# GEORGE MACDONALD

# THE FLIGHT OF THE SHADOW

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# Содержание

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## CHAPTER I. MRS. DAY BEGINS THE STORY

I am old, else, I think, I should not have the courage to tell the story I am going to tell. All those concerned in it about whose feelings I am careful, are gone where, thank God, there are no secrets! If they know what I am doing, I know they do not mind. If they were alive to read as I record, they might perhaps now and again look a little paler and wish the leaf turned, but to see the things set down would not make them unhappy: they do not love secrecy. Half the misery in the world comes from trying to look, instead of trying to be, what one is not. I would that not God only but all good men and women might see me through and through. They would not be pleased with everything they saw, but then neither am I, and I would have no coals of fire in my soul's pockets! But my very nature would shudder at the thought of letting one person that loved a secret see into it. Such a one never sees things as they are—would not indeed see what was there, but something shaped and coloured after his own likeness. No one who loves and chooses a secret can be of the pure in heart

that shall see God.

Yet how shall I tell even who I am? Which of us is other than a secret to all but God! Which of us can tell, with poorest approximation, what he or she is! Not to touch the mystery of life—that one who is not myself has made me able to say *I*, how little can any of us tell about even those ancestors whose names we know, while yet the nature, and still more the character, of hundreds of them, have shared in determining what *I* means every time one of us utters the word! For myself, I remember neither father nor mother, nor one of their fathers or mothers: how little then can I say as to what I am! But I will tell as much as most of my readers, if ever I have any, will care to know.

I come of a long yeoman-line of the name of Whichcote. In Scotland the Whichcotes would have been called *lairds*; in England they were not called *squires*. Repeatedly had younger sons of it risen to rank and honour, and in several generations would his property have entitled the head of the family to rank as a squire, but at the time when I began to be aware of existence, the family possessions had dwindled to one large farm, on which I found myself. Naturally, while some of the family had risen, others had sunk in the social scale; and of the latter was Miss Martha Moon, far more to my life than can appear in my story. I should imagine there are few families in England covering a larger range of social difference than ours. But I begin to think the chief difficulty in writing a book must be to keep out what does not belong to it.

I may mention, however, my conviction, that I owe many special delights to the gradual development of my race in certain special relations to the natural ways of the world. That I was myself brought up in such relations, appears not enough to account for the intensity of my pleasure in things belonging to simplest life—in everything of the open air, in animals of all kinds, in the economy of field and meadow and moor. I can no more understand my delight in the sweet breath of a cow, than I can explain the process by which, that day in the garden—but I must not forestall, and will say rather—than I can account for the tears which, now I am an old woman, fill my eyes just as they used when I was a child, at sight of the year's first primrose. A harebell, much as I have always loved harebells, never moved me that way! Some will say the cause, whatever it be, lies in my nature, not in my ancestry; that, anyhow, it must have come first to some one—and why not to me? I answer, Everything lies in everyone of us, but has to be brought to the surface. It grows a little in one, more in that one's child, more in that child's child, and so on and on—with curious breaks as of a river which every now and then takes to an underground course. One thing I am sure of—that, however any good thing came, I did not make it; I can only be glad and thankful that in me it came to the surface, to tell me how beautiful must he be who thought of it, and made it in me. Then surely one is nearer, if not to God himself, yet to the things God loves, in the country than amid ugly houses—things that could not have been invented by God, though he made

the man that made them. It is not the fashionable only that love the town and not the country; the men and women who live in dirt and squalor—their counterparts in this and worse things far more than they think—are afraid of loneliness, and hate God's lovely dark.

# CHAPTER II. MISS MARTHA MOON

Let me look back and see what first things I first remember!

All about my uncle first; but I keep him to the last. Next, all about Rover, the dog—though for roving, I hardly remember him away from my side! Alas, he did not live to come into the story, but I must mention him here, for I shall not write another book, and, in the briefest summary of my childhood, to make no allusion to him would be disloyalty. I almost believe that at one period, had I been set to say who I was, I should have included Rover as an essential part of myself. His tail was my tail; his legs were my legs; his tongue was my tongue!—so much more did I, as we gambolled together, seem conscious of his joy than of my own! Surely, among other and greater mercies, I shall find him again! The next person I see busy about the place, now here now there in the house, and seldom outside it, is Miss Martha Moon. The house is large, built at a time when the family was one of consequence, and there was always much to be done in it. The largest room in it is now called the kitchen, but was doubtless called the hall when first it was built. This was Miss Martha Moon's headquarters.

She was my uncle's second cousin, and as he always called her Martha, so did I, without rebuke: every one else about the place

called her Miss Martha.

Of much greater worth and much more genuine refinement than tens of thousands the world calls ladies, she never claimed the distinction. Indeed she strongly objected to it. If you had said or implied she was a lady, she would have shrunk as from a covert reflection on the quality of her work. Had she known certain of such as nowadays call themselves lady-helps, I could have understood her objection. I think, however, it came from a stern adherence to the factness—if I may coin the word—of things. She never called a lie a fib.

When she was angry, she always held her tongue; she feared being unfair. She had indeed a rare power of silence. To this day I do not *know*, but am nevertheless sure that, by an instinct of understanding, she saw into my uncle's trouble, and descried, more or less plainly, the secret of it, while yet she never even alluded to the existence of such a trouble. She had a regard for woman's dignity as profound as silent. She was not of those that prate or rave about their rights, forget their duties, and care only for what they count their victories.

She declared herself dead against marriage. One day, while yet hardly more than a child, I said to her thoughtfully,

"I wonder why you hate gentlemen, Martha!"

"Hate 'em! What on earth makes you say such a wicked thing, Orbie?" she answered. "Hate 'em, the poor dears! I love 'em! What did you ever see to make you think I hated your uncle now?"

"Oh! of course! uncle!" I returned; for my uncle was all the world to me. "Nobody could hate uncle!"

"She'd be a bad woman, anyhow, that did!" rejoined Martha. "But did anybody ever hate the person that couldn't do without her, Orbie?"

My name—suggested by my uncle because my mother died at my birth—was a curious one; I believe he made it himself. *Belorba* it was, and it means *Fair Orphan*.

"I don't know, Martha," I replied.

"Well, you watch and see!" she returned. "Do you think I would stay here and work from morning to night if I hadn't some reason for it?—Oh, I like work!" she went on; "I don't deny that. I should be miserable if I didn't work. But I'm not bound to this sort of work. I have money of my own, and I'm no beggar for house-room. But rather than leave your uncle, poor man! I would do the work of a ploughman for him."

"Then why don't you marry him, Martha?" I said, with innocent impertinence.

"Marry him! I wouldn't marry him for ten thousand pounds, child!"

"Why not, if you love him so much? I'm sure he wouldn't mind!"

"Marry him!" repeated Miss Martha, and stood looking at me as if here at last was a creature she could *not* understand; "marry the poor dear man, and make him miserable! I could love any man better than that! Just you open your eyes, my dear, and see

what goes on about you. Do you see so many men made happy by their wives? I don't say it's all the wives' fault, poor things! But the fact's the same: there's the poor husbands all the time trying hard to bear it! What with the babies, and the headaches, and the rest of it, that's what it comes to—the husbands are not happy! No, no! A woman can do better for a man than marry him!"

"But mayn't it be the husband's fault—sometimes, Martha?"

"It may; but what better is it for that? What better is the wife for knowing it, or how much happier the husband for not knowing it? As soon as you come to weighing who's in fault, and counting how much, it's all up with the marriage. There's no more comfort in life for either of them! Women are sent into the world to make men happy. I was sent to your uncle, and I'm trying to do my duty. It's nothing to me what other women think; I'm here to serve your uncle. What comes of me, I don't care, so long as I do my work, and don't keep him waiting that made me for it. You may think it a small thing to make a man happy! I don't. God thought him worth making, and he wouldn't be if he was miserable. I've seen one woman make ten men unhappy! I know my calling, Orbie. Nothing would make me marry one of them, poor things!"

"But if they all said as you do, Martha?"

"No doubt the world would come to an end, but it would go out singing, not crying. I don't see that would matter. There would be enough to make each other happy in heaven, and the Lord could make more as they were wanted."

"Uncle says it takes God a long time to make a man!" I

ventured to remark.

Miss Martha was silent for a moment. She did not see how my remark bore on the matter in hand, but she had such respect for anything my uncle said, that when she did not grasp it she held her peace.

"Anyhow there's no fear of it for the present!" she answered. "You heard the screed of banns last Sunday!"

I thought you would have a better idea of Miss Martha Moon from hearing her talk, than from any talk about her. To hear one talk is better than to see one. But I would not have you think she often spoke at such length. She was in truth a woman of few words, never troubled or troubling with any verbal catarrh. Especially silent she was when any one she loved was in distress. I have seen her stand moveless for moments, with a look that was the incarnation of essential motherhood—as if her eyes were swallowing up sorrow; as if her soul was ready to be the sacrifice for sin. Then she would turn away with a droop of the eye-lids that seemed to say she saw what it was, but saw also how little she could do for it. Oh the depth of the love-trouble in those eyes of hers!

Martha never set herself to teach me anything, but I could not know Martha without learning something of the genuine human heart. I gathered from her by unconscious assimilation. Possibly, a spiritual action analogous to exosmose and endosmose, takes place between certain souls.

# CHAPTER III. MY UNCLE

Now I must tell you what my uncle was like.

The first thing that struck you about him would have been, how tall and thin he was. The next thing would have been, how he stooped; and the next, how sad he looked. It scarcely seemed that Martha Moon had been able to do much for him. Yet doubtless she had done, and was doing, more than either he or she knew. He had rather a small head on the top of his long body; and when he stood straight up, which was not very often, it seemed so far away, that some one said he took him for Zacchaeus looking down from the sycomore. *I* never thought of analyzing his appearance, never thought of comparing him with any one else. To me he was the best and most beautiful of men—the first man in all the world. Nor did I change my mind about him ever—I only came to want another to think of him as I did.

His features were in fine proportion, though perhaps too delicate. Perhaps they were a little too small to be properly beautiful. When first I saw a likeness of the poet Shelley, I called out "My uncle!" and immediately began to see differences. He wore a small but long moustache, brushed away from his mouth; and over it his eyes looked large. They were of a clear gray, and very gentle. I know from the testimony of others, that I was right in imagining him a really learned man. That small head of his contained more and better than many a larger head of greater

note. He was constantly reading—that is, when not thinking, or giving me the lessons which make me now thank him for half my conscious soul.

Reading or writing or thinking, he made me always welcome to share his room with him; but he seldom took me out walking. He was by no means regular in his habits—regarded neither times nor seasons—went and came like a bird. His hour for going out was unknown to himself, was seldom two days together the same. He would rise up suddenly, even in the middle of a lesson—he always called it "a lesson together"—and without a word walk from the room and the house. I had soon observed that in gloomy weather he went out often, in the sunshine seldom.

The house had a large garden, of a very old-fashioned sort, such a place for the charm of both glory and gloom as I have never seen elsewhere. I have had other eyes opened within me to deeper beauties than I saw in that garden then; my remembrance of it is none the less of an enchanted ground. But my uncle never walked in it. When he walked, it was always out on the moor he went, and what time he would return no one ever knew. His meals were uninteresting to him—no concern to any one but Martha, who never uttered a word of impatience, and seldom a word of anxiety. At whatever hour of the day he went, it was almost always night when he came home, often late night. In the house he much preferred his own room to any other.

This room, not so large as the kitchen-hall, but quite as long, seems to me, when I look back, my earliest surrounding. It was

the centre from which my roving fancies issued as from their source, and the end of their journey to which as to their home they returned. It was a curious place. Were you to see first the inside of the house and then the outside, you would find yourself at a loss to conjecture where within it could be situated such a room. It was not, however, contained in what, to a cursory glance, passed for the habitable house, and a stranger would not easily have found the entrance to it.

Both its nature and situation were in keeping with certain peculiarities of my uncle's mental being. He was given to curious inquiries. He would set out to solve now one now another historical point as odd as uninteresting to any but a mind capable of starting such a question. To determine it, he would search book after book, as if it were a live thing, in whose memory must remain, darkly stored, thousands of facts, requiring only to be recollected: amongst them might nestle the thing he sought, and he would dig for it as in a mine that went branching through the hardened dust of ages. I fancy he read any old book whatever of English history with the haunting sense that next moment he might come upon the trace of certain of his own ancestors of whom he specially desired to enlarge his knowledge. Whether he started any new thing in mathematics I cannot tell, but he would sit absorbed, every day and all day long, for weeks, over his slate, suddenly throw it down, walk out for the rest of the day, and leave his calculus, or whatever it was, for months. He read Shakespeare as with a microscope, propounding and answering

the most curious little questions. It seemed to me sometimes, I confess, that he missed a plain point from his eyes being so sharp that they looked through it without seeing it, having focused themselves beyond it.

A specimen of the kind of question he would ask and answer himself, occurs to me as I write, for he put it to me once as we read together.

"Why," he said, "did Margaret, in *Much ado about Nothing*, try to persuade Hero to wear her other rabato?"

And the answer was,

"Because she feared her mistress would find out that she had been wearing it—namely, the night before, when she personated her."

And here I may put down a remark I heard him make in reference to a theory which itself must seem nothing less than idiotic to any one who knows Shakespeare as my uncle knew him. The remark was this—that whoever sought to enhance the fame of lord St. Alban's—he was careful to use the real title—by attributing to him the works of Shakespeare, must either be a man of weak intellect, of great ignorance, or of low moral perception; for he cast on the memory of a man already more to be pitied than any, a weight of obloquy such as it were hard to believe anyone capable of deserving. A being with Shakespeare's love of human nature, and Bacon's insight into essential truth, guilty of the moral and social atrocities into which his lordship's eagerness after money for scientific research

betrayed him, would be a monster as grotesque as abominable.

I record the remark the rather that it shows my uncle could look at things in a large way as well as hunt with a knife-edge. At the same time, devoutly as I honour him, I cannot but count him intended for thinkings of larger scope than such as then seemed characteristic of him. I imagine his early history had affected his faculties, and influenced the mode of their working. How indeed could it have been otherwise!

# CHAPTER IV. MY UNCLE'S ROOM, AND MY UNCLE IN IT

At right angles to the long, black and white house, stood a building behind it, of possibly earlier date, but uncertain intent. It had been used for many things before my uncle's time—once as part of a small brewery. My uncle was positive that, whether built for the purpose or not, it had been used as a chapel, and that the house was originally the out-lying cell of some convent. The signs on which he founded this conclusion, I was never able to appreciate: to me, as containing my uncle's study, the wonder-house of my childhood, it was far more interesting than any history could have made it. It had very thick walls, two low stories, and a high roof. Entering it from the court behind the house, every portion of it would seem to an ordinary beholder quite accounted for; but it might have suggested itself to a more comprehending observer, that a considerable space must lie between the roof and the low ceiling of the first floor, which was taken up with the servants' rooms. Of the ground floor, part was used as a dairy, part as a woodhouse, part for certain vegetables, while part stored the turf dug for fuel from the neighbouring moor.

Between this building and the house was a smaller and lower erection, a mere out-house. It also was strongly built, however,

and the roof, in perfect condition, seemed newer than the walls: it had been raised and strengthened when used by my uncle to contain a passage leading from the house to the roof of the building just described, in which he was fashioning for himself the retreat which he rightly called his study, for few must be the rooms more continuously thought and read in during one lifetime than this.

I have now to tell how it was reached from the house. You could hardly have found the way to it, even had you set yourself seriously to the task, without having in you a good share of the constructive faculty. The whole was my uncle's contrivance, but might well have been supposed to belong to the troubled times when a good hiding-place would have added to the value of any home.

There was a large recess in the kitchen, of which the hearth, raised a foot or so above the flagged floor, had filled the whole—a huge chimney in fact, built out from the wall. At some later time an oblong space had been cut out of the hearth to a level with the floor, and in it an iron grate constructed for the more convenient burning of coal. Hence the remnant of the raised hearth looked like wide hobs to the grate. The recess as a chimney-corner was thereby spoiled, for coal makes a very different kind of smoke from the aromatic product of wood or peat.

Right and left within the recess, were two common, unpainted doors, with latches. If you opened either, you found an ordinary shallow cupboard, that on the right filled with shelves and

crockery, that on the left with brooms and other household implements.

But if, in the frame of the door to the left, you pressed what looked like the head of a large nail, not its door only but the whole cupboard turned inward on unseen hinges, and revealed an ascending stair, which was the approach to my uncle's room. At the head of the stair you went through the wall of the house to the passage under the roof of the out-house, at the end of which a few more steps led up to the door of the study. By that door you entered the roof of the more ancient building. Lighted almost entirely from above, there was no indication outside of the existence of this floor, except one tiny window, with vaguely pointed arch, almost in the very top of the gable. Here lay my nest; this was the bower of my bliss.

Its walls rose but about three feet from the floor ere the slope of the roof began, so that there was a considerable portion of the room in which my tall uncle could not stand upright. There was width enough notwithstanding, in which four as tall as he might have walked abreast up and down a length of at least five and thirty feet.

Not merely the low walls, but the slopes of the roof were filled with books as high as the narrow level portion of the ceiling. On the slopes the bookshelves had of course to be peculiar. My uncle had contrived, and partly himself made them, with the assistance of a carpenter he had known all his life. They were individually fixed to the rafters, each projecting over that beneath it. To get

at the highest, he had to stand on a few steps; to reach the lowest, he had to stoop at a right angle. The place was almost a tunnel of books.

By setting a chair on an ancient chest that stood against the gable, and a footstool on the chair, I could mount high enough to get into the deep embrasure of the little window, whence alone to gain a glimpse of the lower world, while from the floor I could see heaven through six skylights, deep framed in books. As far back as I can remember, it was my care to see that the inside of their glass was always bright, so that sun and moon and stars might look in.

The books were mostly in old and dingy bindings, but there were a few to attract the eyes of a child—especially some annuals, in red skil, or embossed leather, or, most bewitching of all, in paper, protected by a tight case of the same, from which, with the help of a ribbon, you drew out the precious little green volume, with its gilt edges and lovely engravings—one of which in particular I remember—a castle in the distance, a wood, a ghastly man at the head of a rearing horse, and a white, mist-like, fleeting ghost, the cause of the consternation. These books had a large share in the witchery of the chamber.

At the end of the room, near the gable-window, but under one of the skylights, was a table of white deal, without cover, at which my uncle generally sat, sometimes writing, oftener leaning over a book. Occasionally, however, he would occupy a large old-fashioned easy chair, under the slope of the roof, in the same

end of the room, sitting silent, neither writing nor reading, his eyes fixed straight before him, but plainly upon nothing. They looked as if sights were going out of them rather than coming in at them. When he sat thus, I would sit gazing at him. Oh how I loved him—loved every line of his gentle, troubled countenance! I do not remember the time when I did not know that his face was troubled. It gave the last finishing tenderness to my love for him. It was from no meddlesome curiosity that I sat watching him, from no longing to learn what he was thinking about, or what pictures were going and coming before the eyes of his mind, but from such a longing to comfort him as amounted to pain. I think it was the desire to be near him—in spirit, I mean, for I could be near him in the body any time except when he was out on one of his lonely walks or rides—that made me attend so closely to my studies. He taught me everything, and I yearned to please him, but without this other half-conscious yearning I do not believe I should ever have made the progress he praised. I took indeed a true delight in learning, but I would not so often have shut the book I was enjoying to the full and taken up another, but for the sight or the thought of my uncle's countenance.

I think he never once sat down in the chair I have mentioned without sooner or later rising hurriedly, and going out on one of his solitary rambles.

When we were having our lessons together, as he phrased it, we sat at the table side by side, and he taught me as if we were two children finding out together what it all meant. Those

lessons had, I think, the largest share in the charm of the place; yet when, as not unfrequently, my uncle would, in the middle of one of them, rise abruptly and leave me without a word, to go, I knew, far away from the house, I was neither dismayed nor uneasy: I had got used to the thing before I could wonder what it meant. I would just go back to the book I had been reading, or to any other that attracted me: he never required the preparation of any lessons. It was of no use to climb to the window in the hope of catching sight of him, for thence was nothing to be seen immediately below but the tops of high trees and a corner of the yard into which the cow-houses opened, and my uncle was never there. He neither understood nor cared about farming. His elder brother, my father, had been bred to carry on the yeoman-line of the family, and my uncle was trained to the medical profession. My father dying rather suddenly, my uncle, who was abroad at the time, and had not begun to practise, returned to take his place, but never paid practical attention to the farming any more than to his profession. He gave the land in charge to a bailiff, and at once settled down, Martha told me, into what we now saw him. She seemed to imply that grief at my father's death was the cause of his depression, but I soon came to the conclusion that it lasted too long to be so accounted for. Gradually I grew aware —so gradually that at length I seemed to have known it from the first—that the soul of my uncle was harassed with an undying trouble, that some worm lay among the very roots of his life. What change could ever dispel such a sadness as I often saw in

that chair! Now and then he would sit there for hours, an open book in his hand perhaps, at which he cast never a glance, all unaware of the eyes of the small maiden fixed upon him, with a whole world of sympathy behind them. I suspect, however, as I believe I have said, that Martha Moon, in her silence, had pierced the heart of the mystery, though she *knew* nothing.

One practical lesson given me now and then in varying form by my uncle, I at length, one day, suddenly and involuntarily associated with the darkness that haunted him. In substance it was this: "Never, my little one, hide anything from those that love you. Never let anything that makes itself a nest in your heart, grow into a secret, for then at once it will begin to eat a hole in it." He would so often say the kind of thing, that I seemed to know when it was coming. But I had heard it as a thing of course, never realizing its truth, and listening to it only because he whom I loved said it.

I see with my mind's eye the fine small head and large eyes so far above me, as we sit beside each other at the deal table. He looked down on me like a bird of prey. His hair—gray, Martha told me, before he was thirty—was tufted out a little, like ruffled feathers, on each side. But the eyes were not those of an eagle; they were a dove's eyes.

"A secret, little one, is a mole that burrows," said my uncle.

The moment of insight was come. A voice seemed suddenly to say within me, "He has a secret; it is biting his heart!" My affection, my devotion, my sacred concern for him, as suddenly

swelled to twice their size. It was as if a God were in pain, and I could not help him. I had no desire to learn his secret; I only yearned heart and soul to comfort him. Before long, I had a secret myself for half a day: ever after, I shared so in the trouble of his secret, that I seemed myself to possess or rather to be possessed by one—such a secret that I did not myself know it.

But in truth I had a secret then; for the moment I knew that he had a secret, his secret—the outward fact of its existence, I mean—was my secret. And besides this secret of his, I had then a secret of my own. For I knew that my uncle had a secret, and he did not know that I knew. Therewith came, of course, the question—Ought I to tell him? At once, by the instinct of love, I saw that to tell him would put him in a great difficulty. He might wish me never to let any one else know of it, and how could he say so when he had been constantly warning me to let nothing grow to a secret in my heart? As to telling Martha Moon, much as I loved her, much as I knew she loved my uncle, and sure as I was that anything concerning him was as sacred to her as to me, I dared not commit such a breach of confidence as even to think in her presence that my uncle had a secret. From that hour I had recurrent fits of a morbid terror at the very idea of a secret—as if a secret were in itself a treacherous, poisonous guest, that ate away the life of its host.

But to return, my half-day-secret came in this wise.

# CHAPTER V. MY FIRST SECRET

I was one morning with my uncle in his room. Lessons were over, and I was reading a marvellous story in one of my favourite annuals: my uncle had so taught me from infancy the right handling of books, that he would have trusted me with the most valuable in his possession. I do not know how old I was, but that is no matter; man or woman is aged according to the development of the conscience. Looking up, I saw him stooping over an open drawer in a cabinet behind the door. I sat on the great chest under the gable-window, and was away from him the whole length of the room. He had never told me not to look at him, had never seemed to object to the presence of my eyes on anything he did, and as a matter of course I sat observing him, partly because I had never seen any portion of that cabinet open. He turned towards the sky-light near him, and held up between him and it a small something, of which I could just see that it was red, and shone in the light. Then he turned hurriedly, threw it in the drawer, and went straight out, leaving the drawer open. I knew I had lost his company for the day.

The moment he was gone, the phantasm of the pretty thing he had been looking at so intently, came back to me. Somehow I seemed to understand that I had no right to know what it was, seeing my uncle had not shown it me! At the same time I had no law to guide me. He had never said I was not to look at this

or that in the room. If he had, even if the cabinet had not been mentioned, I do not think I should have offended; but that does not make the fault less. For which is the more guilty—the man who knows there is a law against doing a certain thing and does it, or the man who feels an authority in the depth of his nature forbidding the thing, and yet does it? Surely the latter is greatly the more guilty.

I rose, and went to the cabinet. But when the contents of the drawer began to show themselves as I drew near, "I closed my lids, and kept them close," until I had seated myself on the floor, with my back to the cabinet, and the drawer projecting over my head like the shelf of a bracket over its supporting figure. I could touch it with the top of my head by straightening my back. How long I sat there motionless, I cannot say, but it seems in retrospect at least a week, such a multitude of thinkings went through my mind. The logical discussion of a thing that has to be done, a thing awaiting action and not decision—the experiment, that is, whether the duty or the temptation has the more to say for itself, is one of the straight roads to the pit. Similarly, there are multitudes who lose their lives pondering what they ought to believe, while something lies at their door waiting to be done, and rendering it impossible for him who makes it wait, ever to know what to believe. Only a pure heart can understand, and a pure heart is one that sends out ready hands. I knew perfectly well what I ought to do—namely, to shut that drawer with the back of my head, then get up and do something, and forget the

shining stone I had seen betwixt my uncle's finger and thumb; yet there I sat debating whether I was not at liberty to do in my uncle's room what he had not told me not to do.

I will not weary my reader with any further description of the evil path by which I arrived at the evil act. To myself it is pain even now to tell that I got on my feet, saw a blaze of shining things, banged-to the drawer, and knew that Eve had eaten the apple. The eyes of my consciousness were opened to the evil in me, through the evil done by me. Evil seemed now a part of myself, so that nevermore should I get rid of it. It may be easy for one regarding it from afar, through the telescope only of a book, to exclaim, "Such a little thing!" but it was I who did it, and not another! it was I, and only I, who could know what I had done, and it was not a little thing! That peep into my uncle's drawer lies in my soul the type of sin. Never have I done anything wrong with such a clear assurance that I was doing wrong, as when I did the thing I had taken most pains to reason out as right.

Like one stunned by an electric shock, I had neither feeling nor care left for anything. I walked to the end of the long room, as far as I could go from the scene of my crime, and sat down on the great chest, with my coffin, the cabinet, facing me in the distance. The first thing, I think, that I grew conscious of, was dreariness. There was nothing interesting anywhere. What should I do? There was nothing to do, nothing to think about, not a book worth reading. Story was suddenly dried up at its fountain. Life was a plain without water-brooks. If the sky was not "a foul and

pestilent congregation of vapours," it was nothing better than a canopy of gray and blue. By degrees my thought settled on what I had done, and in a moment I realized it as it was—a vile thing, and I had lost my life for it! This is the nearest I can come to the expression of what I felt. I was simply in despair. I had done wrong, and the world had closed in upon me; the sky had come down and was crushing me! The lid of my coffin was closed! I should come no more out!

But deliverance came speedily—and in how lovely a way! Into my thought, not into the room, came my uncle! Present to my deepest consciousness, he stood tall, loving, beautiful, sad. I read no rebuke in his countenance, only sorrow that I had sinned, and sympathy with my suffering because of my sin. Then first I knew that I had *wronged* him in looking into his drawer; then first I saw it was his being that made the thing I had done an evil thing. If the drawer had been nobody's, there would have been no wrong in looking into it! And what made it so very bad was that my uncle was so good to me!

With the discovery came a rush of gladsome relief. Strange to say, with the clearer perception of the greatness of the wrong I had done, came the gladness of redemption. It was almost a pure joy to find that it was against my uncle, my own uncle, that I had sinned! That joy was the first gleam through a darkness that had seemed settled on my soul for ever. But a brighter followed; for thus spake the truth within me: "The thing is in your uncle's hands; he is the lord of the wrong you have done; it is to him

it makes you a debtor:—he loves you, and will forgive you. Of course he will! He cannot make undone what is done, but he will comfort you, and find some way of setting things right. There must be some way! I cannot be doomed to be a contemptible child to all eternity! It is so easy to go wrong, and so hard to get right! He must help me!"

I sat the rest of the day alone in that solitary room, away from Martha and Rover and everybody. I would that even now in my old age I waited for God as then I waited for my uncle! If only he would come, that I might pour out the story of my fall, for I had sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression!—only I was worse, for neither serpent nor wife had tempted me!

At tea-time Martha came to find me. I would not go with her. She would bring me my tea, she said. I would not have any tea. With a look like that she sometimes cast on my uncle, she left me. Dear Martha! she had the lovely gift of leaving alone. That evening there was no tea in the house; Martha did not have any.

With the conceit peculiar to repentance and humiliation, I took a curious satisfaction in being hard on myself. I could have taken my meal tolerably well: with the new hope in my uncle as my saviour, came comfort enough for the natural process of getting hungry, and desiring food; but with common, indeed vulgar foolishness, my own righteousness in taking vengeance on my fault was a satisfaction to me. I did not then see the presumption of the sinner's taking vengeance on her own fault, did not see that I had no right to do that. For how should a

thing defiled punish? With all my great joy in the discovery that the fault was against my uncle, I forgot that therefore I was in his jurisdiction, that he only had to deal with it, he alone could punish, as he alone could forgive it.

It was the end of August, and the night stole swiftly upon the day. It began to grow very dusk, but I would not stir. I and the cabinet kept each other dismal company while the gloom deepened into night. Nor did the night part us, for I and the cabinet filled all the darkness. Had my uncle remained the whole night away, I believe I should have sat till he came. But, happily both for my mental suffering and my bodily endurance, he returned sooner than many a time. I heard the house-door open. I knew he would come to the study before going to his bedroom, and my heart gave a bound of awe-filled eagerness. I knew also that Martha never spoke to him when he returned from one of his late rambles, and that he would not know I was there: long before she died Martha knew how grateful he was for her delicate consideration. Martha Moon was not one of this world's ladies; but there is a country where the social question is not, "Is she a lady?" but, "How much of a woman is she?" Martha's name must, I think, stand well up in the book of life.

My uncle, then, approached his room without knowing there was a live kernel to the dark that filled it. I hearkened to every nearer step as he came up the stair, along the corridor, and up the short final ascent to the door of the study. I had crept from my place to the middle of the room, and, without a thought of

consequences, stood waiting the arrival through the dark, of my deliverer from the dark. I did not know that many a man who would face a battery calmly, will spring a yard aside if a yelping cur dart at him.

My uncle opened the door, and closed it behind him. His lamp and matches stood ready on his table: it was my part to see they were there. With a sigh, which seemed to seek me in the darkness and find me, he came forward through it. I caught him round the legs, and clung to him. He gave a great gasp and a smothered cry, staggered, and nearly fell.

"My God!" he murmured.

"Uncle! uncle!" I cried, in greater terror than he; "it's only Orbie! It's only your little one!"

"Oh! it's only my little one, is it?" he rejoined, at once recovering his equanimity, and not for a moment losing the temper so ready, like nervous cat, to spring from most of us when startled.

He caught me up in his arms, and held me to his heart. I could feel it beat against my little person.

"Uncle! uncle!" I cried again. "Don't! Don't!"

"Did I hurt you, my little one?" he said, and relaxing his embrace, held me more gently, but did not set me down.

"No, no!" I answered. "But I've got a secret, and you mustn't kiss me till it is gone. I wish there was a swine to send it into!"

"Give it to me, little one. I will treat it better than a swine would."

"But it mustn't be treated, uncle! It might come again!"

"There is no fear of that, my child! As soon as a secret is told, it is dead. It is a secret no longer."

"Will it be dead, uncle?" I returned. "—But it will be there, all the same, when it is dead—an ugly thing. It will only put off its cloak, and show itself!"

"All secrets are not ugly things when their cloaks are off. The cloak may be the ugly thing, and nothing else."

He stood in the dark, holding me in his arms. But the clouds had cleared off a little, and though there was no moon, I could see the dim blue of the sky-lights, and a little shine from the gray of his hair.

"But mine is an ugly thing," I said, "and I hate it. Please let me put it out of my mouth. Perhaps then it will go dead."

"Out with it, little one."

"Put me down, please," I returned.

He walked to the old chest under the gable-window, seated himself on it, and set me down beside him. I slipped from the chest, and knelt on the floor at his feet, a little way in front of him. I did not touch him, and all was again quite dark about us.

I told him my story from beginning to end, along with a great part of my meditations while hesitating to do the deed. I felt very choky, but forced my way through, talking with a throat that did not seem my own, and sending out a voice I seemed never to have heard before. The moment I ceased, a sound like a sob came out of the darkness. Was it possible my big uncle was crying?

Then indeed there was no hope for me! He was horrified at my wickedness, and very sorry to have to give me up! I howled like a wild beast.

"Please, uncle, will you kill me!" I cried, through a riot of sobs that came from me like potatoes from a sack.

"Yes, yes, I will kill you, my darling!" he answered, "—this way! this way!" and stretching out his arms he found me in the dark, drew me to him, and covered my face with kisses.

"Now," he resumed, "I've killed you alive again, and the ugly secret is dead, and will never come to life any more. And I think, besides, we have killed the hen that lays the egg-secrets!"

He rose with me in his arms, set me down on the chest, lighted his lamp, and carried it to the cabinet. Then he returned, and taking me by the hand, led me to it, opened wide the drawer of offence, lifted me, and held me so that I could see well into it. The light flashed in a hundred glories of colour from a multitude of cut but unset stones that lay loose in it. I soon learned that most of them were of small money-value, but their beauty was none the less entrancing. There were stones of price among them, however, and these were the first he taught me, because they were the most beautiful. My fault had opened a new source of delight: my stone-lesson was now one of the great pleasures of the week. In after years I saw in it the richness of God not content with setting right what is wrong, but making from it a gain: he will not have his children the worse for the wrong they have done! We shall lose nothing by it: he is our father! For the hurting sand-

grain, he gives his oyster a pearl.

"There," said my uncle, "you may look at them as often as you please; only mind you put every one back as soon as you have satisfied your eyes with it. You must not put one in your pocket, or carry it about in your hand."

Then he set me down, saying,

"Now you must go to bed, and dream about the pretty things. I will tell you a lot of stories about them afterward."

We had a way of calling any kind of statement *a story*.

I never cared to ask how it was that, seeing all the same I had done the wrong thing, the whole weight of it was gone from me. So utterly was it gone, that I did not even inquire whether I ought so to let it pass from me. It was nowhere. In the fire of my uncle's love to me and mine to him, the thing vanished. It was annihilated. Should I not be a creature unworthy of life, if, now in my old age, I, who had such an uncle in my childhood, did not with my very life believe in God?

I have wondered whether, if my father had lived to bring me up instead of my uncle, I should have been very different; but the useless speculation has only driven me to believe that the relations on the surface of life are but the symbols of far deeper ties, which may exist without those correspondent external ones. At the same time, now that, being old, I naturally think of the coming change, I feel that, when I see my father, I shall have a different feeling for him just because he is my father, although my uncle did all the fatherly toward me. But we need not trouble ourselves

about our hearts, and all their varying hues and shades of feeling. Truth is at the root of all existence, therefore everything must come right if only we are obedient to the truth; and right is the deepest satisfaction of every creature as well as of God. I wait in confidence. If things be not as we think, they will both arouse and satisfy a better *think*, making us glad they are not as we expected.

# CHAPTER VI. I LOSE MYSELF

I have one incident more to relate ere my narrative begins to flow from a quite clear memory.

I was by no means a small bookworm, neither spent all my time in the enchanted ground of my uncle's study. It is true I loved the house, and often felt like a burrowing animal that would rather not leave its hole; but occasionally even at such times would suddenly wake the passion for the open air: I must get into it or die! I was well known in the farmyard, not to the men only, but to the animals also. In the absence of human playfellows, they did much to keep me from selfishness. But far beyond it I took no unfrequent flight—always alone. Neither Martha nor my uncle ever seemed to think I needed looking after; and I am not aware that I should have gained anything by it. I speak for myself; I have no theories about the bringing up of children. I went where and when I pleased, as little challenged as my uncle himself. Like him, I took now and then a long ramble over the moor, fearing nothing, and knowing nothing to fear. I went sometimes where it seemed as if human foot could never have trod before, so wild and waste was the prospect, so unknown it somehow looked. The house was built on the more sloping side of a high hollow just within the moor, which stretched wide away from the very edge of the farm. If you climbed the slope, following a certain rough country road, at the top of it you saw on the one side the farm,

in all the colours and shades of its outspread, well tilled fields; on the other side, the heath. If you went another way, through the garden, through the belt of shrubs and pines that encircled it, and through the wilderness behind that, you were at once upon the heath. If then you went as far as the highest point in sight, wading through the heather, among the rocks and great stones which in childhood I never doubted grew also, you saw before you nothing but a wide, wild level, whose horizon was here and there broken by low hills. But the seeming level was far from flat or smooth, as I found on the day of the adventure I am about to relate. I wonder I had never lost myself before. I suppose then first my legs were able to wander beyond the ground with which my eyes were familiar.

It had rained all the morning and afternoon. When our last lesson was over, my uncle went out, and I betook myself to the barn, where I amused myself in the straw. By this time Rover must have gone back to his maker, for I remember as with me a large, respectable dog of the old-fashioned mastiff-type, who endured me with a patience that amounted almost to friendliness, but never followed me about. When I grew hungry, I went into the house to have my afternoon-meal. It was called tea, but I knew nothing about tea, while in milk I was a connoisseur. I could tell perfectly to which of the cows I was indebted for the milk I happened at any time to be drinking: Miss Martha never allowed the milks of the different cows to be mingled.

Just as my meal was over, the sun shone with sudden brilliance

into my very eyes. The storm was breaking up, and vanishing in the west. I threw down my spoon, and ran, hatless as usual, from the house. The sun was on the edge of the hollow; I made straight for him. The bracken was so wet that my legs almost seemed walking through a brook, and my body through a thick rain. In a moment I was sopping; but to be wet was of no consequence to me. Not for many years was I able to believe that damp could hurt.

When I reached the top, the sun was yet some distance above the horizon, and I had gone a good way toward him before he went down. As he sank he sent up a wind, which blew a sense of coming dark. The wind of the sunset brings me, ever since, a foreboding of tears: it seems to say—"Your day is done; the hour of your darkness is at hand." It grew cold, and a feeling of threat filled the air. All about the grave of the buried sun, the clouds were angry with dusky yellow and splashes of gold. They lowered tumulous and menacing. Then, lo! they had lost courage; their bulk melted off in fierce vapour, gold and gray, and the sharp outcry of their shape was gone. As I recall the airy scene, that horizon looks like the void between a cataclysm and the moving afresh of the spirit of God upon the face of the waters. I went on and on, I do not know why. Something enticed me, or I was plunged in some meditation, then absorbing, now forgotten, not necessarily worthless. I am jealous of moods that can be forgotten, but such may leave traces in the character. I wandered on. What ups and downs there were! how uneven was

the surface of the moor! The feet learned what the eyes had not seen.

All at once I woke to the fact that mountains hemmed me in. They looked mountains, though they were but hills. What had become of home? where was it? The light lingering in the west might surely have shown me the direction of it, but I remember no west—nothing but a deep hollow and dark hills. I was lost!

I was not exactly frightened at first. I knew no cause of dread. I had never seen a tramp even; I had no sense of the inimical. I knew nothing of the danger from cold and exposure. But awe of the fading light and coming darkness awoke in me. I began to be frightened, and fear is like other live things: once started, it grows. Then first I thought with dismay, which became terror, of the slimy bogs and the deep pools in them. But just as my heart was dying within me, I looked to the hills—with no hope that from them would come my aid—and there, on the edge of the sky, lifted against it, in a dip between two of the hills, was the form of a lady on horseback. I could see the skirt of her habit flying out against the clouds as she rode. Had she been a few feet lower, so as to come between me and the side of the hill instead of the sky, I should not have seen her; neither should I if she had been a few hundred yards further off. I shrieked at the thought that she did not see me, and I could not make her hear me. She started, turned, seemed to look whence the cry could have come, but kept on her way. Then I shrieked in earnest, and began to run wildly toward her. I think she saw me—that my

quicker change of place detached my shape sufficiently to make it discernible. She pulled up, and sat like a statue, waiting me. I kept on calling as I ran, to assure her I was doing my utmost, for I feared she might grow impatient and leave me. But at last it was slowly indeed I staggered up to her, spent. My foot caught, and as I fell, I clasped the leg of her horse: I had no fear of animals more than of human beings. He was startled, and rearing drew his leg from my arms. But he took care not to come down on me. I rose to my feet, and stood panting.

What the lady said, or what I answered, I cannot recall. The next thing I remember is stumbling along by her side, for she made her horse walk that I might keep up with her. She talked a little, but I do not remember what she said. It is all a dream now, a far-off one. It must have been like a dream at the time, I was so exhausted. I remember a voice descending now and then, as if from the clouds—a cold musical voice, with something in it that made me not want to hear it. I remember her saying that we were near her house, and would soon be there. I think she had found out from me where I lived.

All the time I never saw her face: it was too dark. I do not think she once spoke kindly to me. She said I had no business to be out alone; she wondered at my father and mother. I think I was too tired to tell her I had no father or mother. When I did speak, she indicated neither by sound nor movement that she heard or heeded what I said. She sat up above me in the dark, unpleasant, and all but unseen—a riddle which the troubled child stumbling

along by her horse's side did not want solved. Had there been anything to call light, I should have run away from her. Vague doubts of witches and ogresses crossed my mind, but I said to myself the stories about them were not true, and kept on as best I could.

Before we reached the house, we had left the heath, and were moving along lanes. The horse seemed to walk with more confidence, and it was harder for me to keep up with him. I was so tired that I could not feel my legs. I stumbled often, and once the horse trod on my foot. I fell; he went on; I had to run limping after him. At last we stopped. I could see nothing. The lady gave a musical cry. A voice and footsteps made answer; and presently came the sound of a gate on its hinges. A long dark piece of road followed. I knew we were among trees, for I heard the wind in them over our heads. Then I saw lights in windows, and presently we stopped at the door of a great house. I remember nothing more of that night.

# CHAPTER VII. THE MIRROR

I woke the next morning in a strange bed, and for a long time could not think how I came to be there. A maid appeared, and told me it was time to get up. Greatly to my dislike, she would insist on dressing me. My clothes looked very miserable, I remember, in consequence of what they had gone through the night before. She was kind to me, and asked me a great many questions, but paid no heed to my answers—a treatment to which I had not been used: I think she must have been the lady's maid. When I was ready, she took me to the housekeeper's room, where I had bread and milk for breakfast. Several servants, men and women, came and went, and I thought they all looked at me strangely. I concluded they had no little girls in that house. Assuredly there was small favour for children in it. In some houses the child is as a stranger; in others he rules: neither such house is in the kingdom of heaven. I must have looked a forlorn creature as I sat, or perched rather, on the old horsehair-sofa in that dingy room. Nobody said more than a word or so to me. I wondered what was going to be done with me, but I had long been able to wait for what would come. At length, after, as it seemed, hours of weary waiting, during which my heart grew sick with longing after my uncle, I was, without a word of explanation, led through long passages into a room which appeared enormous. There I was again left a long while—this time alone. It was

all white and gold, and had its walls nearly covered with great mirrors from floor to ceiling, which, while it was indeed of great size, was the cause of its looking so immeasurably large. But it was some time before I discovered this, for I was not accustomed to mirrors. Except the small one on my little dressing-table, and one still less on Martha's, I had scarcely seen a mirror, and was not prepared for those sheets of glass in narrow gold frames.

I went about, looking at one thing and another, but handling nothing: my late secret had cured me of that. Weary at last, I dropped upon a low chair, and would probably have soon fallen asleep, had not the door opened, and some one come in. I could not see the door without turning, and was too tired and sleepy to move. I sat still, staring, hardly conscious, into the mirror in front of me. All at once I descried in it my uncle—but only to see him grow white as death, and turn away, reeling as if he would fall. The sight so bewildered me that, instead of rushing to embrace him, I sat frozen. He clapped his hands to his eyes, steadied himself, stood for a moment rigid, then came straight toward me. But, to my added astonishment, he gave me no greeting, or showed any sign of joy at having found me. Never before had he seen me for the first time any day, without giving me a kiss; never before, it seemed to me, had he spoken to me without a smile: I had been lost and was found, and he was not glad! The strange reception fell on me like a numbing spell. I had nothing to say, no impulse to move, no part in the present world. He caught me up in his arms, hid his face upon me, knocked his shoulder heavily

against the door-post as he went from the room, walked straight through the hall, and out of the house. I think no one saw us as we went; I am sure neither of us saw any one. With long strides he walked down the avenue, never turning his head. Not until we were on the moor, out of sight of the house, did he stop. Then he set me down; and then first we discovered that he had left his hat behind. For all his carrying of me, and going so fast—and I must have been rather heavy—his face had no colour in it.

"Shall I run and get it, uncle?" I said, as I saw him raise his hand to his head and find no hat there to be taken off. "I should be back in a minute!"

It was the first word spoken between us. "No, my little one," he answered, wiping his forehead: his voice sounded far away, like that of one speaking in a dream; "I can't let you out of my sight. I've been wandering the moor all night looking for you!"

With that he caught me up again, and pressing his face to mine, walked with me thus, for a long quarter of a mile, I should think. Oh how safe I felt!—and how happy!—happy beyond smiling! I loved him before, but I never knew before what it was to lose him and find him again.

"Tell me," he said at length.

I told him all, and he did not speak a word until my tale was finished.

"Were you very frightened," he then asked, "when you found you had lost your way, and darkness was coming?"

"I was frightened, or I would not have gone to the lady. But I

wish I had staid on the moor for you to find me. I knew you would soon be out looking for me. Until she came I comforted myself with thinking that perhaps even then you were on the moor, and I might see you any moment."

"What else did you think of?"

"I thought that God was out on the moor, and if you were not there, he would keep me company."

"Ah!" said my uncle, as if thinking to himself; "she but needs him the more when I am with her!"

"Yes, of course!" I answered; "I need him then for you as well as for myself."

"That is very true, my child!—Shall I tell you one thing I thought of while looking for you?"

"Please, uncle."

"I thought how Jesus' father and mother must have felt when they were looking for him."

"And they needn't have been so unhappy if they had thought who he was—need they?"

"Certainly not. And I needn't have been so unhappy if I had thought who you were. But I was terribly frightened, and there I was wrong."

"Who am I, uncle?"

"Another little one of the same father as he."

"Why were you frightened, uncle?"

"I was afraid of your being frightened."

"I hardly had time to be frightened before the lady came."

"Yes; you see I needn't have been so unhappy!"

My uncle always treated me as if I could understand him perfectly. This came, I see now, from the essential childlikeness of his nature, and from no educational theory.

"Sometimes," he went on, "I look all around me to see if Jesus is out anywhere, but I have never seen him yet!"

"We shall see him one day, shan't we?" I said, craning round to look into his eyes, which were my earthly paradise. Nor are they a whit less dear to me, nay, they are dearer, that he has been in God's somewhere, that is, the heavenly paradise, for many a year.

"I think so," he answered, with a sigh that seemed to swell like a sea-wave against me, as I sat on his arm; "—I hope so. I live but for that—and for one thing more."

There are some, I fancy, who would blame him for not being sure, and bring text after text to prove that he ought to have been sure. But oh those text-people! They look to me, not like the clay-sparrows that Jesus made fly, but like bird-skins in a glass-case, stuffed with texts. The doubt of a man like my uncle must be a far better thing than their assurance!

"Would you have been frightened if you had met him on the moor last night, little one?" he asked, after a pause.

"Oh, no, uncle!" I returned. "I should have thought it was you till I came nearer, and then I should have known who it was! He wouldn't like a big girl like me to be frightened at him—would he?"

“Indeed not!”” answered my uncle fervently; but again his words brought with them a great sigh, and he said no more.

When we reached home, he gave me up to Martha, and went out again—nor returned before I was in bed. But he came to my room, and waked me with a kiss, which sent me faster asleep than before.

# CHAPTER VIII.
# THANATOS AND ZOE

I think it must have been soon after this that my uncle bought himself a horse. I know something of horses now—that is, if much riding and much love suffice to give a knowledge of them—and the horse which was a glory and a wonder to me then, is a glory and a wonder to me still. He was large, big-boned, and powerful, with less beauty but more grandeur than a thoroughbred, and full of a fiery gentleness. He was the very horse for sir Philip Sidney!

One day, after he had had him for several months, and had let no one saddle him but himself, therefore knew him perfectly, and knew that the horse knew his master, I happened to be in the yard as he mounted. The moment he was in the saddle, he bent down to me, and held out his hand.

"Come with me, little one," he said.

Almost ere I knew, I was in the saddle before him. I grasped his hand, instinctively caught with my foot at his, and was astride the pommel. I will not say I sat very comfortably, but the memory of that day's delight will never leave me—not "through all the secular to be." There must be a God to the world that could give any such delight as fell then to the share of one little girl! I think my uncle must soon after have got another saddle, for I have no

recollection of any more discomfort; I remember only the delight of the motion of the horse under me.

For, after this, I rode with him often, and he taught me to ride as surely not many have been taught. When he saw me so at home in my seat as to require no support, he made me change my position, and go behind him. There I sat sideways on a cloth, like a lady of old time on a pillion. When I had got used to this, my uncle made me stand on the horse's broad back, holding on by his shoulders; and it was wonderful how soon, and how unconsciously, I accommodated myself to every motion of the strength that bore me, learning to keep my place by pure balance like a rope-dancer. I had soon quite forgotten to hold by my uncle, and without the least support rode as comfortably, and with as much confidence, as any rider in a circus, though with a far less easy pace under me. When my uncle found me capable of this, he was much pleased, though a little nervous at times.

Able now to ride his big horse any way, he brought me one afternoon the loveliest of Shetland ponies, not very small. With the ordinary human distrust in good, I could hardly believe she was meant for me. She was a dappled gray—like the twilight of a morning after rain, my uncle said. He called her Zoe, which means Life. His own horse he called Thanatos, which means Death. Such as understood it, thought it a terrible name to give a horse. For most people are so afraid of Death that they regard his very name with awe.

My uncle had a riding-habit made for me, and after a

week found I could give him no more trouble with my horsewomanship. At once I was at home on my new friend's back, with vistas of delight innumerable opening around me, and from that day my uncle seldom rode without me. When he went wandering, it was almost always on foot, and then, as before, he was always alone. The idea of offering to accompany him on such an occasion, had never occurred to me.

But one stormy autumn afternoon—most of my memories seem of the autumn—my uncle looked worse than usual when he went out, and I felt, I think for the first time, a vague uneasiness about him. Perhaps I had been thinking of him more; perhaps I had begun to wonder what the secret could be that made him so often seem unhappy. Anyhow this evening the desire awoke to be with him in his trouble whatever it was. There was no curiosity in the feeling, I think, only the desire to serve him as I had never served him yet. I had been, as long as I could remember, always at his beck or lightest call; now I wanted to come when needed without being called. Was it impossible a girl should do anything for a man in his trouble? He, a great man, had helped a little girl out of the deepest despair; could the little girl do nothing for the great man? That the big people should do everything, did not seem fair! He had told me once that the world was held together by what every one could do that the others could not do: there must be something I could do that he could not do!

The rain was coming down on the roof like the steady tramp of distant squadrons. I was in the study, therefore near the tiles, and

that was how the rain always sounded upon them. Tramp, tramp, tramp, came the whole army of things, riding, riding, to befall my uncle and me. Tramp, tramp, came the troops of the future, to take the citadel of the present! I was not afraid of them, neither sought to imagine myself afraid! I had no picture in my mind of any evil that could assail me. A little grove of black poplars under the gable-window, kept swaying their expostulations, and moaning their entreaties. The great rushing blasts of the wind through their rooted resistance, made the music of the band that accompanied the march of the unknown. I sat and listened, with the vague conviction that something was being done somewhere. It could not be that only the wind and the trees and the rain were in all that wailing and marching! The Powers of life and death must somewhere be at work! Then rose before me the face of my uncle, as he walked from the room, haloed in a sorrowful stillness. If only I could be with him! If only I knew where to seek him! Wishing, wishing, I sat and listened to the rain and the wind.

Suddenly I found myself on my feet, making for the door. I would not have ventured alone upon the moor in such a night, but I should have Zoe with me, who knew all the ways of it—had doubtless been used to bogs in her own country, and her mother before her! Like a small elephant, she would put out her little foot, and tap, and sound, to see if the surface would bear her—if the questionable spot was what it looked to her mistress, or what she herself doubted it. When she had once made up her mind

in the negative, no foolish attempt of mine could overpersuade her—could make her trust our weight on it a hair's-breadth. In a bog the greenest spots are the most dangerous, and Zoe knew it: the matted roots might be afloat on a fathomless depth of water. Backed by my uncle, she soon taught me to be as much afraid of those green spots as she was herself. I had learned to trust her thoroughly.

I took my way to the stable, with a hug and a kiss to Martha as I passed her in the kitchen, I got the cowboy to saddle Zoe, fearing I might not persuade one of the big men on such a night, and I was not quite able myself to tighten the girths properly. She had not been out all day, and when I mounted, she danced at the prospect of a gallop.

I took with me the little lantern I went about the place with when there was no moon, and with this alight in my hand, we darted off at a tight-reined gallop into the wet blowing night. What I was going for I did not know, beyond being with my uncle. So far was I from any fear, that, but for my shadowy uneasiness about him, I should have been filled full of the wild joy of battle with the elements. The first part of the way, I had to cling to the saddle: not otherwise could I keep my seat against the wind, which blew so fiercely on me sideways, that it threatened to blow me out of it.

I had not gone far before the saddle began to turn round with me; I was slipping to the ground. I pulled up, dismounted, undid the girths with difficulty, set the saddle straight, then pulled at

every strap with all my might. It was to no purpose: I could not get another hole out of one of them. I mounted and set off again; but the moment a stronger blast came, the saddle began to turn. Then I thought of something to try: dismounting once more, I got up on the off side. The wind now pushed me on to the saddle, freeing it from my leverage, while I had, besides, the use of my legs against the wind, so that we got on bravely, my Zoe and I. But, alas! my lantern was out, and it was impossible to light it again, so that I had now no arrow to shoot at random for my uncle's eye. Before long we reached a tolerable cart-track, which led across the waste to a village, and the wind being now behind us, I resumed the more comfortable seat in the saddle.

We were going at a good speed, and had ridden, as I judged, about three miles, when there came a great flash of lightning —not like any flash I had ever seen before. It was neither the reflection of lightning below the horizon, nor the sudden zigzagged blade, the very idea of force without weight; it was the burst of a ball-headed torrent of fire from a dark cloud, like water sudden from a mountain's heart, which went rushing down a rugged channel, as if the cloud were indeed a mountain, and the fire one of its cataracts. Its endurance was momentary, but its moments might have been counted, for it lasted appreciably longer than an ordinary flash, revealing to my eyes what remains on my mind clear as the picture of some neighbouring tree on the skin of one slain by lightning. The torrent tumbled down the cloud and vanished, but left with me the vision of a man,

plainly my uncle, a few hundred yards from me, on a gigantic gray horse, which reared high with fright. But for its size I could have testified before a magistrate, that I had not only seen that horse in the stable as my pony was being saddled, but had stroked and kissed him on the nose. I conceived at once that his apparent size was an illusion caused by the suddenness and keenness of the light, and that my uncle had come home before I had well reached the moor, and had ridden out after me. With a wild cry of delight, I turned at once to leave the road and join him. But the thunder that moment burst with a terrific bellow, and swallowed my cry. The same instant, however, came through it from the other side the voice of my uncle only a few yards away.

"Stay, little one," he shouted; "stay where you are. I will be with you in a moment."

I obeyed, as ever and always without a thought I obeyed the slightest word of my uncle: Zoe and I stood as if never yet parted from chaos and the dark, for Zoe too loved his voice. The wind rose suddenly from a lull to a great roar, emptying a huge cloudful of rain upon us, so that I heard no sound of my uncle's approach; but presently out of the dark an arm was around me, and my head was lying on my uncle's bosom. Then the dark and the rain seemed the natural elements for love and confidence.

"But, uncle," I murmured, full of wonder which had had no time to take shape, "how is it?"

He answered in a whisper that seemed to dread the ear of the wind, lest it should hear him—

"You saw, did you?"

"I saw you upon Death away there in the middle of the lightning. I was going to you. I don't know what to think."

My uncle and I often called the horse by his English name.

"Neither do I," he returned, with a strange half voice, as if he were choking. "It must have been—I don't know what. There is a deep bog away just there. It must be a lake by now!"

"Yes, uncle; I might have remembered! But how was I to think of that when I saw you there—on dear old Death too! He's the last of horses to get into a bog: he knows his own weight too well!"

"But why did you come out on such a night? What possessed you, little one—in such a storm? I begin to be afraid what next you may do."

"I never do anything—now—that I think you would mind me doing," I answered. "But if you will write out a little book of *mays* and *maynots*, I will learn it by heart."

"No, no," he returned; "we are not going back to the tables of the law! You have a better law written in your heart, my child; I will trust to that.—But tell me why you came out on such a night—and as dark as pitch."

"Just because it was such a night, uncle, and you were out in it," I answered. "Ain't I your own little girl? I hope you ain't sorry I came, uncle! I am glad; and I shouldn't like ever to be glad at what made you sorry."

"What are you glad of?"

"That I came—because I've found you. I came to look for

you."

"Why did you come to-night more than any other night?"

"Because I wanted so much to see you. I thought I might be of use to you."

"You are always of use to me; but why did you think of it just to-night?"

"I don't know.—I am older than I was last night," I replied.

He seemed to understand me, and asked me no more questions.

All the time, we had been standing still in the storm. He took Zoe's head and turned it toward home. The dear creature set out with slow leisurely step, heedless apparently of storm and stable. She knew who was by her side, and he must set the pace!

As we went my uncle seemed lost in thought—and no wonder! for how could the sight we had seen be accounted for! Or what might it indicate?

Many were the strange tales I had read, and my conviction was that the vision belonged to the inexplicable. It grew upon me that I had seen my uncle's double. That he should see his own double would not in itself have much surprised me—or, indeed, that I should see it; but I had never read of another person seeing a double at the same time with the person doubled. During the next few days I sought hard for some possible explanation of what had occurred, but could find nothing parallel to it within the scope of my knowledge. I tried *fata morgana, mirage, parhelion*, and whatever I had learned of recognized illusion, but in vain sought

satisfaction, or anything pointing in the direction of satisfaction. I was compelled to leave the thing alone. My uncle kept silence about it, but seemed to brood more than usual. I think he too was convinced that it must have another explanation than present science would afford him. Once I ventured to ask if he had come to any conclusion; with a sad smile, he answered,

"I am waiting, little one. There is much we have to wait for. Where would be the good of having your mind made up wrong? It only stands in the way of getting it made up right!"

By degrees the thing went into the distance, and I ceased even speculating upon it. But one little fact I may mention ere I leave it —that, just as I was reaching a state of quiet mental prorogation, I suddenly remembered that, the moment after the flash, my Zoe, startled as she was, gave out a low whinny; I remembered the quiver of it under me: she too must have seen her master's double!

# CHAPTER IX. THE GARDEN

I remember nothing more to disturb the even flow of my life till I was nearly seventeen. Many pleasant things had come and gone; many pleasant things kept coming and going. I had studied tolerably well—at least my uncle showed himself pleased with the progress I had made and was making. I know even yet a good deal more than would be required for one of these modern degrees feminine. I had besides read more of the older literature of my country than any one I have met except my uncle. I had also this advantage over most students, that my knowledge was gained without the slightest prick of the spur of emulation—purely in following the same delight in myself that shone radiant in the eyes of my uncle as he read with me. I had this advantage also over many, that, perhaps from impression of the higher mind, I saw and learned a thing not merely as a fact whose glory lay in the mystery of its undeveloped harmonics, but as the harbinger of an unknown advent. For as long as I can remember, my heart was given to expectation, was tuned to long waiting. I constantly felt—felt without thinking—that something was coming. I feel it now. Were I young I dared not say so. How could I, compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses to the common-place! Do I not see their superior smile, as, with voices sweetly acidulous, they quote in reply—

"Love is well on the way;
He'll be here to-day,
Or, at latest, the end of the week;
Too soon you will find him,
And the sorrow behind him
You will not go out to seek!"

Would they not tell me that such expectation was but the shadow of the cloud called love, hanging no bigger than a man's hand on the far horizon, but fraught with storm for mind and soul, which, when it withdrew, would carry with it the glow and the glory and the hope of life; being at best but the mirage of an unattainable paradise, therefore direst of deceptions! Little do such suspect that their own behaviour has withered their faith, and their unbelief dried up their life. They can now no more believe in what they once felt, than a cloud can believe in the rainbow it once bore on its bosom. But I am old, therefore dare to say that I expect more and better and higher and lovelier things than I have ever had. I am not going home to God to say—"Father, I have imagined more beautiful things than thou art able to make true! They were so good that thou thyself art either not good enough to will them, or not strong enough to make them. Thou couldst but make thy creature dream of them, because thou canst but dream of them thyself." Nay, nay! In the faith of him to whom the Father shows all things he does, I expect lovelier gifts than I ever have been, ever shall be able to dream of asleep, or imagine awake.

I was now approaching the verge of woman-hood. What lay beyond it I could ill descry, though surely a vague power of undeveloped prophecy dwells in every created thing—even in the bird ere he chips his shell.

Should I dare, or could I endure to write of what lies now to my hand, if I did not believe that not our worst but our best moments, not our low but our lofty moods, not our times logical and scientific, but our times instinctive and imaginative, are those in which we perceive the truth! In them we behold it with a beholding which is one with believing. And,

> "Though nothing can bring back the hour
> Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower",

could not Wordsworth, and cannot we, call up the vision of that hour? and has not its memory almost, or even altogether, the potency of its presence? Is not the very thought of any certain flower enough to make me believe in that flower—believe it to mean all it ever seemed to mean? That *these* eyes may never more rest upon it with the old delight, means little, and matters nothing. I have other eyes, and shall have yet others. If I thought, as so many have degraded themselves to think, that the glory of things in the morning of love was a glamour cast upon the world, no outshine of indwelling radiance, should I care to breathe one day more the air of this or of any world? Nay, nay, but there dwells in everything the Father hath made, the fire of the burning bush,

as at home in his son dwelt the glory that, set free, broke out from him on the mount of his transfiguration. The happy-making vision of things that floods the gaze of the youth, when first he lives in the marvel of loving, and being loved by, a woman, is the true vision—and the more likely to be the true one, that, when he gives way to selfishness, he loses faith in the vision, and sinks back into the commonplace unfaith of the beggarly world—a disappointed, sneering worshipper of power and money—with this remnant of the light yet in him, that he grumbles at the gloom its departure has left behind. He confesses by his soreness that the illusion ought to have been true; he seldom confesses that he loved himself more than the woman, and so lost her. He lays the blame on God, on the woman, on the soullessness of the universe —anywhere but on the one being in which he is interested enough to be sure it exists—his own precious, greedy, vulgar self. Would I dare to write of love, if I did not believe it a true, that is, an eternal thing!

It was a summer of exceptional splendour in which my eyes were opened to "the glory of the sum of things." It was not so hot of the sun as summers I have known, but there were so many gentle and loving winds about, with never point or knife-edge in them, that it seemed all the housework of the universe was being done by ladies. Then the way the odours went and came on those sweet winds! and the way the twilight fell asleep into the dark! and the way the sun rushed up in the morning, as if he cried, like a boy, "Here I am! The Father has sent me! Isn't it jolly!" I

saw more sun-rises that year than any year before or since. And the grass was so thick and soft! There must be grass in heaven! And the roses, both wild and tame, that grew together in the wilderness!—I think you would like to hear about the wilderness.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.