottle, Mis' Peace."

"They do not!" said Mrs. Peace. "I'll trouble you not to teach me to suck eggs, Rachel. Now you are going to take a nap, and much good may it do you!"

"I'm not!" said Rachel. [108]

"You are!" said Mrs. Peace, and drew down the shades and went out closing the door after her.

Mrs. Peace's indignation even extended to Grandmother. "I believe she don't care, either!" she said. "Grandmother, I really believe you don't care that Rachel is a heathen and a publican, and had ought to be slapped instead of fed and cockered up."

Grandmother looked up with a face so radiant, it seemed to startle the whole room into sudden light.

"Oh, but she will!" she said. "She will care, dear Mrs. Peace. She can't possibly help it, you know, when she comes to get about and hold the little darling angel, and feel its little blessedness all warm in her arms. She can't help it then, my Precious Precious, can she? Oh, Mrs. Peace, she is smiling. Anne, Anne, come quick, she is smiling." [109]

"Wind!" said Mrs. Peace calmly.

Grandmother flushed and looked almost angry. "How can you, Mrs. Peace?" she said. "But I know better, I know! I almost heard them whisper; I almost heard the rustle—"

"What rustle?" asked Anne under her breath.

But Grandmother only smiled down at baby. "Rachel says I may name her!" she said. "Isn't that kind of her?"

Mrs. Peace sniffed.

"What shall you call her?" asked Anne. [110]

"Faith!" said Grandmother. "Sweet little Faith, God bless her! and God bless us, and give us wisdom to rear His heavenly flower fit for His garden."

Anne and I always said that the most beautiful sight we had ever seen was Baby Faith's christening. It was in October, a bright glorious day. Grandmother hung great branches of maple everywhere, making the sitting-room a royal chamber with scarlet and gold. Rachel had come down for the first time and was on the sofa in a scarlet wrapper, and Grandmother had crowned her with golden leaves, and told her she was the queen, and had come to the christening feast of the princess. Rachel was all ready to be crowned and petted. She kept Manuel close by her side, or sent him now and then on some little errand across the room, never further—and snatched him back again jealously. She did not want him even to look at the baby, though she liked well enough now to look at it herself, had even grown a little vain of it because people admired it so. [111]

"I think it's real good of me to let you name her, Grandmother!" she said jealously. "And giving her such a mean, poor-sounding name too: so old-fashioned. Ruby Emerald is the name I should have picked out, and after all she's my baby and not yours; but I'm not going back on what I said. I never would do that, though if I was in your place I shouldn't want she should have a name her own mother despised." [112]

I don't think Grandmother always listened to Rachel; she certainly did not seem to hear her now, for now the minister came in, dear old Parson Truegood. He stopped a moment in the doorway, looking at Grandmother, standing there in her white dress with the baby in her arms. I think the same thought was in his mind that had come to Anne—the thought of Mary and the Child—for he bowed his

head as if in prayer, just for a minute. Then he came in, with his cheery smile, and had just the right word for Rachel and Manuel, and all the time it was at the other two he looked.

[113]

Little Faith was one of those babies that are beautiful from the very first. Some people will tell you there are none such, but do not believe them. Even the first day there was no mottled depth of redness, only a kind of velvet rose color. That soon faded away and left the white rose instead that Grandmother always called her. She was not pasty white, nor waxen white; it was a clear rosy whiteness; you see, I have only the same word to say over again. White Rose; that is what she was. And every little feature perfect, as if carved with a fairy-fine tool; and her eyes like stars in blue water. Except Grandmother herself, she was the most beautiful thing I ever saw.

[114]

She was asleep when the service began; but when the water touched her forehead she woke, and looked up and smiled, a heavenly smile.

Grandmother looked up too, as if she saw some one, or thought to see; and I saw a listening look come over her face, as if she heard some sound, or hoped to hear. And when, a moment later, she knelt down to pray, she moved her dress a little aside, as if making room for some one. Anne knew what it meant. Grandmother had told her. "I believe," she said, "that a baby's angel stays by till after it is christened. I can't tell you just how I know, but I hear—sometimes—I hear sounds that aren't this-world sounds. And some one speaks to me—without words, yet I understand—oh, yes, I understand."

[115]

It was a pretty fancy; she was full of pretty fancies, many of them coming, I suppose, from her lonely childhood.

And so Baby Faith was christened, and became the light of Grandmother's life.

[116]

CHAPTER VIII

HOW HER HAIR TURNED WHITE

Now followed the golden time of Grandmother's life. I hardly know how to describe the change that came over her with the coming of little Faith. She seemed to grow taller, straighter, fuller. The windflower was gone, and instead there was a tall white lily, growing firm and strong, sending its roots deep down, spreading its broad green leaves and silver petals abroad to the sun.

She took all the care of the baby. Rachel was not strong, and could not bear to lose sleep, and Grandmother joyfully declared that she slept the better for having the cradle beside her bed. Rachel slept late, and Grandmother would take Baby down and tuck her up in Grandfather's great chair while she got breakfast for Manuel and herself, and then made ready the pretty tray for Rachel. Then out she would run into the garden with the child in her arms, to get the morning dew. [117]

"The morning dew to make you fair,
The morning sun to curl your hair;
The birds to sing to you,
Fly to you, bring to you
Everything sweet from everywhere."

We realized now that many of Grandmother's little songs were her own; we could see them making; they came bubbling up like bird-songs, and she would try one word and another, one note and another, till all was to her mind. [118]

"How do you do it, Grandmother?" Anne Peace would say. And Grandmother would laugh and say, "I don't, Anne. There isn't any making about it; they just come."

She never used to laugh, except with the children, but now she was full of laughter and singing. How could she help it? she would say. Who could help singing with a baby in the house, and such a baby as Faith?

The children were inclined to be jealous at first, all except "Saturday Nelly," as they called the little lame girl. She simply fell down and worshipped with Grandmother. The others—well, it seemed strange to some of them, especially the boys, to have such a fuss made over a baby. They had babies at home, that looked (they thought in their ignorance) very like this one; but no one ever called them rose-leaf princesses or lily-bell angels. To be sure, they often cried—squalled, the boys called it—and this one never seemed to, just smiled and cooed. [119]

"Why should she cry," said Grandmother, "when she is well and happy? If she cries, children, it is our fault, and we must be whipped round the garden with bramble whips all over thorns. So dance now, and make her laugh!" Then they all would dance, and Baby Faith would leap in Grandmother's arms, and crow, and wave her little arms. [120]

"Where did she come from?" asked a little girl.

"Oh, I was just singing about that before you came," said Grandmother. "Listen now, and you shall hear."

"Down from the sky came
Little White Rose;
How they could spare her
Nobody knows.
Through the gate slipping,
Down the air tripping,
What she could tell us,
If she but chose!

Down to the earth came
Little White Rose,
Sadly the gold gates
After her close;
Left them all sighing,
Sobbing and crying;
Will they come after her,
Do you suppose?" [121]

"Will who come?" asked Benny Mack.

"Angels!" said Grandmother. "Troops of them, all shining with

great white wings spread, and white lily-dresses; look up there, Benny! what do you see in the blue?"

"Clouds!" said Benny.

"Yes," said Grandmother. "But I see something else, Benny; a white-lily lady sitting in a cloudy chair. Don't you see her, Nelly? Stay up there, lily-lady; don't come down here! Baby Faith is very well, you cannot have her back."

[122]

"Do you know, children," she said, lowering her voice, "do you know all the things that happened the day Baby came? You don't? come and sit round here, all of you! Nelly-Nell, you shall—oh, Nelly, you are so good and dear and patient, you shall hold her a little, while I tell. Listen now!

The lily-bells rang at the sight of her,
The sunflower turned to the light of her,
The little black mole
Crept out of his hole,
Just to peep at the darling delight of her.

[123]

The daisies all danced 'neath the feet of her,
The roses turned faint at the sweet of her;
The firefly's spark
Came and lit up the dark,
Just to show us the picture complete of her!"

Two years; two golden, beautiful, heavenly years. Then—it will not be easy to tell this part, yet it must be told.

Anne Peace thinks I am hard upon Rachel; her mother used to think I was just the reverse. She always seemed to me the one wholly selfish person I ever knew. She loved Manuel passionately; but so jealously that she did not even like to see him caress the baby, but would call him to her side, or make some excuse to give the child to Grandmother. And yet she was so jealous of Grandmother too! I do not think she ever cared much for the baby, yet she would have fits of jealous rage now and then.

[124]

"I'd like to know whose baby that is, Grandmother!" she would say. Grandmother would look up with the rapt smile she always wore when little Faith was in her arms.

"Whose baby? why, Rachel, don't you know? White Rose, look at mother! throw a kiss to mother!"

"I don't know as I do!" Rachel would go on. "I thought 'twas mine; I didn't know as you'd had one, Grandmother, but maybe I was mistaken; maybe I just thought I had a baby, and she was yours all along."

Then suddenly stamping her foot, she would flash out in the old way.

[125]

"I want you should understand that that child belongs to me and Manuel, and to no one else. I won't have my own child taken away from me; I tell you I won't! Give me my baby this minute!" And she would snatch the child from Grandmother's arms. Of course then the poor little thing would begin to cry, frightened by her wild looks and angry voice, and this only enraged Rachel more. "You've turned her against me!" she shrieked. "You've stole her away from me, you wicked, wicked—" here she would break into a passion of furious sobs; and Grandmother would take the baby out of her arms and go away without a word, leaving her to storm and rave till Manuel came in to pet and caress her into good humor again.

[126]

But again, it would be Manuel at whom she would storm, accusing him of abetting Grandmother in her designs upon the baby; or still again, if she had her wish of the moment, and the baby was left with her for a few minutes, she would find herself ill-used and neglected, and left with all the care of the child on her hands. Well! poor Rachel!

One day—it was a bright fair day, like any other summer day—Manuel had promised to take Rachel for a drive. "We might take Faith!" he said; he had grown very fond of the little one since she began to talk.

"I don't know as I want to!" said Rachel, who was in a bad mood. "I'd like to have a chance to talk to you once in awhile myself, Manuel."

[127]

"I'll take Baby out in her carriage," said Grandmother happily. "We'll go to the woods, won't we, White Rose?"

That was enough. "No, you won't!" said Rachel. "If she's going out she can come with us. You put on her things, Grandmother,

while I get mine."

Grandmother carried little Faith out to the wagon, and put her into her mother's arms, and waited to see them start. It was surely a pretty sight, Anne Peace said; she was watching from her window. Rachel had a gipsy hat full of scarlet poppies tied with scarlet ribbons under her chin. Manuel was bare-headed, his crisp black curls framing his brown handsome face; and between the two dark beauties the little White Rose with her silver curls and apple-blossom face. She was dancing up and down on Rachel's lap, clapping her hands at the horse. A little piece of quicksilver she was.

[128]

"Hold her tight, won't you, Rachel?" said Grandmother; "she does jump about so, bless her!"

"I guess I know how to hold my own child!" said Rachel.

So—they started, and Grandmother waved good-bye, and then went back to the house with a still look; peaceful and serene, but the radiant light gone out of her face.

[129]

No one was ever to see that light again.

They were gone about an hour. Grandmother was in the garden watching for them, when they came back. It did not need her eyes to see that something was terribly, terribly wrong. Manuel was driving furiously, lashing the horse, who galloped his best. Rachel was in a heap on the floor of the wagon moaning and crying; what was that little white drift on her knees, with the red stain creeping—

No! no! I cannot tell that part.

Next moment Grandmother had the child in her arms. She towered like an avenging angel over the wretched parents, who cowered at her feet.

[130]

"She isn't dead!" shrieked Rachel. "Grandmother, Grandmother, say she isn't dead. She's only stunned a little, I tell you. She—lost her balance—"

But Manuel cried out hoarsely: "No lies now! we were quarrelling, and we forgot her. She sprang out—" he choked, and no more words came.

"*Only one hour!*" said Grandmother. Three words; her terrible eyes said the rest.

Grandmother fought for the child's life, silently, desperately. The doctor came, a kind, quiet man, and they worked together. He said a few cheering words; but meeting Mrs. Peace's eyes, he shook his head sadly.

It lasted an hour or more; the spirit nestled wonderingly in the little broken body, lately all light and strength and answering joy. The sweet eyes opened once or twice, seeking the face that had been their sun. It was there, bending close; it smiled, and White Rose smiled back. The last time, the baby arms moved, fluttered up toward Grandmother, then dropped; the eyes closed.

[131]

Presently the doctor rose and went out, with bowed head; he was a father of children. The elder woman, weeping silently, went to the window and opened it wide; and the sunset light, rosy and clear, streamed in on Grandmother, sitting motionless, with the dead child in her arms.

[132]

CHAPTER IX

HOW SHE FOUND PEACE

NEXT day her hair was quite white, as if it had been snowed on in the night. But she was herself again, and went quietly about the house, doing all that had to be done, and waiting on Rachel, who lay moaning and crying in her darkened room, exhausted after a night of hysterical passion. Grandmother brought the breakfast tray, and bathed her face and hands and brushed her hair, in silence; she seemed unconscious of her sobs and tears.

"I think you might say something, Grandmother!" Rachel whimpered. "It's dreadful enough, without your going about looking like a stone image. It isn't your baby that—oh, dear! and just as I was getting so fond of her. She was just getting to the interesting age. Oh, it's too awful; isn't it, Grandmother?" [133]

Grandmother did not heed her, but went on brushing the heavy black hair mechanically.

"I know you were fond of her," said Rachel, "and I sha'n't say a word about your keeping her away from me so much. But of course you can't pretend to feel what I do, Grandmother. You've never had a child, you don't know what a mother feels. You've never had anything to feel, really, all your life. Oh, dear! oh, dear! and Manuel takes it so hard; I'm sure I don't know what is going to become of us. Grandmother, if you are going to be like a wooden stick, I wish you'd go away and send Manuel to me." [134]

Grandmother went without a word. At the door she met the kind old minister, the same who christened Baby Faith—ah, how long ago? She led him aside to the hall window, and with one hand on his arm pointed upward with the other.

"He let it happen. He sent the little life, and then let it be crushed out like the life of a fly or a worm. Why?"

Her eyes looked through and through him, but the wise old eyes looked back steadily and kindly. [135]

"Daughter," he said. "His great laws are not made to be broken. When we transgress them, it is ourselves we break, against their divine and unchangeable order."

Grandmother's head dropped on her bosom. "I see!" she said.

She stood there quietly for awhile after he had gone in to see Rachel; then she went to find Manuel.

Manuel was sitting in the kitchen, his head in his hands, staring moodily before him. He looked up as Grandmother came in, looked at her with haggard eyes, then dropped his head again.

"Go away!" he said hoarsely. "Go away, you white thing! What have you to do with murderers?" [136]

"I never saw one," said Grandmother simply. "Poor Manuel, come out into the garden. It isn't good for you to sit here and brood."

"One place is as good as another," said Manuel. "Leave me alone in the hell we have made, she and I."

Grandmother did not speak for a time; then she said, "Manuel, God's will must be done in hell as much as anywhere else."

"God!" said Manuel; and he laughed, an ugly laugh. "Do you still believe in God after yesterday?"

"Oh, so much more!" said Grandmother; and she added softly as if she were saying over a lesson that she had learned by heart, "His great laws may not be broken. When we transgress them, it is ourselves we break—Come, Manuel, come out into the sunshine." [137]

She spoke as to a child, and like a child he obeyed, and followed her out into the blossoming garden, all life and color and fragrance. As the glory shone upon him, the young man staggered on the threshold and uttered a groan; then he glanced at Grandmother. "Your hair is as white as snow!" he said.

"Is it?" said Grandmother. "It doesn't matter. We must gather flowers, all the brightest flowers, Manuel, for Little One. She liked the gay ones best, and there is nothing else to do—now." [138]

She moved away slowly, among her flowers; she had grown heavy-footed since yesterday; and the man followed her with hanging head.

The thing that was between them, instead of drawing Rachel and

her husband together, seemed to turn them against each other. There were bitter words, words that pierced and stung like poisoned arrows; and every quarrel left Rachel more hysterical, Manuel more gloomy and silent, brooding over that sweet past that had been flung into the dust.

Grandmother would come out of her dream and try hard to make peace, and she could always quiet Manuel, but that often exasperated Rachel the more. When the bitter tongue was turned against her she did not seem to hear, but lapsed again into the listless half-dreaming state in which she lived now, moving softly, doing with exquisite care everything that was to be done, but seeming little conscious of what was going on around her.

[139]

Then came the day when Rachel rushed wild-eyed into her room, as she sat sewing by the empty cradle.

"Grandmother," she cried; "something is the matter with Manuel. He's—sick; he won't speak to me. Go and see what is the matter, quick!"

Grandmother went into the kitchen. Manuel was sitting by the table as he was that other day, his head in his hands. He looked up and smiled at her, a dull, foolish smile. "Grandmother," he said thickly, "I'm glad—see you. I sent the other one away. She's no good; I've had enough of her. No good! but you, Grandmother—you weren't always Grandmother; what's your other name? I know—Pitia! give me a kiss, Pitia! I always liked you best, you know."

[140]

He rose and staggered toward her. She recoiled, her arms stretched out, her face alight with anguish. "Don't come a step nearer!" she cried. "Manuel—not a step!"

He stopped and stared at her stupidly. Suddenly, swiftly, her face changed, softened into pity and tenderness "Poor Manuel!" she said. "Poor boy! come out into the air; come with me!" Again the quiet hand rested on his arm, compelling him, again he stumbled out into the good clear blessed sunshine. Poor Manuel!

[141]

Grandmother brought water and bathed his aching head, and made him lie down under the great russet-apple tree where the shade was thick and cool, and bade him sleep till the headache was over. Then she came back to Rachel, who watched half-jealous, half-terrified, from the hall window.

What need to dwell on the time that followed? Manuel had found the thing that—for the moment—deadened the pain at his heart and dulled his ears to Rachel's reproaches and complaints.

[142]

Some latent poison in the blood—who can read these mysteries?—made the drink a fire that consumed him. He wasted away, and hugged his destroyer ever closer to him. Grandmother battled for his life, as she had for that other sweet life which was the light of her own; Rachel looked on terrified and helpless.

Then came the winter night when he fell down senseless by the garden gate and lay there all night, while the women watched and waited in the house. It was Grandmother who found him. She had persuaded Rachel to lie down, and then thrown a cloak over her wrapper and crept out in the gray iron-bound dawn to look down the road for one who might be coming stumbling along, and might need help to gain the house; and she saw the frozen face glimmering up from the snow-bank where he lay.

[143]

There was one cry; a long low cry that shivered through the still frosty air; but no one heard.

How could she carry him in? We never knew; she never spoke of it; but no one else saw him till he was laid decently in his bed and the staring eyes closed. Then she called his wife.

The doctor came again, and good Mrs. Peace, and all was done that might be; but it was a bitter night, and all was over, as Grandmother knew at the first sight of that glimmering face. Poor Manuel! A fire of straw, as Mother Peace said.

[144]

It was after this that Grandmother had the long illness; when she lay for weeks speechless and motionless, with barely strength enough to move her little finger for "Yes" or "No" when we asked her a question. I helped Mrs. Peace and Anne with the nursing. Rachel had gone away to her mother's people. Sometimes, indeed many times, we thought she was gone; she lay so still; and we could not catch even the slightest flutter of breath. I remember those nights so well; one moonlight night in particular. We knew how she loved the moonlight, and opened the shutters wide. It was a cold still night, the snow silver white under the moon. The light poured

in full and strong on the bed where she lay like an ivory statue, and turned the ivory to silver. I thought she was dying then, and thought what a beautiful way to die, the heavenly spirit mounting along the moon-path, leaving that perfect image there at rest.



"SHE LAY LIKE AN IVORY STATUE."

That was in February. April found her still lying there, just breathing, no more. The doctor gave a little hope, now; she might slip away any time, he said, but still it had lasted so long, there must be a reserve of strength; it was possible that she might come through it.

[145]

One bright warm April day we had opened the windows, and the air came in sweet and fresh, and the robins were singing loud and merry in the budding apple-trees.

[146]

Suddenly from the road outside came a child's laugh; sweet and clear it rang out like a silver bell, and at the sound the ivory figure in the bed moved. A slight shiver rippled through it from head to foot. The eyes opened and looked at us, clear and calm.

Dear Anne Peace knelt down beside the bed and took the slender transparent hands in hers, the tears running down her face. "Grandmother," she said, "you are going to get well now—for the children! Spring has come, Grandmother dear, and the children need you!"

She did get well. Slowly but surely life and strength returned; by June she was in the garden again with the children around her. Not the same, not the light-foot girl who frolicked and ran with the other children, but as you all remember her; serene, clear-eyed, cheerful, full of wisdom, grace, tenderness. Grandmother! who in this village does not remember her? To you young people she seemed an old woman, with her snow-white hair and ivory face, drawn into deep patient lines. She was not fifty when she died.

[147]

During the twenty years she had yet to live, what a benediction her days were to old and young!

People came to her with their joys and their sorrows. Strangers came, from outlying places, and brought their troubles to her; they had heard, no one knows how, that she had power and wisdom beyond that of other women. I met one of these strangers once. I was going in to see Grandmother, and I met a lady coming away; a handsome lady, richly dressed. She had been weeping, but her face was full of light.

[148]

She looked at me. "Young woman," she said, "do you live near here?"

"Yes, madam," I said; "close by, in that brown cottage."

"Yours is a high privilege," she said, "to dwell so near to heaven."

She looked back to the house and kissed her hand to it; then beckoned, and a fine carriage came up and she drove away. I never knew who she was.

I found Grandmother sitting quietly with her knitting, by the empty cradle. [149]

“What did you say to that lady, Grandmother?” I asked, though I knew next moment I should not have done it.

“I told her an old lesson, my dear,” said Grandmother; “a lesson I learned long ago.”

Once it was Saturday Nelly who came; Nelly, now grown a woman—if it could be called growing.

“Grandmother,” she said, “look at me, and tell me what you see.”

Grandmother looked into the pale drawn face with its strange eyes.

“Nelly dear,” she said, “I see a face that I love, a face full of truth and goodness.”

“You see a monster!” said the poor girl. She made a passionate gesture toward a mirror that hung opposite them; indeed, the glass showed a strange contrast. [150]

“Look!” she said. “Look, Grandmother, and tell me! When one is shut up in a prison like that, full of pain and horror—hasn’t one a right to get out if one can?”

Seeing the wonder in Grandmother’s face she hurried on. “Father’s dead; poor father! I would not let myself think of it while he was living. He is dead, and there is no one else—except you, Angel, and you would understand, wouldn’t you? If I put this thing to sleep”—she struck her heart fiercely—“and slipped out of prison—Grandmother, what harm would it do? what harm *could* it do?” [151]

“Nelly! Nelly dear,” said Grandmother, “you couldn’t—could you—go with your lesson half-learned? Such a strange, wonderful lesson, Nelly, and you have been learning so well. To go there, and when they asked you, have to say ‘I didn’t finish, I left it half-done, because I didn’t like it;’ *could* you do that, do you think, Nelly dear? because—it wouldn’t be ready at the other end either, don’t you see, darling? It wouldn’t fit in. You haven’t thought of that, have you, Nelly?”

Nelly hid her face in her hands, and there was a long silence. Presently she spoke, low and trembling.

“Grandmother—suppose there wasn’t any other end! Suppose I couldn’t see—suppose I didn’t believe there was—anything more—when this hateful thing”—she plucked at her poor twisted body as if she would have torn it—“is buried out of sight with the other worms! what then?” [152]

“Oh, Nelly!” said Grandmother softly. “Nelly dear! if it were so; if this were the only lesson, mustn’t we try all the harder to learn it well? if this should be our only chance to help and love and tend and cheer, would we give up one minute of the time? Oh, no! Nelly, no! Think a little, my dear! think a little!”

We all remember Saturday Nelly, in the little shop that Grandmother set up for her, selling sweeties to the children, selling thread and needles and tape, tending her birds and flowers, the cheeriest, gayest little soul in the village. Her shop was a kind of centre of merry innocent chatter for young and old; it was full from morning to night. We never thought much about Nelly’s looks except when we spoke of Grandmother; then her face grew beautiful. [153]

I think the children loved Grandmother better even than in her girl-days.

The Saturday feasts were quieter, but still full of light and joy, and the stories—well, they were like no other stories that ever were told.

“And oh! the words that fell from her mouth,
Were words of wisdom and of truth.” [154]

So she lived, blessing and blessed, twenty more heavenly years; and so, when God called her, she died. We found her one morning sitting by the little cradle, her head resting on it, and a white rose in her quiet hand. When we raised her face and looked at it, there was no need to ask whither the spirit had gone.

And Rachel? A year after Manuel died, she married a man from a neighboring village, a masterful man who broke her over his knee like a willow switch, and whom she adored for the rest of her life. She bore him sons and daughters, and grew—comparatively—cheerful and placid.

She came to see Grandmother now and then, and marvelled at her.

“How you do age, Grandmother!” she would say. “And you without a care in the world. I wonder what would have happened if you had really lived, as I have!”

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GRANDMOTHER: THE STORY OF A LIFE THAT NEVER WAS LIVED ***

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