

FINLEY MARTHA

ELSIE AT
HOME

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Elsie at Home

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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	12
CHAPTER IV	15
CHAPTER V	19
CHAPTER VI	23
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	26

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CHAPTER I

The shades of evening were closing in upon a stormy March day; rain and sleet falling fast while a blustering northeast wind sent them sweeping across the desolate-looking fields and gardens, and over the wet road where a hack was lumbering along, drawn by two weary-looking steeds; its solitary passenger sighing and groaning with impatience over its slow progress and her own fatigue.

"Driver," she called, "are we ever going to arrive at Fairview?"

"One o' these days, I reckon, ma'am," drawled the man in reply. "It's been a dreadful tedious ride for you, but a trifle worse for me, seein' I get a lot more o' the wet out here than you do in thar."

"Yes," she returned in a tone of exasperation, "but I am a weak, ailing woman and you a big, strong man, used to exertion and exposure." The sentence ended in a distressing fit of coughing that seemed to shake her whole frame.

"I'm right sorry fur ye, ma'am," he said, turning a pitying glance upon her, "but just hold on a bit longer and we'll be there. We're e'n a'most in sight o' the place now. Kin o' yourn and expecting ye, I s'pose?"

"It is the home of my daughter – my only child," she returned, bridling, "and it will be strange indeed if she is not glad to see the mother whom she has not seen for years."

"Surely, ma'am; and yonder's the house. We'll be there in five minutes – more or less."

His passenger looked eagerly in the direction indicated.

"A large house, isn't it?" she queried. "One can't see much out of this little pane of glass and through the rain and mist."

"It's a fine place, ma'am, and a good, big house," he returned. "I wouldn't mind ownin' such a place myself. It's grand in the summer time, and not so bad to look at even now through all this storm o' mist, hail, and rain."

"Yes; I dare say," she said, shivering; "and if it was little better than a hovel I'd be glad to reach it and get out of this chilling wind. It penetrates to one's very bones."

She drew her cloak closer about her as she spoke, and as the hack turned in at the avenue gates took up her satchel and umbrella in evident haste to alight.

In the home-like parlour of the mansion they were approaching sat a lovely-looking lady of mature years, a little group of children gathered about her listening intently and with great interest to a story she was telling them, while a sweet-faced young girl, sitting near with a bit of tatting in her hands, seemed an equally interested hearer, ready to join in the outburst of merriment that now and again greeted something in the narrative.

"There is a hack coming up the avenue, Eva. Can we be going to have a visitor this stormy day?" suddenly exclaimed the eldest boy, glancing out of the window near where he stood. "Yes, it has come to a standstill at the foot of the veranda steps, and the driver seems to be getting ready to help someone out."

"A lady! Why, who can she be?" cried Eric, the next in age, as the hack door was thrown open and the driver assisted his passenger to alight, while Evelyn laid down her work and hastened into the hall to greet and welcome the guest, whoever she might be; for the Fairview family, like nearly every other in that region of country, was exceedingly hospitable.

A servant had already opened the outer door and now another stepped forward to take the lady's satchel and umbrella.

"Who can she be?" Evelyn asked herself as she hastily crossed the veranda and held out a welcoming hand with a word or two of pleasant greeting.

"Is it you, Evelyn?" asked the stranger in tones that trembled with emotion. "And do you not know me – your own mother!"

"Mother; oh, mother, can it be you?" cried Evelyn, catching the stranger in her arms and holding her fast with sobs and tears and kisses. "I had not heard from you for so long, and have been feeling as if I should never see you again. And oh, how thin and weak you look! You are sick, mother!" she added in tones of grief and anxiety, as she drew her into the hall, where by this time the rest of the family – Grandma Elsie, and Mr. and Mrs. Leland and their children – were gathered.

"Sister Laura! is it possible! Welcome to Fairview," was Mrs. Leland's greeting, accompanied by a warm embrace.

"Laura! we did not even know you were in America!" Mr. Leland said, grasping her hand in brotherly fashion. "And how weary and ill you are looking! Let me help you off with your bonnet and cloak and to a couch here in the parlour."

"Thank you; yes, I'll be very glad to lie down, for I'm worn out with my journey and this troublesome cough," she said, struggling with a renewed paroxysm and gasping for breath. "But my luggage and –"

"We'll attend to all that," he said, half carrying her to the couch where his wife and her mother were arranging the pillows for her comfort, and laying her gently down upon it.

"Oh, mother; my poor dear mother!" sighed Evelyn, as she leaned over her, smoothing her hair with caressing hand, "it breaks my heart to see you looking so weary and ill. But we will soon nurse you back to health and strength – uncle and aunt and I."

"I hope so, indeed," Mrs. Leland said in her sweet, gentle tones. "You have had most unpleasant weather for your journey, Laura, so that it is not to be wondered at that you are exhausted. You must have some refreshment at once," and with the last word she hastened away in search of it.

"And here is something to relieve that dreadful cough," said Mrs. Travilla, presenting herself with a delicate china cup in her hand.

Evelyn introduced the two ladies, and her mother, being assured that the cup contained nothing unpleasant to the taste, quickly swallowed its contents, then lay back quietly upon her pillows, still keeping fast hold of her daughter's hand, while Grandma Elsie, giving the cup to a servant to carry away, resumed her easy chair on the farther side of the room – near enough to be ready to render assistance should it be needed, yet not so near as to interfere with any private talk between the long separated mother and daughter – and her grandchildren again gathered about her. But they seemed awed into silence by the presence of the stranger invalid, whom they gazed upon with pitying curiosity, while her attention seemed equally occupied with them.

"Your uncle's children?" she asked of Evelyn in a tone scarcely louder than a whisper.

"Yes, mamma. Edward, the eldest, you saw when he was a mere baby boy. Eric, the next, is papa's namesake. The eldest of the little girls – she is in her fifth year – is Elsie Alicia, named for her two grandmothers; we call her Alie. And the youngest – that two-year-old darling – we call Vi. She is named for her aunt, Mrs. Raymond."

"And Mrs. Travilla lives here with her daughter?"

"No; she is paying a visit of a few days, as she often does since her daughter-in-law, Aunt Zoe, has undertaken the most of the housekeeping at Ion."

"She certainly looks very young to be mother and grandmother to so many," sighed the invalid, catching sight of her own sallow, prematurely wrinkled face reflected in a large mirror on the opposite side of the room. "But she has had an easy life, surrounded by kind, affectionate, sympathising friends, while I – miserable woman that I am – have been worried, brow-beaten, robbed, till nothing is left me but ill-health and grinding poverty."

"Mother, mother dear, don't talk so while I am left you and have enough to keep us both, with care and economy," entreated Evelyn in a voice half choked with sobs. "It will be joy to me to share with you and do all I can to make your last days comfortable and happy."

"Then you haven't lost all your love for your mother in our years of separation?"

"No, no indeed!" answered Evelyn earnestly. But there the conversation ended for the time, Mrs. Leland returning with the promised refreshment. It seemed to give some strength to the invalid, and after taking it she was, by her own request, assisted to her room, an apartment opening into that of her daughter, with whose good help she was soon made ready for her bed, the most comfortable she had lain upon for weeks or months, she remarked, as she stretched her tired limbs upon it.

"I am very glad you find it so, mother dear," said Evelyn. "And now, if you like, I will unpack your trunks and arrange their contents in wardrobe, bureau drawers, and closet."

"There is no hurry about that, and isn't that your supper bell I hear?"

"Yes'm, suppah's on de table, an' I's come to set yere and 'tend to you uns while Miss Eva gwine eat wif de res' of de folks," said a neatly dressed, pleasant-faced, elderly coloured woman, who had entered the room just in time to hear the query in regard to the bell. "But, missus, Miss Elsie she tole me for to ax you could you take somethin' mo'?"

"She says Aunt Elsie wants to know could you eat something more, mother dear?" explained Eva, seeing a puzzled look on her mother's face.

"Oh, no! that excellent broth fully satisfied my appetite," replied Laura. "Go and get your supper, Eva, child, but come back when you have finished; for we have been so long separated that now I can hardly bear to have you out of my sight."

"Oh, mother, how sweet to hear you say that!" exclaimed Evelyn, bending down to bestow another ardent caress upon her newly restored parent. "Indeed, I shall not stay away a moment longer than necessary."

The new arrival and her sad condition were the principal topics of conversation at the table.

"I am so glad we have such a good doctor in Cousin Arthur," said Evelyn. "I hope he can cure mamma's cough. I wish the weather was such that we could reasonably ask him to come and see her to-night," she added with a sigh.

"Yes," said her uncle, "but as it is so bad I think we will just give him a full account of her symptoms and ask his advice through the telephone. Then he will tell us what would better be done to-night, and call in to see her to-morrow morning."

The ladies all agreed that that would be the better plan and it was presently carried out. The doctor would have come at once, in spite of the storm, had it seemed necessary, but from the account given he deemed it not so.

"I will come directly after breakfast to-morrow morning," he concluded, after giving his advice in regard to what should be done immediately.

"That is satisfactory; and now I will go at once to mamma and carry out his directions for to-night," said Evelyn.

"Remembering that we are all ready to assist in any and every possible way," added her uncle, smiling kindly upon her.

"Yes, indeed!" said Grandma Elsie; "and you must not hesitate to call upon me if you need help."

"No, no, mother dear. I put my veto upon that!" exclaimed Mrs. Leland. "You are not a really old-looking woman yet, but are not as vigorous as you were some years ago, and I cannot afford to let you run any risk of diminishing your stock of health and strength by loss of sleep or over-exertion. Call upon me, Eva, should you need any assistance."

"Very well, daughter, I shall not insist upon the privilege of losing sleep," returned Grandma Elsie with a smile, "but may perhaps be permitted to make myself slightly useful during the day."

"Yes, slightly, mother dear, and at such time as you would not be otherwise improving by taking needed rest or recreation," Mrs. Leland replied as she hastened away with Eva, with the purpose to make sure that her newly arrived guest lacked for nothing which she could provide.

"At last, Evelyn, child! I suppose you have not been long gone, but it seemed so to my impatience," was Laura's salutation as Eva reentered her room.

"It is sweet to hear you say that, mother dear; sweet to know that you love me so," Evelyn said in moved tones, bending down to press a kiss on the wan cheek, "and I mean to fairly surfeit you with my company in the days and weeks that lie before us."

"And she only waited with the rest of us to consult our good doctor for you, Laura," added Mrs. Leland. "He has prescribed a sleeping potion for to-night, and will call to see you and prescribe further in the morning."

"I think I should have been consulted," returned the invalid in a tone of irritation; "my money is all gone and he may never get his pay."

"Oh, don't trouble about that!" exclaimed Mrs. Leland and Evelyn in a breath, the former adding, "His charges are not heavy and it will be strange indeed if we cannot find a way to meet and defray them."

"Of course we can and will, and you are not to concern yourself any more about it, mamma," added Evelyn in a tone of playful authority. "What would be the use when you have a tolerably rich, grown-up daughter, whose principal business and pleasure it will be to take care of and provide for her long-lost, but now happily recovered mother. And here comes uncle with your sleeping potion," she added, as Mr. Leland at that moment appeared in the doorway, cup in hand.

"Here is something which I hope will quiet your cough, Laura," he said, coming to the bedside. "It is not bad to take, either, and will be likely to secure you a good night's rest."

"I don't know," she returned doubtfully, eyeing the cup with evident disfavour, "I was never good at dosing."

"You prefer lying awake, racked with that distressing cough?"

"No," she sighed, taking the cup from his hand, "even quite a bad dose would be better than that. And it was not so bad after all," she concluded as she returned the cup, after swallowing its contents.

"Glad to hear you say so," he said in reply. "And now take my further advice – lie still and go to sleep, leaving all the talk with Eva till to-morrow. Good-night to you both." And he left the room, followed presently by his wife, who lingered only until she had made sure that all the wants of the invalid were fully supplied.

Laura had already fallen into a sweet sleep, under the soothing influence of the draught, and Eva presently stretched herself beside her, and with a heart filled with contending emotions – love for this her only remaining parent, joy in their reunion, sorrow and care in view of her evident exhaustion and ill-health, and plans for making her remaining days happy – lay awake for a time silently asking for guidance and help from on high, then fell into dreamless, refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER II

Morning found the invalid somewhat refreshed by her night's rest, yet too languid and feeble to leave her room, and her day was spent reclining upon a couch, with her daughter by her side. Dr. Conly made an early call, prescribed, talked to her and Eva in a cheerful strain, saying he hoped that rest and a change of weather would soon bring her at least a measure of relief and strength; but in reply to the anxious questioning of Mr. and Mrs. Leland, he acknowledged that he found her far gone in consumption, and did not think she could last many weeks.

"Poor dear Eva! how very sad it will be for her to lose her mother so soon after recovering her!" sighed Mrs. Leland. "I think we must let her remain in ignorance of the danger for a time at least."

"Yes," assented her husband; "though we must not neglect any effort in our power to prepare Laura for the great change which awaits her," he added with a look of anxiety and care.

"Nor fail to offer up earnest petitions for her at the Throne of Grace," said Grandma Elsie, in her low, sweet tones. "Oh, what a blessing, what a comfort it is that we may take there all our fears, cares, and anxieties for ourselves and others! And how precious the Saviour's promise, 'If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that you shall ask, it shall be done for you of my Father which is in heaven!'"

"Yes, mother dear," assented Mrs. Leland, "and we will claim and plead it for our poor dear Laura, and for Eva, that she may be sustained under the bereavement which awaits her."

"Yes," said Dr. Conly, "and there are many of our friends who will be ready to join us in the petition. I am going now to Woodburn – the captain having telephoned me that one of the servants is ill – and we all know that he and his will be full of sympathy for Eva and her sick mother."

"No doubt they will," said Grandma Elsie, "both as Christians and as warm friends of Evelyn. And it will be quite the same with our other friends."

With that the doctor bade good-morning and took his departure in the direction of Woodburn. The family there were surprised and interested by the news he had to tell of the arrival at Fairview, and of Laura's feeble and ailing condition. They were evidently full of sympathy for both mother and daughter, and had any help been needed would have given it gladly. But the doctor assured them that rest and quiet were at present the sick one's most pressing need.

"Poor dear Eva! I am so sorry for her!" sighed Lucilla when the doctor had gone. "Papa, don't you think I might make myself of use helping her with the nursing?"

"Not at present, daughter; though I can testify to your ability in that line, and your services may possibly be needed at some future time," he answered with an affectionate look and smile.

"Yes, Lu is a capital nurse, I think," said Violet, "but whatever she does is sure to be well done."

"Thank you, Mamma Vi," returned the young girl, blushing with pleasure; "it is most kind in you to say that; but if I am thorough in anything, most of the credit belongs to my father, who has never allowed me to content myself with a slovenly performance of my duties."

"No," he said, "what is worth doing at all is worth doing well; that is a lesson I have endeavoured to impress upon each one of my children, and one which I think they have all learned pretty thoroughly."

"And they have always had the teaching of example as well as precept, from their father," remarked Violet with a look of loving appreciation up into his face; "so that it would be strange indeed if they had not learned it."

"Indeed that is true, mamma," said Grace. "It does seem to me that papa does everything he undertakes as thoroughly well as anyone possibly could."

"A very good idea for one's children to cultivate," laughed the captain. Then consulting his watch, "But it is high time we were in the schoolroom, daughters. Elsie and Ned have been there this half hour, and probably have a lesson or two ready to recite."

"And Eva will not be with us to-day; probably not for many more days," remarked Lucilla with a slight sigh of disappointment and regret, as she and Grace rose and gave prompt obedience to her father's implied order.

"Yes," he said, "I fear so; but her first duty is to her mother."

So Evelyn herself felt, and nobly she discharged it; neglecting nothing in her power for the relief and enjoyment of the invalid who, though often fretful, exacting, and unreasonable, was yet nearest and dearest to her of all earthly creatures. The young girl's loving patience seemed never to fail, and her heart was continually going up in earnest, silent petitions that her beloved parent might be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light; that she might learn to love Him who had died to redeem her from death and the power of the grave, and to give her an abundant entrance into his kingdom and glory.

The doubt of Laura's preparation for death and eternity, amounting to almost certainty that it was lacking, made this nursing an even sadder one than had been that of Eric, Evelyn's father, years ago. To him talk of things heavenly and divine had ever seemed easy and natural, and with the certainty that he was passing away from earth came the full assurance that he was ready to depart and be with Christ in glory.

But Laura hastily repelled the slightest allusion to eternity and a preparation for it. Evelyn's only consolation was in the knowledge that others were uniting their earnest petitions with hers, and that God is the hearer and answerer of prayer.

It was Grandma Elsie who at length succeeded in speaking a word in season to the dying woman.

"Oh, this racking cough! Shall I never be done with it?" gasped Laura, as she lay panting upon her pillow after an unusually severe and exhausting paroxysm.

"Yes; when you reach the other side of Jordan; for there in that blessed land the inhabitant shall not say 'I am sick,'" returned Grandma Elsie in low, sympathising tones. "The Bible tells us that 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.'"

"Oh, but I am not fit for that place yet!" exclaimed Laura with a look of alarm, "and I don't want to die for years to come, though it is hard to suffer as I do. You don't think I'm a dying woman, Mrs. Travilla?"

"You know, dear friend, that no one of us is certain of life for a day or an hour," returned Grandma Elsie gently, taking the wasted hand in hers and gazing tenderly into the anxious, troubled face, "and surely it is the part of wisdom to make careful preparation for that which we must inevitably meet, sooner or later. And if our peace is made with God – if Jesus is our Friend and Saviour – it will only be joy unspeakable to be called into his immediate presence, there to dwell forevermore."

"Yes, yes, if one is fitted for it, as Eric, Eva's father, was. Death seemed only joy to him, except for leaving us. But oh, I am afraid of death! Hard as life is in my weak, ailing condition, I don't want to die, I can't bear to think of it."

"My poor friend, my heart bleeds for you," said Grandma Elsie in low, tender tones. "'The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law.' But 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.' He fulfilled its conditions, he bore the penalty God's justice required against those who had broken it; and now salvation is offered as his free gift to all who will accept it: 'Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.'"

"Is that all? only to believe in Jesus?" Laura asked with a look of mingled anxiety, hope, and fear. "But one must repent deeply, sincerely, and oh, I'm afraid I cannot!"

"He will help you," returned Grandma Elsie in moved tones. "'Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.' Ask him, remembering his own gracious promise, 'Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.'"

"Ah, I see the way as I never did before," said Laura, after a moment's silence in which she seemed in deep thought. "What wonderful love and condescension it was for him, the God-man, to die that painful and shameful death that we – sinful worms of the dust – might live! Oh, I do begin to love him and to hate and abhor my sins that helped nail him to the tree." With the last words tears coursed down her cheeks. "I want to be his, whether I live or die," she added; and from that hour a great change came over her; her sufferings were borne with patience and resignation; and when the end came she passed peacefully and quietly away, leaving her bereaved daughter mourning the separation, but not as those without hope of a blessed reunion at some future day, in that land where sin and sorrow, sickness and pain are unknown.

CHAPTER III

Through all the six long weeks of her mother's illness at Fairview Evelyn had been a most devoted, tender nurse, scarcely leaving the sick room for an hour by day or by night. She bore up wonderfully until all was over and the worn-out body laid to rest in the quiet grave; but then came the reaction; strength and energy seemed suddenly to forsake her, and thin, pale, sad, and heavy-eyed, she was but the shadow of her former self.

Change of air and scene was the doctor's prescription. She was very reluctant to leave home and friends for a sojourn in new scenes and among strangers, but receiving an urgent invitation from Captain and Mrs. Raymond to spend some weeks at Woodburn with her loved friend Lucilla, and finding that her uncle and aunt – Dr. Conly also – highly approved, she gladly accepted; all the more so because she had learned that Grandma Elsie too, whom she loved even better than ever for her kindness to the dear departed, was about to spend some days or weeks with her daughter Violet. That was an added attraction to what Evelyn esteemed one of the most delightful places, and inhabited by the dearest, kindest, most lovable people anywhere to be found.

She was most heartily welcomed by the entire family, Lucilla and Grace being particularly joyful over her arrival.

It was delightful spring weather, and family and guests, older and younger, spent much of the time in the beautiful grounds or in driving and riding about the country.

The captain pronounced Eva hardly in a fit condition for study, and for her sake required his daughters Lucilla and Grace to pass only an hour or two daily in the schoolroom; so that they were able to give to Eva as much of their society as he considered desirable for her under the circumstances – seeing that she needed a good deal of quiet rest and sleep in order to regain the youthful vigour she had lost during the exhausting nursing of her invalid mother.

His kindness was highly appreciated by all three, and under its benign influence Eva made rapid improvement in health and spirits, enjoying every day of her sojourn at Woodburn, the Sabbath even more than any other, especially the afternoon study of the Bible in which all took part, from Grandma Elsie and Captain Raymond down to little Ned.

The subject chosen for the first lesson after Eva's coming was the resurrection, probably selected especially for Eva's comfort in her sorrow over her mother's recent departure, to be with her no more in this life.

"Mother," the captain said, addressing Grandma Elsie, when they were all seated, each with a Bible in hand, "as you are somewhat older and certainly much wiser than I – especially as regards spiritual things – will you not take the lead to-day?"

"Older I certainly am," returned Mrs. Travilla, with her own sweet smile, "but I think not wiser than yourself, captain; and certainly I have not made the preparation for this occasion which doubtless you have. So please lead the exercises just as you would if I were not present."

"You would prefer my doing so?" he asked.

"Very much," she replied. "The resurrection is the subject?"

"Yes; and what a glorious one! how full of comfort for all who believe in Christ! 'For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my death my body is destroyed, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold, and not another,' said the patriarch Job; comforting himself in his affliction with that blessed prospect. The doctrine of a general resurrection is expressly taught in both the Old Testament and the New, and I think we cannot spend our lesson hour more profitably than in looking up the texts on the subject. Can you give us one, mother?"

At that Grandma Elsie opened her Bible.

"Beginning with the Old Testament," she said, "here in Psalms xlix. 15 we read: 'But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah.' Then here in Isaiah: 'Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.'"

Then Violet, sitting next, read from her open Bible: "'The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, saying, Master, Moses said, if a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: likewise the second also, and the third unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.'"

Eva's turn came next and she read: "'And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.'"

Then Lucilla: "'Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.'"

"Will the resurrection be of all the dead, Grace? the wicked as well as the righteous?" asked her father.

"Yes, papa," she answered; then read aloud: "'Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.'"

It was little Elsie's turn and she read a verse in Acts pointed out by her mother: "'And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.'"

It was Ned's turn now and he read a passage selected for him by his mother: "'For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.'"

It was the captain's turn again and he went on with the reading: "'Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised, and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.'"

"Yes," said Grandma Elsie, "we needed a divine Saviour, and Christ's resurrection proved his divinity; as Paul tells us here in the first chapter of Romans, 'And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.' Peter too teaches us that the resurrection of Christ was necessary to our salvation. It seems plainly taught in this verse of the fifth chapter of his first Epistle. 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.'"

"Yes," said Violet, "Jesus said to his disciples, 'Because I live, ye shall live also.' His resurrection is surely the pledge and assurance of that of his people."

"Papa, does everybody have to die?" asked little Ned.

"Everybody except those who are alive when Jesus comes again, as he will some day in the clouds of heaven. This is what the Apostle Paul tells us about it in the letter he wrote to the Thessalonians. 'Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.'"

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words," added Evelyn softly, finishing the quotation; "and oh, what a comfort it is!"

"There could be none greater," said Grandma Elsie. "Think of being reunited with all the dear ones gone before, and in the immediate presence of Jesus; never again to be parted from them or him or to know sin or sorrow or pain. Oh, what joy to be permitted to look upon the face of our Redeemer, to kneel at his feet, to hear his voice speaking to each one of us. 'Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another.'"

CHAPTER IV

"Oh, Rosie, you here? I'm delighted! I hope you have come to spend the day?" exclaimed Lucilla, as on Monday she and Grace, on leaving the schoolroom where they had been reciting to their father, passed out upon the veranda in search of Evelyn and the older ladies and found Rose Travilla seated with the others.

"Thank you; but suppose I have come intending to stay longer than that? as long as mamma does, for instance?" laughed Rose, giving and receiving an affectionate caress; for they had seen nothing of each other for several days.

"The longer the better," was Lucilla's hearty rejoinder. "Do you not say so too, Mamma Vi?" turning to her.

"Indeed I do," said Violet. "She will certainly make a most pleasant addition to our party."

"I think you may as well accept the invitation, Rosie," her mother said with a pleased smile; "and as I know you do not care to keep your errand a secret from any of your friends here, we can call a family council and talk the matter over."

"Yes, mamma; that sounds as though you accept Solomon's teaching that 'In the multitude of counsellors there is safety.' And since he was the wisest of men we may surely consider ourselves safe in so doing. So, if you like, you may tell Lu and Gracie on what errand I came."

"Tell it yourself, child," returned her mother with an amused look.

At that Rosie held up a letter to the view of Lucilla and Grace, saying, with a smile and blush, "It is from Will Croly. He has grown tired of waiting and begs to have matters hurried up somewhat: proposes that I change my name next month, though the prescribed year of waiting would thereby be shortened by two months or more."

"Oh, do let him have his way, then!" exclaimed Grace – "at least if he will promise not to carry you off at once after the wedding – for there could not be a lovelier month for it than beautiful June, the month of roses."

"So I should say," chimed in Lucilla, then added hastily, "though I think I'd make him wait till June of next year, rather than leave such a mother as Grandma Elsie so soon."

At that Rosie glanced at her mother and her eyes filled with unbidden tears.

"I can't bear to think of that," she said with a tremble in her voice, "but perhaps I can coax Will to settle down somewhere in this neighbourhood – bringing his father and mother along so that they won't be lonely."

"A very nice plan, Rosie dear, if you can manage to carry it out," remarked Violet.

"And I have hope that Will, at least, will favour the plan; for he seemed much pleased with this neighbourhood when he was here," said Rosie, adding with a laugh and blush, "and I know my wishes carry great weight with him."

"And we will hope that those of his parents may coincide with yours," added her mother gently; "for I am sure my Rosie would not wish to be the cause of unhappiness to them."

"No, indeed, mamma; I can assure you it is my earnest desire to add to their happiness; not to take from it. I am strongly in hopes, however, that when they come to know you and all the rest of my dear relatives here, they will esteem it a delight to live in your midst."

"And I don't believe they can help it," said Grace. "I am sure everybody who knows Grandma Elsie, mamma, and papa – not to mention all the other dear people – loves them and their pleasant society."

"In all of which I am sure you are quite right, Gracie," said Evelyn.

"I, too," said Lulu. "But now let us hear the plans for the wedding."

"They are yet to be made," laughed Rosie.

"You will want a grand one?" Lulu said in a tone of mingled assertion and inquiry.

"Not so very," Rosie answered with a slight shake of her pretty head. "I think only the relatives and most intimate friends. They alone will make quite a party, you know. I'll want some bridesmaids. You'll be one, Lu, won't you? Unless you fear the truth of the old saying, 'Twice a bridesmaid never a bride.'"

"Pooh! what difference need that make?" returned Lulu; "since I don't intend ever to marry."

"You don't?" exclaimed Rosie.

"No; for there is not another man in the world whom I could love half so dearly as I love my father."

"Oh, well! that is only because you and the right one haven't happened to meet yet."

"Yes, Lulu," said Grandma Elsie, "at your age I thought and felt just as you do now, but some years later I found that another had gained the first place in my heart."

"But my father is so much kinder and more lovable than ever yours was," was the answering thought in Lucilla's mind, but unwilling to hurt the dear lady's feelings she refrained from expressing it, and only said with a little laugh of incredulity, "I suppose I should not be too certain, but I am entirely willing to run the risk of again acting as bridesmaid."

"So that much is settled," returned Rosie in a tone of satisfaction. "I have always counted upon Eva as another," she continued, "but –"

"Thank you, Rosie dear, but of course I cannot serve – under present circumstances," returned Evelyn in a tone of gentle sadness.

No one spoke again for a moment; then Violet broke the silence by asking, "How many do you think of having, Rosie?"

"Perhaps six," was the reply, in a musing tone, "at least including flower girls and maid of honour. Gracie, you will be one of the bridesmaids, will you not?"

"If papa does not object, as I hardly think he will."

"Maud and Sydney Dinsmore I think will serve," continued Rosie. "And wouldn't it be a pretty idea to have Elsie Raymond and Uncle Horace's Elsie, who is about the same size, as either bridesmaids or flower girls?"

Everyone approved of that idea.

"Now, it will be in order, I suppose, to settle about the material and colour of our dresses," remarked Lucilla.

"Perhaps it might be as well to first decide at what time of year they are to be worn," suggested Mrs. Travilla in her gentle tones.

"Yes, mamma, but – you do not want to disappoint Will, do you? And June is really the prettiest month in the year for a wedding, I think," said Rose.

"None lovelier, daughter," her mother responded with a slight sigh, "but October, my own wedding month, seems to me no less suitable."

"Why, yes, to be sure! if only Will could be satisfied to wait till then."

"It will be hardly longer than the time he was given to understand he must expect to wait," returned her mother pleasantly, "or than he ought to think my Rose worth waiting for. But at all events, daughter, we must consult with your grandpa before deciding. Have you had any talk with him on the subject?"

"No, mamma; I preferred coming to you first, and am almost sure grandpa will think it a matter for you to decide."

"Probably; yet I shall want his opinion; and besides he is your guardian as well as your grandfather."

"Along with you, mamma; and I love him as both, he is so dear and kind."

"He is indeed," assented her mother. "He has told me more than once or twice that my children are scarcely less dear to him than his own."

"Partly because our father was his dear friend as well as his son-in-law," added Violet softly.

"Yes; they were bosom friends before I was born," her mother said with a far-away look in her eyes.

"Then you must have been very much younger than he, Grandma Elsie," remarked Grace, half inquiringly.

"Sixteen years younger. I was in my ninth year when I saw him first, and more than twice that age before I thought of him as anything but a dear, kind friend – my father's friend and mine."

"And after that he seemed to you to grow younger, did he not, mamma?" asked Rosie.

"Yes; when he joined us in Europe I had not seen him for two years, and as regarded age he seemed to have been standing still while I grew up to him; and in the daily and intimate intercourse of those months I learned that his worth was far greater than that of any other man of my acquaintance – excepting my father. Ah, there was never a better man, a truer friend, a kinder, more devoted husband and father than he."

The sweet voice trembled with emotion; she paused for a moment, then went on:

"He does not seem dead to me – he is not dead, but only gone before into the immediate presence of the dear Master, where I hope one day to join him for an eternity of bliss."

""Tis there we'll meet
At Jesus' feet,
When we meet to part no more.""

Again there was a brief silence, presently broken by the coming of the captain and his two younger children. All three seemed pleased to find Rosie there, greeted her affectionately, and then the captain remarked, glancing from one to another:

"It strikes me that you are all looking about as grave as if assembled to discuss the affairs of the nation. Can I have a voice in the subject, whatever it is?"

"Yes, Brother Levis," replied Rosie, "I am trying to make arrangements for – doing what you have done twice. And perhaps, since you have had so much practice, you may be more capable than these other friends and relatives of giving me advice."

"Something that I have done twice? What can that be?"

"Will Croly wants to help me," returned Rosie with a laugh and a blush.

"Ah! now I understand. Is the vexing question as to the colour and material of the wedding gown?"

"Mamma thinks the first thing is to settle when the ceremony is to be performed. She does not seem to sympathise in Will's haste to have it over."

"Which is not at all surprising," returned the captain, glancing at his two older daughters. "I can quite understand the feeling. But what is the time proposed by Will?"

"June of this year."

"June seems a very suitable month, but if you were my daughter I should say not June of this year – since you are both young enough to wait for that of next or the year after."

"Ah, sir! that was not the way you talked when you wanted to rob mamma of one of her daughters."

"No; but I was some years older than Mr. Croly is now, and your sister Violet very womanly in her ways."

"And I am not? Ah, well! perhaps it is fortunate for me that the decision rest with mamma and grandpa."

"So you, too, are in haste?" queried the captain, regarding her with a look of amusement.

"Not at all," she returned, drawing herself up with an air of pretended indignation. "Who would be in haste to leave such a home and mother as mine? If I consulted only my own feelings I should be more than willing to wait another year."

"Then why not decide to do so?" he asked with a quizzical look.

"Because I really have some regard for the wishes of my betrothed."

"And it makes it hard for you that the different ones you love cannot agree so that you might please them all," remarked Grace, then exclaimed, "Ah, here comes grandpa!" as at that moment the Ion carriage turned in at the great gates.

Mr. Dinsmore seldom let a day pass without a more or less extended interview with his eldest daughter, and had now come for a call at Woodburn, bringing his wife with him.

When the usual greetings had been exchanged the subject of Rosie's approaching marriage and the letter from Mr. Croly, urging that it take place speedily, were introduced, and after some discussion it was decided to let him have his own way. The day was not fixed upon any farther than that it should be near the end of the month of June, and with that Rosie seemed satisfied.

"Now, mamma," she said, "I think we may go on and discuss minor details, such as dresses and ornaments for bride and attendants."

"Very well, daughter; you may give us your views on the subject. You will want your own dress of some rich white material, I suppose?"

"Yes, mamma; of Bengaline silk, richly trimmed with lace; and I must have a veil and orange blossoms; also a bouquet of bride roses and smilax. Lu and Grace, you will want white silk dresses, won't you?"

"Yes," they replied. "And bouquets of white flowers," added Lucilla.

"Oh, papa, you will let me act as one of the bridesmaids, will you not?" asked Grace, turning to him.

"I have no objection," he replied. "You may both serve, since Rosie wishes it and I see you are pleased with the idea. As for the matter of dress you may settle that for yourselves."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" both exclaimed joyously, Grace adding, "But won't you please tell us, papa, just how much we may spend?"

"Any amount which your mamma and Grandma Elsie do not consider too great," he replied in an indulgent tone. "However, I think I should not hesitate to leave that matter to the judgment of my daughters themselves; for I know that neither of you is inclined to be at all extravagant."

"No, indeed," said Violet, "they are always very careful to make sure that papa is able to afford them what they want."

"It would be strange if we weren't, Mamma Vi," said Lucilla with a happy laugh, "for we know that papa loves us so dearly that he would go without things himself any time rather than deny us anything desirable."

"And I expect to put him to the additional expense of dressing Elsie handsomely for the occasion," laughed Rosie.

"Ah! is she also to be a bridesmaid?" asked the captain with a smiling glance at his little girl, who was turning her bright eyes from one to another with a surprised, pleased, yet puzzled look.

"Not just that," replied Rosie; then went on to explain her plan for giving the two little Elsie a part in the ceremony.

"Should you like to do that, daughter?" asked the captain, taking the hand of the little girl and drawing her to his side.

"I'm 'most afraid I would not know how to do it right, papa," she answered with doubtful look and tone.

"You can take lessons beforehand," he said; "but you shall do just as you please about it."

"And the question need not be decided at once," remarked Grandma Elsie. "We will let the matter rest till we learn what your cousin Elsie Dinsmore thinks about joining you in it."

"Yes," said Rosie, "and fortunately we do not need to settle anything more to-day. Maud and Sydney must be consulted before we quite decide on the colour and material of the bridesmaids' dresses."

CHAPTER V

A pause in the conversation upon the veranda was broken by an exclamation from little Ned. "Cousin Arthur is coming!" he cried as a carriage turned in at the great gates and came swiftly up the driveway.

"Yes," said his father, stepping forward to meet and welcome Dr. Conly, "always a visitor we are delighted to see, whether we are sick or well. Good-morning, sir! We are all glad to see you as friend and guest, though fortunately not in need of your professional services at present. I hope the demands of other patients are not so pressing that we may not keep you here till after dinner."

"Thank you, but I can stay for only a hasty call," replied the doctor, alighting and shaking hands with one after another as they crowded about him.

"You look like the bringer of good news, cousin," said Grandma Elsie, regarding him with a pleased smile.

"Yes," he said, "I feel myself a very fortunate and happy man to-day, and have come to tell my news and ask the sympathy and congratulations of you my relatives and friends. My Marian and I have a son – a fine healthy babe, now some hours old – mother and child are doing as well as possible."

The congratulations were poured forth without stint. Then Mr. Dinsmore asked, "What do you propose to call the lad?"

"Ronald. It is Marian's choice and I am well content, for it is a good name, and I highly esteem the dear old cousin who has showed such kindness to the mother."

"Yes, he is worthy of it," said Grandma Elsie. "I have always felt proud to own him as my kinsman."

"And Ronald and Conly go well together, making a very pretty name, to my thinking," said Rosie.

"Have they heard the news at Beechwood yet?" asked Lucilla.

"I think not," replied the doctor; "but I shall take it in my way home, as it will make the drive only a little longer and I need delay there but a moment." Then with a hasty adieu he took his departure.

"Art is a very happy man to-day," Mr. Dinsmore remarked with a pleased smile, as they watched the doctor's gig on its way down the drive.

"Yes; I know of no one more worthy of happiness, and it does me good to see it," said the captain.

"And no doubt dear Marian's heart is overflowing with love and gratitude," said Grandma Elsie in low, soft tones. "I quite want to see her and her new treasure."

"Both she and Art will be very proud to show it to their friends and relatives," remarked Violet with a smile, "though he will be careful not to admit even relatives for some days yet. He is very kind and careful as both husband and physician."

"Yes," said Rosie; "he will take excellent care of Marian and have her well in time to attend the wedding, I hope."

"I think we can manage that, daughter, as we have not fixed upon the day," her mother said with playful look and tone.

"Oh, yes, mamma! and I do intend it to be at least six weeks before I leave girlhood for married life," returned Rosie, laughing and blushing as she spoke.

"It is too serious a step to be taken hastily, my dear young sister," remarked the captain in a tone between jest and earnest; "a step that once taken cannot be retraced – a venture involving the happiness or misery of perhaps a lifetime; certainly the lifetime of one if not of both."

"Oh, you frighten me!" cried Rosie, drawing a long breath and lifting her hands with a gesture of alarm and despair; "what shall I do? Would you recommend single blessedness – you who have twice tried laying hold of the other horn of the dilemma?"

"Only for a time," he said. "Look well before you leap, as I did, and then you will be in little danger of wanting to leap back again."

"You don't? you never do?" she queried in mock surprise and doubt.

"Never!" he said with a smiling, admiring glance into Violet's beautiful eyes, watching him with not a shade of doubt or distrust in their azure depths; "never for a moment have I been conscious of the slightest inclination to do so."

"Thank you, my dear," Violet said. "And, Rosie, let me tell you for your encouragement that I have known no more regret than has he. I am very sure that if it were in our power to reconsider, the question would be decided exactly as it was years ago."

"I believe it," responded Rosie heartily, "and that Will and I will be able to say the same when we too have lived together for years. He is good as gold, I know, and I shall try to be worthy of him."

The call to dinner here put an end to the conversation and the talk at the table was upon other themes.

Shortly after the conclusion of the meal Mr. and Mrs. Dinsmore returned to Ion, while the others, some on horseback, the rest in the family carriage, went over to the Oaks to call upon the relatives there and consult with them on the arrangements for the wedding, particularly the dress of the bride and her attendants – a subject of great interest to the ladies, especially such to the young girls, but one which the two gentlemen – Captain Raymond and young Mr. Dinsmore – were so entirely willing to leave to their decision that they presently excused themselves and walked out into the grounds, Mr. Dinsmore wishing to consult the captain in regard to some improvements that he had in contemplation.

Then Rosie announced her errand and gave her invitation to Maud and Sydney. It was accepted promptly and with evident pleasure by both. Then Rosie went on to speak of her idea of having the two little Elsie act as flower girls.

"My niece and my cousin, and both bearing mamma's name; about the same size, too; would it not be pretty?" she asked, and received a chorus of approving replies.

"Oh, I'd like to!" cried Elsie Dinsmore, clapping her hands in delight. "It's ever so good in you, Cousin Rosie, to choose us! and I suppose we will be dressed alike, won't we?"

"That is my idea," said Rosie, "and I presume your mothers will not withhold their consent."

"Oh, you will let us, mamma – you and Cousin Vi – won't you?" cried the child, turning to them.

"I am entirely willing, if that suits Cousin Vi and her Elsie," replied her mother.

"As it will, I am sure," said Violet.

"Yes, mamma," said her Elsie, "I shall like it, for I am sure you and the other ladies will choose a pretty dress for us."

"Probably no prettier than some that you already own," Violet returned with an amused look. "Try not to think or care too much for dress, daughter; there are so many things which are much more important."

"But it isn't wrong to like to be tastefully dressed, is it, mamma?" asked the little girl with a slightly troubled look.

"No, I think not, dear," returned her mother with a loving smile into the inquiring eyes; "if it were wrong to love pretty things, surely God would not have made so many for our eyes to look upon – the beautiful flowers and fruits, the sunset clouds, the stars, to mention only a few – but he – our kind Heavenly Father – loves to give us enjoyment."

"And I do enjoy all the pretty things very much indeed, mamma," responded the little girl with a look of relief and pleasure, "and I'm glad it isn't wrong; I like to see pretty clothes on you and my sisters quite as much as on myself. And don't you think papa likes to have us all nicely dressed?"

"I am sure he does; and you may feel very certain that papa approves of nothing but what is right."

"Those are exactly mine and my husband's sentiments upon the subject in question," remarked Mrs. Dinsmore in a lively tone. "But now let us hear what those girls are talking about."

"You will be married in church?" Maud was saying inquiringly.

"No," said Rosie in a tone of decision; "I mean to follow the good example of my mother and older sisters in having a home wedding."

"And you will want ushers? I was just going to ask who were to serve in that capacity."

"I believe Mr. Croly has engaged my brothers Harold and Herbert, who are his most intimate friends," replied Rosie; "but of course there will be plenty of time for all those arrangements."

"I dare say he will ask Uncle Harold to be best man," said Grace.

"Very likely," said Rosie, "and Herbert, Chester, and Frank for ushers. We may as well make it a family affair," she added with a satisfied little laugh.

"And if either you or Will conclude that you would prefer a larger number it will be an easy matter to think of, and invite them to serve a little later," remarked Violet.

"Yes, there is plenty of time," said their mother, smiling lovingly into Rosie's bright eyes. "I am in no hurry to give my youngest daughter to even so entirely a good, worthy, and amiable young man as William Croly."

"Please do not look at it in that way, mother dear. Please remember that you are not to lose your daughter, but to gain another good son."

"That is right, Rosie; I do believe it is going to prove a gain all round," said Violet.

"Why, of course it is," said Maud; "that is settled; so now let us consider and decide the important question what colours we are to wear on the grand occasion. Lu, you wore canary colour at Betty Norris' wedding; suppose I take that this time and you wear pink; it will become you quite as well, I think."

"I suppose so," said Lucilla, "and am perfectly willing to wear it."

"And pink beside my white will look very pretty," said Rosie. "Lu is to be maid of honor, you know, girls."

"Yes; and I for one highly approve your choice, Rosie," said Evelyn with an affectionate, admiring look at Lucilla.

"Yes; and suppose we dress your little flower girls in pink, also," suggested Mrs. Dinsmore.

That idea seemed to suit everybody.

"I like that colour," remarked Elsie Dinsmore sagely, "but I shall be particular about having very handsome material."

"It shall be handsome enough to accord well with the others," said her mother with an amused laugh.

"I think straw colour becomes me," remarked Maud; "so that is what I shall wear, if the rest of the party approve."

"And blue will be the thing for Gracie and me," said Sydney. "What do you say to that, Gracie?"

"I am satisfied if Rosie and the rest approve," was Grace's pleasant-toned reply.

"So that is settled," said Sydney. "Wouldn't it be well for us all to go into the city to-morrow, see what we can find there to suit us, and order other things sent for?"

"What do you say to that, mamma?" asked Rosie.

"I see no objection to it," replied Grandma Elsie. "But we will consult the captain in regard to that matter," she added, as at that moment he and her brother came in.

"Ah! upon what is my valuable opinion desired, mother?" he asked in playful tones; then, in response to the explanation given, said that he thought it a very good plan, as it would surely do no harm to begin needed preparations promptly.

"Then, papa, won't you excuse Gracie and me from lessons for the next few days?" asked Lucilla.

"I will; you may consider the remainder of the week a holiday," he replied.

"For Ned and me too, papa?" asked Elsie.

"Yes; if you think you can assist in the shopping."

"I should like to help choose my own things if you and mamma are willing," she said with a persuasive look from one to the other.

"I think you will be allowed a voice in the selection," he replied, patting her cheek as she leaned upon his knee, looking up affectionately and pleadingly into his face.

"Yes," said Violet, "and I am sure we shall be able to find dress goods and whatever else is needed, that will suit all three of us."

"And it will be four days' holiday we'll have," remarked Ned with satisfaction.

"You are planning to have your wedding a good deal after the pattern of Cousin Betty's, Rosie," remarked Mrs. Dinsmore.

"Yes; in some respects, for I thought it a very pretty wedding; but that ceremony took place in the church, while I mean to be married at home; also there will probably be a difference in the number of attendants and their dress," replied Rosie. "And by the way, mamma," she added, turning to her mother, "we must send Betty an invitation in good season for her to arrange matters so that she can come to my wedding. I was one of her bridesmaids, you remember, and should be sorry indeed to neglect her at this time."

"She shall not be forgotten, daughter," was Grandma Elsie's ready response; "we will shortly make out a list of those you wish to invite, that none may be forgotten or overlooked."

"Yes, mamma; if our list contains only relatives and very intimate friends we will be quite a large party, should all accept."

"Now about to-morrow's shopping," said Sydney. "We need to settle when we will set out on our expedition, where we will meet, or whether we will divide our forces and each division decide questions of taste and expense independently of the others."

"As there are so many of us I think the latter plan would be the better one," said Grandma Elsie.

"And as regards dress goods, we can secure samples and hold a consultation over them before making the purchases," said Violet; adding with a smiling glance at her Elsie, "that will be only fair where two or more are to be dressed alike."

"I like that plan, mamma," said the little girl, "and I do intend to be satisfied with whatever you and papa choose for me."

"With some help from my mamma and me," said the other Elsie in a tone that seemed to imply some fear that their choice might not be altogether to her taste.

"Tut! tut!" said her father. "You need not be in the least afraid that such good judges will fail to select as handsome and suitable material as could be desired."

"But please, Uncle Horace, let her have a vote on the question," said Violet pleasantly. "There may be several pieces of goods of the chosen colour, equally desirable; nor is it necessary that the two dresses should be off the same piece; only that they match in colour."

"And I feel sure there will be no difficulty in settling upon which will be satisfactory to all parties," added Mrs. Dinsmore.

With a little more chat all the arrangements for the morrow's shopping expedition were concluded. Then the Woodburn party bade good-bye and returned to their home.

CHAPTER VI

The weather the next morning proved all that could be desired, and the shopping expedition a grand success – everybody being not only satisfied but charmed with the results.

Mrs. Travilla and Rosie returned to Ion that evening, but scarcely a day passed while the preparations for the wedding were going on, without more or less interchange of visits among the young people of that place, Woodburn, Fairview, and the Oaks and Pinegrove.

Naturally the deepest interest was felt and shown by the ladies and young girls, but brothers and cousins were by no means indifferent. Harold and Herbert, though well pleased with the idea of taking their friend Croly into the family, were loath to part with Rosie, their youngest and only single sister, the only one now left in the Ion family. She had always been somewhat of a pet with them, and during these last weeks of her life with them they treated her as one for whom they could not do enough; while her manner toward them showed full appreciation of their kindness and affection. Much of her time and thoughts was necessarily taken up with the preparations for her approaching marriage; but in leisure moments she had many sad thoughts in regard to the coming separation from home and all there whom she so loved; especially the tender mother who had been, until within a few months, her dearest earthly friend.

"Mamma dear, dearest mamma, I can hardly endure the thought of leaving you," she sighed one day with starting tears, as they sat together over their needlework in Mrs. Travilla's dressing room.

They were quite alone at the moment, Zoe, who had been with them, having just gone out with her little ones.

"No one can ever take your place in my heart or home," continued Rosie with almost a sob, "and oh, how I shall miss you – your love, your sweet motherly counsels, your tender sympathy in all my joys and sorrows – oh, mamma, mamma! at times the very thought of it all is almost unendurable, and I am tempted to say to Will that he may come to me if he likes, but that I can never tear myself away from my dear home and the precious mother who has been everything to me since I first drew the breath of life!" and dropping her work she knelt at her mother's feet, lifting to hers eyes full of tears.

"Dear child," her mother responded in tones tremulous with emotion, and bending down to press a kiss on the quivering lips, "it gives me a sad and sore heart to think of it. And yet, daughter dear, we may hope to see each other very often – to spend weeks and months of every year in each other's society, and when we are apart to exchange letters daily; and best of all, to be in a few brief years together in the better land, never to part again."

"Ah, mamma dear, that last seems a long look ahead. At least – oh, mamma, I cannot bear the thought of – of death coming between us; and yet we can hardly hope to go together."

"No, daughter dear, but time is short, as you will realize when you have seen as many years in this world as I have; and after it will come the never-ending ages of eternity – eternity, which we are hoping to spend with our dear ones in the immediate presence of our Redeemer – united, never to part again."

"Yes, mamma; oh, that is indeed a sweet thought. But," she added with a heavy sigh, "sometimes I fear I may miss heaven; I seem so far, so very far from fit for its employments and its joys – so often indulging in wrong thoughts and feelings – so taken up with earthly cares and interests."

"Dear daughter, look to God for help to fight against your sinful nature," replied her mother in moved tones. "He says 'In me is thine help'; 'He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.' 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.' 'Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.' These are some of his gracious promises."

"Ah, mamma, but the question with me is, is he really my God? am I his? – truly one of his redeemed ones, his adopted children? How shall I make sure of that?"

"By accepting his conditions and believing his word, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.' 'Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.' Come now and accept his offered salvation, whether you have done so before or not; come, believing his word; 'I will in no wise cast out,' 'I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.' 'Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength; even to him shall all men come.' 'In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.' 'The just shall live by faith,' and faith is the gift of God, as we are told again and again in his Holy Word; a gift that he will grant to all who ask it of him."

There was a sound of approaching footsteps and Rosie resumed her seat, taking up the work she had dropped. They recognised the step as Harold's, and the next moment he stood in the open doorway.

"Mamma," he said, "I am going over to Roselands and should like to take you along. You have not seen that youngest Conly yet, and Arthur considers Marian now quite well enough for a call from you. I know, too, that she is wanting to see you."

"And I to see her, the dear girl," responded his mother, laying aside her work. "Come in and sit down while I don my bonnet and mantle."

"Let me get them out for you, mamma," said Rosie, dropping her embroidery and hastening to do so.

"I should include you in the invitation, Rosie," said Harold, "but we think it safer not to let Marian have the excitement of many callers until she gains more strength."

"I thought she was doing finely," returned Rosie, bringing her mother's mantle and putting it about her with loving care.

"So she is," replied Harold with a light laugh; "but we cannot be too careful of her to satisfy her doting husband, and though eager to exhibit her new treasure to all her friends and relatives, she is entirely submissive to his will in the matter."

"Oh, well, I can wait," laughed Rosie. "Give her my love, mamma, and tell her I am not staying away from any indifference to her or the little newcomer."

"No fear that she would ever suspect you of that, Rosie dear," her mother said, with a slight smile; "but I will assure her of your interest in both herself and baby boy. Now good-bye till my return, which I presume will be in the course of an hour or two."

"Don't hurry home on my account, mamma dear," returned Rosie. "I shall not be lonely. I have letters to write, and that will make the time pass quickly."

"It is a lovely day and the short drive with my son will be very enjoyable," Mrs. Travilla remarked, as Harold handed her into the vehicle.

"To us both, I hope, mother," he returned, giving her an affectionate look and smile. "Yours is to me the best company in the world. The roads are in fine condition," he added as he took up the reins and they started down the avenue, "the fields and gardens along the way also, and the air full of the fragrance of flower and shrub. Oh, on such a morning as this it seems a joy just to be alive and well!"

"Yes," she responded, "oh, what cause for gratitude to the Giver of all good that you and I, and all our nearest and dearest in this world, are alive and well."

"Yes, mother; attendance upon the sick and suffering has given me a higher appreciation of the greatness of the blessing of sound health than I had in earlier days. It is saddening to witness suffering from accident and disease, but a great privilege to be able in many cases to relieve it. That last makes me thankful that I was led to choose the medical profession."

"And you have often an opportunity to minister to souls as well as bodies; one which I hope you do not neglect."

"I am afraid I have sometimes neglected it, mother," he acknowledged with a sigh, "and at others performed it in a very halting and imperfect way. But as you know – for I could not keep from you such gladness as the knowledge of that fact brought me – I have been privileged to win some souls to Christ – smooth some dying pillows – and to lead some recovering ones to devote their spared lives and restored health to the service of the Master – the Physician of souls – in whose footsteps I ardently desire to tread."

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