

FINLEY MARTHA

ELSIE'S
WIDOWHOOD

Martha Finley

Elsie's Widowhood

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Martha Finley
Elsie's Widowhood / A
Sequel to Elsie's Children

*"Alone she wanders where with HIM she trod,
No arm to stay her, but she leans on God."*

— O. W. Holmes

PREFACE

It was not in my heart to give to my favorite child, Elsie, the sorrows of Widowhood. But the public made the title and demanded the book; and the public, I am told, is autocratic. So what could I do but write the story and try to show how the love of Christ in the heart can make life happy even under sore bereavement? The apostle says, "I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation;" and since trouble, trial and affliction are the lot of all in this world of sin and sorrow, what greater kindness could I do you, dear reader, than to show you where to go for relief and consolation? That this little book may teach the sweet lesson to many a tried and burdened soul, is the earnest prayer of your friend,

The Author.

CHAPTER I

*"All love is sweet,
Given or returned. Common as light is love,
And its familiar voice wearies not ever."*

– Shelley.

"Come in, Vi, darling," said Mrs. Travilla's sweet voice, "we will be glad to have you with us."

Violet, finding the door of her mother's dressing-room ajar, had stepped in, then drawn hastily back, fearing to intrude upon what seemed a private interview between her and her namesake daughter; Elsie being seated on a cushion at her mamma's feet, her face half hidden on her lap, while mamma's soft white hand gently caressed her hair and cheek.

"I feared my presence might not be quite desirable just now, mamma," Violet said gayly, coming forward as she spoke. "But what is the matter?" she asked in alarm, perceiving that tears were trembling in the soft brown eyes that were lifted to hers. "Dear mamma, are you ill? or is Elsie? is anything wrong with her?"

"She shall answer for herself," the mother said with a sort of tremulous gayety of tone and manner. "Come, bonny lassie, lift your head and tell your sister of the calamity that has befallen you."

There was a whispered word or two of reply, and Elsie rose hastily and glided from the room.

"Mamma, is she sick?" asked Violet, surprised and troubled.

"No, dear child. It is – the old story: " and the mother sighed involuntarily. "We cannot keep her always; some one wants to take her from us."

"Some one! oh who, mamma? who would dare? But you and papa will never allow it?"

"Ah, my child, we cannot refuse; and I understand now, as I never did before, why my father looked so sad when yours asked him for his daughter."

Light flashed upon Violet. "Ah mamma, is that it? and who – but I think I know. It is Lester Leland, is it not?"

Her mother's smile told her that her conjecture was correct.

Violet sighed as she took the seat just vacated by her sister, folded her arms on her mother's lap, and looked up with loving eyes into her face.

"Dear mamma, I am so sorry for you! for papa too, and for myself. What shall I do without my sister? How can you and papa do without her? How *can* she? I'm sure no one in the world can ever be so dear to *me* as my own precious father and mother. And I wish – I wish Lester Leland had never seen her."

"No, darling, we should not wish that. These things must be; God in his infinite wisdom and goodness has so ordered it. I am sad at the thought of parting with my dear child, yet how could I be so selfish as to wish her to miss the great happiness that I have found in the love of husband and children?"

Violet answered with a doubtful "Yes, mamma, but – "

"Well, dear?" her mother asked with a smile, after waiting in vain for the conclusion of the sentence.

"I am sure there is not another man in all the world like papa; not one half so dear and good and kind and lovable."

"Ah, you may change your mind about that some day. It is precisely what I used to think and say of my dear father, before I quite learned the worth of yours."

"Ah, yes, I forgot grandpa! he is – almost as nice and dear as papa. But there can't be another one, I'm very, very sure of that. Lester Leland is not half so nice. Oh I don't see how Elsie *can*!"

"How Elsie can what?" asked her father, coming in at that moment, and regarding her with a half quizzical look and smile.

"Leave you and mamma for somebody else, you dear, dear, dearest father!" returned Vi, springing up and running to him to put her arms about his neck and half smother him with kisses.

"Then we may hope to keep you for a good while yet?" he said interrogatively, holding her close and returning her caresses in most tender fatherly fashion, the mother watching them with beaming eyes.

"Yes, indeed; till you grow quite, quite tired of me, papa."

"And that will never be, my pet. Ah, little wife, how rich we are in our children! Yet not rich enough to part with one without a pang of regret. But we will not trouble about that yet, since the evil day is not very near."

"Oh isn't it?" cried Violet joyously.

"No; Lester goes to Italy in a few weeks, and it will be one, two, or maybe three years before he returns to claim his bride."

"Ah, then it is not time to begin to fret about it yet!" cried Vi, gleefully, smiles chasing away the clouds from her brow.

At her age a year seems a long while in anticipation.

"No, daughter, nor ever will be," her father responded with gentle gravity. "I hope my little girl will never allow herself to indulge in so useless and sinful a thing as fretting over either what can or what cannot be helped."

"Ah, you don't mean to let me fret at all, I see, you dear, wise old papa," she returned with a merry laugh. "Now I must find Elsie and pass the lesson over to her. For I shrewdly suspect she's fretting over Lester's expected departure."

"Away with you then!" was the laughing rejoinder, and she went dancing and singing from the room.

"The dear, merry, light-hearted child," her father said, looking after her. "Would that I could keep her always thus."

"Would you if you could, my husband?" Mrs. Travilla asked with a tender smile, a look of loving reverence, as he sat down by her side.

"No, sweet wife, I would not," he answered emphatically; "for, as Rutherford says, 'grace groweth best in winter;' and the Master says, 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.'"

"Yes; and 'we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.' Ah, we could never choose for our precious children exemption from such trials and afflictions as He may see necessary to fit them for an eternity of joy and bliss at His right hand!"

"No; nor for ourselves, nor for each other, my darling. But how well it is that the choice is not for us! How could I ever choose a single pang for you, beloved? vein of my heart, my life, my light, my joy!"

"Or I for you, my dear, dear husband!" she whispered, as he drew her head to a resting place upon his breast and pressed a long kiss of ardent affection on her pure white brow. "Ah, Edward, I sometimes fear that I lean on you too much, love you too dearly! What could I ever do without you – husband, friend, counsellor, guide – everything in one?"

Violet went very softly into her sister's dressing-room and stood for several minutes watching her with a mixture of curiosity, interest and amusement, before Elsie became aware of her presence.

She sat with her elbow on the window seat, her cheek in her hand, eyes fixed on some distant point in the landscape, but evidently with thoughts intent upon something quite foreign to it; for the color came and went on the soft cheeks with every breath, and conscious smiles played about the full red lips.

At last turning her head and catching her young sister's eye, she crimsoned to the very forehead.

"O Elsie, don't mind me!" Violet said, springing to her side and putting her arms around her.

"Are you so very happy? You look so, and I am glad for you; but – but I can't understand it."

"What, Vi?" Elsie asked, half hiding her blushing face on her sister's shoulder.

"How you can love anybody better than our own dear, darling, precious papa and mamma."

"Yes, I – I don't wonder, Vi," blushing more deeply than before, "but they are not angry – dear, dear mamma and papa – it seems to me I never loved them half so dearly before – and they say it is quite natural and right."

"Then it must be, of course; but – I wish it was somebody else's sister and not mine. I can't feel as if a stranger has as much right to my own sister as I have; and I don't know how to do without you. O Elsie, can't you be content to live on always in just the way we have ever since we were little bits of things?"

Elsie answered with an ardent embrace and a murmured "Darling Vi, don't be vexed with me. I'm sure you wouldn't if you knew how dearly, dearly I love you."

"Well, I do suppose you can't help it!" sighed Violet, returning the embrace.

"Can't help loving you? No, indeed; who could?" Elsie returned laughingly. "You wouldn't wish it, surely? You value my affection?"

"Oh you dear old goose!" laughed Violet; "but that was a wilful misunderstanding. None so stupid as those that won't comprehend. Now I'll run away and leave you to your pleasant thoughts. May I tell Molly?"

"Yes," Elsie answered with some hesitation, "she'll have to know soon. Mamma thinks it should not be kept secret, though it must be so long before –"

"Ah, that reminds me that I was to pass over to you the lesson papa just gave me – that fretting is never wise or right. I leave you to make the application," and she ran gayly away.

So joyous of heart, so full of youthful life and animation was she that she seldom moved with sedateness and sobriety in the privacy of home, but went tripping and dancing from room to room, often filling the house with birdlike warblings or silvery laughter.

Molly Percival sat in her own cheery, pleasant room, pen in hand and surrounded by books and papers over which she seemed very intent, though now and then she lifted her head and sent a sweeping glance through the open window, drinking in with delight the beauties of a panorama of hill and dale, sparkling river, cultivated field and wild woodland, to which the shifting lights and shadows, as now and again a fleecy, wind-swept cloud partially obscured the brightness of the sun, lent the charm of endless variety.

Molly's face was bright with intelligence and good humor. She enjoyed her work and her increasing success. And she had still another happiness in the change that had come over her mother.

Still feeble in intellect, Enna Johnson had become as remarkable for gentleness and docility as she had formerly been for pride, arrogance and self-will.

She had grown very fond of Molly, too, very proud of her attainments and her growing fame, and asked no greater privilege than to sit in the room with her, watching her at her work, and ever ready to wait upon and do her errands.

And so she, too, had her home at Ion, made always welcome by its large-hearted, generous master and mistress.

"Busy, as usual, I see," remarked Violet, as she came tripping in. "Molly, you are the veriest bee, and richly deserve to have your hive full of the finest honey. I'm the bearer of a bit of news very interesting to Elsie and me, in fact I suppose I might say to all the family. Have you time to hear it?"

"Yes, indeed, and to thank you for your kindness in bringing it," Molly answered, laying down her pen and leaning back in a restful attitude. "But sit down first, won't you?"

"Thank you, no; it's time to dress for dinner. I must just state the fact and run away," said Violet, pulling out a tiny gold watch set with brilliants. "It is that Elsie and Lester Leland are engaged."

"And your father and mother approve?" asked Molly in some surprise.

"Yes, of course; Elsie would never think of engaging herself to anybody without their approval. But why should they be expected to object?"

"I don't know, only – he's poor, and most wealthy people would consider that a very great objection."

Violet laughed lightly. "What an odd idea! If there is wealth on one side, there's the less need of it on the other, I should think. And he is intelligent, sensible, talented, amiable and good; rather handsome too."

"And so you are pleased, Vi?"

"Yes, no, I don't know," and the bright face clouded slightly. "I wish – but if people must marry, he'll do as well as another to rob me of my sister, I suppose."

She tripped away, and Molly, dropping her head upon her folded arms on the table, sighed profoundly.

Some one touched her on the shoulder, and her mother's voice asked, "What's the matter, Molly? You don't envy her that poor artist fellow, do you? You needn't: there'll be a better one coming along for you one of these days."

"No, no; not for me! not for me!" gasped the girl. "I've nothing to do with love or marriage, except to picture them for others. It's like mixing delicious draughts for other lips, while I – I may not taste them – may not have a single drop to cool my parched tongue, or quench my burning thirst."

At the moment life seemed to stretch out before her as a dreary waste, unbrightened by a single flower – a long, toilsome road to be trod in loneliness and pain. Her heart uttered the old plaint: "They seem to have everything and I nothing."

Then her cheek burned with shame, and penitent tears filled her eyes, as better thoughts came crowding into her mind.

Had she not a better than an earthly love to cheer, comfort, and sustain her on her way? – a love that would never fail, a Friend who would never leave nor forsake her; whose sympathy was perfect; who was always touched with the feeling of her infirmities, and into whose ear she could ever whisper her every sorrow, perplexity, anxiety, certain of help; for His love and power were infinite.

And the minor blessings of her lot were innumerable: the love of kindred and friends, and the ability to do good and give pleasure by the exercise of her God-given talents, not the least.

CHAPTER II

*"Marriage is a matter of more worth
Than to be dealt in by attorneyship."*

— Shakespeare.

Lester Leland would sail in a few weeks for Europe. He was going to Italy to study the great masters, and with the determination to spare no effort to so perfect himself in his art that his fame as the first of American sculptors should constitute a prize worthy to lay at the feet of his peerless Elsie.

Their engagement was presently made known to all the connection, and with no pledge or request of secrecy, her parents deeming such a course wisest and kindest to all parties. Elsie had many suitors, and it was but just to them to let it be understood that her selection was made.

The communication was by note to each family, which note contained also an invitation to a family dinner at Ion, given in honor of the newly affianced pair.

Of course the matter called forth more or less of discussion in each household, every one feeling privileged to express an opinion in regard to the suitableness of the proposed match.

It created some surprise at the Oaks, but as Lester was liked and his genius admired by them all, there were no unfavorable comments.

At Ashlands the news was received in much the same way, Herbert remarking, "Well, as it isn't Vi, I don't care a pin."

Everybody at Fairview was delighted. At Pinegrove it was pronounced "an odd affair," but just like the Travillas; in choosing their friends and associates they never seemed to look upon wealth as a recommendation, or the want of it as an objection.

It was at breakfast-time that the note of invitation, addressed to old Mr. Dinsmore, reached Roselands. He glanced over it, then read it aloud.

"My great-granddaughter engaged to be married!" he remarked, as he laid it down. "I may well feel myself an aged patriarch! Though 'few and evil have the days of the years of my life been,'" he added, low and musingly, ending with a heavy sigh.

"No such thing, father!" said Mrs. Conly, in a quick, impatient tone. "I'm not going to hear you talk so about yourself; you who have been always an honorable, upright, polished gentleman."

"But what a wretched *mésalliance* is this!" she commented, with covert delight, taking up the note and glancing over its contents. "A poor artist, destitute of fame and money alike, to mate with an heiress to hundreds of thousands! Why, poor as I and my children are, I should have rejected overtures from him for one of my girls with scorn and indignation."

"Which would have been a decided mistake, I think, mother," remarked Calhoun, respectfully. "Leland is a fine fellow, of good family, and very talented. He'll make his mark some day, and you may live to take pride in saying that the wife of the famous sculptor Leland is a niece of yours."

"A half grandniece," she corrected, bridling. "But I shall be an ancient dame indeed before that comes to pass."

"I have found him a very gentlemanly and intelligent fellow," remarked Arthur; "and as for money, Elsie is likely to have enough for both."

"So she is," said the grandfather.

"And he is thoroughly good, and will make a kind and appreciative husband," added Isadore.

Virginia looked scornful and contemptuous. "He's too goody-goody for me," she said, "but just like the Travillas in that, so will fit in exactly, I presume. Well, if people like to make fools

of themselves, I don't see that we need be unhappy about it. We'll accept the invitation, of course, mamma?" turning to her mother; "and the next question is, what shall we wear?"

"We must make handsome dinner toilets, of course," was the reply; "for, though none but relatives and connections are to be present, it will be a large company."

"Yes, and I've no fancy for being outshone by anybody, and Aunt Rose is sure to be very elegantly attired; Cousin Rose Lacey and Cousin Horace's wife no less so. Talk of my fondness for dress! It's small compared to theirs."

"It is principally the doing of the husbands," said Isadore. "Both – or I might say all three, for Uncle Horace is no exception – are very fond of seeing their wives well dressed."

"An excellent trait in a gentleman – the determination that his nearest female relatives shall make a good appearance," remarked Mrs. Conly, significantly, glancing from father to sons.

"But the ability to bring it about is not always commensurate with the desire, mother," said Isadore.

"Thank you, Isa," said Calhoun, following her from the room, for she had risen from the table with her last words; "my mother does not seem to comprehend the difference between our circumstances and those of some of our relatives, and I am sure has no idea of the pain her words sometimes give to grandpa, Art, and myself."

"No, Cal, or she could never be so cruel," Isa answered, laying her hand affectionately on his arm and looking lovingly into his eyes. "I know that my brothers deny themselves many an innocent gratification for the sake of their mother and sisters: and Cal, I do appreciate it."

"I know you do, Isa. Now tell me what you will want for this –"

"Nothing," she interrupted, with an arch smile up into his face. "Do you suspect me of praising your generosity for a purpose? I have everything I want for the occasion, I do assure you. But, Cal, what do you suppose Uncle Horace will think of Elsie's choice?"

"He will not object on the score of Leland's lack of wealth, unless I am greatly mistaken. But here he comes to speak for himself," he added, as a horseman was seen coming up the avenue at a brisk canter.

They were standing in the hall, but now stepped out upon the veranda to greet Mr. Dinsmore as he alighted, giving his horse in charge to a young negro who came eagerly forward to do the service, quite sure that he would be suitably rewarded.

It was the lad's firm conviction that "Massa Horace" possessed an inexhaustible supply of small coin, some of which was very apt to be transferred to the pockets of those who waited upon him.

Greetings were exchanged and Mr. Dinsmore said, "I am on my way to Ion. Suppose you order your pony, Isa, and ride over with me. They will be glad to see you. I want a few moments chat with my father, and that will give you time to don your hat and habit."

Isadore was nothing loath, and within half an hour they were on their way.

"You have heard the news?" her uncle remarked inquiringly.

"Of Elsie's engagement? Yes, sir. You were discussing it with grandpa and mamma, were you not?"

"Yes," and he smiled slightly.

"You don't think as she does about it, uncle?"

"No, I am fully satisfied; that the young man is well-bred, good, amiable, honest, intelligent, educated, talented and industrious seems to me quite sufficient. My only objection is that the engagement seems likely to be a long one. And yet that has the advantage of leaving the dear child longer in her father's house."

"Of which I for one am very glad," said Isa. "What a sweet girl she is, uncle!"

"Yes; she strongly resembles her mother in person and character; has always seemed to me a sort of second edition of her."

They found the Travillas, old and young, all out on the veranda enjoying a family chat before scattering to their various employments for the day.

Grandpa, though seldom a day passed without a visit from him to Ion, was welcomed with all the effusion and delight that might reasonably have been expected if he had not been seen for a month. His daughter's eyes shone with filial love and pleasure as they exchanged their accustomed affectionate greeting, and, as he took possession of the comfortable arm-chair Mr. Travilla hastened to offer, his grandchildren clustered about him, the little ones climbing his knees with the freedom and fearlessness of those who doubted neither their right nor their welcome.

But in the meantime Isadore was not forgotten or overlooked. She too was quite at home at Ion and always made to feel that her visits were esteemed a pleasure.

There was a slight timidity of manner, a sweet half shyness about the younger Elsie this morning that was very charming. Her eyes drooped under her grandfather's questioning look and smile and the color came and went on her fair cheek.

He said nothing to her, however, until the younger ones had been summoned away to their studies, then turned to her with the remark, "I must congratulate Lester Leland when next I see him. Well, my dear child, I trust you have not made a hasty choice?"

"I think not, grandpa; we have known each other quite intimately for several years," she answered, casting down her eyes and blushing deeply. "You do not disapprove?"

"I have no right to object if your parents are satisfied," he said. "But there, do not look uncomfortable; I really think Lester a fine fellow, and am quite willing to number him among my grandchildren."

She gave him a bright, grateful look; then she and Isa stole away together for a little girlish confidence, leaving the older people to a more business-like discussion of the matter.

On every subject of grave importance Mr. Dinsmore was taken into the counsels of his daughter and her husband. His approval on this occasion, though they had scarcely doubted it, was gratifying to both.

There were no declinations of the invitation to the family dinner-party, and at the appointed time the whole connection gathered at Ion – a large and goodly troop – the adults in drawing-room and parlors, the little ones in the nursery.

There was the Roselands branch, consisting of the old grandfather, with his daughter, Mrs. Conly, and her numerous progeny.

From the Oaks came Mr. Horace Dinsmore, Sr., and Mr. Horace Dinsmore, Jr., with their wives and a bright, beautiful, rollicking year-old boy, whom the proud young father styled Horace III.; also Molly's half brother and sister, Bob and Betty Johnson, to whom their uncle and aunt still gave a home and parental care and affection.

All the Howards, of Pinegrove, were there too – three generations, two of the sons bringing wives and little ones with them.

The Carringtons, of Ashlands, were also present; for, though not actually related to the Travillas, the old and close friendship, and the fact that they were of Mrs. Rose Dinsmore's near kindred, seemed to place them on the footing of relationship.

But we are forgetting Mrs. Travilla's sister Rose. She was now Mrs. Lacey, of the Laurels – a handsome place some four miles from Ion – and mother of a fine son, whom she and her husband brought with them to the family gathering and exhibited to the assembled company with no little joy and pride.

It remains only to mention Lester Leland and his relatives of Fairview, who were all there, received and treated as honored guests by their entertainers, with urbane politeness by all the others, except Mrs. Conly and Virginia, who saw fit to appear almost oblivious of their existence.

They, however, took a sensible view of the situation, and were quite indifferent as to the opinions and behavior toward them of the two haughty women.

No one else seemed to notice it; all was apparent harmony and good will, and Lester felt himself welcomed into the family with at least a show of cordiality from the most of the relatives of his betrothed.

She behaved very sweetly, conducting herself with a half shy, modest grace that disarmed even Aunt Conly's criticism.

A few happy weeks followed, weeks rosy and blissful with love's young dream, then Lester tore himself away and left his Elsie mourning; for half the brightness and bloom of life seemed to have gone with him.

Father and mother were very patient with her, very tender and sympathizing, very solicitous to amuse and entertain and help her to renew her old zest for simple home pleasures and employments, the old enjoyment of their love and that of her brothers and sisters.

Ah! in after days she recalled it all – especially the gentle, tender persuasiveness of her father's looks and tones, the caressing touch of his hand, the loving expression of his eye – with a strange mixture of gladness and bitter sorrow, an unavailing, remorseful regret that she had not responded more readily and heartily to these manifestations of his strong fatherly affection. There came a time when a caress from him was coveted far more than those of her absent lover.

CHAPTER III

"Faith is exceedingly charitable and believeth no evil of God."
– *Rutherford.*

Delicious September days had come; the air was soft and balmy; a mellow haze filled the woods, just beginning to show the touch of the Frost King's fingers.

The children could not content themselves within doors, and the wisely indulgent mother had given them a holiday and spent the morning with them on the banks of the lakelet and floating over its bright surface in their pretty pleasure-boat.

Returned to the house, she was now resting in her boudoir, lying back in a large easy chair with a book in her hand. Suddenly it dropped into her lap, she started up erect in her chair and seemed to listen intently.

Was that her husband's step coming slowly along the hall? It was like and yet unlike it, lacking the firm, elastic tread.

The door opened and she sprang to her feet. "Edward! you are ill!" for there was a deathly pallor on his face.

"Do not be alarmed, little wife; it is nothing – a strange pain, a sudden faintness," he said, trying to smile, but tottered and would have fallen had she not hastened to give him the support of her arm.

She helped him to a couch, placed a pillow beneath his head, rang for assistance, brought him a glass of cold water, cologne and smelling-salts from her dressing-table; doing all with a deft quickness free from flurry, though her heart almost stood still with a terrible fear and dread.

What meant this sudden seizure, this anguish so great that it had bowed in a moment the strength of a strong man? She had never known him to be seriously ill before. He had seemed in usual health when he left her for his accustomed round over the plantation only a few hours ago, and now he was nearly helpless with suffering.

Servants were instantly despatched in different directions: one to Roselands to summon Dr. Arthur Conly, another to the Oaks for her father, to whom she instinctively turned in every time of trouble, and who was ever ready to obey the call.

Both arrived speedily, to find Mr. Travilla in an agony of pain, bearing it without a murmur, almost without a moan or groan, but with cold beads of perspiration standing on his brow; Elsie beside him, calm, quiet, alert to anticipate every wish, but pale as a marble statue and with a look of anguish in her beautiful eyes. It was so hard to stand by and see the suffering endured by him who was dearer than her own life.

She watched Arthur's face as he examined and questioned his patient, and saw it grow white to the very lips.

Was her husband's doom then sealed?

But Arthur drew her and Mr. Dinsmore aside.

"The case is a bad one, but not hopeless," he said. "I am unwilling to take the responsibility alone, but must call in Dr. Barton and also send to the city for the best advice to be had there."

"We have great confidence in your skill, Arthur," Elsie said, "but let nothing be left undone. God alone can heal, but he works by means."

"And in the multitude of counsellors there is safety," added Mr. Dinsmore. "Dear daughter, 'be strong and of a good courage;' there shall no evil befall you, for your heavenly Father knows, and will do what is best."

"Yes, papa, I know, I believe it," she answered with emotion. "Ah, pray for me, that strength may be given me according to my day: and to him, my dear, dear husband; no murmuring thoughts arise in either of our hearts."

The news had flown through the house that its master and head had been stricken down with sudden, severe illness. Great were the consternation and distress among both children and servants, so beloved was he, so strange a thing did it seem for him to be ill, for he had seldom had a day's sickness in all the years that they had known him.

Elsie, Edward and Violet hastened to the door of the sick-room, begging that they might be admitted, that they might share in the work of nursing the dear invalid.

Their mamma came to them, her sweet face very pale but calm.

"No, darlings," she said in her gentle, tender tones, "it will not do to have so many in the room while your dear father is suffering so much. Your grandpa, mammy and I must be his only nurses for the present; though after a time your services may be needed."

"O mamma, it is very hard to have to stay away from him," sobbed Violet.

"I know it, dearest," her mother said, "and my heart aches for you and all my darlings; but I am sure you all love your dear father too well not to willingly sacrifice your own feelings when to indulge them might injure him or increase his pain."

"O mamma, yes, yes indeed!" they all cried.

"Well then, dears, go away now; look after the younger ones and the servants – I trust them all to your care; and when the doctors say it will do, you shall see and speak to your father, and do anything for him that you can."

So with a loving, motherly caress bestowed upon each, she dismissed them to the duties she had pointed out, and returned to her station beside her husband's couch.

Mr. Dinsmore, Arthur Conly, and Aunt Chloe were gathered about it engaged in efforts to relieve the torturing pain. His features were convulsed with it, but his eyes wandered restlessly around the room as if in search of something. As Elsie drew near they fixed themselves upon her face, and his was lighted up with a faint smile.

"Darling, precious little wife," he murmured, drawing her down to him till their lips met in a long loving kiss, "don't leave me for a moment. Nothing helps me to bear this agony like the sight of your sweet face."

"Ah, beloved, if I might bear it for you!" she sighed, her eyes filling with tears, while her soft white hand was laid tenderly upon his brow.

"No, no!" he said, "that were far worse, far worse!"

Her tears were falling fast.

"Ah, do not be so distressed; it is not unendurable," he hastened to say with a loving, tender look and an effort to smile in the midst of his agony. "And He, He is with me; the Lord my Saviour! 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' and the sense of His love is very sweet, never so sweet before."

"Thank God that it is so! Ah, He is faithful to his promises!" she said.

Then kneeling by his side she repeated one sweet and precious promise after another, the blessed words and loved tones seeming to have a greater power to soothe and relieve than anything else.

The other physicians arrived, examined, consulted, used such remedies as were known to them; everything was done that science and human skill could do, but without avail; they could give temporary relief by the use of opiates and anæsthetics, but were powerless to remove the disease which was fast hurrying its victim to the grave.

Both Mr. Travilla and Elsie desired to know the truth, and it was not concealed from them. On Mr. Dinsmore devolved the sad task of imparting it.

It was in the afternoon of the second day. The doctors had held a final consultation and communicated their verdict to him. Moved to his very heart's core at the thought of parting with his lifelong bosom friend, and more for the far sorer bereavement awaiting his almost idolized child, he waited a little to recover his composure, then entered the sick-room and drew silently near the bed.

Elsie sat close at her husband's side, one hand clasped in his, while with the other she gently fanned him or wiped the death damp from his brow. Did she know it was that? Her face was colorless, but quite calm.

Mr. Travilla was at that moment entirely conscious, and his eyes were gazing full into hers with an expression of unutterable love and the tenderest compassion.

At length they turned from her face for an instant and were uplifted to that of her father, as he stood close beside her, regarding them both with features working with emotion.

The dying man understood its cause. "Is it so, Dinsmore?" he said feebly, but with perfect composure. "Elsie, little wife," and he drew her to him, both tone and gesture full of exceeding tenderness. "O love, darling, precious one, must we part? I go to the glory and bliss of heaven, but you – " His voice broke.

Her heart seemed riven in twain; but she must comfort him. One bursting sob as she hid her face upon his breast, one silent agonized cry to Heaven for help, and lifting her head, she gave him a long look of love, then laid her cheek to his, put her arm about his neck.

"My darling, my dear, dear husband," she said in her sweetest tones, "do not fear for me, or for our children. The Lord, even Jesus, will be our keeper. Do not let the thought of us disturb you now, or damp the glad anticipation of the wondrous glory and bliss to which you go. Soon you will be with Him, 'forever with the Lord.' And how glad our darling Lily will be to see her beloved father; dear mother to recover her son; and what a little, little while it will seem till we all shall join you there, never, never to part again."

"And neither she, my dear daughter, nor her children, shall want for a father's love and care while I live, my dear friend," said Mr. Dinsmore, his voice tremulous with emotion.

"I know it, I know it, and God be thanked that I leave them in such good and loving hands," Mr. Travilla answered, looking gratefully at his friend.

"You trusted your darling child to me," he went on low and feebly and with frequent pauses for breath, "and I give her back to you. Oh she has been a dear, dear wife to me!" he exclaimed, softly stroking her hair. "God bless you, my darling! God bless you for your faithful, unselfish love! You have been the sunshine of my heart and home."

"And you, my beloved, oh what a husband you have been to me!" she sobbed, covering his face with kisses; "never one unkind or impatient word, or look, or tone, nothing but the tenderest love and care have I had from you since the hour we gave ourselves to each other. And I thought, oh I thought we had many more years to live and love together! But God's will be done!"

"Yes," he said, "His will be done with me and mine. Darling, he will never leave nor forsake you; and though I am almost done with time, we shall have all the ages of eternity to live and love together."

Silent caresses were all that passed between them for some moments; then Mr. Dinsmore inquired if his friend had any directions to give about his affairs.

"No," he said, "all that was attended to long since. Elsie knows where to find all my papers, and understands everything in regard to the property and my business matters as well as I do.

"And my peace is made with God," he continued after a pause, speaking in a sweetly solemn tone. "His presence is with me. I feel the everlasting arms underneath and around me. All my hope and trust are in the blood and righteousness of Christ, my crucified and risen Saviour. All is peace. I am a sinner saved by grace.

"Let me see my children and give them a father's blessing, and I shall have nothing more to do but fall asleep in Jesus."

Elsie and Vi were together in a room across the hall from that in which their father lay, sitting clasped in each other's arms, waiting, hoping for the promised summons to go to him when he should be sufficiently relieved to bear their presence.

Ah, there was in each young heart an unspoken fear that he would never rise from that couch of pain, for they had seemed to read his doom in the grave, anxious faces of grandfather and physicians; but oh it was too terrible a fear for either to put into words even to her own consciousness! How could life go on without the father who had thus far constituted so large a part of it to them!

A shuffling step drew near, and Aunt Chloe appeared before them, her face swollen with weeping, her eyes filled with tears.

"You's to come now, chillens."

"Oh is papa better?" they cried, starting up in eager haste to obey the summons.

The old nurse shook her head, tears bursting forth afresh. "He's mos' dar, chillens, mos' dar, whar dey don' hab no mo' pain, no mo' sickness, no mo' dyin'. I see de glory shinin' in his face; he's mos' dar."

Then as their sobs and tears burst forth, "Oh my mistis, my bressed young mistis," she cried, throwing her apron over her head, "yo' ole mammy'd die to keep massa here for yo' sake. But de Lord's will mus' be done, an' He neber makes no mistakes."

CHAPTER IV

"Death is another life."

– *Bailey.*

"Oh Elsie, Elsie, what shall we do! But it can't, it can't be true!" sobbed Violet, clinging to her sister in a heart-breaking paroxysm of grief. "Oh it will kill mamma, and we shall lose her too!"

"No, no, honey, not so," said Aunt Chloe; "my bressed young missus will lib for yo' sake, for her chillens' sake. An' you ain't gwine to lose massa: he's only gwine home a little while 'fore de rest."

"Dear Vi, we must try to be composed for both their sakes," whispered Elsie, scarcely able to speak for weeping.

"Dear bressed Lord help dem, help dese po' chillens," ejaculated Aunt Chloe. "Come, chillens, we's losin' precious time."

They wiped away their tears, checked their sobs by a determined effort, and hand in hand followed her to the sick-room.

Perfect ease had taken the place of the agonizing pain which for many hours had racked Mr. Travilla's frame, but it was the relief afforded not by returning health, but by approaching dissolution; death's seal was on his brow; even his children could read it as they gathered, weeping, about his bed.

He had a few words of fatherly counsel, of tender, loving farewell for each – Elsie, Violet, Edward: – to the last saying, "My son, I commit your mother to your tender care. You have almost reached man's estate; take your father's place, and let her lean on your young, vigorous arm; yet fail not in filial reverence and obedience; be ever ready to yield to her wise, gentle guidance."

"I will, father, I will," returned the lad in a choking voice.

"And may not I too, and Herbert, papa?" sobbed Harold.

"Yes, dear son, and all of you, love and cherish mamma and try to fill my place to her. And love and obey your kind grandpa as you have always loved and obeyed me."

One after another had received a last caress, a special parting word, till it had come to the turn of the youngest darling of all – little four-year-old Walter.

They lifted him on to the bed, and creeping close to his father, he softly stroked the dying face, and kissing the lips, the cheeks, the brow, cooed in sweet baby accents, "Me so glad to see my dear papa. Papa doin' det well now. Isn't you, papa?"

"Yes, papa's dear pet; I'm going where sickness and pain can never come. My little boy must love the dear Saviour and trust in him, and then one day he shall follow me to that blessed land. Ah, little son, you are too young to remember your father. He will soon be forgotten!"

"No, no, dearest," said his weeping wife, "not so; your pictured face and our constant mention of you shall keep you in remembrance even with him."

"Thanks, dearest," he said, turning a loving gaze on her, "it is a pleasant thought that my name will not be a forgotten sound among the dear ones left behind. We shall meet again, beloved wife, meet again beyond the river. I shall be waiting for you on the farther shore. I am passing through the waters, but He is with me, He who hath washed me from my sins in His own blood. And you, dearest wife – does He sustain you in this hour?"

"Yes," she said, "His grace is sufficient for me. Dear, dear husband, do not fear to leave me to his care."

Tears were coursing down her white cheeks, but the low, sweet tones of her voice were calm and even. She was resolutely putting aside all thought of self and the sore bereavement that awaited her and her children, that she might smooth his passage to the tomb; she would not that he should be disturbed by one anxious thought of them.

He forgot none of his household. Molly and her mother were brought in for a gentle, loving farewell word; then each of the servants.

He lingered still for some hours, but his wife never left him for an instant; her hand was clasped in his when the messenger came; his last look of love was for her, his last whisper, "Precious little wife, eternity is ours!"

Friends carried him to his quiet resting place beside the little daughter who had preceded him to the better land, and widow and children returned without him to the home hitherto made so bright and happy by his loved presence.

Elsie, leaning on her father's arm, slowly ascended the steps of the veranda, but on the threshold drew back with a shudder and a low, gasping sob.

Her father drew her to his breast.

"My darling, do not go in. Come with me to the Oaks; let me take you all there for a time."

"No, dear papa; 'twould be but putting off the evil day – the trial that must be borne sooner or later," she said in trembling, tearful tones. "But – if you will stay with me – "

"Surely, dearest, as long as you will. I could not leave you now, my poor stricken one! Let me assist you to your room. You are completely worn out, and must take some rest."

"My poor children – " she faltered.

"For their sakes you must take care of yourself," he said. "Your mamma is here. She and I will take charge of everything until you are able to resume your duties as mother and mistress."

He led her to her apartments, made her lie down on a couch, darkened the room, and sitting down beside her, took her hand in his.

"Papa, papa!" she cried, starting up in a sudden burst of grief, "take me in your arms, take me in your arms and hold me close as you used to do, as he has done every day that he lived since you gave me to him!"

"My poor darling, my poor darling!" he said, straining her to his breast, "God comfort you! May He be the strength of your heart and your portion forever! Remember that Jesus still lives, and that your beloved one is with Him, rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

"Yes, yes, but oh, the learning to live without him!" she moaned. "How can I! how can I!"

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour," he repeated in low, moved tones. "'Behold I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.' Dear daughter, my heart bleeds for you, and yet I know that He who has sent this sorrow loves you far better than I do, and He means it for good. 'Faith is the better of the free air and of the sharp winter storm in its face. Grace withereth without adversity.'"

"Yes, yes," she whispered, clinging to him. "Go on, dear papa, you bring me comfort."

"What so comforting as the love of Christ!" he went on; "the assurance that 'in all our afflictions He is afflicted!' My darling, 'the weightiest end of the cross of Christ, which is laid upon you, lieth upon your strong Saviour!'"

"And He will never let me sink," she said. "Oh what love is His! and how unworthy am I!"

Never very strong, Elsie was, as her father plainly perceived, greatly exhausted by the combined influence of the fatigue of nursing, overwhelming sorrow and the constraint she had put upon herself to control its manifestations while her husband lived.

She must have rest from every care and responsibility, must be shielded from all annoyance, and as far as possible from every fresh reminder of her loss.

For several days he watched over her with unceasing care and solicitude, doing all in his power to soothe, to comfort and console, allowing only short interviews with Rose and the children, and keeping every one else away except her old mammy.

Never had father and daughter seemed nearer and dearer to each other than in these sorrowful days. To lay her weary head upon his breast while his arms folded her close to his heart, gave some relief – more than could anything else – to the unutterable longing to feel the clasp of those other arms whose loving embrace she could never know again on earth.

But her nature was too unselfish and affectionate to allow of long indulgence in this life of inactivity and nursing of her grief. She could not resist the anxious, pleading looks of her children. She, their only remaining parent, must now devote herself to them even more entirely than had been her wont. Grandma Rose was kind as kind could be, but mamma's place could be filled by no one but herself.

"Dear papa," she said when three days had passed, "I am rested now, and you must please let me go back to my duties. My dear little ones need me; the older ones too. I cannot deprive them of their mother any longer."

"Would it not be well to give yourself one more day of rest?" he asked, gazing sadly at the wan cheeks and the mournful eyes that looked so unnaturally large. "I do not think you are strong enough yet for anything like exertion."

"I think the sweet work of comforting and caring for my darlings – his children as well as mine," she said with a tremble in her voice, "will do me good."

"It is partly for their sakes that I want you to take care of yourself," he said, putting his arm about her, while her head dropped on his shoulder. "Would it not have been *his* wish? were you not always his first care?"

She gave a silent assent, the tears coursing down her cheeks.

"And he gave you back to me, making you doubly mine – my own darling, precious child! and your life, health and happiness must be my special charge," he said, caressing her with exceeding tenderness.

"My happiness? Then, papa, you will not try to keep me from my darlings. My dear, dear father, do not think I am ungrateful for your loving care. Ah, it is very sweet and restful to lean upon you and feel the strong tender clasp of your arm! but I must rouse myself and become a prop for others to lean upon."

"Yes, to some extent – when you are quite rested. But you must bear no burdens, dear daughter, that your father can bear for you."

She looked her gratitude out of tear-dimmed eyes.

"God has been very good to me, in sparing me, my father," she said. "And my children, my seven darlings – all good and loving. How rich I ought to feel! how rich I do feel, though so sorely bereaved."

The tears burst forth afresh.

"You will let me go to them?" she said when she could speak again.

"To-morrow, if you will try to rest and gain strength to-day. I am quite sure it is what he would have wished – that you should rest a little longer. The children can come to you for an hour or two to-day."

She yielded for that time, and the next day he withdrew his opposition and himself led her down to the breakfast parlour, where all were gathered to partake of the morning meal.

CHAPTER V

*"Weep not for him that dieth,
For he hath ceased from tears."*

— Mrs. Norton.

There was much unselfish love for their mamma and for each other displayed by the young Travillas in those sad days immediately following the death of their dearly loved father.

Every heart ached sorely with its own burden of grief – excepting that of little Walter, who was too young to understand or realize his loss, yet was most solicitous to assuage that of the brothers and sisters, but especially to comfort and help "poor, dear, dear mamma."

They were filled with alarm as they saw their grandfather almost carry her to her room, then close the door upon them.

"Oh," cried Violet, clinging to her older sister, and giving way to a burst of terrified weeping, "I knew it would be so! mamma will die too. Oh mamma, mamma!"

"Dear child, no!" said Rose, laying a caressing hand on the young weeper's arm; "do not be alarmed; your dear mother is worn out with grief and nursing – she has scarcely slept for several days and nights – but is not ill otherwise, and I trust that rest and the consolations of God will still restore her to her wonted health and cheerfulness."

"O grandma," sobbed Elsie, "do you think mamma can ever be cheerful and happy again? I am sure she can never forget papa."

"No, she will never forget him, never cease to miss the delight of his companionship; but she can learn to be happy in the thought of his eternal blessedness and the sure reunion that awaits them when God shall call her home; and in the love of Jesus and of her dear children."

Rose had thrown one arm about Elsie's waist, the other round Violet, and drawn them to a seat, while Edward and the younger children grouped themselves about her, Rose and Walter leaning on her lap.

They all loved her, and now hung upon her words, finding comfort in them, though listening with many tears and sobs.

She went on to speak at length of the glory and bliss of heaven, of the joy of being with Christ and free from sin; done with sorrow and sighing, pain and sickness and death; of the delight with which their sister Lily, their Grandmother Travilla, and other dear ones gone before, must have welcomed the coming of their father; and of the glad greeting he would give to each of them when they too should reach the gate of the Celestial City.

"Yes, grandma, papa told us all to come," said little Rosie.

"I know he did, dear child; and do you know the way?"

"Yes, grandma, Jesus said, 'I am the way.' He died to save sinners, and He will save all who love Him and trust in Him alone, not thinking anything they can do is going to help to save them."

"Save them from what, darling?"

"From their sins, grandma, and from going to live with Satan and his wicked angels, and wicked people that die and go there."

"Yes, that is all so, and oh what love it was that led the dear Saviour to suffer and die upon the cross that we might live! Dear children, it was His death that bought eternal life for your beloved father and has purchased it for us all if we will but take it as His free, unmerited gift."

"But, grandma," sobbed Harold, "why didn't He let our dear papa stay with us a little longer? Oh I don't know how we can ever, ever live without him!"

This called forth a fresh burst of grief from all, even little Walter crying piteously, "I want my papa! I want my own dear papa!"

Rose lifted him to her lap and caressed him tenderly, her tears falling fast.

"Dear children," she said, as the storm of grief subsided a little, "we must not be selfish in our sorrow; we must try to rejoice that your beloved father is far, far happier than he could ever be here. I think the dear Saviour took him home because He loved him so much that He could no longer spare him out of heaven. And He, Jesus, will be your Father now even more than He was before: 'A father of the fatherless and a judge of the widows is God in his holy habitation.'"

"I'm very glad the Bible tells us that," remarked Herbert, checking his sobs. "I have heard and read the words often, but they never seemed half so sweet before."

"No," said Harold, putting an arm about him (the two were very strongly attached and almost inseparable); "and we have grandpa too: papa said he would be a father to us."

"And he will, dear children," said Rose. "I do not think he could love you much more than he does if he were really your own father, as he is your dear mamma's."

"And I am to try to fill papa's place," said Edward, with a strong but vain effort to steady his voice. "I am far from competent, I know, but I shall try to do my very best."

"And God will help you if you ask Him," said Rose; "help you to be a great comfort and assistance to your mother and younger brothers and sisters."

"Ah, if we might only go to mamma!" sighed Violet, when she and Elsie had withdrawn to the privacy of their own apartment. "Do you think we might venture now?"

"Not yet awhile, I think – I hope she is resting; and grandpa will let us know when it will not disturb her to see us."

"O Elsie, can we ever be happy again?" cried Violet, throwing herself into her sister's arms. "Where, where shall we go for comfort?"

"To Jesus and His word, dear Vi. Let us kneel down together and ask Him to bless us all and help us to say with our hearts 'Thy will be done,' all of us children and our dear precious mamma."

"Oh we can't pray for papa any more!" cried Vi, in an agony of grief.

"No, dear Vi, but he no longer needs our prayers. He is so close to the Master, so happy in being forever with Him, that nothing could add to his bliss."

Violet hushed her sobs, and with their arms about each other they knelt, while in low, pleading tones Elsie poured out their grief and their petitions into the ear of the ever compassionate, loving Saviour.

Fortunately for them in this hour of sore affliction, they were no strangers to prayer or to the Scriptures, and knew where to turn to find the many sweet and precious promises suited to their needs.

Some time was given to this, and then Elsie, mindful of the duty and privilege of filling to the best of her ability her mother's place to the little ones, went in search of them.

The tea hour brought them all together again – all the children – but father and mother were missing. Oh this gathering about the table was almost the hardest thing of all! It had been wont to be a time of glad, free, cheerful, often mirthful intercourse between parents and children; no rude and noisy hilarity, but the most enjoyable social converse and interchange of thought and feeling, in which the young people, while showing the most perfect respect and deference to their parents, and unselfish consideration for each other, were yet under no galling constraint, but might ask questions and give free expression to their opinions, if they wished; and were indeed encouraged to do so.

But what a change had a few days brought! There was an empty chair that would never again be filled by him to whom one and all had looked up with the tenderest filial love and reverence. All eyes turned toward it, then were suffused with tears, while one and another vainly strove to suppress the bursting sobs.

They could not sit down to the table. They drew close together in a little weeping group.

The grandparents came in, and Mr. Dinsmore, trying to gather them all in his arms, caressed them in turn, saying in broken, tender tones, "My dear children, my poor dear children! I will be a father to you. I cannot supply his place, but will do so as nearly as I can. You know, my darlings, my sweet Elsie's children, that I have a father's love for you."

"Yes, grandpa, we know it," "Dear grandpa, we're glad we have you left to us," sobbed one and another.

"And mamma, dear, precious mamma! O grandpa, is she sick?"

"Not exactly sick, my darlings," he said, "but very much worn out. We must let her rest."

"Can't we see her? can't we go to her?"

"Not now, not to-night, I think. I left her sleeping, and hope she will not wake for some hours."

At that the little ones seemed nearly heartbroken. "How could they go to their beds without seeing mamma?"

But Elsie comforted them. She would help mammy to put them to bed; and oh it was the best of news that dear mamma was sleeping! because if she did not she would soon be quite ill.

Molly Percival, because of her crippled condition, making locomotion so difficult, seldom joined the family at table, but took her meals in her own room, a servant waiting upon her and her mother, who, in her new devotion to poor Molly, preferred to eat with her.

The appointments of their table were quite as dainty as those of the other, the fare never less luxurious.

A very tempting repast was spread before them to-night, but Molly could not eat for weeping.

Her mother, tasting one dish after another with evident enjoyment, at length thought fit to expostulate with her.

"Molly, why do you cry so? I do wish you would stop it and eat your supper."

"I'm not hungry, mother."

"That's only because you're fretting so; and what's the use? Mr. Travilla's better off; and besides he was nothing to you."

"Nothing to me! O mother! he was so good, so kind to me, to Dick, to everybody about him. He treated me like a daughter, and I loved him as well as if he had been my own father. He did not forget you or me when he was dying, mother."

"No; and it was good of him. Still, crying doesn't do any good; and you'll get weak and sick if you don't eat."

Molly's only answer was a burst of grief. "Oh poor, poor Cousin Elsie! her heart must be quite broken, for she idolized her husband. And the girls and all of them; how they did love their father!"

The servant came in with a plate of hot cakes, and a slender girlish figure presently stole softly after, without knocking, for the door stood open, and to the side of Molly's chair. It was Violet, looking, oh so sad and sweet, so fair and spiritual in her deep mourning dress.

In an instant she and Molly were locked in each other's arms, mingling their sobs and tears together.

"I'm afraid we have seemed to neglect you, Molly dear," Violet said when she could speak, "but –"

"No, no, you have *never* done that!" cried Molly, weeping afresh. "And how could I expect you to think of me at such a time! O Vi, Vi!"

"Mamma cannot come up, for she is not – not able to leave her room, and – and O Molly, I'm afraid she's going to be sick!"

Molly tried to comfort and reassure her. "Aunt Rose was in for a while this afternoon," she said, "and she thinks it is not really sickness, only that she needs rest and – and comfort. And, Vi, the Lord will comfort her. Don't you remember those sweet words in Isaiah? – 'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted.'"

Violet had come up to see Molly, lest the poor afflicted cousin should feel neglected, while Elsie was engaged with the little ones – taking mamma's place in seeing them to bed with a little loving talk on some profitable theme.

To-night it was the glory and bliss of heaven; leaving in their young minds, instead of gloomy and dreadful thoughts of death and the cold, dark grave, bright visions of angelic choirs, of white robes and palms of victory, of golden crowns and harps, of the river of the water of life, and the beautiful trees on its banks bearing twelve manner of fruits; of papa with sweet Lily by his side, both casting their crowns at Jesus' feet and singing with glad voices, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

Leaving them at length to their slumbers, she joined Violet and Molly for a few moments; then Edward came to say that their mother was awake and grandpa had given permission for them to go to her and just bid her good-night, if they could be quite composed.

They thought they could; they would try very earnestly.

She was in her dressing-room, reclining in an easy chair, looking, oh so wan and sorrowful.

She embraced each in turn, holding them to her heart with a whispered word or two of tender mother love. "God bless you, my dear, dear children! He will be a father to the fatherless and never leave nor forsake you."

Violet dared not trust herself to speak. Elsie only murmured, "Dear, dearest mamma!" and Edward, "Darling, precious mother, don't grieve too sorely."

"The consolations of God are not small! my dear son," was all she said in reply, and they withdrew softly and silently as they had come.

The next morning and each following day they were all allowed a few moments with her, until four days had passed.

On the fifth, as we have said, she came down to the breakfast room leaning on her father's arm.

As they neared the door she paused, trembling like a leaf, and turning to him a white, anguished face.

He knew what it meant. She had not been in that room, had not taken her place at that table, since the morning of the day on which her husband was taken ill. He was with her then, in apparently perfect health; now – the places which had known him on earth would know him no more forever.

Her head dropped on her father's shoulder, a low moan escaping her pale lips.

"Dear child," he said, drawing her closer to him, and tenderly kissing her brow, "think how perfectly happy, how blest he is. You would not call him back?"

"Oh no, no!" came from the quivering lips. "'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak!'"

"Lean on your strong Saviour," he said, "and His grace will be sufficient for you."

She sent up a silent petition, then lifting her head, "I can bear it now – He will help me," she said, and suffered him to lead her in.

Her children gathered about her with a joy that was as a cordial to her fainting spirit; their love was very sweet.

But how her heart yearned over them because they were fatherless; all the more so that she found her father's love so precious and sustaining in this time of sorrow and bereavement.

He led her to her accustomed seat, bent over her with a whispered word of love and encouragement, then took the one opposite – once her husband's, now his no more.

Perhaps it was not quite so hard as to have seen it empty, but it cost a heroic effort to restrain a burst of anguish.

CHAPTER VI

*"Happy he
With such a mother! faith in womankind
Beats with his blood, and trust in all things high
Comes easy to him, and though he trip and fall
He shall not blind his soul with clay."*

– Tennyson.

Life at Ion moved on in its accustomed quiet course, Mr. Travilla's removal seeming, to outsiders, to have made very little change except that Mr. and Mrs. Dinsmore now took up their abode there for the greater part of the time, leaving the younger Horace and his wife in charge at the Oaks.

An arrangement for which Elsie was very thankful, for her father's presence and his love were as balm to her wounded spirit.

Her strongest support in this, as in every trial of her life, was in her almighty Saviour; on Him she leaned every hour with a simple childlike faith and confidence in His unerring wisdom and infinite love; but it was very sweet to lean somewhat upon the strength and wisdom of the earthly father also, and to feel that the shield of his care and protection was interposed between her and the cold world.

Both his and Rose's companionship had ever been delightful to her, and were now a great solace and pleasure.

She gave no indulgence to a spirit of repining because her chief earthly treasure had been taken from her for the remainder of her life in this world, but was filled with gratitude for those blessings that were left, ever deeming God's goodness to her far beyond her deserts.

And her own sorrow was often half forgotten in tender compassion for her fatherless children. For their sakes, as well as because such was her Christian duty, she strove after a constant abiding cheerfulness; and not without success.

But it was not sought in forgetfulness of the dear one gone. They talked freely and tenderly of him, his looks, his words, his ways; his present happiness and the joy of the coming reunion with him. He was not dead to them, but living in the blessed land where death could never enter, a land that grew more real and attractive because he was there.

Elsie found great comfort in her children – dear as her own offspring, and dearer still because they were his also. They were very good and obedient, loving her so devotedly that the very thought of grieving her was pain.

Her unselfish love seemed to call forth its counterpart in them: they vied with each other in earnest efforts to make up to her the loss of their father's love and ever watchful tender care.

They were very fond of their grandfather too, and always yielded a ready obedience to his commands or directions.

He never had shown to them the sternness that had been one of the trials of their mother's youthful days, but was patient and gentle, as well as firm and decided. Mr. Travilla's example as a father had not been wasted on him.

He was wont to say "he had three reasons for loving them – that they were the children of his friend, Elsie's children, and his own grandchildren."

It was very evident that they were very dear to him, and they loved him dearly in return.

Mr. Travilla had left no debts, no entanglements in his affairs; his will was short, plainly expressed, and its conditions such as there was no difficulty in carrying out.

Elsie and her father were joint executors, and were associated in the guardianship of the children also. The estate was left to her during her natural life, to Edward after her death.

Hitherto the education of all the sons and daughters had been carried on at home, but now Edward was to go to college.

It had been his father's decision, and his wishes and opinions were sacred; so neither the lad nor any one else raised an objection, though all felt the prospect of parting sorely just at this time.

There had been some talk of sending Harold and Herbert away also to a preparatory school; but to save them and their mother the pain of separation, Mr. Dinsmore offered to prepare them to enter college.

Elsie was in fact herself competent to the task, but gladly accepted her father's offered assistance; desiring to increase as much as possible his good influence over her boys, hoping that so they would learn to emulate all that was admirable in his character.

They were of course leading a very quiet and retired life at Ion; but with her household cares and the superintendence of the education of her younger children to attend to in addition to other and less pressing duties, Elsie was in no danger of finding time hanging heavy on her hands.

One of the numerous demands upon her maternal responsibility and affection was found in the call to cheer, comfort and console her namesake daughter under the trial of separation from her betrothed, delay in hearing from him, and a morbid remorse on account of having, as she expressed it, "troubled poor, dear papa by grieving and fretting over Lester's departure."

"Dear child," the mother said, "he sympathized with but did not blame you, and would not have you blame yourself so severely now and embitter your life with unavailing regrets. He loved you very, very dearly, and has often said to me, 'Elsie has been nothing but a blessing to us since the hour of her birth.'"

"O mamma, how sweet! Thank you for telling me," exclaimed the daughter, tears of mingled joy and sorrow filling her eyes. "He said it once to me, when I was quite a little girl – at the time grandpa – your grandpa – and Aunt Enna were hurt, and you went to Roselands to nurse her, leaving me at home to try to fill your place. Oh I shall never forget how dear and kind he was when he came home from taking you there! how he took me in his arms and kissed me and said those very words. Mamma, I cannot recall one cross word ever spoken by him to me, or to any one."

"No, daughter, nor can I; he was most kind, patient, forbearing, loving, as husband, father, master – in all the relations of life. What a privilege to have been his cherished wife for so many years!"

The sweet voice was very tremulous, and unbidden tears stole over the fair cheeks that had not quite recovered their bloom; for scarce a month had passed since the angel of death had come between her beloved and herself.

"Dear mamma, you made him very happy," whispered Elsie, clasping her close with loving caresses.

"Yes, we were as happy together, I believe, as it is possible for any to be in this world of sin and sorrow. I bless God that he was spared to me so long, and for the blessedness that now is his, and the sure hope that this separation is but for a season."

"Mamma, it is that sweet hope that keeps you from sinking."

"Yes, dearest, that and the sweet love and sympathy of Jesus. My father's and my dear children's love does greatly help me also. Ah how great is the goodness of my heavenly Father in sparing me all these! And keeping me from poverty too; how many a poor widow has the added pang of seeing her children suffering sore privations or scattered among strangers, because she lacks the ability to provide them with food and clothing."

"Mamma, how dreadful!" cried Elsie. "I had never thought of that. How thankful we ought to be that we do not have to be separated from you or from each other. To be sure Edward is going away for a time," she added, with a sigh and a tear, "but it is not to toil for a livelihood or endure privations."

"No, but to avail himself of opportunities for mental culture for which we should be grateful as still another of the many blessings God has given us. He will be exposed to temptations such as would

never assail him at home: but these he must meet, and if he does so looking to God for strength, he will overcome and be all the stronger for the conflict. And we, daughter, must follow him constantly with our prayers. Thank God that we can do that!"

To Edward himself she spoke in the same strain in a last private talk had with him the night before he went away.

"I know that you have a very strong will of your own, my dear boy," she added, "and are not easily led; and because I believe it to be your earnest desire and purpose to walk in the way of God's commands, that is a comfort to me."

"You are right in regard to both, mother," he said with emotion: "and oh I could sooner cut off my right hand than do aught to grieve you, and dishonor the memory of – of my sainted father!"

"I believe it, my son, but do not trust in your own strength. 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.'"

"Yes, mother, I know, I feel that otherwise I shall fail; but 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.' Mother," he added, turning over the leaves of his Bible (they had been reading together), "in storing my memory with the teachings of this blessed book, you have given me the best possible preparation for meeting the temptations and snares of life."

"Yes," she said, "'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path;' 'Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.' Let them ever be yours, my son; in doubt and perplexity go ever to them for direction – not forgetting prayer for the teachings of the Holy Spirit – and you cannot go far astray. Make the Bible your rule of faith and practice, bring everything to the test of Scripture. 'To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.'"

"Mother," he said, "I think I have a pretty clear idea of some of the temptations of college life: doubtless there are always a good many idle, profane, drinking, dissolute fellows among the students, but it does not seem possible that I shall ever find pleasure in the society of such."

"I hope not indeed!" she answered with emphasis. "It would be a sore grief to me. But I hardly fear it; I believe my boy is a Christian and loves purity: loves study too for its own sake. What I most fear for you is that the pride of intellect may lead you to listen to the arguments of sceptics and to examine their works. My son, if you should, you will probably regret it to your dying day. It can do you nothing but harm. If you fill your mind with such things your spiritual foes will take advantage of it to harass you with doubts and fears. 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.' He who would rob you of your faith in God and His holy word is your greatest enemy. Study the evidences of Christianity and be ever ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you."

"Mother," he said, taking her hand in his, "I will heed your counsels, but it seems to me that having seen Christianity so beautifully exemplified in your life and my father's, I can never doubt its truth and power."

Then after a pause in which tears of mingled joy and sorrow fell freely from her eyes, "Dear mother, you have given me a very liberal allowance. Can you spare it? I do not know, I have never known the amount of your income."

"I can spare it perfectly well, my son," she answered, with a tender smile, pleased at this proof of his thoughtful love. "It is the sum your father thought best to give you – for we had consulted together about all these matters. I do not wish you to feel stinted, but at the same time would have you avoid waste and extravagance, remembering that they are inconsistent with our Saviour's teachings, and that money is one of the talents for whose use or abuse we must render an account at the last."

CHAPTER VII

*"But O! for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still."*

– Tennyson.

It was a chill November day, a day of lowering clouds, wind, rain, sleet and snow.

Arthur Conly coming into the drawing-room at Ion and finding its mistress there alone, remarked as he shook hands with her, "The beginning of winter, Cousin Elsie! It is setting in early. It froze hard last night, and the wind to-day is cutting."

"Yes," she said, "even papa and my two big, hardy boys found a short walk quite sufficient to satisfy them to-day. But you poor doctors can seldom consult your own comfort in regard to facing wind and storm. Take this easy chair beside the fire."

"Thank you, no; I shall find it quite warm enough on the sofa beside you. I am glad to have found you alone, for I want to have a little semi-confidential chat."

She gave him an inquiring look.

"I am a little uneasy about grandpa," he went on: "he seems feeble and has a troublesome cough, and I think should have a warmer climate through the coming winter. I think too, cousin, that such a change would be by no means hurtful to you or your children," he continued, regarding her with a grave, professional air: "you are a trifle thin and pale, and need something to rouse and stimulate you."

"What is it you wish, Arthur?" she asked, with a slight tremble in her voice.

"I should be glad if you would go to Viamede for the winter and take our grandfather with you."

He paused for an answer.

Her face was turned toward a window looking out upon the grounds; her eyes rested with mournful gaze upon a low mound of earth within a little enclosure not many rods away.

Arthur read her thoughts, and laying a gentle hand on hers, said in low compassionate tones:

"He is not there, cousin, and his spirit will be as near you in your Lily's birthplace, and your own, as here. Is not that home also full of pleasant memories of him?"

She gave a silent assent.

"And you can take all your other dear ones with you."

"Except Edward."

"Yes, but in his case it will only involve a little delay in receiving letters. Your father and Aunt Rose I am certain will go with you. And our old grandpa – "

"Is a dear old grandpa, and must not suffer anything I can save him from," she interrupted.

"Yes, Arthur, I will go, if – if my father approves and will accompany us, of which I have no doubt."

He thanked her warmly. "It may be the saving of grandpa's life," he said.

"He is getting very old, Arthur."

"Yes, past eighty, but with care he may live to be a hundred; he has a naturally vigorous constitution. And how he mellows with age, Elsie! He has become a very lovely Christian, as humble and simple-hearted as a little child."

"Yes," she said turning toward him eyes filled with glad tears, "and he has become very dear to me. I think he loves us all – especially papa – and that we shall have a happy winter together."

"I don't doubt it; in fact, I quite envy you the prospect."

"Oh could you not go with us to stay at least a few weeks? We should all be so very glad to have you."

"Quite impossible," he said, shaking his head rather ruefully. "I'm greatly obliged, and should be delighted to accept your invitation, but it isn't often a busy doctor can venture to take such a holiday."

"I'm very sorry. But you think there is no doubt that grandpa will be willing to go?"

"He'll not hesitate a moment if he hears Uncle Horace is to go. He clings to him now more than to any other earthly creature."

"Papa is in the library; shall we join him and hear what he thinks of your plan?" said Elsie, rising.

"By all means," returned Arthur, and they did so.

Mr. Dinsmore highly approved, as did Rose also on being called in to the conference.

"How soon do you think of starting?" she asked, looking at Elsie, then at her husband.

"Papa should decide that," Elsie answered, a slight tremble in her voice, thinking of the absent one to whom that question should have been referred were his dear presence still with them.

She caught a look of tenderest love and sympathy from her father. How well he understood her! How ever thoughtful of her feelings he was!

"I think the decision should rest with you, daughter," he said; "though I suppose the sooner the better."

"Yes," said Arthur; "for grandpa especially."

"I presume no great amount of preparation will be needful, since it is but a change from one home to another," suggested Rose.

"No," said Elsie, "and I think a week will suffice for mine. Papa, can business matters be arranged in that time?"

"Oh yes! so we will say this day week."

The door had opened very quietly a few moments before, admitting little Rose and Walter, and stealing softly to their mother's side they were now leaning on her lap, looking from one to another of their elders and listening with some curiosity to their conversation.

"What is it, mamma?" asked Rosie.

"We are talking of going to Viamede, dear."

"Oh that will be nice!"

"But we tan't doe wis-out papa," prattled Walter; "tan we, mamma? I wish my dear papa tum back quick."

Rosie saw the pain in mamma's dear face, the tears in her eyes as she pressed a silent kiss on the brow of the innocent questioner, and with ready, loving tact she seized the little fellow's hand, and, drawing him away, "Come, Walter," she said, "let us go and tell the rest about it."

They ran away together, and Arthur rose to take leave.

"Am I imposing upon your unselfish kindness of heart, my dear cousin?" he asked in an undertone, taking Elsie's hand in his; "is it too great a sacrifice of your own feelings and inclinations?"

She answered with a text, as was not unusual with her, "'Even Christ pleased not himself.'"

Mr. and Mrs. Dinsmore were conversing apart at the moment.

"Perhaps," returned Arthur musingly, "we might make some other arrangement; grandpa might be willing to go without – "

"No, no," she interrupted, "I could not think of giving him the pain of separation from papa, nor could I bear that myself. But do not trouble about me; there will be much pleasure mingled with the pain – pleasure in ministering to the comfort and happiness of the dear old grandpa, and in seeing Viamede and the old servants. I have always loved both the place and them."

Her father had caught a part of her words.

"Separation from me?" he said, turning toward her, "who talks of that? It shall not be with my consent."

"No, papa, nor with mine, for either grandpa or myself," she said with a look of affection and a slight smile. "Arthur, will you carry a message from me to Isa?"

"With pleasure."

"Then tell her I should be very glad to have her spend the winter at Viamede with us, if she feels that she would enjoy the trip and the quiet life we shall lead there. There will, of course, be no gayeties to tempt a young girl."

"Thank you," he said, his eyes shining; "I have not the slightest doubt that she will be delighted to accept the invitation. And, now I think of it, Aunt Enna and Molly will of course find a home with us at Roselands while you are away."

"No, no, they will go with us," returned Elsie quickly, "unless indeed they prefer to be left behind."

Arthur suggested that they would be a great charge, especially upon the journey, but the objection was promptly overruled by Mr. Dinsmore, Rose and Elsie.

Molly must go, they all said; she would be sure to enjoy the change greatly: and the poor child had so few pleasures; and the same was true of Enna also: she had never seen Viamede, and could not fail to be delighted with its loveliness; nor would it do to part her from Molly, who was now her chief happiness.

"I trust they will appreciate your kindness; Molly will, I am sure," Arthur said as he went away.

As the door closed on him, Elsie glided to the window and stood in a pensive attitude gazing out upon that lowly mound, only faintly discernible now in the gathering darkness, for night was closing in early by reason of the heavy clouds that obscured the sky.

A yearning importunate cry was going up from her almost breaking heart. "My husband, oh my husband, how can I live without you! Oh to hear once more the sound of your voice, to feel once again the clasp of your arm, the touch of your hand!"

A sense of utter loneliness was upon her.

But in another moment she felt herself enfolded in a strong yet tender embrace, a gentle caressing hand smoothing her hair.

"My darling, my precious one, my own beloved child!" murmured her father's voice in its most endearing accents, as he drew her head to a resting place on his breast.

She let it lie there, her tears falling fast.

"I fear this going away is to be too great a trial to you," he said.

"No, papa, but I am very weak. Forgive my selfish indulgence of my sorrow."

"My darling, I can sympathize in it, at least to some extent. I remember even yet the anguish of the first months of my mourning for your mother."

"Papa, I feel that my wound can never heal; it is too deep; deep as the roots of my love for him, that had been striking farther and farther into the soil with every one of the many days and years that we lived and loved together."

"I fear it may be so," he answered with tenderest compassion; "yet time will dull the edge of your sorrow; you will learn to dwell less upon the pain of the separation, and more upon his present happiness and the bliss of the reunion that will be drawing nearer and nearer with each revolving day. Dear one, this aching pain will not last forever; as Rutherford says, 'Sorrow and the saints are not married together; or suppose it were so, Heaven would make a divorce.'"

"They are very sweet words," she murmured, "and sweeter still is the assurance given us in the Scriptures that 'our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'"

"Yes," said Rose, coming to her other side and speaking in low, tender tones, "dear Elsie, let those words comfort you; and these others also, 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.' But for that and similar texts I should wonder much that trial of any kind was ever permitted to come nigh one who has been a loving disciple of Jesus since her very early years."

"Was it that I loved my husband too well?" Elsie queried in tremulous tones. "I do not think I made an idol of him; for inexpressibly dear as he was, the Master was dearer still."

"If that be so you did not love him – your husband – too well," her father answered.

"I hear my children's voices; I must not let them see their mother giving way to grief like this," she said, lifting her head and wiping away her tears.

They came in – the whole six – preceded by a servant bearing lights.

There was a subdued eagerness about the younger ones, as they hastened to their mother asking, "Mamma, is it really so – that we are going to Viamede?"

"Yes, dears, I believe it is quite settled. Grandpa approves, and I hope you are all pleased."

"Oh yes, yes!"

"If you are, mamma," the older girls said, noticing with affectionate concern the traces of tears on her face; "if not, we prefer to stay here."

"Thank you, my darlings," she answered, smiling affectionately upon them; "for several reasons I shall be glad to go, the principal being that our poor old grandfather needs the warm climate he will find there; and of course we could not think of letting him go alone."

"Oh no!" they said; "he could not do without grandpa, and neither could we."

"And neither could grandpa do without his eldest daughter, or her children," added Mr. Dinsmore playfully, sitting down and taking Walter upon one knee, Rosie upon the other. "So we will all go together, and I trust will have a happy time in that lovely land of fruits and flowers."

They had not seen it for several years, not since Walter was a babe and Rosie so young that she remembered but little about it. Both were delighted with the prospect before them, and plied their grandpa with many eager questions, while their mother looked on with growing cheerfulness, resolutely putting aside her grief that she might not mar their pleasure.

The other four had gathered about her, Vi on a cushion at her feet, Elsie seated close on one side, Herbert standing on the other, and Harold at the back of her chair, leaning fondly over her, now touching his lips to her cheek, now softly smoothing her shining hair.

"Dear mamma, how beautiful you are!" he whispered.

"You might as well say it out loud," remarked Herbert, overhearing the words, "because everybody knows it and nobody would want to contradict you."

"We are very apt to think those beautiful whom we love," their mother said with a pleased smile, "and the love of my children is very sweet to me."

"Yes, mamma, but you *are* beautiful," insisted Harold; "it isn't only my love that makes you look so to me, though I do love you dearly – dearly."

"Mamma knows we all do," said Violet; "we should be monsters of ingratitude if we did not."

"As I should be if I were not filled with thankfulness to God that he has blessed me with such dutiful and affectionate children," added the mother.

"Mamma, how soon will we go to Viamede?" asked Violet; and that question being answered, another quickly followed. "We will not leave Molly behind?"

"No, certainly not; nor Aunt Enna, if they will kindly consent to go with us."

"Consent, mamma! I'm sure they cannot help being delighted to go. May I run and tell them?"

"Yes, my child; I know you always enjoy being the bearer of pleasant news."

Molly heard it with great pleasure and gratitude to her cousin; Enna with even childish delight. Neither had a thought of declining.

Isadore Conly, also, was very much pleased, and sure she should vastly enjoy the winter with her relations, spite of many an envious prognostication to the contrary on the part of her mother and Virginia. They would not go on any account, they averred, and were glad they had been overlooked in the invitation – mean as it was in Elsie not to include them – for life at Viamede could not fail to be a very dull affair for that winter at least.

But Elsie, of course, heard none of these unkind remarks, and seeing the happiness she was conferring not only upon more distant relations but upon her children also, who showed increasing pleasure in the thought of the expected visit to their lovely southern home as the time drew near, she felt fully repaid for the sacrifice of feeling she was making.

CHAPTER VIII

*"'Tis easier for the generous to forgive
Than for offence to ask it."*

– Thomson.

The only noteworthy incident of the journey of our friends took place at New Orleans, where they halted for a few days of rest to all, and sight-seeing on the part of the young people.

Mr. Horace Dinsmore, who had some business matters to attend to in connection with Elsie's property in the city, was hurrying back to his hotel one afternoon, when a beggar accosted him, asking for a little help, holding out a very forlorn hat to receive it.

There seemed something familiar in the voice, and Mr. Dinsmore stopped and looked earnestly at its owner.

A seamed, scarred face, thin, cadaverous, framed in with unkempt hair and scraggy beard – an attenuated form clothed in rags – these were what met his view, surely for the first time, for there was nothing familiar about either.

No, not for the first time; for, with a start of recognition and a muttered curse, the mendicant dropped his hat, then stooped, hastily snatched it from the ground, and rushed away down an alley.

"Ah, I know you now!" cried Mr. Dinsmore, giving instant pursuit.

He could not be mistaken in the peculiarly maimed hand stretched out to regain the hat.

Its owner fled as if for his life, but, weak from disease and famine, could not distance his pursuer.

At last, finding the latter close at his heels, he stopped and faced him, leaning, panting and trembling, against a wall.

"George Boyd, is it you? reduced to such a condition as this!" exclaimed Mr. Dinsmore, eying him searchingly.

"You've mistaken your man, sir," panted the fugitive. "My name's Brown – Sam Brown at your service."

"Then why did you run away from me?" coolly inquired the gentleman. "No, I cannot mistake that hand," pointing to the maimed member.

"And you'd like to hang me, I suppose," returned the other bitterly. "But I don't believe you could do it here. Beside, what's the use? I'll not cumber the ground much longer, can't you see that? Travilla himself," he added, with a fierce oath, "can hardly wish me anything worse than I've come to. I'm literally starving – can hardly get enough food to keep soul and body together from one day to another."

"Then come with me and I will feed you," Mr. Dinsmore said, his whole soul moved with pity for the miserable wretch. "Yonder is a restaurant; let us go there, and I will pay for all you can eat."

"You don't mean it?" cried Boyd in incredulous surprise.

"I do; every word of it. Will you come?"

"A strange question to ask a starving man. Of course I will; only too gladly."

They crossed the street, entered the eating-house, and Mr. Dinsmore ordered a substantial meal set before Boyd. He devoured it with wolfish voracity, his entertainer watching him for a moment, then turning away in pained disgust.

Time after time plate and cup were filled and emptied, but at last he declared his appetite fully satisfied. Mr. Dinsmore paid the reckoning, and they passed out into the street together.

"Well, sir," said Boyd, "I'm a thousand times obliged. Shall be more so if you will accommodate me with a small loan – or gift if you like, for I haven't a cent in the world."

"How much do you think you deserve at my hands?" asked Mr. Dinsmore somewhat severely, for the request seemed to him a bold one under the circumstances.

"I leave that to your generosity, sir," was the cool reply.

"Which you expect to be great enough to allow you to escape the justice that should have been meted out to you years ago?"

"I've never harmed a hair of your head nor of any one belonging to you; though I owe a heavy scare to both you and Travilla," was the insolent rejoinder.

"No, your imprisonment was the due reward of your lawless and cruel deeds."

"Whatever I may have done," retorted the wretch with savage ferocity, "it was nothing compared to the injury inflicted upon me. I suffered inconceivable torture. Look at me and judge if I do not speak the truth; look at these fearful scars, these almost blinded eyes." He finished with a torrent of oaths and curses directed at Travilla.

"Stop!" said Mr. Dinsmore authoritatively, "you are speaking against the sainted dead, and he entirely innocent of the cause of your sufferings."

"What! is he dead? When? where? how did he die?"

"At Ion, scarce two months ago, calmly, peacefully, trusting with undoubting faith in the atoning blood of Christ."

Boyd stood leaning against the outer wall of the restaurant; he was evidently very weak; he seemed awe-struck, and did not speak again for a moment; then, "I did not know it," he said in a subdued tone. "So he's gone! And his wife? She was very fond of him."

"She was indeed. She is in this city with her family, on her way to Viamede."

"I'm sorry for her; never had any grudge against her," said Boyd. "And my aunt?"

"Is still living and in good health, but beginning to feel the infirmities of age. She has long mourned for you as worse than dead. You look ill able to stand; let me help you to your home."

"Home? I have none." There was a mixture of scorn and despair in the tones.

"But you must have some lodging place?"

"Yes, sometimes it is a door-step, sometimes a pile of rotten straw in a filthy cellar. On second thoughts, Dinsmore, I rather wish you'd have me arrested and lodged in jail," he added with a bitter laugh. "I'd at least have a bed to lay my weary limbs upon, and something to eat. And before the trial was over I'd be beyond the reach of any heavier penalty."

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