

A DAUGHTER OF THE HIGHLANDERS



FRANCES JONES MELTON



*Yours Very Truly
The Author*

A DAUGHTER *of the* HIGHLANDERS

BY

FRANCES JONES MELTON



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DEDICATED

To my classmates—the dear lads and lassies—lineal descendants of the exiles who had followed “Bonny Prince Charley” to the fatal Battle of Culloden; in memory of the days when we went a-Maying to gather jessamine and arbutus in the pine-lands.

AUTHOR.

BOOK I.

SPRING.

“ . . . And I heard the voice of old gardens,
Of quiet woodland ways;
But few hearts there were who would heed them
In the rush of the busy days.
The cities grow old and vanish,
And their people faint and die;
But the grasses are green forever,
Forever blue is the sky.”

—Selected.

CHAPTER I.

THE FOREST—JESSAMINE AND ARBUTUS—THE SCHOOL AND RUTH.

“ dream of vine-clad hills
And fragrant fields where violets bend before
The kissing breeze, love shy; and robins pour
Their throbbing songs upon the air; and rills
Low murmuring gently creep with peace that fills
The saddened heart with longings for the lore
Of Nature's mind.” —Selected.

Inflorescent Spring-time, with its asphodelian tapestry, its delicate wealth of emerald tinting, its soothing ripple of belated water, and grateful sighing of warmth-laden breezes, was reigning prophetically.

The vivid sunlight fell broadly; the earth basked genially; even in the pine-barrens the rejuvenating influence of the coy season was portrayed in the budding scrub-oaks; in the intense color of the sap-filled pine needles and the balsamic tonicity of the translucent atmosphere.

In the slightest concavity of the mounding hills clothed in vigorous, long-leaf pines, it was emphasized by a remarkable display of blossoms and delicate vines.

The crystal sunlight sifting through the plumed pines imbibed a mystic tinge of gold-alloyed emerald

to pervade the light shed beneath the sheltering vault of canopied forest. The impressive solemnity of the secluded solitude; the stately seeming of the tall pines; the glittering sheen of the sandy soil; the glancing light upon the glistening pine needles; aye, the bubbling joy of infantile Spring-time; its mysterious hopes and golden promises, stirred and thrilled the heart of Edwin Phillips as spirit-filled wine sends its permeating glow through the veins. The inspiring glamor of Spring's individuality was so fascinatingly suggestive of heart-emotions it evoked vague longings and promulgated intangible dreams.

The two months he had spent at the Turpentine Camp had been so squalid and dreary, with chill winds intruding through the cracks in the walls of his shanty; in February, snow and ice dissolving in an uncomfortable slush and the atmosphere reeking with a depressing dampness; in March, sharp winds shrieking and blustering and rasping his nerves, rendered life very unpleasant, generally, at the bare, make-shift camp. He had grown homesick, restless and disillusioned with the ambition to make money at any cost to personal inclination or comfort.

It had been so different to any other experience of his well-bred life! Why, in the mid-Winter, that then seemed forlornly distant, he had danced and dined in a dress suit, in the company of girls in evening dress; and he loved society and dancing upon waxed floors to the passionate music of skilled orchestras.

Society and its artistic conventional refinement had been the stimulus of his youth, and was the real

influence that had impelled him away from a very comfortable parental roof-tree to go into exile in the sand-barred, piney woods.

He had finally, and reluctantly, realized that a position in society rested solely upon golden pillars, that a golden key alone could open the door giving ingress to its costly sanctuary. The knowledge had not been pleasant; self-esteem had dwindled when weighed in its iron-hearted, exacting scales, but he had quietly folded away his dress suit and turned his face toward the wilderness to toil obscurely for the omnipotent gold which he had sincerely believed alone could assure him the happiness he coveted.

No California gold fields lured his cupidious mind; no Klondike tempted his pressing desire for gain; fortune beckoned from another and more prosaic direction. A cousin, much older than himself, had gone out to the pine-lands the previous year, and worked turpentine in that favorable and uncrowded locality. His cousin's name was Henry Stephenson, and he had cleared several hundreds of dollars by the venture. He had brought his family out and rendered them as comfortable as circumstances permitted.

Edwin Phillips had been induced to join him and invest his limited capital in a sure thing in naval stores.

He had fetched his trunk, a few good books, a prized horse and light buggy. His share of the labor of the outfit was to keep the accounts and to ride from one orchard of pines to another and give an oversight to the work in the forest, where men hacked the boxed trees with weighted, handled in-

struments, and later would ladle the raw product from the scooped incisions which arrested and retained the oozings from the scarified surface above.

Work had been preparatory and urgent against the time when the sun would warm the sap-laden trees and they could manipulate the State's typical product; and his mind had been burdened with the effort to understand intelligently the, to him, new and novel business. But he was familiar with the details then; and the work had assumed a more prosperous seeming.

The youth of his twenty-five years asserted itself in spite of his manly endeavor for fortune. His was a youthful temperament not easily subjected into staid and sedate behavior. His glossy, black hair was neatly brushed, his blue flannel blouse was redeemed by a skilfully adjusted gray silk scarf; his coat fitted him with the grace attained by a competent tailor; his wide-brimmed, soft hat was worn jauntily. At the camp he, invariably, maintained a dignity of manner and a neatness in attire that distinguished him above all the other men with whom he was associated in the woods. His horse was nicely groomed, his buggy and harness ever gleamed with polished purity.

That day, or rather late afternoon, he drove briskly along the root-checkered road, enjoying the exhilarating movement; and Spring's influence surcharged his mood with its flowery blitheness. He chirped to his horse, he whistled; and finally he hummed the last waltz he had danced with Maude Endiston.

A shadow flitted over his handsome countenance,

a shadow like that cast by a straying April cloud-wrack, eclipsing a sunny landscape; and he ceased to sing. For a moment he frowned in unpleasant thought. Maude Endiston, he knew, or at least he did not doubt, was dancing still, and, perhaps, flirting while he was far away, toiling for a fortune to win her. His mind with some effort shed the reflection, and he whistled again, but not quite so merrily as previously.

In a little dell a pine sapling lent its support to a wreathing, goldenbell laden vine. The intense, flaming color commanded his attention. He gazed admiringly, drew rein, and sprang to the ground. He stood entranced by the swaying tendrils. Never had he beheld anything so perfectly lovely and graceful.

"Jennie must have some of this," he said, addressing the thought that, in her shanty home, Jennie's life held many deprivations she had not hitherto had to endure; and he gathered a sheaf of the waxy blossoms. They emitted a powerful fragrance peculiarly penetrative. He folded them carefully behind the curtain of the seat cushion of his buggy, then turned for a parting glimpse of the charming woodland oasis.

A gleam of delicate rose-color among glistening green leaves arrested his glancing scrutiny. He turned back and plucked some leaves and dainty blossoms and stowed them with the first forage. The beauty and the fragility of the wild things pleased him.

"I have never seen and shall never see anything more lovely," he reflected, as he drove away. He

squinted at the declining sun and urged his horse into a swifter pace. He had promised Jennie's children, as a reward for some unusually good behavior, to come to their school and take them home in his buggy, and he was then on his way to keep faith with them.

He had never been in that particular locality, and noted with the glance of a connoisseur, who could place the price upon the product of a tree instantly, the vigorous, slender pines which stood, primevally, along the way.

The ozonic breath of the pine-lands filled his nostrils with balsamic breathings. He inflated his lungs, he exhaled enjoyably. The land was not so monotonous then, when April had flung her mild, evocative sway broadcast.

In March's blustering reign, he had been afraid and uncomfortable. Danger had lurked in those woods then, swift, fatal menace, when unsound limbs and trees fell constantly, and to be abroad meant the bearing of the courage that sustains a soldier in a field swept with musket and cannon balls.

No hint of danger was consonant with the serene and smiling mood of Nature that lovely April day, so he could sing and whistle blithely and forget for the sweet moment that he was far from home and all he prized and cherished.

He was supremely handsome, that debonair, sanguine Edwin Phillips. His features were almost feminine in contour and gentleness of expression; they mirrored smiles so tenderly winning that they bore in repose a mirage of the charm of those past

and those belonging to the near future; his eyes were liquidly dark and luminous, with a wistful light which won by the appeal that touches the heart rather than commands the understanding.

His manner was cultured, easy, and entirely free from affectation, although gracefully engaging. He was more humble than haughty in mien, more pleading than commanding, even in his business relations with men, yet there was great strength in his personality, virile, muscular force, and distinct, attractive individuality, emanating from inherent qualities portrayed in indefinable traits in mind and physiognomy; even as a certain air of personal vanity was suggested obscurely; nevertheless, he had been richly endowed with one invaluable gift, personal magnetism. It won for him the most pleasant things of life, the liking of men and the love of women, the devotion of relatives and the confidence and esteem of every one who fell beneath its seductive sway.

He was popular in society, greatly beloved in his home and his innate amiability and caressing voice paved a rose-lighted way for him to travel.

He chirped encouragingly to his horse as he turned into a broad highway, leaving behind him the narrow woods road. Glancing either way, the vista charmed him, as the white-sanded road dwindled into distances, colonaded by tall, slender pines. He sped his horse down the road southward, that he might not miss the children, who usually traveled footpaths that shortened the distance. Soon he arrived at his destination, a low, sharp-roofed, white

building, its glazed windows blazing with reflections of the westerning sun.

He was relieved to find that he was on time to keep faith with the children. School was dismissed though, and they were on the playground. His arrival created a sensation among the scholars, who gathered about the vehicle, curious and interested. The Stephenson children climbed into the buggy and seated, posed for the benefit of their envious mates, who were not so fortunate.

The teacher, Donald MacKethan, came to clasp his hand courteously and cordially. He gave his name and stood with bare head conversing formally. They exchanged views upon the weather, the season, and Donald expressed his admiration for the horse, a really fine animal.

While this interchange was in progress Edwin Phillips chanced to lift his eyes from the face of his new acquaintance and the polite speech on his tongue faltered into an incoherent murmur. Amazement superseded all other ideas. He gazed admiringly and caught his breath in a short, quavering gasp. Donald MacKethan, to cover an awkward silence, playfully wedged the little son of the distiller at the turpentine camp and the youngest daughter of Henry Stephenson into the limited space shared by three pairs of feet on the floor of the small buggy. The scholars viewed his disposition of the boy and girl, and Edwin stared as he had never before in all his well-bred life, over the group near him, to where a freckle-faced boy was closing the door to the rural hall of learning, and a slender, queenly-poised girl was descending the steps leading

to the portico sheltering the classically fashioned entrance; a girl so much fairer and lovelier than any he had ever beheld. He held his breath as he realized her perfections.

She was robed in soft, white flannel and a dainty jacket of blue velvet, her flowing, yellow hair crowned with an azure bow of satin ribbon and floating free in a gleaming cascade of golden waves over her youthful shoulders. Suspended from her arm was a book-satchel and she carried a white frilled sunbonnet swinging from her hands by broad, white strings. Her complexion was as transparent and as delicately tinted as the waxy arbutus he had just plucked in the forest; but her most potent charm was the ineffable purity and innocence of her expression and appearance.

As she was passing by the group around his buggy she lifted her dark eyes, frankly meeting his impassioned scrutiny. An emotion akin to pain contracted his heart as the beauty of their soulful depths was revealed to him briefly, but indelibly. Thoroughly entranced, he instinctively lifted his hat and saluted her. She returned the courtesy with a slight and silent obeisance; then her eyes sought and swept the horse with admiring interest. A flaxen-haired boy detached himself from the press of idle boys and joined her; and, together, they crossed the highway to pursue a road leading directly westward.

Donald made a movement suggesting dismissal and dispersal, and lifted his hat in adieu.

"I am glad to have met you, Mr. Phillips," he said cordially. "May I hope that the pleasure is mutual, and that we may meet again, early and often?"

Edwin drew his eyes from the girl and her companion reluctantly, and promptly responded with effusive thanks and acquiescence to the overtures of his new acquaintance.

The children dispersed, and he turned his horse into the highway. Far down the dim road, through vistas of pines, he could get glimpses of the blue and white-robed figure and the picturesque boy in velvet knickerbockers, a gay plaid sash knotted at his side, a green velvet cap tipped saucily on the back of his head, his abundant flaxen hair floating in long fluffy curls over his sturdy shoulders, although he was quite twelve years of age.

They seemed to him so alien, so foreign to the forest, rather they were suited to a page of romance they were so refined in appearance, so daintily clad, so superior in every way, to be denizens of a remote country-side.

He had caught the glitter and sparkle of gems as the girl went by, and the boy resembled the page of a princess.

"Who is that?" he demanded of Jennie's eldest daughter, and he indicated the point where she was disappearing at a distant bend of the road she was traversing with accelerated step.

"Oh, that is Ruth! Didn't you know who she was?" Lina replied, readily.

"Indeed, I did not know her! How could I know who she was when I have never seen her until this moment? Surely she has some other name than simple Ruth?" he persisted.

Lina, who had been bubbling with the pleasure of a ride, became semi-serious with unavailing thought.

"I have forgotten," she said, blankly. "In this country they call people so simply. Why, most of the scholars call the teacher Donald, but we do not; Mama forbade it. But who is Ruth, Lena? The Ruth with Jamie."

"Why, Ruth—— I don't know," Lena confessed as blankly as her elder sister.

"You should be ashamed not to know a school-mate like her," Edwin rebuked them, chidingly.

"But we only know that much of her name, and it ain't that we do not know her; although she ain't a bit like the rest of us, I can tell you. She wears the nicest clothes; she's always so nice and beautiful, and comes to school in a fine carriage if the weather is the least bit ugly. My! How I wish I was her!" concluded the ambitious and frank Lina, whose native desire for luxurious surroundings had been intensified by the austerity of life in the pine-woods.

"Ask Mama, Cousin Edwin," the younger but more practical Lena advised, noting his disappointment. "She'll tell all about Ruth, for she went with us all to see her once."

"Oh, yes! and My! rode in her carriage there, and nearly killed ourselves eating. Yes, ask Mama, Cousin Edwin, and please let us drive faster on this nice road. I do love to ride real fast," contributed the vivacious Lina.

To please her, he drove swiftly up the broad highway to the junction of the woods road that would lead them directly eastward to the camp; and that road was so encumbered by scrub oaks and so paved with pine roots, he drove carefully the crowded,

frail vehicle, but he did not whistle, neither did he listen to the chatter of the elated children.

The sunlight faded, a sunset radiance gilded the green forest; the zephyrs sank into languishing whispers. How still the forest! How impressive the unbroken solitude!

CHAPTER II.

THE TURPENTINE CAMP—THE HIGH-LANDERS—A LETTER AND VIOLETS.

"To-morrow and to-morrow! Shell there be
Perchance a morrow when I shall not see
Your face before me any more? Ah, no,
My love, my love, I cannot let you go."

". . . But ever perfect, ever wise and true,
To-morrow and to-morrow beholding you."

—Whitney.

When the twilight supper at the camp had been eaten and the men had dispersed to their shanties or duties elsewhere; when moonlight as misty and ethereal as a spiritual realm illumined the whispering forest; when Jennie Stephenson sat out on the rustic porch of the family shanty and crooned to Henry, Jr., her youngest child, as she swayed back and forth in a low rocking-chair, which thumped the rough floor noisily, Edwin Phillips closed the ledger in which he had been figuring steadily since the supper hour, lit a cigar, and strolled over the inter-

vening, cleanly swept space between his and the Stephenson shanty, and seated himself on the doorstep to interview Jennie.

She welcomed him gladly, pleased to have someone to converse with after the long, uneventful day. She thanked him effusively for the flowers he had kindly gathered for her.

"They are jessamine and arbutus," she informed him. "The unrivalled jessamine and the dainty arbutus, the trailing variety, the most exquisite things in the forest."

"I did not know their kind, but I realized their beauty," he said. "I would be glad to send Mama some of them. I am sure she has never seen anything like them, and you know her passion for flowers."

"But you cannot send them," she assured him, regretfully. "They are so fragile. Those you fetched me will have wilted by to-morrow. I learned that much about them last year, and also that there was a peculiar poison pertaining to the jessamine blossoms that will give one a headache and nausea. I have forbidden the children inhaling their fragrance, and I warn you of the danger lurking in those lovely, golden bells, with all their beauty."

He listened with absent-minded attention, giving but sufficient heed to be informed on a subject that was to him vitally interesting.

It had been a wonderful day and it was a charming night! The day with a sapphire sky, an unblemished sun and a fragrant atmosphere, the most perfect of his life, crowned with its most blissful night. Finally he was rewarded for his politic attitude and

forced attention, when she reverted to the social lack in her daily life.

"But there are people about here, very nice people, too, are there not?" he queried, purposely.

"Oh!" Jennie exclaimed, and then paused, puzzled how to proceed in explaining a situation she understood but vaguely. "They are all Scotch, you know," she said finally, and with meaning. "This is veritably a land of Macs. They call themselves Highlanders. I have yet to hear one style himself an American, much less a Carolinian. First they are Highlanders, and last those other things; in their peculiar estimation. Oh, yes, they are pure, unadulterated Scotch, and have been here," she looked abroad into the moonlighted forest, "since the world began—out here," she concluded, laughing at her own exaggeration. Then in a serious tone she continued her dissertation upon her stranger neighbors.

"The few that are in this locality are generally very quiet and unobtrusive, but not exclusive, and so clannish as they are popularly reported to be. I have found them very kind and cordial, I am sure. Otherwise, I am convinced I should have starved before I learned to manage and provide the necessities, under the circumstances, when I first came out here. They were, indeed, kind to me in my sore need of those days," she said, reflectively.

"But who are they? I have seen so few of any of them. Where do they live?" he questioned, implicitly hoping to divert her from a general to a personal description of their unfamiliar neighbors.

"Oh, but you have seen some of them," Jennie reminded him. "The Dalrymples and the Mac-

Lemores, for instance. I thought you admired Anice Dalrymple when you went there with Henry."

"She seemed to be a very nice young lady," he said, non-committingly, recalling with lack of interest the vision of the dark-eyed lassie at the Dalrymple homestead, a few miles eastward of the camp. "But are there no social features in the lives of these Gaelics?" he persisted.

Jennie rested her explorative eyes on the lunar-lighted forest horizoning her temporary home, arranging facts in her mind, that she might reply to his insistence intelligently. Thoroughly domestic, she had not sought the social element in her few quiet neighbors whose habits and environment held foreign touches which impressed her with their unfamiliarity. Whenever she had entered their homes, the solitude of the forest had been dispelled by the vestal flame burning upon the altars of their Lares and Penates. Never had she known more intense, methodical life, more careful detail and interest manifested in the home circle.

Each home was a little world of its own contrivance, and self-supporting in comfort, neatness, plenteousness, and beauty of adornment, they had seemed complete and independent. She had invariably felt that she was in the presence of a pastoral civilization so ancient and finished, her own past appeared crude and raw and pioneer. But the social conditions viewed from the standpoint of a society veteran such as she knew Edwin to be was hard to classify and select. She had accepted people as she found them, sometimes interested with their

modes and customs, but seeking for no more than they had given casually and spontaneously.

With young people there might be phases of society she was not aware of. She laughed outright when, suddenly, Edwin's probing interest reminded her of an amusing episode she had almost forgotten. Humor was not lacking in the plump, energetic Mrs. Stephenson.

"You must investigate the social realm personally, Edwin. I cannot help you; but may I relate Simpson's experience?" she asked, laughing, still in teasing humor.

"Well, what of Simpson?" he acquiesced, resignedly. Simpson was the cook and caterer of the camp, assisted by his wife, Nancy. He was intensely black and recently married.

"Simpson's experience, socially, was ludicrously disastrous," Jennie declared, mischievously. "When we first came out here, he soon became lonesome and restless, and sought acquaintance among his color. He visited a family who works for Duncan MacLemore, over on Pink Eye Creek. His sole leisure time was Sabbath afternoons, when I undertook the supper to give him an outing, and it was at those times he visited the daughters of the house of Julius.

"Julius had always lived among the Scotch, and according to Simpson's version, 'out-Scotched the Scots' in adherence to their customs and heed to the mandates of their church. He strenuously objected to his daughters receiving frivolous company on the Sabbath day; hence Simpson proved to be a thorn in the old patriarch's sensitive prejudices.

"Simpson primed laboriously and disappeared for several consecutive Sabbaths; and then suddenly he remained at home and relieved me of all care about the evening meal. He was so solemn and sulky I knew he had been mortally offended, and finally he confessed to me the story of his venture. It was rich to hear him express his great indignation.

"Julius had catechised him mercilessly, 'from de book itself,' making him tell who made him and who God was, and who was Abraham, and every one of the prophets; and when he had answered 'every one of dem fool quistions' to the very best of his 'solemn ability,' Julius had insinuated that he was wickedly ignorant and an erring non-conformist.

"Simpson said when he called him that word, 'his dander riz,' and but 'for de presence of de ladies he would have mashed his mouth, shore as ye're born.' He had carried his banjo once, and Julius had forbidden his entering 'eben de yard wiv it,' so he had hidden it in the woods while he was visiting, and the hogs found and demolished it. Julius had made the girls read chapters from the Bible out loud, and Simpson declared 'It was wusser dan awful.' They couldn't read much, and had to spell most of the words before they pronounced them; and seldom could 'nounce dem' after they had tediously spelled them. He had borne his many trials heroically until Julius got to praying for him, right there 'afore de gals,' talking about his greasing his hair and wearing a 'white wescot' to lead astray silly women who wouldn't know Satan if 'they met him in the road.' It was then he gave up the quest for society, and

finally he went back home and married Nancy," Jennie concluded, abruptly.

"But the point of the story?" Edwin reminded her.

"I had forgotten that I was illustrating. Julius was, presumably, copying from the white people, in his Puritanical observance of the Sabbath, so they may be very strict and sedate even in their pleasures and amusements, these Scotch Presbyterians. They seem to content themselves with books and their duties; and they are very intellectual, generally, and I think that accounts for their superior home life even in the most remote neighborhoods.

"By the way, Edwin, did you see Ruth MacKenzie when you fetched the children from school, and is she not pretty?" she asked, with a swift change of subject.

His heart gave a fainting leap. He lifted the cigar from his lips and drew an uncertain breath before he replied with unusual constraint. What he had so desired had come at last to find him unprepared for its reception.

"No, not pretty" he said, tritely, as his heart leaped free with an unfamiliar surge that sent hot blood coursing his veins.

"I think she is extremely beautiful," Jennie contended, earnestly. "And she is but a child in years and experience. They are such splendid people, those MacKenzies. You should see Kissic-Dale, Edwin! The children and I spent a whole day there in the autumn. It is like a painting, an artist's ideal, I mean. Ruth gave Lula a birthday dinner. You would have thought it a wedding feast, but it was

for the pleasure of my baby daughter. They have shown me many favors, although I am such a distance from them. Kissic-Dale is such a lovely old place, I am terribly homesick after seeing its beauty and comforts and then coming back here to my shack in the woods; and beyond there, still farther west, is their church. They call it 'the kirk.' You should go there some time and have a peep at the natives who attend from a circuit of many miles."

"Jennie," he said, aggrievedly, "it is strange you never mentioned the MacKenzies to me until now. You have spoken often about the Dalrymples and others, though. Why, the man who teaches the school is the finest kind of a fellow. I knew he was a thoroughbred college man the moment I saw him."

"But he is not a MacKenzie, nor any relation to them. He is a MacKethan, and Ruth's tutor. The school is a side issue; teaching Ruth his main business. Her aunt so dreads sending her to college, which would be much less expensive. Ruth is an orphan and the sole heir to Kissic-Dale, and the MacKenzies have always been wealthy, as wealth is counted in this country; also proud and superior-minded, so the Dalrymples have informed me. They are, as you know, my nearest neighbors."

Thus Jennie discussed the MacKenzies, and then changed to other subjects, any topic that presented itself to her active mind. Edwin's mere presence was an inspiration which excited to an overflow the ideas barred into thought by the repression of her lonely days. Was he not a part of the world she had left when she had followed Henry in his quest for the isle of "Fortuna," that they might provide

more liberally for the dear children, three of whom held in the thrall of "study hour," were grouped around a lamp-lighted table beyond the open doorway, through which she kept strict oversight upon their devotion to their books. The other child, her only son, slept supinely in her arms. That Edwin seldom spoke did not discourage her loquacity; a good listener is, at times, the best of company; but finally she paused in the midst of a flow of words to exclaim with some excitement: "I am sure I smell violets, Edwin! Again and again the fragrance of home violets, the dear, little, prim violets, which seem to dissolve in an odoriferous mist of perfume, has swept my nostrils!" She sniffed audibly and experimentally. "I do inhale the scent of violets," she declared with conviction.

Edwin arose and abruptly excusing his departure with some murmured plea of business, left her to wonder vainly over the scent of violets, alone and unenlightened.

In his shanty he turned up the light and remorsefully searched his pockets. When he had arrived with the children, a wearied teamster had also driven into the camp, bringing supplies and the mail from the distant railroad station. He had then received several letters and promptly forgotten them; but at the time he had scanned their superscriptions. While looking at one, the odor of violets had been wafted from the square white envelope, and he had reflected that "Maude has written at last," and had sent him a floral greeting.

By the light of his lamp he selected it from others and broke the seal to extract the closely written

pages of fashionable stationery. A tiny bouquet of violets, pressed flat, was disclosed, and a delicious fragrance still clung to their bruised and perishing petals. His interest was aroused despite the neglect he had accorded the missive, and he sat down to peruse the letter, an expectant flush upon his features; but his interest soon waned as he passed from page to page of the gilt-edged stationery. The last one was glanced over absently, and replacing the violets, he folded them in with the written message, then hid them away in the depth of his trunk.

Seated again, he stared unblinkingly at the glowing blaze of the lamp-wick, stared unseeing, until he knew its incandescence had blinded him. He lowered the flame and continued his reverie, which was alternately serious and gloomy and anon was radiant in a glow of new-born ecstasy.

The walls of rough, unplanned lumber from a saw-mill run by the water of Pink Eye Creek faded from his vision; and he lived over and over, incessantly, the sweet influence of the Spring-time forest and its intense climax just as the sun was sinking below the pine-fringed western horizon. He longed fervently for the morrow to dawn, for all other morrows allotted to his providential span of life.

From the elating summit of undreamt-of happiness, he slipped at intervals into the abyss of his heedless past which confronted him as an accusatory scroll. In those depressing intervals he would glance remorsefully at the trunk where he had placed the letter and violets, whose message came a few hours too late to meet the welcome they were so confident of receiving. Helpless in mute sur-

render, he fell back into his chair and buried his face in the curve of his arms as they lay folded upon the table. There, hidden away from all objective influence, secure from the rebuking incense of the perishing violets, he lapsed into a dreaming realm embodying Spring's golden promise and the solemnity of the forest, the charm of the flaming jessamine, the dainty arbutus and a fair, slender girl with a crown of golden hair, and eyes dark, with a spiritual beauty he had never discovered elsewhere; neither such transcendental purity and sweetness of expression. Rapturously, he whispered to his palpitant heart, as it clamored for an endless repetition of the source of its enchantment, "Ruth, Ruth MacKenzie," and the letter and the violets were forgotten as he dreamed, and the pines whispered and sighed unheeded, out in the forest.

CHAPTER III.

FANCY'S REALM—SUNSET AND HOLLY CREEK— DONALD'S BEHAVIOR.

"Whither the path leads,
Dear, little matter;
Amber of spring hole,
Waterfall's chatter;
You are my goal, dear,
Wildwood thing."

—Selected.

"Her fancy roved as mystic foam,
Kissing shores of golden sand."

Ruth and Jamie walked circumspectly and with due regard for appearances until they were beyond the vicinity of the highway; then Ruth smiled a merry challenge. "Now, Jamie!" she cried, and the restraint of the schoolroom fell from her manner, revealing a girlish love of fun and frolic.

Jamie responded gleefully, and led in a spirited race which lasted until their breath was well-nigh spent, and the oppression of the day's restrictions was dissipated in that wild rush of action. Neither had ever, until that scholastic year, known the restraint and discipline of a schoolroom; yet no pupils could have proven more docile and respectful to its regime. Jamie was Sandy's first-born, whom Jean had named for her lamented brother, and he was

cherished equally under the broad roof of Kissic-Dale and in the flower-embowered cottage of his parents.

Ruth and Jamie paused at a certain point on the roadway, and Ruth, warm and flushed from the speed of the race, took off her jacket and threw it, with her white sunbonnet and her book-satchel, upon the stout limbs of a scrub oak; Jamie added his cap and satchel to the weight of the short branches, and, unhampered, they ran into the woods, their hastening feet slipping and sliding over the sleek carpet of brown pine needles, covering, treacherously, the white sand of the forest soil, their discarded belongings left to signal Donald and Sandy's two younger children, whom they had so far out-distanced. The goal of their journey into the woods was a bit of swamp, far down the declivity which sloped from the road on the plateau of the hills. Jean loved the delicate wild growths of fern and flower, and they were to be found there in marvellous profusion and perfection; the beloved arbutus, the alluring and brilliant jessamine, and the first unfoldings of tenderest fern-fronds; a treasure-trove of Spring's offerings in the sand-paved pinelands.

With laden hands they returned to the road and found Donald and the children waiting patiently. Donald smiled indulgently when Ruth stood in the road, flushed and panting; he had encouraged, at all seasons, athletic exercise for his pupils, and Ruth's childish love of fun and frolics. She was arranging, compactly, the mass of vine and fern and blossoms in her unwieldy bouquet, trying to so re-

duce its proportions that her hands would be free to carry her other burdens conveniently.

"You must wear your jacket, Ruth," Donald said firmly, as he lifted the garment from the scrub-oak to assist her in putting it on.

"Must I? Oh, Donald, I am so warm!" she said, persuasively. She lifted her glance in airy appeal, a smile wreathing her lips with inconsequential mirth and playful defiance. Her mood was spontaneous, and as artless as the joyous spontaneity of a normal child. It was such an overflowing delight just to live in such buoyant health and in such a bright, perfect world, she could embalm each bright-winged moment in bubbling mirth and joyous deportment. The slanting sun flung prismatic bars of amber light athwart her rosy countenance, and intensified the dark depths of her soulful eyes, sparkling then, with the elixir of youth and burnished the gold of her gleaming hair.

As she stood in her white, clinging dress, the embodiment of Springtime beauty, joy and hope, Donald paused, and with swift scrutiny took note of her ineffable charm and rare, youthful loveliness; not from a personal standpoint; that had been placed immovably long ere then; but from the viewpoint that had blazed its signals in the eloquent eyes of the handsome young stranger with whom he had parted a few moments hence; and the wondering surprise, the intense admiration, he had seen in the stranger's eager survey was dominant in his newly evolved estimate of Ruth's fair personality. In the glance she had given to his countenance, she had caught a glimpse of an unfamiliar mood, mirrored in his ex-

pression; and instantly, not fathoming its meaning or divining its portent, she was humble and penitent, yea, abjectly obedient in her easily evoked contrition.

"Excuse me, Donald! Certainly, I will wear it if you think it most prudent to do so, if I melt." She supplemented the concluding words as a smiling sop to her vanquished independence.

She quietly arranged her bouquet so that the coarser growths could shield the tender ferns; they were so easily bruised, and Jean loved them most for the very qualities which rendered them so easily wounded and perishable. Donald held her satin-lined jacket, with its bordering of rose-tinted arbutus blossoms, done in silk floss, waiting to assist in its donning; and while she arranged her flowers, her mind wholly upon their adjustment, his heart acknowledged afresh his pristine conviction, that the world held no fairer, radiant maiden.

A solitaire diamond glistened upon her slender hand; at the tips of her pretty ears there sparkled, like impaled dewdrops throbbing their iridescent hearts, tiny gems of the first water, giving a note of richness and elegance to her simple school dress of snow white wool, enhanced by plain bands piped with white silk cordings. He knew the story of the costly jewels, and he knew also that they were not worn in a spirit of vanity, but with filial reverence and devotion to her parents; that on her sixteenth birthday she had received them as a young novice receives her veil and vows, or as a devotee the confirmation of the Christian rites, for Jean had then informed her that they had been gifts from Jamie

to her mother, who had worn them constantly until they were taken from her after she had passed from earthly things, and preserved as a most precious heritage for her daughter.

"Thank you, Donald," she said, with her caressing, brogue-tinged voice, after she had assumed the garment. "You are so kind."

She flashed such a sweet, grateful smile into his brooding eyes, the last vestige of color forsook his features. He bit his lips that she might not spy upon his tell-tale flushings.

"I will carry your satchel and bonnet," he said curtly, dismissing her.

"Very well," she acquiesced obediently, as she swung into step with Jamie, his younger brother and sister, and hurried homeward.

The pleasure, diurnally renewed, of returning to Jean and the scenes she loved with an undivided affection, quickened her footsteps and elated her mind with sweet anticipation. So many joys awaited her in the fragrant twilight hours, she invariably had a race with the moments of time that sweep affrightedly in advance of great ebon-winged Night. The joy of greeting Jean, who habitually awaited her at the gate which gave ingress to the lawn, the meeting with Mary Graham and Dicey, Iphogenia and Ezeke; the caresses due to Leo, the great house dog, the petting of the kittens, the visit to the fowls, who retired strictly at sunset but kept their heads from under their wings to give her a welcome home; the rush to the dove-cote, where innumerable pigeons were fretting for the grain she would feed them in liberal handfuls; the dash to the sheep-fold

to behold, ecstatically, the frisky lambs, and the pause at the barnyard, to glimpse at the horses and the cattle then gathered in from the fields and pastures; the brief flitting over the lawn, where Spring's own children were blooming, and a peep at the rose garden, where standards were bursting into full blossom; and finally, the family group around the supper table, which invariably presented a festive appearance and an array of appetizing dishes that atoned for the cold lunch she and Donald partook of at noon. It was then Dicey imprisoned the kittens in the kitchen and Leo in his kennel, force alone keeping them from her in the first hour of her return, and thus Dicey had learned to regulate their behavior.

Donald lagged in their rear as they tripped homeward, an unusual happening, yet unnoted by Ruth and the children, who were as eager for their home and mother as Ruth was for Jean and Kissic-Dale. Indeed, the children forsook her at the great gate which barred the fields from the forest, and ran swiftly down the road over the long slope to the flat lands bordering 'Holly Creek.'

When Donald came through the gate, left ajar against his coming, Ruth walked slowly, idly, but a short distance beyond the entrance. He shut the gate, hesitated a moment, then with a firm step overtook and passed her by, because he knew that his company would be an intrusion. She was not aware of any mundane object or interest.

He had learned to divine her moods and the vagaries of her mind, and a glimpse of her countenance informed him that she was in a mood of

spiritual meditation, and was insensible to Kissic-Dale in its fair plenteousness of broad, green fields of young, sprouting grain and fields of freshy turned dark mold, sown in corn and cotton, of winding brook, alder and willow-fringed; of gaily bedecked, blossoming orchards; of groves and woodlands clothed in an emerald mist of budding foliage and the white-walled mansion looming against a spectacular background of purpling hills and a gold and amethystian sunset. Ruth, he knew, was not entranced with the aspect of the smiling valley; with rapt expression and speculative eyes, her glance roved the celestial display of tinted, vaporous hues, searching for a soulful region beyond the gates of sunset, set ajar briefly and alluringly. She smiled absently as he forged ahead, his eyes upon the prosperous fields and signs of industry.

On the bridge spanning Holly Creek he paused and awaited her tardy approach. He knew she would tarry there, as she had done invariably on the bright afternoon when they walked from school. He, with his mind set valiantly on practical things and the practical wonder of Nature, often found a soothing charm in the spot swept by the broad flow of water. The place presented as much the handiwork of man as the tireless thrift of Nature. Aged and graceful weeping willows, planted by hands long folded in the last sleep, drooped their swaying branches at either approach to the wide, bannistered bridge finished with fanciful conceits in architectural designs; the wild willows and other growths, with an affinity for water, were trimmed and left to grow so as to clothe the shelving banks artistically. Tall

aspen trees, with spire-like trimness, poised as sentinels of the stream, and as statuesque; yet he stood with averted gaze that embraced the brow of a distant hillside, showing crude and bare from a recent gashing with a deep-set plough. He had but a few moments to await Ruth's loitering footsteps. She came forward anticipantly, her face alight and no longer dreamy, the tinted glamor of the sunset intensifying the pure charm of her loveliness with its transforming radiance.

He smiled a casual welcome and in silence leaned upon the flat upper railing of the bridge, and focused his interest, apparently, on the fields of grain in an opposite direction from the ploughed land. Ruth tarried also, and leaned against the railing idly. With fanciful interest she searched the reflection of the sunset sky where it lay mirrored in the rippling water; reproductions of the celestial world rainbowing the horizon above the valley.

She gazed silently, too, but with keen, unalloyed pleasure, and a rioting imagination which seduced her presently into a reverie, transporting her mind into a realm of mysticism far removed from commonplace and material environment. It was a nether world; her feet trod its firmament. To its citizen sprites she was perhaps, a goddess enthroned in their sky. Her sensations were so real, she experienced a physical awe of the startling height obtained in giving espionage to a world spread so far below and distant in ethereal spaces. The stream bore upon its gliding surface a few blossoms of yellow jessamine tossed from some swaying branch, perhaps, near its source in the pine-clad hills; and they entered into

her vision as golden argosies cruising in resplendent waters, unswept by the gales which lash terra firma craft.

Donald came to her side and with fleeting glance noted the scene which had so enthralled her fancy. He sighed, and with deliberate trite intonation, said: "How fast the grain is growing! There is quite a change since yesterday. Shall we be going, Ruth? See the twilight is being heralded."

She withdrew her eyes from the water and viewed him with the aloofness one accords the stranger, Donald was so alien to her mood. She was a spirit of the ideal regions reflected in the water, the sky above and below, the earth annihilated; sweet breezes, the breath of infinity, fanning her pulsing temples; therefore, she did not comprehend his remark or respond to his observation.

She smiled acquiescently to his concluding suggestion, although she did not grasp his meaning until, with a covert glance at her hypnotized expression, he walked on, her satchel depending from his arm, her white bonnet held by one long streamer, the other trailing its fluttering length on the ground.

When he had gone beyond the swaying branches of a patriarchal weeping willow at the west end of the bridge she turned for a last impression of the water, the painted bridge and the panorama of the emerald valley nestling so snugly between the sloping hills. She sighed regretfully as she cast her clinging fancies from her mind and left them with the scene which had evoked them in the fertile soil of her imagination; and, once more a common mortal

plodding the earthly world, she followed Donald up the incline to the blossoming realm of the orchard.

She was laughing and skipping when she flitted by him at a point where, leaving the public road, the way to the house led down a broad lane flanked by graceful cherry trees in a bridal array of blossom. She sped lightly and swiftly down the length of the lane; and, at its terminal, threw her arms around Jean, who, as usual, stood by the gate awaiting her.

CHAPTER IV.

EVENINGTIDE — THE SONGS OF THE CLANS — DONALD'S RESOLVE.

"Maxwelton's braes are bonny,
Where early falls the dew——"

"The sun's low down the sky, Lorena,
The frost gleams where the flowers have been——"

"Oh, light was her heart ere love's witchery came!"

That evening was the customary one in the quiet household. A tray of violets and a bowl of hyacinths graced the supper table, and the meal was a season of pleasure as usual.

Twilight fell imperceptibly. Shot with tender moonlight, the house was brilliantly lighted. Ruth spent an hour at the piano, practicing. A cheerful fire blazed on the sitting-room hearth, the cat dozed, Jean read, when Ruth came from the parlor and

gathered her text and note books around the lamp on her study table and waited for Donald, who was then in his room upstairs. At the stroke of nine o'clock he came into the room and helped her with her lessons. for the morrow's recitations, for Ruth studied indefatigably, her innate love of knowledge strenuously accentuated, as a sop to the Cerberus of circumstances; thus she atoned for her truancy to college life and paid for the privilege of being happy at home and the companion of Jean in her loneliness. She knew each study finished would curtail that much her inevitable absence in the future.

For nearly an hour they were absorbed in Homeric translations in the hieroglyphical language of the classical Greeks. Then Donald suggested music and Jean accompanied him to the parlor while Ruth continued her studies. Jean's stately Sonatas nor Donald's piping strains on the flute, embracing old Scottish airs and English melodies, did not disturb her. She had heard them so often and was so familiar with every note of their music.

Mary Graham, Jean's housekeeper, laid aside her knitting, folded her hands and closed her eyes in sentimental attention when they played the songs celebrating the exile of the clans to the pine-lands of Carolina, and their loyalty to the cause for which they suffered so severely.

Donald returned to his apartments, and Jean played on, unattended, for her own amusement. At last she began to sing the sentimental songs of her own youthful days, "Lorena" and "Annie Laurie," "Marguerite" and "Robin Adair," and "Douglas."

She sang simply and with tender pathos at times

tremulously, when memory smote the chord of some past joy or sorrow ; and as she sang she was vaguely sad and depressed ; why she never knew. Intangible grief touched her mood persistently. She evoked dashing strains, striving for a more cheerful feeling. Such songs as "Douglas" and "Lorena" seemed to mingle with their melodies voices so long, so heart-breakingly silent ; so she played "The Campbells Are Coming" and "Roslyn Castle," and the whistling variations of "The Mocking Bird" ere she paused with the intention of closing the instrument. She hesitated, sitting quite still for many moments, gazing introspectively, with unwinking eyes ; then she sighed deeply and her fingers caressed the keyboard with aimless movements until they glided mechanically over certain notes which voiced the air of "Araby's Daughter."

She played a few bars repeatedly, then struck a full chorus of chords and sang every word of the ballad, plaintively, and with a sympathy which probed an unfamiliar chamber in her heart, as if she was personally lamenting the fate of the daughter of Araby.

"Farewell, farewell, Araby's daughter,"

Thus warbled a Peri beneath the dark sea ;

"No pearl ever lay under Oman's green water

More pure in its shell than thy spirit in thee."

Oh, fair as the sea-flower close to thee growing!

Oh, light was thy heart ere Love's witchery came!

But long upon Araby's green sunny Highlands,
Shall maids and their lovers remember the doom
Of her, who lies sleeping beneath the pearl islands,
With naught but the sea-star to light up her tomb.

And still, when the merry date season is burning,
And calls to the palm-groves the young and the old;
The happiest there from their pastime returning,
At sunset shall weep when thy story is told.

She set her foot firmly upon the soft pedal and sang the refrain again, and yet again, clinging morbidly to the wailing protest, the pathetic melody. When it seemed to resolve into a human voice breathing prophecy she shuddered as if an unkind wind had smitten her form. With a repulsing gesture she arose, closed the piano firmly and arranged her yellowing music.

The fragrance of the woodland jessamine pervaded the room like Satyr's incense in a grotto temple as she passed by the heavy, marble-topped table in the centre of the room and caressed with appreciative touch Ruth's gift of fern and blossom. They were held in an antique silver vase, a loving cup, the gift of royalty to one of her ancestors. She sighed again, expressively, as she took mental note of a coincident just then presented to her mind, the offering of the wee lassie, the last of the Mac-Kenzies, reposing in the gift to their most revered progenitor. The past seemed to float out from the blank void of "long ago" and mingle its shades interwovenly into the present; and the past wore shrouds and the habiliments of the tomb. It was uncanny

to be in its presence, alone in the room, with the woodland aroma conjuring it into an almost personal presence. She was not aware that two pondering vigils had been kept, unknown to each other, yet each, influenced by her music, knew that her mood was unusual and sad.

She left the room in a quest for company to exercise gloomy foreboding which she felt was groundless and denoted an abnormal condition of her nerves. She found Mary Graham asleep in her chair and Ruth absent from the study table. She searched vainly until she explored the eastern veranda. Moonlight veiled in silvery mist lay upon field and orchard; and where its revealing radiance fell upon palms and hothouse products, banking the southern entrance to the veranda, she found Ruth seated by a column. Jean approached over a floor checkered with shadows and white lunar rays, and laid her hand upon Ruth's drooping shoulder.

"Why are you here, bairnie?" she asked playfully, to hide her own seriousness.

"I came out here to hear you sing," Ruth answered, lifting her head bravely and smiling, although tears bedewed her cheeks and sparkled upon the heavy lashes fringing her limpid eyes. "You are sad to-night, Auntie," she asserted tenderly. "I have never heard you sing just that way until now. Is it memories troubling you? I thought so. You must have so many sad ones; memories of Papa, of Archie, and all your dear ones. I sometimes wonder at your optimism. I could not be so strong, I am sure," she concluded with a sigh, the breath of a deep sympathy. Jean knew then why

she had been shedding tears, and she stroked the bright hair of her bairnie as she said, gently :

"It is true I have many sad and sacred memories, but they no longer make me deeply sorrowful. I have become resigned and am hopefully looking to a future that will reunite me with lost loved ones. When I sing 'Douglas,' my lover husband, always young and tenderly devoted, lives again, as in the happy past, and every detail of my simple life has power to invoke fond recollections, but to-night my mood is prophetic, and I feel strangely afraid and apprehensive. I had an involuntary tremor, as the winking of an eye or unconscious sighing. I have chided Dicey often for referring such a chill to an old folk-lore superstition that someone was treading the soil of your future tomb.

"But," Jean proceeded, as Ruth pondered her words silently, "something seemed whispering to me, or rather suggesting," she strove for ideas to express a feeling so definite, yet at the same time so elusive and intangible, "until—I—grew really anxious. It seemed to say distinctly: 'This is the beginning of the end.'"

Ruth sprang up amazed and frightened. She folded her slender arms around Jean's stately form. "Auntie!" she cried, "I know you are going to be ill! I have never known you to be this way. Your singing impressed me as strange and unusual. I have been listening with deepest sympathy."

"I have frightened you," Jean said, "and without cause, bairnie, for I am quite well and without anxiety normally. It is the trait of my race to be superstitious. That, in some psychological manner,

is influencing me. I have felt its terrors before this time."

"But you are not superstitious," Ruth declared in fond defence. "You are so strong-minded, so logical, Auntie."

"But I *am* superstitious!" Jean asserted, with solemn conviction. "And I have no strength to overcome the weakness or misfortune, if it is either. I also believe in the second sight, not alone inherently, but experimentally. When Archie died in that freezing Northern prison, when Paul and Daniel died together on that blood-drenched battlefield in Virginia, when death came with compassionate haste and released my heart-broken mother, and then my father, from their crushing bereavements, I was warned by visions of their fates; but I was overwrought then by overwhelming anxieties and believed my sensations and perceptions the result of nervous worry; but now my life was never more peaceful and my health is almost perfect."

Ruth's arms had tightened spasmodically as Jean referred to her sad past; now her head drooped upon Jean's shoulder. "Poor Auntie!" she sighed in inexpressible sympathy.

"I am sorry to distress you. I would give my life freely to ensure you unbroken happiness, and tonight, I am therefore unreasonably, vaguely afraid, because—I feel—that some indefinite danger threatens you, bairnie," Jean faltered, uncertainly.

"Me! Oh, Auntie! How you frightened me! But now I am not afraid, for I am all right. I was fearing for you, but I am in splendid health and quite happy in every way. 'And not a wave of

trouble rolls across my peaceful breast,' " she quoted brightly and without flippancy. "And I am so much happier than formerly; I was such a fearful, morbid child, was I not, dearie? But now I see things more clearly, and I have you, the dear home, dear ones to love, and none to hate me; what more could I desire, pray tell me."

"You are right, bairnie," Jean admitted hopefully, for self-comfort, "and I am a silly old woman. Let us forget my strange fancies. I should have never entertained them for a moment. Let us admire the charming night. I did not realize the attractions abroad, or I would have come out earlier and not have sung myself into such a state of morbidness."

It was, indeed, a scene of beauty which environed the old homestead. Holly Creek shone as a stream of molten silver, as it wound its way through slumberous fields; mist walled in the valley; the apple trees robed in dainty blossoms, stood as maids of honor attending the regal queen of night.

"I do so love the moonlight," Jean remarked, inconsequently. "What is there in the beautiful world that I do not love, I wonder?" Ruth responded gaily; but her tones were tremulous and her mirth an effort.

"Especially Springtime," Jean commented, analytically. "The robins have come again, Ruth," she continued, with assumed cheerfulness, "and so have the swallows, and the little housewifely wrens are building their nests beneath the roof. Soon, the mocking-birds will come to the magnolias, and then we shall have bird music, indeed."

"I shall be glad if our old acquaintance returns;

the one who so fooled Dicey. You remember, do you not, Auntie?" Ruth said, reminiscently, and she laughed merrily over the memory; their depression could not last, a shadow without substance. That shrewd bird had very much interested them the previous summer. He had nested in the tall aspen tree and indulged in most perfect mimicry. Ruth recalled gleefully how he had worried Dicey by crying "Whip-poor-will" in the vegetable garden. Traps had been set for the supposed marauder, until one day as Dicey was resetting them and muttering about the wariness of the thief, who seemed to be endowed with a miraculous art in disappearing, the mocking-bird had poised defiantly upon the gatepost and trilled the whip-poor-will's cry, shrilly and derisively. Dicey had thrown the trap at him in sudden fury at the trick which he had played upon her credulity.

"If he comes, we will have the bird-world of song," Ruth declared admiringly, in happy remembrance of the facile songster. And thus they conversed for some time until Ruth's infectious gayety had cheered Jean's heart somewhat. Reluctantly, finally, they left the veranda, where ethereal beauty brooded so ineffably, and retired, Ruth imparting a last touch of comfort in her loving good night.

But when the lights were extinguished and the solitude of the nearby forest crept into the slumbering domain of Kissic-Dale, and all opposing influence was withdrawn, the sadness came again into Jean's heart, stealthily, persistently, and the same whisper seemed to float and sigh around her, "This is the beginning of the end." She warded off the

sensation or the fancy, or the reality, as one repulses and shrinks from a blow aimed at the vitals. Once she awoke in a condition resembling nightmare, panting for breath, her veins tingling with an irregular rush of blood. She did not know if it was mental or physical depression; it seemed a comingling of each, and she put forth strong effort for normal poise of mind and feeling, as she recalled the bright, sunlighted hours of the sweet Springtime day. She scanned all the circumstances of her life, gaining courage from their unmenaced peace. No shadow presaged, no storm threatened, and—she was silly. But still, fear held sway in her mind, for well she knew by grim experience the instability of human life and the evanescence of the most closely guarded happiness; that

“The rainbow melts with the shower,
The white-thorn falls in the gust,
The rose-cloud dies into shadow,
The earth-rose drops into dust.”

and that:

“The bird-song piercing the sunset,
Faints with the sunset’s fires.”

“The power of the star and the dew,
They grow and are gone with a breath.”

And like others who listen to the pulsing of Nature’s great heart, she cried impotently: “What is to be, will be!” and embraced anew, thus, the inexorable creed of pre-destination.”

While Jean and Ruth were on the veranda, Donald, resting in a hammock on the upper veranda, heard, incidentally, their conversation, intending to forget it promptly, not suspecting that in a distant future, when changeling years had drifted him far from the moonlighted night at Kissic-Dale, he would recall the prophetic words Jean had uttered so reluctantly, as if impelled by a power beyond her. At the moment, he was deeply absorbed in a reverie purely personal, but so intense that the strenuous ambition of his heart was in abeyance; yet even then he was soundly logical in his reasonings and self-discipline. The result of his musings, which lasted long hours after an unbroken silence ruled the house, and even Jean slept, if fitfully, and the tranced shadows of the leafless trees, stretched far to the eastward. What if his hot heart yearned and clamored, his strong gray eyes gazed sternly at facts which not all the silvery charm and fragrance of the night could vanquish or transform into good fairies holding to his thirsting lips the coveted draught of happiness. So when he stole to his room, in the wee, small hours of morning, he had commanded himself in tones imperative to cultivate the acquaintance of Edwin Phillips and to attend strictly to his own future, which had not yet begun to be builded.

CHAPTER V.

LOCH-LILY — FAUNS AND FAIRIES — ALADDIN'S PALACE.

"Silver streams hath Arcady,
Radiant, shining skies;
Flowers that could not fairer be
Seen by human eyes."

—Selected.

"When life was like a story,
Holding neither sob nor sigh." —Riley.

The third Saturday of the ensuing month of May, the florescent charm of the season was exquisite in the tender verdant beauty of Summer's finished toilet; its fresh array of leaf and blossom.

The seduction of azure skies, of inspiriting sunshine, was irresistible. It had rained the preceding week, a cold, clammy downpour from flat, sweeping clouds, estray from some intemperate zone alien to May skies and the Southern climate, but for the past few days unblemished sunshine had bathed the earth in a brilliant flood of genial warmth and balminess.

That morning Jean had announced at the breakfast table that in the afternoon she was going "a-fishing" and "a-Maying," and invited all those inclined to recreation to join her, irrespective of color or condition. Donald had declined regretfully; he

had promised the day in another direction, and soon he had set off to fulfill the appointment.

Nevertheless, it was a happy party Jean led to her picnic ground early after the noon meal; and the wild birds fled, temporarily, from the chattering voices invading their secluded kingdom in the cool, green woods below the spring and the dairy. Sandy, Jean's farmer, and his wife, Dicey, the cook, and her son Ezeke; Sandy's three children, Mary and Ruth, who carried her sketch-book and indulged in much gay humor at the expense of the merry cavalcade, armed with bamboo rods and carrying little cans of bait.

She never angled since, as a child, she had gone with Jean and Mary to "Loch-Lily," and the writhings of the hook-impaled worms and the violent deaths of the shining-scaled beauties of the depths so won her sympathy and compassion, she had abandoned the sport, pityingly and finally. But Jean had locked her text-books in the security and repose of the glass-fronted "secretary," and had quoted with authority: "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," and "Gill's a stupid girl," she had added significantly as she placed the key in her pocket.

Their rendezvous was "Loch-Lily," a famous angling point for generations of MacKenzies. Following the "spring branch," whose source was the sparkling, never-failing fountain at the foot of a cliff-like hill, a dim path, from which the undergrowth was cut away annually, led them a quarter of a mile to the banks of Holly Creek, which crept secretively through primeval privacy, when it had passed from the glare of publicity in the broad fields

of Kissic-Dale. Those woods had been highly prized from generation unto generation of the rural Mac-Kenzies; to them it was indeed, a treasure-trove in the enviring aridity of prevailing pine forests; a cherished arboretum for the pleasure and enlightenment of their sons and daughters, in indigenous growths of thrifty trees, of trailing vines and creeping mosses, in the condition it had thriven in when the first MacKenzie, fresh from the Scottish hills and lakes, built his hewn-log residence and searched out the resources of the fertile valley. Later generations believed that their pioneer ancestor fancied a resemblance to his lamented Highlands in the varied growths of the foliage-crowned, steep hills and the spring-fed waters of Holly Creek.

In a distant past the creek had been widened at a certain point and skilfully deepened, its treacherous banks stayed with rough stone masonry, and the oval lake thus formed christened "Loch-Lily," when its margin had been stocked with the fibrous roots and floating pads of a medley assortment of water lilies native to the section, and brilliant-hued, indolent lotuses.

The loch covered the greater part of a flat dell, encircled and overshadowed by sharp, wooded elevations, which began their ascent within a few feet of the water, secluding it as if walled with oak, hickory, maple, dogwood and other Southern forest; and the precipitous incline embraced crevices recalling Dryadical retreats meshed in ferns, vines and divers woodland plants common to the climate.

"Loch-Lily" was interesting at all seasons, but never so lovely and attractive as in the Maytime,

when the green and gold liquid of infantile growth surcharged the youthful foliage, when the belated arbutus (and what Scottish heart could resist its charm of resemblance and relation to their moorland heather?) puts forth blossom weeks after their sisterhood had bloomed on the uplands; when ferns and delicate mosses had attained perfect form, when white-starred lily-pads slept upon the opalescent bosom of the water yet retaining the sparkling purity of winter's crystal ice and snow; and the mating wild birds, nesting in the sylvan jungles, and smiting the warm, fragrant solitude with long-drawn, silvery notes, mates calling unto mates in endearing strains, from purple sunrise to sapphire noon and the golden eventide.

A great birch tree stood on the hither side of the lake and rude stone steps led down to the water where the tiny boat, a white, enameled shallop, had its place of mooring, since a time far beyond the memory of the previous generation.

The space beneath the wide-spreading branches of the birch was hard and smooth, a sanded soil, splotched with green moss fostered by the sheltering limbs of the old tree; and there boulders of stone from the rock-ribbed hillsides had been placed for the convenience of anglers. In that interesting retreat Jean seated her companions, that they might angle for the finny tribe, who frequented the dark, deep water which bathed the roots of the tree, where there was a "baited" space free of the floating lotus, lily, and coarse, picturesque rushes that grew rankly in the more shallow margins of the lake.

Until the heat and languor of the noon hours

lapsed into the lengthening shadows and refreshing breezes of midsummer afternoon, Ruth loitered in the water-gemmed dell where the fishing was desultory and the luck minus excitement. Quietude was strictly enjoined, for the fish in "Loch-Lily" were notoriously shy of the human voice, so she sought out the tiny growths of the moist locality, sketched some, but oftener sat in restful, dreamy repose, seeing the tender leaves flutter in the languid breeze like the half-formed, palpitant hopes which sometimes stirred her heart with indefinite desire and pleasure.

In her brief acquaintance with the locality, it had meant much more than a botanical study or resort for angling with its pleasures; or than as a realm dedicated to the goddess Flora. Each year since her infancy the place had held a different seeming in its mysterious silences; for it had ever been that there her fruitful imagination could take unto itself irresponsible wings and float into regions not restricted by periods of time, limitations of space or the material difference of locality.

In her most youthful days it had been fairyland, and tiny elves hid in the fern-banks in the daytime and danced upon the spaces of emerald moss by moonlight radiance. Tiny gnomes peopled the liquid obscurity of the dimpling water, whose groves and temples were canopied by the lilies and the tall rushes, which grew thriftily in places not covered by the encroaching nymphæ.

Such fancies had had their passing with Kriss-Kringle or Santa Claus, giving peace to adaptations

of the creations of other minds and the romantic incidents of history to the wood-enhanced scenes.

Beacons had flashed upon the hill, and there shepherds had led their gentle sheep, seeking pasture and piping their flutes, when it was the heart of Scotia, the landscape of its pastoral episodes, and the scenes of its warring feuds; there, then, battles had been fought and castles besieged, clans annihilated; Mary, Queen of Scots, had held court there and rode in quest of the displeasing Gordons. The heroes of the Waverley Novels had also lived the most exciting phases of their thrilling romances in that vicinity.

In one fascinating period, "Loch-Lily" had been "Loch-Katrine," and her own white boat, christened anew each succeeding Spring, when it received its annual coat of white paint, was the famous skiff that bore "Ellen" and the "Knight of Snowden," to the Highland lodge of the exiled Douglas; and the unsuspecting pigs and calves and the browsing sheep and swine figured as wild beasts and animals daring the skill and valor of betartaned huntsmen, and as lithe buck and roe, hiding in the leafy coverts of vine and bracken.

Its most innocent domain was filled with storied action and the happenings of ancestral legends, it had lent itself so facilely to her imagery of the knowledge she had been industriously acquiring throughout her recent childhood, it so satisfied her roving thoughts with its remoteness and seclusion from the strenuous, every-day life of human endeavor.

Its most thrilling seeming had been when it was

a realm of magic, the abode of deified Nature, as portrayed in the mythological treatises she had been permitted to study; then Fauns and Satyrs, Dryads, Naiads, aye! all the sylvan gods and goddesses had haunted the green shadows and—"wove their spells, where hung sweet lily-bells"—and birds flung trilling melody to seduce the hearts of wood-nymphs and water-sprites when they held revelling courts attended by the children of the gods, solely.

Latterly, it had evoked day-dreams; misty, speculative visions of a veiled future; and embryo ambitions had superseded the impractical thrall of fancies which had so enriched her lonely childhood that had known no playfellows but Jamie and Ezeke, both much younger than herself, and as much without her inward life as the kittens, the calves and the pigeons; thus she stood alone, her own self, with no alloy of ulterior association mingling with her standards of thought attained by rigidly circumscribed instruction and the normal conception of a sensitive soul in its most transitory stage.

She had become enamored with the joys of intellectual attainment and had experienced the thrill of creative labor, the satisfaction of achievement. To acquaint herself thoroughly with the texts of her studies, to give skillful interpretation to an intricate musical composition, to portray with idealistic touch a scene upon cardboard, to know how Iphogenia did the clear starching, and how Dicey contrived the many tempting dishes were real pleasures and of absorbing interest, each in their allotted season of the happy hours.

As the afternoon waned, she had tired of the re-

strait of the quietude angling imposed and the consequent dreaming, and had wandered away, accompanied by the restless children, adown the dim trail, which led deep into unfrequented woods and unfamiliar stretches of the meandering creek; into the region of the gods, the wood-nymphs, and Nature's secluded, unhampered domain.

When they returned late in the afternoon her mind was unusually introspective and spiritually wistful; and the eagerness of successful sport was dominant among the anglers.

"May I disturb you all for a moment, just long enough to row to the opposite side of the water?" she requested, as she stood by Jean, carrying her sketch-book and pencils. She pleaded in a subdued and timid tone, and Jean felt rebuked for selfishness. The child shut up in the schoolroom all the week and then repressed in a rare and brief outing!

So she assented in her ordinary tone of voice, which sounded startlingly loud after the prolonged period of whispers and mute signs of communication. As Ruth pushed away from the landing, she earnestly thanked them for their concession to her whims. "And," she added, with laughing jest, while she managed the oars with grace and skill, "you are certainly picturesque. I wish to include you in a series of sketches I propose making and entitle it 'The Anglers of Loch-Lily.' Kathy's hair has fallen from its coil, Sandy's is rakishly dishevelled, Auntie has a smudge on her nose, Dicey's turban is all awry, and Mary has a disreputable stain upon her left cheek; indeed, all of you are in various stages of

untidiness and reckless absorption in an inglorious sport!"

Her mirth was gleeful, as they each manifested a sudden interest in their personal appearance.

"Never mind, my dearies, so long as you are enjoying yourselves. The considerations of the toilet are of minor importance to a really good time. My own hands are soiled beyond recognition and my unseen countenance may be in any condition, but I shall not worry in the least! When I return, I shall fetch a whole boat-load of lilies to decorate the house for the Sabbath. I hope the fish will return in a moment, come back to escape me over here!"

She nodded gaily, and with hurried strokes backed the boat quite to the opposite shore. There among the rushes and the lily-pads, the star-like, white and carmine-tinted, waxen blossoms, she moored the boat to a stout rush-stalk and began a sketch conceived while threading the woods and reflecting upon former fancies.

She was not so much engaged but she noted with teasing humor the happenings on the bank. When the sun sank behind the western hill, rearing loftily above the land and water-locked dell, a luminous shadow gloomed the water, a refulgence from the sunlight slanting upon the tree-tops far above, and the fish seemed ravenous since the white light had forsaken their retreat; and excitement and disaster prevailed on land.

Kathy, Jr. in unskilled endeavor to land a minnow, hooked firmly and tenaciously Dicey's red silk turban, worn in honor of the gala occasion; Jamie unbonneted Mary Graham, and afterward attached

his hook finally, it seemed, before it was extracted, in the strong linen meshes of Jean's dainty collar. Ezeke landed a small fish upon the white expanse of Dicey's "Sunday apern," and Jean had to interfere to avert immediate and aggressive war. Then Ezeke sulked beyond Jamie's position upon a favorite boulder, until sleep overcame him and he nodded, intermittingly.

Jamie, responding to a nibble at his hook, pulled violently and at first futilely upon the impaled prey until it came forth, wriggling and squirming, and a chorus of shrieks from women and children attended its gyrating departure from its native element to hostile, unwelcome land. Ezeke awoke, startled, and the creature on Jamie's hook, as if by some malevolent instinct, instantly threw itself upon the gaping boy and encircled his neck with the wet line. He rivalled then the dance of the whirling Dervishes, for he believed the creature a serpent, as its lithe body whipped his breast and thrust itself into his shrieking mouth.

Ruth sat helpless in her boat but deeply sympathetic with Ezeke's terror of the loathsome object. It was such a repulsive thing to have invaded their sylvan Paradise.

"My dearies," she suggested persuasively across the prismatic water, that reflected the hues of the azure depths far above the leafy tree-tops, "I would not risk life and limb any more if I were you! Would it not be prudence to return home before something really serious happens?"

"Not just yet, Ruthie; the fish are biting so famously," Jean protested, wistfully.

"And there may not be another eel in a mile of this place," Sandy amended, intently absorbed in the uncertain sport.

Ruth sighed but urged them no farther. Sandy landed a plump perch and a tense silence followed. Ruth sat motionless; she had completed the outlining of her sketch but inspiration had ceased with the appearance of the monster which had shocked her idealistic conception of the locality, and she could not gather lilies and ruffle the placid water so essential for successful angling in Loch-Lily.

The light waned in its illuminating diffusiveness; the shadows deepened and the water darkened until its depths seemed immense and obscurely mysterious; the bird notes were solemn though musical calls for vesper repose. She lost sense of time and forgot her companions, even the eel which had so startled her. She sat silhouetted against a background of water rushes and the wooded hillside, rearing precipitously beyond the sloping bank laved by the water and swept by lily-pads, undulating on a liquid bosom. She was not aware of the beauty of her graceful pose in the emerald shadows, pervaded with an amber radiance reflected from a sky shot with slanting rays from a blazing sun, then far down behind the western hill; a golden-haired, white-robed Naiad, with veiled eyes drooping in careless fashion, her duplicated position in the white boat, the name "Ruth" flashing in golden letters evenly with the water, which reproduced it all literally, in inverted reflection.

Thus Donald and Edwin Phillips discovered her as they emerged from the screening shrubs flanking

the path, which led them in their quest for the Maying party. Donald had met, by appointment, his recent acquaintance, at a certain point on the road beyond the schoolhouse, and had spent the day with him in the woods, dining with him, Jennie and the children, and finally bringing the young man with him to Kissic-Dale to spend the evening. As they came from the woodland into the smooth, cleared space between the water and the hill, they discovered Ruth, and paused involuntarily, staring for a few ungoverned moments at a vision which would have entranced sterner and more elderly eyes than theirs, alertly bright, and probing with early manhood's unsatiated zest and romantic ardor.

The scene, the opal-tinted lake set in a wreathing margin of the delicate beauty of lily and lotus; the engirdling hills clothed in the tender emerald of youthful verdure unscathed by Summer's blanching suns and showers; the fragrant incense emanating from the waxen hearts of the starry nymphs, and the vesper solitude smitten with the fainting notes of weary songsters, was a fitting environment for the young girl who appeared to them the incarnation of the charm of the scene and the enrapturing glamor of approaching eventide.

Then Ruth opened her eyes with a sensitive flash and with artless surprise met their direct and admiring scrutiny as they stood motionless, impassive; and her cheeks flushed timidly with a strange dismay and shyness, as she smiled a welcome to Donald.

"Hist!" she warned them, in a voice that carried her tones clear and distinct over the resonant water, and she pointed to the group under the birch tree.

Donald laughed a hearty, unrestrained peal of acute mirth. Birds fled precipitately; echoes of his mirth called mockingly from caverned hills; the group on the bank were startled and aroused to a perception of his presence, and the spell of beauty, of sentiment, was dissipated as he led his companion to Jean and introduced him as a guest of her famous home.

Jean was very much impressed with the neatly groomed, handsome young stranger. She loved beauty and was thrilled with the pleasure of meeting such a charming specimen of youthful manhood. She lost interest in the fish and transferred her attention to her guest. "Come, Ruth," she cried, in a happy effusiveness, "it is time we were going home, I am sure."

"Certainly, Auntie," Ruth responded with hidden amusement, and she fell to gathering lilies with the energy of a long-delayed impulse, gathering a full harvest of the tempting blossoms, with their lengthy, rubber-like stems, which attested standard purity.

Donald's companion she accepted without comment, even in thought. His coming to Kissic-Dale seemed a natural sequence to events in the recent past; and they were accustomed to entertaining the strangers who rarely invaded the neighborhood. She recalled her memory of the driver of a pretty horse who had, at intervals, appeared at the school to carry his young cousins home. Once, during the rainy days of the previous week, he had been, momentarily, something more, when she had left the schoolroom to enter her waiting carriage, and he had swept into view from the rain-drenched, cloud-

gloomed forest, a dripping umbrella sheltering him from the perpendicular downpour of raindrops, his sleek raincoat glistening with moisture, his soft hat-brim pressed back from his white forehead, his smiling features and his dark eyes alight with a tender radiance which gave her an impression as if sunlight had swept into the gray, inclement atmosphere.

As she plucked the lilies from their watery roots, he was reeling in Jean's damp fishing line, and Donald was viewing the eel, which still squirmed and wriggled, coating its gelatinous body with dirt and sand.

"Ruth," he requested in a playful mood, "come classify this aquatic monster to atone for neglecting your studies to gather lilies!"

"It's an eel, Mars Donald," Dicey explained, as she avoided it in gathering up the scattered fish representing various catches.

"Yes, I know that much, but I want Ruth to tell me what kind of an eel it is," he persisted in dictatorial humor, "whether it is of the genus *Amphiuma*, *Amphioxus*, or some other genus."

"It's jest er eel, I tell ye," Dicey insisted, eyeing the loathsome object; "a hateful, slimy eel, with thunder or something all over him. My hands ache yit where he struck me, they do."

"You need not bother now, Ruth," Donald exclaimed, dramatically serious. "Dicey has explained. She says it is an electric eel of the genus *Anquiller Vulgaris*; that she knows from personal contact, which is the surest test."

Ruth had heaped her boat with fragrant bud and

blossom and was propelling it toward the landing; her eyes beseeched Donald.

"Hide it, please, Donald, oh, please do, for poor little Ruth!" she begged in a guarded tone of tense entreaty. She rested the oars and waited anxiously.

Donald gathered a leafy bough and thus shielding his hands he caught the eel and disappeared with it down the trail following the water. A splash a moment later proclaimed that the tortured creature had regained its life-giving element. Donald returned and hastened to assist Ruth as her boat touched the stone pier.

"Hail, Lady of the Lake! May James FitzJames—er—er—ah——" he paused for grandiloquent expression, and then, with an air of discreetness, resumed in quite another tone, "I will take care of your lilies. Go meet my friend."

Ruth leaped ashore, her arms laden with the treasures she was guarding too carefully to trust to his ignorance of a lily's fragility. As he was securing the chain to the staple used to moor the little craft, Jean, marshalling her crowd, headed the procession wending homeward.

At the white turnstile which gave egress from the woods, Edwin Phillips observed Ruth loitering in the rear of the straggling procession as she came out of the semi-gloom beneath the trees, a smile lingering on her lips, her eyes pensive and serene, embracing the splendor of the glowing sunset devotionally; her hair shining as a drapery of gold, golden tendrils caressing her thoughtful, white brow, the dark veil of lashes lifted from the spiritual orbs they were wont to cast in mystic shadow. She was not

then a child, but a budding woman, searching with wistful probing the scroll of the unwritten future and the obscure horoscope of an illimitable eternity.

Donald, also, turned and glanced a swift scrutiny of Ruth's mood and appearance, then he caught step with Mary Graham and proceeded nonchalantly and cheerfully.

"Mr. Phillips," Jean remarked to her own gallant escort, "there is our dairy and spring-house. Some day, when the sun is too powerful for comfort out in the forest, come over and find out their supreme comfort and attractiveness. Just now I shall merely introduce them."

"I shall be delighted to do so," he returned, gratefully. "Less superior attraction would appeal irresistibly then, I am sure."

"Since meeting you and knowing the conditions you have to contend with in your work, I shall be glad if I can in any way contribute to your happiness," Jean assured him with sincere sympathy. In her heart, she was saying, "He is such a charming, gallant young fellow, I am sure he has a lovely mother, who is devoted to him. She could not be otherwise to such a dear boy."

His heart was rioting with the bliss of the intensely desired opportunity of meeting Ruth and feasting his eyes upon her loveliness. He and Donald had found companionship very congenial. They were mutually informed of many subjects and phases of life, and the isolated country presented little of social interest to either, but Edwin Phillips was dominated by one supreme purpose in meeting the proffered friendship of Donald cordially. He

really, apart from any selfish motive, felt a sincere liking for the clear-eyed, cultured young Scotchman, and the affinity deepened with the prospect of gaining an introduction to Ruth and Kissic-Dale. In the same grateful spirit he was cultivating Jean's liking and thus attaining the vantage point of intimacy in the family circle.

Conditions are the fostering elements of a great and absorbing passion; and not one other is so intense and wholesome as living near to Nature's heart. Mankind, as represented in society, is a disillusionist, who ruthlessly sweeps away the tenderest and most potential emotions of the human heart, leaving it callous and insensible to the sweetest, most divinely implanted instincts of the soul unto which, alone, is accorded the joys of an unalloyed passion wholly unknown to the worldly and aspiring. So fate had suddenly controlled the heart of Edwin Phillips. His regenerated perceptions thrilled sensitively to the winds sweeping the shrilling harps of the singing pines; to the flashing radiance of jewelled sunlight; to the vesper light and the matin glitter of the scintillating stars; to babbling water and caressing breezes, whose influence reigned supreme in the cloistered stillness and cathedral dignity of the forest, and induced meditation and reflection, and a heed to the great primal need of the soul.

He was then so *en rapport* with the peaceful scene, he viewed the white-walled dairy, screened by drooping willow branches, and the overflowing fountain cradled in a white stone basin and hedged with limpid ferns and trailing mosses, in the light

of an Aladdin's palace, where wishes were magically changed into joys; and singing birds of blissful anticipations nested in the heart and piped of sub-lunary felicity.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GUEST—MUSIC AND MOONLIGHT—GALATEA AND TEARS.

"As when a flower holds my eyes enchained
By its impassioned beauty, so thy face
Holds me, beloved, till I have attained
Full knowledge of its grace; . . ."

—Selected.

The sunset tints had dissolved into violet shades fringing the robe of departing day, when Jean sought Ruth, bearing in her arms a filmy white dress, fluffy with lace and airy frills.

Ruth was standing before the mirror in her room, leisurely brushing her hair. There was an air of cheerful haste and pleasurable excitement attending Jean's entrance which influenced her to pause and observe her relative with wondering attention. She had just returned from feeding the pigeons, and the time until the supper-bell rang she had esteemed as her own, to spend alone and restfully.

"Must I dress, Auntie?" she queried in surprise, as she beheld the dress that had been her smartest costume the previous summer.

"Surely, bairnie, in courtesy to the stranger within

our gates, who has been accustomed to the conventions of gentle people. If we are in the backwoods, we need not be rustics in our dress and behavior; and in society it is the appearance that denotes the standard of one's position."

"But Auntie, I have outgrown that dress. Had you forgotten?"

"Yes, but last week I made alterations that you might be able to wear it while waiting for the dresses Mrs. Barnard is having made for you. Put it on, please, and arrange your hair more formally by the time I also have changed my dress." Then Jean left the room hurriedly, Ruth regarding her with a quizzical expression.

When Jean returned after a brief absence, Ruth was wearing the dress and was busily folding an azure ribbon about her slender waist, as she sang in her clear, young voice, "Oh, Fair Dove," a song popular with Jean and Mrs. Barnard, her former governess, for a brief season:

"Oh, fair dove! Oh, fond dove!

Oh, dove with the white, white breast!

Leave me alone as I make my moan,

And my heart seeks peace and rest."

She sang unconsciously, a fond memory of her pets dimly influencing the trend of her musings. The note of tragedy portrayed in minor chords and cadences, the wistful and despairing suggestion of the strangely weird ballad, jarred upon Jean's happy mood.

"Why do you sing that now, bairnie?" she asked, disapprovingly.

"I do not know, dearie. I was not aware that I was singing until you mentioned the song," Ruth answered, apologetically.

Jean placed her pinz-nez and scanned her niece with fond criticism; then adjusted the bow which confined her yellow, fluffy hair and patted the silken sash into graceful undulations.

She nodded approval and said: "Come, bairnie," as she led the way toward the veranda, Ruth following docilely to achieve a fresh lesson in deportment, for thus she regarded the event. Lessons were the rule of her life; step by step, she had been led since earliest infancy, into books and knowledge, into economics pertaining to the home, in social behavior. Following Jean up the colonnaded veranda was but one of many tasks imposed by her accruing rote of attainments; but it was more formal and embarrassing than any previous experience she was capable of recalling, except the annual torture of being photographed.

Jean wore a modest white rose in the sleek coils of her fair hair, and carried herself with an imperial stateliness which awed and impressed Ruth with the formality of the occasion. At the southern point of the wide veranda, Donald and his guest reclined in wicker chairs and awaited them, and supper.

As Ruth approached in the wake of Jean's rustling progress, a nervous panic assailed her mind. She dared not meet Donald's critical regard or Jamie's staring wonder; she stood with downcast eyes and waited for Jean to solve the dilemma of her deport-

ment. The incense of roses and lilies floated upon the wings of the eventide zephyrs, the valley reposed in the violet shadows of approaching twilight, a pale moon posed serenely over the purpling, pine-clad hills far to the eastward.

"Mr. Phillips," Jean said, dimpling and smiling, enthused with the pleasure of showing her most loved treasure, "I want you to know our bairnie, our little Ruth!"

Edwin Phillips arose and bent his head low, with distant courtesy. His manner posed Ruth upon a pedestal of womanly remoteness and seclusiveness, and repelled the suggestion of artless intimacy intimated by Jean's mode of presentation. Not as a child could he meet and establish an acquaintance with the queenly, slender girl, who had so enthralled his mind and heart and swayed his soul with passion's uttermost enchantment.

Ruth's drooping eyes filled with nervous tears, which blurred her vision, a burning blush spread swiftly from throat to brow, as Edwin withdrew his glance and attention.

"You have a charming home, Mrs. MacEarchan. I have been admiring the view and your flowers," he said, in his suave, gentle voice, as he indicated the scene in question by a wave of his hand, which held an unlighted cigar. Apparently, he had forgotten Ruth and had centered his mind upon the landscape; and Ruth moved over to where Donald sat, contained and silent, and found a seat beside him. Timid with uncomfortable sensations, she slipped her hand into his with confiding appeal for comfort and companionship.

Jean and her guest were discussing the potted fuchsias clustered around the base of the nearest column. Ruth's fingers fluttered like a frightened bird in Donald's listless clasp until he resolutely withdrew from the contact, and said in his most practical and indifferent voice: "Shall I have to deprive you of playtime on Monday, Ruth? Have you prepared your lessons?"

Ruth's quick, sweet smile flashed over her features instantly. "It is Aunt Jean should bear the punishment; she has locked up all my books. Won't you have her to give them to me after supper, that I may atone for the day's idleness?"

"No," he said, positively, "the evening belongs to the entertainment of our guest."

The supper bell rang, and they followed Jean and Edwin to the dining-room, where Mary Graham and Iphogenia had displayed taste and skill in arranging the sumptuously spread tea table. Its glittering mahogany surface was enhanced by dainty lace doilies, and adorned with real cut glass and silver, and bowls of long-stemmed, fragrant roses. Edwin Phillips' trained glance took note of the appointments, and he tasted the rich fare with the relish of an epicure emerging from abstinence.

He gave an undivided attention to Jean and the conversation she led, apparently, but every movement and expression of Ruth was garnered, incidentally. She fitted so harmoniously into the environment of her home; into the details of the artistically embellished homestead and the gentle refinement of the pleasant household; into the roseate radiance diffused from the shaded candles in the

tall candelabra and the rose-scented atmosphere of the place; and she was the fairest object of all the flower-decked domain.

She was such an unmitigated surprise, encountered so unexpectedly in those distant forests of pine and sand! He thrilled with silent exultation in that he had found her thus, in her youthful beauty and innocence, and as securely sheltered as the arbutus and jessamine adorning the placid bosom of the forest.

He recalled the story of "The Sleeping Princess," of which he was enamored in his more callow youth, and found in it an analogy to his discovery of Ruth. The forgotten castle, where the princess slept, was deep in the heart of a wood, and in the primeval woods he had found Ruth. How alien she had appeared to the life he had known out in the forest; but all incongruousness vanished when he had entered the gates which shut in Kissic-Dale. The green valley, the bridge-spanned brook, the groves and orchard, the leafy, vine-tendrilled woodland secluding "Loch-Lily," the artistic grounds encircling the imposing mansion with its wide verandas, massively colonnaded, and the life it sheltered, were a fit environment for her grace and loveliness.

The touch of age portrayed in every one of those details were "hall-marks" of the lineage and influence suited to the prediction of a final ideal in blood and heritage of charm; truly, she was a princess also by the right of her perfect beauty and inheritance of fair Kissic-Dale, that was more than a castle in the woods; it was a home where she reigned as a supreme idol. He was charmed with

her timid aloofness and the beauty of her eyes, that were as liquid violets scintillating with the dewy sparkle of ecstatic youth and anon pensive with a spiritual dreaminess that inflamed his heart with blissful desire, and sent electric thrills pulsing from heart to brain.

When the meal was ended and he had been conducted to the parlor, where he sat in company with Donald and Jean, Ruth's absence worried and depressed him unreasonably. To divert his thoughts of her, he studied the appointments of the room, and he was much impressed by the portrait of a young Highlander, picturesque, blonde and gay, wearing, with dashing air, the "Lincoln green and the tartan plaidie, the plumed bonnet," and irrepressible ringlets touching his shoulders lightly, flightily, as he seemed to be studying Philip with critical sang froid and snobbish contempt.

It might have been the undulating glass pendants which fringed the fixtures of the elaborate chandelier, or the swaying of the filmy lace curtains at the four tall windows, that at intervals he appeared to wink and grimace at him, as he sat formally erect, although sinking deeply into the yielding seat of a very sleek horsehair rocking-chair.

At such moments, Philip withdrew his eyes from the tantalizing portrait that he was scanning for some trace in its Old World lineaments of Ruth's perfect features; for he was convinced that it was an ancestor.

He was monosyllabic and almost silent with the speculative thoughts, the room and the absence of Ruth evoked. He was such a stranger to his present

environment, he felt as if glimpsing one when he glanced at his reflection in the huge mirror overtopping the marble mantel.

Finally, Donald arose and went in search of Ruth. He found her on the veranda, bathed in a silvery shaft of moonlight, which poured through a cleft in a bank of tall ferns and palms. The fragrant gloom of the dewy night had enamored her, and she started violently as he approached.

"It is like a funeral in the parlor, Ruth; come in and play for us," he said, persuasively. Ruth smiled, but remained seated.

"Oh, do come!" he insisted more entreatingly.

"I had rather not, Donald," she answered, evasively. "Aunt Jean will play for you."

"No, you must come," he persisted. "Phillips will appreciate it so much."

She arose then, and placed her hand upon his arm to impress the objection she was about to confide to him.

"Tell me truly, Donald, do you think I am capable of amusing or entertaining anyone who has seen and heard as much as Mr. Phillips, who has spent his life in the gay world of men and women, while I have known only the forest and a few friends who live most sedately?"

Donald laughed discreditingly and seized her hand to lead her into the parlor. She held back firmly.

"You know I am ignorant, Donald, and have no more experience of the world than if I had been reared in a convent; you said that to Aunt Jean only last evening; so please excuse me, and I will go to my room like a sensible child, and leave the enter-

tainment of guests to my elders," she pleaded earnestly.

"Oh, what a precocious child it is!" Donald exclaimed derisively. "Knows when it should go to its room, efface itself and subdue curiosity."

She drew her hand from his, gently, but firmly.

"You are quite capable of entertaining Phillips," Donald assured her, with a cynicism for which he instantly despised himself; the next moment he was gentle and penitent. "I would tell you if you were not. I have seen something of the world also, and I am sincerely your friend and would not flatter you vainly."

She went with him then, and he smiled critically when she entered with a conscious poise of her head and a stately step quite foreign to her usually girlish behavior.

Bravely she seated herself at the piano and placed her music when Donald had opened the instrument. It was a "grand," a costly gift to Jean when she was almost as young as her timid niece. It fronted the two eastern windows, and asserted itself prominently, evincing thus the esteem it had commanded from the music-loving household; that it was a much-appreciated object, a throne upon which was pedestaled all the goddesses of music. In the evocative depths of its melodious bosom, Caliope, Melphomene, Polymnia, Terpsichore, Thalia and Urania abided actively; sirens to lead astraying into Lethe, burdens of care it were not wise to harbor on a weary mind which preferred to glow with idealistic emotions.

Although Ruth avoided the glances of the stranger

to the home circle, she was distressingly aware of his furtive espionage and intense alertness, veiled by an affable demeanor toward Jean.

Her cheeks burned and her pulses throbbed with an unfamiliar embarrassment and acute consciousness of his fascinating personality. When her fingers evoked a prelude to one of Mendelssohn's compositions, she found composure in its exulting, uplifting chords; and for an hour she played unweariedly. She had been well trained in music, and she chose the most ponderous in her repertoire of classical selections. The intricate and soul-inspiring creations of Listz, of Schuman, and other divinely inspired artists.

She was fatigued and listless when at last Donald permitted her to leave the instrument. She escaped to the veranda and bathed her burning cheeks in the cool foliage of the potted plants yet limpid from their vesper sprinkling.

From that retreat, she heard Jean at the piano and Donald piping his wild airs on the flute. An ominous silence was broken by Jean's experimenting dancing measures; and Donald appeared in the doorway, searching the shadows to find her. He called imperatively: "You are wanted in the parlor, Ruth!" and retreated ere she could reply.

As she entered the room, in response to his summons, he seized her hand and his feet began marking time with the music, which throbbed rhythmic measures to set his feet twinkling merrily.

Ruth tried to resist dancing with him and her eyes sought Jean appealingly; but Jean enjoyed a romp and the exuberant spirits of youth. Often in the

past winter, to enliven long evenings gloomed with depressing weather, she had played for Donald and Ruth to dance and skip like care-free children, while Donald learned Ruth the various dances he had become familiar with in the dancing schools at the University; for Donald danced enthusiastically. It was an impulse of his temperament rather than a passion, which found vent in the graceful evolutions. He would have found congenial expression in the wild abandon of the Highland Walloch, in which he could have shuffled off in hilarious gayety the torrential exuberance that infrequently surcharged his studious behavior, by the sluice-way of a terpsichorean revel; thus portraying the opposite traits of his character and incompatible inheritances.

Edwin Phillips smilingly retreated to a position near the piano and viewed their whirling movements with amused interest. He was beyond the range of the cynical eyes of the painted young Highlander, whose vision appeared to embrace with equal cynicism the winding figures circling the restricted spaces of yielding Brussels carpet which spread the floor with abnormal bouquets of flowers and Arabesque designs in weaving.

From waltz to galop, to schottische, to quickstep and polka, Jean led them, tirelessly, until Ruth broke away from Donald and fled to the most secluded window, flushed with fatigue and excitement.

Donald barely drew a panting breath, but with the same gay mien he posed by Jean and sang lustily, with expressive voice, some topical songs current in his college community the previous year; then, with

sentiment and emotion, he sang "Annie Laurie," "My Home Is in the Highlands, My Home Is Not Here," "We'd Better Bide Awee," and "The Blue Bells of Scotland." Finally, in compliment to his guest, he sang "Ho, for Carolina," and "The Old North State Forever."

When he ceased to sing, Edwin declared the necessity of his taking leave, and Donald went in search of Tony, the stable boy, as Jean left the room to prepare a hamper for Jennie and her children.

Ruth, leaning from the distant window, enjoying the mystic spell of lunar light upon lawn and orchard, sat erect and tremulous as Edwin approached her retreat and expressed his appreciation of the evening's hospitality in complimentary phrases.

His pointedly seeking her, and the knowledge that besides themselves the room was empty, dismayed her. She had purposely screened herself with the window drapery, deprecating his glances, which puzzled and disturbed her so unusually. She sat stiffly upright in her chair, the personification of prim reserve and formal dignity, as with downcast eyes she listened to his fluent phrases.

"We have been rather gay and boisterous, do you not think so?" she deprecated in her most sedate voice.

"Indeed, no," he disclaimed with positive negative. "It has been a most perfect and delightful evening."

"Donald is so energetic and impulsive—at times," she explained with flaming cheeks, "but generally he is quite sober in his behavior. You have seen him in

his most frolicsome mood, I assure you, Mr. Phillips."

Edwin bowed his head, non-committally.

"He reminds me of some people Mrs. Barnard knew; a sect called Quakers," she proceeded, with deepening blushes.

He smiled as he recalled Donald's terpsichorean feats and musical achievements in comparison with the saintly and subdued demeanor proverbially ascribed to the Society of Friends.

"He is so impulsive in some of his moods and so quiet in others," she said, aghast at her strange inanity, as the reddest of roses bloomed upon her cheeks and tears of a helpless dismay shrouded her vision with a limpid veil. "He is generally the quietest person I ever knew," she concluded with an expiring effort. Oh, why did they leave her as sole entertainer of the difficult guest! She realized the dreadful task as excruciatingly cruel and embarrassing. She had conversed heedlessly; silence was too awful, too disconcerting to bear for a moment.

"Those people, you know, I suppose, move and speak at the dictates of an influence they call a spirit. Did you ever meet with any of them?" she queried with wistful desperation.

"No, but I have known people who professed to have seen the Myths, personally," he replied, studying her seriously.

"Are they Myths?" she questioned in wide-eyed amazement.

"Do you know anything of people beyond this vicinity?" he counter-questioned, earnestly.

"No, or at least, hardly anything. I have been

with Aunt Jean when she has gone to visit her Archie's people beyond the State and county line. You might think the distance quite insignificant, but to me it seemed great; a few times I have gone with Uncle Angus to see my mother's relatives. They, too, live in another county, but those counties are very much like this vicinity, all pines and sand and cotton."

He listened with keen interest and regarded her with half-veiled eyes glowing with admiration.

"I should enjoy seeing a country where great forests were like the woods down by 'Loch-Lily,'" she concluded, hardily.

The dreaded silence fell, ominously; she breathed upon its turbulent repose, a tremulously gasped sigh of helplessness; she fluttered in ignominious defeat in conversational effort. She leaned upon the low window sill that the night breeze might fan her with its perfumed breath; she was so warm and uncomfortable. It toyed with her flowing hair and threw a few of its golden strands upon his shoulders as he, too, leaned forward and found interest in the landscape swept with lunar radiance.

"Some day you will see things you desire to view, but you will not be more blessed or happier," he prophesied; and his tone was tinged with sadness.

In the silence she was incapable of ending other tears than the limpid mist of nervousness were clamoring at the bulwark of her composure with strangling sensations.

He bent his head low and smiled with infinite pathos, as his eyes probed deep into her heart and

emotions. "In seeing you," he affirmed, "all worlds are discovered."

Footsteps approached, accompanied by a silken rustle. He stood erect and met Jean with a smile as she entered. "I will now say good night, Mrs. MacEarchan," he said, with formal effusiveness. "I extend sincere thanks for a very pleasant evening." He bowed, standing in the doorway, and included Ruth in the parting.

"Such a nice young man!" Jean declared when he had gone and his voice could be heard hailing Donald at the distant gate. "Such a very nice young man," she repeated as she moved to an open window to view his departure; and Ruth escaped from the room unobserved.

As Edwin drove along the white sanded way to the camp, spanning bright spaces and shadows alternately, he reviewed the events of the evening with concern. In doing so, the memory of a play he had witnessed many years previously intruded upon his thoughts. The play had been "Pygmalion and Galatea," and the heroine's artless assertion of having been born yesterday he applied, consonantly, it seemed to him, to Ruth's innocence and inexperience.

Ruth, kneeling by her bed, essayed vainly to formulate an evening petition; instead, she buried her hot face in the cool depths of the white bed and sobbed tempestuously. She smothered her secret sorrow, lest Jean should hear and come to investigate the heartbroken weeping; and she knew no explanation of her hysterical behavior. Jean went smiling and peaceful to a grateful repose and

dreamless slumber. It had been a charming day and a lovely evening, and her emotions were unusually elate and pleasant.

Donald found thorns bristling his pillow and rest a farce mocked by restlessness. His important future and illimitable ambitions afforded no food for his turbulent reveries as the night rolled ponderously its dragging cycle.

CHAPTER VII.

KISSIC-DALE'S ROSES—WHERE THE BROOK AND RIVER MEET—DONALD'S DEPARTURE.

"I was in the lane
 On a day when Love came by,
 And was fain
 To elude him, but the pain
 Of his pleadings made me sigh.
 Who is he?
 When I met him I was free,
 Now I tremble, all afraid. . . ."

—Selected.

Saturday afternoon, a week later than the date of Jean's May-day outing, the month stood crowned as if for an annual festival in reverence to the goddess Flora," whose flower-petalled sandals must press full-blown blossoms.

At Kissic-Dale, roses were blooming in extravagant profusion. They embowered trellises, climbed the trees, wreathed the fences and covered great,

clipped bushes which adorned the verdant lawn; in those initial days of their carnival time they generously flaunted to the flaming sunlight their luscious color and clouds of perfume. From the windows of the mansion and the shaded expanse of broad verandas, they met the vision as a "garden of Paradise."

Withal, though, they were confronted with many formidable rivals. Approaches to some of the trellised pagodas and embowered garden seats were sanded white lanes, hedged by waxy, ineffably fragrant Cape jessamine; and hedges of syringas and Sweet Betsey bushes shut off the view of the vegetable garden and the poultry quarters in one direction. Tall spruce pines and evergreens posed monumentally upon the lawn, and shining-leaved magnolias, whose upper branches nodded to one peering from the restful seclusion of the second story verandas.

The noon hours brooded languorously, and a throbbing, white sun poised deliberately in the sky, as if loath to pass from the scenes Summer had decked so lavishly; and it dallied tardily in the illimitable spaces between the sapphire heavens and the emerald earth, beaming in torridical felicity.

From abroad, out in the glowing radiance of the bright day, the family at Kissic-Dale was invisible; but there was girlish mirth and a murmur of voices, first in Ruth's room, west of the parlor, whose windows overlooked an old-fashioned rear lawn, and the rose garden, where magnolias flourished phenomenally and standard roses were cultivated with patience and skill that ensured success. Anon, the

voices migrated to the parlor, whose windows were open to admit the scented breeze, which swept in from the redolent surroundings. x

Jean came out into the hall and glanced up the broad stairway. "Donald, will you not come down for a moment?" she called.

Donald responded by descending the stairway, his gray eyes clouded with introspective thought.

Jean rebuked his absent-minded acquiescence, his mechanical obedience and haste.

"Studying at mid-day in this warm, enervating weather, Donald?"

"Yes," he admitted with a deprecatory smile. "Better that than to be asleep. The somnolence of the day demands something to keep one awake, do you not think so?"

"And I have disturbed you for such a vain thing, perhaps," Jean said, leading the way into the parlor.

"Oh, that is all right!" he returned genially. "We are going fishing anyway, are we not?"

"When it is a mite cooler, but I—er—I wished to consult you in regard to Ruth's new dresses," Jean explained.

"Ruth's dresses?" he queried, bashfully.

"Yes," Jean farther explained, as she entered the parlor. "It is the box of dresses that came yesterday. I employed Mrs. Barnard to select them for her. You know her taste is good, generally, but—but behold the selection!" Jean spread her hands ruefully. "I sent her Ruth's latest photograph and her exact measure; I also mentioned Ruth's extraordinary growth the past year, for I was afraid she

would not realize her height and the dresses would be too short—but I did not bargain for this!”

Her dismay was too sincere not to enlist his interest. Ruth emitted a merry peal of laughter that echoed throughout the halls and the spacious rooms as if the imp of mirth had invaded a stately sanctuary. Donald leaned against the door-jamb and was discreetly non-committal. Jean's visible concern and Ruth's irrepressible mirth puzzled him as much as Ruth's extraordinary appearance astonished and awed him into an uncomfortable relation to his former pupil.

For school was finished; never again would they journey together to and from the white schoolhouse in the eastern forest; never again gather around the evening lamp for study and instruction; never again the golden days that had meant so much to him, but for her so little, he was fearful. All day he had been schooling himself, diving into subjects that would re-awaken dying ambition and give him strength to plunge into the dreary future. From troubled depths he forced his mind to reflect in what way Mrs. Barnard's judgment had erred and to probe for Jean's motive in consulting him on such a wildly dense subject as feminine attire.

Ruth stood flutteringly where she could view her full length reflection in the mantel mirror. She faced herself with a preening pose, then turned and took a peep over her shoulder. She stepped forward experimentally; a billowy train followed her wary movements. She paused in statuesque dismay, dimpling and smiling with the novel amusement of wearing a real train.

"Oh, Donald, behold me!" she cried, with an assumed quiver in her tones. She spread her hands tragically, her eyes danced gleefully. Jean, scanning her through polished lenses, sighed profoundly.

And Donald beheld, silently, her sylph-like form arrayed in a diaphanous raiment which swept the floor with cascades of airy flounces. An elaborate corsage and lace-befrilled sleeves, completed a toilet of festive or formal appearance that accentuated the height and litheness of her slender figure then in the transitory stage of rapid growth, peculiar to her years.

Her shining hair done *a la mode Psyche*, also assisted the delusion of stateliness and astonished Donald in greater degree than the costume's transfiguring influence, and he gloomed speechlessly in the doorway.

"Could you not give me some ideas in regard to the management of a train?" she appealed to him, gaily. "It is a mystery to me how anyone carries about with them such an ungainly quantity of material." She moved her feet painstakingly, preening her head to note the undulations of the courtly train.

"I am really afraid, Auntie, I shall be a living, practical illustration of the proverb you used to write in my copy-books; you remember, dearie, 'Pride goes before a fall.' Oh, how many times I have written that sentence, never dreaming that some day I should be an object lesson for the moral it taught so persistently."

Jean solemnly ignored her gay persiflage. "You will certainly have to be more careful in your move-

ments when you wear those dresses," she said, positively. "Trains must be very fashionable now; I told Mrs. Barnard to select the latest styles. You know your uncle wishes you to be up to date in style of dress, but these, it seems to me, are extreme in the matter of length, do you not think so, Donald?"

"There are an even half dozen of them," Ruth said, with sighing implicitness, but her dancing eyes evinced duplicity. "Such pretty dresses, too; too pretty for the country and such a young girl, don't you think so, Donald?"

Donald lifted his eyes from the floor that he had appeared to be studying. Bravely he faced the radiant vision of Ruth, which dazzled him with its overmastering charm; then he spoke indifferently: "I am rather obtuse on feminine styles of dress, but it strikes me that such toilets are designed for special functions."

"Oh, Donald! And did the pretty girls you danced with at those balls wear dresses such as this?" Ruth questioned with the first serious word she had uttered. "No wonder you are so fond of dancing! How it must have bored you to dance with me last Winter, after those fine times with the girls you must have admired, or at least their dresses. I think this very pretty, indeed, if it was worn by a grown-up girl."

"You must wear them, anyway," Jean said musingly. "We are so far from everything, and they are here and ready made, to say nothing of the cost and trouble of acquiring them. I am sorry you have no present occasion for such artistic costuming, but you can wear them for your own advantage

in culture and for the pleasure and uplifting of the home; here at least we all will admire your grandeur and bask in its refulgence."

She bent her spectacled gaze upon the dress. "It is French organdy, a very beautiful material, but very fragile," she concluded critically.

"Dear Auntie," Ruth said, in her gentlest, most caressing manner, "I appreciate the nice things immensely, although they must be rather premature for a girl like me, are they not, dearie? I shall feel that I am aping grown-up people, but you will understand, and I will explain to Mama's people." She smiled encouragingly; the dresses had been a real shock to their Puritanical and conservative way of regarding dress.

On the way to Loch-Lily, where Donald was to gratify an expressed desire to angle before leaving Kissic-Dale, he said to Jean, keeping his eyes strictly upon the distance:

"Let Ruth go with me to Commencement? There she will have full opportunity to wear her dresses, and I can arrange the trip nicely. Mrs. Gorman, the wife of my favorite professor, would be delighted to receive Ruth and chaperon her to the different functions, where she would be immensely admired, I am sure."

The color deepened painfully on his fair countenance as he queried: "Do you realize that she is extremely beautiful and is wasting her charms on desert air?"

"At times I do, Donald," Jean replied, as if she regretted the dower of charms bestowed upon her beloved charge. "And because she is so innocent of

the fact, and so inexperienced, I cannot let her go to Commencement, much as I appreciate your kindness in proposing the pleasure for my desolate, little bairnie," she concluded, gratefully.

"You should put her in college, at once," Donald said harshly, "and let her know the world and be capable of judging for herself. As it is, though a great girl, almost grown, she is more ignorant of some things than many infants of ten years of age! How old did you say she was?"

Jean had not said a word relative to Ruth's age, but she answered meekly, feeling the friendly reproach: "Seventeen next October. Oh, when did she attain all those years? It seems but yesterday she was such a tiny, fairy-like baby girl."

Jean sighed regretfully and followed Donald through the turnstile. Iphogenia and Mary Graham had outdistanced them so far as to be invisible in the brush. Jean quickened her steps, but Donald walked deliberately, and as deliberately entreated her: "You should send Ruth to college."

"Oh, but she will not go!" Jean declared, with a note of triumph.

"You should induce her to do so," he insisted, sternly.

"Yes, but not this year, Donald. It seems that I could not bear the parting just now. She is all I have, you know."

She was so touched, he desisted, with a frown of gloom and fell silent, moodily reticent, his lips pressed firmly, pathetically.

Ruth, left alone, changed her dress, replacing the white gown with a sweet thing in colored organdy,

which so charmed her she ran down the veranda to Dicey, who was baking in the kitchen. Dicey was properly amazed and complimentary.

"Shore, it is a purty thing, but ain't it mighty long? Seems like you be gwine step right on de carpet," she commented with grunts and sighs.

Ruth laughed merrily, not having the slightest conception of the meaning of Dicey's remarks. She enjoyed the dress from an artistic standpoint acutely; the colors blended so harmoniously; it was a sheer organdy, with a purplish gray ground, spangled with large pinkish flowers, and she had enhanced its quaint loveliness by encircling her waist with a broad pink sash and fastening a butterfly bow of pink ribbon in the bright coils of her hair. She noted the physical details of pink cheeks and purplish eyes and the rich touch attained from the golden sheen of her hair, and folded each into a musing scheme of color which pleased her artistic taste in that no harsh note was visible in her entire appearance.

When she had exhausted interest in the new finery she tried some music Mrs. Barnard had enclosed in the box. She had declined the trip to Loch Lily for that especial purpose, never divining that in abiding at home she had wounded Donald keenly. For more than an hour she explored the eloquent pages by sight and sound, gleaning the choicest bits of sentiment and melody.

She left the piano finally, and sat in the window opening upon the veranda, listlessly viewing with appreciative but calm vision the familiar splendor of Summer's magnificence; but the roses had

bloomed just as gorgeously every year of her care-free life, the magnolias had been emblazoned with the great petalled blossoms, the Sweet Betseys, just as faintly sweet, the grass as green and velvety, the potted palms as stately and tropical. She had never seen any place more pretentious than her home, she held no unsatisfied longings or aspirations.

The slumberous afternoon was restfully quiet; no one moved about the house. Leo slept upon the veranda steps, Dicey, in the distance, droned a hymn as she proceeded with her cooking for the ensuing Sabbath. The unusual quietude was impressive; it seemed a material quality, claspings in its couchant thrall, the dozing and absent life went to echo in the silent spaces. The pigeons smote its resonant surface with silvery whiffings of their white and dove-gray wings, the clock in the hall accentuated its reign with emphatic strokes of its ponderous pendulum, and Ruth sat a long while in a motionless attitude.

At last she stirred restively and centered her gaze beyond the tree-shadowed lawn, where the world basked in a flaming effulgence of mid-afternoon sunlight. Thus until the silence and the sibilant somnolence was cleft by a riterello, clear-toned in its warbling, trilling, bubbling challenge to the warmth and peace of the Summertide upon which was flung in musical rills a bursting heart of liquid melody. Ruth sprang up, joyously alert, her heart athrill with glad welcome, her eyes searching the pyramidal magnolias.

"He had come again! The dear, darling little

songster, the embodiment of the joy and enchantment of the beauteous Summer day!"

But was it the same? "There are no birds in last year's nest," Jean had written, also, in her copy-books. It sang so much as he had done, but would he sing those same fresh, vibrant notes two seasons in succession? Had he weathered storms and stress of existence to return in all his pristine joyousness? What a pean of praise and alleluia of thanksgiving had been his salutation of blossom and sunshine, of warmth and fragrance, which charmed for a moment his exuberant fancy!

Ruth's fancy soon turned again to musical measures, and, resuming her seat at the piano, she played Hungarian dances and tripping melodies as blithely as the mocking-bird had sung in the magnolia.

Someone hailed her at the open window. She glanced over her shoulder a startled inquiry into the sound of a voice and met the smiling greeting of Edwin Phillips.

"Did I frighten you? I am sorry, but I could attract no attention otherwise."

She arose, diffident and blushing, and greeted him with evident constraint.

"I called to bid Mr. MacKethan farewell. He leaves to-morrow, does he not?" he explained, standing aloof from the window, bare-headed and handsome.

"Yes, in the morning," she replied in a lowered voice, denoting her timidity. She resumed her seat on the piano stool; she dared not move to any other position. She could laugh and pose in trailing garments and display the mature arrangement of her

hair in the presence of the household, but facing a stranger so attired, robbed her of all composure and presence of mind for the moment.

"May I not wait for Mr. MacKethan?" he suggested, tentatively.

She arose again, convicted of unpardonable rudeness. The voluminous folds of her lengthy skirts twined about her, impedingly.

"Will you come in and be seated?" she managed to articulate, blushing furiously. He stepped across the low window-sill and entered the parlor. Then he seated himself deliberately quite near the window.

"Donald is down at Loch-Lily, fishing; so is Aunt Jean and Mary," she informed him, and hoped he would propose joining them.

"I wish them luck. It is a fine day for such sport," he responded formally.

With supreme effort she continued to converse, spasmodically. She asked for news of Mrs. Stephenson and the children, and quizzed him in regard to the flora in the forests he rode over daily.

He was politely responsive, but withal there fell speechless periods, in which her mind seethed with bashful confusion and her self-consciousness became a poignant pain.

That his melting glances mirrored passions hitherto a stranger to her youth she realized vaguely, but she did not assign them to the sublime category of Love, as pictured in the romances she had read with the credulous wonder with which she had received the improbable myths of the gods. To grasp such a transcendental emotion and embody it in the familiar atmosphere of Kissic-Dale would have

seemed to her guileless intuition a blasphemous sacrilege.

"Suppose we have some music or go out among the roses?" he requested finally, when her constraint and evident discomfort could no longer be hidden by their desultory remarks.

She drooped her eyes secretively, her dark lashes sweeping her scorching cheeks. The climax of her woes had fallen mercilessly upon her.

"What is troubling you?" he queried solicitously. "Had you rather that I did not wait for Mac-Kethan?"

"Oh, no! You must wait! He would be so disappointed. I—I—will show you the roses if you will let me explain. Do you observe that I do not appear natural? Would you believe that I am wearing my own dress?" she appealed, desperately. He smiled, as if some hidden knowledge elated him.

"I refuse to commit myself upon the subject farther than to say I think you very charming, and all that one could desire in loveliness and appearance."

"You do not say that in sincerity, for you know I am a fright and am childishly aping a grown-up person," she said reproachfully. He bore the reproach so meekly she was touched with a sudden repentance.

"I must explain," she persisted, "why I look so ridiculous."

"Well," he said, with an air of repressed amusement; and she related the true story of the box of much-needed dresses which had proven so disconcerting to Jean. Her eyes sparkled with tears of nervousness.

"It was fun, though, before you came; now it seems so ridiculous wearing this awful dress," she remarked with a bit of her quaintly precocious wisdom that he had found so irresistible.

"Get your hat and show me the flowers," he commanded, with a voice blended in caress and persuasion. She arose then, and choosing her steps with care, shrank, mentally, into a wisp, as she swept out of the room, the coquettish train swishing upon the carpet with defiant frou-frou.

"Do you know that Dicey says I look as if I was stepping upon a carpet, dressed in this fashion," Ruth said to him as they descended to the lawn.

"Did Dicey say that, sure? What did she mean by such a remark?" he quizzed her, his eyes dancing with amusement.

"I do not know, I am sure. It was one of her figurative speeches, I suppose. She thought me so unfamiliar looking. It is a wonder you knew me, having seen so very little of me, only once, you know."

"But I did know you the moment I found you," he said, so emphatically that she blushed and led the way, primly silent and timidly bashful.

Out in the sunshine and the sweet shadows, with her toilet explained and her mind relieved upon that point, she was more self-poised and reliant. Finally, after long dallyings by peculiarly interesting shrub or flower, they stood by a little dwarfed pine overshadowed by a symmetrical maple tree. The quaint, sanded path leading from the front lawn to that locality was hedged with a squat, straggly shrub, whose branches drooped, not ungracefully.

"Aunt Jean prizes this spot more than even her rose garden or any other place on the lawn. This is her Scotland, her 'ain countrie.' This little pine came direct from Scotland, from the Highlands, in the lifetime of her own grandfather, and the broom, too, and the heather." She stroked the pine and then the broom, as she mentioned their endearing value.

"Do you know anything of Scotland? We are Scotch, as you may know, and we love that country dearly. It is rather cold there, I infer, for they planted this maple to screen the pine and broom from the midsummer sun. Soon the broom will be in bloom, bearing great spikes of yellow blossoms. You might think them ugly, but to us they are always beautiful, because they grow upon the Scottish moors. Do you understand?"

He bowed affirmatively, happy to listen, when at last she had been induced to chatter. In the rose garden she was again eloquent in commending an old sun-dial and a dwarfish rose-tree, also said to have been imported from Scotland.

He was so enthused with the beauty and the fragrance of the luscious roses, he induced her to tarry indefinitely. They loitered beneath the great sheltering wings of a tall magnolia and viewed the western landscape, which included the dove-cote, the vineyard, and the forest-crowned hill, whose declivity was covered with oak, hickory and maple, and its crest with tall, waving pines, whose green-plumed polls glistened as they braved the full glare of the western sun. As their acquaintance progressed, she was deeply impressed with his gentleness and

gallantry; peculiarly so when he carefully disentangled a rose spray which had clutched with tenacious thorns the fragile flouncing of her ungainly dress.

Also he caressed the roses so daintily and held aloof from the sensitive magnolia blossoms that a warm breath would tarnish irreparably. She was conscious of an increasing admiration, and felt an uplifting pleasure in his society which enhanced life, as flowers give a refined note to the landscape.

They returned to the house when the sun was dipping into the pine-cushioned western hills, and paused on the central steps of the veranda, to wait for the fishing party, then expected, to return. Ruth laid aside her hat and leaned against a column restfully, when they had seated themselves on the broad white steps. He sat on the step below her position, and made desultory remarks upon the weather so very perfect, the roses so lovely, and the green and white semblance of the remote forest. It was so easy to be optimistic and happy in that Edenic environment, arched by a smiling sky, the senses lulled by languorous breezes.

"I have seen flowers all my life and have known many pleasant places, but never such flowers or such a home as Kissic-Dale," he affirmed, breaking a silence during which he had been thoughtful and serious.

"You flatter the old home, surely, but to me, who have always known and loved it, it seems pleasant and adorable," Ruth rejoined amiably. He fell silent again, his thoughts speculative, his heart acutely sensitive to the charm of the secluded domain and the beauty of its youthful heiress.

"See! There comes the absent ones!" Ruth exclaimed presently. "They seem to be fatigued. Perhaps they had no luck, after their heroic courage in going down there this warm afternoon."

Along the way from the spring and the vicinity below it came Jean and Donald, followed by Mary Graham and the maid. The latter bore spoils to prove that the venture had not been in vain. They approached, smiling upon the handsome couple upon the broad steps, and Edwin ran down to assist Jean's ascent; but she sank upon the lowest step and motioned him to a seat beside her.

"Come sit with me, Donald," Ruth invited, as Donald stood aloof, hesitating whether to enter by that route or by a more indirect way to the comfort of the veranda. He obediently did as she requested; his lips were smiling, but the shadow of a frown gloomed his expression.

"You would have been *de trop* down there; Aunt Jean has a habit of monopolizing Mr. Phillips, you know. He has been waiting a long time, and once he spoke of going without seeing you, but he has waited to bid you goodby. It is so sad you are going away! How much we shall miss you, especially Aunt Jean, who loves company more than any of us. I am just beginning to realize that we are to give you up. It will be very lonely here without you, Donald."

The frown deepened on Donald's brow, but he said lightly: "You will survive my absence, no doubt," and his eyes fell upon the dark, sleek head of Edwin Phillips exchanging amenities with Jean. Later he followed his acquaintance to the gate and

laid his arm affectionately about his shoulders in the moment of parting; and he promised cordially to deliver messages to any acquaintance of Phillips he might chance to meet during the Commencement season.

He departed from Kissic-Dale quite early the next morning while the birds were chanting their matin songs and the sun was sipping mists from the hearts of the roses. He departed in great state, amid the openly expressed regrets of the entire household. David in his grandest raiment, frock coat and tall beaver hat, was to drive him to a distant church, where his mother, by pre-arrangement, would meet him and convey him home. He gazed backward until a turn of the avenue hid from his clinging vision Ruth, with streaming eyes, silhouetted against the summer roses. Then his head drooped dejectedly, pain clouded his sad eyes and a hungering despair raged in his heart as he set his face firmly up the lonely heights of a strenuous future.

BOOK II.

SUMMER.

“So the blue, blue skies, who shall boast of them,
 Though fair as day?

And the green, green grasses, make the most of them,
 They will not stay.”

—Selected.

CHAPTER I.

A NIGHT IN JUNE—THE HARVEST MOON—CUPID'S COURT.

“There is no star that rises white
To tiptoe down the deep of dusk,
Sweet as the moony nymphs of Night,
With lips of musk. . . .”

“Oh, my heart's sunrise hope is sweeter than rest!
Better than peace is Love!”

“And life to me means Love!
And love means you!”

—Selected.

June was languishing in the last days of her flower-crowned reign; torridial temperature prevailed. The fields of golden grain had been harvested, and the yellow sheafs dotted distant slopes as if Ceres had pitched her tent there and gathered around her an abundance for distribution. Green, growing crops clothed the fields, where young corn waved infantile blades and cotton was acquiring leaf and foliage. The days were strenuous with growth, the nights prophetic of fruitfulness, as the posy-crowned month lapsed into the fervent sway of fiery-hearted July.

A full month had gone by since Donald had left Kissic-Dale, and only the hardiest roses braved the deepening intensity of the sun's rays, impregnating the subject earth with their voluptuous influence, impelling to fruition the tropical white lily, the riotous honeysuckle and hothouse products which had spent the winter under glass.

In such an ardent atmosphere, the most phlegmatic mind is influenced and life assumes a fuller meaning; the emotions are quickened to the least touch of sentiment and romance.

Ruth had, but a day or two previous, returned in company with her uncle, Angus Bethune, from a tour of visits to her mother's people. She had enjoyed the visit more than any previous one. Her cousins lived on large plantations and were very pleasant and prosperous people living in good neighborhoods, populated mostly with cultured Scotch, who were very congenial with each other. X

Allen MacRea had been a college mate and lifelong friend of Angus, and Jean, knowing that he would be at Kissic-Dale to meet his friend, had invited Edwin to supper and to spend the evening. She had made a feast in their honor, and was thoroughly enjoying having Ruth at home and guests that were congenial.

Her friendship for Edwin Phillips had flourished as the green bay-tree while Ruth was away; and she had insisted that he should come over and meet Angus and Allen MacRea. It was the first glimpse Edwin had had of Ruth in several weeks, and the weeks of her absence had seemed months of loneliness and suspense.

Twilight had descended gently but effectively; rose tints melting into violet, which faded into an unstable gray mist, that early resolved into Egyptian dusk, when the stars stood revealed upon the stage of Night, silhouetted by the dark panoply of the invisible sky; great golden stars flaming with the fervor of the day's caloric atmosphere.

In the total eclipse of any adequate luminary, Edwin sat with Jean where the light from the hall flowed out across the veranda and pierced the gloom beyond its flower-banked spaces. Not alone had his persistent visits to her in the lonely days subsequent to the departure of Ruth and Donald endeared his presence, but far back in antebellum days she had been a student at a famous college in the Piedmont Hills, and his sister had but recently left the same school. This furnished food for much conversation between them, for he was familiar with the dear old scenes, and could inform her of modern life in the places sacred to her own gilded youth.

Upon that subject, of course, Ruth was wholly ignorant, so she sat beyond the circle of light, her form dimly outlined in the semi-dusk. She knew that it was a transitory eclipse of light, that the ebonized dusk would give place later to a spectacular moonrise, so when a silvery light, elusive, indistinct, dawned on the eastern horizon, she arose quietly and slipped away to the southern point of the veranda to witness, silent and alone, the belated appearance of the harvest moon.

She found a seat where she could command the east with a clear vision, and she searched the faint glow with interest as it gradually brightened until

objects stood forth from the shroud of darkness, dimly revealed as phantoms of the weird thrall of night, aloof, unreal from their every-day appearance. Soon a great red sphere arose boldly, from a misty depth, and swung "like a rick on fire" above the horizon.

The pigeons cooed drowsily in the distant cote; sheep bells tinkled in the remote fold; the mocking-birds trilled a slumberous serenade in the leafy orchard; the foliage rustled in the strengthening zephyrs; the forest glittered like a silver sea in shrilling unrest as the glowing orb poised tentatively and stared at the sentient world stolidly from its sequestered realm, expressing its importance as a matchless mechanism of Omnipotence.

Ruth viewed the miracle of its ascent with a sensitive conception of its celestial origin, its awe-inspiring grandeur and effulgence; and in spirit she worshipped the power which had created it and the life of the world it irradiated with its supernal loveliness.

A surge of spirituality uprose in her heart to meet its mysterious enchantment; that phase of her soul which had so impressed Jean in her childhood, when she had discovered her lying in the clover, out in the orchard, where blue-bells shrilled their tiny notes to her attentive ear as she lay dreaming of other spheres, her eyes searching the vaulted dome of the summer sky, where fleecy clouds sailed upon the cerulean deep as ships upon the blue main; and the kittens might gambol around her, the pigeons flutter above her all unheeded, as she dreamed the dreams she was then incapable of interpreting.

Jean had often speculated as to what the final ideals of a nature so attuned might be, if there was an earthly fate that could satisfy its desires and fulfill its hopes after so much probing into what lay beyond the ken of mortal vision and knowledge.

Ruth's mood that night was intense in its longing for light upon sublunary subjects.

"Standing with reluctant feet, where the brook and river meet," the mystery and the burden of the miraculous transformation weighed upon her spirits, in alternate pain and pleasure, in blissful welcome and shrinking reluctance. She was but dimly conscious of the cause of her awakening to the fact that time and circumstances were impelling her into the ranks of those who are exposed to the love-tipped darts of the little god, Eros. The idea frightened her, yet held a peculiar fascination, which drew her mind to constant revery and analysis, and a blind groping for defence against the winged enemy to sane and dignified behavior.

One family of cousins had included Janet Bethune, an accomplished girl, just graduated, and more interesting and wonderful, engaged to be married the ensuing autumn. Her idyl of love and sweet anticipations had been an interesting and puzzling object lesson to Ruth's acquisitive mind, which discerned the mystic light irradiating their lovelorn countenances. Furthermore, that cousin Janet had been induced to accept some of the elaborate costumes selected by Mrs. Barnard, and in return had summoned her own dressmaker to construct for Ruth some pretty dresses more simple and suited to the simplicity of life in the pine-lands;

daintily fashioned, exquisitely fitting sheer white dresses, demi-trained and girlish, which revealed the slender height and willowy grace of Ruth's youthful form to perfection. That evening, at Kissic-Dale, she wore one of those dresses and maintained a new and interesting manner, the influence of ideas and impressions attained during the extended visit.

Circumstances favored the full indulgence of her personal inclinations and her mood of pensive seriousness, for Allen MacRea and Angus Bethune were absorbed in each other, and recollections of "Auld lang syne," and had early retired to the upper veranda for uninterrupted converse in the company of their pipes.

Mary Graham was a silent and respectful auditor to the conversation Jean led with Edwin, and Ruth was free to indulge in reverie that was assuming a habit with her in those days, into which books and study were not allowed to intrude. She was aroused from her dreaming thoughts by Edwin, who came leisurely up the veranda and found a seat where he could command a view of her features.

"We are to have some music, but Mrs. MacEarchan will play. I have managed that she should do so and not impose the task upon you. The gentlemen up stairs requested music, and her music will please them more than yours; men at their age are more sentimental than critical in their estimate of melody."

Ruth listened with a dreamy attention not easily seduced from the spell cast by the supreme moon-rise of the cycle of twelve the year embraced.

"You had rather remain out here, had you not?"

he questioned tentatively, when her glance returned to the glowing sphere of inane rotundity slowly climbing zenithward. "You appear interested in the moonrise."

"It is too lovely to be ignored, to be treated with indifference, and I have a habit of studying it," she declared gently.

He was not interested in the moon, save as it illumined her charms. His emotions were profound in their grateful ecstasy, and he fell silent to realize the bliss of the moment, while Ruth resumed her vigil of the lunar world, vaguely conscious that his presence enhanced the charm of the scene and vivified its poetical glamor.

Not aware of his intense expression, his enrapt study of her pose and countenance, she gazed wide-eyed, dreamily alert into the mist-phantomed, luminous east, where:

" Beyond the tranced shadows,
Low-brooding down long hills and fertile fields,
A deepening whiteness of pure cloud revealed
An eastern vestal burning silver bright;

And from its fires far-fanned with mystic might,
And voiceless, the enshrined queen concealed,
Flung straight and wide across the slumbering world,
A radiant arrow dipped in crystal light"

So still lay the scene, so still! At intervals the voice of Jean and her guests in the parlor intruded; the lilt of the mocking-birds, the cooings of the crowded dove-cote, the shrill bark of a silly terrier

at Sandy's cottage foolishly baying at the moon; and far away in the distant wheat fields, whip-poor-wills threshed their plaintive cries faintly as the effulgence deepened, until the moon posed effusively, a globe of intensely glowing, molten gold.

It poured level rays straight into Ruth's heeding eyes; it shimmered them upon her bright hair, her round throat, and arms bare to their elbows, and over her white dress, impressing its mystic touch on each detail with fairy magic; emphasizing her faultless beauty and pensive sweetness of expression.

The sorcerous quietude was finally broken when Jean began the prelude to the long-delayed music; then caressingly she evoked the chords of sentimental harmonies isolating them with a burst of melody which pierced the heart with a revealing ecstasy.

When Ruth at last resumed an attentive attitude toward her companion, her eyes, dazed by moonbeams, met his glance of ardent admiration, and she sat erect and assumed her forgotten dignity.

"Shall we go in now?" she proposed, wistfully.

"No, please; I prefer the moonlight and your company. Nothing else can afford me such exquisite pleasure," he demurred pleadingly.

"I think they will expect us," she faltered, uncomfortably.

"Please remain with me a while longer. I missed you so much while you were away and I have had so little opportunity of being with you. Never until then had time passed so tardily and drearily! Yet I did not dare to hope that you would give a thought to my loneliness or to myself, for that matter."

"I did not know that you were lonely," she said simply.

"Ah, if you could only know how lonely!" he exclaimed in a tone suggesting such depths of feeling she was smitten with an intangible contrition.

"I am sorry," she hastened to offer sympathy, "for I was having such a nice time with my Uncle Angus and my jolly cousins."

"How can I feel glad that you had such a gay time the while I was so lonely and miserable?" he returned, with a gallant lament that deepened her intangible sympathy. "I find it impossible to realize any joy in others monopolizing your thoughts and society," he asserted so gloomily, she essayed to lead him from a subject so surprisingly burdened with a seemingly persistent sadness by aloofly withdrawing from conversation.

Sounds of subdued revelry flowed through the open windows of the brightly lighted parlor. She could glimpse the benevolent and florid visage of her bachelor uncle wreathed in smiles and beaming enjoyment. Jean was singing an old-time favorite song. Sure of her audience, she sang with unwonted feeling and expression; and Ruth gave heed to the candid force of its sentiment and melody, compelling him to like behavior while the music throbbed in minor keys and mingled with the fragrance of golden-chaliced, incomparable lilies crowning a great green bed of foliage just beyond the columned veranda.

The night was a climax of Nature's divinest mood; so bright, so deliciously freighted with the breath of roses, magnolia and lily; its voices so at-

tuned to its mystic solitude; the cooing of pigeons, the slumberous notes of the mocking-birds, the fainting cries of the whip-poor-wills, the fairy-like charm of a night in June. Its sorcerous spell enmeshed Ruth's heart, so sensitized with a previous spiritual exaltation, in a blinding revelation of the ecstatic joys of an awakening in Cupid's rose-embowered court, its atmosphere pulsing with all the resplendent charm and enchantment haloing the dawn of the birthday of Love.

She was tremulously awed in the presence of something she did not comprehend; it was so different from an ordinary experience. The familiar notes of the time-honored piano, the dear voices so mirthful in the parlor, so magically translated into an orchestra of seductive strains impelling her irresistibly into the labyrinthean mazes of a strange and wonderful realm. His eyes had drawn hers with mesmeric force to meet his and read, not with understanding, but with reluctant subjection to their magnetism, the story of his besieging heart.

"I am afraid," she confided with an ungovernable impulse of the moment, and she shivered in a wave of nervousness she had not the strength to subdue. He smiled reassuringly and leaned that he might still further enfold her in the thrall of his wooing eyes. She drew away instinctively. "Why do you act so? It troubles me," she faltered, gaspingly. her extreme nervousness evinced in her difficult words.

He was rebuked, and sat erect, inhaling his suspended breathing deeply, but he did not trust himself with speech; rather he lifted his gaze moodily until it rested upon the distant forest, from which

came sibilant sighs of its solitude. In its depths, he knew, grew jessamine and arbutus, and—the cloying, ozonic mucous of the pines, which had decoyed him into that region and to his fate. Well he knew that his being there was proof of his subservience to a vain woman's whims and extravagant ambition. His heart filled with a rush of bitter perplexity as memory flashed panoramic views of his past and its entanglements.

He felt as if Maude, dancing through the swirling maze of society's realm, was treading his heart with iron-shod feet.

He threw such reflections from his mind and swiftly recalled himself to the present; his glance fell from the forest over lunar-lighted fields and terraced orchards until it rested again upon Ruth and noted her seraphic beauty and artless youth; then a pathos of tenderness surcharged his heart and regenerated his soul.

The divine light of a supreme adoration flamed upon Ruth as he leaned toward her. Tears sparkled on her dark lashes, her ruby lips quivered, timidly. She had propped her bare elbow upon the back of the seat and rested her cheek in the palm of her hand meditatively. Jean was singing "Danube River" with the fervor consonant with the romantic period familiar to her youth and to the callow manhood of Angus Bethune and Allen MacRea. A pathos of memory, of blasted hopes and heart-breaking disappointments weighted the wings of the melody voiced with the plaint of romantic renunciations; but Edwin Phillips heeded not its monition to desperate hopes born of infatuation.

"Never, no, never,
Can I forget that night in June."

the refrain burst forth, its volume argued with the basso of the men's deep voices and the faint, timid soprano of Mary Graham's effort. He leaned toward Ruth, his manner gentle, his voice deferential.

"I love you, Ruth. You are so beautiful! I should not, but I am helpless. Will you forgive me?"

There was a tremor in his voice and a sincerity in his tones that was convincing to her unsophisticated heart. His mood had enchained her interest and subdued her timidity.

"What is the love you mention?" she queried, solemnly, candidly curious, and seeking light for a dense ignorance.

"Love is life, Ruth," he whispered, tensely, with caressing intonation. "The only life of the soul!" he continued, speaking slowly as if the knowledge was new-born in his own heart, "and love to me means you, Ruth."

"Me?" she cried in surprise and positive negative.

He bowed his head affirmatively, humbly.

"I do not understand you; I do not know anything of a love such as you ascribe to me," she returned, drawing herself erect as the idea occurred to her that Jean would not approve of her listening to such vehement and personal utterances.

"No, you do not understand," he informed her with serious conviction, as he absorbed each detail of the beauty that was seducing his soul from the path of rectitude and honor; her clinging white dress

draping her slender form in sinuous folds, her cheeks like the heart of a blushing rose, her eyes like golden-tinged, purple pansies, her silken, golden hair, her snow-white purity of personality, aye, her white-robed innocence, the supreme note in her charms which enslaved him, irrevocably.

Ruth entwined her fingers interlacingly, the visible sign of her dismay and abashment in the thrall of such strange and translating emotions. She could not enter the parlor after that experience. She believed they would know her sensations instantly; watchful Mary Graham, loving Aunt Jean, astute and practical Uncle Angus.

"Will you not go into the parlor? I really think I ought not to linger here any longer," she said, dismissing him diplomatically.

There was such pressing appeal in her bravely spoken words, he was touched, and complied immediately. "Certainly, for I shall be leaving directly, but before I leave you, please assure me of your forgiveness if I have offended you."

"Offended me?" Ruth queried.

"Yes, for presuming to love you from the first moment I knew you. Loving you has not been an unalloyed happiness, but it has been the most wonderful and thrilling experience of my life."

She listened with confused mind and throbbing pulses, also with a guilty sense of unconventional behavior. "You will excuse me, please; I—I really do not know how to judge what you have been saying. I am so—so surprised," she faltered, her utterance choked with tears of fright and nervous timidity. She was so sincerely embarrassed, he hastened

his effort to leave the sorcerous scene, though he would fain have lingered in its enchantment indefinitely.

"Well, *au revoir*," he said, tenderly, his eyes caressing her bashful and disturbed countenance. "If fate is kind I shall see you often and teach you to regard me more kindly and with less fear of my presence, which has always so dismayed you. Shall we go in together?"

"No, please," she entreated. He left her abruptly and went directly to the parlor to complete his adieus.

In the parlor he was greeted with a full quartette of song. With beaming countenances, Jean and Mary, Angus and Allen, were singing the refrain of "Danube River," whose sentiment had enthused their hearts with memories which made them all young again for the fleeting moment. He waited unobtrusively near the door until the song was finished, after many repetitions of the chorus, when he bade each one good night.

As he traversed the length of the veranda as he was leaving, he discovered that Ruth had disappeared. He plucked a branch of geranium foliage which her bright head had touched as she had leaned against the column watching the moonrise, and thrust it through a buttonhole of his coat.

The moon was nearing its zenith when he arrived at the camp, but life still pulsed in the sordid hamlet of shanties, fully revealed by the vivid moonlight. His horse neighed greetingly as he drove past the long row of rude stables where the wagon mules ate steadily and noisily. A banjo twanged merrily

in the negro quarters, where a shuffling of feet denoted revelry. Smoke, black and lurid, hovered above the distilleries, which resembled a veritable inferno where the fire is not quenched, be it daylight or moonlight. The rat-a-tat of hammers in the cooper's shop sounded in vain tattoos to the laborers of the night force. Smiths were shoeing mules where a bellows, mounted like a cannon on a battery, wheezed asthmatically. The aggregate of labor which day and night wrought for the gold which was to assure him position in society and the privilege of leading to the altar Maude Endiston, whose father's wealth had rendered her so seemingly desirable.

A boy from the night's detail of helpers assumed the care of his horse and buggy, and he was free to enter his shanty where the servant who attended to his comfort had placed his mail beside the lamp, which was turned low, thriftily. There were several letters, and he scanned their superscriptions with a guilty shame in his heart. He did not find what he so dreaded encountering that night, and he breathed a profound sigh of relief in that no message from beyond the pines rebuked his wayward affection. It was in his mind to wish sincerely that his life could be horizoned from its beginning to the uttermost of its limit, with the camp and its work, with his horse and—Kissic-Dale; for

“How is it under our control
To love—or not to love.”

CHAPTER II.

LOVE'S TEASINGS—JULY IN THE PINE-LANDS—THE MOTTO OF SCOTLAND.

“ Come, Clarisse! Put by hay-rake!
The sun is hot enough to bake!
And those who keep to the fields to-day
Must scorch and shrivel like drying hay;
But where the blackberry patches lie,
Birches give shade and a brook runs by.”

—Selected.

It was a day in the last week of July; and July in the pine-lands means the glare of Sahara, the heat of the tropics, so little is there of practical shading to ward off the vertical sun-rays, to ameliorate the dazzling reflection of the white sand and dissipate the stifling radiation of the rifts of glistening pine needles.

The prophecy of the morning indicated that that day would not be different from its immediate predecessors, in whose torrid noons all nature had seemed to gasp and faint, in swooning impotence.

As he entered the cool domain of Kissic-Dale, Edwin Phillips, in sheer relief, bared his head to the emerald repose and tempting shadows of that oasis in the deserts of bleak pine forests.

The embowered acres of terraced orchards, the

century's growth of shade trees, pleasing features of the breeze-swept valley bearing on its green bosom the rippling waters of Holly Creek, willow-fringed and sinuous, were peculiarly enhanced in their promise of comfort, by their contrast to the shadeless forest and bare reaches of sand crystals which burned the feet through solid leather where pines posed as magnets to concentrate the ferocious intensity of the sun's direct rays.

Edwin drove slowly down the long slope from the eastern gate; he drew rein as he was crossing the bridge, his horse drawing panting breaths in the shadow of drooping willows, where the water swept soothingly beneath, and a limpid refreshment arose from the transparent depths, inexpressibly grateful to man and beast.

It was yet the dewy hours of morning and the valley was cool and fresh from its bath of sparkling dewdrops. Through shadowed vistas he glimpsed fruiting orchards, Sandy's vine-draped cottage and the white-columned mansion; and leisurely he drove on, pondering speculatively upon his impending reception by Ruth.

Ten o'clock struck while he sat with Mary and Jean in a cool, flower-environed corner of the veranda. Mary strung snap-beans for Dicey; Jean was sewing; Iphogenia, the dusky maid, was peeling peaches for preserving. He ate peaches and Jean served him with melons and grapes and conversed amiably.

Ruth was invisible; every door and window stood wide open and glimpsing the interiors he could find no hint of her presence. He had arrived warm and

thirsty, for since earliest morning he had been riding the circuit of orchards, installing the man who was to relieve him for a holiday trip and a visit to friends and relatives. He confided to Jean that he had driven over to pay her a farewell call before his departure for home scenes. She was cordially pleased that he could have the pleasure and recreation to be derived from the vacation from work which could not possibly be wholly agreeable.

Life was strenuous, indeed, in the orchards and camp just then. Men hauled mountainous loads of new barrels resounding with emptiness to designated spots, and left them to be filled with raw turpentine, which other men brought to those points in buckets replenished tediously from the boxed and hacked trees; and other perspiring teamsters carted them, full and weighty, back to camp, where their contents were poured into the rapacious maws of the distilleries whose ink-black smoke tinged the atmosphere constantly. Turpentine was king in camp and orchard. Its perpetual odor bathed the entire vicinity, its dross covered the ground in the locality of the distilleries like cooled lava from an active volcano.

It coated quickly all the barrels and implements, and it besmeared the men's clothing, and besmirched their countenances and matted their brows and hair; it set its tenacious seal upon every object that permitted its contact, but Edwin Phillips had held aloof successfully from its debasing and disfiguring touch. He had shunned it and its influence as a diver evades the reaching tentacles of a deep sea octopus. When its novelty had worn into drudgery he had wearied

extremely of camp life, when the influence which had deluded him there was attenuated by a stronger desire, he had become listless and repugnant of its deprivation; then memory had sung a song of rolling, leafy hills, of level fields and gravelled roads, of smiling men and women, and the glamor of well-dressed, refined society. He was to return to his former element as an amphibian creature from the drouth-scorch'd land to the cool, dim depths of water.

One regret alone, one solitary joy, hindered a full anticipation of the prospective pleasure which awaited his venture—Ruth and Kissic-Dale. Out in the forest the sun burned his eyes, the hot air stifled his lungs, the plain food repelled his failing appetite, the sand gnats tortured him and “pepper gnats” drove into his eyes as flying seeds of pepper. His shanty was often the temperature of a baker’s oven, the water was brackish and unwholesome, his horse constantly in a frenzy with the plague of stinging pests; aye! but he was delighted to be rid of his worries, for at least a season.

Yet those worries were not the supreme motive which sent him away from his work in the midst of its busiest season; his mother and sister had affectionately but imperatively insisted that there should be amends shown his fiancée, whom he was neglecting with unlover-like negligence. He had decided to obey them in justice to himself and the girl he was fast forgetting, or at least her claim upon his allegiance.

He had reflected that perhaps his judgment had become faulty by the deprivations and paucity of his

present environment, by a clamoring of his heart emerging from the winter of a great discontent and depressing homesickness, when it was assailed by spring's magical influences, and chance had supplied the object unto which all his vicarious longings were directed for fulfillment of urgent desire.

Perhaps Ruth was not so absolutely desirable as his impoverished heart had esteemed her; perhaps Kissic-Dale was not the paradise he had conceived it to be in his sordid state of existence. At home the flowers might be just as sweet, his sister's music just as entrancing; and Maude's be-architected home just as stately and reposing as the white mansion which sheltered Ruth.

Aye! perhaps Maude's smile was just as enamoring as Ruth's flower-like purity of expression and golden-haired loveliness.

Ruth had been distant and impressed him that she was alien to his race of people. Since that June night he had visited regularly at Kissic-Dale, yet had never achieved another quiet interview with her; neither since that time had she shown such embarrassment and agitation in his presence; a subtle dignity had marked her behavior and imposed a barrier to all but impersonal intimacy. He had exhausted every known excuse to visit her; he had even joined fishing parties—and he detested the sport—inaugurated by Jean and Angus Bethune, and each time Ruth had declined to join the outing. He had dined and supped at Kissic-Dale, called for fruit and flowers, and had several times fetched Jennie or the children to spend a few hours there, but all his efforts had been futile.

Sometimes Ruth had been absent visiting some sick Gaelic neighbor or young girl friend who lived distantly; and while her uncle had tarried at Kissic-Dale, he had been responsible for many of her absences. Jean had invariably explained that she encouraged the truancy from home and books, and music and pencil; that Ruth needed a true vacation, she had studied so indefatigably the past year—and the years of her growth were not yet ended.

He could not understand whether she purposely avoided him. Occasionally she was smiling and cordial, at other times pensive and sedate, excluding herself from social converse and leaving his entertainment to Jean. Perhaps her unsatisfying demeanor had much to do with his extreme weariness of the life at the camp. Anyway, he was deliberately seeking an interview with her before going away and was determined to achieve it if he spent the day in the effort. Finally he inquired casually if Ruth was at home.

"She is down by the spring with Jamie and Ezeke," Jean replied readily. "They have improvised some kind of a boat and invited her to the launching. I think she is to christen it with a bottle of spring water; and she seems to be spending the morning in the woods with them."

"May I go down and see what they are doing?" he requested, tentatively. "I wish to bid her goodbye and beg of her some flowers for my sister."

"If you will take the trouble to seek her," Jean assented graciously. "Tell her to give you a glass of milk. We have none at the house. Such weather as this we keep all our milk and butter in the dairy.

I will gather some flowers for your sister; I shall esteem it a privilege to do so."

He thanked Jean and hurried away. He was much relieved that Ruth was not purposely hiding from him; a suspicion that she might be had forced into his heart a dreary despondency. He trod the path leading from the north gate down a long slope to the spring, the way worn by the feet of past generations of MacKenzies, and sheltered by vine-covered trellises, which excluded the hot sunshine. As he emerged from the tunnel-like path, he descended a few stone steps to the floor of the sylvan dell that surrounded the spring and dairy. Honey-suckle and other driftings from the house lawn mingled with and draped wildwood growths there, and a flagged walk led to the spring embowered in weeping-willows.

Maple and black-gum trees threw their protective branches above the tender turf and sweet water-grasses, the ferns and mint, and water-rushes; and the atmosphere was permeated with a limpid purity, peculiarly grateful and refreshing, amid such glaringly warm weather. Voices smote the woodland solitude in boyish trebles, and he soon discovered the boys wading in a pool and propelling a fancied gunboat, constructed from a long, water-tight box. A defunct rush-stalk posed as a mast, from which Ruth's small cambric handkerchief waved as an ensign; an unwieldy vessel, surely, but their imagination supplied all deficiencies, and they were joyously happy.

Ruth sat apart on a wash-bench in a shady spot, busy with her pencil. She was sketching a deformed

maple, which had known many vicissitudes, but had survived all perils by floods and winds in its sapling youth, and bravely held aloft a symmetrical canopy of foliage to crown its unshapely trunk. Its twisted and scarred body, its distorted roots, bulging beyond the soil to which they clung for sustenance, showed evidence of a tragical history and interested her more than did the slender, graceful specimens of the coppice, whose prosperous appearance denoted a placid, uneventful growth.

With his first glimpse of Ruth, Edwin paused, arrested by a sudden sharp stab from his conscience. She was so girlishly innocent and youthful, in a simple white dress, her bright hair falling unrestrained to her waist, floating in a bath of warm summer breezes. When, finally, he approached her and apologized for intruding so unceremoniously, she stared for a moment in complete surprise; then her face flushed rosily and her eyes drooped timidly.

"I have found you," he said in a tone of reproach.

"Why, indeed, I was not hiding," she retorted, with emphatic denial, and the blush deepened reprehensibly.

"I did not say you were hiding. I merely remarked that I had found you," he returned, with a teasing smile and gay humor. Her tell-tale blushes rendered him deliriously happy in a mercurial rebound from doubt and repression.

"You say truly," she assented quietly, and with unsmiling expression, as he threw himself down upon a boulder deeply sunk in ferns and water-grasses and pushed the damp hair from his white brow. He leaned negligently against one of the

slender-trunked maples, and politely but intently studied Ruth critically, but withal, admiringly. She laid aside cardboard and pencil and was courteously attentive.

"I called to say goodby; I am going home," he said with abrupt directness, and he watched her furtively. "Will you not wish me bon voyage?"

"Certainly," she answered, not meeting his eyes, but with a sudden tremulous twitching of her sensitive lips.

"And also thank you for being so kind to me, a stranger, without claim to your hospitality," he continued, testingly.

"We have done nothing deserving special gratitude, I am sure, and the pleasure has been mutual," she responded stiltedly and with a stately distance of mien.

In her heart she was saying, "Going back to his own friends, to the cherished ones who have always known him. I am but an incident in a short period of his busy life."

"You have been as the shadow of a rock in a weary land," he declared fervently, suddenly serious and pensive.

"I am glad you have found pleasure with us," she replied with cordial formality. "It must have seemed cruelly dreary to you out here, away from every one who could interest you."

He viewed her with slanting, puzzled scrutiny. He had caught echoes of Jean's stately utterances in the lifeless words. Her mimicry rebuked his sincere ardor of sentiment. "I have found Paradise with you," he exclaimed, pugnaciously.

Her serious eyes brooded the rustling corn beyond the forest-fringed little stream; in fancy, she beheld the world beyond the sand-hills, the world of which she was so profoundly ignorant, but was his native element. Her ignorance assigned vital realities to its seductive wiles and roseate grandeur. She sighed, she reared her head proudly:

"Weird women we! By dale and down,
We dwell afar from tower and town!"

she quoted, submissively, and with a vague touch of hopelessness.

He lifted his head and sternly assailed her aloof expression with a compelling glance, as he also quoted, deliberately, and with pointed emphasis:

"We stem the flood! We ride the blast!
On wandering knights our spells we cast."

Then he fell back to his former position and absently plucked a delicate fern-frond and proceeded to strip its hairy stem in nonchalant leisure.

The birds sang piercingly, the cicadas shrilled their jarring notes in the leaf-clothed trees, the little rill murmured melodiously. The amateur gunboat lay a deserted derelict among the marginal rushes, the brave white pennant drooping pathetically. The boys had siezed an opportunity to wade to its mouth the pretentious stream. The mirage of heat waves floated above the level of corn whose blades were curled against the blistering sun-rays; afar off, beyond the suffering fields, reposed the forest, a glow-

ing reflector of the intense atmosphere. The bird notes, long-drawn and liquid, emphasized the cool retreat in the sylvan depths of the green, tangled woodland. Edwin's heart surged in a mad turmoil of strong emotions, as he stripped the last frond from the frayed stem, which he flung aimlessly at a piping cricket. What folly had been his that for a moment he had imagined that he was mistaken in the fascination Ruth possessed! He was longing for some gleam of comfort to soothe him while absent on his enforced journey. When he spoke again his voice vibrated with appealing gentleness. Ruth had ignored completely the inference conveyed in his apt quotation.

"Ruth, are you sorry that I am going, even briefly?"

She deliberated, then chose her words carefully. "Of course, we shall miss you, Mr. Phillips; we have so few diversions. We have missed Donald very much, and Uncle Angus. Aunt Jean has remarked that you have somewhat filled the void left by their absence; but it would be very selfish to be sorry that you can have the pleasure of seeing those who are really near and dear to you. At the most we are but strangers and of another race than you, who, in your relations to us, are but a bird of passage. I am glad for your sake, and hope you may experience every pleasure you now anticipate in full measure."

She avoided his eloquent glance, tinged with unspoken hurt and mute reproach. She gathered together her bonnet and sketching material. "Did Aunt Jean send any message by you to me? Did

she say for me to come home?" she queried, nervously, hoping for an excuse to escape from a situation that was peculiarly trying to her dignity and self-possession.

"She did not say for you to return home, and would you forsake this sylvan Paradise, as if I were a serpent come to contaminate its Edenic atmosphere? Ah, no! You cannot be so unkind! Ugh!" he continued with an expressive shudder. "If you could realize the heat of the pine woods, you would feel like tarrying here indefinitely."

As he leaned against the tree with an air of fatigue he confessed to her his discontent and worries exaggeratedly.

"I am tortured by the sand and pines by day and dream of them all night. They have become a plague, from which I must flee to ensure my sanity. At times I have felt that I had been cast into the fiery furnace with Daniel, or—er—was it Nebuchadnezzar they condemned to the furnace so many times heated?"

Ruth stared, pondering his ignorance or unseemly levity.

"Oh, was it some other fellow who happened to that misfortune?" he supplemented quickly, as he recalled with flashing memory Simpson's shipwreck upon the social strand. Ruth still regarded him seriously; he fancied rebukingly supercilious. She reflected how aptly he had quoted Scott but a short time previous, and could not believe him so woefully ignorant of the sacred Scriptures.

"It was some other people," she answered gently, he believed pityingly. "It was Shadrach, Messhach and Nebednego."

He bowed his head humbly, in deference to her superior knowledge, presumably. She mistrusted the sincerity of his humility, and, in her silvery, brogue-tinged voice, which ever reminded him that she was "a sweet Scotch lassie," she continued insistently: "Please, shall we go now? Aunt Jean will surely expect us."

"Not just yet," he begged earnestly. "Let us tarry just here a little longer. I shall soon be far away, and shall not see you again in such a dreary length of time."

"But you go gladly, of your own will, not as if sentence had exiled you," she reminded him critically, the least bit jealously, as the primal passion of every human heart found birth in her innocent emotions.

"Do I?" he retorted with a hint of secluded bitterness. "Have you considered my life in a shanty, the claim of a mother and an only sister?" he argued, defensively.

"Indeed, I have! Did I not wish you bon voyage just now?" she asked, conciliatorily.

"You did. Forgive me," he returned tenderly, and with a glance so direct and appealing, she avoided it by lifting hers and gazing abroad, impersonally. In the moment of tense silence which followed, the cicadas rasped noisily, the shadows were teasingly restless, shifting bars of scorching sun-rays that burned as they drifted over her yellow hair, her white forehead, her flushing cheeks.

"I wonder," she remarked, suddenly and with concern, "why Jamie and Ezeke are out in the corn? I fear they will be ill by exposing their bare heads to such extreme heat."

She arose to get a better view of the creeping, stalking figures, whose actions had compelled her attention so opportunely.

She was presently enlightened by a flurried flight of two plump partridges, which arose from the shelter of trailing pea-vines and obscuring corn blades, and flew distractedly to the refuge of the woods.

"Oh, Jamie," she appealed in a distress of sympathy, "leave the poor little things just where they are hidden! Do, Jamie! And go back into the woods, out of the sun!"

"But the birds have flown into the thicket; did you not observe their flight?" Edwin advised, lazily, without interest.

"Oh, yes, but they left their little ones, wee, brown mites of birds, hidden from the boys. Jamie, you must come away immediately! Oh, how they must have tortured the poor little mother!" she exclaimed, as if voicing a strata of thought underlying her verbal expression.

"All right!" Jamie halloed in response to her entreaties. "We didn't mean to catch 'em. We are trying to count 'em."

Ruth, with that assurance from Jamie, resumed her seat. Jamie and Ezeke returned to the shade of the woodland; Edwin viewed the evidence of her excited sympathy for the mother-bird and her tiny brood critically.

"I wonder," he remarked reproachfully, "why you are always so cruel to me? Yet you show so much tenderness to a bunch of peeping brownies."

With eyes glowing still with the fervor of the sym-

pathy for which he reproached her, she flushed sensitively.

"You are—you have been extremely unkind to me," he accused her, bravely.

"I do not think so," she said, constrainedly. She held her head proudly, grateful that she no longer trembled in his presence and quivered like the wee, brown birdies hidden out there among the pea-vines, quaking from an instinctive terror of the unknown and unfamiliar.

"Let me make amends for any lack of hospitality you may have fancied, Mr. Phillips," she requested, with an excess of cordial attention.

"Well?" he assented, interrogatively.

"Let me offer you a cool glass of milk from the dairy; I am sure you must be thirsty," she replied, and waited expectantly.

"I will have some milk presently, but my thirst is not very insistent." He idly plucked blades of tender water-grasses as he stifled a sigh, lugubriously.

"Have you forgotten all I said to you that night in June when the full moon was shining? Or do you despise me because I confessed so much of my sentiments toward you then? Really, you have behaved as if it were so, and thus you have tortured me unmercifully, Ruth," he complained, wistfully.

His humility and artful pleading touched and thrilled her, and she found it difficult to maintain her assumed dignity and aloof manner. Her throat was aching from an emotion akin to tears, she felt stifled and nervous, as if she were becoming ill. Oh, it was a warm day! With heat enveloping the earth as a smothering blanket, heat that made her eyes smart,

her temples throb and her vision dim and glancing. It was very trying to be stately, to sit steadily upon the unaccustomed pedestal of assumed dignity; so difficult to hold in her languorous mind the lesson she had studied so determinedly. She blushed painfully, but she did not respond to his reproaches.

"Ruth, to me you are the fairest, sweetest, dearest object on earth; is it ignorance of love or coquetry that you are so perfectly indifferent, so cruelly unkind?" he insisted desperately.

She dropped her eyes to the purling water, and another expression supplanted her blushing confusion. He had at last goaded her into a proud defence and expressed accusation.

"Is that merely a proper expression of gallantry? Or do you expect me to accept it as sincerely spoken?" she queried, her eyes scintillating with an emotion tinged with jealousy and assaulted pride.

"I dare to speak the truth as prompted by my heart," he said stubbornly. "What other motive could have induced me to seek you as I have persisted in doing since the first day I knew you?"

His voice faltered with rising passion; the weeks of madness and hopeless infatuation arose to confront the present. Logic fled as the emotions of those days found vent in words.

"I could not help it," he said. "But I did not love you willingly or wisely; your beauty and charm overwhelmed every prudent resolve, and truly, I have never, and never shall love anyone else as I love you; and—you are trying your best to despise me!" he accused her, vehemently.

"I am not," she denied instantly, "but sincerity is

as the milk of life to me ; thus I feel inherently, and so I have been trained ; it is the corner-stone of our religion, so to speak ; and I have felt, instinctively, perhaps, that you were not sincere with me, at least ; that perhaps I just afforded you amusement for your lonely days out here."

Her lips curled at the idea, the pride of proud, self-contained generations robed her in a distinct imperialism.

"Perish the thought!" he cried, negatively, although a flush crept dully over his features, shadowed by the tilted brim of his nobby straw hat.

"Pardon me for speaking plainly ; but I think it best," she said, humbly, contritely. Already she regretted the voicing of the doubts which had secretly beset her mind and aroused her pride and jealousy.

"Ruth !" he exclaimed, with conviction, "someone has been poisoning your mind against me ; filling it with ideas you would never have entertained of your own volition. It must have been that bachelor uncle of yours. It was not your aunt, I am sure. She is too kind and charitable, and my friend."

He was bitter in his arraignment of Angus Bethune ; in it was embodied some of the spite he unconsciously cherished for the hale, hearty and prosperous relative, who had appropriated so much of Ruth's society since he had known her.

"Not directly," Ruth admitted, "nor initially. He never said a critical word to me about you, really. It was a minister who first gave me advice about worldly young men."

"Tell me who it was and what he said that has so influenced you?" he demanded, curious and amused

in spite of an anxious and serious state of mind. He recalled the previous Sabbath at Kissic-Dale kirk, the subdued, hallowed peace of the atmosphere of the sacred interior, the devotional mien of the Scotch congregation, the sincerity and austerity of the worship, the dignity and purely Scriptural inspiration of the services, of Parson MacLoughlan's discourse, uttered with simple but devout simplicity. There was nothing in the sermon relative to the ideas she had professed to have imbibed.

"It was when Uncle Angus and I went home with Allen MacRea," she related, reminiscently. "On the Sabbath we attended a church beyond his home, and there was a young minister in the pulpit; a theological student, I was informed. He was discussing modern life as lived by worldly people. He became very much excited; Uncle Angus did not admire him nor like his sermon. He said, afterward, he believed the young fellow had a personal grievance, that his own wings had been singed in swell society, where he had no business to be, in deference to his vocation. And Uncle Angus——" She was suddenly silent and visibly embarrassed.

"Tell me all, Ruth," he demanded sternly, with a feeling that he was brought to judgment.

"He, Uncle Angus, said men in love were often goosey and women silly, the most silly things in creation; that men never meant half they professed, but women were prone to believe their false flattery. So, I made a firm resolve not to listen to men or be a silly woman."

He was silent for so long a time after she had finished speaking, she grew restlessly nervous.

"Please, shall we go now and get you a glass of milk? I really must not stay a moment longer. Aunt Jean will be uneasy, I am certain," she said, gathering up her bonnet and sketching material.

He arose without further protest and followed her to the dairy. She opened the door and entering, filled him a brimming cup from one of the deep jars cooling in a trench of flowing water. He took the cup and drank silently, then leaned against the door-jamb negligently while she rinsed the cup and replaced it on a nail driven into the white wall; then, forgetting the youngsters deep in the woods and the forsaken craft capsize among the rushes, she led the way up the flagged path, homeward.

He insisted upon carrying her sketch-book and bonneting her bare head, and assisted her courteously in ascending the granite steps, although she wore no train and was as nimble as a chamois.

Under the grapevine arbor she came to grief. Like Absalom, her golden hair, escaping below the frill of her sunbonnet, was caught by the intruding tendril of an overgrown vine. Quietly, she assayed to disentangle the strand enmeshed, but vainly. He came to her rescue gallantly, and while her cheeks flamed rosily, he clumsily fingered the snarl, and finally it was loosed and she was free. He leaned and smiled wistfully, as he searched her blushing face, her drooping eyes and timorous confusion.

"Thank you," she murmured, retreating from his scrutiny.

"The smallest service rendered to you gives me infinite pleasure," he said, with tremulous earnestness.

As they came through the gate and were crossing the lawn to the veranda, Jean noted their quiet manner and that they were remarkably silent for young people. She had been culling her sweetest, rarest blossoms, and they were heaped upon a table, where she was leisurely sorting them, wrapping their stems in damp cotton and placing them in a white paper box, for his convenience in carrying them.

"The heat has been trying to you both, I know, and you show the effects of its depression," she greeted them, solicitously. "Can you not remain with us until late afternoon, Mr. Phillips?"

He declined regretfully; then, standing by her, bare-headed and gallant, he admired her selection of flowers.

"Ruth," Jean insisted, "you must gather something as a special gift to Mr. Phillips' sister." Ruth had returned so constrained and quiet. Jean experienced a vague desire to infuse more graciousness and cordiality in the entertainment of their brief guest. "Bring some of your carnations, bairnie. They are more peculiarly your very own than any other flower in the garden."

Ruth complied obediently, pleased with an excuse for absence. The carnations were, most of them, the offspring from gleanings of garden pinks diffused over the lawn by seedlings from beds cultivated by Jean's mother. It had been a filial duty with Ruth to gather them up and mass them in a bed of rich loam near to Jean's Heart of Scotland, and Jean had added modern varieties of the cultivated carnation to the dwarfed assortment of old-fashioned pinks.

It was, indeed, a spot of fragrance and color, by which Ruth knelt and plucked the blossoms; red, white, and crimson, whose petals were charged with the essence of their delicious fragrance. Edwin came down the prim walk flanked with broom and joined her, restlessly eager for every moment that could be spent with her.

"You were so long away, I came to say you must not worry about the flowers. Just gather one, and give it to me for a keepsake," he said, as she sprang to her feet and stood before him with a sheaf of the blossoms clasped in her arms.

"I am sending them to your sister," she returned, pointedly. She had retreated to the shade cast by the dense foliage of the maple which protected the Scotch pine and the heather; where, in the lea of the broom, grew also a few shrubs of gorse, native to the "land o' cakes."

She was folding the long-stemmed carnations into the odorous sheaf.

"And you will not give me one tiny token that I may know you do not utterly despise me!" he complained, pleadingly. "Perhaps, I may never meet you again," he added, artfully. Her lips twitched but settled firmly; her eyes drooped before his, but she made no reply. Her hands had arranged the flowers, and she laid them on his arm.

"For your sister," she said. "I am indebted to her for the instruction you gave me so kindly when I was wearing those new dresses, you remember?"

"And not one bloom for me!" he sighed forlornly.

She averted her face and hesitated, her features hidden in the depths of her befrilled, white sun-

bonnet. Higher, still more vertical, climbed the sun; even in the densest shade one felt the oppressive influence of the blazing, molten king of summer, enthroned in a blazing sky. A lengthy drive awaited him; a drive of many miles over the hot sand, through the unshaded forest, whose plume-topped trees afforded no shelter from the prevailing heat and glare of equatorial sunlight; yet he lingered wistfully, longing for comfort and solace to accompany him.

"Be kind to me in this parting moment," he begged abjectly.

"Faith is not a bubble blown with the breath of an incident," she answered, sententiously.

"Perhaps it is just that you do not trust me," he responded, so humbly she was impressed by his contrite tones. Almost he had won her confidence, but not quite. The doubt decided the quality of her gift.

"I will give you a token, if you will accept it," she said, reluctantly. "You quoted Scott. Do you know the motto of Scotland?"

He admitted that he did not, apologetically.

"It is, 'Nemo me impune la cessit,'" she informed him, earnestly.

"Translate it!" he challenged her.

"You cannot wound me with impunity," she translated, with quivering lips and eyes smarting with urgent but repressed tears. She turned to caress the scrubby little pine, devotionally, staunch and brave with the sentiment it symbolized in a Highlander's heart.

He divined something of her meaning, of the antagonism opposing his mastery of her heart and allegiance. He was reverently silent as she snapped

a small twig from the cherished tree, plucked a spray of heather and one of broom, which she arranged in a simple cluster.

"It is not a pretty favor, it is not suitable for a boutonniere, but it is the most precious one I am capable of bestowing; and I would not offer it to one I did not hope to esteem, ultimately. Poor, homely relics of my exiled race, struggling for existence in an alien clime, buffeted by its inhospitable suns, storms and droughts, its broad sweep of horizons and ferocity of liberty and freedom of space," she apostrophied, as she offered unto him the most unlovely growths in Kissic-Dale's overflowing gardens.

He received them with the serious mien she had maintained while presenting the gift.

"Ruth," he said, rebukingly, when he had thanked her, "with me there has been no question of race, pride or of social conditions; it has been simply and wholly your dear self; nothing else has mattered to me, or will in the future."

She smiled reluctantly, tears pearling upon her lashes, her eyes seeking his shyly, yet bravely.

"Take the carnations to Aunt Jean and she will add them to the flowers she is arranging for your sister. I am going to visit the pigeons, and we will say goodbye here. I sincerely hope for you a most pleasant journey. Again bon voyage."

"You must not forget me, Ruth," he appealed as she sent him away.

"You are more likely to forget me and the entire country," she replied, waiting, tensely, his tardy departure.

"Let the future prove us," he challenged, as she bowed his final dismissal.

CHAPTER III.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM—GUESTS AT KISSIC-DALE— THE ROSE-GARDEN.

"And as a snowflake ere it catches stain,
Gross and impure from earth's commingled dyes."

—Selected.

"Who has not felt a doubt, a pang, a throe,
When some desired yet hopeless boon is given?"

—Pocahontas.

The summer days were gliding near to the golden fringed margin of autumn's reign on the harvest-laden bosom of the last days of August. Tempestuous showers had refreshed the earth and banished to the tropical isles the fervid heat of mid-summer.

At Kissic-Dale vagrant clouds, like milk-white fleece, flecked the silvery azure of a sky washed free of any tinge of haze or mist by flashing billows of condensated vapor and rending electricity. The fields were a climax of summer's efforts, gardens meet for the pleasure of the gods who empty the horn of plenty upon petitioning soil; a pleasing sheen of corn, amber-tasseled, of blossoming cotton, bearing crimson, white and yellow blooms.

It was the lull between seed-time and harvest,

the sowing and the reaping; when the orchards were weighted with mellow fruit, the vineyards draped with purple and golden grapes, as if for a feast of Bacchus, the stubble of the wheat-fields submerged in newly sprung verdure.

Edwin Phillips viewed it all with a critic's eye, from a point of view obtained in the weeks of absence. First at Altamont, then at Maude's pretentious home in a small manufacturing town, and later at his own home, where his mother's grave voice and subtle pride had recalled him to the stable moorings of his hopeful youth, and soothed the torturing friction of his heart and circumstances. He had returned to the turpentine camp the preceding Monday. It was then a Saturday afternoon, when he had decided to go to Kissic-Dale and—pay his respects to Jean.

As he had returned from his vacation, despite his deepening relations with Maude, his heart had thrilled with a glad anticipation. The clanking car wheels had throbbed a continuous refrain: "Nearer to thee, nearer to Ruth;" and the white and green forest had greeted him with its mystic charm and broad smile of unhampered sunlight, the pines whispering the conviction of his heart: "Here is your destiny; you cannot escape it."

He had made some heroic resolutions as a sop to bickering conscience that could not be cheated or deluded by any worldly sophistry, yet as he had resumed his place at the camp, he was thrilled by a secret elation that at any time he might ride to Kissic-Dale and resume his pursuit of Ruth's virginal affections.

He had chosen the time with due regard for appearances, that no unduly haste might evince his real mission there, that his visit might assume the guise of casuality. The short journey was a pleasant reminiscence of that day when he had discovered Ruth so unexpectedly. The by-roads were firm and freshly carpeted with needles, the highway as solid as a wave-washed beach, the air balmy and ozonic; all Nature robed in a sensuous maturity.

He drove, in a retrospective mood, from the eastern gate to the bridge and passed over the swollen stream forging its way between shallow banks, with imposing volume and hoarse murmurs of strenuous progress. Leisurely, hesitatingly, he pursued the way up to the mellow-scented orchard, bowing to Katherine on her shaded porch, where her two youngest children played and the black terrier worried a white, disdainful cat, on the door-steps.

In the cherry lane he met gangs of young turkeys, protecting hens guarding their scurrying broods, and was saluted by the hum of bees buzzing on the trail of ripening fruit. The weather was still quite warm, but there was no oppression in the atmosphere. The winds were laden with a restful languor, for Nature reposed in completed tasks, the ease of assured harvest after the heat and travail of midsummer.

As he paused by the hitching-post beneath the ancient sycamore guarding the threshold of the entrance to the lawn, he beheld on a distant point of the veranda a group of strangers, and he knew that Kissic-Dale was entertaining guests. Tony had discovered his arrival and came to meet and assist him

with his horse. He held the gate ajar and invited him to enter with the grandiloquent air of a high-born lackey, as he grinned a silent but cordial welcome.

"Dey am at de uther side ob de feranda ; dey have company, sah," he informed Edwin, as he ushered him through the gate.

Ruth came to meet him, up the colonnaded way set with ferns and palms, and wreathed with graceful vines, which cast an emerald shadow upon the enclosure.

She was wearing her most elaborate dress and the scene was one of elaborate festivity. He paused on the entrance steps and noted the mien of social felicity haloing the staid mansion and its happy inmates. The fragrance of cut flowers banking the parlor mantel and filling bowls and vases in the halls and rooms, convinced him that those guests had not happened there unexpected. The aroma of fruit and melons assured him that a feast was in progress, grouping them in that corner of the veranda.

He did not know until later why Ruth came to meet him, instead of Jean, who usually took the initiative with guests. As Ruth approached he was conscious of a new and novel charm in her appearance, and—that all his logical resolves were as handwriting in shifting sands. As fair as the spirit of an unclouded morning, as sweet and fresh as the essence of springtime's glamor, more beautiful than even his heart had esteemed her, she impressed him as she extended her hand with an emotional revelation which banished doubt from his heart as night shadows flee before the car of smiling Aurora.

He noted with infinite exultation that her slender hand quivered like a frightened bird in his strong, wounding clasp; that her lips were momentarily robbed of color and that her left hand, unconsciously, pressed her side, as if in strong excitement.

She recovered her composure instantly, but he had read the fleeting evidences of his influence and was elevatedly triumphant. She led him to Jean with due formality. Jean lifted her hands, dripping with the juice of a melon she had been quartering and warned him of their condition; yet she welcomed him with unfeigned pleasure and introduced him, with cordial impressment, to her guests, the minister of Kissic-Dale kirk and his wife, the beloved cousin Janet and a party who had accompanied her on a week's end visit to Ruth.

The party, besides Janie Bethune, consisted of her brother Robert, her betrothed, Duncan MacLeod, and Malcolm MacAfee from beyond Craig Rhonie, the post office of a settlement on Buie's Creek.

The minister and his wife were making their semi-annual visitation to Jean; Malcolm had joined Duncan there to renew memories of the days when they were college mates, and he was the life of the party, with his restless, quaint humor and boyish wit.

They, with one accord, welcomed the new arrival; and soon the minister had appropriated him and was probing him for news of the world beyond the sandhills, which horizoned the scope of his life and labors. Jean, beaming hospitality upon all, impartially, found an opportunity to address him, with: "We did not know you had returned from your holiday trip, Mr. Phillips."

"I came back to the camp several days ago, but this was my first leisure in which I could come to see you and deliver the messages my mother and sister intrusted to me; especially the sincere thanks of my sister for the flowers she appreciated so much," he responded, his mind relieved by repeating the formula he had arranged when planning the visit.

The few remaining hours of the afternoon passed happily, at times merrily. The minister was jovial; Malcom MacAfee fairly scintillated mischief and mirth, as the mood swayed him to either extreme. He was an unique young Scotchman, his nervous intelligence portrayed in piercing, dark brown eyes, a high receding forehead, crowned by a mat of closely curling auburn hair of the most glistening shade of that facile term.

He was constantly showing his white teeth in good-humored grins, and his vivid, restless mind grasped the most subtle details of existing actualities. He was jubilant in being there beneath the broad roof-tree that had sheltered him at intervals since his early boyhood; and he recited with simple pathos infantile reminiscences of hours spent at Kissic-Dale in the days when Jean and Jamie constituted the family.

Edwin marvelled at their simple happiness and appreciation of simple details, their serene indifference to competitive conditions beyond their immediate environment. They were not impressed by the prestige of his affiliation with a realm wholly foreign to Gaelic circles. They accepted him as a welcome guest, made him one of themselves for the

passing moment, and rendered him unfailing courtesy; but he realized, for all that, that in their estimation, he was an alien to their race and clannish ties, neighborly and socially.

Ruth, though, studied him, furtively, timidly. She noted that he was, indeed, very handsome and winning, that he wore a new white flannel suit, a fresh style of neckwear and faddish tennis shoes; that he had lost the tan and slight roughness acquired during the midsummer heat; and that his glance sought hers tenderly, ceaselessly.

She was also earnestly solving a personal heart problem which had surprised and puzzled her intensely. His presence had vivified her realization of the marvellous emotions she had experienced. Just then she was conscious of a peace indescribable, a fluttering, sensitive joy pervaded with delicious appreciation of every phase of life's fair landscape, a permeating, volatile happiness that had immeasurably enriched the boon of living.

"There is nothing half so sweet in life
As Love's young dream,"

and no other joy which can surcharge the heart with an intensity that so mysteriously resembles pain; and intensity does not promote hilarity, therefore Ruth sat where tall ferns and swaying vines afforded some seclusion and framed her a picture it was a delight to behold, even with the indifference bred of fortuitous scrutiny.

In his prolonged absence her heart had held

memories of Edwin which had merged into a full-blown idealism and were the source of innumerable rose-lighted dreams and awakenings; the dawning of enigmatical moods as variable as an April sky, and as optimistic.

When elongated shadows bridged the valley and lay upon the eastern slope, when troops of fowls from field and orchard wended perchward, and beves of pigeons circled above the lawn, deviously en route to the cote, the group of guests, by unspoken selection, disintegrated.

Janie and her lover strolled the lawn and, finally, moored themselves to a rustic seat by the rose arbor. Jean led the minister and his wife to the poultry yard where the feathered creatures of her household were mobilized to receive their evening's ration of food. Robert Bethune repaired to the barn, where his favorite horse was stabled; and Malcom MacAfee soon felt *detrop* with Edwin and Ruth, whose remarks were mere monosyllabic utterances to his spirited attempts to converse. He arose and suppressing a relaxing yawn, followed Robert to the stables on mincing feet, which seemed to scorn the gravel they pressed, protestingly.

Then Edwin turned to Ruth with an accession of tenderness in his voice.

"Let us go and feed the pigeons, Ruth. Why should we alone be idle and let your pets go supperless?" he suggested, with open challenge to her shy avoidance of him since his arrival.

"I had forgotten them!" she returned, remorsefully. "Thank you for reminding me of an important duty."

She left him to procure the grain Tony always provided; when she returned, he claimed the small basket and led the way through the halls, over the rear veranda, down the steps, trellis-sheltered, on by the circle of evergreens and the hedge of clipped cedars. He opened the wicket gate; beyond lay the rose garden; a rose-laden arch spanned the entrance. As he held the gate ajar, she ducked her head as she passed beneath the rose arch, avoiding carefully the straying branch bearing crimson roses.

He laughed reminiscently and endeavored to capture her drooping glance, but she eluded him and hastened on to an exit at the opposite limit of the pampered garden, which was a heavy turnstile it required some strength to turn.

"Wait," he insisted, still laughing, and she obeyed reluctantly, as he deliberately opened the way and permitted her to pass. She preceded him down the path to the cote, where an innumerable melee of silvery-winged and white-feathered creatures circled around the cote, perched high upon a single stout post, braced sturdily; bright eyes peered hungrily from every tiny doorway of the many-roomed mansion; whiffing wings bore a multitude to meet Ruth with welcome cries, ogling entreaties and cooing impatience. Some poised upon her shoulders, quaintly questioning her empty hands; one snow white favorite poised presumptively upon her head, pecked at the white fuchsias she wore in her hair and craned its graceful white neck in disapproval of the unpalatable ornaments. Others, too numerous for individual favor, in swaying beves swooped to the

ground, a rippling turmoil of plaining, pleading creatures, voicing their haste to be fed.

"See, how hungry they must be!" she exclaimed, spreading her hands to ward off a threatened mobbing, as he leisurely approached, idly swinging the basket.

"What greedy things they are, to be sure," he remarked, critically, and stood aloof, enjoying her discomfiture.

"Oh, no!" she defended her pets, "but they are, indeed, very hungry."

"You have spoiled them. Let me give them a lesson in patience," he mentored, negatively.

Thus tantalizing her, he withheld the grain until a shrewd old bird found the basket and led others to struggle with him for the food they knew was a lawful possession. Instantly, he was enveloped in a cloud of fluttering wings and flashing feathers, and he abandoned the basket, which she recovered and scattered the grain with a trained skill in giving each bird a portion.

On their return, he detained her in the rose garden, the loveliest spot in all fair Kissic-Dale, bird-haunted, perfumed with the incense of rarest roses, remotely secluded by the stalwart trees in the rear of the mansion and the towering magnolias whose glistening foliage accentuated the glowing colors of the fragrant-hearted roses.

He swept the scene with appreciative eyes. "I never knew such a Paradise of bloom and color," he declared, wistfully.

"It is an old-time ideal," Ruth responded, "the cherished pet of a lonely woman," she added, seriously.

"A sweet ideal and a beautiful scene," he commented, musingly. The refulgence of a gaudily tinted sunset, a brave array of orangean and amethystean splendor transformed its aspect and deified Ruth in her shimmering white dress, as she stood facing the west flaming its roseate vapors.

"Let us rest here and enjoy the sunset," he suggested, indicating a wrought-iron seat sheltered by a magnolia.

She reflected that she would not be more alone with him there than anywhere else while everyone was engaged elsewhere; and it was very pleasant there with him, in the sunset glow, amidst the roses. Distantly, came the soothing echoes of scattered life, remote, but yet with a comfortable nearness that precluded the dreariness of a complete solitude like the woodland below the spring. The tinkle of sheep-bells, the lowing of kine, the wooing notes of the pigeons, the rustle of foliage, the raspings of belated "katydids." The tones of Malcom and Robert down at the stables mingled in a comforting concord of sounds, as she sat with him where the old magnolia drooped its branches.

He sighed with the fullness of a great content. "I am so happy just now. Would that such perfect bliss could last forever! I was never really happy until I knew you. I cannot explain it very lucidly, but I know it is true. Answer me truly, Ruth. Were you not glad to have me return to you?" he questioned, his voice liquid with appeal and persuasion. She flushed and thrilled as if he had offered a caress. She moved and faced him to repulse the fancied intimacy.

"I was very glad, indeed, to welcome you," she replied briefly, but truthfully.

"Why were you glad? Tell me, please," he persisted, with blandishing voice.

His eyes held her tenderly, in a glance in which his sincere adoration was unveiled and insistent, for, from the depths of his soul arose an intense longing to win and possess her; a deep humility augmented his sincerity.

She lifted her dark eyes timorously but bravely. "I do not know," she said simply, so artlessly, he recalled his first impression of her unalloyed innocence, recalled his recollection of Galatea.

He fell silent to study her and feast upon each detail of her delicious charm, her naive behavior. He divined her perplexity in defining that which had so recently been revealed to her heart. He ceased his urgency to know her esteem of him and his pretensions; he was happy with the assurance, despite her past antagonism and misgivings, that he had inscribed, indelibly, on the white page of her life, his signet to seal as his own, peculiarly, the treasure of her virginal affections.

Fatefully, in the wake of the assurance, came troubled thoughts, as a Nemesis pursuing a thief of forbidden sacramentals; suggestions of future complications, prophesies of the hour which would reveal his dishonor.

Ruth did not name her emotions happiness; rather a soulful reverie was evoked by his presence, his wooing voice, as the sunset gates barred an Elysian whose gold and violet flames illumined a terrestrial Eden and the rainbow-tinted west seemed a symbol of an affiliation of celestial and earthly joy.

The radiance of the scene diffused its subtle beauty over her countenance, the shadow of curving lashes swept the rose-tinge of her cheeks. He worshipped at the shrine of her spirituelle loveliness, silently; for as his doubts as to winning her dissolved, and his heart sang a paen of passionate triumph, its ecstasy was assailed by a menacing shadow of the unalterable past, his duality. It was Nemesis, indeed, which projected upon the scope of his mind memories of Maude and his recent promises to her.

The keenest thrust of all came with the remembrance of his recent interview with Maude's parents, to which she had led him with the impetus of her own imperial will and he had submitted weakly. With swift perspection his mind contrasted Kissic-Dale and its wholesome culture, its humane simplicity and sincerity, its piety and Puritanical refinement, its lineal dignity and mellowed beauty, with the crash aspirations, the heedless ambition, the reckoning pride and gaudy ostentation of the crudely new home and riches of the Endistons. He knew, and the knowledge brought a repugnant twinge, that it all was the result of extortionate profits upon the labors of puny men, women and children, whom the iron tongue of the bells upon the successful man's factories haled to hard, unremunerative toil, daily, through sweltering heat, amid winter's piercing cold, crushed beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut car, successful men ride to the acclaim of unreflecting society.

In that moment of revulsive emotions, his former aspirations and standards collapsed finally; in his heart arose an invincible growth of rectitude and principle.

As if in occult sympathy, Ruth smiled tenderly, sweetly, as she comprehended the sad solemnity of his expression. His eyes flamed with instant response.

"I wish my mother and sister could see you," he murmured, so irrelevantly, yet with so much inference she blushed, and her glance reverted to the sunset sky. Each was speechless in the solemn rapture of the moment, as :

"A Siren of the West unrolled her hair,
And on the scene a mass of gold,
The radiance rested;
In the hour when sunbeams fade and die,
And twilight shrouds them with a pall;
When hushed is every songster's cry,
And hesitating dewdrops fall
To touch with heaven's tears the rose,
And scatter fleeting pearl-drops shy."

Through luminous mists of twilight they moved, as they left the garden. At the wicket gate he plucked a crimson rose, a luscious bud with folded petals. He slipped it through a buttonhole of his coat. "For remembrance," he informed her. She stroked the rose with a consecrating touch as her eyes sought his, wistfully. She was treading a new and untried realm, in which she was a timid stranger.

He smiled reassuringly, his eyes lustrous and glowing with deepest admiration. A gem scintillated light on her white hand, a costly sheen of drapery accentuated the grace of her slender form, substantial wealth was her rightful portion, yet a

dove-like humility clothed her features and nestled in the violet depths of her pensively shaded eyes, which mirrored the sublimity of the purity of her soul.

He wore the rose during the short but exceptionally pleasant evening. It glowed against the background of his white flannel coat as "a crimson ensign of a warm heart," so Malcom MacAfee expressed his romantic conception of its appearance.

"We have had a letter from Donald. Did Ruth inform you?" Jean said to him when he was saying good night. "And he has secured another preceptress for Ruth. He found her at the school he has been attending all summer. He will go North from the university, and begin a post-graduate course of study. He sent his regards to you, Mr. Phillips."

"I am sincerely glad to hear from him. I have a grateful remembrance of the friend who introduced me to you, my dear friend," he returned gallantly, as he bowed low in parting from his gracious hostess.

CHAPTER IV.

GOLDEN DAYS—THE BRIDGE—THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER.

"And like a lily on a river floating,
She floats on the river of his thoughts. . . ."

". . . In her heart the dew of youth,
On her lips the smile of truth. . . ."

"Gazing with a timid glance,
On the brooklet's swift advance. . . ."

—Selected.

"October was reigning,
Summer was waning,
The rich color fading,
From bloom and foliage."

The sunshine was gold and amber, the atmosphere veiled in a mystic drapery shot with a gilding of glowing sunlight and holding in its ethereal purity a wine of tonicity which antidoted summer's enervations and lotus dreaminess. The corn fields were as marshalled soldiers, whose disciplined ranks bore arms of yellow-husked ears, ripe unto harvest. Bobwhites led their full-fledged broods among ripened pease; the cotton fields gleamed as softly spread,

broad snow-drifts; the song-birds were emigrating Southward, fleeing by myriads before the icy breath of the frost king then campaigning the inhospitable Northern climes. All night the stars burned amber fires and the autumnal harvest moon glowed as a spheroid of burnished gold.

At Kissic-Dale, the maples were huge bouquets of intense color, of gleaming, golden yellow, which dazzled the eyes with its ephemeral splendor; pleasing the more by contrast with the ever-green sedateness of fir, arborvitae, and magnolia. Shaggy chrysanthemums divided homage with rare standard roses, whose vitality would survive until midwinter's solid freezes; in every sighing breeze gold and brown leaves fluttered to the green sward and rested briefly upon the bosom of Mother Earth.

Out in the forest, the scrub oaks and bits of swamp-land, premonitioned the bleak, leafless days then imminent. The sap ran sluggishly in the full-veined pines, the smoke arose leisurely from the black-throated distilleries. It was a period when the mind regretfully bids farewell to the buoyant and volatile pleasures of summertime and heroically turns to less evanescent interests.

A warm, bright afternoon in the last days of October, Edwin Phillips sat with Jean and Mary by the sitting-room hearth, on which smoldered an oak chunk, the remains of a more pretentious fire built in the early morning. A restful somnolence pervaded the room, and in the cheerful atmosphere of semi-idleness Jean stitched daintily and Mary Graham knitted negligently.

He was almost a stranger to the room that was

peculiarly the domain of the domestic circle of the household. Family portraits adorned the walls; the furniture was massive and polished to a mirror-like surface; the carpet, bright-hued and substantial. The room was even less modern than the parlor, and he viewed it with some curiosity, divining its novel and unfamiliar individuality partaking of a past preceding his generation.

He offered to hold the skein Mary was winding, as it lay circling upon her lap until the soft ball had absorbed the last of the strand; he was patient, and responded aptly to Jean's bright observations and Mary's demure utterances. Through polished panes he glimpsed the lawn, empty then, save that Ruth's governess was seated where a full sweep of sunshine burnished her auburn-tinged, brown hair; she had evidently sought that remote spot because the sun favored it at the hour when she was at leisure to bask in its rays.

He did not fancy the governess, a Mrs. Anderson, who, it seemed to him, possessed an unwarranted curiosity concerning him and the country that was the scene of his past. He had made it a habit to avoid her in his frequent trips to Kissic-Dale, and her spying espionage had made him very wary, indeed, in his wooing of Ruth. He feared her as one fears a concealed explosive, which may burst at any moment and carry devastation in its wake. She was broadly acquainted in society, and Maude was one whose light could never be hid under a bushel.

Ruth had gone to David's to visit his invalid wife. Quenna was fond of her white people, and it encouraged her to bear her sufferings when any of the

family visited her ; so Ruth had combined an outing with a visit to the invalid, and surely she was prolonging her stay ; she had been gone quite a while when he came.

From an eastern window of the room, a vista revealed David's cottage on the distant rim of the forest. Mary had resumed her knitting from the freshly wound ball, ere he spied a graceful figure passing from the cottage. The governess was still poring over her book in the vivid sunshine flooding her retreat.

A few moments later he was strolling along the cherry lane into the public road, which led by Sandy's cottage and down the way to the bridge that spanned Holly Creek. There he paused where a weeping-willow trailed branches that swept the flat plank which topped the railing enclosing the floor of the bridge. He climbed to a seat on the railing, and in the seclusion thus secured awaited Ruth's tardy coming. Not aware of the impending tryst, she loitered pleasurably. She gathered purple-tinged, weed blossoms growing in the grass-fringed wayside ; she stood statuesque to heed the shrill chirp of the crickets, the pipe of the frogs, the weird, tiny voices of hidden insects. She carried a white silk shawl, heavily fringed, but she wore neither hat nor bonnet. The sheen of her bright hair shone as a condensated mass of the nebulous mist enmeshing the golden rays of the globular sun beaming radiantly from the western plane of the sky, as she descended the path, dreamily viewing the inspiring glamor of the landscape, where the glory of an autumnal haze "lay like a robe of airiest gossamer."

He evinced no impatience that she loitered so aimlessly; he did not advance to meet her when she paused to note the flight of a bluebird from the roadside hedge and stood with uplifted gaze to watch the passing of a migratory flock of birds from the moment they appeared on the northern horizon until they disappeared far away beyond the southern limit of sight.

Much lay in the motive that had induced him to seek Ruth, to plan for an interview where there would be no intrusion. Such an interview was hard to achieve in the peculiarly formal, yet informal family circle at Kissic-Dale. Besides Mary and Jean, who seemed not to have the slightest suspicion that he regarded Ruth otherwise than as a child and the pet of the household, there was the omnipresent governess, and Sandy's children were often there since the installation of Mrs. Anderson as a teacher.

Since that August eventide he had proven a model lover, gentle and considerate, quick to divine her sensitive innocence and avoiding shock to her youthful and romantic ideas. Although quiet and contained by temperament and training, Ruth had been uniformly kind and devoted, but her maidenly diffidence and timid susceptibilities would not and could not encompass unreckoning passion.

When he had understood her character and the influences which had molded it, his respect and fears had grown in ratio. He knew then that he had rather lose her altogether than behold the light of her love and esteem fade into contempt. He had spent sleepless nights and anxious days pondering the situation, and had become convinced that precipitation alone would assure him happiness.

During the weeks since summer, he had been as one that dreams; as one safely stranded on a "blessed isle" whose atmosphere banished care magically and invoked felicity; but in that happy realm a spectre had arisen, dark-browed, imperative, menacing. Maude had divined that his regard for her was not so absorbing as formerly, and the suspicion had enhanced the value of his acquisition. She had become clamorous for the fealty of his vows; and he was afraid of Maude and her assertive will.

As Ruth finally neared the bridge, he discovered that she was smiling, and that her step was buoyant and not lagging only when she was attracted by some object she viewed with interest. As she ascended to the bridge he sprang to his feet and went to meet her. He enjoyed her surprise and confusion at his unexpected appearance. With a quick breath, her lips parted with a welcoming smile, her eyes brimmed with happiness, she extended both hands in impulsive greeting. He led her to a place where the willows secluded them, that he might retain her hand in his clasp; and leaning on the railing, their eyes spoke the gladness of their hearts and the bliss of the moment. She was blushing rosily, and her dark eyes reflected the happiness she felt in his presence.

"You are quite well, Edwin?" she questioned, with quaint maturity of thought.

"Quite well," he echoed, smiling tenderly.

"How long have you been waiting here?" she asked, analyzing the unexpected tryst.

"Just as long as you have tarried," he reproached her. "I was at the house a long hour before I came out to meet you."

"Oh," she lamented, "and I was reading poetry to Quenna, so leisurely." She sighed her regret.

"Poetry?" he cried, discreditingly. She laughed merrily; his surprise was amusing.

"Yes, truly; Longfellow's poems. She likes them very much, especially 'Hiawatha' and a few others. She says they soothe her. Perhaps it is the flowing smoothness of his rhymes and the picturesque language; I cannot believe it is because of a poetical temperament; she is very practical and material in her ideas." Laughing lightly, in exuberant mood, she unfolded the silken shawl and disclosed a gilt-edged volume, with "Jamie MacKenzie" stamped in golden letters upon the cover. The most trivial idea seemed to accord with their mood. It was enough to be there together if never a word had been spoken.

The breeze lifted the silken hair from her white forehead and smote with tingling touch the fair mold of her countenance. The sunshine swept beyond them to break in golden waves upon the hill, crested far away with singing pines; beneath them the water gurgled a monotonous call, but she did not heed the shadowy world it yet reflected, as it had done when she had stood there beside Donald and the spring skies had smiled so wooingly above and below; the happy reality was too entrancing and sufficing to admit visionary fancies. He influenced her to talk, to smile and blush, to radiate pleasure and content with the worshipping tenderness of his speech and glances. He tightened the clasp which imprisoned her hand.

"Ruth, are you as happy when I am away as when I am with you? Tell me truly; I do not ask idly," he urged her, with wistful earnestness.

"You render me very happy, indeed," she answered truthfully, still radiant and smiling, still meeting with brave eyes his serious, fond glances.

"Do you never reflect how it will be with us when circumstances divide us?" His voice was hoarse and strained, his hand crushed hers convulsively.

Her smile faded in the wan gloom of a prescient sorrow. Her heart rebelled restively. "Oh, Edwin, we are so happy! Why let the future disturb us just now?" she exhorted him, tenderly. She did not wish to recall the chill that assailed her heart each time college was mentioned by Jean and Mrs. Anderson. That alone had seemed a menace to her unlimited happiness.

"We must consider it, Ruth; already I feel impending sorrow of parting. We have been too utterly happy for it to last; something always defeats perfect happiness," he persisted, sadly. "Business compels my absence. I am going away next week to the seaport town which has been exporting our naval stores, to straighten up the year's business of our firm. I do not know how long it will take me to do so. Then I have promised to be at home for the holidays; in justice to my mother I must fulfill the promise. After then, we will enlarge our work, and I shall be in another section, where we will install a sawmill plant. Jennie will not be here another year, and her absence from the camp will render it unfit for civilized habitation. I am to board at Mr. Dalrymple's, but I shall not be there regularly until spring."

"Well?" Ruth interrogated, thoughtfully.

"It all means that I cannot see you often, hardly

ever," he said, dolefully, and with strict surveillance of her reception of his statements.

"I shall miss you very much in the near future, but after then, I, too, shall be away. I think Aunt Jean will send me to college the first of next year," she returned with forced resignation. Tears suffused her vision, pressing the barrier of drooping lashes. Her brave smile was but the ghost of the ones so previous, which had been the embodiment of care-free happiness. A gray, chill shadow seemed to have settled upon the landscape, dimming its golden cheer and robing it with a dreariness incomprehensible.

His lips went white when she spoke of the plans made for her future, but he rallied bravely.

"I am broken-hearted when I contemplate the inevitable, but what is there for us but dreary absence, ceaseless heartache, if—if——"

His lips again were drained of color, his eyes darkened with intensity of suspense; he trembled with his fear of the venture as he whispered constrainedly, "if we do not marry."

His eyes entreated, his breath fanned her cheek. She stared, unbelieving.

"Marry me, Ruth. Give yourself to me irrevocably, so that we can be together constantly, fearing no parting, bearing no heartache, no longing unfulfilled; make me the happiest, most grateful mortal on earth," he urged hoarsely, his voice freighted with unlimited appeal and persuasion.

She still stared blankly, groping blindly for his meaning, stunned by the shock and surprise of his vehement words.

"I love you, love you so much, Ruth! I want you

for my own as long as life lasts ; nothing else in this world matters to me. Can you not understand, dearest?" he ended, meeting her dazed look with reassuring tenderness. But she was speechless, every thought submerged, in a cloud of bewilderment. Her ideas of marriage were vague and immature ; indeed, she had never contemplated it in regard to herself ; the happiness she had found through him had held no prophecy of connubial bliss ; only of blessed moments added to the rapturous estate of youth.

He continued to urge her, pleading desperately when she shrank in dismay from his vehemence as his meaning was unfolded to her benighted mind with the violence of sensitive repugnance in its most exquisite form. She withdrew her hand gently, but firmly ; pale and drooping, she leaned against the railing and her eyes fell diffidently to the undulating water, which caricatured their reflection with distorting ripples. An inexplicable emotion compressed her heart, as, awed and afraid, she stood at the threshold of the weird mystery which attaches to the manifest destiny of humankind.

Life, at best, for the pure in heart and those of chaste sensibilities, is a succession of surprise and exploration ; the structure of knowledge a many-roomed edifice. From the nursery to the tomb, mortals are rushed from one apartment to another by tasking time, who drives mercilessly and inexorably, passing Rubicons which bring a pang of Death, the sad burial of some phase of life.

The blush that had died her cheeks was the finality of her childhood. In the dark, leaf-stained water all the bright years of the care-free past swept away

in a swirling, dizzying flight, rushing with the youthful tide of the brook toward the ancient mighty sea that would engulf its purity and bubbling freedom in its briny, bitter depths, its unrelenting immensity.

His suggestion of marriage rendered her heart cold and ravished of all its buoyant happiness, and, aching with the vision of sacrifices; it was a mandate to lay down every aim of her youth, to step from the gentle charge of Jean into an untried realm of mystery and responsibility.

Her mind gave a swift, panoramic leap into such a future, with its depths of ignorance, and she drew yet farther away from him and his solicitous eagerness. He forced her to face him by grasping her hands and holding them firmly, he searched her eyes wistfully for a moment, then dropped her hands and leaned upon the railing, listlessly.

"Ruth," he said quietly, "I believed that you loved me. Forgive me if I have wounded you, or offended. I would not hurt you willingly," he continued, when she stood silent, with averted eyes and so pale and troubled. "But has not your good common sense grasped the fact that love preludes marriage as a happy finale? To love one being only, to give your very soul into their keeping, means a union of lives as well as of hearts. The future holds nothing for me without you; I desire no moment of life that you do not share. I am ready for any sacrifice, any effort for your sake, and love alone prompts every motive and desire. Ruth, I love you!" he concluded, simply, but with the pathos of heartfelt sincerity strangling his voice.

Ruth was dumb with the tragic element of the in-

terview; his tones, words and behavior were so burdened with reproach and intense appeal; what had been a love-lighted drama, a blissful swell of harmonious felicity, was suddenly robed as a tragedy of stern deeds, and, perhaps, fateful issues. Tears stung her eyes, her heart beat in violent throbs; she trod unstable ground in a dizzying maze of confusing ideas and clashing emotions.

"Look at me, Ruth. I will be heard and answered. Say if you do not love me? I dare you to deny it. I know you love me!" he said, with harsh insistence. He drew her hands from her face, which she had draped in shame and sorrow, but he instantly released them. Troubled and desperate, he at last desisted, to pace the floor of the bridge restlessly, while she gazed stupidly down upon the unresting water, where fallen leaves, brown and amber rifts, rode helplessly upon the rushing tide; but no golden argosies cruised fanciful spaces. Stern reality reared stony barriers to shut off the realm of fancies. Marriage was a very, very solemn problem; death had seemed barely of so serious import or so fateful in consequences.

Her mind evinced its logical training. She stood erect, she suppressed her distaste of the subject and smiled, while her lips yet trembled, as he came back from his aimless tramp back and forth over the restricted surface of the bridge roadway.

"Please tell me, Edwin, what has prompted you to such rash conclusions? Will not our love bind us as firmly if we are absent from each other as when we are together? I do love you," she faltered, as the conviction wrung her heart with an all-absorb-

ing tenderness, "and I am afraid my manner has hurt you; but I cannot help it; you frightened me so."

"And I love you so much I want you by my side always, my own, to have and to hold forever," he responded, his eyes flaming with renewed hope and intensity of longing.

"But why not be happy as we are, just yet? I shall always love you," she said, gropingly, learning the truth as she uttered the words, "love you more and more as I grow wiser and know my own heart, for even so it has been since I have known you. Some sweet day, Edwin, when I am more worthy, and you want me, and Aunt Jean can spare me, we will ask her to let us be together as you wish."

Her voice faltered, and she was silenced by the stern setting of his lips, the cloud of disappointment which distorted his features.

"I will not force you with persuasion; you shall take me now or lose me finally, as your love prompts you," he said assertingly.

"But it will not be necessary to lose you, will it, Edwin?" she queried, anxiously; a solemn awe of him was creeping into her heart; a prescient sense of his influence upon her future.

"You will, if you do not marry me soon, say, some time this winter. I am powerless against circumstances that you could not understand if I tried to explain them, dearest. You have never known anything beyond the placid life of your home; the real world and its temptations, its machinations, are as a sealed book to you, and I hope you may never read it; that you may be spared the unholy revelations

sure to disillusion you ; but if you love me, you must marry me soon, must forsake all else and cleave to me only. I am forced to make such stern conditions," he explained, with bitter self-accusing, "but if you love me as I love you, they will not seem hard, but blissfully easy."

His words and manner impressed her with a vague anxiety. There were tokens of real suffering, of vital earnestness, which filled her heart with indefinable perplexity and a humiliating view of their relation to each other. She was so preoccupied analyzing the thoughts so strange and bewildering, she did not reply, but turned away and faced the valley, her mind reviewing the past months in which Cupid had been so busy with his shuttle, not his bow, weaving into life's web beautiful scenes, an iridescent tapestry revealing vistas of sheer delight in rose-embowered Edens.

She tried to find the cheats in its pleasures and its sweets, if in love's garden, as in Aunt Jean's, roses veiled hidden thorns to pierce the heart ; she gazed probingly into the heart of Nature, and realized why some practical lines had been haunting her mind that afternoon :

"With what a glory comes and goes the years!
The buds of Spring! Those beautiful harbingers
Of sunny skies and cloudless times enjoy
Life's newness, and earth's garniture spread out;
And when the silver habit of the clouds
Comes down upon the autumnal sun and with
Sober gladness the new year takes up
His bright inheritance of golden fruits,
A pomp and pageant fills the splendid scene."

Donald had read the lines impressively the previous year, and revealed to her their beauty and appropriateness; she had been so impressionable then, when life had seemed to be a manifold poem. As yet, though, her heart had not evolved an idealism of love's crowning event, and she could not entertain a thought of it with the least pleasure.

"Of what are you thinking, Ruth?" His voice recalled her, imperatively. "Will you not give me some kind of an answer? I must soon be going, and I have not spoken idly."

She heeded him with an unreserved answer.

"Edwin, it is very pleasant to see you, to be with you, to dream of you and to know that you love me, but I cannot marry you just now," she said, regretfully.

"That shall not be final, Ruth," he contended, obstinately. "You must consider fully before deciding; so much depends upon your decision! Our whole future will be determined by it, and you are but a child after all, and cannot realize how vitally I feel about it. I must be patient; I have fairly stormed you for a reply, and it is not just. You shall have some time to reflect and learn what it means for us to be separated. I am going away. I will attend to business strictly, and when I come back you may tell me whether you will marry me or go to college. I shall be prepared to act either way then, no matter how you decide."

His voice was tremulous, with a lifeless note. His lips were stern and unsmiling. "Only, say once more, Ruth, 'I love you, Edwin!' that I may take the words with me to cheer me in the dreary days of absence."

"I do love you, Edwin! Indeed, I love you!" she cried, fervently, and gave him her hand to seal the confession. He clasped it so hungrily and gazed into her eyes so longingly their violet depths were bathed in tears of sympathy and feeling.

"Shall we be going? I have to be at the camp at the supper hour," he suggested, when she had dried her tears and was pensively calm.

As they strolled homeward, it was as if they had left tragedy at the bridge and entered again the love-lighted drama which had so irradiated their short acquaintance. When they turned into the cherry lane, he said, in spite of their sedate pace:

"But we need not hurry so; there is no haste, and I wish to further impress upon you the importance of what I have been saying to you. Consider it rationally; put aside romantic ideas and deal only with practical facts. Lay love in all its alluring happiness and charm side by side with everything that can combat it, and when I come again be ready with your answer. I shall give you time; I shall be gone several weeks, and I shall return prepared for any emergency."

"Have *you* also considered, Edwin? Do you realize all you propose?" she said, with grave concern.

"I have considered," he returned emphatically.

"That I am quite young, that I have never been to college, that I know nothing of your people, your home or the men and women of the world you are accustomed to mingle with; and that Aunt Jean has a right to be consulted? She has been everything to me, you know; and there is Uncle Angus. He is

very fond of me, too," she argued practically, and with the sincerity so innate in her character.

"I know that there is not a phase of the subject I have not brooded upon until I was almost crazy," he assured her, convincingly. "And Ruth, you must not consult anyone; your heart alone must make the decision. I could not bear for your uncle to stand in judgment upon our love, that heartless, crusty old bachelor. That he is not married proves that he is not capable of love!"

"But Aunt Jean! She would understand! Let me seek her counsel? I have not told anyone yet, the secret seemed too sacred to discuss, and I have never thought it necessary until now. I would like so much to consult Aunt Jean. She has been married. She could explain the things that seem so strange to me."

"Consult no one but your own heart," he reiterated insistently. "Promise you will not?"

"I promise," she acquiesced with a sigh of relief.

They were nearing the gate where his horse and buggy awaited him. The mansion, amid autumnal foliage, loomed massive and aggressively, staid and monumental; gilded with the mellow rays of the declining sun, imbued with the sober seeming of Indian summer. Ruth viewed it with a new and clinging affection through a vista of its patrician past. "I am the last of them, the honorable MacKenzies, who so loved and cherished it," she realized, with a surge of allegiance and duty.

They paused at the gate, which he refused to open. The short day was almost spent; imperative duties awaited him at the camp, yet he lingered a few moments.

Ruth stood by the gate, ephemerally happy, conscious of a sensitive joy pervading her most transitory thoughts.

Mrs. Anderson was promenading the veranda back and forth, and they were conscious of her espionage.

He leaned over the wrought-iron fence and plucked a last rose of summer, blooming amid the solitude of still verdant foliage. He laid the listless, cold blossom in the warm palm of his hand and examined it critically. She watched his movements wistfully; the pallid bud seemed to each prophetic, and when their eyes met each sighed with a mutual regret and bereavement.

"How fares the blessed little pine, Ruth?" he quizzed, with a flash of his former teasing.

"It is an evergreen, you know," she retorted, blushing and smiling with ineradicable diffidence. He craved a magician's wand, the power of the gods to demolish barriers and conquer the fortress of circumstances.

The level rays of the setting sun swept the gold of her hair, the rose of her cheeks, the purple depths of her heavily-lashed eyes.

"Goodby," he said finally, holding her eyes and pleading dumbly; then he drove away swiftly in the rainbow lights of purple, gilded clouds, pillared against the yellow wall of sunset.

CHAPTER V.

THE CRISIS—RELICS OF SCOTLAND—GOODBY, SWEET- HEART, GOODBY.

"Hands of invisible spirits touch the strings
Of that mysterious instrument, the soul,
And play the prelude of our fate."

—Selected.

"Close, close in a rapturous kiss,
He drew as a bee draweth honey,
My soul, until it fainted with bliss .
And passed into his keeping forever,
To have and to hold as his own."

—Selected.

The bright, ephemeral days of Indian summer faded imperceptibly into days when chill winds shrieked over the sand-hills and dipped into the valleys. At Kissic-Dale, the boisterous breath of approaching winter had blown down the wide-throated chimneys, where huge logs blazed upon the hearths when gray clouds lowered and pattering hail and glistening sleet enshrouded the tomb of summer.

Anon, there were bright days, and the elusive warmth mocked frostbitten nature and the nights scintillated with the Arctic purity of myriad stars

sown thickly upon a purplish sky and reflected by frost-encrusted foliage and frozen dewdrops.

The forces of Nature, the fluctuating tides of the seasons, are dominant elements in lives passed far beyond the glare of gas-lighted streets and the roar of traffic where the mind loses ken of the miracles evolved in the plan of creation; into the warp and woof of those isolated lives are interwoven the influences of the solar systems, the sidereal and lunar phenomena, the whims of Boreas, the meteorological conditions of atmosphere, for they are dominated and diverted by their caprices.

Thus one evening, late in December, closed doors shut in snugly the inmates of Kissic-Dale. Fires blazed upon the hearth of sitting-room and parlor. Late roses and potted geraniums mingled their fragrance with the elusive aroma of burning pine, oak and hickory. Jean entertained Edwin Phillips in the parlor. He had arrived at sunset in time for supper and had received a genuine welcome from Jean. Ruth had been very quiet and meditative and the governess very talkative at the table. After then Mrs. Anderson had detained Ruth in the sitting-room to complete the day's allotment of recitation. Ruth's voice and eyes had beseeched pardon for her unavoidable negligence, and he had excused her.

Jean was conscientiously entertaining him and ran the gamut of social amenities. Then, whether influenced by his own anxious state of mind which rendered him absent-minded and dull, or inspired by some psychological intuition, she lapsed into reminiscent and personal subjects.

With a long-drawn sigh of difficult resignation,

she informed him that she had at last induced Ruth to enter college.

Providence had favored her desire. Mrs. Anderson had been offered a position in the faculty of a Presbyterian college and Jean had been assured that Ruth would be permitted to room with her and that she would give personal oversight to her bairnie's health and comfort. It would be but half of a scholastic year, and that would be so much better than enduring a whole year of separation in the first parting. In the isolation and seclusion of the household, home ties were strong and broke with a shock to heart and habit, and that arrangement would somewhat ameliorate the dreaded inevitable.

His interest was silent but flatteringly intense, and for the first time she confided to him details of family history. Pathetically and fluently, she acquainted him with ancestral traditions; her pride of race and lineage, and lamented that none of them were left of the long line to perpetuate the prestige of Kissic-Dale but Ruth. She deplored the fate of her husband and brothers, dwelling upon the end of Jamie, whose death had thrown such responsibility upon his daughter. She emphasized the need of Ruth's being liberally educated, in that her forbears had ever deemed ignorance a crime beyond pardon, and to esteem their race lightly culpable treason.

She fetched some of her precious relics and reverently exhibited them; a bagpipe with tarnished chanter; a fire-bellows of lacquered ebony, embellished with blood-red roses with silver leaves; a plumed bonnet crested with an eagle's feather; a crude broadsword and a time-stained philibeg; a

scathed poniard, with a curiously wrought handle, and the heavy loving cup, the prince of her souvenirs, filled then with the last gleaning of roses from her garden. She remarked the fact and sighed; the garden had been abandoned to the desolate sway of winter, its blighting snows and paralyzing ices.

For awhile, then, they sat in a rather embarrassing silence. His eyes brooded constantly, the scented hickory logs gasping red-hot breaths upon the marble hearth, where they were hedged securely by the huge elaborate brass andirons and the fanciful green enameled fender.

Ordinary and unsentimental subjects seemed flat and savorless after discussing pathos and tradition. Once Jean intercepted his furtive espionage of her favorite ancestor, the pictured, betartaned young Highlander. She explained that he was the father of the lads who followed "Bonny Prince Charlie" to the fatal field of Culloden; and that the bearded, fierce-looking, full-jowled Scot, whose portrait hung in the sitting-room, lived in the days which originated the Highland and Lowland clans; the days of border warfare, violence and robbery, of rough gallantry and ruder chivalry; violent loves and obstinate lovers, when betartaned Lochinvars dashed across the border to snatch sweethearts and wives from their turbulent enemies.

In the thrill of narrative she disclosed her clannish zeal for all that pertained to her time-hallowed race, her unbending pride of lineage.

She said: "Although we are transplanted and only unnoted units of a great nation whose national fame submerges individuality, yet we are Gaelics in

heart, and materialize our inherited race pride by our intelligence and industry, and proud aloofness from other peoples. Why, my mother spoke English brokenly, and never in her life entered another church but our own. She was a MacGillivray; Jean, the daughter of Laurie; and there is a tradition, not verbal, but written, that an ancestor, a favorite at court, found his bride at the castle of a Norse nobleman. Jamie and I fancied that Ruth inherited her characteristics from that bride 'of ye olden time,' Jamie also had yellow hair and blue eyes; Ruth's dark eyes came through her mother."

Jean lapsed into speechless silence to ponder some intruding thought or memory. Edwin gazed upon the varying shadows of the face he loved, reflecting Ruth from her infancy to the past summer. When she had fetched her relics for exhibition, he had found among them a box of photographs that included many of Ruth; and he had retained them to study at leisure, the pictures delineating every phase of her growth.

"A rare lassie, is she not?" Jean remarked with irrepressible affection.

He nodded an emphatic rejoinder, then shifted the cardboards, nervously.

"When I was a child," Jean spoke again, ruminatively, her mind dismissing the photographs, "the sermons at our old kirk were preached in Gaelic. I have planned that some day Ruth and I would sit together in some old kirk in the Highlands of our 'ain countrie,' and hear the pure Gaelic, unalloyed by foreign intermixture. It is the desire of my heart to keep Ruth with me until her character is

permanently formed, and be thus assured that she will perpetuate our ideals. It would break my heart to fail in this duty to Jamie and all former Mac-Kenzies; therefore, she must have a full enlightenment, every grace of culture and advantage of education, even if I have to be lonely and bear with what fortitude I can the sorrow of her absence; and she will not prove a disappointment, my brave little bairnie!" she concluded, with absolute faith, as she reached for a small hand-broom, with which to brush the white ashes blown upon the gleaming marble of the hearth by the hissing incineration of the crumbling logs.

"Grant me a favor, Mrs. MacEarchan," he appealed, suddenly, strangely, she conceived with some surprise.

"What is it?" she asked, wondering vaguely.

"A photo of Ruth as she appeared last summer," he explained.

"Oh, yes, it was made while she was away with Angus. I have several," Jean said, and waited.

"May I keep it, please?" He pleaded so insistently her heart was touched and her family pride flattered.

"For the sake of our pleasant friendship; as a souvenir of our beautiful summer," he persisted, earnestly.

"If you so particularly desire it," she acquiesced, kindly, thus revealing trust and unconventionalism. "There are several of the same copy. Angus, with his usual generosity toward Ruth, had a dozen made to distribute among relatives. He is very fond of her; he insists that he must pay her college expenses and speaks of giving her a trip abroad when her education is completed."

He placed the photograph in his pocket, a smile, strangely triumphant and sad, evincing a definite purpose.

"But why do you want it so much?" Jean inquired, frankly, not in the least divining his real motives and feelings.

"Because it is so much as I imagine the angels to be," he replied in a tone that increased her wonder.

Mrs. Anderson came in, breezy, in strictly formal cheeriness. "Ruth is putting away her books and will be in directly," she explained to Jean in a polite aside.

"May I seek her to say goodbye? I must be going soon, and I have scarcely seen her," Edwin requested instantly.

"Of course," Jean answered, politely.

As he left the room Mrs. Anderson went to the piano, and Jean leaned back in her chair and relaxed into pleased attention. She never wearied of music, and Mrs. Anderson played brilliantly; and neither dreamed of the interview imminent in the sitting-room.

Edwin entered that room quietly and shut the door firmly. Ruth had not left the study table, her face was buried in her folded arms, portraying deepest dejection. He knew that she was alone, that Mary Graham was away on a visit. He was beside her ere she realized his presence. She lifted startled, tear-drenched eyes to meet his, blazing with fierce excitement. Her tears disarmed the ferocious despair compressing his heart. He smiled leniently into her woe-stricken countenance, although his stiff lips resisted tensely.

"I was coming, Edwin," she apologized, confusedly, as she wiped her eyes in forlorn haste and forced to her lips a wan smile of welcome.

"I much preferred coming to you," he returned, tersely, "and I am not surprised to find you crying. I would cry, too, if I had broken two loving hearts so wilfully."

"Oh, then, you know! Aunt Jean has told you?" she exclaimed, shrinkingly.

"She has told me so much there is no need of your assuming the pain of reiteration. I understand, and I must not blame you, must I? No doubt it is all for the best, if I could feel it to be so, but love is proverbially blind, you know," he said, with a composure incompatible with the lurid flame smoldering in the glance she met bravely, if tearfully.

"I have wanted so much to consult you, to explain. You have been away a long time, Edwin, it has seemed interminable to me; and I have reflected, and—and I could not do any other than the way I have chosen. I am not so young but that I realize my dense ignorance of the real, every-day world. Shakespeare says: 'Home-keeping youths have homely wits'; and according to that I am supremely homely, uncouthly equipped with a woman's most essential knowledge and graces. You would have been ashamed of me, Edwin, in the presence of your friends, your family, your society, where the women dance and coquette so fascinatingly."

"Well?" he questioned, amazement for the moment superseding all other ideas.

"And I could not bear that. I would not for any consideration put such a test upon your love for me."

There are other reasons that I should regard sacredly, but they are not so vital, for, Edwin, your love, your respect would be paramount for any happiness I covet, and I cannot run any risk of not deserving your highest esteem," she pleaded, defending her course with tearful apology.

He listlessly viewed her agitation and depth of earnestness, as if he knew it all was useless, any discussion with her, any effort. He stood upon the hearth rug, his face fronting her, his eyes brooding the scene restlessly, fighting his battle alone in dumb pain and rebellion. Ruth dabbed her eyes with her sodden handkerchief, utterly distraught and unnerved in that crisis, and she took the initiative, someone might come in at any moment and prevent a full understanding and justification.

"I shall think of you every moment, I am sure. I have thought of nothing else since last summer, it seems to me, Edwin, but I will work and be more worthy; I will be true to you forever!" she protested, plaintively.

He drew her picture from his pocket. "See, Ruth, what your kind aunt has given me!" He held it aloft, triumphantly. "It is mine, and no power on earth shall take it away from me. It shall abide with me in life and go with me to my grave; my good angel, my one love, my priceless treasure!"

He searched her living features steadily, then intently their radiant, smiling shadow. He sighed as he put it away; then he sought for and found the portrait of the bearded Highlander, who smiled broadly from the dim old canvas. If he, also, had lived in the days of border outlaws, such stress as

he was then enduring would not have been necessary. There was sweet surrender in Ruth's expression; soon she would count all things dross but him and his devotion; but that was romantic surmise, the reality was that there was nothing more to be said but farewell, nothing could avail any more, and his only consolation was that when the love-light faded from her eyes he would not know it or behold the scorn they would mirror when she would believe him false and utterly worthless.

He searched the room with a swift, probing glance. They were quite alone, the doors were closed, the windows curtained. The green shade of the study lamp threw an emerald shadow to dim the red gleaming of the cheery hearth. The music from the parlor came through closed doors in muffled but mellifluous strains.

He posed a long time, pondering, irresolute, braving the clamor of his aching heart, heeding his tender reverence for her youth and innocence. Ruth sighed and almost sobbed as she remarked the change in him. He was so unlike the happy, debonair Edwin she had first known. He came to her side, intending to say goodby and go his desolate way without further parley, but his heart failed him. For a moment he hesitated; the music throbbed distantly, but it melted his heart as no other music had ever swayed his emotions, and the room was so quiet and secluded. The cat purred on the cozy hearth, the fire-impregnated logs glowed warmly. He leaned and lifted her into his arms; his voice in a tense whisper seemed to shriek his words.

"You love me, Ruth! Say you love me!" he ap-

pealed, with sobbing breath, and as her head sank against his shoulder he laughed recklessly, defiantly. His mind leaped with the speed of a winged Mercury from the depths of depression to the rapturous heights of an exalted passion. A supreme tenderness, the effulgence of blissful gratification, transformed his countenance, as he caressed her hair and stroked her cheek with gentle touch until he lifted her head, so timid and drooping, that he might compel her to look into his eyes, and she gazed in a thrilling ecstasy as the gates of his soul revealed the refined gold of his love from which all dross had been eliminated in the crucial pain of parting:

"For as gold is tried by fire,
So is the heart by pain."

He smiled into the sweet countenance so near his own at last, and in a frenzy of reciprocated love, he held her to his breast and pressed his lips to hers in a clinging caress. In a rapture too exquisite for expression he kissed away the tears bedewing her eyes, the sweet, fathomless eyes, that were to him windows of the only heaven he should glimpse upon earth, then again, and yet again he kissed the tender lips quivering and sentient.

When finally she escaped his arms he met her blushing rebuke with an exulting smile that embodied remembrance of silvery April skies; of jessamine and arbutus; of a fair, wonderfully sweet maiden, who had suddenly personified all that springtime ecstasy. Was he not reaping a reward no other ever could claim, that no untoward fate

could snatch from him; the first love of her heart, the first kiss of her lips, her first surrender to the suit of an adorer?

He drew her to him again, brave with the thought of victory, forgetting its limitations, as with dim vision and caressing voice, he whispered fond words, adoring phrases, assuring her of his love, his undying devotion.

"Do you really love me so much?" she questioned, awed by the vehemence of his words.

"So much, so absolutely," he vowed, "that love alone gives me strength to renounce all hope of happiness."

Their eyes met again in a thrilling revelation.

"Oh, Edwin!" she whispered, as one exclaims at a supreme burst of grandeur.

"Did I not tell you long ago that love was more than life, that nothing else mattered?" he reminded her.

"And I had no conception of it then, of its splendor of happiness," she admitted, wonderingly.

"Oh there are looks and tones that dart!
An instant sunshine through the heart!
As if the soul that instant caught
Some treasure it through life had sought;
As if the very lips and eyes,
Predestined to have all our sighs,
And never be forgot again,
Sparkled and spoke before us then."

"I knew you were my fate from the first moment I beheld you," he said, his eyes gentle and glistening

with unshed tears. "Oh, why did I find you but to lose you!" he exclaimed, rebelliously.

"I hope to make you very happy some day, Edwin," she assured him brightly, but his smile faded as stern reality quenched all anticipatory hope; the music in the parlor broke abruptly into silence. Nemesis confronted him in Medusa-like ugliness and watchfulness, as Ruth revealed her heart and devotion.

With masculine strength and a literal viewpoint, he estimated the situation, for beneath the outward splendor of her charms, as an inexorable power behind a jewelled throne, he knew abided invincible monitors which guarded the gateway of her soul and pillared a firm character; lofty ideals, pious conceptions, infinite distaste for deceit and dishonor; and that he had won her falsely, had met with effort, her exalted standards. Even then her eyes, those wonderfully beautiful and expressive eyes, were saying:

"Oh, thou adored! The glories of thy burning eyes afford me visions of elemental fire! Oh, what art thou to move me so? To be the cynosure of my soul on earth! Of all the mysteries I dimly knew, until love's flame of wonder made them glow."

Alas! that she had given him sublimated faith and ascribed to him every grace and virtue of an unblemished, noble character. She was ignorant of the deceit of worldly standards, her training taught a sincere foundation for every structure in human character; she knew nothing of society's whited sepulchres, and the knowledge of them, where they would concern her vitally, would slay her respect by

their manifold horror. He felt sin-scarred in view of her saintly ignorance which had made her so wholly, so deliciously worth winning and possessing. News of the world had come to her through the stilted moralisms of standard literature and the clarified medium of godly minds sternly arrayed against laxity in the least detail of principle; therefore he must plead no more, but embrace renunciation, acquiesce in an arrangement which he knew would divide them forever.

The pain of the moment grew intolerable, a sorrow so intense no ephemeral bliss could longer assuage it, when she said, with plaintive appeal to his strength and affection: "Do you think I will be able to bear the long, lonely months away from you, Edwin?"

Her voice broke into sobbing as her heart filled with an indescribable presage of solitude.

His reply was to take her in his arms and press her lips with his. She could hear muffled throbs of his heart as he whispered: "My beloved, my only love!"

He released her gently, and walked deliberately to the door, but with his hand upon the knob he paused for a last, lingering survey of the room and of Ruth, puzzled and waiting by the study-table, ignorant of his intention, not dreaming it was a farewell parting. Dazed and dumb, with the significance of his acts, he gazed, as if from a remote distance, upon the lost Eden of the bright spring days, summer's rose-lighted reign and autumn's love-gilded climax; of which the scene, staged peacefully in the mingled glow of lamp-light and fire-light, the Rembrandesque

shadows bathing the stolid Highlander in glimmering light, his woollen "plaidie" thus matching the gorgeous sheen of the silken one of the cynical young Highlander on the parlor wall, and shimmering with gentle radiance, on Ruth's slender form, regal wealth of bright hair and timid violet eyes, was the end of the elusory dream of bliss.

He turned the bolt and the door fell ajar. Mrs. Anderson was singing:

"Oh, fond dove! Oh, fair dove!
Oh, dove with the white white breast!"

"Oh!" Ruth gasped. "Oh, Edwin!"

He slipped through the door and closed it noiselessly, reverently, as, for the last time, the lid of a casket is lowered, secluding forever beloved features.

In the hall he drew on his overcoat and secured his hat. He waited for a pause in the song; then from the doorway he said good night to Jean and Mrs. Anderson.

As his faithful horse bore him swiftly through the shrilling forest, he buttoned his coat closely against the chill of the winter breeze moaning above in the frosted pine-tops, whose bristling needles were stiffened and fretting harshly, wailing, sighing, heart-piercing cadences that seemed a sentient voice expressing the dreary loneliness of his heart.

From the depth of aching hopelessness, the blank void of desolation, his mind was struggling heroically with plans for the future; resolving to fight

life's battles manfully, to fulfill his pledges to Maude, slavishly achieve her comfort, and yet no usurious gain wrought by the weak fingers of women and children, the product of the necessitous lives of the needy and unfortunate, should assist in his conquering of fortune; bravely he would struggle alone, unaided by a successful father. And the forest sighed, the tall pines bowed sympathetically in unison with the turmoil of his soul.

BOOK III.

AUTUMN.

"They have flourished in beauty and freshness;
They have laughed in the beams of the sun;
They have wept when the heavens were unwindowed,
They have sighed when the darkness begun.
Let them fall; let them perish; it is well!
Their youth and their sweetness have flown."

—Longfellow.

CHAPTER I.
SHADOWED ROSES—A DESPERATE APPEAL—MAD
FOR FLIGHT AND SEEKING LIGHT.

“Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in
passing,
Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness;
So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another,
Only a look and a voice, then darkness again and a
silence.”—Longfellow.

“How dread the day must be when Love,
A while by angels fanned,
Must drop apart, a broken thing,
Despised, and barred, and banned.”
—Lindsay.

The broad, illimitable sweep of sunlight of a bright June day lay upon Kissic-Dale and its wilderness of roses.

Mary Graham, alone upon the veranda, sighed helplessly as she surveyed the floral magnificence spread so lavishly for her solitary enjoyment. The sun shone so brilliantly with the lustre of diamonds in its refulgency; the roses were so extremely lovely, so vari-colored, so intensely tinted, so lavish of their fragrance, so luxuriant in their blooming. In the long years of her stay at Kissic-Dale she could not recall such a harvest of fragrance and blossom,

of emerald foliage and bird music; the magnolias dressed daily, as if for a bridal, the Cape jessamines, regal in their luscious crop of waxy, white petals and cloying aroma; the white lilies rivalling them, and seducing the bees and brilliant-hued humming birds; the honeysuckle rioting in plebeian growth and diffusive incense; and the birds singing as if their hearts were bursting with melody, and the long days were too short for them to warble off the overflow of their liquid music, their ephemeral joy and ecstasy.

The elements had been remarkably propitious, the spring season a germinating flood of sunlight and showers. Yet with Nature in her sunniest mood, Ruth's absence had been felt deeply, and the place dreary without her sunny presence.

Weeks before she had been due to come home, the time had been daily computed, until Jean had gone to fetch her, and they had counted the hours, and finally the minutes that elapsed ere her presence filled the aching void in the home.

At first the joy of the reunion blinded them to the fact that the hectic flushes on her cheeks were produced by the excitement of the glad home-coming; then Jean's aroused concern was shared by all her household. It was not the child of their hearts, their former Ruth, who had come back to them. The other Ruth had not wandered aimlessly and with dragging step, here, there, everywhere, and anon to sit for hours motionless, deep in a frowning revery. Neither had she been capricious in eating and sleeping, indifferent to the flowers, the cats, and the pigeons. This Ruth refused to go to the kirk, and

was wont to go for lengthy journeys into the lonely glens below the spring house and dairy.

The past noon she had been away since early morning until then, and had returned wan and haggard, and had not eaten dinner, though pressed to do so with the insistence of almost a command.

Jean and Mary had wondered and fretted over their bairnie; her constant pallor, her listless behavior, her lack of appetite had worried them greatly. Jean was remorseful for sending her away, and Mary was significantly silent when she voiced the unavailing regret.

Jean had written Mrs. Anderson Ruth's condition, demanding light upon the deplorable change in a nature once so hopeful and buoyant. Mrs. Anderson was also sorely puzzled. In the spring Ruth had fainted in the college chapel during prayers, but she had rallied and would not let Jean be informed of the happening or her subsequent change of health and spirits. Ruth had been, in the first months at school, feverishly eager to graduate in every branch of study for which the college gave diplomas, and she had stolidly accepted her diploma when she had successfully won it. Mrs. Anderson had not understood and could not explain further Ruth's demeanor, for she had not confided to her teachers any cause for her listlessness.

Therefore Mary sighed, perplexedly, dropped stitches in her knitting as she absently blinked at the bright landscape, feeling the gloom shadowing the flower-gemmed lawn, the cool interior.

Finally, she grew restless with the oppression of unavailing surmises and, laying aside her knitting,

put on her sunbonnet and strolled out among the roses, which she caressed regretfully, in that so much beauty and sweetness should go unappreciated.

She pursued a meditative mood, which led her to the orchard, where her feet smote the bluebells, ringing fairy chimes unheeded. It was delicious there in the shade of the fruiting foliage haunted by happy birds and trembling in the breath of aimless breezes.

When she had left the great colonaded veranda, silence had reigned there in intensified degree, except for the faint scratching of Jean's pen, as she wrote at her desk, placed in the pathway of breezes sweeping through the open windows of the sitting-room, until Ruth came out and reclined languidly in a large wicker chair, her eyes viewing, blankly, the lawn and exquisite prospect. Then Jean laid aside her pen and came out also, to sit beside Ruth.

"I have been wishing to speak with you, Ruthie," she said, earnestly, "but I would not disturb you while you seemed to be resting."

"Well, Auntie?" Ruth returned, faintly interrogative.

"Yes, I have been impressed that you find it lonely here after being with so many young people for several months; and really it is lonelier here than formerly. You miss your teachers, Mrs. Barnard, Donald, and Mrs. Anderson. And last summer Mr. Phillips and your uncle were here a great deal and helped to divert us. Suppose I give you a house party, invite as many of your schoolmates as you desire, and induce some of your relatives and acquaintances to join them here, and thus enliven our solitude?" Jean suggested, earnestly.

"Oh, do not think of such a thing, I implore you!" Ruth exclaimed, with such a repugnance to the idea Jean stared her surprise and repulse.

"Surely you are ill!" she cried, solicitously.

"They would surely drive me mad, dearest Auntie," Ruth apologized, the lost color rushing to her cheeks, flushing. She arose impulsively; then kneeling by Jean, she laid a cold hand upon her cheek and probed her soft, hazel eyes with her own, dark and glittering.

"You love me, Auntie?" she queried, in an appealing, hopeless voice.

"Of course, I love you! Who else have I on earth to really love and cherish but you?" Jean replied, with a reassuring caress.

"Then, Auntie, let me arrange my life for the near future? Do you mind telling me just what we have to spend, you and I?"

Jean gazed long and anxiously into the flushed and haggard countenance, which had erstwhile been so bonny. Ruth's eyes drooped secretively, evading the perplexed scrutiny.

In the slumberous quietude, the bees buzzed drowsily over the flower-scented lawn; the old clock ticked sonorously in the open hall; a light breeze stirred the aspen leaves into a frenzy. In the distance, Mary Graham was entering Sandy's cottage to visit Kathy; Dicey droned a hymn in her room beyond the kitchen; a mocking-bird was trilling lazily in the topmost branches of a magnolia. A darksome dread compressed Jean's heart; her bosom ached with a repulsive foreboding.

"Do you mind telling me, Auntie?" Ruth whispered, hoarsely.

"You did not sleep well last night, bairnie," Jean said, evasively.

Ruth waited tensely for an answer to her request.

"I will tell you exactly," Jean said, finally and thoughtfully. "It is your right to know. I should have told you long ago if it had occurred to me to do so."

"Well?" Ruth encouraged her with unsmiling lips. She felt that she was pleading for sanity.

Jean deliberated, arranging facts and sums mentally and methodically. "Your dear Mamma," she resumed with precision, "had some of the little fortune left her when Jamie married her. He never touched a penny of it, and neither have I. It amounted to five thousand dollars then, and it has been accumulating interest ever since, and now it must be considerable more than that. It is safely invested in bonds, where Jamie placed it after they were married. Then Jamie's life was insured for ten thousand dollars, and I had it added to the sum your mother left for you." She faltered and stroked Ruth's hair, as Ruth laid her arm around her shoulders in a silent caress. Jean resolutely put aside distressing memories and continued:

"That is all yours absolutely; I have no part in that money, and all the balance will be yours when I pass away. I also have a few thousands invested in bonds. You know Archie left me a farm that pays me a good rental, and I have never used any of it here, for I have never needed to do so. Kissic-Dale more than pays our moderate expenses; and to prove it I could show you as much as we could spend soon, in the till of the old chest in my bedroom. Did you ever imagine that thing a bank as well as a relic?"

Ruth lifted her head to smile wanly. "No, but I believed it contained some mysterious treasure. I used to build all sorts of romances concerning its contents. I did not want to know ; speculation was so much more interesting." Her effort to be gay ended with a sigh.

"Besides that I have spoken of, there are the thousands my father invested in the bonds of the city of L——, which has been increasing steadily since his death some years before you were born ; and lastly, here is Kissic-Dale, with its hundreds of acres of long-leaf pines, which make the best of lumber, to say nothing of their possibilities in turpentine and rosin. When we choose to have them worked or to sell them for lumber, the timber of our sand barrens will become veritable gold mines, and the plantation ensures a good living as long as it is cultivated.

"But we do not need our pines to be sold, maybe never. It would grieve me to know them slain. I feel they are living witnesses of the past, of the lives of those sleeping in the churchyard at the kirk. They can wait indefinitely, for you know your Uncle Angus is quite wealthy and has never married, and that he says you are his heiress," she concluded, smiling down into the wan face pressed against her shoulder.

Ruth's eyes were veiled inscrutably. There were purple shadows beneath them ; her cheeks were flushing nervously.

"Now tell me your plans for your future, bairnie," Jean queried anxiously. "Tell me why you are so suddenly and for the first time in your life concerned about our finances?"

Ruth answered with repressed urgency. "I have been thinking, Auntie, or at least I am thinking now, that I had rather go to a more advanced college than the one I attended last winter. It was so easy to win a diploma there. I wish to go to the very best school in the United States, get away from everything local, and be where I can glimpse the wide world, all its progress, and meet people whose influence will exalt my mind and avoid those who will lower my ideals, my first impressions of the divinity of human life. Do you not realize that I am right, that my ideals are reasonable and logical! And it is mainly your fault that only the very best and most conservative will please me. I am anxious to see and consult with Uncle Angus."

"We will write him immediately, my dear. You know I am replying to his last; I have not concluded my letter," Jean suggested hopefully.

Ruth rested a moment, spent and listless with un-resting excitement. She was speaking with supreme effort, and while doing so had often moistened her dry lips, which resisted her voice and refused to be mobile. When finally she withdrew her eyes from a vacant stare into blank distance, Jean could hardly bear the suffering appeal, the shadows of pain embodied in their strained expression.

"Let us be wildly free this summer, and—and—like the care-free birds wing our way to another clime, to Uncle Angus in his distant home. I wish very much to go, and he will be so pleased to have us with him. We will stay with him until we can arrange about the school; Vassar or Bryn Mawr I have been planning. I like the last name; it

has a sound like the old country, doesn't it? Say that we will go, oh, please do!" she entreated so vehemently and impractically, the tears rose from an aching depth in Jean's heart and brimmed her eyes to an overflow she suppressed with difficulty.

She began to fear that Ruth had been smitten with sudden insanity. She searched the records of the lives of all known MacKenzies and was relieved that she could not recall a hint of infirm mentality in any branch of the family tree. Yet she nervously began to reassure Ruth that her happiness was the paramount interest of hers and Angus Bethune's lives.

"Of course we will go," she promised, rashly, for until that moment such an idea had not entered her mind. "I will arrange everything as you desire; only be happy and well again, bairnie, and I will not count the cost of any undertaking, but it will take some time to bring it to pass, I fear."

"Oh, no! I have thought out the entire plan, please, Auntie! We must go right away. I am so dreadfully tired, so tired, so tired!"

She leaned wearily against Jean's shoulder, the white lids veiled her smarting, tearless eyes; the dark lashes lay in the purple shadow encircling them which showed lividly against the white pallor of her cheeks. Her words, her manner awed Jean into an anxious silence.

"I have not finished; I have not explained my plans. You must go with me to my school and stay there with me. We can arrange for that also; here everyone understands their duties and will fulfill them; Mary, Dicey, Sandy and David, and you need the change. You love to know things and appreciate

the world far more than I ever shall. You have made yourself a recluse for my sake; now you must go abroad and acquaint yourself with the ideas of the present day; you will enjoy that, dearie. At the school we must live comfortably. I shall insist upon the best of everything for you. What is the use of money but to spend it reasonably to enhance our lives with knowledge and pleasure? Why should we not finally see bonny Scotland? You would enjoy that so much, wouldn't you? The dear scenes so sacred, the land our forefathers so loved and cherished!—and—and by-and-by, when I have grown wise and strong, and peace is my portion, we will come back here and I will care for you in your old age and repay your tenderness to me in all the days of my life."

"Hush, Ruth!" Jean commanded, peremptorily. "I am giddy with the recital of your astonishing plans and fancies! Be practical, dearie."

"Oh, but you will heed them. Say you will, Auntie?" Ruth wailed so desperately Jean hastened to promise again and again that every wish should be gratified, however fanciful and impractical.

"My caged bird, so long in captivity, shall spread its wings and soar beyond these tame pine-barrens, shall know the great world of restless men and women, the scenic wonders of this mysterious globe! But oh, bairnie, I fear the experience will render you no happier; happiness is purely a heart-growth, and you cannot be separated from that, you know. When weighed down with sorrows or restive from monotony, I have communed with myself, drilled my heart into subjection, then bowed in reverence as the rod

of affliction passed over my suffering life, until I could truthfully say, 'Thy will be done.' "

Jean ceased her soothing monologue and waited to know if it had proved consoling; troubled and perplexed, she divined the seething unrest of the young soul she had endeavored to lead into paths of peace and holiness since Ruth's earliest infancy.

"Thank you, Auntie; you are so kind," Ruth murmured, gratefully, as she recalled how she had lingered about Loch Lily on its dizziest brink, gazing into its sinister depths, fascinated with its menace to life, which it could so easily extinguish.

It had been her salvation that she could not overcome her repugnance to the object Jamie had drawn from its placid water when May skies were reflected by its luminous surface. Her despair was fathomless, and had submerged her care-free past as a storm-cloud obscures the sunlight and drapes the earth in lurid light.

One day she had sat in her room at the college, where the windows permitted an outlook of rolling hill-country, and, very distantly, misty blue mountains horizoned the view from the small, collegiate town which straggled over the raw hilltops. A white sweep of March sunshine had irradiated the scene, blustering blasts of a fickle wind had been rocking the leafless trees and swaying the coppices of green, stunted young pines, which were as emerald splotches upon the sear wastes of brown sedge and red clay embraced in the landscape. A girl pupil had entered the room flourishing the local newspaper of her home town.

"Oh, but they have really married!" she had ex-

claimed in a flurry of girlish interest. "Here is a description of their wedding. I knew them last summer. They were at Altamount while I was there with Mamma! They were the only engaged couple there that we knew of. He came to see her there, and brought such a quantity of the sweetest flowers; she was really insolent in her lavish display of them before our envious eyes; carnations and roses, sweet camelias and fuchsias! She wore them in great clusters at her belt, even in the daytime, and the stingy thing gave no one so much as a blossom, except his sister, who, rarely, had a rosebud or a wilted carnation; but my! how they smiled and danced together! She quite appropriated him; let us know, unmistakably, he was her property; she actually paraded their engagement, she did, Miss Mac-Kenzie!" The girl had chattered with a very exaggerated interest in matrimony and lovers.

Ruth's listless attention had not deterred her confidences, and she had left the paper when a voice had called to her from the hallway.

"There is Lula come to visit me, and I must go to my room, but you look it up and read about the wedding. It was such a fine wedding; my! palms and ferns and Southern smilax; fine dresses and music. They were named Phillips and Endiston, and they were married at Ardenia, where her father has a factory."

She had flitted away as Ruth accepted the paper, more in courtesy to the girl than prompted by curiosity.

But when she had found the notice of the wedding and glanced over its grandiloquent phrases, descrip-

tive of what it termed "a marriage in high life," a torturing premonition was evoked in her mind by the name of Phillips. She had never heard the name of the other party to the marriage contract, and she refused to believe it was the Edwin Phillips she knew. There had been so little said of the bridegroom, his personality had been so submerged by the glowing epithets bestowed upon the bride and her successful father.

A few days later on, a letter from home had enlightened her so much her heart could no longer entertain the slightest hope. She had fainted in the chapel the following morning as the entire school had been assembled for prayers and distribution of mail. She had kept the incident from Jean, and strove heroically to conceal her humiliating sorrow. In the restless mood of unaccustomed suffering, she had longed inexpressibly for the haunts of her childhood, for Jean, and the secure harbor of Kissic-Dale's protecting love and solace.

The world had not realized her pristine conceptions of its grandeur, indeed, it had fallen far short of the ideals that were mediocre standards at Kissic-Dale; yet, as the days and weeks had dragged their interminable length, the ineffable peace and beauty of home scenes had proven so antagonistic to the dreary pain that filled her heart, daily and hourly, she had become frantic for an immediate flight, since an incident of the previous afternoon, when Sandy had fetched some purchases he had made for Jean at the distant country store in their present post office town.

Sandy had tarried to relate bits of neighborhood news he had gathered on the trip.

Jean and Mary were very much interested, and to please them he had gossiped for their benefit.

"I saw young Phillips and his wife; they had driven over there for mail," he said, incidentally, when the health and welfare of distant neighbors had been discussed and he had arisen to depart. "She is with him now, at Dalrymple's, you know. They say they have enlivened up things over there. His sister is there with his wife."

"Is she?" Mary Graham had interjected. "I heard he had bought new furniture and a carpet for his room and had everything quite stylish for his wife when she came."

"He is running an engine over the tram road he has built, now. It leads from his mill to the railroad station," Sandy had remarked with keen interest, while Jean and Mary listened attentively.

The tram road was an innovation, something the natives had never dreamed of, had not imagined possible; the long, undulating lines of rough scantlings laid without grading, over which a small, specially constructed engine hauled flat cars loaded with lumber.

While the seductive subject had been discussed, Ruth had moved from the circle to hide her betraying features. A memory of the violent emotions of that moment had brought a sleepless night and a suffering day. She had felt as if paralyzed with the shock Sandy's innocent words had given her. A flat dish, overshadowed by thrifty geraniums, had been, fortunately, then discovered to be dry, to the

feverish discontent of two thirsty pigeons, who lamented the fact with wistful plainings. She had filled the dish and stood stroking the pets with trembling hands until she had gained strength to escape to her room. Her mind had held but one idea since, her heart but one overwhelming desire; and that was to go far away and forget she had existed previous to that March day which loomed on the scroll of her past as a crucifixion of her soul.

The frenzy of her mind, the dread of hearing or seeing that which would increase the torture of her suffering heart, gave her courage to form plans with a flagellated conception and to plead with Jean for their execution.

"You know, Auntie, Mary cannot stay here alone," she resumed, lifting her mind from a reflective silence; "you said not long ago that you would build Neil a cottage, so that he might marry Flora in the early autumn. Let them marry right away! They can live with Mary while we are away. You must go with me, and we must go immediately. Do you comprehend how vitally I desire this, dearie?"

"Yes, yes, bairnie, we will go. I can soon arrange everything needful for the trip and the absence. I will write another letter to your uncle in reply to the one I received yesterday. Yes, we will go; rest here while I re-write my letter."

So, after a reassuring kiss received by Ruth's dry and pleading lips, Jean returned to her desk and wrote Angus Bethune that Ruth and herself were coming to visit him in the immediate future.

When the early evening meal was concluded, she repaired to the parlor and opened the piano, seek-

ing peace of mind in voicing some of her favorite hymns. She felt so much at sea, logical thought was so enmeshed in an intangible anxiety; and Ruth wandered in aimless unrest to the rose-garden and sat, stilled and listless, upon the wrought-iron seat beneath the ancient magnolia, trying to wring from torpid life some interest that would infuse a natural trend to the darkened way leading out into a dim and cheerless future; but she was as insensible to every objective influence as the Sphynx gazing stolidly across the desert throughout eons of time; so Night, God's Angel Night, spread its brooding wings over the gasping earth and dropped lotus petals upon the lids of eyes that were aweary, while Ruth prayed despairingly for a healing draught from Lethe's panacean fountain.

CHAPTER II.

THE TEMPEST—KISSIC-DALE AND DREAMLAND— WITH THE STOICS IN ZENO'S POICILE.

“As the winged steeds of wrath are loosened
In elemental conflict dread and wild
While in the void electric squadrons wheel
And measure keep with earthquakes’ strides below.
Then in the calm that storms do leave, the bow
Of peace doth span the circumambient air
With colors brighter far than painter’s dreams,
Wrapping the soul in beauty soft and mild.”

—Selected.

June again; the last sultry days of that ideal month, when the sun, mounting to its uttermost zenith, rains vertical rays direct upon its satellite, laboring, plodding Earth.

And Kissic-Dale again; but a modernized, newly painted mansion, with re-embellished interiors, which had lifted it from the peaceful slumber of several decades into the wide-awake up-to-dateness distinguishing recent innovations in progressive cities.

There were still the pine-fringed horizon, the fruit-laden orchards, the clipped vineyards, the rose-garden, the old trees, the flowers and the familiar faces, and the buildings were materially the same, only gleaming in fresh, pearl-tinted colors, that

transformed the dignified old mansion into a city-like appearance and elegance.

Its spacious interior walls were aggrandized by embossed paper hangings and expensive laces draped the tall windows, while new gilded furniture put to blush or exclusion the beloved old pieces which had been the pride of Jean's halcyon youth. New pictures upon the walls, gleaming bronzes, poetical statuary, modern mirrors and gorgeous rugs and artistic bric-a-brac were prominent features of the plan of renovation.

On the lawn and in the rose garden sculptured marble in graceful forms or in uncouth idealizations graced the scene by daylight, and amid night-shadows gleamed weirdly as estraying phantoms from mythological realms, to Dicey's great discomfort. She disapproved of the heathenish things, declaring, "They most had gibben her de jim-jams." She was frightened by them so often, when she had forgotten what they were.

Richly gilded jardinières held the cherished palms and ferns; and a loquacious parrot, a tiny French poodle, and a cage of noisy canaries had been installed as household pets.

Ruth's plan of the previous summer had thus achieved a result unforeseen and unpremeditated in her scheme of the future. Jean and Angus Bethune had each been aroused and concerned by her mood, and had gone the length of idolatrous affection in an endeavor to render life interesting and hopeful, that it might fulfill the promise of her girlhood.

The summer spent with Angus and at the resorts he had visited with them had indeed improved and

quieted her. She had developed a strength of dignity and judgment that gave her a graceful and imperious manner. Thrown constantly among strangers, she had soon learned the art of polite and cordial graciousness. In replenishing her wardrobe she had chosen the richest, the most becoming toilets, yet had been singularly free from any vain pleasure in her appearance and the admiration accorded her wherever they had appeared.

Finally they had secured her admission to a school of her choice, whither they both had accompanied her; and Jean had remained until after mid-winter. Ruth had chosen an elective course of study, and had at once gone to work with an absorbing zeal, which had left her no leisure for vain regrets or brooding grief.

Jean, though much gratified by the opportunities offered in the nurturing regime of the college, yet had found much in Ruth's behavior to perplex and disturb her. Ruth avoided as much as possible all reference to Kissic-Dale and discussion of home news, and had never expressed any desire to return or any regret for their absence from the home. It had seemed so abnormal, so unlike the gay girl who had formerly lavished unstinted affection upon every object at Kissic-Dale.

When Angus had visited them during the winter holidays and proposed to take them south and to Kissic-Dale, Ruth had declined the trip and had suggested touring some of the nearby Northern cities, which they did, visiting theatres, museums, art galleries and other points of interest until Jean, remonstrating, had declared she must rest; then, while she

had rested at a hotel, Angus had taken Ruth on shopping expeditions, spending money so lavishly, her thrifty soul had rebelled against their unwonted extravagance, and she had hurried Ruth back to her school.

Later, one evening at their own room, Jean, after a thoughtful espionage of one of Ruth's moody reveries, had said, sternly interrogative: "Are you happy, bairnie? Is this urgent style of living satisfying you?"

"Why should I not be happy, Auntie?" Ruth had replied, slowly, absently, in a voice strained of every fibre of interest or emotion.

"I do not know why, but at times I am convinced that you are miserable; you are so unnatural, so different from the little girl I have always so cherished," Jean had responded, sadly.

Ruth had sat silent, gazing at her in a melancholy too deep for words.

"I am homesick, bairnie," Jean had then confessed. "I long for home scenes and things familiar. Dr. Lynshaw spoke of Donald this afternoon when I met him on the campus. He had met him on a recent visit to his college. He says Donald is very popular with faculty and students, also with the local society of the town."

"Indeed!" Ruth had replied listlessly.

"Yes, but Donald would be popular anywhere. I was sorry we missed seeing him last summer. You know Mary wrote us he came there soon after we had gone," Jean had continued.

"Yes, Auntie," had been Ruth's sole rejoinder, and Jean had lapsed into a thoughtful silence, seeing

visions of past days and fancying future ones at Kissic-Dale. Her heart had turned yearningly back to the dear old home and the familiar faces she had been so accustomed to see. She had been aroused by Ruth's voice singing softly, but with plaintive sadness and regret:

"Oh, the days of the Kerry dancing!
Oh, the ring of the piper's tune!
Oh, for one of those hours of gladness!
Gone, alas! like our youth, too soon."

She sang so hopelessly and with such pathos of feeling, Jean had cried: "Oh, hush, bairnie! I cannot bear it! Youth is yours and all its golden promises! If you do not fulfill them it will be your own fault or a perverse temperament."

Ruth, gazing wistfully at her mentor, had said, with infinite finality: "Oh, you do not know, Auntie, therefore cannot understand!"

"What do you mean, bairnie?" Jean questioned, but Ruth had evaded the issue by smiling wanly and changing the subject, determinately.

While Ruth had been visiting the music rooms, the studios, and the class halls, pursuing with tireless zeal the accomplishments she was striving to attain, Jean had brooded much alone in their chamber. She had not been alienated in the least from any former interest, but withal, she had enjoyed her belated journey into the world keenly; the quiet, cultured realm of the college community, the glimpsing of life in fine hotels, the gorgeous staging of operas, the long galleries of art, the expensively equipped mu-

seums and libraries, the bustle and throngs of the great cities and streets, and the swift rush of life in commercial centres, but yet she had longed intensely for the peace of her "ain hame an' steadin," and when spring drew near, she became restive.

"I want to be at home planting things and seeing things resurrected from the spell of winter," she had complained so pathetically, Ruth had consented for her to leave her and return to Kissic-Dale.

A more vital reason than homesickness had spurred Jean's innate desire for the comforts of her home into a pressing need. She had been impressed that Ruth was enamored with modern luxury, and did not appreciate the touch of time more or less imprinted upon every object at Kissic-Dale. She had recalled her own enjoyment of the innovations rendered as a tribute to her own youth and social prominence. She still prized family prestige very highly, her pride of race, of ancestral traditions, were sacred heritages to be perpetuated inviolate and unslighted. She had closely observed in her travels and had labored zealously since her return. She had been disappointed, but not disheartened, when Ruth delayed her own return weeks beyond the annual expiration of the school term. Her excuse for the delay had been the inducements offered by a summer course of special studies, from which she would spare a fortnight of time during the season's solstice, when it would be difficult to work, and pay Kissic-Dale a visit.

"I am making up for lost time. I am getting too old not to be more informed of subjects that I deem essential for my future usefulness and pleasure,"

she had written, most practically. "When I am quite through, I shall devote my talents to the edification of you and Uncle Angus, and to the honor of my family tree."

On that sultry day in June she had at last arrived, and the day was celebrated throughout Kissic-Dale as a very glad one, indeed.

"It is so nice to be at home; I am sure to enjoy every precious moment!" she declared, happily, as she stood once more on the broad veranda in the midst of the assembled homefolks. When the greetings were finished and she had a moment to glance over material objects, she stood amazed, as she swiftly comprehended the change wrought by Jean's masterful skill and unwonted generosity.

"Oh, Auntie!" she exclaimed, in undisguised dismay and reproach. Ere Jean could speak she realized that she was wilfully inconsistent. Had she not prayed that the roses might be faded entirely, that the home might be as prosaic and sordid as was possible to its sentimental atmosphere; and had she not dreaded, with unspeakable pain, the memories it might evoke in her sternly trained emotions?

"It was for your sake, bairnie, your enjoyment solely, that I have been to this expense and trouble. It had been so long since we had made any improvements, I could not blame you for disliking the old-fashioned home. To your enlightened and youthful mind, it must have seemed mediaeval."

"How you have misconceived my heart, Auntie!" Ruth observed, passionately. "I loved the old state of things and revered it more than anything else in this world, but perhaps you have acted with

providential wisdom; no doubt but that you have been entirely right in catering to my supposed ambition. Anyway, our happiness is not conserved by material things, but by the way we utilize our talents."

She put her arms around Jean, contritely. "Thank you, darling Auntie! But oh, how you must have been slaving and planning to accomplish so much in such a limited period."

"It was all finished weeks ago," Jean informed her. "I am anxious for you to appreciate your home. I love it dearly, bairnie."

"I do appreciate it, and I will enjoy every moment of my stay here, I am sure," Ruth responded with intense sincerity, yet she breathed as a child who resolutely endures pain, or overcomes sorrow.

When the heat and dust of the long journey had been exorcised by refreshing rest amid the comforts of the cool rooms and she was girlishly fresh in a simple white toilet, Jean led her from room to room, to acquaint her with their changed appearance. She, dutifully, admired, and lent approval to every detail, flattering Jean's taste and artistic discrimination so skillfully, her countenance beamed with a satisfaction she had not experienced since her self-imposed task was undertaken.

"Donald may be here to-morrow," Jean remarked, as they entered the parlor. "He was here some three weeks ago, and I found him much improved in every way. He has attained his degree and secured a good position in a Western college. He asked me many questions concerning you; he is very anxious to see you, and, according to a promise I gave him, I have

written him the exact date of your arrival, and he may be here to-morrow or the day after. Here is your Daphne portrait, Ruth! Donald spent moments gazing upon it. I informed him of the interest it had excited in artistic circles."

Ruth advanced to the position of the picture, on the space between the two eastern windows.

"Who informed you of that interesting fact?" she demanded, when she comprehended Jean's mysterious knowledge of the fame the portrait had really achieved during the commencement season at her college.

"Mrs. Beale and others of our mutual acquaintance, Ruthie," Jean informed her, smiling shrewdly.

"And it did not occur to you that Mrs. Beale had sold you this at an exorbitant figure? and that she was attaining a coveted reputation by acclaiming the merits of her masterpiece, as she was pleased to style my portrait, in which she has so idealized me I hardly recognize myself as the original?" Ruth queried and remarked, critically.

"Do not be cynical, Ruthie. I detest a supercilious woman," Jean rebuked her niece's unusual asperity.

"I beg your pardon, Auntie. I spoke without reflection," Ruth submitted.

"The portrait is just as you used to be," Jean declared convincingly. "Donald said it was a wonderful likeness and a true artist must have executed the sympathetic study of your lineaments."

Ruth viewed the portrayal of herself, silently and searchingly, and a deprecating frown clouded her features. Alas! Mrs. Beale had been too literal in her reproduction; she had probed beneath the as-

sumption and pose that had rigidly guarded her real self, peered beyond the shadow veiling her soul from the gaze of the curious and observant. She wondered if Donald had noted it, that ogre which had been a stranger to her life when she knew him.

Hundreds of discriminating people had pronounced the portrait indescribably beautiful during the art exhibit of the school, where it had proven to be the *piece de resistance* in the splendid array of talent shown. Repeatedly she had been sought for and impelled to meet admiring groups of strangers, who gazed upon her reverently, if curiously. How much she had regretted posing for the picture! She would never confess to Jean, who, yielding to the insistence of Mrs. Beale, had influenced her in posing as a flower-crowned Daphne that she might obtain a copy.

"Ruth," Jean recalled her from a retrospective of many memories pertaining to the speaking if insensate shadow of herself, "did I write you of Edwin Phillips bringing his wife here some time about the first of this month?"

"No, Auntie, you did not mention it that I remember," was the casual if forced response from Ruth, who moved restively as her features settled swiftly into stern, set lines, robbing her lips of all mobility.

"Well, they were here and spent most of the day," Jean related, not discerning Ruth's sudden reserve and cold attention. "She said, frankly, that she had heard of the flowers at this place and made him bring her. Your picture reminded me of her, and—and I did not quite like her, which I regretted, for I was

very fond of Edwin, as you may remember, before his marriage; but she seemed to regard me and my home as a sort of menagerie she was privileged to view and comment upon unceremoniously. Edwin was very quiet, inclined to silence, while she did most of the talking. He came to see me about a section of timber that is sandwiched in among a tract of Colin Gilmour's his company has purchased for lumber. After dinner we were in here for some time, and she opened and played the piano; afterward she found your picture, which I had hung the day previous.

"'Who is it?' she inquired brusquely, as she indicated the picture with pointing finger, and I informed her that it was my niece, then studying in the North. Edwin did not answer, but sat down and stared through the window, as if to avoid any discussion of the subject, but she appealed to him directly by asking: 'Did you know this Ruth, Edwin?' I resented that he had never mentioned you to his wife after being entertained here so frequently, formerly. 'Of course he did,' I exclaimed, I fear somewhat indignantly, and she ignored me to quiz him farther. 'Is she the person who sent Della and I roses that summer? I thought she was some old maid from the way you spoke of her!' Edwin replied very quietly but positively: 'You are mistaken, Maude; I never mentioned the donor to you. I delivered the flowers to Della, to whom they were given.'

"'And it was from this place you brought those flowers to Altamont?' she resumed reminiscently. 'I want to see where they grew, especially those carnations I wore while we danced that evening!' and

I had to go with her to the carnation plot, and she gathered your blossoms ruthlessly."

"But why do you tell me this, Auntie? We are accustomed to giving away flowers!" Ruth interposed in a hard tone that she contrived to render steady.

"Because I resented the way she spoke of you, bairnie, and—his allowing it," Jean explained defensively. "But when we returned to the house and entered the parlor, I found him standing in front of your picture, studying it intently; then I forgave him his previous indifference. Where are you going, Ruth? You have not seen the room that I was most anxious to show you," Jean remonstrated, as Ruth was passing abruptly from the room.

"I will see everything later; I am very tired, you must remember, dearie, and I must rest a while." And keeping her face averted from Jean's stare, she passed out hurriedly, leaving Jean to follow at her leisure.

As the afternoon waned, a lurid light marked the eventide. Dark cloud-banks loomed on the western horizon; an ominous stillness prevailed.

"We shall have a storm to-night, I think," Mary Graham remarked as they came out to the veranda after an early supper. Jean prophesied that the storm would be severe, but it would clear the atmosphere of much of its sultriness for another day. "You could not have chosen a worse time for travel, bairnie, than the past two days; they have been insufferably oppressive," she asserted.

They tarried in the outdoor air until near midnight, but the storm yet delaying its approach, they

finally sought rest in sleep, but soon were aroused by a violent tempest of wind and electricity and down-pouring rain; the night became hideous with the uproarious tumult of the storm-charged elements.

Ruth was assailed with an unconquerable nervousness, which drove her from her room in a quest for comfort with Jean and Mary.

"I am afraid, Auntie; sore afraid!" she appealed, shivering with dread and the chill of her sensations, as the clap and detonation of huge thunderbolts seemed to rend the earth asunder and the house quivered upon its stable foundations from the rushing impact of the shrieking winds; and so it was as cloud after cloud arose and passed over, spending its fury, deafeningly.

Finally, restless with the strain imposed upon her courage, Ruth wandered to an eastern window, where she viewed with a weird fascination, by the light of continuous flashes of lightning, the wind and rain pelting trees and flowers; and gazed afar off to where the forest bowed and writhed, and lowering clouds, black as coal smoke, dropped glittering bolts of swift destructive power. The imagery and fancies of her childhood seemed to be reincarnated by the storm.

She experienced a peculiar reverence for the spectacular strife, that battle of the atmospheric gods, furious amid the forces of Nature; Neptune uplifting the flood-gates of his realm with his pronged trident; Boreas, awful breath whizzing and shrieking wrath, lashing with insensate fury the submissive, moaning forest; Jupiter hurling, with ponderous might, irresistible missiles of streaming fire; the con-

quered earth drenched in penitential tears, flowing in the wake of victory.

Jean found her and stood by her side, silent and reflective, until the crisis of the tempests was spent and the storm-clouds were massed in ebon array against the eastern horizon ; until the flashes of electricity became intermittent and the trees dripped splashing showers of intercepted raindrops. Then, still gazing abroad, viewing the shivering and sighing forest, she said, impellingly : "You did not wait to hear the point of my story about Edwin and his wife ! I am reminded of it by conjecturing the destruction such storms as this entails upon the timber. I was thinking of Edwin, who, I have been informed, is working slavishly to wring fortune from its resources. He must be enamored with the pines, but I did not used to think so. His wife said that day, when speaking of the carnations she wore in the dance, that he had worn a small twig of pine upon his coat lapel, that he had pretended to wear it as a symbol of his work here."

Ruth leaned wearily against the window frame. "Do you think he is happy now ?" she questioned wistfully.

"I suppose so ; I have seen so little of him, only that one time. He is more serious, more quiet, less effusive than formerly, but yes, I suppose he is quite happy. His wife is a very stylish, very handsome girl," Jean replied, reservedly.

"I am very tired now, and perhaps I can sleep," Ruth said, breaking a short silence in which she had assured herself that the storm had passed on and silvery stars twinkled from a band of purple sky,

showing in a rift of the storm wracks. Jean left her comfortably disposed in bed, and she believed she would soon be asleep. The previous night had been spent in travel, and she had ridden from the distant station in the sultry forenoon hours. Surely, she must sleep well and dreamlessly from sheer fatigue; and ere long she did succumb to the languorous spell of the tempestuous night and extreme weariness; and then in dreamland, in snow white apparel, she chased white butterflies over the orchard carpeted with white clover blooms, gazed upon silver-winged, brilliant-hued birds flitting amidst snow-white blossoms crowning the apple trees. Bevvies of white pigeons circled upward, silhouetted against a turquoise sky, keeping pace with her swift, uncertain movements.

A weird radiance, remarkably luminous, dazzled her vision and concealed some indefinite object of her unresting quest. Anon the scene changed, and she was down by Loch Lily, whose surface gleamed with the waxen sheen of blossoms; and later in the tangles of the green woods where cloying tendrils clutched and rent her filmy raiment as she played hide and seek with wondrously clad fairies.

Unresting, but ever brilliant and radiant, a dazzling kaleidoscope, fairer than any scene embraced by land or sea, was unrolled upon the mysterious landscape of her slumbering brain, until finally she was in the parlor as it used to be, and the people assembled there were white-robed and statuesquely silent.

Instinctively, she was aware that her Uncle Angus was being united in marriage to some invisible per-

son she labored in vain to behold. In tattered robes, she stood afraid while the marriage was being solemnized and Angus posed with bowed head and clasped hands before a white-haired minister who was solemnly reading the service. Beyond Angus was another bowed head, crowned with orange blossoms, and that invisible, mysterious party to the marriage contract, aroused an excruciating anxiety in her mind. She must know! Oh, why was the identity hidden from her? She cried aloud for Jean in an agony of smothering distress, and Jean answered her.

"What is it, bairnie? Have I frightened you? See! The sun is shining. It is near nine o'clock of this beautiful morning, and breakfast is waiting for you," she exhorted, leaning above the bed whereon Ruth struggled into consciousness and with supreme effort emerged from the spell of dreams. Her veins throbbed like a tumultuous stream, her eyes smarted in a burning dearth of moisture, her heart tripped as a leaden hammer and her mind reeled with an uncanny premonition of evil. Then she realized that she had awakened in her own room in the rear of the parlor, that the sweet breath of flowers entered through the open windows, and she caught the fond cooing of her pigeons at the dove-cote, the tinkle of distant bells afar off in wheat pastures, and beheld Jean's adoring countenance bending solicitously toward her. She stretched forth her arms and clasping Jean's neck, impulsively kissed her.

After breakfast she expressed a wish to go out into the bright sunshine and the radiant warmth of the perfect morning. "You may unpack my trunks.

"I have a present in them for each one, remember," she said, in a tone of blitheness.

She loitered in the rose-garden and then, passing from the dove-cote, went down to the barn to view the animals. There were none in their stalls, being out in the pastures, but Sandy was there, placing upon the broad back of one of the gentle horses a large sack of grain. Ezeke, gawky with uncouth growth, was helping to balance the ungainly burden. Sandy explained that it was choice corn, to be ground into fine meal for the pantry. The torrential rains of the past night had reminded him that Gilmour's mill, so primitive and small, would be flush with water, and he was sending the grice that it might be ground while there was water to turn the wheel.

Ruth had an instant inspiration that she must go over and sketch the little mill and the homestead in the hollow of low hills seen distantly from the upper windows of Kissic-Dale, and present it to Mrs. Beale, who was ever alert for quaint and novel subjects for her art class. Ezeke rode proudly away, astride of the corn-sack, with the appearance of a grasshopper crouched for a spring, elated that for the moment he was master of the equine whose docility would ensure safety to his precarious seat and amateurish equestrianism.

Out in the woods Ruth stroked the fawn-colored calves and gathered the tender leaves of hickory and other growths that she might crush and inhale their woodland incense.

Jean had warned her away from the spring and the flood-drenched glens below, and she confined her

wanderings to upland pastures and forest. When quite spent with tramping she rested awhile upon a gravelled knoll in the shade of a gray-trunked post-oak, and, through vistas of leaves and tendrils, glimpsed the billowy sea of primeval pines beyond the valley in which lay Kissic-Dale, with its broad fields and the winding stream of Holly Creek.

Ruth experienced an affinity with the remoteness of her position; in the aloofness of her present ideals; her aspirations and achievements. She rejoiced that she could no more enter into the fancies and passions of her past than Eve could return to the sword-guarded haunts of Paradise. With swift retrospection, she reviewed her stern effort to ascend to the emotionless plane of the Stoics, to live in the calm, rare atmosphere of philosophical composure.

It is lonely upon the heights which test the strength and courage in attaining such extreme altitude, and she was conscious of an acute loneliness, a bitter bereavement, a chill of the heart, there in the diffusive sun cheer and the smiling warmth and beauty of an ideal summer landscape. In vain the birds sang, the sunshine danced, the green leaves quivered, and the woods breathed their sylvan incense; never again would such charms set her young heart pulsing, her sensitive fancies teeming with intoxicating hopes and anticipations.

The incidents Jean had related so innocently had hurt, for a moment, as the cruel tearing apart of partially healed wounds in sensitive flesh, but she had acquired strength to conquer and subdue even such sharp and sudden pain. The year of heroic discipline had not been in vain; she had learned

there, where the scenes of her heart's tragedy confronted her with their suggestions of the past, the dead and buried past, beyond resurrection, irretrievably cast into outer darkness. The proof was, that she could recall it all and be as calm and as chillily serene as winter's distant stars; the happy result of mental culture, of metaphysical and logical training directly opposed to the flaming violence of emotional ardor.

It was true that in the tempestuous night she had been weakly afraid of the storm, weirdly wrought with a superstitious thrill that Fate was confronting her with stern and brawling menace; but that temporary nervousness had been the effects of fatigue, of enervation from extreme sultriness; purely physical exhaustion, not the cowardice of soul. In the revealing light of a cloudless day and the influence of oxygen-freighted atmosphere, those phantoms of the tempest and feverish dreams, and their dismal prescience, had dispelled in obedience to a mandate of the gods who mercifully blind those whom they wish to destroy.

In the meantime, Ezeke had arrived at Gilmour's mill. A sandy roadway led abruptly to the shanty-like structure below the small homestead, consisting of a tiny cotton field, a potato patch, an orchard, and a low, be-sheltered farmhouse with its restricted dooryard gay with blooming roses and flaming annuals. The mill stood precariously upon the brink of the log-padded dam, that imprisoned a small pond of water, which served to turn the great water-wheel, that was almost as large as the building

erected to accommodate a miniature arrangement for grinding meal and hominy.

The flour-dusted door was closed, the noisy mill silent, the water trickled through the sluiceway and dripped from the green, moss-covered paddles of the ponderous wheel.

Mrs. Gilmour, gathering fruit in the orchard, called to Ezeke: "You might blast the horn! He's being in the woods anon, but I'm expecting him. He went with a man to scan timber, but won't be gone long."

Ezeke had dismounted painfully, with twofold apprehension. He feared the unbalancing of the grain and that the Gilmour's great yellow dog might respond to his call for the miller. With trembling fingers he secured the cow's horn suspended by a leather thong from a nail in the doorpost, and made abortive attempts to summon Colin Gilmour, the miller, and Kissic-Dale's nearest neighbor. The forest had resounded with his demoniac screeches until he was rewarded by the appearance, from out the forest, of the flamboyantly bearded miller, with the yellow dog trotting at his heels.

"You must leave your grice until its turn comes to be ground," he informed Ezeke, who was eyeing the dog nervously. "Man! but all the neighbors are wanting meal, and you have many ahead of you."

Ruth, returning, lingered in the rose-garden to view the modern note Jean had imparted to that treasured spot; the most artistic object was a basin fringed with wood-ferns and mosses, its shallow water floating lily-pads, through which a sculptured "Father Neptune" had, apparently, pushed his way

to hold aloft his three-pronged trident. Naiads and Nymphs hid in the ferns drooping to the water's edge, and Neptune's son and trumpeter, Amphibious Triton, stood boldly forth amid the fantastic circle, tooting a spiral shell. Ruth was absorbed in a study of the statuary and in wondering how Jean had found the cheap but artistic group so aptly set among her roses.

The sun shone fiercely and thirstily, sipping the last drop of moisture from turf and foliage, but its ferocity had not intimidated Ruth, who seemed to revel in its Southern fervor.

As she finally proceeded leisurely toward the house, the peace of the wood-crested hills where the birds sang so blithely in the unworldly seclusion of the sylvan solitude, was rudely dispelled from her mind by Dicey's greeting: "Come on, fer gracious sake, child!" she cried, distractedly. "Dey ain't er soul here but me, an' 'somebody's dead, shore's yer born, ober yander." She waved her arms indefinitely and tragically.

"Are you crazy, Dicey?" Ruth exclaimed, in bewilderment; Dicey's disordered turban and excited manner appeared to her very unseemly.

"Wish I was crazy, an' not dis t'other thing happened," Dicey retorted dolefully.

Ruth laid her hand upon the cook's arm and said reassuringly, "Be quiet, do, and explain. You have frightened me."

"Why, 'twas dis way. Mars Neil he come runnin' down through the orchard and hollered sumfin' to Miss Jean an' Mars Donald, who had just come, an' dey got up some things in less dan a minute an' druv

er-way in Mars Donald's buggy. His horse hadn't even been unhitched, I tell ye, and Miss Mary said someone was dying in the woods, an' she went off to Miss Kathy's 'fore I could say er word. Den David come on from de field an' hitched up de kerridge. I seed him drivin' off an' hollered to him, but he shook his head and kept right on, like sumfin was arter him. Dey all been gone er long time, an' I ain't seen no more of 'em yit. I is shore glad you's come, I felt dat lonesome, an' dat Iphogenia down ter de spring, churnin' or er sleep, one or de t'other," Dicey ended, nervously irritable.

CHAPTER III.

DRIFTING AWAY—DONALD'S QUEST—THE LAST MEETING.

"How a heart's deep passion and bitter woe
Gave echo in sobs to the words she said;
How a soul's deep pain and a heart's wild want,
Went floating away where the angels sing;
Where fancy finds in the secret haunts
Of Longing, a hope that is like a wing."

When she had learned all that Dicey knew, Ruth repaired to her room and laid aside the hat she had worn in the woods; then, restlessly, and with unaccustomed suspense, she sought the most convenient position on the veranda to scan the road leading to the great gate shutting out the eastern forest.

In a short space of time she espied a buggy that descended the slope toward the bridge and in a very few moments reascended to pass through the gate into the forest.

A vague fear disturbed her mind, a presage of calamity pressed heavily upon her spirits. She recalled the strange dream from which she had awakened that morning; it had meant this, then, the nervous apprehension from which she could think of no refuge.

Dicey fetched her a glass of milk and lamented the spoiling dinner. "And I had jest done my purtiest in gittin' it for you an' Mars Donald!" she complained. "It shore seems er long time since you an' him were here tergether, honey!"

Ruth smiled absently and sipped her milk. "What can have happened, do you suppose, Dicey?" she queried, just to voice some of the uneasiness she felt so poignantly yet vaguely.

"Thank goodness, dar comes Miss Jean, an' she shore can tell us!" Dicey exclaimed.

As Jean entered the gate and advanced to the veranda, upon Mary's arm, her pallor alarmed Ruth. She ran down the steps and helped her to a seat on the veranda.

"It was Edwin, bairnie! Our bonnie Edwin! Ezeke found him as he returned from the mill. Poor Edwin! I think he intended coming here to see me about that timber. I had decided to give it to him, bairnie! We were just in time to see him die. He was lying some distance from his buggy, prone upon the pine needles, the hot sun in his eyes, but he was unconscious and soon ceased to suffer. A decayed

limb had fallen from a great height and struck him on the temple. The firm heart of the decayed branch was encased in sodden, dead fibre. The rain last night had filled every pore of its spongy surface, and it fell like a thunderbolt from a clear sky and as fatally. But it was to be so;

‘Not a sparrow falleth,
But his God doth know,
Just as when His mandate
Lays a monarch low,’ ”

she paused to quote, tenderly and resignedly. “I closed his eyes, bairnie!” she resumed when the group about her stood in awed silence and waited for her to proceed. “I closed his dear, gentle eyes! There was something so pitiful in their last glimpse of the blue sky, the bright sunshine, but with the last sigh from his lips a smile seemed to spread over his countenance which had been so disfigured with suffering. I was praying, and Donald held him in his arms, and—and—we suffered also,” she sobbed hysterically, her strength broken by the shock of the scene she had so recently experienced.

“Colin Gilmour had just left him; they had been in the woods together. Colin is with him now, and Donald and Sandy. Neil has gone to the camp and Tony to Hector Dalrymple’s, and they are bringing him here. I came on to prepare for his coming, so that he might be cared for in a humane manner. They are waiting for Henry Stephenson. We sent for him before he died; Henry is the only one of his people in this country at present; his wife is away

with his or her people. I am glad to do all I can for the poor fellow! He was always so gentle, so deferential and kind." Jean concluded her eulogy with a deep sigh of compassionate sympathy for the young life so suddenly ended.

Ruth still spoke no word; she hardly comprehended Jean's sobbing utterances, yet she was pale, whiter than her white dress. She felt that she, too, was dying, at intervals, and that the earth was folding in with ponderous might to crush her, when, lifting her glance to the road beyond the bridge, she discovered the carriage descending it slowly, a man walking by either side, the horses guided carefully, the curtains drawn, shielding from the mid-day sun the pitiable burden. Then realization came upon her sharply; a murderous pain was stabbing her heart as she groped her way into the house, unnoted by Jean, who was endeavoring to check her futile tears and regain composure. The walls of the hall appeared to be closing in upon her so smotheringly, she sought the air by passing through the open window of her bedroom, and from there to the rear lawn, where she walked aimlessly until the horror of the moment drove her into the circling paths threading turf and shrubbery; and finally, as the carriage forced its tedious way down the cherry lane to the gate, she fled incontinently down the way to the spring and dairy, bare of head, wild-eyed, and wholly heedless.

It was late afternoon when the many sad offices for the dead had been accomplished, and upon a white bier in the centre of the parlor, reposed the

rigid form of Edwin Phillips, neatly composed in the last, dreamless sleep of mortality.

White-starred jasmine, with its graceful foliage, outlined the prostrate figure, beneath its white drapery; and a sheaf of white lilies lay beside the pillow pressed by the quiet head. Palms stood as sentinels guarding sacred slumber, and ferns were massed as a base for a formal catafalque. The lawn and rose-garden had been levied upon, recklessly, and bowls and vases overflowed with fragrant-hearted roses, delicate smilax and maiden-hair ferns; and abroad the strong, fervid light of the summer day mocked the gloom brooding the minds of those present.

Jean had done all that could be achieved in honoring the dead and dispelling the gloom of his untimely death. The sorrow of her manifold bereavements evoked a pitying tenderness, which she lavished upon the friend who had died away from home and dear ones. But at last even her exacting sympathy could command no more from her willing hands, and thoroughly exhausted, she had retired and rested for awhile to recruit her strength.

The remoteness of the locality retarded preparations which were necessary to shipping the body. Messengers had been sent to the distant station with telegrams and to secure a casket, but not until the hours of early morning could they start on the sad journey to catch the first train eastward.

Jennie Stevenson had never returned to live at the camp; but all the men associated with him in his work at the mill had come to Kissic-Dale, to be with him once more ere he was taken away finally; and

a few Scotch neighbors of that vicinity had come also to help or extend sympathy by sitting, deferentially, in solemn silence, throughout the long vigil. Mary Graham, aided by all the household, was hospitably busy, and they each believed Ruth to be resting in her room, into which they would not intrude, when there was no response to their repeated efforts for admittance. Jean finally became anxious, turned the bolt and stood amazed, for the room was empty of the presence she sought. The contents of Ruth's trunks were piled upon the bed and chairs, as she had left things when summoned to meet Donald but a moment before the startling message had called them to the forest. She sought Iphogenia, who positively asserted that she had seen Ruth running by the dairy, just as she was finishing her churning. "Nobody ain't axed me or I would er told 'em so," she declared, innocently. Jean, disturbed and remorseful, found Donald on the veranda by the parlor window, and informed him of Ruth's long and unaccountable absence.

"I know she must be alone somewhere, and that she has an absolute horror of death to any object. I have known her to grieve over the wilting of a flower in her childhood, but I should think she would prefer being in the house and with company. Once I was afraid she would be mentally unbalanced, grieving for a baby of Quenna's, who died when she was very young and we unwisely took her to view it. We brought her away shrieking and beseeching that someone would warm the chill body and blow breath into the still lungs; and for so long a time she worried about it, I have never let her approach a dead

person since. But to-day I was so shocked and so in sympathy with poor Edwin, I have neglected her, and I do not know where she is nor how she is bearing the sad conditions here," she said to him, evincing a remorseful suspense.

"I will go down that way and look for her," Donald proffered readily, and immediately started on the quest, much to Jean's relief and comfort.

Indeed, Donald was glad to go in search of Ruth, whom he had not yet seen. The day, which had dawned so bright and held such promise, had proven so far very disappointing, beyond the sad features of an untimely death. He had waited so long, so hungrily, for a glimpse of Ruth; and he did not find her at the spring. Hopefully, he pursued his way down the path which led to Loch Lily.

There he found her, seated on Jean's boulder, and leaning listlessly against the trunk of the old birch tree. Her attitude was so dejected, so forlornly listless, he approached her diffidently, with an acute sense of intrusion. He called her name, tentatively, and started violently, when she turned and lifted dozed, uncomprehending eyes and gazed upon him, stolidly, indifferently. She evinced no surprise or recognition; her vision seemed incapable of embracing him as an object apart from the ordinary scene of water, woods and green, deepening shadows.

"Won't you speak to me, Ruth?" he appealed, wistfully. "It is I, Donald." He raised his voice and spoke in a tone one uses to awaken a sleeper. It had dismayed him beyond measure that she had

no greeting for him, staring at him blankly, with her clouded eyes.

The changing length of two long years was compressed into the moment of that unforeseen meeting. This Ruth, whom he confronted, appeared so different from the Ruth he had parted with in her springtime beauty, silhouetted against a background of summer roses. He had, that afternoon, been leisurely studying her portrait adorning the walls of the parlor, where they had been keeping vigil, crowding his thoughts with memories of her and of the days when he had been with her so constantly; and the portrait was a deification of the sweet recollections which had been the solace of the years since he had been parted from her. She had lifted the eyes of a heart-broken woman.

There was a green stain upon her colorless cheek and similar ones upon her hands and dress. The willowy slenderness of her girlhood had been displaced by a form of mature proportions; a rounded, stately figure, with a head queenly poised, although no art could have then influenced her posture.

She caught her breath in quivering sighs and the lids drooped weightily to veil her bedimmed eyes. Distraught with a weird anxiety, he caught her hand to induce her to arise, that he might take her away from the morbid retreat as quickly as possible. Her hand lay in his inert and cold, and in the twilight shadows of the wooded hills her face shone pale and ghastly. His healthy mind revolted and resented the tomb-like atmosphere of the locality and her ghostly appearance. The opalescent water lay in a lifeless calm, an occasional dimple in its surface

accentuated its suggestive repose; the bloomless lily-pads intensified its colorless composure and the notes of the wood-birds sounded plaintively in the dim solitude, as the languid breeze swept the forest foliage with doleful sighings, and a damp, moist odor ladened its perfunctory breathings as the day sank into approaching eventide.

He was athletic, broad-shouldered, the embodiment of stalwart, normal manhood, yet his mind experienced a creepy sensation as the touch of her icy fingers came as a reminiscence of the death in the forenoon, when he had held the livid, chilling hand of Edwin Phillips.

His personality was a pleasing combination of mental and physical strength, although he was as blonde and as fair as a woman of that type, with yellow lashes fringing pellucid gray eyes, with a crystal luminosity; full, sensitive lips, close cropped, fair hair, the stamp of a superior intelligence impressed upon every feature of his countenance, robed in the pure white pallor of an overworked student; a personality mirroring purity of life and exalted ambition.

She resisted his attempt to impel her away. "It is so quiet here," she whispered, with a dry hoarseness of voice.

He sat down beside her, wounded and perplexed, yet solicitously compassionate.

"How long have you been here, Ruth?" he questioned in the lifted tone of voice he used in addressing her.

"Oh, a long time, surely!" she replied with a listless despondency.

"But why here at all?" he scolded. "The place is dreary and too lonely for you to be here alone. There may be serpents about, if no worse danger!"

"There are serpents here," she answered, absently, her eyes upon the water. "I have seen them, several."

"And you were not afraid?" he cried, incredulously.

"No; I was not afraid. One passed near my feet, but it did not try to hurt me."

"And you have been here a long time?" he repeated, as he scrutinized her apprehensively.

"Yes, surely a long time!" she affirmed, lifelessly; "almost ages, it seems."

He was silenced by sheer amazement, her words, her manner puzzled him, depressingly. Ruth had spoken mechanically, yet sincerely. She was so stunned, so astray in a realm of overwhelming horror, which precluded normal thought or rational ideas, realization of conditions, of time and circumstances, were translated for the moment to an abnormal plane of chaos and violence. She did not recall the hour when the sun ruled high above the trees and she had stood in the little dell, panting, breathless.

Since then she had lain a long time upon the ground, spent with a wailing, helpless agony that held no affinity with weeping; when Fate croaked as a demon raven the hopeless refrain of "Nevermore," and hissed into her shrinking consciousness the awful thing present at the house, the conditions which had driven her into exile.

Silently, analytically, Donald was searching for

logical cause for her illogical behavior. He reviewed what Jean had related of her temperamental horror of death. He reflected how it was to return to childhood scenes after a long absence, the unfamiliarity, the sense of incongruity with things once familiar and personal to every-day life; and he remembered the fatiguing journey with physical strength impaired by protracted study, the consequent excitable brain and task-worn mind. A compassionate tenderness swelled his heart, always tender, ever constant, in his secret devotion, in that he knew her worth and guilelessness.

"You must come with me, Ruth," he commanded, peremptorily, but kindly.

She arose to her feet obediently; then she staggered, dizzily, and gave a slight cry of pain. She was standing, tottering, on the brink of the deep pool; her little boat lay upon its bosom, the birch tree overshadowed it to intensify the gloom of its sinister depths.

He rescued her from the perilous position and forcibly led her away from the spot. She did not resist, but leaned heavily upon his arm as he hurried her up the way to the turnstile. She was too dazed and exhausted to converse, and he was silenced by the paralyzing conjecture of what might have happened.

As they emerged from the woods they were confronted by an unwonted aerial brightness. The sun had entered vaporous banks at the verge of the horizon, tingeing them with a luminous, golden amber; and a golden diffusion bathed the entire at-

mosphere and gilded every object with its radiant enameling of liquid light.

She released his arm and leaned upon the turnstile. She hardly breathed as her glance swept from the flaming horizon to the glowing zenith, as if pleading for strength and mercy, and a wistful light dawned in the violet depths of her reawakening eyes. He lounged on another arm and watched her, unobservant of sky or environment, noting the changes wrought in her the years since they had parted. With a quivering intake of breath, her glance fell, still seekingly, and with startled exploration.

She had forgotten Donald, or rather, had not, as yet, realized his presence. He moved uneasily, for her expression and behavior reminded him of the manner of some of his sleep-walking mates in college days. She was mentally stunned and physically ill, he was convinced. Those gloomy woods and long hours alone, in her state of mind and body, had proven disastrous.

With impulsive sympathy, he offered his arm and impelled her to the spring, where he seated her, and then fetched a gourd of water from the sparkling pool, and compelled her to quench a burning thirst she had not been sensible of until the cool liquid trickled over her dry throat.

Seeing her abstinence in regard to water, he recalled that she must not have had any dinner; and the inspiration sent him to the dairy, to return with a brimming cup of cream. "Drink this, Ruth, do," he insisted so gently, she obeyed and drank it readily.

He nodded approval and sought farther to reassure her.

"Ruth," he said, seating himself beside her and speaking diplomatically, "I am sorry to wound your vanity, but truth and a proper regard for appearances compels me to ask you to let me wash your face and hands before we leave here. You might meet some of the people at the house. There are several there, and——"

"I am not going up there!" she cried, gaspingly. "Oh, no; I cannot return there now!"

"But you must, you know," Donald insisted, masterfully. "You cannot stay in the woods alone; it was very imprudent your doing so, at any time."

"You can leave me here. Nothing will harm me, and to-night I will find shelter in the dairy," she contended, feverishly.

"Ruth, poor child," he insisted commiseratingly, "I know death in any form is terrifying and inspires us with a dread awe, indescribable; and I know you knew Phillips when we were all here that happy springtime, two years ago now. I am grieved and shaken, too, for I liked him very much, found him no end of a good fellow. I visited him when I came here last summer after you were gone, and met his wife and sister, who seemed very devoted to him, indeed. I thought of them this morning, and could not repress a rebellious feeling that such things could be, but they must bow to the inevitable, and so must we. I feel no repulsion to his lifeless body, rather a yearning pity, a sweet satisfaction in being near him and serving him. He was a part of my blissful

memory of this place, those peaceful spring days, when life was so real and restful.

"Have you forgotten them, Ruth, and that he shared our pleasures? Oh, surely not! He had not, I am sure, for there was a photo of you in his innermost breast pocket, folded in with a faded, crimson rosebud, the only souvenir I found when we were securing the contents of his pockets, that they might be sent to his people. There is nothing repulsive about him now; indeed, he is a pleasing object, with a smile frozen upon his lips. He is dressed in his wedding suit and surrounded by friends and flowers; there is nothing to shock one or indicate violence but the purple wound on his temple. There are no distressing scenes to witness, for none of his own people are here; just the men from the camp and a few of your neighbors. Shall we go now, Ruth? Your aunt is very anxious about you," he concluded, leaning to catch a glimpse of her averted face. Her hands were clasped, closely; her features bore the impress of an agonized endurance. He was instantly contrite and conciliating.

"Had you rather stay here, Ruth? It is true the weather is warm and we can send someone down to keep you company," he assured her, sympathy ruling his heart to the exclusion of self. He waited anxiously a long while before she spoke, or rather whispered faintly, her surrender.

"I will go with you, if I may go directly to my room and do not have to meet anyone whatever, not even Aunt Jean."

"But really, Ruth, I must insist that you wash

your face," he stammered, blushing furiously as her questioning eyes sought his.

"Well," she acquiesced, docilely, but glanced around, helplessly. He hastened to the dairy, found a towel, which he saturated in the trench, and came back to her smiling with victory. Tenderly, if clumsily, he bathed her face and hands and smoothed her rumpled hair to the best of his ability. She caught the towel from his hand when he had finished and wound it about her throbbing temples for the grateful relief it afforded.

When he came back to her after hanging the towel on the limb of a maple, she greeted him with a wan smile of recognition, as she held out her hand.

"You are very kind, Donald, if it is really Donald. I had not realized it until just now. I am very glad to see you; very glad, Donald." When he had clasped her hand, she drew him to a seat beside her.

"Take care of me, please. I do not believe I am quite well, and I feel so afraid. I feel so strangely alone, so lonely, oh, so lonely!" she soliloquized, addressing her own sensations rather than him.

"Well, let us go to the house, where we will find company. It is lonely down here," he affirmed, arising and helping her to her feet; then he drew her away and hurried up the path, lest she should change her mind and insist upon returning to the spring. Silently, they entered the lawn and ascended to the veranda; she would not enter the sitting-room, for she believed dimly that the horror she so dreaded was staged there.

"To my own room," she whispered imperatively, with white lips and eyes dark and tragical. He

bowed a silent assent and led the way, turning into the wide-open doors of the hall.

At the parlor door she paused, arrested by the scene within the room, which came as a complete surprise to her. The white draped bier, flower-crowned, met her vision as an uplifting revelation; the fragrance of the roses saluted her; the beautiful, pervasive sunset light left not one shadow in the large room, but held in radiant relief every object and detail, where the watchers sat in silent and reverent vigil.

She gazed wistfully, so intensely, she scarcely breathed; and Donald, watching her apprehensively, beheld a swift transformation of her expression as the beauty of her innate spirituality irradiated her features. For her, in reality, the moment was thrilling, indeed, as her heart throbbed sensitively to the holy influence which flows earthward when the gates of eternity are lifted for the entrance of an immortal spirit.

From the eastern wall beyond his feet, a pictured Ruth, smiling, rose-lipped, pensive-eyed, gazed serenely upon the bier; in the doorway another Ruth, unto whom he had been, dually, her supreme bliss and sorrow, a very Hagar of banishment and bereavement, beheld the end of the man who had so persistently wooed and then betrayed her heart.

A death-like stillness reigned among the watchers, who felt an indefinable awe of the moment of Ruth, so tragically still in her pose in the doorway.

Donald stood sentinel by her side, waiting patiently for her own impulse to guide her. He, too, appreciated the celestial beauty of the scene bathed

in the splendor of the permeating, golden-tinged sunset radiance. But not for one moment could he forget the lifeless form of the man who had suffered death so violently and so suddenly. The real material meaning of the accident still held its brutal value in his mind as Ruth swayed a step backward and met his alert expression with a smile, in which were blended physical fear and exaltation of spirit.

"Ruth! Ruth!" he exclaimed, in a low tone, warning her.

She drew herself erect, smiled again, then turned away and sought her room, unaided. There, she desperately courted repose, and finally sank into a half-conscious slumber under the ministrations of Mary, who bathed her hands and temples with lavender and brushed her hair soothingly.

It was nearing the midnight hour when she was awakened by one of Jean's repeated visits to her bedside, and she sent a message to Donald, begging him to come to her on the rear veranda; then she arose, bathed her wrists and face in cool water, brushed her hair, letting it flow restfully over her shoulders, and donned one of her elaborate tea gowns, thus striving for a calm and natural manner as she went forth to meet Donald. When he came to her, as she sat in a secluded corner bowered with the dense pendant foliage of honeysuckle, she extended her hand as if he had just arrived at Kissic-Dale.

"It is so nice to have you with us again, Donald, here at the dear home where I am almost as much of a stranger as you are," she said, with a sincere

courtesy that removed some of the constraint he had felt in her presence.

"You sent for me, Ruth?" he interrogated, when releasing her hand. He leaned on a railing of the banister near where she sat in a shadow so dense he could not read her expression. He was very weary. It seemed a long time since he had driven down the elm avenue, the morning sunlight not more vivacious than the sweet anticipations filling his heart and elating his mind. The day had proven very disappointing, Ruth even more so, and his healthy optimism was blighted by physical exhaustion.

"I wished to thank you, Donald, for your kindness to me this afternoon, when I was really ill. Do you not believe it?" she responded, bravely, as her evanescent strength was ebbing swiftly, she knew with dismay and discouragement.

"Oh, yes, you were ill, all right. I did not doubt it," he answered readily, but with covert reservation. "What did you want of me?" he demanded directly.

She gathered all her strength, and with supreme effort replied: "I wish you to do me a great favor."

"Well," he returned, tersely.

"You said—I think—that you found a photo of mine in his—in the dead man's pocket. Would you mind giving it back to him, that it may be buried with him? Will you, Donald?" she beseeched, in a tense, shrill, whispering voice.

Donald moved to an erect posture and thrust his hands into his pockets, nervously.

"Will you, Donald?" she repeated.

"Certainly, since you request it. I was loth to send it to his people. "When they arrive with the

casket and are removing him to it, I will replace the photo as I found it; but first tell me, Ruth, why he was carrying it?" he demanded, with cold insistence.

"Aunt Jean gave it to him, not I, but in that he has treasured it, which surprises me, really, and—and—because of something he said of it, I beg you to let him keep it," she faltered, as her voice broke with a harsh sobbing she could not suppress. "It is an atonement that may comfort me in the future, Donald."

Donald was silent so long, she drooped her head in a helpless, tearless agony, believing he would refuse her request. He was reflecting that her tender conscience was reproaching her for some fancied hurt she had given Edwin in that past in which he had certainly admired her. So he sat down and essayed consolation.

"Poor child, poor little Ruth," he said tenderly, caressingly. His reflections had given him an exquisite relief from a sharp jealousy of the poor clay reposing so stark and silent in the parlor. Ruth's simple words had evoked a rush of hopes that sang in his heart as a chime of silver bells; but Ruth arose precipitately.

"I must go to my room, Donald; I am faint. Excuse me, I must lie down," she explained as she was hurrying away. He sprang to her assistance and escorted her to her door. As the light of the rear hall revealed her appearance, he saw that she was very pale, but never had her beauty so appealed to him in its unworldly seeming.

Ruth never forgot the distress that was embodied in the ensuing hour, in which she wrestled with the

direst temptation she had ever experienced ; for the impulse raged in her heart to rush into the parlor and lay her lips upon those cold and silent ones, in forgiveness for all the suffering he had so cruelly imposed upon her.

She was restrained by the brutal knowledge that he had deliberately rendered such an act a crime ; it was despicable even to think of him but in the sacred role of another's husband ; but the desire was unconquerable and resurrected forbidden memories to mingle with thoughts of the harrowing present as time dragged its suffering moments heavily and the stars began their morning courses ; the dews of deepening night-tide chilled the atmosphere, and the dank, dark depression of the time preceding dawn accentuated the ghostly silences.

Finally there was a stir of footsteps in the parlor, the sounds of a fresh arrival. She leaned through the window to listen to subdued voices by the distant gate, the last preparations for immediate departure. Then followed the tramp of a moving procession, wheels grating, measuredly, horses treading steadily. She stretched forth imploring hands ; her eyes sought the star-spangled sky as the solemn cavalcade passed beyond the orchard.

Drifting away ! and forever ! Never again would he menace her life with joy or sorrow, with pleasure or humiliation ; and life was devoid of a future. No more planning to avoid him, no more shrinking or striving. Kissic-Dale, with its forest-crowned hills girdling it as a billowy, barricading sea, had been her cradle and her tomb, and life was finished. A deathly chill smote her heart, a strangling sense of

supreme loneliness and isolation from all companionship. Solitude was rendered unendurable.

Jean and Donald re-entered the hall, after standing reverently upon the veranda until the sad cortege was lost in distance. They found Ruth in the parlor doorway, her hands clasped and depending, her eyes brooding the interior with despairing wistfulness.

The undraped bier still occupied the centre of the room; its white drapery had been thrown negligently upon chairs, scattering the white-starred jasmine and wilting white roses over the new, richly-toned carpet. The young Highlander, his recently varnished countenance shining, gazed across the room cynically, unsympathetically, upon his fair descendant, distraught in ruthless excitement.

The profusion of roses were fainting, perishing, the aroma of their expiring fragrance freighted the breezes sweeping through the open windows, lifting their lace drapery as wafting wings, fanning desolation. The Daphne portrait, as insensate as the Sphinx, viewed the scene with smiling pensiveness.

Ruth's white dress fell in sinuous folds, her bright hair, caught in the breeze, swept her breast and shoulders; her eyes were dull and opaque, her soul straining to the hour when Israfeel should sound the trump of resurrection. Jean folded her arms about her, pityingly, protectively, and led her back to her room. Donald leaned upon the stair railing in a musing reverie until Jean returned, and said, with a sigh of weariness:

"I have requested Dicey to give us a late break-

fast ; so let us retire and sleep off the excitement and fatigue of the past unhappy day."

He bowed and ascended to his room and to an eloquent pillow.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEASIDE — A SHELL-STREWN BEACH — A PAVILION DANCE AT THE HOTEL.

"Life is not all tears. There be sunny slopes
And sweetly gliding streams and smiling plains,
To break its rugged aspect, though the hopes
Of youth may have perished in the sad pains
Of disappointment, fading, as it were,
Like the flowers in the early springtime."

—Selected.

One afternoon, late in August, Ruth was seated upon a white sand dune, or rather, she had burrowed into the porous sand and planted her sunshade, a lace-befrilled white silk parasol, just above her position. The sand was warm and dry, a pure breeze from the mound of the sea beat back the heat from landward, and robbed the sun-rays of much of their caloric intensity.

A book lay unopened upon her lap, the ocean loomed blue and majestic from its base at her feet to the distant, dim horizon ; and in the rear, back of the crest of the sand dune, lay the placid waters of the sound, mirroring the turquoise sky and en-

bosomed fairy islets of emerald verdure reflected in the crystal sheen of the quiet water.

She had stolen away from Jean, who, as usual, was chatting with friends in the pavilion laved by the surf, and pursued the damp, shell-strewn margin of the beach until she was far beyond the last stragglers searching for shells left stranded by each recedence of the never-resting waves.

She found it a precious boon to be quite alone, to be in uninterrupted leisure, that she might relax absolutely her mind and features, and imbibe impassively the mood of the throbbing waters, whose uttermost brim touched the azure sky, draped with fleecy clouds, which puffed their breathings gently, caressingly, over the sparkling main.

It was not the first time she had sought that broad seclusion and reclined for hours together inertly upon the sands; hours that she had spent listlessly, hardly dreaming or thinking, regretting or desiring; blank periods which had proven a panacea to her wrecked nerves and saddened mind. At times, she had judged herself molded clay from which her soul had departed, for fancy was slain, imagination wingless, her mind torpid with the dregs of lacerating emotions which had sapped her strength with vampirish onslaught. Out there on the sands, lulled by the mystic influence of the psalm of the sea, she had often reclined in the lethargic repose of physical and mental exhaustion.

That afternoon, in the distance, people strolled the beach and bobbed like disporting ducks in the shallow surf; and more distantly, a crowd surged about the rude pavilion where she supposed Jean to

be. More than once she had arisen partially to survey the Sound, with its sparkling bosom gaily bedecked with emerald gems and white sailboats skimming over its liquid surface, resembling butterflies floating on a summer's zephyr; but more constantly she gave heed to inertia and the monotone of the restless sea, and she knew, without emotion, that the sea's sad voice meant eternity when it called unto her heart so imperatively.

As impassive as the sea in its unending unrest, she had no inspiration to send forth fancy over the radiant deep in quest of "Fortuna Isles." Rather, she abided as a castaway on a desolate strand, where birds of hope never sang a pean nor the roses of love ever bloomed in the passionless waste. She had been thrust from the gardens of the Stoics and stranded in an emotionless void, where she evolved a new philosophy wholly personal and not, to her knowledge, portrayed in books, or any other person's experience; she realized that her heart was as a withered bud plucked ere its petals could unfold into a perfect blossom. Oh, the regret that she had drank the precious wine of youth to its dregs so prematurely; the outbreak of the grapes before the vintage; that so soon what others deemed pleasure was to her only pain and a weariness; nor work, which meant the play of faculty, "a delight like that which a fish feels in darting through the water," or "a bird experiences in skimming the shores of atmosphere," or "a lamb in frisking in the spring sunshine," as yet held no impelling charm, and she was content to spin the precious moments of youth's bright span lolling upon the sands; and the enchantment of sea

and sky, and vastness of spaces could not steer her thoughts to lands not laid down in any chart.

She had never explained to anyone the weird suffering of those few days and nights she had remained at home in the middle of the summer. Her condition had thoroughly alarmed Jean, and Donald had advised the seashore. So Jean had borne her keen disappointment that she could not have her bairnie at home for a longer period, and brought her down to the mountainous blue of the main, with its breeze-swept beaches of silvery sands, and loitered there, while her fields bore thrifty crops, the fruit ripened in her orchards, the grapes hung golden and purple in the vineyards, the roses bloomed riotously in her garden, living in a hotel barren of all those luxuries and comforts; her recompense the illimitable, wondrous ocean, with its healing balm for her weak and nervous charge.

The journey had been brief, but to Ruth very fatiguing; the trip to the distant station, a short flitting by rail to the seaport town, then another brief ride by a pleasure route to the bustling little station, where the journey ended and the sea had met them, with its ponderous, violet-tinged mystery.

At first Ruth had viewed it from the hotel windows, her strength returning imperceptibly in the clarity of the freedom of ethereal spaces which were realms of such rare purity, the phantasms of dreams, the visions of a shock-inflamed brain, had been exorcised by sweet, refreshing sleep, and the tonic of the intensely oxygenized air.

Then Jean, her fears allayed, entered into the social life of the gay and informal resort; and when

Ruth had so far improved that she frequented the seashore and lolled in the hammocks swung from the live oaks surrounding the hotel, Donald had arrived, accompanied by his mother, and she and Jean had been as cheerful as if they were enjoying a protracted picnic, mingling unreservedly with the crowds which went every afternoon, by way of the tiny railway over to the beach, for a revel in Neptune's briny domain. Ruth also undertook the journey often; and in the evenings there had invariably been music and sometimes dances in the hotel pavilion, and games and social intercourse in the parlors.

There were companies of the State militia in encampment nearby, and brass-adorned uniforms enlivened the occasions with formal apparel. Indeed, it was a happy, cheerful world down there by the sand-barred, majestic ocean; and Ruth viewed it uncritically, but with the aloofness her mind evinced toward the starry firmament or the tossing, restless billows, always flowing from or ebbing to an inscrutable distance.

When the afternoon had waned until the declining sun blazed as an opal in its reflection far out at sea, Ruth became aware that someone was directly approaching her retreat, and she reluctantly withdrew her glance from the glittering expanse of ocean, where the white-capped breakers approached in endless procession to melt upon the beach, an intangible, doleful moaning attending their dissolution.

She sat erect and assumed a smile as Donald, warm and flushed, shaded by a large yellow cotton umbrella, came with miring footsteps and approached her position, some distance from the firm,

wave-washed strand. She lifted her sad, serious eyes to his suffused countenance; she gathered the voluminous, befrilled skirt of her white dress compactly about her feet as she said, hospitably:

"Share my seat with me, Donald! You appear really fatigued and very warm."

She indicated the limited level space by a sweep of her hand over the ledge she had dug in the sand. He planted his stout umbrella near her dainty canopy and reclined in its shadow. He was garbed in a nobby suit of white duck; he fanned himself with his wide-brimmed straw hat, adorned with a blue silken band. He had been much of a dandy during his happy holiday; gallant and gay, persistently cheerful and in touch with all the gayety the place provided.

"Why will you run away to such unreasonable distances?" he queried, with frank petulance, feeling an unwarrantable desire to scold her; resenting instinctively the lifeless tone of her conduct, her constantly introspective manner.

"I wished to be alone, and here I find congenial quietude," she responded with listless amiability. She serenely viewed his evident fatigue and nervousness.

"A craving for solitude is your chief desire, it seems to me," he retorted, and ostentatiously drew his handkerchief and wiped his flushing countenance. Ruth judged that he must have been very gallant and gay to have so invited fatigue and irritability.

"I believed you were in the surf still with those girls from the city?" she remarked, interrogatively.

"I was ; but I am not living in the surf, remember. It is hours since we came out of the water, and the girls have returned home to rest up for the dance to-night."

She smiled upon him sympathetically. "It was too bad for them to leave so early, and it is your last day to be with them."

"Indeed, so!" he rejoined, so inattentively she changed the subject, impressed that it was incumbent upon her to entertain him, in that he had sought her so directly.

"Is it not restful here?" she remarked confidently. "One feels the warmth, but it does not enervate the system, for the air is such a pure refreshment ; as pure as the breath breathed into Adam's lungs by his Divine Creator."

"Are such the thoughts which evoked the forlorn expression you were wearing just now?" he asked, still absent in manner.

"No, I was not thinking of Adam," she confessed, readily.

Donald, refreshed by the breeze and welcome shade, forgot his former irritation ; the languorous thrall of the summer day, the slumberous chant of the hymn of the sea, the charm of Ruth's prized presence, had soothed his nerves and restored his cheerfulness.

Secretly he had rebelled against Ruth's abiding listlessness and aloofness from every temporal interest and pleasure, her unabating passion for the sea ; that she arose at early morn to view its flushing glory, her lingering at sunset to watch the light fade from its rare placidity of surface ; that she

worshipped it by starlight and moonlight, and all the long days heeded its voice of sonorous solemnity. It seemed to be the only thing that compelled her interest and commanded her attention. He resented her silence and self-effacement, when she could have so easily reigned absolutely in the little world of which she was the most admired member.

He had taken his holiday appreciatively, given his time to recreation and spent his limited leisure down there by the sea because Ruth was the attraction that had drawn him there. Now he felt sensitively aggrieved that he had seen so little of her. She had not, it was true, particularly avoided him, but her presence was hard to obtain in any circle where he passed the time in vapid gallantry with people he did not care for, and who often bored him exceedingly. Ruth would not dance, and was seldom out of her room in the evenings when others danced or had games in the hotel parlors.

Notwithstanding, he had often espied her on the pier in company with an old gentleman, who reeled in ringed fish enthusiastically, and out in a hammock swung beneath a remote live oak, where, through a convenient vista, she glimpsed the distant mound of the sea; and rarely he had located her far away up the beach, basking on the sands, with only her thoughts for company.

He had, then, just left the gay and noisy pavilion on the brink of the surf and tramped the long way to secure a coveted interview with her, for he was going away to-morrow to begin the tedium of another long absence. He swept her profile with covert but admiring glances; the gleam of her golden

hair, the sweep of her silky lashes thrilled him with exquisite sensations, although his expression was the antipode of sentimental espionage.

"Ruth," he said, inquiringly, "why are you so changed, so different? What is it that is wrecking your youth and giving you such premature seriousness and sadness? None of the pleasures of life seem to appeal to you."

"I am just as I am. I cannot help my moods; you believe what I say, do you not, Donald?" she replied, slowly, forlornly.

"You need some ambition, some interest, to arouse you," he said, admonishingly.

"Do you think so? Perhaps it is so, but really I have been working assiduously; I have not been idle since we parted."

"That should be no reason for nun-like behavior, though," he said, and then paused, stammeringly.

"No, but just now I am not very strong, remember," she answered, turning her glance upon him frankly.

The color suffused his face painfully; he gazed seaward, and blinked from the glare of the sun reflected in its troubled waters.

"I—came up here to speak with you, Ruth; you know I am going away to-morrow, and—and—er—," his blushes became really embarrassing to each, and caused Ruth to wonder, silently, why he was so bashfully perturbed.

"Oh, Donald, do not ask me to dance to-night. I am going out just to please Aunt Jean and your mother!" she cried.

"It is not about the dance I came to see you; it is

quite different," he explained, his embarrassment deepening, perceptibly.

"Well?" she encouraged him.

"No; it is nothing about the dance. It is something more important, to me at least," he repeated incoherently. "I came up here to—to—inform you that I was in love—and—er—wished to tell you so."

Ruth frowned in her effort to comprehend; viewing his unwonted diffidence, it was some moments ere she grasped what he was confessing so confusedly.

"And is it the little Edna Wallace, Donald?" she queried gently, sympathetically.

He stared, and then vociferated an emphatic denial. "That giggling, frisky, vain child! I am humiliated in that you could suggest such a thing!"

"But I thought, or rather inferred that you were with her very often, and therefore quite fond of her," Ruth hastened to explain. "Well, who is it, then, that has won your heart, if I may question you on so delicate a subject?" she insisted, assuming an interest in his affairs of heart she was guiltless of entertaining.

He did not answer her immediately; indeed, he was just then floundering in the throes of an abject abasement, feeling that he was not worthy of her respect, even. So painful was his confusion that his features were as intensely colored as a freshly blown peony blossom. Ruth was silent from sheer amazement; his behavior was so at variance with his character.

"It is you I love, Ruth, and none other. Have you never guessed that I love you?" he said, and his

high color ebbed violently, leaving him pale unto a white pallor of lips and a darkening intensity of his clear gray eyes. The evidences of such sincere emotion, of such intense feeling enlightened Ruth more than his incoherent speech, and she suddenly awoke to a realization from which she recoiled with an infinite repugnance and sorrow. She sat erect, she clasped her hands in impulsive distress.

"Oh, why do you say such things to me, Donald?" she exclaimed, in sharp rebuke, her dismay too genuine to be easily suppressed.

"Why does any man say such things?" he retorted, argumentatively, as he picked up a bleached shell, a crumbling waif astray from its element, and tossed it afar into the dimpling surf.

He turned to question her silence, and in the lambent flame of his passion-lighted eyes, the tremulous quiver of his white lips, she beheld again a heart's supreme surrender to her charm. She nearly swooned with the shock of the discovery, that Donald, her one-time mentor, her ever dear friend, had given his happiness into her unwelcome keeping.

"I love you, love you, Ruth!" he explained, and lapsed suddenly into a calm reversal to sophisticated speech and behavior. "Always I have loved you, it seems to me; so long, I long ago became accustomed to the pain and the bliss of the knowledge; pain in that I might never win you; bliss just to have known you and the love you inspired so innocently. It is as much a part of my life as living and breathing! What is there so strange in the fact that it should so astonish and frighten you?" he added, rebukingly, and found another shell to aim at the unoffending ocean. Her behavior humiliated him exceedingly.

"It is too horrible to be true!" she breathed, in a soliloquizing tone, as swift reflection mirrored possible suffering, and sorrow for such a noble, true heart as she believed his to be.

"Oh, say it is not true! Say that you are trying to tease me, to mock me! Oh, anything, but that you love me!" she beseeched him so desperately he was hurt, offended, and disdained to reply.

"Love me! Oh, Donald, you must be joking!" she implored, seeking relief from a knowledge that was agonizing. He sat rigid and unresponsive.

She arose in the stress of an uncontrollable excitement. "Say you are jesting, Donald! See how you have frightened me!"

"I am not jesting, Ruth! I would not jest upon so sacred a subject as love," he said contritely, as his hopes fluttered low as birds with wounded pinions.

She stood motionless, probing the sombre depths of his eyes, in which was mirrored the unspoken depth of his devotion to her. Her heart was pierced with a torturing remorse, and she knelt contritely, humbly, in the sand at his feet.

"Tell me, Donald, that I am not to blame in this! I cannot realize that I am. If I did, remorse would slay me. What did I do that you should love me?" she prayed, piteously. She was convinced that he loved her by the remembrance of her own passion and sorrow.

"You did nothing but be your own true self," he assured her. "You were, you are very beautiful; people speak of that fact every day, here, but it was not your beauty that won me. I have been accustomed to meeting the most beautiful women in this

and adjoining States since my earliest college days, and I never felt toward one of them as I have regarded you since I have known you intimately. I have given you the one love of my heart. Whatever it was that won me, I know I love you with an absolute affection! I think it was your innocence and uprightness of character, combined with your seraphic spirituality."

She clasped her hands and bowed her head in the intensity of her questioning rebuke.

"Why did you not woo me, then? Oh, Donald! Our lives might have been so different if you had won my heart, when I was a veritable Virginia in my innocence of the world; you could have so easily posed as Paul in our untrammelled acquaintance-ship."

"I was a gentleman," he averred, proudly. "I could do nothing so dishonourable as to win your love ere you knew anything of others; it might have proved fatal, as well as dishonourable."

"Dishonourable?" she echoed, in a startled tone. "Why dishonourable?"

"I was your tutor," he explained. "Your aunt trusted me to fill that role with credit to myself and respect for you; I could not take advantage of your inexperience and ignorance of other men. I did not desire to win you so; I wanted you to see the world, to be informed, to have an enlightened standard wherewith to judge me and my aspirations, my ideals; and I am glad that I restrained my desire to win you then. But now I can urge my suit with a clear conscience," he concluded, determinately.

She breathlessly scrutinized his fair, pleasing per-

sonality, his great strength of muscle and the purity of his countenance, mirroring so truly his loftiness of spirit.

"I wish it could be as you wish, but it is too late now," she sighed, in a genuine burst of regret. "Donald, dear friend, it is too late to form such a tie between us."

"I cannot believe it!" he cried, stubbornly. "Unless there is someone else who has a claim upon you. Is there someone, Ruth?" he asked, with disbelieving concern.

"No," she returned, studiously, after an interval of reflection. "There is no one else on earth who has the least claim upon my heart or loyalty, and there never will be, I am convinced, almost to a certainty."

Her words and manner were too sincere, too solemn, to admit of the least doubt that she spoke from a firm conviction. Intense sadness clothed her expression as she arose and brushed the sand from her dress, drew on her white gloves, and, lifting her parasol, furled it, absently.

"Donald, listen and heed my words. I shall never love anyone else, but that does not leave the inference that I shall ever love you. You must give your heart and hand to some happy, fair woman, who will cherish you as you deserve to be loved and adored; you must think of me as a friend only, but a very true friend, who prays for you the very greatest good the wide world has to offer to its noblest of sons and devotees."

He sprang erect, strong and composed. "Never mind about someone to cherish me! For the other part of your prayer, grateful thanks and apprecia-

tion! I—I will wait and labor to win you, even as Jacob served his seven, yea, twice seven years to attain his Rachel.”

He lifted his ugly sunshade and deliberately furled it as she stood facing the sea, her heart battling with a tide of resurrected emotions. Silently, and by mutual impulse, they moved down to the margin of the beach and walked along the hard, moist strand, oppressed by the crisis of the moment.

Donald detoured on the way to gather for her a sheaf of golden sea-oats, and casually discoursed discursively upon their hardy growth and tenacious vitality. He picked up iridescent shells, newly washed ashore, and examined them with assumed interest and speculation.

They found the beach pavilion deserted, except by those who catered to the pleasures and the appetites of the public which flocked there in private parties and public excursions. Those mercenaries were putting their booths in order for another day and clearing the playground for care-free, holiday seekers.

The lilliputian engine and its diminutive train of two small passenger coaches stood panting and restive for its last trip across the Sound. Donald assisted her aboard and found her a seat. He reversed the seat in front of hers, and sat facing her, holding in his hands the sheaf of oats, his translucent, alert eyes embracing her worshippingly, whenever she dared to meet the adoring light flooding their strong depths. She cowed in spirit from his optimistic view of their relations to each other; her heart throbbed in slow, pulsing regret and hopelessness.

The opalescent Sound, over which they were passing, impelled by the fussy small engine, dimpled and radiated golden lights, the sun was reflected in its waters as a blazing, intensely toned topaz; and Donald, the restraints of convention for the moment cast off, gave rein to a happiness unto which he was a stranger.

They disembarked from the train to the strains of the orchestra, playing their ante-supper stint in the pavilion. When night had fallen upon the sea, it lifted up its voice to smite the solitude of darkness with moanings and sighings peculiar to its burthen of sound. Ruth leaned from their bedroom window as Jean preened before their one mirror. The hotel, its grounds and pavilion, blazed with lights, and revealed unusual festivity. A certain military company was giving a German complimentary to the young ladies who had enlivened their leisure since they had gone into encampment, a mile or so distant from the point occupied by the hotel on the hammocks.

The present occasion had been given rare importance, for the company had proven a very popular one with the seaside society that summer, and a large contingent of the smartest society, in the nearby city, were expected to attend the function.

Jean had conceived a peculiar reverence for the best element of people in the old town near the sea, which was so indissolubly associated with the fortunes of the exiled Highlanders, especially their colonial career. She enjoyed meeting its citizens and favorably impressing them with her own importance as a member of the honorable families descended from the exiles. She had made it a habit

to be elegantly dressed, and had imbued Ruth to obedience to the same custom, although Ruth was indifferent to such a vanity of social distinction, and had shrunk sensitively from the admiration her appearance constantly excited.

That evening Jean had insisted that she should wear her most elaborate toilet and the rare gems Angus Bethune had lavishly given to her out of his great abundance; and she had complied with Jean's wish with her usual docility. When Jean had put the final touch to her own elegant toilet, she turned and discovered Ruth drooping on the window-sill.

"Well," she breathed in a burst of satisfaction with her appearance, "we will go out now, if you are ready, bairnie?"

Ruth arose with visible reluctance and took up her fan and evening wrap.

"Are you not well, Ruthie? Did dressing fatigue you?" Jean questioned, solicitously, as she noted an excess of lassitude in Ruth's manner.

"No, not especially, thank you, Auntie," Ruth rejoined, evasively.

"The outdoor air will refresh you and the music rest you," Jean assured her, after a moment's hesitation. Ruth quietly led the way from the room, and Jean followed her. She was rarely handsome in her glistening black silk costume, relieving daintily her fair hair and Gaelic features.

A gay scene greeted them beyond the entrance. Gaudy Oriental lanterns depended from the low branches of the live-oaks, emitting a dim but gorgeously tinted light; the pavilion was brilliantly illuminated, and draped with State and national flags and bedecked with fragrant greens and flowers.

A full orchestra breathed sweet and plaintive airs; formally arrayed people, gay and noisy in their pleasure, moved about the grounds or graced the interior of the pavilion with their beaming presence.

Ruth found a seat with the matrons, Donald's mother and Jean on either side of her, desiring as much as possible to efface herself from the feverish scene of revelry.

Donald danced, when the ball was opened, and was very gallant with the pretty young girls, clothed in their artistic evening dresses. He seldom approached the matrons' section, and Ruth was mostly oblivious of him as she lived in memories which, despite her inclination:

"The tender words she had heard so oft,
Still rang through heart and brain,"

to the sobbing, sighing, exulting strains of the tenderly subdued music, until

"She writhed and her pulses throbbed,
With a bitter, maddening pain."

She found it futile to say to her plaining heart:

"Oh, why should I think of those broken vows with such
regret?

I must rise above and beyond it all, and in time quite
forget!

Yet I cannot keep those memories back, they are too
strong for me;

They come and go, they rise and fall, like the waves of
the restless sea.

They dash against my broken heart, those memories—
those memories lone;
They leave me like a stranded ship, whose helm and
anchor are gone."

With introspective mind she heeded the wailing, thrilling voice of the instruments, lost in a realm of reverie, a soul's seance of mingled bliss and worm-wood. Summer skies and the fragrance of roses, darkest eyes and tenderest smiling lips, seen far away in the past, which the music re-embodied in moonlight, in perfume of lilies, in the notes of mocking-birds and the cooing of pigeons. As the music swayed its influence, drowning the suppressed agony of the sea waves' mystery, the circling couples gliding over the glossed floor were dim, distant figures scarcely noted, as her heart melted with longing and sorrow. When the longing became an overwhelming desire which she knew could never be realized, she prayed, desperately:

"Oh for a haven where still waters lie!
Where no memory can my bosom fret!
For the water of Lethe, for the Siren's song!
That will help me to forget."

It was the misfortune of her sincere temperament that her life could not be a series of episodes, like many of the gay young creatures wholly absorbed in the dance; perhaps not capable of a supreme emotion; with her, emotion, like flowers, might wither and decay, but would have perpetual roots.

Although aloof in spirit and in heart widely separated from the present, she was, personally, the

cynosure of many admiring glances. Jean and Mrs. MacKethan were the recipients of many flattering attentions from young men seeking an introduction and hoping to secure a dance with the most beautiful and most elegantly attired young lady present. Elderly people openly admired and sought her acquaintance; the young girls envied her beauty, her elegance of apparel and splendor of gems; and Donald swept her with prudent but ardent scrutiny, incessantly, for to him the assembly held but one charm, one solitary joy, the bliss of her presence.

When the last dance had been finished and the strains of "Home, Sweet Home," were dismissing the wearied but happy throng, Donald sought her resolutely, and placing her hand upon his arm, piloted her along the dim, winding way to the hotel entrance. There they paused to await their relatives, who were parting leisurely with a group of acquaintances down at the pavilion. He unfolded her cloak, a rich, silken garment given to her by Angus Bethune the previous winter, and wrapped it gently about her shoulders. The limpid peace of the solemn midnight hour brooded the intruding sea; alone, the golden stars glittered in the purple depths of the obscure heavens.

"Come out with me, Ruth. There are seats quite near, and I want to be alone with you while my heart is breaking with the sorrow of parting. You know I leave early in the morning and shall not see you again," he pleaded, tremulously. She shrank from him then, with a shrinking akin to a fear of him and the flaming passion in his beseeching glances.

"I cannot, Donald. Really, I am almost fainting

with fatigue; I will say goodbye to-morrow," she faltered.

"As you please," he said, with a brave pride. "But I shall go very early."

"We, too, will leave here next week. I shall go direct to my school, but Aunt Jean will return to Kissic-Dale for a lengthy stay before joining me, perhaps some time in the Autumn. Uncle Angus will visit me at the school as soon as I arrive there. He is now in the North on business, and that is why Aunt Jean has decided not to accompany me. And—and I shall not return to Kissic-Dale for a long period, Donald; you must forget all you have said to me to-day ere we meet again, for the poor little Ruth of Kissic-Dale died a long time ago; she is no longer among the living. You are cherishing a phantom of other days! The dear, dead days of long ago, days beyond recall, therefore, forget them; banish all thoughts of me from your heart and be happy, as you so richly deserve to be," she entreated with a dreary earnestness. She laid her hand upon his arm caressingly.

"Dear, kind friend," she added, meeting the sombre wistfulness of his regard with appealing tenderness, "I do honor you more than anyone on earth, and it breaks my heart to wound you, but forget me by not seeking me or letting a thought of yours stray to the time when you say you learned to love me. I am not that child, that little Ruth. Will you not believe me? It pains me very much to wound you, but I could not be otherwise than sincere with you, Donald."

Moodily he gazed upon her regal beauty, intensified by splendor of raiment and scintillation of gems;

it was a far cry to the little schoolroom in the pine forest, to the sweet spring days when his heart had made its final and everlasting surrender; and the future lay dim and uncertain in the land of dreams and hopes to be accomplished.

"I cannot promise you so much; I think I shall seek you again, and yet again, throughout my whole life, if no one else claims you before I win you," he said, with equal sincerity and earnestness.

"No one else will ever claim me. I can assure you that much," she rejoined, moving a step away from him and scrutinizing him by the radiance of a swinging light depending from the ceiling of the hotel veranda.

He was very handsome, she confessed, ungrudgingly, in his conventional evening clothes, and he was strong and graceful, a blonde Viking, whose courage would give him the desire and the prowess to assail the strongholds of worldly success and distinguishment.

"God grant that no one wins you. I believe it would drive me insane to know you were lost to me irrevocably," he declared with vehement passion.

"No, it would not, Donald," she answered, with a prophetic consolation; "such blows as you seem to dread bring no such oblivion as is found in insanity."

Jean and his sweet-faced mother approached and joined them; they beamed happily upon their idols; their approval of the tete-a-tete they had happened upon, was as a city set upon a hill; Ruth observed, and understood, with a guilty sense of enmity to their wishes.

"I am bidding Donald farewell," she explained,

with twofold meaning, which Donald alone comprehended.

"Not farewell, Ruth," he interposed, correctively, "only *au revoir*, until a more propitious morrow."

BOOK IV.

WINTER.

"All things are symbols; the eternal shows
Of Nature have their image in the mind,
As flowers, fruits and falling of the leaves;
The song-birds leave us at the summer's close,
Only the empty nests are left behind,
And piping of quails among the sheaves.

—Selected.

CHAPTER I.

FLEUR-DE-LIS—RUTH'S CHANGE OF DESTINY— WHEN DONALD RESUMED HIS WOOING.

"I've marked it well, and found it true,
Death never takes one alone, but two!
Under roof of gold or roof of thatch,
He always leaves it upon the latch,
And comes again ere the year is o'er."

—Selected.

"A wood depth skirting the way, . . .
. . . the glow of the sky, . . .,"

". . . like the flower and the weed,
That wither away to let others succeed."

"Then be content, poor heart!
God's plans, like lilies pure and white, unfold,
We must not tear the close-shut leaves apart;
Time will reveal the calyxes of gold."

—Selected.

Nearly two years elapsed ere Donald met Ruth again; for the following summer Angus Bethune and Jean had gone abroad with her, and upon their return in early autumn had left her at the school that

for so long a time had been the only home she frequented.

Then, in mid-winter of an unusually mild season, La Grippe, a scourge of almost national affliction, had appeared, and many were the victims of the insidious disease. Jean was early attacked, and Ruth had come home to attend her, when Angus Bethune, learning of the distress at Kissic-Dale, came from his distant Western home to Ruth's assistance, only to succumb to the same malady, contracted on the journey.

Jean had survived but had not regained normal health. Angus had died in April and was buried beside his sister Ruth, at Kissic-Dale kirk. This, and many more details, Donald was informed of, as he drove his mother's sleek buggy horse adown the elm avenue into the aroma and charm of the well-remembered old homestead at Kissic-Dale.

He had left his childhood's home in the early morning and had traveled constantly to reach his destination ere the June sun had attained to high noon. The silence of the solitary journey had induced much self-communion, and a critical review of his individual sphere in the plan of the universe. It came to pass with him, as with every logical and reflective mind, to search the conditions, growths of the present, that had evolved his ego in its current stage of evolution.

His mother's home, similar to Kissic-Dale in its comforts and standards of living, lay beyond many miles of pine barrens from Kissic-Dale; and his pace was set by roads of yielding white sand, through which the wheels of the light buggy had ploughed

with a constant grind and hiss of friction. Through vistas of pines, he had gazed afar into the environing forest, glimpsing shapely green hollies, frowsy scrub oaks and clumps of bulrush in the frequent hollows scooped out of the hills. Indeed, at places the land lay in great curving and conical ridges, as if—and he conjectured that it must be—it was a deserted sea-beach, with its dunes and shapen surface, woven by winds and tides, with the sand for the web driven by their fickle shuttles, which centuries had kindly clothed in tall pines and tough scrub oak bushes.

Insensibly, the scene, so familiar to his boyhood, but so unfamiliar to the habits of his manhood and his vision accustomed to the ideals of the Western college, where he held an important position in its faculty, had lured his fancy back to the primeval days of its pioneer settlement by the exiles of the battle of Culloden, the unlucky, loyal-hearted followers of "Bonny Prince Charlie." They were his own sturdy progenitors, his hardy ancestors, who had lain aside "the plumed bonnet, the Lincoln green and tartan plaidie," the kilts and the philobegs with the sporting and martial spirit of

"Scots who had with Wallace bled,
Scots whom Bruce had often led,
Who for Scotland's king and law,
Freedom's sword would strongly draw,"

and clothed in the products of the looms of the pioneer, had hewn themselves homes in the wilderness of the budding Carolina provinces. They had

come from the most romantic and cultured section of the Highlands, he knew, and the battle cry:

“Up with the banner! Let forests fan her!
It has waved over Stuarts ten ages or more!”

at the beginning of the rebellion which had ended so disastrously at Culloden Moor, was no idle boast, for:

“For Charlie they lost house an’ haddin,
For Charlie they fought on the sward;
For Charlie they bled at Culloden,”

and for Charlie endured massacre and exile; yet bravely sung:

“ ’Tis well I love my Charlie’s name!
Though there be some who hate him;”
I swear by moon and stars so bright
And the sun which glances early,
If I had twenty thousand lives
I’d give them all for Charlie!”

But for all their brave loyalty to a lost cause, he knew they had suffered acutely with loneliness and homesickness, for did not another old song say, a song he had often sung with Jean MacEarchan when he was at Kissic-Dale:

“There was a track across the deep,
A path across the sea,
But the weary ne’er returned
To their ain countrie.

"They ne'er dinna see the broom,
With its tassels on the lea;
Nor hear the linties sang
In their ain countrie.

"They sighed for Scotia's shore,
They gazed across the sea;
But they could not get a blink,
Of their ain countrie."

There were other old songs, too, which he had sung with Jean and they recurred to his memory as he realized the silence and solitude of the land, which appealed to his fancy persistently:

"Oh, that the past I might forget!
Wanderin' an' weepin'!
Oh, that aneath the hillock green
Sound were I sleepin'!
Where bonny ran the burnie down,
Wanderin' an' windin',
Sweetly sang the birds adown,
Care ne'er mindin'."

He had raised his voice and sang the stanza while he had wondered over the extent of the original tracts of land appropriated by those lonely, repining pioneers. He speculated if their ambitions had been baronial, or if they had been enamored of the seclusion and peace to be attained amid so many sterile acres of palisading pines. Following this trend of thought, he had also recalled, with a throb of racial loyalty, that he was amid historic scenes sacred to

the memory of the heroine, "Flora MacDonald," whose husband, Kingsburgh, son of the "old Laird," who befriended "Bonnie Prince Charlie," had preempted thousands of acres surrounding his home at "Killie-gray," ere his royalist zeal sent him and his family back to Scotland, to the loch-bound "Isle of Uist."

Jean had written him a wonderful letter from that isle the previous year; a letter as full of patriotic zeal as a cocoanut is of meat, but he had resented its exclusion of news of Ruth, devotedly, from a personal standpoint, but very unpatriotically, he confessed, indifferently.

As if by natural gradation, his mind reverted to Ruth's accession of fortune by the immense inheritance that had befallen to her from Angus Bethune's estate, which had far exceeded any former estimate of his fortune; in comparison, Kissic-Dale was a pigmy possession. He was not pleased with the situation; he would much prefer Ruth in a condition that he might strive to win her position and pleasure, and thus prove the sincerity of his devotion; yet he would still seek to win her, he knew, regardless of any influence fate might entwine about his suit.

All this and much more, lay in the background of his mind as he secured his horse and entered Kissic-Dale unannounced. The familiar scene basked in its most charming mood, as the splendor of June ennobled every phase of its appointments. The roses gleaming on shrubbery and twining columns and trellises, rivalled the magnificence of a tropical garden; the mocking-birds were gay in the royal magnolias. An emotional surge of passionate remembrance

thrilled his heart and mind as he embraced it all in a receptive wave of fondest feeling.

He found Jean in an invalid chair placed in her favorite nook of the veranda, with Mary Graham knitting beside her. Each was robed in black as a tribute to the lonely man who had none nearer to mourn him than the household at Kissic-Dale. He inquired for Ruth, and Jean lamented that her weakness had imposed much responsibility upon Ruth, who was then, she inferred, in the rear garden as was her habit much of her days.

"I will look for her," he said, and he instantly started on the quest.

To pass from the front to the rear lawn was as if passing from a scene set for the public eye to the cloistered peace and quietude of a family altar; for it breathed the incense of "ye olden days" in scent, and profusion of old-fashioned conceits in shrub and posy. The past seemed held ineffaceably in the shadow and growth promulgated by a former generation, whose feet had trod the turf and lungs inhaled the refreshing aroma.

The spot had always appeared peculiarly a memorial to those who had lived and flourished in their brief span of life close to its vernal heart that embodied the elements of love of race, of family reverence, clannish ties, fraternal affections, loyalty to principles and inviolable standards.

The overshadowing trees of Catalpa, of Pride of India, of Aspen, of elm and maple; the one slender pine standing as a sentinel guarding a lonely outpost, the clipped box and cedars, the beds of lavender, white lilies, lady grass, four-o'clocks and white and

purple, flourishing *Fleur de lis*; the attenuated little Scotch pine; the green, tough grass, to which sparkling dewdrops clung tenaciously; the lilacs, the honeysuckle, the hedges of broom, the clean, graveled paths; aye! and an Old World atmosphere, altogether, embalmed in lavender and thyme and the dainty incense of garden pinks and ascension lilies.

Donald's footsteps lagged as he descended into its emerald, shadow-flecked peace and fragrance, its serene and reposeful dignity. Involuntarily, he felt for the hat he was not wearing, to salute the sentiment it evoked in his bosom. Notwithstanding that he was of the world and worldly in its highest, most intellectual sense, the most holy recess of his heart was troubled with a peculiar emotion of reverence for the past, the sincere simplicity of the pioneer days of his ancestry transplanted to an unbroken wilderness. He was instantly informed of a difference in the spot from his recollections of it in former days; there was such pertinent evidence of culture bestowed in laborious detail, in nicety of pruning of shrubbery, in clipped grass and cultivated beds and neatly kept paths.

He was arrested, indefinitely, by a great bedded circle of vigorous *Fleur de lis*, centrally located and encircled by a wide sweep of sanded soil, which he was certain had not been there when he lived at Kissic-Dale. He was to learn later that Ruth had gathered together every root of the once famous flower scattered widely over the entire premises from seedlings of colonial days, and massed them in a highly enriched bed of loam in the most prominent and conspicuous situation of the enclosure. He knew, though, the history of the plant and the rever-

ence of the pioneer Highlanders for the hardy Iris; that it was a reminiscent relic of the Jacobin and colonial eras, so impressive and tragical in their revulsive, storm-smitten conditions.

The huge bed was a mass of blooms with gold gilded throats encased in a shaggy livery of crinkled white and purple crepe, the fragrance peculiar to the genus diffused with that of the old-fashioned roses, perfuming the cool spaces as frankincense and myrrh seals their individual atmosphere to devotional altars.

He plucked a quaintly garbed blossom and studied it analytically; he flirted the plumed calyx and probed for the golden stamens and royal corolla of purple velvet, the details which had won the flower its distinction; memories, rooted in traditional knowledge were reinstated in his mind as butterflies arise from a thrifty bed of herbs.

"Oh, flower of France!" he soliloquized, reverently, "you flourish as memorials of many generations, lest we of Highland blood forget that your country gave asylum to our Bonny Prince Charlie! And, perhaps, in that you rendered succor to a weak and struggling colony, paradoxical as that sentiment may appear from the viewpoint of Revolutionary history!"

He deliberated a moment ere he selected a white bloom, still apostrophizing the loyalty of the idea conveyed by the honor bestowed upon a plant so long past its novelty and fame, that a study of them informed him of life's evanescent quality and fleeting span that:

"Alas! We are but eddies of the dust!

Uplifted by the blast, and whirled along the highway of
the world

A moment only, then to fall back to a common lot of all
At the subsidence of the gust."

Through the reverence and loyalty of all former generations of MacKenzies, the spot perpetuated the memory of the French monarchs whose dominance had ended with Louis XVI., and the martyred Marie Antoinette; and also the departed glory of the regime of the Stuarts, the hopes of the clans in the Highlands. He meditated a few moments upon the tragedies and sorrows forever associated with the thrifty *flower de luce*; then soberly continued his quest for Ruth, carrying in his hand a long-stemmed white blossom he had gathered from the mass adjoining the circular bed.

He found her easily. She was kneeling by the hedge of broom flaming brilliantly with bright, yellow spikes of clustered blossoms. She was busily prodding the dark mould sustaining the hedge, nutritively, with an oval-pointed trowel. A watering-pot stood near, and there was a limpid touch to the atmosphere, an earthly smell pervading the vicinity. She was robed in thin, sheer, black material, her bright head bare and glistening as a silky, golden crown. Her arms were also bare to her elbows, her white hands stained from contact with the damp soil. She glanced around when she heard his footsteps, then sprang erect in a movement of surprise and pleasure.

"Oh, it is you, Donald! Now, really!" she cried.

coming to meet him with outstretched hands, which she withdrew before he could grasp them. "I am sorry, but I cannot give you my hand," she said simply, meeting his glance bravely and candidly.

The shadow of her recent bereavement lay deep in her dark eyes, washed clear of every alloying medium by the crystal floods of an overflowing grief.

"Poor little Ruth," he murmured, with sincere commiseration. Her lips quivered like a grieving child, so she just stood before him, the image of acute but resigned sorrow in which no thought of self intruded; self had been forgotten when she had gone with Jean and Angus to the very verge of eternity's realm, where with all her strength she had held Jean back when Angus had passed into unbroken sleep.

She wished to tell Donald all about that heart reforming experience; dear Donald, who had always been so strong and helpful, so willing to aid even unexpressed wishes. With an eloquent gesture she piloted him to one of the many rustic seats she had placed in shady nooks.

"I had grown so fond of him, Donald; it was such a comfort to have his strength and wisdom to guide and sustain me, that now I feel I am as a rudderless ship on the chartless sea of time," she said, with filial reverence and sincere sorrow.

"You have my full sympathy, Ruth," he replied, simply, his features serious and compassionate in expression.

"I see you have a *flower de luce* blossom; I planted them as a tribute to his memory. That last day he said to me when spent with his great suffering,

'I am so tired, Ruthie, so tired, I think I shall be at rest and peace very soon, and it will be so sweet to go to my ain countrie. When you come into the inheritance I shall leave to you, you must not forsake the things our forefathers loved and cherished, and we have ever held sacred. You must be your own pathfinder, though, that you may honor and uplift, edify it may be, the Scottish zeal of patriotism for all that pertains to their ancient race and history.'

"He said other things, too, Donald, that I shall always remember and obey. He imposed such trust upon me I wonder where he found the courage or the encouragement to so estimate my ability. One thing he said touched me more than any other; and that was to never disregard sickness, pain or sorrow, but to do all I could to alleviate it. His own sufferings rendered him thoughtful and tender. Oh, he suffered, Donald, and was so tired, so very tired, I felt it wrong to grieve, but I cannot help it," she concluded, a shower of tears streaming over her cheeks and splashing upon her soil-stained hands.

Donald's own eyes grew limpid in sympathy with her grief, so spontaneous and sincere, evincing that her heart was dissolved in unavailing regret for the dear, indulgent uncle who was the last tie between her and the mother she could not remember. So deep and so poignant were the memories she retained of her lost relative, they had changed the whole tenor of her life, her ambitions; the serenity and piety of her girlhood had returned as a prodigal who had wandered afar to be despoiled and humiliated.

She had gone to the kirk regularly, when Jean

had so improved that she could leave her to the care of Mary and Dicey. The first time she had occupied the MacKenzie pew, she had broken down and wept throughout the service, not alone grieving for Angus, but in ruthless repentance and remorse, that she had been so selfishly immersed in her own grievances, so bitterly alienated from the sweet, normal communion of home and kirk. The Gaelic congregation had mourned with her, and after the services, they had pressed to her side with sincere and kindly sympathy beaming upon their rugged features as they greeted the "fair MacKenzie." It had been the happiest and the saddest hour she had known in the tempestuous years of her absence from the kirk; and thus she had found potent consolation and the pensive realm of pious resignation.

Since then, she had been content to plan for a definite sojourn at Kissic-Dale, to consecrate her life to its interest, unreservedly. She had devoted all her leisure from other duties to caring for the flowers now that Jean's weakness prevented her from any active oversight or labor.

Donald drew her on, that she might express her views and plans for the future. He studied every intonation, every gesture, every emotion, with the keen analysis of a vital interest, as if he was waiting for a rendered verdict which might change his entire future, yet he was careful to veil the ardor of his regard, and she had, apparently, forgotten his declarations at the seaside; and he, long ere then, had realized that his precipitate conduct then was unwise and premature, and he had conceived a different plan to win her love and efface his unfortu-

nate blunder. Finding her so domesticated at home, the scene of the inception of his love for her, seemed to place them upon the hither side of four eventful years which had been as rock-ribbed barriers, shielding her from the presumption of his hopes.

Life, even in its happiest phases, is an analogy of shifting sand-dunes, which the gales of circumstances demolish and rebuild constantly with the unstable stratas of mutable changes and emotions; and the sum of each cycle of experiences weights the heart with memories that trace their influence in mystic lines upon the countenance; Ruth's expression was a spiritual pensiveness devoid of its simplicity, her serious, soulful eyes no longer held the obvious query seen in infantile solemnity; Donald was more stalwart in figure, more commanding in manner.

His blonde hair had thinned above his temples, his mobile lips fell unawares into the masterful curve of dictatorial authority; his voice deeper, and of harsher note, yet thrilled with gentle cadences as he bent his head to question or to heed what she was saying.

"You seem to have altered this sequestered nook immensely," he remarked, as they were leisurely walking toward the house. Ruth had at last remembered his long and early drive, therefore his need of rest and refreshment; also that she was not exactly tidy. She swept the environment with an affectionate glance.

"I have learned to like it so much since I realized the romance and interest attaching to even the humblest of the things growing here; their roots

reach down through more than a century of heroism, of trials bravely borne, of unquenchable faith and patriotic zeal. It has been my salvation," she declared, wistfully.

"In what way, Ruth?" he asked, puzzled and probing.

"It has presented me with a mission, a work to accomplish, an excuse for living. Donald, I enjoyed the trip to Europe so much; it reinstated life for me. I believe a kind Providence has directed my footsteps and made me realize that the world is not a fleeting show, if the great plan of creation is rightly understood. The trouble with me had been that I felt too much my individual importance; now I know that I am but an insignificant unit in the Omniscient plan; it has taught me humility; that every creature, irrespective of condition, is a necessary atom, nothing more nor less in the grand scheme of universal creation."

"I have always felt that responsibility had descended upon you in too concentrated quality for you to be normally happy. I have always feared that, Ruth, even in the inception of our acquaintance, when your aunt defined my duties as your tutor and explained the standard by which your studies should be regulated. It has been as I feared, you have not known even moderate happiness," he remarked, judicially.

She lifted her glance, with a startled swiftness. "You are mistaken. Aunt Jean has done much to ensure me normal, care-free happiness; it would break her heart if she was convinced to the contrary, and yet Uncle Angus gave me most comfort

and strength; I owe him a great deal for his advice and help these later years, you can never know how much, Donald, and I will repay it all to his memory, if I am spared to do so. With the austere consecration of a vestral priestess, I will keep alight the altar fires in the temple of my Manes; and with that in mind I trod the sacred scenes of storied Scotland and beheld the beauties of Lochs and Braes, of heathery moors and fir-clad hills; with dedicatory ecstasy, I gazed upon my own reflection in the azure waters of Loch Katrine of Loch Etive and Ericht, of Loch Achray and Lomond, and wandered over hills and vales where our ancestors had flourished and lived their full historic and romantic lives. Aunt Jean made quite a ceremony of laying a wreath of holly and pine upon the hallowed shrine in the kirk-yard at Milton, Uist, Uncle Angus assisting, and they each appealed to me to realize the significance of the heroine's courageous behavior, the influence of that tragical leaf in the Highland's history, upon my own life and the lives of my ancestors. I hope some day to portray my impressions upon canvas that they may be preserved and adorn the walls of Kissic-Dale, as souvenirs of Scotland and its ancient civilization; and thus to submerge the egotism of my youth in the overwhelming cataclasm of bygone centuries and find an interest that will please Aunt Jean and confirm the memory of Uncle Angus," she concluded, as she stood in the rose-arched gateway and swept with pensive vision the scene where every shrub and tree bore a loved individuality.

In her black robes, her velvety, rose-tinted complexion and exquisitely molded features, gleamed as

a clear-cut cameo intensely relieved by its settings. They had detoured far from the straight course to the house, unconsciously. Donald lifted from the gate an old white sunbonnet of hers that aroused tender remembrances in his bosom. He was sure that it was one she used to wear to the schoolhouse over in the eastern forest.

"Put it on, Ruth," he requested, boyishly. "Oh, do, please, for the sake of Auld Lang Syne!"

She smiled for the first time, a swift, spontaneous smile, but meeting the flaming ardor of his glance his laughing request had not revealed, she flushed in sudden remembrance of their last interview that August night, "after the ball was over." He bit his whitening lips, and sharing her sensitiveness, walked ahead, swinging the bonnet by its long streamers, in a way so peculiarly his former manner; she followed, silent and retrospective, an indefinite awe thrilling her vaguely.

That evening, as they lingered on the veranda after Mary had assisted Jean to her room, the harvest moon arose in all its semi-annual pomp and effulgence; white mists wreathed the valley, the mocking-birds trilled drowsily, the whip-poor-wills cried in the distant wheat fields, an intangible, sighing whisper floated in from the surrounding forest, the fragrance of roses weighted the atmosphere, freighted with lily and magnolia incense. There had been entertainment in the parlor, Jean and Donald essaying some of their former music, and Ruth had played tirelessly and brilliantly as long as they requested the diversion of her performance; but a shadow had gloomed their bravest efforts. The new

grave at the kirk and Jean's travail of affliction could not be forgotten, and it had been a relief to repair to the veranda, where the balmy tide of dew-drenched zephyrs swept them with a welcome refreshment.

Left together, an awkward silence lasted indefinitely, while thought imposed a quietude into which the shine of the moon, the pensive voices of the summer night, the whisper of the breeze and the flower fragrance intruded. Ruth was the first to speak, and she asked a question.

"Do you feel old, Donald?" she inquired, plaintively, a note of irritable feeling burdening her tones.

"Well—er—not very," he replied vaguely. "Do you?" he counter-queried, lifting his thoughts from a dreaming revery.

"I feel like the ancient of days, sometimes," she exclaimed, rebelliously. "As if I had lived one entire life; that I have approached and gone beyond the confines of one existence! It is a very lonely, unpleasant sensation, I assure you!"

"Well?" Donald interrogated, exploitingly.

"I feel," she confessed, groping for a lucid expression for ideas she had not voiced previously, "that my primal self is annihilated, that it disappeared in a chaos of happenings; my present self seems to hold no relation to it. Why is it so, Donald?"

He studied her profile outlined and obvious on the glow of silvery moonlight. "I guess it is the result of transplantation from a lengthy and methodical routine; of belated entrance into an unfamiliar

realm. In the future, perhaps, you will fall into accustomed grooves again, and you will be in affinity with your mode of environment and regain poise of mind and memory," he suggested, logically.

"I do not know; I lose myself so easily and the past sinks so mysteriously from my grasp, taking a part of myself with it into the voidless abyss. Even now, my time at school and the months spent abroad are receding swiftly from my mind and I stand pauperized at the threshold of an unknown, untried future. Oh, how I shall miss Uncle Angus, and suffer through Aunt Jean's weakness. Do you think she will ever entirely recover, Donald? Do you think I can keep her with me until I am more able to endure life alone and uncounseled?"

"I hope so. She is yet in middle-age and may regain her strength, but Ruth, you will never be left entirely alone while I live, for I live but to serve you," he asserted with a brave timidity.

"Thank you, Donald, but you have your own aims and duties to consider," she replied discouragingly.

He remained silent and she gazed abroad into celestial spaces where the moon sailed the silvery depths of a luminous azure sea; soft, fleecy clouds drifted and intervened, intensifying the distance, contrasting purely the warm radiance of the splendor of moonlight and the cool luminosity of silvery space.

Donald, at last conqueror in a struggle for repression of that which he so ardently wished to utter, spoke finally and irrelevantly: "And you will not return to your studies? You have decided to settle down at home, definitely?"

"I suppose so. You see, Aunt Jean's state of health renders any other plan futile and ungrateful," was the reply.

"But what can you achieve here, aside from the filial devotion to your aunt? You will be literally buried alive; you, with your beauty and talents. I thought you had seen enough of the world to make you abhor the eventless existence of life in these pine lands?"

"I haven't the slightest desire for any other existence now," she replied, sadly, and the dispassionate mood of her ambitions were mirrored in the wan mysticism of her expression which the moonlight revealed, faithfully and aloofly.

"Poor little Ruth," he cried, pityingly, and then was thoughtfully silent.

"I shall not live idle, Donald," she protested. "I shall not abandon my studies; I shall have teachers if I need them. I shall relieve Aunt Jean of responsibility here. I shall spend my leisure enhancing the only home I have, or ever shall know, perhaps, and will endeavor to do as much as I can to infuse life and Christianity in this isolated region. And do not people outgrow unhappiness, even as they slip so easily from happiness and felicity? It would be too cruel if only happiness could take to itself wings and we could not escape sorrow; joy vanishes as a bubble explodes, surely sorrow must have a surcease? I will try the life here, do all I can to render it tolerable and useful to others, but I do not know, Donald, the future seems terribly lonely at times."

"I long for the future; I pant for the fray of its

battles," he declared with a sudden excitement of aroused ambition. "To me it is a Beulah Land, the abode of a Fata Morgana, who woos me irresistibly! But," his voice softened and fell into pleading cadences, "every hope centres upon you, every ambition; without the hope of winning you it would be a Dead Sea of indescribable tameness. I pray for the lyre of Orpheus to enchant you with its magic, if my mortal charms and persuasion cannot win you."

"Do not say such things, Donald. They sadden me," she said, after a breathless moment of discouragement and pain.

"I must, Ruth, although I grieve to cause you a moment of discomfort or pity for my unappreciated devotion." He leaned wearily against a fluted column, seeing yearningly the pale, pensive beauty of her countenance, the charm that had ever so enamored his heart. She sat dumb and miserable, friendship and liking fighting against an instinctive repugnance to Donald's persistent wooing.

Noting her dejection, he murmured: "Excuse me for teasing you, Ruth. It is quite unpardonable in view of what you have had to bear so recently. I will retire, if you give me permission?"

"As you please, Donald. I am quite accustomed to sitting out here alone," she returned, listlessly, depressed with the reflection that she had unavoidably wounded and humiliated him.

For a long time after he had gone up stairs, she remained there in the moonlight, her eyes upon the landscape, where the white mists trailed in shining wreaths and Holly Creek sang in gurgling murmurs, while the fireflies flitted intermittently as phantom

lights stray from the fireside ; and the forest sighed with fretting needles. The glowing moon rose higher and sent shafts of its blinding effluence full upon her face, her golden hair and black dress.

“ I shall be content to stay
Where the ghosts of dead years
Wander through the halls of yesterday,”
she reflected, decisively.

CHAPTER II.

THE IMMIGRANTS—THE STRANGER AT THE NEW CAMP—THE DAWN OF ANOTHER DAY.

“For human passions all have stirred my mind,
Have held me, now I feel and know—
None can surpass sweet charity.”

* * * * *

“What is it in his frank, young face,
Which more than beauty more than grace,
Holds in its warm and strong control
The instinctive homage of my soul?”

—Selected.

Midway from Kissic-Dale and the nearest railroad station, a large sawmill plant had been recently located in the heart of a vast tract of long-leaf pines.

Since the time when Henry Stevenson and Edwin Phillips had delved in turpentine and lumber, many

such distilleries and mills had been planted in the territory so prolific in unworked forests, and following those industries were numerous workmen and capitalists, forced to endure varied hardships in the unavoidable conditions attending their ventures.

They had felled the imposing forests leaving the pines, plumed crowns, which had waved in the breezes of centuries, to decay where they had fallen; and summer's suns scorched and winter's rains deluged them; then from their funeral pyres, an avenging demon had crept forth to poison the veins of their destroyers.

They had named it "pine fever," but it embodied all the symptoms of malignant malaria. The exposure in their thin shanties, their restricted fare and the monotony of their labor and lives, were prolific agents in inviting disease and aggravating ordinary ills. Then, falling trees and limbs killed and wounded them, logs crushed and mules kicked them, rendering blows almost as fatal as when boilers exploded carrying death and mangling into their ranks wholesale; indeed, so numerous and importunate were their misfortunes their Gaelic neighbors prophesied their annihilation in some fell sweep of their shocking tragedies.

The summer three years previous to the locating of the mill, when Ruth renewed her allegiance to the old home and kirk, she was informed of the conditions of the constantly increasing numbers of strangers in that vicinity, and painfully impressed by an incident of a young fellow who, crazed by fever, had wandered into the woods and died ere he could be located. He and a partner of his were working

a small orchard of turpentine trees, and each had been ill with no one to attend them; and from that time Ruth had done all she could to alleviate the distresses of the followers of the mills and distilleries.

She had become accustomed to the austere conditions of their settlements, unstable and crude in their transitory usefulness; and to seeing heavily laden wagon and cart tires miring through the sand and crushing the brown layers of needles sown endlessly over the sandy soil. She was familiar with the shrieking and screaming sawmill whistles and the buzzing of saws cutting the hearts of forest giants; and with the interior of scantily furnished shanties and the pathetic element which mostly ruled the lives they sheltered.

Her own life and home were so luxurious in their vivid contrast to the parsimonious details of those of the strangers, she was ever ready to respond to the least known need of their lives; therefore, one September afternoon it happened that she was at this mill in a stylish surrey drawn by two sleek-coated horses driven by David, arrayed in a brown livery, ornamented with gilt braid and brass buttons, and wearing a silk hat and brown gauntlets.

With upright dignity and patient care, he guided them through the log-tangled, lumber-heaped mill-yard of "Sears and Thayer," capitalists of a recent firm, which had bought out the interests of several smaller firms and consolidated them into that large and modernly equipped industry. Among their employes were many who had been at mills nearer Kissic-Dale, and that was why Ruth had beside her, prone upon a cot, resting on the seats of the vehicle,

a young girl whose cheeks were flushed with fever. She was the thirteen-year-old daughter of Joyce Allan, a most worthy man, and the firm's skillful sawyer, who had lost his wife a few months previous.

He walked beside the vehicle, holding his daughter's hand and apologizing to Ruth for imposing the care of his child upon her, his little housekeeper, the caretaker of his two younger children.

"Oh, do not worry, please, Mr. Allan!" Ruth entreated him. "I assure you it will be a pleasure to us all; Aunt Jean and Mary will be glad to nurse her, and their skill is almost more certain than a physician's with this kind of a fever."

"I know! I know! Who could be more convinced of your kindness? That is why I presumed to send for you. I just couldn't bear the idea of letting her suffer, and perhaps die like her mother."

"You did quite right to send for me. You should have sent the first day she was ill; that is the only censure I feel for you," she responded with sincere utterances, as she held, with protecting clasp, the slender form steady, as the vehicle jolted over the rough, labor-clogged route which led by the hissing tram engine where its engineer, the lumber boss, was loading its train of flat cars with lumber.

Ruth knew him and bowed to him graciously, as he stood with bare head on the step of the cab, as she was passing. A stalwart, young stranger leaned negligently against the side of the cab and stared unbelievably and with undisguised surprise and admiration upon Ruth, as the carriage swept by him and was soon hidden behind a great stack of lumber

Incidentally, Ruth's glance caught and held for a moment the full gaze and meaning of his startled scrutiny, ere she was swept away and impelled again into the forest road, where she bade adieu to the anxious father and David set a strenuous pace homeward.

"We shore must git out dese woods afore dark!" he exclaimed to Ruth, excusing his haste. "If we don't, we'll be lost, shore as ye're born! Dese mill folks make er new road every time dey goes ter post office, I jest believes."

When the brief twilight was draping the forest in a gray mist and pale moonlight shimmered upon the white sand and green, pine canopies, they emerged from the unfamiliar woods and came into an old country road, which finally led them into the king's highway, surveyed in good old colonial days, when King George ruled the colonies of exiled Highlanders, who then spoke un-Anglicized Gaelic. Straight as an arrow from a strong bow, they sped down the broad way silvered with sand and moonlight and flecked with shadows of plumed pines, to the little schoolhouse, white, silent, yet monumental of the sweetest memories of her heart.

Out of its dimness and statuesque dignity came forth phantoms of those youthful days of hope and joy, to efface for the moment the haunting, perplexing impression made upon her mind by the insistent, frank scrutiny of the young stranger at the mill. So warmly had stirred her heart, so free had roved her fancy, as she had been conveyed through the solemn thrall of the night-brooded forest, feeling the

mysticism, once more, veiled in the pensive moonlight:

“ that glimmered the forest tips,
And through the dewy foliage drips
In little rivulets of light,
Making the heart in love with night.”

Her emotions bore her eloquent company along the way from out the forest and through the eastern gate, over the bridge, through the orchard, and down the cherry lane to the gate; such youthful emotions she had not experienced in the slow, creeping years since that springtime when she had awakened fully to the heart-life of every soul-endowed individual.

Jean came out to meet her; also Mary and Iphogenia, to awaken the sleeping girl and assist her to a room waiting for her on the second floor of the brightly illuminated mansion.

When the dawn of the following day came tardily, and a chill gray light crept through the open windows to mingle with the dim lamp-light which illuminated the chamber where she had watched the entire night beside the fever-wrought child, Ruth arose, and leaning above the slumbering patient, listened anxiously to the regular breathing of the girl unto whom they had administered heroic remedies during the night; then she passed her hand exploringly over features bedewed with a profuse perspiration.

With a soft towel she gently dried the slumbering countenance and spread the damp, fair hair, so silky and the color of ripened wheat, over the pillow just

as the sun fell in dancing waves upon the childish features and clammy strands of glistening hair.

"She is such a baby! I would so like to kiss her," Ruth soliloquized, as she gazed upon the face so instinct with the dews of life's morning-tide; but she did not bestow the kiss; rather, she moved around to the other side of the bed and awoke Mary Graham, who had found rest and repose in a luxurious armchair.

"She is much better, dearie!" Ruth informed Mary in a low tone of voice that could not disturb the invalid. "And I am aweary, dearie!" she added, sighing gently. "My eyelids seem weighted with lotus-petals and every nerve plaining for relaxation."

Mary suppressed a relaxing yawn and said, insistently: "Well, go immediately to your room, and I will have your breakfast carried up to you; you cannot sleep fasting. We will see after Lily; you must forget everything but your need of rest."

She secured a fresh towel and took Ruth's place by the bedside, but Ruth loitered aimlessly, and finally seated herself on the sill of an open window and surveyed the glowing eastern sky beyond the sea of vapor, brooding the lowlands, where the sun poised in opalescent splendor. The birds were chanting matin hymns, the forest glistened in the leyl rays of the refulgent sun so newly returned from its mysterious journey to the antipodes, diurnally recurring; the dew drenched valley sparkled with points of radiance gleaming through a soft veil of whitening mists. Her weary eyes brightened alertly, as a pure, strong shaft of sunlight bathed her sensitive form in its warm, caressing beams; she extended her

arms to grasp its geniality and arose to inhale the elixired limpidity of the atmosphere.

With a desire so intense it was a compelling prayer, she longed for a hope as youthful, as sweetly inspiring as the fair promise of the new-born day. She left the window finally and stood in front of the full-length mirror on the dresser.

"Dearie!" she called softly to Mary, as she scrutinized with critical eyes her reflection in the mirror, "do you not suppose the vestal priestesses became, at times, very tired of feeding the sacred fire upon the altars of Vesta? You know their term of service lasted throughout all the years of their youth; their capacity for pleasures. I think they must have pined sadly for freedom, for the privilege of living the destiny of other maidens, to say naught of the natural craving for communion with congenial spirits and knowing the real life of the world, the life of living men and women who accomplish things."

"Ruthie," queried Mary, with concern, "what has disturbed you?"

"I believe that I am aging, dearie; that I am looking, as well as feeling, worn and faded," Ruth confessed, laughing tremulously.

"You are needing rest and sleep," asserted Mary. "Even children become wan and haggard with the lack of either."

"I will heed what you say, immediately," Ruth returned docilely; then her glance scanned the appointments of the luxurious room, to note if it lacked any comfort or necessity. She lowered the shades and adjusted the lace curtains. "Kathy or Flora may come over and assist in the nursing if

you will let them know," she suggested, as she slipped from the room and closed the door silently.

Mary sat for some moments vainly pondering Ruth's unusual demeanor. She reflected that it was a natural sequence to the exacting, self-imposed duties the bairnie had assumed for the past three years. That even with willing service and unlimited means, it had been a strenuous effort to bring the home to its present artistic standard of comfort and elegance; and then the study of so many branches of art and literature, and music, and her constant philanthropy. She and Jean had often wondered where she found the strength or the inspiration for such endless industry.

When she had entered her room, Ruth did not immediately seek the repose she so urgently needed; rather, she opened her desk and selecting a letter, she extracted the closely written sheets, bearing a foreign postmark. The letter was the last she had received from Donald, then the popular president of the college he had been associated with for so many years. He had been abroad the entire summer and Jamie MacPharland had accompanied him. For two years Jamie had been a student at the college, and Ruth's lavish interest in the boy had created the impression among her neighbors that she was preparing him to be her heir. She had corresponded more freely with Donald that she might thus gather some news of Jamie to assuage Jean's and Kathy's anxiety concerning their boy. That morning, though, she skimmed over the lines relative to Jamie and came to where the phrases were personal to herself.

"Are you still spending your days at Kissic-Dale

and your strength for the welfare of others? Tell me truly, Ruth, do you really enjoy such a life, or have you assumed vows to efface self altogether?

"Ruth, I have visions, vain ones, perhaps, nevertheless, they persist in haunting my thoughts, in thrilling my heart with life-giving hopes, and spanning my otherwise leaden sky with a rainbow of promise; and the visions, dearest one, are that you will cast your lot with mine some sweet and blessed day; that when you have drained the cup of your altruistic wine to its dregs, as I believe you will, in view of your youth and love of the things the world alone can give you, I may reap the reward of many years of devotion and patience.

"Otherwise, why is it that the long waiting only intensifies the love which had its inception at a time when honor and conventions forbade my making the slightest effort to win you?"

There were pages more, in the same strain of loyalty and ever increasing devotion, which she read and re-read until the breakfast bell warned her to appear in the dining room ere her meal was dispatched to her room.

CHAPTER III.

RUTH—THE YOUNG CAPITALIST—WHAT THE LUMBER BOSS SAID.

"God sent His messenger of faith,
And whispered in the maiden's heart,
Rise up and look from where thou art,
And scatter with unselfish hands
Thy freshness on the barren sands
And solitudes of death."

The young stranger leaning against the car and gazing with unmitigated surprise upon the astonishing spectacle of the equipage and its beautiful occupant tenderly guarding the recumbent figure beside her in the carriage, was further amazed at the behavior of Bill Seaman, the rough, uncouth man who ran the tram cars and supervised the placing of lumber on the flat cars out at the siding on the railroad. Bill had bared his head and bowed with what grace he could command to the lady, whose appearance denoted the highest culture and social position.

He continued to stare for some moments at the point where the vision had disappeared behind the great heaps of lumber ; then he slowly brought his abstracted glance back to the lumber boss, who was replacing his shapeless hat upon his befrowsled head.

"Who is she, and what does it mean?" he interro-

gated Seaman, who shook his head and waved aside the question.

"I ain't no time to talk now, if we get this here shebang out ter the siding ter-night. I jest got ter git them niggers ter loading. Look, will ye! I'm blamed if every son er gun of 'em ain't er hustlin' down ter the mill! I'm on ter the game, too! See you when I git back, Mr. Thayer!" and he, too, hustled down to the mill, where nearly all the force of the yard were gathered in a group around a wheelbarrow.

Charley Thayer wondered what was up, but he could not even guess. Since investing in the plant and assuming its oversight for his partners, who were married men and did not care to live away from their families, he had lived in a crude hotel out on the main line of railway, near to the siding where cars were placed to receive his lumber, and although he made almost daily trips to the mill, he knew very little of the social element of the camp and less of the adjacent country. When Seaman came back, he brought fruit, peaches, purple-hued grapes and mellow apples, and gave them to Thayer.

"Thank you very much," he said, gratefully. "And now will you tell me something of this mysterious lady, and why she came into the camp and carried away some person in her carriage?"

"It was that gal Allen has been fussin' so 'bout lately; wanted my wife ter take care of her, but she wouldn't, and I don't think it was right ter impose her on Ruth, either, God bless her kind heart, that can't stand for no one ter suffer an' not try ter help 'em."

"Did you say her name was Ruth?" the listener queried.

"Yes, Ruth MacKenzie, but ter us all an' most everybody she is just Ruth, meanin' an angel, maybe; an' now jest let me tell yer, if yer stay erbout here long, yer won't think we've misnamed her. Be sick," he said, searching his own experience for descriptive ideas, "with this blasted pine fever, your blood on fire, your tongue parched like er cracklin, millions of pains hiking around all through every inch of your body, nothin' but er shanty to live or die in, nothin' but er tin basin ter bathe your feet in, the water hot an' tastin' like gunpowder, not er drap o' milk nor er chunk o' ice, nothin' ter eat but fat meat an' biscuit plum yallow with soda, the skeeters er bitin' ye, the sun so tarnal hot it jest briles ye through cracks in the weatherboardin', an' ye so tarnal sick ye wish ye were dead, yet at the same time plumb scared ter death erfraid he would die, not er thing nice or comfortin' about ye, your wife sick an' one of the childern, and every blamed nigger erfraid to come nigh ye, scared of the fever, which ain't catchin' until ye have it already."

He fell silent from sheer agony of the memory, and for a moment was lost in darkest, most depressing remembrances. "Why, jest ter git plumb crazy with the misery, an' lose your senses, just like the worst kind of a nightmare, in which the house is burnin' down on ye an' ye with nary drop of water ter put it out, nor ter drink nuther, an' then ter wake up like, with ice upon your head an' ye in the purtiest room ye ever sot eyes on, lookin' glasses, carpets an' fine curtains, an' pictures, perfume an'

flowers; the cleanest room, an' you so clean, ye want to be introduced to yourself, an' the sweetest old lady an' niggers wearin' caps to wait on ye, an' the pain all gone an' some of the weakness, yerself treated like er king till ye are well an' strong—an'—er—young man, ye'll allus take yer hat off to Ruth after then, ye will, I bet ye!"

He screwed his eyes menacingly. "I do be sorry for any man that didn't show her respect; I wouldn't give that for his life if the men, black and white, erbout here could ketch him. Why, when the fire broke out beyond Gilmour's mill, at Hunt's sawmill, the wind drove it toards Kissic-Dale, an' there wa'n't er man in this whole country who didn't go there to fight it, as if their lives depended on their keepin' it from burnin' up her home. The wind blew like er tarnado, them trees what had been worked and were caked in turpentine, blazed like the infernal regions, the dead trees flamed to the very tops, an' were fallin' every which er way, the pine needles smoked like er furnace, the shanties burned like tinder; we put the women an' childern in the pond. We done it, by thunder! Ye needn't grin. I'm tellin' ye a straight story, an' then some of the little niggers got burnt; one died, died at Kissic-Dale, the day after we put out the fire," he said, chokingly and slowly, his eyes shining with the remembrance with the recalled horror.

He cleared his throat and bit an apple as he drew his mind forcibly from unpleasant memories. "We put that fire out, as I said," he bragged, with an assumption of levity that was not sincere, "if we did mi'ty nigh put out our own chunks at the same time.

My, how Ruth cried an' took on over us! Callin' us her heroes an' brave, noble men, an' all the fine names ye could think of. Kissic-Dale was like er picnic for the next fortnight afterwards, for she took in every one that was homeless an' kept the women an' children there until shanties could be built for 'em, giving things to furnish the shanties, an' buyin' close for 'em, what had lost all they had to wear."

He paused for breath and another bite into his apple, with one hand firmly grasping the throttle which controlled the brakes worked by the negroes riding on the loaded flat cars, for they were then on their way to the siding. They flew down the grades and crept up the ascents similar to a switchback railroad. Just then they were nearing the crossing on a country road, and the small engine's whistle shrieked a warning.

When the crossing had been passed, the boss resumed the monologue of past times in the forest. "There is one thing I want to tell yer, particularly. It is 'bout er feller that runu this shebang two years ergo; er good enough young man, an engineer, too, for that matter. You see," he explained with unflattering candor, "they send youngsters here, mostly, for older men won't leave the big roads. Well, way back yonder, we were sawing the Mac-Intyre's timber.

"The day he was killed we was skootin' along, just like we are now, goin' down grade like the mischief was after us, an' plumb in the woods, not er track of er path erbout, or nowheres nigh us, when er scantlin' broke an' went through the cab like er

cannon ball. I wa'n't in here, or I wouldn't be here now, tellin' erbout it, ye may bet yer bottom dollar. It broke the poor fellow all to pieces an' run the engine offen the track, an' there we were, couldn't move er peg.

"I sent the niggers through the woods huntin' help an' for Ruth. It seemed nobody ever would come! It was miles ter Kissic-Dale, an' er great many more to er doctor, an' the niggers likely ter git lost an' find nobody at all. The poor fellow began to suffer, an' finally jest screamed in his agony. He prayed for water, he prayed ter die, an' begged me to kill him; an' the blood er streamin', his breast stove in, his arms both broke till the bones stuck out. It was awfuller than I can tell ye, the place so lonesome, the pines er moanin' an' 'er whisperin', like er funeral, until I looked down the track an' see Ruth er comin', runnin' like the wind was er floatin' her; there wa'n't no way of gittin' there ridin'. She had er pillow an' that little chist she carries erbout with her. She went off somewhere to learn how to use the things in it an' how to fix folks when they are wounded. Her hair had come down like er yellow veil, she had run so fast, an' when she saw us, she give er sorter cry an' ran faster. In er minute, she was kneelin' by him. He knowed her an' gasped her name, an' water.

"My, how her hands flew! She worked like lightnin' as she took out er flask of cracked ice and water, an' motioned me ter give it ter him. He was shore glad ter git it. In another minute she had got out one of them double-barreled needles, filled it with somethin' from er little bottle an' pumped it into the

arm what was the least broke; then she fell ter wipin' off blood an' stoppin' the bleedin' with bandages. She knelt in the blood, an' it streamed from her fingers, but she did not seem to know it. She was doin' 'all she could for the poor boy who was dyin', I believe, when she got there; he lived er while, though, an' rested at last, jest like er baby goin' ter sleep in er cradle.

"She was too late, or maybe nothin' could er saved him, he was torn up so, but I never seen Ruth look as she did when he died. She was whiter than her dress, her lips almos tas purple as her eyes, her hands er tremblin', when he had gasped his last breath.

"She stood up, but she staggered an' there was the quairest look on her face as she stared up through the pine tops, away an' beyond them, clean into heaven, seemed ter me; an' I've always wondered ever since what she saw, an' what she was er thinkin'. She seemed to see a vision or somethin', like John did when he wrote Revelations; so shore was I that she was er lookin' at some real things, I looked up myself, but I saw nothin' but the same old sky above the pines. When Sandy MacPharland got there, some time after she did, he cut down scrub oaks an' made er shelter ter keep the sun off his face, an' he tried ter help her. He spread a handkerchief over his face an' smoothed the hair of the dead fellow; folded his hands upon his breast, an' then led Ruth away; but at the station, when we sent him home to be buried, old David brought the sweetest flowers, maybe er bushel of 'em, an' we put them on his coffin."

They were again descending a grade, and the engineer's eyes dropped to his hands, as he grasped the lever firmly.

"I wish I could know this Ruth, Bill," Thayer said, huskily.

"Ye'll git ter know her if ye stay in these diggings long; it is full of trouble an' sickness, an' where them things are ye'll find Ruth, shore, an' ye'll respect her next to the church or heaven."

"She is marvelously beautiful; if she was out in the world, her face would be her fortune."

Bill snorted derisively. "Her fortune, indeed! She don't need no fortune! She's done got one big one an' more comin' to her when her aunt dies. She's got er bank full o' money! She's plumb rich, an' she she spends her money like er queen, ain't er bit stingy, like some er these Scotch folks livin' erbout here. She plants big fields in vegetables, jest ter give erway, she's allus givin' ter somebody an' never slights nobody, no matter how poor an' mean an' not worth anybody's kindness.

"Why, she even took care of that low-down bar-keeper what come ter Craig Rhonie jest ter sell liquor; no, it was ter Abercrombie that one come that she sent her man Tony ter nurse when he liked ter kick the bucket with the pine fever." Bill grinned with the recollection. He chuckled with satisfaction over some memory.

"He was er onery cuss, a mean one, there ain't no doubt. Put up er little shanty an' filled it with cheap whiskey, mixed with concentrated lye an' red pepper, an' one pizen thing an' ernother, an' then sot down ter make er fortune. He tuned up an' old fiddle an'

blowed er jewsharp 'twist servin' drinks, an' raked in the money from the fools erbout, till he took the fever. When he got over it, for some reason he went ter church where Ruth keeps er Sunday school goin' all the time, an' he heard her sing 'The Holy City.'

"The very next day he packed hissself off an' took his whiskey with him. The boys turned in an' finished the job, set fire ter his shanty an' burned it up, an' his fiddle, too, which he had left or forgotten. He must have took his jewsharp erway, as we could never find it when we cleaned up the shanty. Say! Ye—ought ter go ter the kirk, as the Scotch folks call it. You jest ought ter, ter hear Ruth sing an' play the harp an' organ! It is better than preachin'."

Thayer reflected for a moment. He had intended to go up on the main road to get away from the sand and pines, if but for a brief respite from their monotony, but he said with sudden resolve and anticipation: "I will go next Sabbath, if I can arrange to get there, certain."

"Ye won't never regret it," Bill assured him, earnestly. "These here woods won't never seem the same to ye; it will feel more like God's country, but never like any place ye ever knowed. See what I tell ye!"

One afternoon, in the midde lof the succeeding week Charley Thayer was again in the cab with Bill Seaman; and they ran along with the usual varying speed over the crude track of scantlings laid upon the undisturbed, ungraded surface of the sand-barred hills.

"Bill," he abruptly queried, "how old is Miss MacKenzie?"

"Ruth, you mean?" was the reserved, cool response.

"Well, Ruth, then. But why you should show her so little reverence in speaking of her so bluntly I cannot conceive."

"It ain't disrespect; it's somethin' more than respect, and it's the way people call them they like erbout here."

"Why, do you suppose, she has not married? Her age is a puzzle to me, too; she could easily be twenty-five or sixteen, there is so much youth and innocence mingled with her mature dignity."

"She ain't neither the one nor the tother, to my certain knowledge; but see here, young man. Ain't you jest—er—er—the least bit too meddlesome about what ain't none of ye bizness?"

"Don't be grumpy, Seaman. No one could respect Miss MacKenzie more than I do, but I cannot get over the wonder of finding her here and leading the life she does. She cannot find it congenial, and she is not the proper material for martyrdom or sacrifice. Every note of her character is a plea for something different, for that which she can never possibly find in this backwoods region."

Bill's sensitive pride flamed up instantly.

"See here, sir! We may not be much on fixings, but we aint' used to being run down right to our faces. It's somethin' Ruth ain't done yit, and she is used to things that's all right, ye bet! Do ye doubt it after seein' her home so fine, with statutes and all the fixin's anybody could have er mind for?"

"That is all true, Seaman, but I was not thinking of material things; and I was so surprised to see how her music affected you tough fellows out at the kirk last Sabbath. I did not think you were so sensitive as to weep for a hidden and mysterious sorrow voiced in the tones of Music's great masters."

"It wa'n't er hidden sorrow; it was our very own, an' the whole world's sorrow of achin' hearts an' diserp'intments; one lonely sorrow or one lonesome person wa'n't er drap in the bucket to the trouble that orgin poured outen its bosom! Say! Ye know what I said erbout Alan's kid? I thought of it when I was listenin' to that music an' felt meaner than a yaller hound what's been stealin' sheep. I wished I'd shown Allan more sympathy; an' I couldn't help thinkin' maybe he'd told her."

Just then the engine took a down grade and went whizzing over the rails at such a speed conversation was impossible; and young Thayer leaned on the rail of the cab and held a seance with the memory of that day at the kirk, when Ruth arose from the organ, the captive of a soulful mood which clamored for expression.

"Like a lone shepherd on a promontory,
Where, lacking occupation, looks far forth
Into the boundless sea and rather makes than
finds what he beholds."

He alone, perhaps, of all those present, knew that echoes of divinely inspired creations interluded and ruled the heart probing symphony, or realized the

culture portrayed in the rendering of echoes from Bach, Schuman, from Wagner, and the uplifting charm of Haydn's melting symphony.

"Oh, beauty of holiness!

Of self-forgetfulness! Of lowliness!

Oh, power of meekness whose very gentleness and meekness

Are as the yielding but irresistible air,"

he quoted, his eyes upon but not seeing the vistas of forest along the route.

"What did ye say?" Bill said, quizzically.

"Oh, nothing, my dear fellow," was the breezy reply, which did not convince the practical boss.

"But ye did, though," he contended, with patent curiosity.

Thayer arose and shrugged his shoulders, as if to throw off clinging thought. "I am thinking of taking pot luck with Allan. He has a very good cook, and I am sure it will be more convenient for me to live at the mill, from a business standpoint. I want a carpenter to-morrow; can you tell me where to find one?"

"I mought. Maybe ye can pick up one er-round the station. What's ye goin' ter build, now?"

"Why, a shack near Allan, and also a stable and buggy shelter. I am going to bring out my horse and my books, and with Allan's collection at hand, I shall not lack for entertainment on long winter nights," he explained, with cheery frankness.

The preceding Sabbath he and Joyce Allan had gone out to Kissic-Dale in a skeleton road cart,

drawn by a lazy, sawmill mule. He had left Allan with his daughter, and had gone on to the kirk in time to hear Ruth play a recessional that would have captivated an audience in any city church, he knew: Back at Kissic-Dale, he had met Ruth, and—well—he would ask no greater fortune henceforth than to live at the mill and identify himself with every object in which she evinced an interest.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONFESSION—THE VIGIL IN THE FOREST— THE RUNE OF THE PINES.

“The spring-time of her childish years
Hath never lost their sweet perfume,
Though knowing well that life hath room
For many blights and many tears.”

November's fitful days of pale sunlight or low, trailing, leaden clouds, had led to the last bright period of “Indian Summer,” and the air was so tempered with a dry warmth pervading the chill emanations of the cooling earth, the doors of a shanty, deep in the heart of a lonely pine forest, stood each ajar, so that the voices of the night-brooded forest swept in with every breath of the languid breeze.

The weird sighing and whispering of the lithe-some pines had so affected the nerves of Nellie Owens, the young mother of the child in the casket

reposing upon the white-draped, flower-crowned bier in the centre of the one room the cabin embraced, she became hysterical with her unaccustomed burden of bereavement.

Ruth had been with her all day. When she came in the forenoon on an almost daily visit, she had been so impressed that the end of the ailing child was imminent she had tarried until the last sigh had escaped over the livid lips of the sufferer, and then sent David home for Iphogenia and many necessities and luxuries the bare shanty did not contain.

The little girl was the only child of Sydney Owens and his youthful wife, and their grief had been heart-rending. Ruth had never met a scene which so commanded her sympathy and sapped the strength of her optimism, as had those hours of the pallid winter day in which she had exerted all her powers of consolation to woo peace and resignation to the hearts of the stricken couple.

In the lonely hour of twilight, she had sung hymns in low, persuasive tones until her voice strained and refused to sound another note; and it was then the runing voice of the forest swept in and rasped the worn-out nerves of Nellie.

A night hawk hooted distantly in some dim depth of the primeval woods; and quite near a screech owl plained with its shivering notes of prescient portent.

Iphogenia was frightened, and the superstition of her savage forbears was aflame in her untamable African-tinged soul. She leaned against the rude chimney facing, and replenished the fire on the hearth with fresh billets of pine. Ruth, with Nellie's head pillowed upon her lap, met her maid's appeal-

ing glances with a reassuring smile and a bend of her head to indicate Sydney Owens, tramping the dooryard, restless with grief, who was there to protect them, if any real danger menaced.

When she could bear no more the night hawk's startling call in the distance, or the wailing cry of the intrusive screech-owl, Nellie implored Ruth to sing again; and Ruth, lifting her weary voice, crooned another hymn, softly, pleadingly.

As she sang, she stroked the bowed head of the young mother, and recalled that her own mother had died when she was even more youthful than poor, sobbing Nellie. How Nellie had loved her little girl! And she had been deprived of that worshipping tenderness which a mother alone can bestow upon her offspring. In her childhood days, when, at intervals, she had grieved inconsolably for Jamie, Jean would give her some photos to hold in her hands, perhaps for hours, pressing them to her tiny bosom with pathetic affection and yearning; and one of them was of a very young girl, with smiling lips and wonderful dark eyes, and it was Ruth Bethune, her own mother lying beside Jamie in the mystic realm of the kirk-yard. Her memories of Jamie had been living ones; and Jamie, the slender youth, Jamie as a youthful cadet in formal-fitting uniform, Jamie as a college student, a senior in cap and gown, and again in clerical attire, when he had embraced the ministry, was her beloved and remembered father, whose love and tenderness had gilded the first years of the morning of her life.

When he had come to Kissic-Dale, in a raging

snow storm, because she was ill and he would not delay coming to her, and had died a few days later from the effects of the exposure, she had been then at the age of the little girl lying there at rest beneath the flowers, which filled the room with a rare, sweet fragrance.

From that point her mind leapt swiftly to a newly born conception of the circumstances that had dominated her career thus far; the sacrifices death had imposed upon so many that wealth might flow into her listless, unseeking hands; and the fate which had, compulsorily, driven her into channels where that wealth could best be conserved for the weal of so many whose lot clamored for alleviation.

From that invisible realm unto which Nellie's baby's spirit had flown that day, so many chords reached forth to entwine her heart, to govern her ambitions, to demand her duty and consecration of conduct. She was Jamie's daughter, the custodian of the estate of Angus Bethune, the heiress of all former MacKenzies, not alone of their worldly possessions, but of their pride of race and idealistic honor; and a daughter of the grand old patriots, the martyred and loyal exiled Highlanders, who had given their all for "Bonny Prince Charlie;" which was but saying: had lain down all of life for the integrity and freedom of Scotland.

"March! March! Ettrich and Treviottsdales!"

Why, my lads, do ye not march in order?"

appealed to her conscience as an occult mandate de-

scending through centuries of steadfast loyalism to

"Wild dummie vassals three thousands times three,"

who had cried:

"Hey, for the bonnets of bonnie Dundee."

Thus her mind slipped from beneath the death shadow hovering the room and seduced a more comforting spirit into the rendering of the hymn she was then singing, unconsciously.

Nellie lifted her hand and gropingly pressed her shoulder; Iphogenia relaxed from the crouching position by the hearth and teased some fresh, live coals from the fire to place under the tea-kettle, which instantly responded by hissing steam from its stubby spout. Sydney Owens ceased his aimless tramp of the yard to seat himself on the doorsill and imbibe the hope infused into the minor melody of the hymn; but with the last note sung came the lonely silence with the inflowing of the shrilling of the pines, the weak, peevish plaining of the persistent screech owl; then footsteps sounded beyond the circle of light cast by the candles' sensitive flames through the doorway, and, in another moment, Joyce Allan and Charley Thayer entered, to be welcomed by none with more relief than Ruth, experienced in shifting the pathetic task of consolation upon less suffering sympathy than hers had proven.

Soon after their arrival she quietly left the room to cross the open space before the door and enter the needle carpetted vistas beneath the pines; there,

through interlacing boughs of the trees, she glimpsed the cool, twinkling stars in their everlasting orbits in far away, cerulean spaces, and the whisperings of the pines and the crying of the owl no longer depressed her. Rather, she was disturbed, heart-brokenly, by young Thayer's presence, withal his sunny optimism in strength and amiableness. Jean had confessed to a great liking for the handsome, well-groomed boy, whose culture and gay, though polished manners, held a lure of the world from which their secluded lives were of late so drearily debarred.

Her loyal plaint that he reminded her so much of poor Edwin had only intensified the indefinable mistrust of self, the emotionless defence behind which Ruth was fain to retreat when she met him. And she had met him so frequently in the few weeks since she had become aware of his existence, for he was now often a guest at Kissic-Dale and present at the kirk, and happened at so many places where duty had long been in the habit of compelling her attendance. Just then, what he personified to her understanding was incompatible with and so at variance with the mood possessing her mind, she had purposely escaped to regain a more normal poise of thought and the reserve and caution with which she invariably met his flame-lit glances and unmistakable devotion.

His most casual smile and gallantry of behavior had probed deep into the tomb of her youthful hopes and visions, tearing apart the mantle of sorrow in which she had so envelopingly shrouded them;

where from its dreary vault of bereavement her heart had so often cried in lonely pain :

"Where'er thy foot has passed is holy ground!

The groves are sacred!

I behold thee walking under these trees where we
walked

In the morning of thy youth!

I feel thy presence now; feel that the place has taken

A charm from thee, and is forever hallowed."

and the sad runing of the pines had ever appealed to her as the one consonant note in all the universe, of the human-peopled world, with the bleak monotone of her heart's unavailing sorrow.

She shrank exceedingly from exciting regard where she could not reciprocate it. She had suffered too excruciatingly, and her sympathy was too susceptible, for her to inflict the shadow of such a pain upon any heart, willingly. She had renounced the world and lived a recluse, that she might not be confronted with such crises as were threatened by Charley Thayer's persistent seeking of her company.

And again she was vowed to Donald; inviolably sealed to him or to definite celibacy by repeatedly assuring him so much of devotion in return for his heart's steadfast loyalty to her. Secretly, hardly acknowledged by her own sound common sense, she was a Fatalist in belief, and felt that no incident happened but by predestined, projected manoeuvres of a never-resting Destiny. From the first moment of knowing Charley Thayer, she had, instinctively, perhaps, regarded him as a figure on the chessboard

of fate, and she had experienced the occult divination of a real Gaelic "second sight" warning.

Iphogenia appeared in the bright doorway, peering forth into the gloom so earnestly, Ruth knew she was uneasy and anxious for her return. Reluctantly she retraced her steps and met Iphogenia as she was coming out.

"You said Mrs. Owens must have some tea, which I am jest now ready to make," the maid said, diplomatically.

"Oh, yes, indeed," Ruth responded, accepting the explanation in apparently good faith. "She has eaten hardly anything at all to-day; no wonder she is nervous and distraught in the shock of her grief."

When she entered young Thayer arose and proffered her his chair, but she graciously declined it, and set about preparing a meal for the long-fasting parents, who had had no mind for anything but the loss of the child throughout the day and eventide. The coming of friends had opened afresh the wounds of their hearts, but Allan was succeeding in calming and helping them to a logical behavior.

So when Ruth had opened the large hamper Jean and Mary had dispatched with Iphogenia and David, and had extracted a teapot and a package of tea, which she delivered to the maid, and then delved for white napery to spread the small dining table resting against the wall between the door and hearthstone, and brought forth a boiled ham, pickles and jellies, milk and butter, bread and cake and a jar of golden honey, Allan, at Ruth's invitation, insisted upon their dining with him upon the delicious fare so bountifully provided.

"Mr. Allan," Ruth had entreated, "persuade Nellie and Mr. Owens to break their fast, and then induce them to try to rest and sleep. Neither of them has slept but very little in several nights to my knowledge, and they will be ill if they do not relax from the strain very soon."

There was not space at the table but for three plates, so Ruth apologized to Thayer, with a promise that she would dine with him later. "I have had no supper as yet, so you have come in time to keep me company during the meal."

He smilingly retreated to the door, that Allan might make use of his seat at the table, and the novelty of the makeshift arrangement caused him to seek Ruth's glance with a quizzical gleam of humor, that he decorously suppressed in deference to the solemnity of the occasion.

His seat in the doorway isolated him to a degree, and from that point of vantage he listened to the remarks at the table and embraced Ruth in a searching if furtive scrutiny, veiled by the urgent care with which she induced Nellie and her boy husband to eat and drink, and, for a moment, experience a blessed reprieve from their sorrow.

"Ruth," Joyce Allan remarked near the close of the meal, "Lily is worrying to see you all. You must drop in to see her some time when you are out in the carriage. She thinks you might be offended, you have avoided us so of late."

"Oh, no, not that, Mr. Allan!" Ruth exclaimed, and then paused, visibly embarrassed, to continue more quietly: "Please say to her that when it is possible I will come and bring as many of my household as the carriage will contain," she concluded, with a tremulous laugh and a rising color.

With analytical vision and almost idolatrous fascination, Thayer caught the sensitive flushes and made false auguries therefrom, and noted the plain but exquisitely fitting black toilet, relieved by white cuffs and collar, and the sheening coils of her golden hair which framed her beautifully molded features with a delicate aureole of silken waves sweeping her white brow with careless grace; but with more enslaving pleasure and a joy so intense it embodied pain and sadness, he drank in the beauty of her dark eyes so instinct with a pensive humility and the radiance of a soulful spirit; and the queenly carriage which so inscrutably commingled girlish innocence and the sophisticated culture of maturity. He gazed until his heart was faint with its burden of blissful desire, and he turned resolutely and set his eyes upon the dim, shrilling forest, that was more indistinct than normal in view of his misted vision.

Afar off, the sonorous voice of the great night hawk hooted and halloed, and nearer at hand the shivering little owl pined and plained incessantly.

Later, he sat at the table with Ruth, facing an overflowing board, but lacking the full appetite to appreciate at their proper value the dainty viands Ruth and Iphogenia pressed upon him so hospitably. Rather, his mind was obsessed with watching Ruth's movements, noting that she was distraught; that her hands trembled when she poured his tea or passed him some dish of food; that her eyes fell swiftly before his slightest glance, and that she spoke but seldom, and then with a reserved graciousness, lacking spontaneity and impulse.

In the meantime Allan had persuaded the worn couple to repose upon their couch, which he screened from the light of the candles by suspending a blanket from the low rafters, curtain-wise, and then moved a trunk to the bedside and sat there in a sympathetic silence similar to the vigil of Job's comforters upon the ash heap, while Iphogenia, having consumed her plate of lunch, took a rich carriage robe from Ruth's outdoor supply of wraps, and, at Ruth's suggestion, spread it in the corner by the hearth and sat upon it, with her head resting against the angle of the rude fireplace.

"I see it is up to you and I to keep the vigil, Miss MacKenzie," Thayer remarked later on, after an alert glance around the room. Iphogenia was frankly snoring and Allan's head drooped until his chin rested upon his breast, and the deep, regular breathing on the couch evinced that the young couple had found a brief oblivion from their aching sorrow.

"Or, if you will find a place where you can rest, I will brave it alone, if you will suggest some way to quiet that freezing, shivering bird," he amended, when he perceived Ruth's startled glance, as her eyes swept the room with dismayed comprehension. "He gets on my nerves out here in this lonely thicket, I confess, candidly."

"I have known women who would chase them out of the vicinity with a broom; and men who would sally forth with a gun, bent upon their destruction; but they are really most harmless, innocent creatures, tiny bundles of nerves and feathers, though they make a very weird impression upon a great

many people. I am so thankful you and Mr. Allan came out here to-night, for really it has been the most uncanny experience of my life, and so depressing," Ruth chattered nervously, but in low, guarded tones.

"I saw the little casket as I came down from the station with Seaman to-day, and at supper I mentioned the incident to Allan. He informed me where Owens lived and worked his holding of turpentine trees, and we concluded to come," he explained, simply.

"I shall take Nellie home with me from the burial to-morrow, and her husband can have a horse to ride out here to his work. Aunt Jean sent me word to be sure to do so. Nellie would go mad, I am afraid, being alone here through the day after this," Ruth remarked with grieving tones and sad expression, as she glanced over the rude room and listened to the sighing of the pines which the rising wind was teasing restlessly.

"If ever ghosts walk abroad in this world, I believe they find an especial affinity for the conditions of these primeval forests," he declared, hearkening to the wail and murmur swelling beyond the open doors, which he presently arose and closed against the sudden chill brought on the wings of the eastern breeze.

They lingered purposely over the informal repast, in view of the lengthy tedium of the slow hours of the long night; and when they finally cleared the table, they resumed their seats by it and forced conversation into intermittent intervals of silences.

Almost the entertainment of Thayer was as trying

to her nerves as the heart-straining effort to console Nellie. In the lonely hours beyond midnight Thayer restlessly arose from his chair many times, to snuff the candles, that were gradually sinking into the sockets of Jean's second-best silver candelabra, and spilling wax in picturesque disorder over their glistening ornamentations of scroll and leaf work which attested the silversmith's skill and artistic conceptions.

And he replenished the fire with pine knots from a generous heap beside the doorstep; and again, he had folded the top coat he had fetched there upon his arm, had placed it on the side of the couch and deftly lowered Allan's nodding head upon it without awakening the sleeper.

It was in a lonely hour near the coming dawn when the crisis that each had felt impending, though in a widely different way, fell upon them with the shock of a climax, snapping with a swift stroke the formal reserve that had marked the evening.

Thayer, after a final replenishing of the fire and snuffing of the candles, then low, indeed, in their padded sockets, quietly resumed his seat and was so impressively quiet for so long a time, Ruth, who had feigned an assumption of repose by resting her head on her hand supported by an elbow propped on the table, and closing her eyes in a drowsy languor she was guiltless of experiencing, for her sensitive heart was torn by a conflict of stern emotions which rendered her tremulous anxious and wakeful, was impelled to steal a swift scrutiny of his behavior to learn if he had gone to sleep. Her glance surprised tears in his eyes and an ex-

pression on his features that could not be misinterpreted; it was such a revelation as no feminine heart could ever misunderstand or ignore. It laid bare his soul for her reading and the story was the portrayal of a fervor of love and admiration that overwhelmed her with its insistent, pleading pathos.

He did not try to evade the truth, although he had no solid ground whereon to build a single hope. "I love you, Miss MacKenzie! I have loved you from the first moment I ever beheld you!" he whispered, thrillingly.

"Oh, do not say that, I beg you!" she cried, with a first impulse, putting out her hand as if to ward off a blow; then, after a stunned pause, she hid her face in her hands and murmured breathlessly: "Wait a moment, please. Say no more until I have spoken."

"But do not hide your face. I—I want to see your eyes," he pleaded, plaintively, pale and excited with strong emotion.

He gazed upon her hypnotically for a while, seeing her lips move and her hands tremblingly press their veiling of her sight and her quivering features. He arose in a stress of excitement and moved about the room aimlessly until she lifted her head and revealed a pale countenance.

"Come, be seated. I have a story to relate, and you must listen," she commanded tragically.

"Do not, if it disturbs you," he said, contritely, as he seated himself to lean toward her in a petitioning posture. "I should not have said what I did! It was as if I was persecuting you, forcing myself upon you in unpardonable degree in the circumstances."

"No, truth is always best; if it was truth, it is

best spoken that a wrong may be averted, and that is why I am going to tell you that which I have never spoken of to anyone; not even to Aunt Jean or Donald," she contended.

"Donald?" he echoed, inquisitively, and a hopeless gloom chased all light from his features.

"Yes; but never mind; he has nothing to do with what I have to tell you," she whispered tensely.

"Well, tell me," he urged, and waited.

"How old are you, Mr. Thayer?" she queried, irrelevantly.

"Thirty-two," he answered, mechanically, so busy was he trying to conjecture her mood, her intention.

"So much as that!" she exclaimed, in genuine surprise.

"Every day of it, and a few months more," he affirmed, still puzzled. "Did you take me for a kid, Miss MacKenzie?"

"Oh, no," she returned absently, as she drew herself erect and intertwined her fingers, nervously. She moved her tongue to moisten her lips, and then said, with direct intonation:

"You had a cousin once, so you have informed Aunt Jean, and you know he was out here some time just previous to the time he died?"

"Yes," he breathed, and again he waited.

"I loved him!" she faltered, pale and with set expression. "He is the only person I ever loved, and I love him still!" she enunciated, her lips immobile and her eyes glittering with the torture of her self-imposed confession. "May I tell you how it all happened?"

"You, you, Miss MacKenzie," he breathed, unbelievably.

"Yes, I!" she repeated, her heart scorched with the pain of the first effort of the memory. Bitter as the waters of the unsanctified sea, as gall and wormwood to the taste, was this sacrifice of her most sacredly guarded, canonized memory.

"May I tell you the story, just as it happened?" she requested, and lifted her hand to impose attention; and when he bent his head to signify that he was attending, she said, brokenly:

"Dear friend, I am going to prove to you how much I respect and esteem you, and—and trust you," she reached forth her hand, and he took it in a retaining clasp and held it while she began at the very inception of her knowledge of Edwin Phillips, and related tersely but concisely every incident of her relations with him. He was silent as she concluded, but he pressed her hand sympathetically.

"How old were you when you first met him?" he asked.

"Not quite seventeen, and oh, such a child to be confronted with such a problem! Until this day I have no proper conception of his character! I was too young to judge; I could only idealize and worship what seemed to me all of the charm of life, or—of heaven."

"He was a fine fellow, a darling boy, and everyone loved him," he declared loyally, heroically, yet his eyes slanted toward hers with perplexed scrutiny and inquiry.

"Yet he was false to me, false to every word he ever uttered, brutally, heartlessly false, after wooing me, an ignorant, trusting child, with all the art and witchery his worldliness gave him command of,"

she said, wonderingly. "I must have loved him more than I was aware of until he died; and since then I have worshipped his memory, and have spurned all thoughts of love from others. If you had been wounded unto death by any agent, could you ever have willingly been drawn into such a maelstrom of circumstances again, now, could you? I have protected my heart since then with stern repulsion of all that could lure me from my hard-fought-for peace and serenity."

"Yet," he said, pausing and emphasizing each intonation, "I love you and shall always love you, though you have loved a thousand other poor wretches. I am sure that Phillips loved you, for I am certain he had never found anyone else just so altogether worth loving."

She smiled tremulously, and her eyes faced his just for a moment. "Yet he married another," she reminded him.

"Yes, but that is not all of the problem, and had nothing to do with his love for you, I am assured," he asserted confidently.

"That is all. Let us close the subject," Ruth requested, and she leaned back in her chair and clasped her hands behind her head with a gesture of extreme fatigue and discouragement.

"Certainly," he acquiesced, his slanting vision embracing all the evidences of her weariness and unusual strain. Then he arose, turned and advanced briskly to the side of the deeply slumbering sawyer and clasped his shoulder to shake him into wakefulness.

"Dawn is here, Allan!" he cried, running his

fingers through the man's hair with an exasperating effort, to enforce his words.

Allan stretched his cramped limbs and arose to vent a strenuous yawn.

"It is quite time for us to be going, really," Thayer remarked in a tired, lifeless tone of voice that Allan was quick to perceive.

"It was beastly in me to go to sleep and not give you a chance for a nap, wasn't it?" he apologized, suppressing another clamoring yawn.

"That is all right! I have not been in the least drowsy. Say! If you feel any remorse, hurry out and put the horse to the buggy; that will open your eyes, for you will have to do some hard peeping to see anything, I guess."

Later, when Allan had gone out, he took his coat, and, shaking out its crumpled folds, put it on, deliberately, all the while his eyes seeking Ruth, as she sat in deep dejection, her head again supported in the palm of her hand, as formerly.

He approached and stood before her. "I am going now," he said, "but I wait to assure you of my intense sympathy in all that you have confided unto me; and that I shall hold sacred every word of your confidence; but I think I divine why you assumed the pain of telling me, and am sorry to inform you that I believe it was perfectly useless, for my heart holds you in the same regard, and I esteem you just as when we began the conversation. Now, please, awaken your maid; you should not be left a moment without company. And," he smiled archly and the sunny light gleamed in his eyes with an evanescent

sparkle, "come to see Lily soon, or better, shall I bring her out to see you?"

Ruth lifted her eyes with a startled movement. "Surely," she said, "it would be best not to do either."

He smiled inscrutably, said "Goodby" hurriedly, and, with a last lingering glance, went out into the chill, gray twilight of the approaching dawn.

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTMASTIDE—DONALD AGAIN AT KISSIC-DALE —A WOUNDED SANTA CLAUS.

"Light of the Darkened World,
Shine as of old, when the lone shepherds
Watched over the fold."

* * * * *

"Prince! With the stoic my pride agrees;
I gave my all and I went my way, . . ."

* * * * *

"Not mine the peace of hearthstone and of home."

Christmastide happened in one of those spells of bright sunshine so wont to embrace that period in the Southland; and the day had been marked by crisp breezes which set the blood tingling and the spirits dancing to the joy-laden measures of the time-honored festival.

Donald had arrived at the kirk on Christmas Eve,

the previous afternoon, to be more exact in statement, and had attended the elaborate exercises celebrating the annual festival, the climax of which was two immense, heavily-laden trees, not alone for the Gaelic congregation, but also for the strangers in a wide territory. It had been a gay season of music, of smiling faces, of happy greetings, and of an optimistic cheer, that irradiated each one of the large audience.

It was near the midnight hour, when the household, including him as its only guest, had arrived at home and immediately sought rest in slumber. He had arisen late that morning, and breakfasted in solitary state while Ezeke, grinning with sheer delight, had scrupulously attended to his slightest need. Then, during the forenoon, he loitered aimlessly around the house and premises, in a conjecturing silence, for there was no opportunity of speaking with anyone he was acquainted with, as groups of strangers thronged through the gates and entered the mansion with an air of assured welcome and hospitality.

Ruth was so very much engaged with those arrivals and other duties, she could only exchange a smile or a word as she met him by chance while flitting by on some duty as hostess to her innumerable guests.

Lengthy tables, dressed in glistening damask, tastefully adorned with greens and holly berries, and richly enhanced by glittering silver and frosted cakes, flanked by great stands of whipped cream, later satiated the keen appetites of men, women and children; and in a rear room of the kitchen were

similar tables, where David presided and dispensed cheer to people of his own color.

In the afternoon, Donald sat by the hearth of the sitting room and chatted with Jean, who reclined on a luxurious leather couch, drawn near the fire of incinerating logs, whose delicate blue flames sent their thin, fragrant smoke up the wide-throated chimney.

The restless, laughing confusion of the thronged house, the constant tramp of footsteps on the veranda, came to them in muffled sounds through the doors closed against any demand upon Jean's exhausted strength.

They found much to discuss, and, for Jean at least, the time slipped away as the invited guests were leaving for their homes, most of them distant, and beyond a tedious drive. The house gradually assumed a quietude in contrast to the noisy hours of the morning and noon. Finally, Ruth came in, rosy and chilled from a trip outdoors to speed some departing guests. She hurried to the fire and knelt upon the hearth-rug to stretch her hands toward the glowing logs and let their genial warmth bathe her frost-chilled body.

She was very good to look upon, with her rosy cheeks, wind-blown coiffure and dark eyes sparkling unwontedly with a pleasing memory of the happiness she had that day bestowed upon so many homesick, labor-weary people. She was richly clad in a heavy, silver-tinted, gray silk, shirred and girdled at the waist line, and corsaged by an elaborate scheme of creamy lace arranged as a plastron to plainly wreath her exquisitely molded white throat, and to be confined at the waist beneath its girdle of crushed silk.

Donald knew that she had just returned from witnessing an unique embarkation down at a point where the lawn met the approach of the cherry lane. He had himself viewed it in unfeigned curiosity through a window. It had seemed to him that a multitude of passengers of all sizes and sexes had crowded into a long, wooden frame constructed of scantlings and thin lengths of lumber, the frame resting upon wheels coupled very far apart, and decorated in a very festive manner with intertwining holly and mistletoe; and a similar adornment had been attached to the heads of the four stout mules harnessed to the unwieldy vehicle. "It was the crowd from Sears' and Thayer's mill," Jean had remarked, when he had commented on the remarkable equipage.

As she knelt on the rug, they each had maintained such a prolonged silence Ruth was constrained to glance at them with a humorous smile wreathing her lips.

"You do not seem to be in a very gay mood, either of you," she said, and arose to draw an upholstered armchair to the side of the couch.

"We were just remarking that it had been an exceptional day," Donald returned, absently.

"It has been simply delightful, so pleasant in every respect," Ruth averred, stroking Jean's silver-threaded hair with caressing fingers. "But they have all gone now, Auntie, but a few, whom Mary is entertaining in the parlor, and we are now comparatively quiet. Are you very tired, dearie?"

"Just enough to rest comfortably, thank you, bairnie," Jean responded, with simple sincerity.

"Your aunt has been telling me, Ruth, that you have painted my portrait from a photo she had. I should like very much to see it, and I, too, must be going soon," Donald spoke with deliberation.

"It is not a masterpiece, but such as it is, you may behold it," Ruth replied, arising to lead the way out to her studio, which Donald then entered for the first time. Indeed, very few people had ever crossed its threshold; it was a retreat that she held in sacred seclusion; for there the sybaritic element of her nature evolved the voluptuous charm of sensuous ease and beauty, of splendid luxury and idealistic culture, which the austere, Gaelic training and heritage of mental traits so deprecated, she was fain to hide it away from the gaze of the curious and critical, and veil it as a holy of holies for her own solace and enjoyment.

Here she personified the culture and intelligence, the discriminating taste and standard of luxury acquired in the years of study spent away from Kissic-Dale; and the generous inheritance from Angus Bethune had rendered it all so facile in attainment, her ideals had thriven without hindrance.

The way leading down to its entrance, over the court-like peristyle, in winter was inclosed by glazed sash, to serve as an auxiliary to the overflowing conservatory, then connected with the parlor by another glaze-walled peristyle; so it was through a lane of palms and other thrifty hothouses products, that Donald approached a vision he would remember his lifetime.

As they entered the pagoda-like building of two spacious rooms, his first impression was that of the

most enchanting color, warmth and fragrance; rose-colored velvet portieres and window draperies, overhung with cream-tinted laces; generous windows and duplicating mirrors produced an effect of splendor, of tone and spaciousness; and potted plants, such as ferns and palms, flowering japonicas and azaleas, dwarf rose trees and baskets of dainty smilax in contrasting greenery, filled the rooms with an ineffable incense of living perfumery.

The furniture was artistic and novel in designs; richly-toned art squares of velvet moquette, and costly rugs, spaced the glistening hardwood floors; and pictures literally sheathed the hard-finished walls of a neutral color.

Ruth's entrance was greeted by a warbling chorus from two cages of golden canary birds, and a shriek of joy from a gaudily-plumaged parrot swinging on a perch beside an open upright piano, where the sun bathed her sensitive body and fell across the ivory keyboard in a warm, rose-tinted bar of light.

A white poodle uncurled its fluffy body on the hearth-rug, in front of a rose and gray-tiled hearth, and a glowing fire of hickory logs, upheld by immense brass andirons, and yawning lazily, stretched its Liliputian limbs ere it bounded to Ruth's side, fawning and yearning for its accustomed fondling.

As she was appeasing her neglected pets and stilling the strident cries of the haughty parrot, Donald gave free rein to his surprise and admiration. Instinctively, he experienced a pang of jealous resentment that Ruth had bestowed so much of herself upon the insensate, if beautiful, interior; how much she had given, he realized as his eyes searched the

room with its splendor of appointments, and scanned the amazing gallery of paintings lining the walls from baseboard to ceiling. His lips fell into a stern pose of repression and disapproval; yet his desire to probe into the phases of her life hidden from him by such extended absences forced him to a concentrated scrutiny of her taste, her genius, her industry in pursuing ideals, her use of Angus Bethune's fortune.

"Polly is such a scolding rival of my pigeons, she has to be shut up where her vision and voice cannot reach them; their dismay is something comical, as she attacks them like a veritable virago of jealousy and rage when they are so unfortunate as to happen in her vicinity," Ruth remarked, with smiling criticism of the peevish bird.

"And you allow it?" Donald said, with such an assumption of cynical reproach it evoked a sensitive color in Ruth's countenance.

"Polly is impervious to discipline, as it happens," she protested, as she absently stroked the iridescent dress of her tropical pet.

Donald's unresponsive silence impelled her attention from the bird.

"What is it you so disapprove of in my beloved sanctum?" she queried, smiling, noting his frowning absorption as his glance roved from object to object, rather in disparagement than with admiration and approval.

"All of it," he replied, tersely, "because it is so futile and selfishly useless."

"Why, Donald, how cross you are!" she exclaimed lightly, refusing to be scolded seriously.

"Why do you sacrifice your life to such amazing drudgery as art and philanthropy and similar barren worry and toil is beyond my power to comprehend comfortably," he complained, critically.

"Oh, but you know I informed you of what I intended to do, long ago, Donald!" she reminded him, with smiling patience.

He bent his head with an incisive gesture of assent and then devoted himself to a closer inspection of heroic water colors and paintings. Ruth experienced a reminiscent misgiving, such as she had felt when he, with vested authority, had sat in judgment upon her solutions of abstruse problems set forth by theoretical text-books. His critical inspection of her work rendered her suddenly nervous, and a dread of his unfriendly verdict evoked an inspiration to lift her violin from its case and with deft fingers twist its strings into harmonious chords. Polly danced in raucous glee and the canaries linked their liquid notes to the first tentative strain of a Schumanesque symphony.

As the music swelled into heart-probing cadences, Donald was seduced from his critical regard of the interior, and, selecting a seat, he heeded the violin's loquacious voice, as it wove with threads of divine melody, the Mystic Web of Life.

"That serene, unconscious, ceaseless flow
Of light and dark, of life and death, which makes good
 out of evil, order of odd.
Spirit and substance mingling as they go,
Until a new, self-centered soul awakes
To know that all is the gentle will of God."

As the last quavering aria floated into an abrupt silence, she laid the instrument in its case and closed the piano ere she turned to face Donald, whose eyes had darkened and were sombre with repressed feeling and admiration.

"Let me show you the portrait now, please," she requested, timidly, deprecating the impulse that had led her to divert him with music.

With a resigned mien, he arose and she led the way beyond the curtained archways on either side the hearth-stone; and he found himself in another large room, evidently her library, where light-weighted book-stacks stood in sections upon the mirror-like gloss of the uncovered floor. There the furnishings, though elegant, were austere plain, and the interior motive, strictly intellectual.

Donald viewed it with glowing eyes; the atmosphere of books appealed to him as the home-cote to a carrier pigeon. The other apartment repulsed him, it so exclusively personified sensuous ease, racial sentiment and emotional ecstasy.

Ruth moved with deliberate purpose through intricate windings of the aisles between the book-stacks, and paused before a stout, oaken easel, upon which rested the portrait they had set out to view. Donald approached leisurely, loitering by book-stacks to note their classification. When, finally, he faced his portrait, that speaking likeness of his unformed, vernal youth, he frowned at its almost feminine delicacy and obvious callowness.

"It is very much as you appeared at the period the photograph was made, of which it is a copy," Ruth asserted, apologetically.

"Perhaps it is," he admitted, ruefully.

When she could do so considerably she moved away and slipped back to the other apartment where her pets were peevishly demanding her presence. She held Muffet, the tiny poodle, in her arms, chirped to the canaries and scolded Polly for not assuming more dignity in the presence of a visitor; and Polly volubly made an excuse by a constant repetition of "Polly wants a cracker, Ruth! Polly wants a cracker," although cake in abundance was spread about, where Iphogenia had provided sustenance for the little prisoners.

When Donald finally returned from the inspection of his portrait and the room, which had really interested him more than the picture, with its adornment of stag's antlers, bagpipes and other relics of the "land o' cakes," and in every conceivable niche or position busts of poets and authors and other less notable celebrities, he said, in a censuring manner, as he rejoined Ruth, "And all this is hidden from any eye but your own; reserved exclusively for your own enjoyment and edification!"

"Oh, no! I have an audience, and an unique one! Mary used to come in at lengthy intervals; Aunt Jean comes oftener, and worships reverently at her chosen shrine. See! There is her prized loving cup beneath it, and the floral offering is her own!" Ruth pointed to an immense canvas, from which beamed the pensive face of "Mary, Queen af Scots." "And," she continued, "Iphogenia keeps the place in order and feeds my pets; Tony and Ezeke and David all have duties to perform in here, at one time and another, and they all, every one, from Aunt Jean

down the lists, are critics. Some of their remarks are rich, and I have wished that others, artists and so forth, I mean, could have heard them, not alone for their amusement, but for the sake of the intensely literal viewpoint. Dicey, I must say, is the most candid and picturesque of any of them. You should have heard her original comments on your portrait," she said.

"Ruth," he interposed sternly, "you are evading some issue and diverting me from every subject I am anxious to touch upon. As for this gallery of the personages who have made our history, and whose traits and traditions we have inherited and accepted, the whole collection is superb. I was in Edinburgh and the Highlands last year, and know your conceptions are idealized realisms, nothing less, I assure you. I must glance over them again; just glance, for indeed, I must be going. Fain would I tarry indefinitely, but I have not seen my mother in almost two years, remember, and this brief holiday has been an act of violence to very pressing duties."

And once more he went the round of the sheathed walls, while Ruth stood helplessly by the window and permitted the keen scrutiny of work that she had never been able to judge with any definite accuracy as to its merits or faults. His lingering inspection finally brought him before a portrait of the Scottish heroine, Flora MacDonald, and he was deeply impressed with its realism. It was after a painting by Ramsay, highly idealized and endowed with lifelike touches, wholly lacking in the original.

From the skillful use of the most delicate color-

ings and the vital rendering of expression, had been evolved a living, breathing Flora, who gazed with serious, candid eyes upon "Bonny Prince Charlie," on the opposite side of the room. He seemed to be viewing her, also, with speculative seriousness, as his eyes slanted pensively in her direction.

Such a lovely, bonny Flora! With a rose nestling in her shining curls, and roses upon her bosom, her shapely hands holding with careless grace some pretty white flowers he was not able to class. Surplined sleeves of some sheer, white material, and bare white throat and shoulders, from which her tartan plaid of brilliant-hued silk fell gracefully, leaving them exposed, gave to her the formal and distinguished air evening dress imparts to all climes and periods. She appeared to be living, and her lips to say: "I am willing to put my life in jeopardy to save His Royal Highness from the dangers which beset him."

The portrait of the chevalier prince was after a painting by Le Togue; and his countenance glowed with the sparkle of a dewy morning, his eyes beamed with radiant hope and energy, his fair hair, brushed carefully from an open brow, curled on his neck encased with white silk, which matched the elegance of his beruffled bosom and cuffs. His dress was a heavy, royal-tinted silk in court style of Louis XV. period, and an ermine cloak drooped from his shoulders.

The innocence, the pathos of trust and confiding gentleness was matchlessly expressed, and the seductive charms of character suggested by the original had been idealized until it made his heart ache with a tender pity in beholding it; and that pitying sorrow

was intensified into infinite compassion, when his glance left that springtime of manhood and rested upon another portrait of the Prince, copied from the painting by Humphrey, where age had set its seal, and the once beautiful mouth, so expressive of gentleness, drooped pathetically; and the one time flashing eyes gloomed stolidly, if not suspiciously: "A prince still," and withal, a heart-broken wanderer, "a man without a country."

Environing those two most interesting portraits were bold delineations of the very essence of the romantic charm of the Highlands of Scotland. Wild scenes of Alpine grandeur, rocky caverns and narrow gorges, rock-ribbed cliffs and foaming surfs and whirling sea fowls; azure skies and awesome tarns; fir-clad steeps and emerald dells; feeding flocks and bonneted shepherds; the splendors of castles and the squalor of the mountain sheiling; the barbaric interiors and the mad revels in the halls of chiefs, the serene crooning quietude of the inglesides of cottagers; the lordly patrician and the humble patriciate; the beacon-lighted hills and the gathering of clans, picturesque in plumed bonnets, tartan plaids and kilts, and armed with halibards, claymores and broad axes.

"For Charlie they drew the broad sword,"

strong, earnest men, who sang sincerely:

"We'll over water to Charlie;
Come weal, come woe,
We'll gather and go,
And live or die for Charlie!"

A contrast to the brave marshalling of clans, commanded by cross of fire and led by skirling bagpipes, were reproductions of the portraits of the Royal Stuarts, and the dignitaries who helped to make the history of their reign; James I. and Mary Queen of Scots were conspicuous in high, frilled ruffles of the Elizabethan era, and the courtly dress, in grim contrast to the richness and furbelows of the personages from the French court of the reigns of the Louises.

After a prolonged and interested study of those details so intimately allied to the traditions of the exiles, Donald, with a full intake of breath that had been partially suspended, moved his position to again face the portrait of the Highland heroine that was enshrined as a goddess. A gilded bracket held tiny candelabra, bearing waxen tapers; and a vase of rare flowers embraced also pine twigs from the cherished little pines from the motherland.

He turned to Ruth with a teasing smile. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," he quoted, gesturing to indicate the altar-like environment of the heroine's portrait.

"She saved our prince, you know, and his veins ran with the blood of the Stuarts. My reverence for her and the Chevalier Prince is but a tribute to my sacred heritage from the storied 'Ancient of Days.' Oh, do you never reflect how our kings and our country has been denied us, although our race was a pioneer one in the civilization of Europe; and that wherever we are, and in whatever condition we are in heart and in ideals Gaelics still!" Ruth exclaimed, appealing to his racial patriotism.

"Indeed, I subscribe to Tacitus, who said to our ancestors two thousand years ago: 'As therefore you advance to battle, look back upon your ancestors; look forward to your posterity,'" he agreed, assentingly.

He was so much of the world and his mind so permeated with the exigencies of the position he occupied in its strenuous intellectuality, he glanced backward to history but incidentally. He had ere then been impressed that Ruth brooded too much on the unalterable, depressing past of their eventful race, and was without proper zest for the interesting present and the potential future; so when she moved to the door as a signal that they should depart from the studio, he followed reluctantly and thoughtfully. As she closed the door she paused and said, earnestly:

"I love my work, Donald, and it has afforded me much pure pleasure, but its claims I consider entirely personal to myself,—I have never imposed their consideration upon others."

"I understand," he rejoined, conciliatingly. "But let us, I pray, speak of the present for the few moments left me to be with you, for Ruth:

"Little it avails us now to know
Of ages past so long ago,
Nor how they rolled;
Our theme shall be of yesterday,
Which to oblivion sweeps away,
Like days of old."

"Let us sit here," he suggested, indicating a white,

enameled seat placed near a small stove that was given draught by a terra-cotta chimney on a brick foundation, whose office was to furnish heat for the improvised hothouse, where tropical growths thrived uninfluenced by weather. Donald felt more at ease there where the unalloyed sunlight fell upon green growing things and shimmered in changing lights upon Ruth's yellow hair.

"Now tell me," he insisted when they were seated, "why you invited me to spend Christmas here? Your invitation was as much of a command as a request?"

"Why, I really wanted to see you very much, indeed. I have never forgotten the time when you lived here with us. Have you, Donald?" she answered naively, and with visible duplicity.

"It is the one memory of my desolate life!" he exclaimed with tremulous despondency, that aroused her constant remorse to a quickened sympathy.

"Scenes that are brightest may charm for awhile,
Hearts that are lightest and eyes that smile;
Yet o'er them above us, though Nature beam,
With none to love us, how sad they seem!"

He quoted this verse from one of Jean's favorites, sung often in the days when he sojourned at Kissic-Dale. Her glance drooped to her folded hands—ringless, but for her mother's solitaire gem—and a pensive dejection infolded her features in habitual lines.

"Oh, why do you remain lonely? That was one reason why I was anxious to see you. I wished to find out if you were permitting a mistaken sense of

loyalty to me to interfere with your happiness. If you are lonely, there are so many beautiful women in your circle, why have you not let some of them round out your life by making a home for you? I am sure some of the grand women you know could make you very proud and happy," she suggested, wistfully.

Donald sat erect, squared his shoulders, and assumed all the hauteur with which he was accustomed to meet the people of his world. Indeed, at all times, he bore himself with the air of a conqueror, for he had not been victorious beyond the most hopeful dreams and pretensions of the beginning of his career. He was not vain, but he was informed, nevertheless, that he was a very handsome, stalwart figure, and that women gave him their sweetest smiles unsolicited.

But with all his attainments, social and professional, he knew that the one essential to real happiness had, so far, been denied him; but so stolidly had he borne the emptiness of his lot, his associates had never known the aching void his life really embodied. He threw all the strength of disclaimer to crime in his poise and utterance, as he said, with more than a touch of bitterness:

"What!" he cried. "Be false to every holy instinct and longing of my heart, and debase myself and an innocent victim with a loveless marriage! No! If you do not marry me, I shall go to my grave in single state. I am as assured as if I had trod the desolate way already. Did you invite me here to say that?" he demanded, sternly.

"Partly," she admitted, guardedly. "But there

were other reasons. I had no frivolous motive, be assured."

"I am assured, or I should never have come to see you and then go away to fight over the ever-recurring battle for patience to repress the clamoring ache of my heart, always so faithful, but ever denied the solace it craves so desperately," he complained with a fretting tone quite incongruous with his stately form and bearing.

Ruth leaned against the arm of the seat and beheld him with candid vision. There were distinct shadows beneath her dark eyes, a pathetic wistfulness in the pose of her features that Donald observed with a swift throb of remorse.

"Never mind, Ruth. I am sorry that I have said so much. I should be man enough to bear disappointment without weak plaining to one who is not responsible, and has always been the truest, sweetest of friends. I must manage to get along without you, although it is hard to be always resigned and patient."

"Donald, long ago when I could not answer as you wished me to do, I promised you that I would not marry anyone else while you waited for me, so if you have been desolate, so have I," Ruth protested, contritely.

"Well, that is a situation to please an ascetic, but I must confess it can never be very comforting to a mere material man! I see no solace in the duet of desolation. Ruth, tell me, whatever has made you such as you are? You were not that way when I first knew you; neither was there prophecy of anything of the kind; your mind and heart fairly teemed

with joy and anticipation. I have puzzled so much over the problem, but it seems I shall never achieve its solution."

"There comes Jamie with Catherine and Lorna, your one-time petted pupils. Haven't they grown, though! They came from school to meet Jamie, who is their idol," Ruth exclaimed, pointing to where a tall youth of eighteen years of age with a girl on either arm, whose ages were respectively thirteen and fifteen years, had entered the lawn, and laughing and chattering, were approaching the veranda.

Donald arose to his full height and buttoned his coat snugly across his breast. Ruth confessed to an acute admiration of his Viking strength and blonde personality; and noted that the hair was thinning above his broad, white brow, that his movements, unconsciously to himself, were commanding and dictatorial; an element lacking ere his training in the school of combative ambitions.

"My hour is over; Jamie's coming means that he is ready to take me home," he said, with a sad finality in mien and expression. "Perhaps, I may come again in the summer to renew my stale plea for some reciprocity in a bitter siege of loyalty."

Ruth moved her lips to speak, but caught the words ere they escaped into speech. Instead, she walked on by his side, silent, until they emerged upon the veranda and were about to join the children. She remarked then that she was going to have a luncheon served to him and Jamie before they departed on their journey; and with this excuse she hurried forward to disappear later in the direction of the dining-room.

After Donald and Jamie had finally gone, Ruth busied herself in helping set the house in order. There had been such a number of guests barely a chair was in place in the rooms accustomed to the strictest precision in neatness and system; so when the sun-flaming west had paled and the early twilight was draping the interiors in a mist of gray shadow, peculiarly individual to the festive day, she was in the parlor, leaning dreamily against the closed window, watching the decline of the short, eventful day, and recalling the last glance of Donald's, in which she had glimpsed unspoken heartache and premonition of immediate loneliness, when the musical tones of Charley Thayer's voice startled her from the sad reverie.

He was in the sitting room, where Jean had just received him, and he was declaring to her in positive tones that if he had missed the evening meal he would collapse from sheer hunger and an appetite clamoring for some of her dainty Christmas fare.

Jean was fain to join his jesting humor, and would not say that the meal was yet to be served.

"Perhaps we haven't anything to eat, and must therefore all go supperless," Ruth heard her remark in a teasing tone that evinced she was enjoying the situation. "You know we have had much company to-day."

While they were jesting thus, Ruth left the window and lighted the lamps in the chandelier. He had come, then, after all. Mr. Allan had informed her that day that he had not slept the previous night; that the burns on his hands and neck had been so painful and, lacking proper remedies, he had sat up

all night applying damp cloths to the smarting wounds he had received that evening out at the kirk, where he had been a most charming Santa Claus.

She experienced again the sharp agony of horror that had assailed her, when his robe, sheathed in fluffed cotton, had been set aflame by an accidental candles which had served to adorn and light the contact with the tiny blaze of one of the innumerable trees. It had lasted but a moment, as with great presence of mind he had deftly swept the flames from his throat and wrist, and then rushed behind the curtain that hid the gifts the trees could not contain and quickly subjugated the ephemeral blaze.

He had made light of his burns later, when she approached him, in acute sympathy, and a sense of personal responsibility, for she knew that he had assumed the laborious role but to serve her and aid in her effort to give pleasure to a great many whose lives embodied deprivation.

Soon the supper bell rang and put an end to the bantering in the sitting room; and she went forth and joined them as they were preparing for the journey to the dining-room.

"I resemble a battle-scarred veteran of a holy war, do I not?" he questioned, soberly, when Ruth bent pitying eyes upon his bandaged neck and hands. "But, indeed, the burns are slight; there would not have been one blister if I had not neglected to attend to the scorched places at once. As it was, they did pain me some last night, but they have ceased to smart now."

Thus he chattered, while they served him solicitously until he declined another morsel. Later,

it devolved upon Ruth to entertain him in the parlor. Jean was weary with the unusual demands the day had levied upon her strength; and Mary had retired soon after the serving of the last meal. Jean had insisted upon a thorough attention to his wounds, and had supplied him with a portion of all her salves and emollients. He professed to being perfectly comfortable, but he could not play any instrument as he had been in the habit of doing at previous calls; therefore Ruth exerted herself to amuse him, and taxed her mind with subjects of peculiar interest to him, she presumed.

Jean, in her solicitude for his comfort, had ensconced him in the most comfortable seat in the room, and placed a rich ottoman for his feet to rest upon; but after she had retired, his assumption of cheerfulness ebbed into a pensive acquiescence to all of Ruth's rather labored remarks.

"Shall I play for you, and what instrument would you prefer?" Ruth questioned, seeing his lack of animation and believing, truly, that he was not feeling well.

"Your harp, please; I have a slight headache, and I think its soft notes would soothe rather than shock my treacherous nerves," he replied, listlessly.

"Had you not better retire?" Ruth inquired earnestly.

"Oh, no, please! I have spent the day in bed, and it was awful! Play for me, and I shall be perfectly content and grateful," he insisted, and Ruth obediently secured her large, triangular harp and evoked from the responsive chords pensive arias to which she sang snatches of sentimental melody, including

cooing lullabies and tender home songs; but not one note that could appeal to the emotional passions of the heart.

He was charmed with her rendition of "We'd Better Bide a Wee." She searched into Jean's great folio of old-time music, and keyed the harp to the rude monotones of ancient Scotch minstrelsy, to sing to the accompaniment of the peculiarly adaptive instrument, quaintly worded and rhymed lays of adventure and chivalry in mediaeval periods, relative to Britain and Scotland. His interest was deeply aroused, and she ventured on to finally chant a lyric of even rhyme, but of the eventful days of the later crusades.

She had sung many verses of the legendary song that related how the pilgrim had returned after a long absence so changed, his own miller failed to recognize him; on through the pilgrim's pathetic song at the bridal feast, the lady's declaration, and then came her plea:

"Yes, here I claim the praise, she said, to constant
matrons due,
Who keep the troth that they have plight so steadfastly
and true;
For count the term howe'er ye will, so that you count
aright,
Seven twelvemonths and a day are out when the bells
toll twelve to-night."

Involuntarily, subconsciously startled, Ruth paused, her voice and fingers dropped the rhythmic thread of the lyric, as, for a full moment, her eyes clouded

with an introspective shadow and she sank into a dreaming pose, as if she had finished. But even as he opened his lips to speak, she recovered her wits and sang on, not just as before, but with a stolid persistence that finished the few remaining verses without loss to enunciation or harmony. Then she arose and put aside the harp.

"Shall we retire now? I am sure you must be weary," she proposed, tentatively. Just then the tall, colonial clock out in the hall boomed ten sonorous strokes, which justified closing the interview.

"I will retire directly, for your sake, not my own," he returned, reluctantly. "But Miss MacKenzie, will you please tell me why you fell so suddenly serious, just now? What was it in the song affected you so?"

"Oh," she sighed, and then paused, as if perplexed and saddened. "It is hard to explain to you," she said, finally. "But it was an uncanny sensation. I will not tell you, for I will not have you accuse me of being superstitious."

"I would not," he asserted, caressingly.

"Do you know," she remarked, in a deliberate but aloof tone and mien, "that we Gaelics have a species of occultism or some intuitive force that others do not seem to possess? Aunt Jean says that she has the privilege of involuntarily looking beyond the wall of the present; and of finding in the bud of things the thorns that will some day pierce the hand that clasps the flower of joy."

He gazed into her introspective eyes steadily and exploitingly; then he abruptly changed the subject, for he discovered that she was troubled.

"Will you also tell me, please, at what age that portrait of you was executed?" and he pointed to the Daphne portrait, which still retained its first position on the wall.

"In my eighteenth year, I believe," she returned, with such evident reserve he arose to bid her good night.

"I shall be off for my holiday to-morrow, and shall be gone some time. See after my people while I am away. I shall come to see your aunt upon my return and bring her the news I have promised her; and, perhaps, I may bring you something that you will appreciate more than my uninteresting self," he remarked, as he was leaving the room.

She flushed rosily, but maintained a dignified silence, as she bent her head in acknowledgment of his words, but she could not meet his eyes that were swimming in tears forced by some keen disappointment.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TELEGRAM—AS THE SUN WENT DOWN— AFTER MANY DAYS.

“Drink the dew, the dairy fate said,
That the poppy lends repose
Mingled with the fragrant nectar,
Chaliced in the golden rose, . . .
Then she drank the draught Lethean
From the bowl with flowerets crowned.”

(The Mystic.)

“Not love that grossly clings to earth,
But something of diviner birth,
That lifts the drooping soul afar
Until it twines Faith zenith star.”

(Selected.)

The last days of January had been marked by a belated snow storm, which had swept down into the sunny South from the storehouses of wintry blizzards in the bleak Northwest. It had come, swift and furious, from piling gray clouds, and had raged for a day and night; then followed freezing temperature amid impotent sun-rays.

Ruth had enjoyed that glimpse of Arctic weather and its attendant beauty of feathery snow wreaths fantastically adorning the trees and shrubbery. When gray clouds were yet robing the forest in tem-

pered light, she had gone forth, unafraid, though alone, and wandered for some time, to note the strange, unreal charm of green pine-tops crested with snowflakes; the gleaming holly, with its red berries and sprangled leaves, dusted and capped with a powdery frosting; and when the sun had appeared in a blinding brilliancy, lacking warmth, in which snow and ice crystals sparkled with a scintillance indescribable, she had gone down to the bridge and sketched the wintry scene so seldom seen at Kissic-Dale, and, very evanescent, she remembered from her experience of such late snow showers.

Also she had sketched the mansion, with its eaves fringed with pendant icicles; and the pigeons clustering under the corniced corners, where the sun, but not the bleak wind, could reach their feather-robed, yet sensitive bodies. Her group of sketches included also glimpses of Loch Lily, the spring and dairy, the dove-cote and rose-garden, and were to be included in a galaxy of scenes environing the cherished home.

Her plan was that, at her leisure, she could embody them all in oil and colors, and give them spaces on the walls of the various halls and rooms. The pleasing occupation and the inspiriting weather had been an unusual season of enjoyment and recreation which had deepened the rose-tinge of her cheeks and the pensive light of her lash-shadowed eyes.

When the snow had lain at its greatest depth, and the glamor of an Arctic, sunless atmosphere had given an unfamiliar charm to the landscape and forest, Charley Thayer had arrived at Kissic-Dale,

picturesquely attired in hunting costume, to join Neil and Sandy MacPharland in a day's hunt on grounds to which they would pilot him, where the game had not been frightened away by the screech of sawmills or the more quiet tread of the turpentine worker and the Gaelic husbandman.

They returned at early eventide, bearing much trophy to attest a most fruitful chase; and Jean was presented with a couple of wild turkeys and several braces of birds, with the compliments of young Thayer, who was to spend the night as her guest. He had prepared for the event by bringing a change of dress in a small valise, which he had left in the room assigned him for the period of the visit. After supper he devoted himself almost exclusively to Jean, retailing a wonderful amount of news picked up while he was away during the lengthy midwinter holiday; but Jean, despite her interest, finally yielded to the languor of a slight indisposition resulting from the bitter weather, and retired, though reluctantly, leaving such congenial company.

Ruth, with blooming color and a beauty enhanced by her costume of a white robe of heavy, woolen serge, was left to entertain him. He had changed from the corduroy of his hunting array to conventional clothes; his cheeks were rosy, too, from exposure to the stinging winds; his personality exhaled the freedom of the woods and the exhilaration of successful sport.

There was an odorous twang to the atmosphere of the warm parlor, of incense of geranium foliage, the aromatic perfume of lemon verbena and Jean's cherished, thrifty citerina; the cozy seclusion in it-

self was a delicious contrast to the harsh weather prevailing beyond the draped windows; and life in its most buoyant phase coursed the veins and keyed the heart and mind to roseate hopes and prophecies.

Ruth listened with absorbing interest to a detailed account of his chase of the largest turkey he had captured; and in imagination she beheld the remote forest draped in snow and the wily route the bird had led his stalking pursuer, so vivid and impressive was his narration of the incident. But alas! other ideas finally displaced recollections of the sport, and he bethought him in that he had a mission to perform, a message to deliver to Ruth.

"I have imposed upon you quite enough," he said, apologetically. "At this, my first opportunity, I wish to show you something that I believe you will appreciate, or, if I am mistaken, you will pardon the presumption when I sincerely believed you would," he said, arising and excusing his absence from the room for a few moments.

Casually, but not acutely, Ruth felt some curiosity as to his meaning; he had twice spoken so earnestly regarding the thing he was to bring her. She heard him ascend the stairs to his room, and then descend. Whatever it was, he carried it in his valise, and she smiled expectantly when he again entered the room, carrying a flat paper-bound package. Resuming his seat, he unknotted the strings, unfolded the paper wrappings and held in his hands a photograph of cabinet size and some smaller squares of gray cardboard.

"This, Miss MacKenzie," he said, and laid the pic-

ture before her with a knightly air of self-abnegation, evincing an unconscious heroism, "is what I felt you would esteem most; and these are simply accessories of the main subject."

Smiling and unprophetic, Ruth leaned to take up the photo lying upon the chair Jean had recently vacated and not yet removed to its usual position. In an instant, she recoiled with an irrepressible cry of dismay and horror, for Edwin Phillips, as he had appeared in the days when she knew him, had smiled into her eyes with the winning charm and gay insouciance of literal life and presence. But not as a living spirit, or a shadow of a wholesome life, charmingly individual in its days of activity, but as a gruesome spectre emerging from the lurid depths of a dead past, of another world, so alien they seemed to any normal experience, the well-remembered, but vaguely placed features that stared at her from the background of chemically-tinted paper and cardboard.

If he had come forth bodily from his grave and confronted her, she would have been hardly less shocked or repulsed. She covered her face with her hands, instinctively, the victim of indefinable fear and repugnance; thus for some time she curtailed vision in a speechless panic of weakness and discomposure, and he sat rigid and undecided in his estimate of her emotion, whether it was an excess of joy and appreciation, an ecstasy of reawakened impressions, or a frenzied shrinking from a once beloved object. Anyway, it was a test he had long planned, to prove if her confessed devotion to the memory of his cousin was real and inviolable, or a

fancied conviction resulting from morbid reaction following poignant grief and disappointment.

"Oh, take it away, please!" Ruth begged, in tremulous accents, and he noted that her lips were white and her fingers quivering, as they pressed down the lids to securely drape her sight.

"Oh, what have I done?" he exclaimed in genuine remorse and self-reproach, as he snatched up the cardboards and hastily bestowed them in their wrappings. "I believed that, perhaps, you would be overjoyed to see such a good resemblance of Edwin. You told me how you had cherished his memory all the long years; that at times you had almost gone mad with the longing to behold him again; if but for one inestimable moment; that you had been so abject in your loneliness, you would have esteemed it the greatest privilege to go to his grave and kneeling, kiss the turf that robed it; that your most intense desire had often been to find his grave and die beside it; that," he related with lips as white and immobile as her own, "often you had thought of his wooing voice and pleading eyes, which had never for a day ceased to haunt you with their enchantment and influence!"

"Hush, please," Ruth entreated, as her hands dropped from her eyes and she lifted a wan countenance to plead for mercy. Her eyes, dazed and clouded, swept the room and then embraced him in a steady glance that deepened into returning composure, and said:

"I was insane to say such things to you, and so you must have esteemed me."

"No, you were simply sincere, but I firmly believe

mistaken in your judgment of self," he replied, in convincing tones. "Another thing, you wished to crush in its inception my deluded love and devotion."

She made no denial to any of his assertions, but at his last words her eyes fell and the color crept to her cheeks, vivid and burning. Restlessly she reached and plucked a spray of cisterina and crushed the scented leaves to press them to her lips that she might breathe their refreshing aroma, for she was faint and ill, and fighting to subjugate revulsive sensations. He put aside the package and took the seat beside her.

"I secured a camera and photographed those scenes that I have not shown you; and I saw his mother. We talked a great deal about Edwin, and she admitted that he married Maude very reluctantly. At the time she assigned his hesitancy to the fact that his bride-to-be was so fond of flirting. She married in less than a year after he died; they deemed it unseemly, and have never liked her since," he concluded, noting that Ruth sat with drooping lashes and pathetically set lips; and that all the sparkle and pleasure of her recent buoyant mood had been dissipated.

She had heard him so dispassionately and with such an impersonal interest, he restlessly arose, and, going to the piano, opened it with characteristic impulse, and said, ingratiatingly: "Shall I play for you?"

"If you choose," Ruth murmured, with polite acquiescence. She also arose and moved her seat to a more retired position, and sat facing the instrument, with her hands clasped listlessly upon her lap,

her head reclining languidly against the glistening satin of the upholstered chair. He viewed her, ponderingly, his eyes alight with a brooding tenderness. He touched the keys absently, still watching her and deliberating, his heart so aching with its burden of suspense he felt ill and overwhelmed in what he deemed a crisis.

With wistful chivalry, he sprang up and found an ottoman to place for a rest for her feet. She accepted it with an aloof expression of thanks for his consideration. He paused a moment irresolutely, and then, with a tremulous intake of breath, returned to the instrument. She would not or could not assume cordial relations with him. "I am going to play the best I can, Miss MacKenzie, and if it in the least wearies you, do not hesitate to say so. I live but to serve you, now and all the time, remember."

She inclined her head and smiled, but the smile was as lifeless and as cold in seeming as white moonlight upon whiter snow.

His music, though impressive and always appealing, was strictly extempore, improvisations for the rendering of any topical melody or snatch of opera that pleased his fancy; but his mood did not incline to dancing or rollicking measures, as it was at times wont to do; instead, he touched the keys dreamily, and played old love songs to minor chords and cadences. He sang, softly, but distinctly, innumerable verses of melodious rhymes, all breathing devotion, longing and sacrifice for the beloved object; and his facile voice rendered to the simplest words and sentiment a pathos of expression that assailed her heart with ineffable wooing and promise.

And, as he sang on and on, gliding from one melody into another, sometimes without a pause at the change of harmony, Ruth sat in passive silence, so still, that at intervals she was rigid in a frowning pose of concentrated depression.

Finally his voice grew husky and strained, and at last it was strangled into silence. He shrugged his shoulders and, arising, thrust his hands into his pockets to stride about the room, aimlessly scanning bric-a-brac and portraits, or any object that might serve as a welcome diversion from the seething turbulence of his heart. When finally he paused beside her, Ruth lifted her eyes and beheld him with a fortuitous vision that embraced, spiritlessly, the irrepressible agitation of his movements.

She vaguely hoped that he would retire at once, she craved so much to be alone, to singly and desperately fight her way back to normal feeling and composure. Yet she had no strength to suggest it, no art to pass over the crisis of the moment and reserve for future solitude the snapping of her taut nerves into a healing collapse from the strain she was bearing so ingloriously. Her Gaelic temperament forbade light behavior where vital issues were concerned; so she stared at him stolidly, as he swept her feet from the foot-stool and sank upon it, in a dramatic posture of appeal and adoration.

"My beloved," he appealed, in broken tones, "I must tell you how much I love you! The repression has grown a torture that I can no longer endure. Despise me, spurn me, if you will, still I must speak and tell you of the wonderful joy I experience in loving you. And it is so much like loving an angel,

dearest, so far you seem above me, so different from anyone else I have ever known. I loved you the first moment I ever beheld you, and I have loved you every moment since, with a love that deepens each time I behold you."

He grasped her hands and imprisoned them in his own and laid his cheek against them with a caress intensely yearning and pleading. That was the beginning of his plea, which ran the gamut of the emotions of his enslaved heart. Ruth was impelled to listen to the faltering torrent of protestations of love, devotion and admiration. He was desperately sincere and very eloquent, and she required all of her depleted strength and strategy of mind to resist the flood of pleading with which he besieged her heart and bombarded her resolute prejudices against the wily god Eros.

But she did withstand the assault without once lowering the ensign of her fortified heart, or so she believed, when she had gently but firmly closed the interview and dismissed him to his room. He had not obeyed with the abject docility of a rejected lover, but had, in the final moments, asserted his right to be heard and given consideration.

"Be kind and merciful," he adjured her in wooing accents, which held an element of command. "Be humane to me, as you are to every other creature who falls in the way of your sympathy, and I will beg that you do not let me suffer for the sins and cowardice of another!"

He had drawn himself erect and stood before her, strong and courageous, handsome and impellingly winning. Yet, dumbly, apathetically, she could only

bid him go and await a more befitting season to discuss so vital a subject.

When he had gone, she listened dully, until his last muffled footstep had ceased to echo along the upper hallway; then she bowed her face into her cold hands and sobbed a few aching breaths, while her eyes smarted with a dry, blasting dearth of tears.

Afterward, she attended to the fire and the fastenings of the windows, for she had sent Iphogenia to bed to seek a cure for an acute headache earlier in the evening. Also, she extinguished all the lights ere she repaired to her own apartments, where she found the maid asleep in her boudoir on a folding couch she was accustomed to occupy since Ruth, years previously, had taken rooms on the second floor. Logs glowed with heat upon the hearth of that and also her bedroom, which she entered and noiselessly closed the door. At last she was alone.

The following morning she slept late, much later than was her habit; but it was a rule of the house that she was not to be awakened unless some special reason demanded it. It had been well on toward morning ere real slumber had reinstated normal poise and feeling. When she came down it was near to nine o'clock, and she was informed that Thayer had breakfasted and departed. She was much relieved that she did not have to meet him; she hoped that the events of the past night might lie far in the background of happenings, ere she should be forced to confront the issue of his suit again. In the meantime, she welcomed the diversion of work and the discharge of homely duties; they were an antidote to unrest that she had found infallible.

Nothing else presenting its claims, she spent the day in her studio with her pets for company. She had found it extremely cozy out there in the pagoda-shaped building, and she labored desultorily. That morning the first signals of an impending thaw had appeared in an abatement of the intense cold, which had held the welcomed snubeams in a chill paralysis the previous afternoon. The mid-day had been a scene of uncomfortable slush, and the afternoon marked by a raw atmosphere.

Toward the close of the short day, although a keen frost was being evolved by the chill of approaching eventide, the interior of her artistic retreat held summer warmth and balminess.

Amidst the warmth and luxury so vivid they transformed the intruding wintry sunlight into tropical radiance, Ruth was the fairest object, her living charms far exceeding the tediously achieved, artistic features. She was again robed in the house gown of white serge, which fell in classical folds and was girdled by a large cord with depending tassels of yellow-stranded silk, matching her hair, and the silken bands adorning her robe, which showed Oriental touches in flowing sleeves and rounded collar.

It had been an unusually dull day in spite of her determination to lose thought in tasking labor; some occult influence seemed to enslave her mind and rob her hands of their wonted skill. Valiantly, many times, she had brushed the web of fancy from her brain and applied herself diligently to the task she had assumed, still she was unmistakably idle.

As the afternoon waned, she left her easel and

abandoned the futile endeavor to work. In the enervating warmth of the glowing fire, she reclined in a low chair, that wooed her to restful repose with its seducing comfort, while the frosts of approaching evening fell prematurely over the world beyond the transparent, screening windows; and purple cloud-wracks came creeping in cheerless detachments from the ruling northwest to trail luridly over the pale, lustreless sky.

Of outdoor conditions, though, she soon became oblivious, as, with closed eyes, she lived an inner, sub-conscious life among memories and recent events. She neither judged nor analyzed those pertinent phases of experience, so evanescent in reality of time, but so tenacious in their influence upon heart-recollections.

As her languor deepened in the soothing relaxation from forced effort, she found that every train of thought converged persistently to the moments spent with Charley Thayer in the parlor the previous evening. All day, she had thrust aside such memories, recoiling sensitively from the remembrance of what she had suffered. Last night she had kindly but firmly repulsed his ardor, and the flood of his protestations had not moved her from a position of unreceptiveness and deprecation; she had been able to sustain the calm, platonic regard she had long since tendered him.

Perhaps it had been that just then her feelings had been freshly seared with the blasting flame of the remembrance of Edwin's duplicity and her youthful trust and faith; and the morbid revulsion of a wounded heart had at that time alloyed her finer

sensibilities; but now life flooded to high tide, emotionally sweet and pure, embodying in most alluring charm the hour she had listened to the pleading of her enraptured lover and beheld his love for her as a poignant flame kindled by some irresistible charm she had exerted so unwillingly.

The comforting warmth and idealistic sensations so exorcised the rasping tension of her nerves, the aftermath of the experience of the previous night. she finally lost consciousness for an interval in which her brain sustained the emotional pleasures of her day-dreaming.

No clouds flecked the radiant azure of the sky doming the realm of slumber; no thorns grew among the roses of joy blooming in that blissful dreamland where she was blithe of mind and heart-joyous, as she had been in that ideal springtime seven years ago; but it was not Donald, Jamie or Edwin Phillips with whom she skipped through the pines seeking ferns and arbutus and wafted hither and yon in the roseate symphony of life's pure morning.

Bonny Charley Thayer held her hand and guided her through labyrinths of flower-hedged ways, sharing her joy as she heeded the rippling of crystal waters; the glad strains of bird-music; the sweet, mysterious runing of the pines voiced by languishing zephyrs. His hand had wiped away all her tears, the warm flame of his love had dissolved the stony grief barring the fount of Hope and Happiness. Bravely, hand in hand, they were dancing up the broad, love-lit vista leading through a radiant distance to the flower-crowned mount of beatitude, the vine-draped "Bowers of Bliss."

The clock on the velvet-draped mantel chimed one resonant, musical note, marking half-past five of the short winter day as she awoke, dazed and translated from the time preceding her dream-haunted slumber. The sun sinking into purple vapors infused transitory color and implied warmth into the drab pall of the overcast sky; the rainbow-light streamed through the windows, over the bright furnishings of the room, the picture-draped walls; and the birds greeted it with a burst of song more vociferous than the warblings which had mingled with the features of the phantasms of her dream; the parrot, with a peevish cry for outdoor freedom; muffed aroused from her repose upon the rug at Ruth's feet, stretched and yawned and then resumed her rest supinely when her mistress had clasped her hands behind her head and sat motionless, brooding the gasping coals with introspective eyes.

Finally some thought or conclusion smote Ruth's consciousness with a rebuke so material and pertinent it dispelled the illusions of a fanciful happiness, and she arose and moved restlessly to a window and threw up the sash, to lean upon the sill and breathe thirstily the crisp, frosty air, as more suited to the lungs of a daughter of the logically-minded Highlanders, the self-elected priestess nourishing the fires on the altars of the temples of her "Manes," than the flower-scented, dream-evocative warmth of the interior.

As she had passed a full-length mirror set as a panel in the rear of a niche in the wall, she had been arrested by the very obvious beauty of her reflection; the pose of her erect, gracefully-lined figure,

draped in the clinging robe of white serge, her rose-red cheeks, the pensive beauty of her violet-tinged eyes secluded by long, silky lashes, her classical features, still youthfully artless in their perfect molding, their creamy texture and delicate tinting; and the crown of gleaming, golden hair she had long ago appreciated as the rarest gift of the fairy godmother, whose magic wand had touched her cradle so graciously.

She had felt a temptation to lean and kiss the alluring vision the mirror framed so enticingly, caress it for the sake of Charley Thayer's avowed worship of its charm; but under the spur of the conclusion she refrained from the impulse with a re-assertion of the stoical training of her heart and impulses. Stolidly she faced the keen, cold pinge of the raw, gray atmosphere of the bleak eveningtide.

In the west, a low line of deeply-tinted, purple horizon was edged by a prim bordering of orange-ated hues. The sun, shrouded and lurid, was sinking into its enveloping vapors as a red disk disappearing in the repelling cold depths of a Northern lake. The soil of the orchard was dark and damp, and the increasing frost was sheathing its surface with a crust of congealed moisture. The snow lay in small patches on the northern side of each tree, whose bare limbs posed as quaint network against a steely sky. "Oh, youth, youth," she breathed, in a pathos of regret and yearning, in a hopeless rebellion that time robs the heart of faith in sublunary felicity, "what a radiant sweet thing you are!"

With the lifting of the broad sash, she had braced her warm, nerve-threaded form to meet the rasping

chill of Nature's harshest, most repellant mood; in the stern immensity of the Arctic-ruled universe, the art-arrayed, sensuously appointed interior of her studio was as an exotic in the incisive mercilessness of the scheme of creation. Resting between the two extremes she balanced soul and life upon the veering border-line of things that were, that are, and will be, and a span as frail and fleeting as an iridescent soap-bubble.

How still and solemn seemed the familiar things in their bare, unadorned estate! The winter's thrall seemed to be a portent of waiting, of patience permeated with prescience!

No living thing seemed to be abroad but David, pursuing a stray turkey he was endeavoring to drive perchward; David, in a long coat that was flapping his heels, as the dazed fowl led him aimlessly; his boots crunched the frost-rime, giving constant fright to the witless creature.

While she dreamily viewed their wild detouring, insensibly recalling the chase so interestingly portrayed by Charley Thayer's musical tones, the sun dipped so deep into the imperial-tinted cloud-bank, its rays were entirely extinguished.

It was then hoof-beats cleft the resonant air, as a man on horseback galloped down the cherry-lane and unceremoniously alighting at the gate, threw his bridle rein over a post of the iron fence, and entered the lawn. He had discovered Ruth at the window, and he came direct to her, fumbling, as he came, in his overcoat pocket.

She awaited his approach without apprehension, although he was spattered with black mud and his

horse panted heavingly, as it stood with lowered head beyond the fence. Her thought was, that someone needy or ill, out in the forest, had sent to her for succor. She was surprised but not frightened, when he drew forth a telegram and passed it up to her outstretched hand. She laid it aside unopened, her mind engaged with concern for the plight of the man and his hard-ridden animal.

"Will you not go around the corner there and make your presence known, that someone may attend to your comfort and see after your horses?" she urged him, hospitably.

"No, but I thank you just the same. I am cousin to Sandy's wife, and will go up there and spend the night," the man returned, deferentially.

"Tell Sandy to pay you five dollars for me. I have no money with me just now," she called to him, as he was hurrying back to the gate. Closing the window, she found and opened the telegram, still with no premonition that it could affect her in any serious manner.

"Donald not expected to live! Pneumonia. Begs for you. Come.

"JAMIE."

So read the message scrawled upon the yellow slip; and she did not repeat the first reading of it; each uncouth character was impaled in the perspective of her mind a sluminous words upon a transparency.

With a composure that was the antipode of real tranquility she returned to the perfumed warmth of

her treasured refuge; for a refuge and haven it had been to her soul, nestling it when it cried aloud in longing, nurturing it in its effort to put forth idealistic growths and aspirations, shielding it from tempest and drouth, even as the house walls warded its inmates from the blight and inclemency of varying weather. She came back to the hearth and laid some billets of rich pine upon the dying coals, that greater warmth might check the creeping chill stealing through her veins so sinuously; and some instinct was warning her that the heart-encircling thrill was the approach of stolid-eyed Fate, haling her to one of the inquisitorial bridges which span crucial gaps in tyrannical-hearted Destiny.

With a tremulous sigh of helplessness she stretched her cold hands out to meet the genial flame, as if it was an aid to needed self-control in the first numb shock of an impending crisis; that unforeseen climax to her habit of apathetic peace and procrastination. Her nerves were taut in a rigid endurance of the first sensations of an acute and intolerable suspense.

Donald in extremis and calling for her! Giving the last cry of his hungry heart, that had famished for seven eventful years, never faltering, that she knew, even in the forlorn depths of unsolaced discouragement, in his hope and desire to win her; but for the first time his appeal had probed deep into her soul and aroused there its first conjugal impulse and an overweening tenderness for the strong, heroic man, stricken to such a weakness; he had cast aside all fear, and boldly demanded her presence as his soul's supreme absolution.

The silver-voiced clock ruled off the fleeting moments; twilight crept through the unshaded windows, the parrot and the birds tucked their heads beneath their wings, docile to the neglect accorded them, so unwontedly, as step by step she approached the Rubicon, which, when she had passed over, she could never recross back into the life she would then renounce forever.

With straining memory, she went back to that springtime, peering among its Arcadian incidents to scrutinize Donald, whose personality had been so overshadowed by the more brilliant one of Edwin Phillips; and among the events of all the succeeding years to trace her platonic affection for him, her esteem of him and his achievement; and in the revealing light of her present acute sympathy, the scrutiny incarnated the sum of all her recollections into an impelling lure of race, of fealty to a vow she had never contemplated as being so affected by circumstances as to feel compelled to fulfill it, in that she was done forever with the game of love and its attendant demands upon faith and devotion.

Nevertheless, she was vowed to Donald. It was all she could do in atonement for winning his heart, all the comfort give him in his professed loneliness and longing. Year by year, she had waited expectantly, that his own defection would free her from the nominal obligation; but time had seemed to confirm him in his first belief that she alone could command his heart and render him happy.

He had been too busy to trouble her often with his suit, so it had been easy to let their relations stand on a tentative basis until this—until Charley Thayer

came to reawaken from their death-like torpor golden dreams and youth's glad promise of love requited.

She was aroused by Iphogenia's entering to inquire if she had heard the supper bell, which had rang some time ago. She had not heard it or thought of the evening meal. She was not hungry, so she sent word to Jean not to wait for her.

"And say to her to please send for Kathy, that I must see her immediately; and ask her to come out here when she is quite through with supper; not until then, remember," she enjoined the maid as calmly and rationally as if that yellow slip of paper had never been handed to her through the window.

"Shall I take the birds to your room?" Iphogenia suggested, as she pulled down the central hanging lamp, gorgeous with decorated shade and trappings of silver chains and glass pendants.

"If you please," Ruth murmured, retreating from the light cast upon her features. With cold, tremulous hands, she wrapped a cloth about one of the cages of canaries and passed it to the maid, who held the other as Polly, grumbling peevishly, clung to her shoulder.

"Listen," Ruth repeated. "You are to send for Kathy, and when Aunt Jean is at leisure you are to ask her to come to me here; and you may keep something warm for me; I may be hungry later."

She succeeded in dismissing the faithful Iphogenia without arousing her rather obtuse curiosity.

It was when the door closed finally and she was again alone in the room brilliantly lighted and enchaining her with the vision of the objects upon

which she had lavished such labor and devotion, that realization of the crisis forced upon her came with the sharp incisive pain of bereavement or renunciation.

"Oh, last night, to-day, and then this!" she cried, wringing her hands and distraught with the pressure burdening the moment. If she went to Donald,—and go she must—it would be a public, irrevocable declaration of the bond between them. If he lived, she must marry him at once and plunge into a strange new world, for which she could not feel the slightest affinity. If he died—he died—the suggestion of such an issue chilled her heart with horror and bereavement, such a fear and revulsion, she paced the room in uncontrollable agitation; the thought of such a thing was too agonizing to entertain a moment.

So acute was the anxiety aroused by such a supposition, she restlessly drew aside the drapery from the connecting archway, ran into her library and knelt before Donald's portrait with clasped hands and pleading lips, her face upturned to the pictured countenance plainly revealed in a bar of light cast through the archway by the swinging lamp Iphogenia had lighted.

"Oh, Donald, you must not die! I cannot bear it, Donald! I will come to you; I will give my soul to save you! Oh, Donald, live until I get there and I will save you. I will not let you die!" she prayed in an abject fervor of self-immolation and forgetfulness. It seemed to her his insensate shadow heard and understood the stress which had so completely unnerved her.

"You will live and be good to me, will you not, Donald?" she appealed, with tears streaming over her cheeks, her form rent with sobs, which convulsed her breathing. "I am afraid, Donald, more afraid than ever in my life before, but you will be kind and patient, and merciful to poor little Ruth, will you not, Donald?"

Tears finally submerged utterance, and she could only sob disconsolately, each laboring breath a prayer for help and guidance on the unknown sea upon which she was about to launch her sensitive barque of life. She would not consider any contingency pointing to Donald's non-survival; in view of that, her own death seemed preferable; any arrangement except that, any sacrifice that she could lay upon any propitiating altar.

At length her tears were spent, even as the strongest emotion attains its ebb-tide point and recedes into a lifeless calm where the mind rests apathetic and reviews its stress. For some moments Ruth bowed her head as unconscious sighs followed her tempestuous sobbing in diminishing frequency; and in the lull of the spent storm of heart-bursting agitation, the still, small voice of memory intruded, reminding her what the situation portended and its lack.

"Oh, last night, to-day, and then this!" she reiterated with a wailing sigh of remembrance. Truly, Fate was throwing its shuttle fast and furious to fill out the web of her destiny! Was it last night Charley Thayer was singing and she was submerged in the bitter regret of a blighted youth; singing those dear, old heart songs, his eyes speaking his own

ardor and devotion? She bent the ear of memory to hear again his silver-luted voice sing :

“My love is young and fair,
My love hath golden hair;
And eyes so blue!
And heart so true!
That none with her compare.”

With suspended emotion, she hearkened, exploitingly, as the words of the refrain haunted her heart, as they had done in that dreaming phantasy in the afternoon, as he had sung them in the parlor the previous evening :

“I’ll live for love or die!
So what care I
Though death be nigh!
I’ll live for love or die—or die—”

The phrase kept repeating, until she instinctively clasped her hands upon her ears to drown their insistence.

“Oh, my poor heart!” she wailed in a long, shuddering sigh, whose depths of pathos was a fresh revelation.

“Ruthie!” Jean’s voice exclaimed through her muffled hearing. “My bairnie?”

Jean’s arm encircled her quivering shoulders and there was unlimited wonder and dismay in her exclamations. Instantly, Ruth assumed composure. Regard for Jean’s frail health overcame her own hysterical suffering. She arose and drew back into a deep shadow beyond the bar of light. With

supreme effort she steadied her voice to speak distinctly.

"I am weak and silly, you may think, but Auntie—I—am—in real distress. I've had a telegram from Jamie; they think Donald may die, and they have summoned me to him, and I must go by the first train."

Jean stared her amazement. "A telegram, Ruthie!" she cried, unbelievably.

"It is true, dearie," Ruth spoke, assuringly "You will find it in the studio. A man brought it some time ago; he is to spend the night with Kathy. Find the telegram, and then you will understand and help me prepare for the journey."

Jean, at last convinced that there was a message, was anxious to verify the news by reading it, and while she found and received the confirmation the telegram conveyed, Ruth came from the library, where she had regained a measure of outward calmness and a more rational view of the situation.

"I think Donald must have been guilty of some untoward negligence during the late weather that must have been intolerably severe up there, considering its bitterness here. You must be very prudent, bairnie, and let me hear from you every day. If the weather was the least bit mild I should go with you," Jean remarked, solicitously, crumpling the yellow slip in her hand, absently. With native reserve she refrained from questioning Ruth concerning her evident distress when she found her; and long ago she had given up the hope that Ruth and Donald would ever be other than congenial friends.

"Kathy will go with me, and you may come later, if I do not return immediately," Ruth explained; and soon Jean was alert to put in motion the necessary preparations for the long winter journey, to begin ere the dawn of the following day.

Ruth promised to join her as soon as she could arrange her rooms for an indefinite absence; and Jean, prompted by her sympathy for Donald and her anxiety for her bairnie's comfort during the journey, hastened away, to Ruth's infinite relief and gratitude. In that supreme moment she prayed to be alone to summon strength for the renunciation so vitally affecting her life to its remotest detail, materially and spiritually.

Dizzy and heart-weary, she set the rooms in strict order, touching the most cherished objects with caressing finger tips or clinging lips and shedding tears, listlessly.

The habits and ideals formed in long, solitary years were embraced in the suddenly forced renunciation; forced in that she was pledged to Donald and must flee the temptation of Charley Thayer's winning influence and tempestuous wooing.

She could accept any fate but that achieved through dishonor and self-protecting cruelty to another who had trusted her vows, however equivocally promised; and it was then the startling revelation was flashed into her consciousness that Edwin Phillips was justified by the fatalism of her own destiny.

"What is to be, will be. All things are pre-ordinated from the beginning; it is vain to seek happiness if it is not predestined by the power that

rules the atom and the universe," was the awed conviction that stilled the last throb of rebellion to the crisis which had enmeshed her, and set her face valiantly toward the solemn, duty-hedged way she must tread with Donald.

When she had finally arranged the hallowed rooms, placing her secret treasures under lock and key, and draping others into a sacred seclusion, and was closing the door, she paused, and wistfully alert, stood with strained attention set against the winter wind sweeping eerily over the broad roofs of Kissic-Dale; listening hungrily for some token from the forest, from its devoted denizens, to waft some comfort to her torn and suffering heart; but the runing siren of the pines was silenced by the bitter blasts of the frost king's breath; and sighing helplessly, she locked the door and took away the key.

* * * * *

Donald survived, and a few weeks later they were married in the collegiate town where he was held in much honor. The interesting pallor of a recent invalidism was a transparent medium radiating his blissful satisfaction. His mother and Jean viewed their marriage vows through tears of supreme gratitude; and far away:

"Beyond them stood the forest,
Stood the groves of singing pine-trees;
Ever singing, ever sighing,
And the pleasant water-courses,
You could trace them through the valley."

THE END.