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Hope Trueblood

Hope Trueblood By *Patience Worth.*

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HOPE TRUEBLOOD

CHAPTER I

THE glass had slipped thrice and the sands stood midway through, and still the bird hopped within its wicker. I think the glass had slipped through a score of years, rightfully set at each turning, and the bird had sung through some of these and mourned through others. The hearth's arch yawned sleepily upon the black woollen table cover, where yellow fruits cut of some cloth were sewn. It may have been that I fancied this, but nevertheless it yawned.

The wick had been lighted, as it had been the score of years, at the first coming of darkness. The kettle had been hung within the yawning hearth, and sent its steaming mists up the dark of the chimney's pit. I think the steam knew the chimney's pit, for it had so often climbed the way. The fire seemed fitful, sleeping almost to ash, then suddenly flaming up as though to see the trinkets upon the what-all or read the woollen sampler that told unto the coming guest: "God is Love."

I may have fancied this, but I watched it long and I think I am right; although it may have been it but longed to reach the red deer that sped a purple field at the left. Still, there was the castle beneath glass, made of quills. No, I am sure it was not the castle; for the deer was speeding o'er the purple way, and I think the fire feared that it might fall o'er the dizzy height.

I do not know that all of this matters, and yet when Mr.

Passwater arose and coughed behind his long thin hand, I seemed to forget him and remember the fire. It was of more importance, but he insisted, coughing, and walked across the garlanded carpet that puffed beneath his feet and seemed to raise within one the sounds of golden fields.

He was a tall gentleman who looked much as a robin, his smalls tight upon his legs, and his rounded stomach vested in magenta and specked of snuff. He moved in a sort of hops, and his coat tails bobbed. As I remarked, he coughed as though to apologize, and walked to an inner room and knocked and called :

" Patricia ! My dear Patricia ! "

And was answered by a thin voice with a hook upon it. Mr. Passwater coughed suddenly and started, almost as though the door had been suddenly opened. Wheeling, he brought the great chair up to the hearth and set the hassock at its foot.

Miss Patricia opened the door primly, raised her skirts ever so slightly, and tripped into the lighted room. Her face had been young, I think, but she had forgotten it—not her face, but her youth. No, I think Miss Patricia's face was a thing that might whisper to one even in the dark. Of course I may fancy this, but it seems true. I am sure Miss Patricia had forgotten that her hair ever hung, for it was netted in as though bound of steel, and pinned back until her ears stood out pale and thin, showing the fire through them. Her eyes were bright and round, like a rat's, and her narrow chin was offset by two huge moles, sprigged of hair. I do not think that Miss Patricia ever forgot the moles, for she had a nervous habit of fingering them.

Her frock never wrinkled ; indeed, Miss Patricia's back never bended. She sat upon the armchair straight, and her back never had been known to rest upon the tidy. She sat, as I remarked, and rested the bowl that filled her hands upon her thin knees.

Mr. Passwater watched her from the hearth's side, much as a robin might watch a worm. Miss Patricia was sorting candle ends, and her thin hands showed white at the knuckles as she pried out bits of wick and cast them into the basket upon the black table cover.

" Waste ! Waste ! " said Miss Patricia, " wilful waste !

My dear brother, why do you stand staring like a fool, when you may see that your sister would save you from ruin? Stand from the fire, Reuben, your woollens are smoking."

Mr. Passwater coughed and started as though a sudden pain had seized him. Miss Patricia rubbed her eyes with her knuckles, daintily rubbed her finger tips one upon the other, and stared in astonishment at the floor, starting up and all but spilling the candle ends.

"Reuben Passwater! Do you mean to say that you would tread upon this carpet with wet feet?"

Mr. Passwater stood meekly, his head bowed and his eyes seeking something to aid his agony. They seemed to seek the red deer and I fancy—of course it is but fancy—that he would have gladly gone o'er the dizzy height.

Miss Patricia stood rigid, her eyes round and her thin lips hung open. Mr. Passwater gulped and let his eyes seek the floor where they rested upon his wet feet, and suddenly looked therefrom, as though fright had overcome him; but Miss Patricia gave no sign of softening, and he murmured meekly:

"But, my dear, my dear!"

Miss Patricia tossed her head and sniffed:

"Don't 'my dear' me, Reuben Passwater. Sit down!"

Mr. Passwater sat suddenly upon the hearth seat only to arise more suddenly, for Miss Patricia's knitting had been upon the seat. It was at this point that I snickered, and the bench upon which I sat within the shadow, creaked. Miss Patricia whirled and faced the shadow, her eyes straining to see what had made the sound. I quaked.

Miss Patricia came to the shadow, and my bench, slowly, her neck arched and her hands folded across her stomach, as I had seen them every Sabbath at the chapel since I could remember. She spoke no word to me, but reached out one thin hand and took me by the ear and led me forth to the light. I stood blinking. Miss Patricia stood waiting, I blinked more. Miss Patricia drew herself up and seemed to my youthful eyes to grow before me. Her thin lips snapped open and she suddenly shot the words:

"Well! what have you to say for yourself?"

I quaked and looked to the red deer, but my eyes would not stay and sought timidly to Miss Patricia's face. This

to my own undoing. Miss Patricia looked horrified and shook me by one shoulder:

"Speak! Speak, numskull!"

But my tongue was tied. I saw nothing but the two great moles. I seem to see myself now, as I write, scarce higher than the table hung of the black woollen scarf; my small hands working in my woollen comforter; two flaxen braids hanging out of the folds of green wool; white and frightened, swallowing, and shutting my eyes not to see those moles work. Even do I feel the dry throat and the aching. Miss Patricia turned to Mr. Passwater and addressed him:

"Look you, Reuben Passwater, this is the brat of the woman, Sally Trueblood."

Reuben squinted, his hands moved swiftly over his magenta waistcoat, and he remarked vaguely:

"So it is. So it is. So it is."

Miss Patricia looked at Mr. Reuben Passwater in disgust and sneered:

"So it is! So it is! Reuben Passwater, you are a fool. Since our pa died it seems that the family name is to fall upon a fool. Of course it is the woman's brat."

Here I looked to Mr. Passwater, but he feared to look at me. I saw that he had two mild blue eyes, a small round head, a mouth too thick, and ears like his sister, Miss Patricia, thin and pale and outstanding; but he had not the moles. Again I turned my gaze to Miss Patricia only to be undone, for the moles *would* work. Miss Patricia perceived that I stared and shouted to me:

"What are you staring at? Come! what has brought you?"

Miss Patricia looked thunders upon me and shouted once more:

"What brought you?"

I stammered: "Ma'am?"

I swallowed hard and looked at the floor and timidly at Miss Patricia, and the moles worked.

"Do they really move!" I asked.

Miss Patricia shrieked: "What!"

"Move," I replied solemnly.

Mr. Passwater made a sound. It may be but fancy, but

I believe he laughed. Miss Patricia wheeled upon him. Mr. Passwater sighed and sat down upon the hearth's bench and stared into the fire. I stood waiting Miss Patricia's reply. She seemed to forget my query and stooped down to unwrap my comforter. Her hands were cold and hard. She scratched my chin and got her fingers mixed in my flaxen locks. All of this I stood, intently watching the moles.

Miss Patricia arose, brought forth a small hassock and a pewter plate, took me by the hand and led me to the hassock. I sat upon its edge and she put the cold pewter plate in my small pudgy hands. I remember that the plate was bright, brighter than any I had ever seen, and that it was heavy, and I wondered what she gave it to me for; but I did not speak, thinking in my young mind that it was warm and Mr. Passwater was friendly. I waited.

"What brought you, now?" said Miss Patricia, as she sat down and took up the jar of candle ends. I looked at her, but her head was turned and I answered:

"Rudy Strong told me about them."

"About what?" asked Miss Patricia.

"The moles," I replied. "He said they moved."

Miss Patricia turned, her jaw hung open and she crisply remarked: "Well!"

"They do," I sighed, fingering the pewter plate. "But, I don't believe that your face sours the curds, nor that your tongue licks every pot in the village."

Miss Patricia arose suddenly and the candle ends bounded merrily in all ways. I stooped to gather them up, thinking what fine chewing they'd make. I bit one and it crumbled and the bits flew down my throat and I choked. Miss Patricia came to the rescue, beating upon my back, and, I may but fancy it, but it seemed that the beating upon my small back was overmuch. Miss Patricia shrieked to Mr. Passwater:

"Reuben, bring a bowl of water!"

Mr. Passwater looked dazed and his lips formed the words:

"Water? Yes, my dear, yes. Water."

And he moved slowly to an inner room to come back bearing the water and a flagon of port. Miss Patricia shoved the bowl's rim between my teeth and let the water pour over my frock's front, down my neck and even upon the carpet, and I choked once more.

"Look here," said Miss Patricia, "youngens like you should be abed. Rudy Strong shall hear of this."

"Yesum," I choked, "yes—um."

"Sit down," said Miss Patricia.

"Yesum," I answered, and sat upon the edge of the hassock. Miss Patricia went to the inner room and came back with a Scotch cake and a plum. These she put upon the pewter plate and gave to me. Then she seemed to forget that I was there and I sat munching the Scotch cake and protracting the occasion, thinking that the longer the cake lasted the plum would last.

Miss Patricia went to the fireside and sat beside Mr. Reuben Passwater. He was mulling port. He had removed his shoes and loosened his waistcoat. Miss Patricia spoke softly, and, as I write, I seem to smell the port and taste the crumbly cake and see the shadows and the moths that flickered about the lamp's wick. And bits of the conversation came idly to me, disconnected and meaning little, yet much.

"The woman's a wanton." I remember Miss Patricia said this, and I bit the plum. Mr. Passwater seemed to listen, but never looked to Miss Patricia and his back was turned to me. "It is shameful among Christians." I picked the crumbs carefully off the pewter plate and wondered what was shameful. "Her mother——" Miss Patricia's words sunk to whispers, and I swung my legs and licked my fingers. I do not remember that Mr. Passwater spoke, but there came to me Miss Patricia's words again.

"The man should be held up before the people. He is clothed in the garb of the hypocrite." I sucked the plum stone and wondered what a hypocrite was and if they were upon the road at night. "Sally Trueblood's brat!" I looked to the sampler and read slowly, "God is Love." And I wondered what a brat was.

Mr. Passwater seemed not to relish his port, and Miss Patricia sipped hers gingerly. I sneezed and Miss Patricia seemed not to hear me, but continued, "'Tis shameful."

I got from off the hassock and tiptoed over to the castle beneath the glass and stood wrapt. Beside it lay a book of prayer. It was thin and flat and black, and I knew it was Miss Patricia's. From this I went up to the what-all, and

the lights played o'er it and I stood before it filled with wonder. Upon the third shelf was a china dog, with a babe upon its back. Oh, to touch this! I turned stealthily and looked to Miss Patricia. She did not see. I reached forth one hand and tiptoed and it was mine. I hugged it close to maure and the what-all shook and rattled. Miss Patricia was upon her feet in an instant and pounced upon me, taking me within her grasp so suddenly that I let fall the china dog. Miss Patricia gasped:

"A thief! My dear brother William's pet! Oh, that the earth should be so sinful! Reuben Passwater, take this brat out of this house! Shut her out!"

And Miss Patricia shook me. I whimpered, and stooped to pick up the dog, tenderly, leaving my tears to fall upon it, and offered it to her hand sniffling. Miss Patricia took it and placed it upon the third shelf where it had stood and I backed away staring, my fingers within my mouth and the tears coursing down my cheeks. I knew what a thief was. Miss Patricia stared at me and looked at my feet, crying out:

"Why does your worthless mother leave you free in night's hour to visit Christian homes? Your feet are upon the ground. Where are your better shoes?"

"I haven't none, thanks. She has promised 'em at Mayin'."

This seemed to send Miss Patricia into a storm, for she rocked and shrieked and beat her bosom, crying out that the tongues of the village were lashes and that no Christian might dwell among them, stopping only to shout: "Take her away! Take her away!"

Mr. Passwater stooped slowly and took up a shoe and put it on, then the other just as slowly. He arose and buttoned his vest, sighed, went for his greatcoat and made a sign to me to follow. We went out of a narrow hallway that smelled of mutton. Mr. Passwater opened the latch and we stepped into the night. I followed him, frightened, and he did not speak. I did not seem to fear Mr. Passwater, but the dark. He seemed silent, and, as I write, I see his dark form stooped and hear him step heavily and my light footfall following, pattering. I called:

"Mr. Passwater, they do move, don't they?"

He walked slowly for a long time, and I may fancy it, but I believe that he answered softly: "Yes." I followed for a time and Mr. Passwater turned and stooped in the dark and asked:

"Where do you stay?"

"In the eaves of the Grey Eagle," I replied.

Mr. Passwater made a sound, a sort of long sound—"U-u-u-m." We went upon our way. I was weary and I remember remarking:

"Mr. Passwater, your legs are long." And he suddenly stooped and took me up. I never before had been so high. Shall I ever forget it? I had seen the children of the village tossed so by their sires, but I had not a sire. I sighed and nestled down next to his shoulder, shutting my eyes and dreaming and—of course this is fancy, but it seemed to me that Reuben Passwater pressed his cheek to mine.

We had gone for some time so and I know that my tiny arms wound about his neck, but the dream ended.

We came to the Grey Eagle and, though I had not opened my eyes, I smelled it. It was dark and the dog barked and roused some fowls that set up sounds. Mr. Passwater loosened his hold upon me and I seemed to slip a great way down. I felt so small. My feet were numb and I reached up and held to his hand and pulled him down and I whispered:

"Mr. Passwater, I like her."

He stood up and did not answer. I pulled him down once more and whispered: "That beautiful worsted—did she do that?"

Mr. Passwater seemed not to understand. I whispered once more: "It says, 'God is Love.' Did she?"

Mr. Passwater answered: "No."

"Who then?" I asked.

"My mother."

"Are you a brat, Mr. Passwater? You know she called me 'Sally Trueblood's brat.' What is a brat?"

Mr. Passwater stooped down and took me to him and whispered soft: "A brat is an elf."

I knew what an elf was, for She had told me. I kissed Mr. Passwater upon the hand and sped to the dark doorway, calling out: "Good night!" He seemed to tarry, then walked slowly into the dark, and of course even this may be

fancy, but it seemed that the words came back soft to me, "Sarah Trueblood."

The dog barked as I slipped up the quaking stairway to the eaves and sought the cot. She slept and I sought her side and laid one small hand upon her. She sighed and caught my hand and kissed it, and I whispered, "Sarah Trueblood, I am your brat."

She did not answer and I made ready for sleep and lay wondering, seeming to see Miss Patricia's moles and I fell asleep listening. I thought it was blowing without, for a sighing sounded. But I know now she wept.

CHAPTER II

WHEN I waked the rain roared upon the roof and the chill of night filled up the room. I sat up in my cot and rubbed my eyes open, yawned and looked to her cot. The light was still pale. I shivered and arose to hasten to her side. She lay huddled, shivering. I threw my small arms about her and let my lips press her cold cheek, saying:

"Sally Trueblood, I love you."

She did not wake and I crept to her side, beneath the covers that she might warm upon my body. I could not sleep, but lay watching a small hole in the roof where the rain dropped slowly through. I watched the grey-bright that showed through and knew that though it was raining the hour was late, and darkness was but the cloud.

Long we lay. I heard the dog arise and shake. He had slept next the hearth. I wondered why he might sleep there, and resolved in my small mind to watch the latch and wait the Grey Eagle's sleeping at some future time and sleep beside it, too. There was a high hearth in the Grey Eagle inn and it smoked in the wet tides; but when the days were crisp and cold it sparkled. I had watched from the doorstep and seen the shadows skip the walls and floors, and went upon wondrous travels in their changefulness.

I lay dreaming anew these dreams, and my back ached, for I feared to move lest I wake her. It was chill, and she coughed when the chill hung. Yes, this was a thing I knew

too well; this, and that her cheeks flamed and her eyes seemed filled of tears. I turned my aching neck slowly to see her. Yes, her cheeks flamed and her lips were dry. I laid my cool hands upon them and touched her sweet locks that clung in damp curls unto her white brow. Her lids fluttered and opened and I kissed her and cried softly:

"Sally Trueblood, it is morning!"

She did not smile, but this was no new thing. I waited, but she did not speak but lay gazing up to the roof as though she saw something there that I did not see.

"I think," I whispered softly, laying my cheek to hers, "I think you are dreaming shadow-dreams, Sally Trueblood."

She did not smile. I stroked her burning cheek and wondered what to say. She drew herself up upon her elbow and coughed, and I seemed to feel within me, deep down, an aching. Suddenly I remembered and laughed, laughed until the empty eaves rattled, and I cried:

"I know! You are playing! Look!" And I puffed out my cheeks making a sound with my small fists, pushing out the air I had filled them with. She hid her eyes. "Listen, Sally Trueblood, listen! Hold out your white hand."

She held it forth—all too white and shaking. I kissed it.

"Open up your eyes. Let me see the morning!"

She opened them slowly. Oh, the thing I saw not then is clear now!

"I am hungry, Sally Trueblood, but listen! I went last night to Miss Patricia's. You know, she has moles and they move, and she has Scotch cake and plums, and Mr. Reuben."

My mother suddenly arose and clung to the coverings, wrapping herself within them and coughing. She seemed like a slender reed in the wind, the cough swayed her so. I forgot Miss Patricia, for the doves awoke that nested in the chimney corner. I heard them coo and flutter and I sped to the spot, and found that they were wet. She busied at the cupboard and brought forth a cold mutton joint almost bare, and I knew that the Grey Eagle inn had souped.

I watched her lay the table carefully, as though it were feast. Her slender hands laid the bowls lovingly, seeming to by other things. The meat from the cold joint she plucked

daintily and put into the bowls, and she heated at the new-kindled fire a brew of herb tea. I watched her, and I seemed to feel that I was losing something. Her cheeks *were* thinner, and her hands shook more. I remembered when her step had been light, and when she would throw herself upon me, hold me fast and cry out happily, even though her voice seemed filled of tears:

"Oh, my dream-baby! *Will* you fade?"

And she would arise and shut the door suddenly and look fearful, and come back and hold me close unto her breast. And I could hear her heart throbbing, throbbing, throbbing, and she told me it sung: "I love you! I love you! I love you!"

I left the doves and sped to her side and drew her down and laid my ear upon her breast—and it stammered. I wondered was it singing, and asked her. She smiled and coughed and held me to her and spoke softly:

"Wait! Wait the Mayin'."

"Will it sing in the Mayin'?" I asked, and she kissed me and smiled and whispered close to my ear:

"How may we sorrow when the buds burst?"

I stopped and wondered, and asked: "Do you believe that Miss Patricia's chin has budded?"

She laughed and pinched my cheek and said: "No, Miss Patricia is a winter tree. Oh, my darling, the May sun is upon you!"

The brew was ready and steaming and she bade me sup, I sat beside her upon the bench beside the table, my arm around her slender waist, and I watched, for I knew she would not eat.

We sat long. I watched her eyes. They looked heavy, dull. Her hands lay motionless in her lap. I broke the loaf of dry bread and supped the broth. She did not look. I hugged her close and whispered: "Dearest." She started, and I placed upon my lips a crumb, and she smiled and laid her lips upon it, and I laughed, for she had smiled. This was an old game, the game of doving. I brought forth a bit of the meat and did the same and she ate it. I supped the bowl of brew anew and offered it to her and she supped. This was too much. I crushed her within my small arms and kissed her sweet cheeks o'er and o'er.

We could hear the inn below awaking. I heard the bolts turned and the stirring of the embers within the hearth and the casting of new logs. Peter Goff slipped scuffing over the sanded floor. I heard the scraping of the brush broom as he righted up, and, suddenly, the shriek of a goose, and I knew it would shriek no more. And within me I resolved to make my way to the side of Delicia Prue's pot and beg the giblets.

She seemed to read this upon my face, for she shook her head solemnly: "No. No. No." I laughed and shook mine: "Yes. Yes. Yes."

"It's a wet morning, Sarah Trueblood. You shall venture not forth. I shall send the coach and four for you when the sun comes. Have you brushed your shining locks? Have you dipped your face? Are your robes waiting? Sir Lilyfinger Dappergay will await you."

She spread her scant skirt and curtseyed and shook her locks free, and held her arms open, and I fled within them. She whispered:

"You shall say to Sir Lilyfinger that his lady is overcome. You shall say that——" she stopped and her cheek whitened and she caught her breast and swayed. And the aching away down deep within me came again.

I struggled with her limp form to the cot and she lay upon it, white and panting. I hastened to the table and brought the brew and offered it. She smiled wanly and sat up that she sup, and I knew the brew would not help.

I whispered: "I love you," and she smiled. I stood before her, clinging to her hands, and my heart was pounding so that I feared she would hear it.

She lay long, and when she had rested until the panting had ceased, she turned to me and whispered:

"Not to-day, dearest, not to-day. Go to the parish house and tell Mrs. Gifford not to-day."

I ran to the basket beside the window and took up a bundle of small garments, and sat in the dim light wondering if I might finish them. Even to this day within my chest is one of these with many crooked stitches within it. As I fingered the garments the tears started. I felt so lonely. She was so still and the inn beneath did not stir. I looked out the crack of the window shutter, and the rain still trickled

and dripped so that I scarce could see without. Suddenly my small body was chilled and fear overcame me. I ran to the cot's side and cast myself upon her crying:

"Sally Trueblood, you must not go! I am lonely, Sally Trueblood, lonely! Put your soft hand upon me! Kiss me! Oh, please, please, do not go!"

She sat up smiling, and I see her thin hands push back her heavy locks, and she smiled and spoke low:

"No, I will not go! Tell Sir Lilyfinger his lady waiteth him."

I shrieked with joy and jumped up and down. I bowed before her and said:

"Sir Lilyfinger begs that his trusted servant offer thee this." And I presented to her hand the plum pit of the night before. She arose and made a stately bow, and her eyes saw things I am sure that mine did not, for they burned bright, and I felt that they knew me but burned with the light I ne'er had seen.

"You shall rest, dearest, here upon the cot, and wait. Oh, will you wait?" She seemed glad to answer "Yes," and lay down, and I may be but fancying but it seems now to me that she shut her ears to a calling.

I ran to find my woollen comforter and bound my head with it and still chattered as I made ready to go below.

"I shall be back almost at once." I kissed her and she gave me a treasure of a smile. I ran down the quaking stairs, through the open archway, under the eaves, to keep free of the down pouring rain, to the inn door and knocked.

Peter Goff came hastily to the door and opened it with his come-open-personally smile, but it stopped when he saw me. He even made to shut the door and I called:

"Peter Goff, leave me in!"

He left the door open, but walked to the hearth and did not look at me. I shuffled my feet in the new-spread sand and watched the long tracks my slipping feet made—like a coach, I fancied. Peter Goff saw and made a dive at me, catching me by the comforter and drawing me between his knees. He was sitting upon the hearth settle, and the pots, hung within it, already smelled. I sniffed and wiped my mouth with the back of one hand.

"Get out!" said Peter Goff, as he shoved me from him

I looked at the dog that slept stretched flat upon the hearthstone, then to Peter Goff.

"You like dogs, Peter Goff, don't you?"

"Dogs is dogs," Peter Goff replied, grunting.

"And I am Sally Trueblood's brat, Peter Goff."

He wheeled, and his eyes seemed to start forth, and he laughed long and loud and shouted, "Get out!"

"Then you don't like brats, do you, Peter Goff?"

"Brats is brats," Peter Goff replied.

I stood wondering, twisting my comforter end and smelling long smells. Peter was dusting flagons and ranking bowls and mugs. I watched him and finally ventured:

"Dogs eat, don't they, Peter Goff?"

He did not answer.

"So do brats," I continued. He grunted and I sidled up to him and pulled his smock.

"Which goose wailed?" I asked.

Peter Goff went on at his ranking and dusting. I sat down in the sand and began to trace paths and mark off palaces. Suddenly Delicia Prue and her pots entered my mind. I arose and tiptoed stealthily to the kitchen way. Delicia Prue! Why Delicia, I never knew, nor Prue, for she was spare and lean and sour, and Delicia and Prue always brought up wonderful dreams of tarts and plum pies. But Delicia Prue had a weak spot and this was Peter Goff. This I knew and when I had come to the pots and Delicia, I looked up at her and whispered:

"Peter Goff thinks your broth is like none in the countryside."

Delicia Prue simpered. I knew the heart was mine, but what for the liver and the sand-bag, the goose's grister? I sat long wondering and at last I spoke:

"Delicia Prue, I know something that you would love to know."

Delicia knew I had been in the inn's great room with Peter Goff and Delicia wondered. She was paring marrow-roots* and I watched her blade slip and the thin peel unwind. Delicia answered:

"The lights and fillin's be yours for it."

I arose and went to the kitchen shelf and found the fillin',

* Turnips.

and when it was mine I ran to Delicia Prue's side and whispered:

"There are lots and heaps of things that I know, Delicia Prue, that you would love to know—but you shan't!"

Delicia suddenly stood up, and the marrow-root spilled, and I ran post haste to the inn's great room. I had intended to flee to the eaves, but alas! when I had come to the inn's room the coach had drawn up before it and the passengers alighted. They were drenched and chilled. Peter Goff had piled the logs high and the pots were steaming merrily. The dog was awake and wagged his tail and wormed among the guests. The fire was monstrous, leaping like waves up the chimney's ope. It cracked and spat and within my breast my heart danced.

There was a small gentleman in blacks and smalls. His great hat ran small black rivers over his white frill. His small face seemed shrunk to fit the opening at his neckband. His small hands seemed womanlike and his small feet minced him about.

This gentleman bore the name of Strong. This was the uncle of Rudy Strong, and I wondered if he had about him the sacks of gold Rudy had told me of. There was a lady, a beautiful lady, who sat upon a settle afront the fire and it seemed that some sorrow was hers, for her eyes had the look that She had shown me. And a gentleman was with her, "Mr. Willoughby" they called him, and "Geneva" he called her. I heard him address her so and minded it, that I might tell Her. Geneva Willoughby! The very name brought up within me a wonderful castle and lands rolling away from the walls upon all sides, green and gardened. Geneva Willoughby! Ah, to have possessed such a name! I gazed in wrapped wonder upon her. Her eyes looked afar; her cheeks were thin and their colour pale. Her lips too, were thin, and scarlet, and her features showed her high birth. I saw her reach her hands to shake the drops from her locks and a warm glow swept me, for they were white and thin like Sally Trueblood's; but Sally Trueblood's hands were more beautiful, for they pleaded. And her locks were not the fire's glow like Sally Trueblood's, but ashen. Her robe clung her limbs, damp, and her feet were crossed before the fire to dry the small shoes. I saw that they were

slim and arched, and I crossed my small legs and looked at my worn shoes and wondered would I one day be so beautiful. I arose and slowly stepped over the sanded floor until I stood before her. In my hand I grasped the bowl with the goose's liver and heart and grister. What were these? I had forgotten them. Here before me was Geneva Willoughby. She turned haughtily toward me and raised her brows. I was frightened, but stood steadily staring, and raised mine. Miss Willoughby looked amused and pressed her thin fingers over her lips and her eyes twinkled. I pressed my free fingers over my lips and my eyes twinkled.

Miss Willoughby leaned forward upon the settle and held her hand forth. I marched slowly up to her and offered my bowl of giblets. Peter Goff spied me and made a start toward the spot, reaching his hands out to grasp me, but Miss Willoughby turned her steel-blue eyes up to him and circled me within her arm. I stood up very tall and raised my brows at Peter Goff.

Mr. Willoughby was drying before the fire and Mr. Strong minced about, first at this seat then at the other, then to the fire, then to the shadows where the mugs were racked. His great hat lay top down and dripping upon the table slab, and Peter Goff eyed the guests as he heated brews and poured mugs of smelly stuff. All of this I saw as I stood circled in the arm of Miss Willoughby. Nor did I care that without the winds howled and the rain swept hissing upon the walls.

The fire lighted up the whole place, and it was warm, and Miss Willoughby, of whom I had heard only from the lips of Rudy Strong, held me, me! within her arms. I sighed and timidly laid my head upon the shoulder of Miss Willoughby. Miss Willoughby's arm tightened, and I heard my heart singing. I reached my hand forth and smoothed over the silken petticoat that still was damp, and Miss Willoughby let her hand fall over mine and held it. I wondered what to say.

The dog arose and shook, and I remembered Peter Goff's words and I repeated them. "Dogs is dogs," I said. Miss Willoughby smiled, and I watched the fire-light tint her cheeks and play sparkles in her eyes. She answered:

"Yes, truly, dogs is dogs."

" And brats is brats."

Miss Willoughby started and did not answer.

" Do you know, Rudy Strong told me of you. You are Miss Willoughby, and the countryside says your name behind their hands. Do you know what brats be ? "

Miss Willoughby shook her head, and I may fancy it but I believe she bit her lips.

" They are elves."

Miss Willoughby started. " They are elves," she repeated and patted my hand.

" Do you know Sally Trueblood ? I'm her brat."

Miss Willoughby raised her hand up to her eyes and rubbed them, and I believe her hand shook.

" Miss Patricia Passwater told Mr. Reuben I was her brat. You know Miss Patricia, don't you ? She has moles that run up and down her chin."

Miss Willoughby shook and I knew she was laughing, but she answered :

" No, I do not know Miss Patricia, nor Mr.—what did you call him ? Reuben ?—Reuben," went on Miss Willoughby, " nor Sally Trueblood. But if you are Sally Trueblood's—" Miss Willoughby hesitated—" elf,, then I want to know Sally Trueblood. Are you like her ? "

My spirits fell, for I knew I was not. But I answered bravely : " No. She says I am like him. You see, my eyes are brown. She says his were brown, and true. Yes, my eyes are his, she says. Hers are blue, blue, blue ! Oh, Miss Willoughby, sometimes they are pale, and I fear them then, for they look away, away, far, and sometimes they are just blue, deep blue, and then is when she opens her arms and calls me her dream-baby."

I had forgotten Miss Willoughby and went on : " Oh, she is so beautiful when she kneels and takes me to her, and I feel her cheek close to mine, and her lips seem to cling to me, and her heart sings, ' I love you ! I love you ! ' She has told me. Oh, she is thinner. Yes, I am sure of it. And twilight lies beneath her eyes. I saw it, and she told me it was twilight."

I had clutched Miss Willoughby and was brought to myself by drops that fell upon my cheek. I started and made to go, but Miss Willoughby held me and whispered : " Where

do you go ? " I pointed to the rafters and whispered : " Up there, beneath the eaves."

Miss Willoughby pressed me to her and whispered : " Take me."

I was frightened and looked wide-eyed at Miss Willoughby, and then to the fire that leapt high, and then up to the rafters, and shook my head " no."

Miss Willoughby whispered : " Please ! "

And I shook once more " no," and answered : " She would hide."

Miss Willoughby's cheek glistened in the firelight, and I touched the drops and laid my cheek to hers. She spoke softly : " Not from me."

I answered slowly : " Yes, she would. She never goes except to Mrs. Gifford's. She goes there to sew." And I whispered softer : " I am afraid. She takes something there that she never brings back. When she goes in the morning her cheeks are red, and she leaves the red there."

Miss Willoughby kissed my cheek and I started and clutched my bowl of giblets and said : " I must go. Listen ! Is that her ? "

Miss Willoughby stopped and a lull in the wind and rain left silence free, and She coughed. I heard it and my great eyes sought Miss Willoughby's, for the cough was ice to my heart. Miss Willoughby knew. Her eyes told me so, and I shook my head " no," and pulled her close to whisper :

" Do not come ; it would hurt her. She has told me that eyes hurt her."

Miss Willoughby suddenly stood up and her face was white as she answered : " No, I shall not come, but say to Sarah Trueblood : ' Miss Willoughby's compliments.' "

My heart leapt. Miss Willoughby's compliments ! I shall call Sir Lilyfinger Dappergay and tell him this. I shall roll the words about ! Miss Willoughby's compliments !

I stopped and set the bowl upon the floor and threw my arms wide and swept upon Miss Willoughby. She stooped and took me to her and I kissed her. I tucked my cheek down into her sweet neck's curve and spoke :

" When you sleep there shall be an elf upon your pillow and that is me. Oh, Miss Willoughby, I love you ! "

And I blushed crimson and took up my bowl and cast kisses to her and fled.

The door was wind-heavy and dripped upon me. The rain swept my cheek as I opened it; but I fled up beneath the eaves where it was almost dry. There was a beautiful puddle just beneath the stairway. I stopped and took up a bit of broken wood and stirred it. This was a sea. I set a chip floating it, and the water oozed through my shoes and I felt it trickle between my toes. I stood up and watched the rain, and suddenly the bright inn came to me.

Miss Willoughby was there. I started and went up the stairway singing to the tune of my strides, " M-i-s-s W-i-l-l-o-u-g-h-b-y-'s c-o-m-p-l-i-m-e-n-t-s." Here was the landing. I stopped panting. I seemed to remember that I did not call all the letters, but I fancied I did. I stood listening, but no sound came from within. I opened the door softly and saw the room was lighted with the gleaming that told that the mid-heavens were breaking and the sun would come.

I tiptoed to the table slab and set upon it the bowl. I did not raise my eyes but waited. She did not speak. I shook my wet frock and unwound my comforter and called in a pompous voice, " Sir Lilyfinger Dappergay ! "

She started and sat up. I think she had been sleeping. She made a sign that I should come to her. I stood watching her. Her eyes seemed not to see me and I called: " Listen ! Listen, Sally Trueblood ! What do you think ? The coach has come, and what do you think ? " She seemed to try to awaken and I went to her and stood beside the cot with my arms about her. " Listen ! " I went on. " She is down there." I pointed below.

" Who ? " asked Sally Trueblood.

" Miss Geneva Willoughby."

She stood up suddenly and her lips seemed dry. She licked them and laid her helpless hand to her brow and I saw that it pleaded. She whispered, " Geneva Willoughby ! " and sat down suddenly.

" Do you know Geneva Willoughby ? " I asked.

" No," she replied. " You say she is there ? "

I watched her and answered, " Yes. And she is beautiful ! Her feet, oh ! they look like the pony's back beneath,

and her hands, oh they are white, and her eyes, they are blue, and her cheeks are pale and her lips red and she sits so." I sat down and spread my frock so that it nearly fell to the floor and made it cling to my limbs. "And she held me close, close!"

I looked at Sally Trueblood, and she was white and her lips shook and she fell weakly back. I was frightened and called her and begged that she come back and let me tell her all that I knew, but she did not wake and lay long. I held her hand and it clutched and opened upon my own. I knew that when she did this her heart hurt. I knew this and that I should not speak until she bade me. So I sat stroking her brow and waiting.

It grew darker. I heard the coach rattle and the horses champ beneath, and I knew that they would be off. I knew that it was growing later, though I was filled with such an aching that I lost the time. I seem now to feel the tight grip about my heart, the aching of my small legs from sitting so long motionless. My hands grew cold, but my brow sweat. I was hungry, and the brightness that had shown was overcome by cloud and the rain settled down for an all-night's singing. Still she did not stir. It grew darker. I saw the inn's lamp lighted, and I sat watching its reflection upon the wall. I was fearful of the great dark corner-ways and kept my eyes upon the light that swung dizzily o'er the ceil.

I smelled the inn's sup and my mouth watered. I leaned over her and saw by the reflected light that swept her face now and then that her eyes were open and they were staring at me softly.

"Dearest, are you awake?"

She answered: "Yes."

"Listen," I whispered. "Miss Willoughby held me close and she bade me say—she spoke it with her own words, so: 'Say to Sally Trueblood, Miss Willoughby's compliments.'"

She threw herself down upon her face and sobbed long. I was miserable. Why did she weep? I leaned over her and laid my cheek close and amid my kisses whispered: "Never mind. Your brat loves you."

She sat up and in the dim light sought my eyes and held my cheeks between her hot hands and called me: "Hope! Oh, answer me, my Hope!"

I trembled, for I did not know this Sally Trueblood. She held me crushingly to her and then held me away, straining to see me, and when I had watched and feared long, she spoke softly: "Sit beside me and listen." Within me was the desire to flee. "Say this slowly," she said, "slowly. He is true. Say it."

I repeated: "He is true."

"He will come," she added.

I followed her: "He will come."

She waited and I heard her breathing loudly. Now she raised to her elbow and leaned to me and whispered:

"Oh, my dream-baby, will you ever know? If, when there comes a time when Sally Trueblood has gone—listen, Hope, I am whispering—remember you were her sunshine, her hope. Oh, my babe, Sally Trueblood would take with her all the bitterness. Remember this, and if the day is dark—listen, dear!—if there is no light—listen, dear!—if you ever know—listen, dear! Sally Trueblood's smile will show to you. Will you answer it? Will you? Will you?"

She crushed me to her breast and I heard her heart singing.

"Then you do not want Miss Willoughby's compliments?" I asked.

She started and said slowly: "Hope," and she laughed and coughed long, "one day you will know. Thank God, the spring is upon you. Listen!—we shall play."

I cried aloud in happiness. Then she was well! "How?" I cried.

"A wonderful game and you shall listen. There was once a noble knight, ah, so fair, so young, and the great halls of his castle burst ope of knightly kin. His sires and great-sires and greater sires had warred and won. A noble knight was he."

"Oh," I sighed, "were his eyes steel-blue?"

"No," she answered softly, "brown, and true."

The game seemed familiar. Where had I heard of such eyes? "Oh, let his eyes be steel-blue!" I begged.

"No," she answered, "they were brown, soft brown, and true."

I sighed, and somehow, some way, it seemed the story lacked.

"Did he have a courser?"

She did not answer, but her voice seemed to croon on: "This noble knight was his blood's pride, and the ladies of the land were before him to woo—beautiful, all silken robed and wondrous fair. Do you hear?"

"But his eyes are brown," I remarked, as though that ended it. Was this then the end? For she suddenly stopped. I stood up and smelled at the air and listened, but she did not speak. I stretched slowly and said: "I am hungry."

"Then we shall play another game," she called. "Come! Listen, Hope. If you were full of love, and it was May, and you were a blossom upon the field, and no thing sought you, and you stood longing, longing, and the days were beautiful, and the flowers about were happy, yet apart from you, and you were lonely, and the wind told you that a hunter came, and he was a great bee whose sting would end your day, and you waited long, and one day the bee came and he found you, and he spoke words that made the dull hours flame like morning dew—would you, would you, Hope, leave your love go? Would you? Would you leave it go? Hoping—listen! say it slow: 'I am not a brat.' Say it slow."

I repeated slowly: "I am not a brat. I am hungry."

Now she coughed long and lay between the long coughing silent, and I forgot that I was hungry. It was cold, and I shivered, and was frightened, and the stories seemed to tumble one o'er the other in my mind. I saw a blossom and a bee and the knight fell over the bee and the ladies—oh, dear, I was weary.

"It is a game," Sally Trueblood whispered, "called 'waiting morning.' You shall sit and never a sound, and wait, and when it is light, go fast to Mrs. Gifford's and say, 'Sally Trueblood is sleeping. Come and wake her!' Do you hear me?" She called, "Do you hear me? Oh," and she laughed like the tinkle of a young lamb's bell, "Oh, it is spring? I smell the lilacs! Hope! Hope! Where are you? Wait! No, I will not go! No! No!"

My heart was thumping. "Is this the game?"

She seemed to hear and said: "Yes, yes, yes! The game! Waiting morning! Waiting! It is the longest word e'er spoken."

Then there was silence, and I shut up my eyes and thought how I should wake her. I sat long and I believe I must have slept, or dreamed, for somewhere come softly now the words: "Tell Sir Lilyfinger Dappergay his lady waits!" It may be fancy, but I hope it was not.

I started up but remembered the game. She would not forgive should I forsake the game and I sat rigid, listening. It was very cold and I crept to the cot, whispering: "I am playing, Sally Trueblood, but it is cold," and I huddled at its side.

It rained without. I hear it yet, weeping, weeping, weeping, and the winds sighing, sighing, sighing, and moaning soft. I see the light dizzily playing the ceil and feel the cramp and chill that filled me. I touched her hand. It was cold, and I lay my cheek to it and then sleep came and I dreamed that she was a rose and the wind had scattered her, and the great bee hung over her.

CHAPTER III

THE morning came still wet-swept. I remember waking and the game was fresh upon me. I cried aloud: "It is morning, Sally Trueblood, and I am playing!"

I took my comforter, nor turned, just as she had told me, and sped down the quaking stairs and out the rain-swept way to Mrs. Gifford's. The gate was latched and the rain made the latchet slippery. I fumbled at it and it opened suddenly, swinging out upon me and shaking me full of drops. I ran up the gravel way. I hear it now, wet and soppy. The Gifford house stood well back from the street's way, and the roof was mossed. I stepped upon the wooden step that led to the door, and I remember that it was rotted and black and gapey. I remember, too, that there was a beetle swimming in a puddle that stood in the rotted wood.

I knocked, and Teeny Gifford opened the creaking door that stuck. I stepped up to the topmost of the steps, which was a long stride, for one had rotted away. The rain dropped from the doorsill, "top, top, a-top"—plunging in the puddle where the beetle swam. Mrs. Gifford came to meet me and looked surprised.

" Where is your mother ? " she asked.

I stood looking at the table where the porridge steamed, and Mrs. Gifford followed my gaze.

" Will you have some ? " she asked.

I did not answer, but unwound my comforter and went to the bench that stood beside it and sat down and reached for the bowl. Mrs. Gifford watched me and asked again of her.

" You see," I said, " we are playing, ' waiting morning,' she calls it. She is sleeping and bade me run fast here and tell you to come and wake her. It was a long game."

I fell to the porridge and my eyes roved the walls where prints hung. Mrs. Gifford started up and called to Vicar Gifford, who came in, long and black and slim and sleek. I remember his face and that it always reminded me of one who had seen the sins of the world and fainted. He wore a huge black cross upon his breast and his white fingers fumbled at it. His hair was thin and shone as though oiled upon his head, hanging in pot hooks upon his shoulders. He had pointed out sin until his forefinger was longer than any man's.

Some of this I fancied, and some of it She had told me. When she would come to the eaves at the evening, she would often make a play and show me Vicar Gifford and Teeny Vicar Gifford and Nebuchadnezzar Vicar Gifford and all the Vicar Giffords. Teeny Gifford was possessed of a slit lip and wailed through the day. She had told me this, and it all went sweeping through my mind as I took the porridge and watched the Vicar Giffords. You see, there were the " Coffin " Giffords, and this, to Sally Trueblood, was too much.

Mrs. Gifford spoke softly to Vicar Gifford and his thin lips answered her, but I did not hear. Mrs. Gifford brought out a shawl and bound up her head and cast her cape about her shoulders and left us. The Vicar stood watching her go, and then retired to his study. I sat licking up the last of the porridge and Teeny Gifford watched me, her pale eyes eating each mouthful.

" Are you a sneathen ? " she asked.

I hated her. She took up the porridge bowl I was finishing and held it to her breast, and her eyes told me she would meet me. I stood up from off the bench and stared at Teeny Gifford.

" I want that porridge bowl," I shouted.

She stood her ground, still clasping the bowl and hissed spitefully: " Are you a sneathen ? "

I stood gazing at the lips of Teeny, fascinated.

" What cracked it ? " I asked.

Teeny Gifford glared back and suddenly threw the bowl at my head. There was a rush and I remember that Teeny and my small self were dreadfully mixed. We were separated by the pious Vicar, whose thin hands closed upon my shoulder and sent fear coursing up and down my spine. Teeny sent up a woeful cry and although I was sorely fretted, I remember that she called me a " sneathen," and I recall the word " sthinn." I stood listening, my eyes upon the cracked lip. Suddenly I was filled with the desire to question Vicar Gifford as to this crack and I remember that I shouted over the tumult that Teeny raised, " Did God do it ? "

He gathered the still wailing Teeny to his bosom and it was then that Mrs. Gifford opened the door. Her face was white and she was panting as though she had been running. The Vicar looked up and did not speak of the difficulty between Teeny and myself. Mrs. Gifford did not seem to see us, but went up unto him and whispered something. He made a sound like I had heard him make when the elders pray, and started.

Teeny swept upon her mother, wiping her tear-stained face upon Mrs. Gifford's skirt and continuing to weep. Mrs. Gifford did not heed her daughter's woe, but continued speaking softly to Vicar Gifford and suddenly turned to me, and I saw that her eyes were red. She came to me slowly and asked would I have more porridge. I answered, " Yes." She took up the bowl that Teeny had cast from her when the rush had occurred and placed in it more porridge. I sat that I sup, and Vicar Gifford took his daughter to his study and I heard the voice of Nebuchadnezzar raised in wailing.

Mrs. Gifford left me and went to an inner room to return with Nebuchadnezzar upon her arm. He was a doughey child. He looked like a bowl of Delicia Prue's loaves that had stood too long. His cheeks rested upon his breast and his mouth hung open and long crystal streams dripped therefrom. His pudgy hands were tipped with dirty nails and his legs wallowed over his shoe tops. He seemed possessed

of a bottomless wail and Mrs. Gifford did not seem to hear it, but with her one free hand calmly went on with the unwinding of her head free of the shawl and cape. I think that Mrs. Gifford must have laboured with one hand most of the time, for her one arm was seldom free of Nebuchadnezzar.

As I supped the porridge and dipped my bread into it, I wondered if Nebuchadnezzar cried upon his in-take or his out-go. There was certainly no mark between. Mrs. Gifford called Teeny, who came and she delivered to her arms Nebuchadnezzar, who remonstrated lustily. Teeny went within to the study and the Vicar came and spoke softly to Mrs. Gifford, and I saw, while I ate, that Mrs. Gifford was unpacking a chest. I watched her as I munched and supped and I recall that I had never seen so much black. There comes to me, too, some of what they were saying. Mrs. Gifford smoothed her hands over a shiny black garment and with a grim mouth spoke the words:

"No Christian will be there."

The Vicar shook his head slowly and remarked: "Alas for sin! Sin hath its own wage."

Mrs. Gifford shook her head in acknowledgment and went on:

"Not a garment of decent black. Such folly! She had been——" Mrs. Gifford stopped and shot a glance to me.

The Vicar asked: "Yes, you say she had been——"

Mrs. Gifford raised her brows and answered: "The walls have ears, my dear."

Suddenly I remembered the game and I stood up and wiped my mouth upon my pettiskirt's hem and went up slowly unto Mrs. Gifford and spoke:

"Did you wake her? Did you tell her I did not look? I am still playing."

Mrs. Gifford suddenly stood up very straight, holding the shiny black garment, and answered me:

"She is awake. You may stay here until evening." And she turned unto the Vicar and asked, "May she not?"

He nodded, and I remembered that I had a feeling that the game was not a good one. I watched Mrs. Gifford's face and I knew that she was lying, for I had seen Rudy Strong look as she did. Mrs. Gifford would not look at me straight

and I waited as I watched her bring out a white kerchief and laid it upon the shiny black garment.

" Mrs. Gifford," I said, " are you a heathen ? "

She whirled and faced me and cried :

" What do you mean ? "

" You lie," I remarked calmly.

Mrs. Gifford looked to the Vicar and raised her shoulders and said :

" You see, this is the outcome of sin."

The Vicar nodded slowly, " yes," and rested his long forefinger upon his chin. I turned to him and asked :

" What do you do with heathens when you catch 'em ? "

Mrs. Gifford tossed her head and sniffed and the Vicar raised his eyes prayerfully and shook his head solemnly. I wondered just what was wrong, and I bethought me of Teeny and I stood very straight and spoke to Mrs. Gifford, saying :

" Sally Trueblood would not let me throw bowls, or call bodies ' heathens.' I know God cracked her lip for it."

The Vicar gasped and Mrs. Gifford stood staring at me, slowly folding the black garment and the kerchief, saying :

" You are not to return to the inn until evening," as though she had forgotten what I had just said.

" Yessum. What am I to do ? " I asked.

" Do as you please," she snapped. And turned to the Vicar, saying :

" They have sent word to Pious for the box."

Box ! I remembered this, for within me came the vision of a wonderful box filled up of beauteous ribbands and trinkets, and a feather and two slippers that were Sally Trueblood's. They seemed to forget me and the Vicar returned to his study. Mrs. Gifford again took up her shawl and cape and the garments before mentioned and left, going toward the village.

I stood listening, and could hear Nebuchadnezzar still wailing and Teeny singing something that dripped spit. I looked out the shutters. It was still raining. I wondered why she had sent word to me not to return to the inn, but she had said it was a game. Then, perhaps, she was still playing. I turned and walked over to a great chair where the cat had curled up and was sleeping. It was a yellow cat

with a pink nose and his belly was white and I watched it coming up and down. I pointed one finger and punched it. It waked and sniffed and stood up, arching its back to rub its sleek sides upon my small shoulders and purr. I sat down and held it close and it made little sounds like " um—eh ? "

" Um—eh—um," I answered.

It gaped and cuddled down in my lap. I sat long and no one came. I could hear the creaking of the floor where Teeny walked and sang. I was lonesome and wondered what was the matter. I crept off the chair, still hugging the cat, and went once more to the shutters. It was not raining, but had suddenly stopped, and although the outside seemed to drip, the sky showed it was clearing.

I let the cat down and went softly to the door. It was unbolted. I opened it and stepped out and my eyes looked to the inn's way, but something within me said :

" You are playing."

I ran a short way down the gravel walk and came upon a bird that had fallen. It was wet and stunned with the cold. I stooped over it and looked at it close and took it up, and I was frightened, for it shut its eyes and opened them slowly, and I had seen the look in Her eyes the night before. It fluttered in my hand and stretched and its little feet drew up and it did not move. Suddenly I began to cry. I breathed upon it, thinking I might warm it ; but its head hung limp and its eyes had let down their white curtains.

I started to run, thinking I would go to Ole Dodson's, who kept a shop and had jars filled up with wonderful red sugars and dried fruits. He had a fire-log on such days as this and the villagers crowded about it. They would never know that I was there. I remember that I was running, and my throat ached, and I clutched the dead bird, within me the desire to reach the fire of Ole Dodson and warm it. As I ran some one called :

" Hi ! Hi, Hope ! "

It was Rudy Strong. He ran to meet me and said excitedly :

" There's a deader in the village. They be a-coverin' the box. See ? " And he held forth a handful of white fringe and some bright nails. I stood staring at him and ice crept about my heart. No, this could not be. No !

"Who is it?" I asked.

"Dunno," Rudy grunted, "but listen! The red cow's got a calf. Come on down to the mead."

I shook my head, and Rudy Strong spied the dead bird.

"Where are you goin'?" he asked.

"To Ole Dodson's to warm it," I replied, stroking the damp feathers with my warm hand.

"It's dead," he said. "It's dead. It won't warm. Deaders don't warm."

"But it moved," I said, laying it to my cheek.

"Naw, it don't," said Rudy. "It's a deader. Throw it away."

I looked at it and held it closer.

"Listen," said Rudy Strong, "do you know Philander Strong is come? And the Willoughbys?"

"Yes," I answered, "they came last night to the inn and Miss Willoughby held me in her arms."

Rudy Strong bent double and laughed:

"Oh, my eye, she didn't. She hates 'em."

"Hates what?" I asked.

"What you be," he answered.

This was too much. I had been called a heathen and I was sure Rudy Strong knew what a heathen was, and Miss Willoughby had known.

"What am I, Rudy Strong? What does Miss Willoughby hate? She loved me, I tell you, and held me close."

Rudy Strong stood casting pebbles and sucking his teeth.

"Go on to Ole Dodson's, but if you want to see a real somethin', go past Pious Gifford's."

I held the bird closer and thought long and shook my head, "no," and went upon my way; even though Rudy Strong coaxed as I went and painted wonderful pictures of the new red calf. I trudged slowly toward Ole Dodson's and I noted as I went that the villagers were excited. Knots of them stood on the corner ways, and the women hung over the fences and talked much. I heard one of them, as I passed whisper: "There she goes," and I knew that they knew I was a heathen.

I passed on and my footfalls brought me to the chapel house. I stood beside the high, wrought fence and pressed my face against the openings, looking to the dripping tree

arches that bended over the white stones. I could hear the birds fluttering in the dark wet green, and now and then a chattering from their throats. I saw the sexton making a new ope and I called to him. He stopped and wiped his hands upon his sides and came to the gate.

" Leave me in," I said.

" What for ? " he asked, looking down upon me.

" Rudy Strong says it is a deader," I said and showed the limp bird. " Leave me in."

He unlatched the gateway and I passed through and I remember spelling off one of the stones, " Obadiah Willoughby." The mound was high and I wondered if his stomach caused it. I passed on and read upon a small stone, " Willie Pimm Passwater," and I went up to the spot and said aloud :

" I did not mean to let your dog fall. She shook me."

The sexton had followed me and I knew he was watching me. I stooped down and touched the earth and it was wet. I gathered some of the wet leaves and wrapped my bird in them and walked down the briared pathway that led to the old yard. Here the stones fell tipsily to right and left. Some had sunk and their white faces looked like drowning things. Larkspur spears nodded wet and I plucked some of these and added to my wet leaves. I sat down upon a stone that had fallen and found that I was facing a worn slab that showed faint lettering. I read slowly :

" Felicia Trueblood," and beneath it a line : " Here lieth the dust of Felicia Trueblood. Unto him who readeth, know thee this : All bitterness hath an end."

Felicia Trueblood ! Was this Felicia Trueblood who had lived behind the shutters, whose locks were like Hers ? I wondered and I went to the spot and stood before the stone and spoke aloud : " Why do you make her weep ? "

The sexton was casting the wet earth out from the pit he was making and I went to him and asked what he was about. He did not answer and I leaned over the side and asked :

" Would you please leave me put it here ? See, I have wrapped it all in leaves and larkspur. Put it in here. It may sing even there in the dark when it is warm."

He laughed and nodded, and with my small hands I buried

the bird, laying it gently in the deep pit and covering it with the wet earth. The sexton had lifted me in, and I sat upon a stone and watched him, even after I had covered the bird. He cast the earth and made the pit deeper and did not speak. After I had watched him long I remember I asked:

"What do you dig a pit for?"

"For deaders," he answered.

"What are deaders?" I asked.

"Moon's dust that falls on fools," he answered.

"Oh, I see," I said. "Then please lift me out. I am cold and the sun is coming."

He lifted me up to his shoulder to the sod above. And I sped down the path, keeping free of briars and plucking larkspur and harebells. When I had come to the gateway I saw that some of the villagers were coming that way and they bore a long black box.

CHAPTER IV

I SEEM to remember the old yard and see that the sun was come forth, and that the wet drops seemed to smile and twinkle, and that o'erhead the sun shone in patches through the thick trees' tops. I seem to remember all of this, but before me comes a great cloud and this is the black box. I did not know them that bore it. They were villagers, but no friendly faces that I had known. I stood watching, and idly played with the larkspurs that I had been plucking. I remember, too, that great wonder filled me. This, then, was a deader. I never before had seen such a box. It was black and I was frightened, for the faces of them that bore it were solemn.

The sexton, hearing their steps, came forth, and pointed the way. Something seemed to start in my breast, and I do not know why, but Mrs. Gifford's words came to me: "There will be no Christian there."

I seemed to connect the black box with these words. I stepped along the wet path until I had come to the strange group who bore the box and I timidly called. One of them looked at me and I asked:

"Is this the deader?"

They looked one to the other and did not answer.

" Mrs. Gifford said," I went on, " that no Christian would be there. I am a heathen."

They smiled and I remember that their faces were not kind, and that I had a queer feeling about the box, and I felt that they were heathens, too.

" What's in there ? " I asked, and pointed to the box.

They stopped and I went up and touched it, and I remember the cloth was thin and I could feel the splinters under the weave. I do not know why I did the thing that I did do, but I suddenly laid my larkspur upon the box, and I remember that a great white butterfly soared above and darted down and rested upon them.

They did not notice all of this, but went on and I followed and they went to the new-made pit. I stood watching and I remember that the sun had filled up the pit. I can hear the birds now, singing snatches, and their whirring songs and the falling of the sods that filled up the pit. I heard all of this and I wondered what it meant.

A deader ! I had never known of death save in flowers and birds and beetles and small things. I recall that there had been ones of the village that had died and when I had asked Her she had answered : " Oh, wait the morrow." And then the morrow came and I had forgotten.

They that came with the box had not remained to see the pit filled, but I sat upon the sod beside the stone that read " Felicia Trueblood " and watched. The sexton had finished and still I sat, my hands idly clasped in my lap, and I remembered that Sally Trueblood had told me that Felicia Trueblood was arm-hungry. She told me this and said :

" Oh, Hope, your arms would have driven away the darkness ! "

I stood up and reached my arms wide and clasped the stone, and the sexton saw and asked :

" What be ye at ? "

" Oh," I replied, " I am filling up Felicia Trueblood's arms."

He watched me, and I may fancy it, but I believe his eyes were tearful.

He reached out his hands to me and asked : " Where be ye goin' ? "

" To Ole Dodson's," I replied, " but I forgot."

He started and patted my head slowly and leaned over me and laid one of his clay-stained hands upon my cheek and said :

" Be ye lone, come yon." And he pointed to his sextonage.

" But," I answered, " I am not lonely. Sally Trueblood is waiting. We were playing ' Waiting morning.' It is a long game and I shall go at the eve's hour and tell her about the deader and the bird and Nebuchadnezzar and Teeny Gifford and the Vicar Giffords, and she will smile. She will ! She will ! "

And I danced up and down in glee even to think of her smile. And I looked at the sexton and he said :

" Shoo, now. Run along to the Giffords and bid them speak ye what ha'e been."

I turned slowly to look upon the new-covered mound, and the sun was shining brightly. Some of the larkspur had fallen from the box and lay withering. I looked up to the sexton and asked :

" Will the deader be lonely ? Listen ! Don't you believe the bird will sing ? "

" Yea," the sexton nodded ; " be on now."

I skipped in the bright sun down the shadowed path, plucking at the tall grass' tassels, and passed through the great gate running up the path into the village. I had gone well upon the way and had turned the corner to Ole Dodson's when I came upon a thing that frightened me. It was tall and straight and upon its chin the moles. It was Miss Patricia, and I feared her. Yet within me was a something that warmed my heart. I think it was Mr. Reuben. I ran up to her and held forth my hand, but she looked at me as though she had never seen me.

" Miss Patricia," I ventured.

She drew up very tall and snapped : " Well ? "

" Don't you know me ? I am Sally Trueblood's brat."

She threw her hands up and then grasped me by the shoulder and her voice rasped : " What are you doing on the street ? "

" I'm playing ' waiting morning ' with Sally Trueblood. She is asleep. Mrs. Gifford said she told me to stay away from the inn till the evening, but it's so long. Do you think

I might go? I would only creep in and not wake her, and I would tell her about the calf and the deader and Nebuchadnezzar and your moles."

"Stop your foolishness!" said Miss Patricia, "your mother's dead."

My lips stiffened. I felt myself slip away.

"What?" I quavered.

"Dead," Miss Patricia snapped.

"Dead?" I repeated. "Dead?" And I laughed. "No, she is playing. It is a game. Don't you understand?"

"She's dead," answered Miss Patricia, "dead and done."

I stood before her and I remember that the little me that was so proud, so full of what she had given me, was no more. I was but a frightened baby. I threw my arms wide and held them up to Miss Patricia.

"Oh, hold me!" I cried, "hold me!"

I clutched her but she was rigid. I grasped her hand and held it hard upon my cheek and ran my small hand o'er her thin arm and I was weeping.

"Oh, Miss Patricia, say you lied! Come, take me to the inn! I shall show you. She is lying upon the cot. I know it! Her beautiful curls are damp. She is there, I know."

I stopped and my eyes sought Miss Patricia's. Hers were hard and small. She looked down upon me and I shrank.

"Be on," she snapped, "to Gifford's and stop your snivelling."

She swept on and left me standing dazed. I looked to the inn's path and my little heart jumped and my body shivered even as though a chilling wind had struck upon me. I remembered that the village houses seemed to be running blurrily. I stepped and the earth seemed so far away. To Gifford's? I turned sick. Then I sat upon the sod and let my hands pluck up blades. I shut out the words of Miss Patricia and thought of Teeny Gifford and her cracked lip and wondered if the calf was sucking.

Then I arose and I laughed, for I was certain that Miss Patricia had not told me the truth. I would go to the inn and I would tell Sally Trueblood how they had lied to me. I would tell her of the deader, and suddenly at the thought of the black box I quaked. What had been in the box? I wondered. Just what was a deader? Not Sarah True-

blood. Her eyes shone like stars. She would laugh and pinch my cheeks and call me her Hope. Yes, I would go to the inn, and turning swiftly I ran down the path and as I ran came upon Mr. Reuben. I saw him coming, bent and slowly, his hands clasped behind his back, and although I had seen Miss Patricia override him, I thought in my small mind that if he would only stand up straight he would be wonderful. I ran to meet him, holding my arms wide, and I grasped him about the limbs and cried :

" Bend down, Mr. Reuben, and listen," and he bent low. " What is a deader, Mr. Reuben ? "

He stood up very slowly and rubbed his chin and cleared his throat, and I saw that he had been weeping.

" Never mind," he answered. " Where are you going ? "

" To the inn," I replied, " to the eaves. She told me Sally Trueblood was dead and done."

I remember Mr. Reuben started, and I may be wrong, but I fancy he said, " God ! "

" Come, Mr. Reuben," I went on, " come, and you shall see that she is there. She is playing. She is waiting, I know ! And the doves are come to rest and are cooing. Come ! Oh, do come ! I am afraid."

Mr. Reuben held his hand out to me. I remember that the sun was golding for a glorious setting and that little fish-clouds swam over the golden way. I forgot that I was afraid. Mr. Reuben held my hand. He would go. We stepped slowly upon the way and I remember that the village eyes followed us. We came to the inn and Peter Goff was standing with his arms folded upon the hitchrack. Mr. Reuben smiled and bowed and said something about the bright evening, and Peter Goff spit and slowly wiped his lips upon his hand, and scratched his head, setting his long cap well back upon his head, and grunted. Then he had put his hands beneath his smock and turned and gone within, leering. I remember that Mr. Reuben had flushed very red. All of this did not matter to me. I was going to see and to show Mr. Reuben that she was there.

" Wait ! " I said. " Do not come. I shall call you. She would not want you. Wait ! And when I call, Mr. Reuben, you will know that Miss Patricia has lied and you may go."

I ran up the stairway and turned the landing. My heart

was thumping and icy. When I came to the door, I saw that it stood open a little way. I touched it and it squeaked and frightened me. I leaned close to the opening and called: "Sally Trueblood!" She did not answer. "Sally——" I began to cry—"Trueblood! Sir Lilyfinger——" I stepped into the room. It was lighted with a sickening golden light, and it was empty. The mugs she had set the morning before, stood dejectedly, one leaning almost toppled over upon the crust. Her shawl trailed gracefully from the cot's edge, and it seemed to plead. I thought of the doves. They would be waiting. I sped to the chimney corner and they were gone. My little lips trembled and the tears burst forth and I kept calling:

"Sally Trueblood! Sally Trueblood! We are playing! Oh, won't you answer?"

Then I stopped and laughed and flung my arms out and skipped to the cot and cried: "I know! You are playing!" And I peeped beneath the couch's cover, but it was dark and empty beneath. I stood up very slowly and stared, empty-eyed, all ways. In one corner I spied the box, the box that came to my mind as Mrs. Gifford had spoken of Pious and the box. I went to it and I saw all that I possessed folded carefully and packed within it. It was still light and I sunk beside the box and my fingers sought within it. I took up my worn cape and I saw that she had mended it. Something rattled and I let my fingers seek it. It was a scrap of paper pinned to the cape. I took it to the shutter ope and spelled:

"It is a game of waiting, Hope. Will you play?"

Then she *was* playing. I sped to the door and called: "Mr. Reuben, she is here!"

He made no answer and I forgot to listen. I sat down upon the cot and wondered when she would come. Perhaps she had gone to Gifford's and would come and tell me of the Vicar Giffords and who Mrs. Gifford had brought the shiny black to. I got up and went over to the chair that was a prized possession. It had a bulgy back and a saggy bottom. She was always Lady Lilyfinger when she sat upon this chair. I sat upon it and dreamed dreams, but hunger came again. My old friend. I knew him.

I sniffed at the air and got off of the chair and went to the shutter. It was growing darker; the small fish-clouds had

swam away and the sun had sunk. Still I was waiting and she did not come. It grew darker and I lay upon the cot, thinking I would wait until she stepped upon the stair and go to meet her. I think I must have lain long and slept, for when I waked it was pitch-dark and the room was silent, yet filled of creakings and groanings. I was frightened. I sat staring into the dark, nor did I arise, for fear had frozen my limbs. I called in a small voice that quaked: "Sally Trueblood! I am afraid."

I heard a step without and some one called softly. It was a man's voice. It was Mr. Reuben. I sped through the darkness, stumbling over the tables and benches, and I heard the tipsy mug fall upon the floor. My lips opened. I was chilled and fear-stricken. I called:

"Mr. Reuben, come! She is not here!"

I heard him open the door and I felt my way up to him. His hands clutched me and he whispered, "Come," and took me up. I was safe, but my heart was thumping. But I shut my eyes that I see not the dark. I did not speak but rested my head upon Mr. Reuben's shoulder, and I remember that he stumbled down the quaking stairway and out the inn's arch. It was light without, for pale starlight thinned the dark. I had opened my eyes when I felt the cool air and knew we were out of the inn.

"Oh, Mr. Reuben, what shall I do?" I asked. "She is not there and Miss Patricia has said she is dead, dead and done."

He held me closer and did not answer and by the faint light I saw that we were upon the way to the house of the Passwaters.

"Why did you come?" I asked. And Mr. Reuben answered: "I did not leave."

"But I called," I went on.

Mr. Reuben shook his head and answered: "I waited."

"Then you play the game, Mr. Reuben?"

"Yes," he answered.

"It is a long game, isn't it, Mr. Reuben?"

"Yes," he replied. "Yes, very, very long."

We had come to the gateway and Mr. Reuben opened it. The light was lit and Miss Patricia was knitting, and I wondered as we went within, was it her fingers or the needles that clicked. Mr. Reuben did not speak but cleared his throat

and Miss Patricia started up and let her knitting fall and stood rigid and screamed: "Reuben Passwater, what does this mean?"

Mr. Passwater did not answer her, but took me to the smouldering fire and set me upon the settle. He stooped and took up an iron bar and poked the logs. They smoked green and yellow and it smelled and puffed into the room. Then it suddenly blazed up. Mr. Passwater stood up very slowly, and very slowly set the iron bar beside the hearth, and I remembered that ash fell off its point in a little circle as he set it down.

Miss Patricia walked very straight-backed to the fireside and again screamed: "What does this mean?"

Mr. Reuben turned and his mild eyes were gone. His lips shook and he answered:

"It means that she sleeps here."

"Never!" screeched Miss Patricia. "Think of the village! The tongues! And this brat in a virtuous household!"

Mr. Reuben shook his head and replied:

"You think of them, Patricia. I have other thoughts."

Miss Patricia gasped and let her hands fall from her stomach where they were crossed piously. "Sleep here!" she gasped once more."

"Yes," replied Mr. Reuben; "in the guest room."

I was frightened, and Miss Patricia stood staring at me. She began to speak and I suddenly had spied the bird that was hopping merrily within its wicker and forgot to listen. But I remember some of what she said.

"The village is agog. She did not give the man's name. Her shame is before the people and she has now left the brat to disgrace Christian people."

Mr. Reuben sat down and I looked to him. He hung his head upon his clasped hands. Miss Patricia went on, but I know he did not hear, for he sat long and then arose and sternly said:

"Light the candle! She shall sleep."

Miss Patricia fingered in her basket and brought out a bit of candle, almost burned away, and held it in front of the fire until it had melted and carefully stuck it upon a plate. Her eyes were mutinous. Mr. Passwater spoke kindly to me: "Go with Miss Patricia. She will make you ready."

Miss Patricia did not answer, but took my out-held hand and jerked me toward the door.

Mr. Passwater said one word softly. It was "Patricia." She sniffed and opened the door and pushed me in. I remember the bed was high-posted and canopied like a great cave. There was a coverlid of white and linen sheets. It was tall, like Miss Patricia, and had thin legs, and upon the head posts were two protuberances. They were moles to my small mind. I fully expected the yawning cave to snap out, "Well!"

Miss Patricia went over the bare flooring to where a mat was spread before a table. Upon the table was a glass, a reflector, which gave dizzy reflections. All of this I saw. Miss Patricia came up to me, grasped my hands, looked at them and rolled her eyes in horror. She cast them from her as unclean and unchristian, and left the room to come back with a basin. The water was chill and she plunged my hands almost up to the elbows into it, and before I had time to make an outcry she had wet my face. I tried to speak, but the words sounded: "M-m—iss-Pat-tri—m-m-pst!"

Miss Patricia snapped: "Less talk!" She dried my face and hands and began to undress me. I saw her eyeing my clothing. The garments were coarse and patched, but whole and clean, and my flesh was white and soft, for She would bathe me, and kiss my flesh, for she loved it. Miss Patricia brought out a shirt. I think it must have been Mr. Reuben's. And when I was stripped she put this upon me and I laughed and looked at her and said:

"It is too small, isn't it?"

"Be abed!" she answered and turned back the coverlids. The sheets struck my flesh cold. They were hard, like Miss Patricia's lap would be, I imagined. Miss Patricia made to blow out the light. I sat up, for I was still frightened, and I called:

"Miss Patricia, you lied, didn't you? She is not a deader. She wrote upon my cape about the waiting. She is playing."

"Nonsense," Miss Patricia answered. "She is dead."

"Dead!" I asked. "Then where is she? Oh, Miss Patricia, you should have been at the deader's burying. They brought a black box, a long one."

"That was her," Miss Patricia supplemented.

Horror froze me. Miss Patricia blew out the light and left me. I lay afraid to move. Then the box was her. No! Yet the words of Mrs. Gifford about the Christians, the shiny worn black, the white kerchief! The whole day swept through my mind. Was this Sally Trueblood, this black box? Had they put her in the pit? Oh! I shivered and sat up and my heart was hollow. I heard Mr. Passwater and Miss Patricia make the house secure and go to rest. It was quiet, so quiet.

I whimpered and got out of the bed and sought my clothes. It was lighter without now, for the moon was coming. I dressed swiftly and unlatched the door and crept carefully through the room where the hearth still smouldered. I found the door and unbolted it and stepped without. I do not know what I intended to do, but I sped like a wild thing straight to the chapel yard and through the gate, nor was I afraid, for Sally Trueblood was there. I found the stone in the white light that read "Felicia Trueblood," and I found the new mound.

With my small hands I began to lift up the earth handful by handful, crying:

"Sally Trueblood, are you there? Answer! Oh, I am lonely! Listen!" and I put my cheek upon the mound: "your brat loves you."

And frenzied I began to take up more earth, tearing at it and weeping. And then weariness, the brother of sleep, my old friend, came, and I nodded to him and lay down. And I do not know why, but I fancied that I slept upon the breast of Sally Trueblood. And I dreamed that the black box was a dream and Sally Trueblood beckoned me to a new land where it was Mayin'.

CHAPTER V

When I awoke the sun was not come. Silence hung about, like unto a shroud, pierced but by some waking bird that called to its mate. I sat up slowly and stretched. New thoughts teemed my mind. The red calf, Teeny Gifford, the great canopy bed, the inn, and hunger. I could not take in the fullness of all that had been and rubbed my eyes anew

and yawned. I seemed to realize that I was upon the mound and fright overcame me and I cried aloud. I heard the door of the sextonage open and I blindly stumbled over the sod and grasses to the spot. The sexton was watching and I flung myself upon him, crying:

"Take her out! Take her out! She is there!" And I pointed to the new mound.

He stooped and took me up and carried me within. The room was barren, save for a cot and table slab and some shelves. I smelled porridge and forgot that I had cried out unto him.

"Shoo now," the sexton said, and patted my head when he had let me down. "Come and porridge. Thee'lt be a-better. Shoo now. Weep 'e not."

I looked great-eyed at him as he brought forth a mug and set it upon the table slab and went to the fire that crackled within a small hearth. He took off the pot of porridge slowly and poured the mugs full. It was a meat broth and I fell to it, breaking the loaf he offered and never speaking a word.

"What brought ye sae early?" asked the sexton.

I looked slowly at him and replied, amid my chewing:

"I—um—did not come. I stayed."

"Shoo now," the sexton grunted, "never ye stayed!"

"Oh, but I did," I replied. "She is there. Come, bring the thing yonder and take her out."

"Na, na, now. Run ye on to Gifford's and tell the Vicaress to speak ye what ha'e been."

"Oh, Miss Patricia told me, but she lied. Come, take her out. She is playing. See?" And I held out the bit of paper on which was written of the game.

"Na, na. Run 'long now. Ye be a-porridged. Run along to Gifford's."

I turned from the table and watched the fire and I remembered there was a fire at the inn. It would be but first embered now, scarcely leaping, weak and smoky. I resolved to go to the inn, for within me was still the feeling that Miss Patricia was lying.

I got off the bench and walked slowly to the door s ope. The sun was well up. I watched the shadows play over the paths and I wondered why people wept when they came

here. I had seen Miss Patricia weep, and Peter Goff, and the Giffords, although I had always had a feeling well down within me that the Vicar wept almost too freely. I skipped out the doorway and I remember that the sexton stood and watched me. I picked a larkspur and briar buds and smelled the sweet morning's breath that still clung like the ghosts of night beneath the deepest shadows. Suddenly I started, for a stone had fallen just beside me. I waited and another fell and a voice followed:

"Hi, Hope, hi! It's up! Come on down to the mead. Its legs wobble, but it runs. Come and see!"

I shook my head "no."

"Did you go to Pious Gifford to see the box?" the voice asked. And Rudy Strong came through the gateway, his hands filled of stones and his smock ragged and filthed. I shook my head "no" again.

"Say, Hope. Pious Gifford said Sally Trueblood was dead and the box was hers!"

I nodded slowly and somehow a feeling of pride arose within me.

"Where is she?" he asked.

I pointed to the new-made mound. Rudy Strong stood staring at it and spit through his teeth, scratched one leg with one bare foot, hitched his smock's neck with his finger, and went on casting stones at imaginary birds.

I sat upon the sunken spot beside the stone of Felicia Trueblood and looked mournful. Rudy shot a sidelong glance to me and flushed.

"I guess you ain't no place to go," he remarked.

I raised my brows and did not answer.

"Where to?" he asked.

"Perhaps to Gifford's," I answered.

Rudy stopped and turned and shouted:

"My eye, no! The Giffords 'long here? You ain't goin to the Giffords. My eye, no! Better as ye go to Ole Dodson's."

I rose and smoothed my frock that was much rumpled from my night's sleeping upon the sod; carefully dusted the spots that showed clay, and stood meditating. A step sounded upon the path. I could hear the pebbles grating. I looked, startled, for I suddenly remembered that I had fled

from the Passwaters'. Rudy, too, started but kept on casting stones and said softly :

" It is the Vicar. You know it's Sabbat'. Let's go down to the mead. Come on."

I did not answer, but stepped over the wet grass toward the sextonage. I saw the sexton go toward the chapel and I knew he was turning the great key to let the Vicar see God. I had seen the Vicar sit, before the village came to worship, and I had watched his lips move and I had often wondered what he was saying to God that he would not say aloud. Somehow, I did not associate the Vicar's God with Sally Trueblood's and mine, for when Sally Trueblood spoke to Him, her beautiful eyes seemed to light up and her voice was never so sweet. I knew that she *knew* Him. I remember she never spoke of Him except in endearing terms, and I often had lain long and heard her tell Him aloud of things that I did not understand, and always within me was the feeling of comfort, for I knew that He knew her. But the Vicar always shut his eyes when he prayed and his voice seemed to tremble and I always had a feeling of fear way down within me, for I knew that the Vicar's God always frowned.

All of this swept through my mind as I played with a web that some industrious spider had spread from the top of the stone reading " Willie Pimm Passwater " to a thorn bush that stood some distance away. It was a beautiful web, and a little silver-winged moth was struggling to free itself from its silken embrace. There were little drops all beady upon the strands of the web, but the moth, I knew, wanted that it might flee and seek some shady spot where the larkspurs nodded. So I loosed it and it clung to my finger. Rudy came to see and suggested that we peg it to a leaf, but I had no intention of doing any such a thing, and I remember that I told Rudy so, and also that I had bidden him to go and leave me.

I don't know why, but the great silence of Sabbath seemed to make me lonely. The villagers were now coming one by one to the chapel. They did not speak and those of them that would have nodded brightly or spoken to me, passed straight-backed and solemn into the chapel. I had left the web and gone slowly, plucking grasses and flowers, to the gate and sat upon one of the great stones that were its base.

I saw the Vicar Giffords come down the path led by Mrs. Gifford in her best black, and Nebuchadnezzar upon her hip with his crystal streams still flowing. Teeny followed and Sephira, the eldest, of whom the village knew little except that she was wayward. She was a pale girl, tall, like the Vicar. Her locks were dark and shiny. She was dressed in black with a white band on the throat and sleeve bands. I had heard of her. Sally Trueblood had told me that she loved to play games, but not being sufficiently prayerful, she was kept in the background. I saw them pass and heard the whistle of Rudy Strong afar that told me he had reached the mead. They passed me and did not turn. I suppose they did not see me. I am sure that Teeny's back did not bend, nor her eyes fall from the heights. Then the "Coffin" Giffords passed, and I remember that their eldest had an overskirt trimmed of white fringe such as Rudy Strong had shown to me and some little glistening buttons that reminded me of nails. Even "Coffin" Gifford himself looked long and black like a box, and like his brother, the Vicar, he was "powerful of prayer." Then the Sniflys. Miss Snifly with her flounces bounced past, her mittens primly exposed and a little feather in her bonnet that whipped the air, pst, pst, pst!

I resolved to wait the outpouring following the meeting, for I knew I should hear all the village knew. Miss Snifly spied me, stopped, her flounces bouncing, raised her eyes, pressed her lips firmly and ejaculated: "Well!" and bounced on. Mrs. Kirby followed her closely, and I saw a gleam in her eye as Miss Snifly had stopped and spoken the word, and I knew that they would discuss me. I wondered why Miss Patricia did not come, nor Mr. Reuben, and I waited. They were singing now, something very, very sorrowful. I do not know why, but I wanted to cry. It was something about angels and singing, and I wondered if Sally Trueblood was an angel and if she heard, and I laughed, for I knew if she was she was laughing.

I remember that many passed me and I forgot to watch, playing with my blossoms and the little black bug that had begun to run up and down one of the stems. I had not realized that the chapel was well filled. Having recognized my acquaintances, the other comers did not interest me.

Then I heard the Vicar's voice saying something about

children and suffering. I arose and I forgot the singing and within me came a longing to be among people. I stepped very slowly and timidly to the chapel. I had never been within it. You see, She never went, for "eyes hurt her." We had sung in the eaves, and she would read me all about the wonderful things in the little black book. I had heard how they sang at the chapel and had stood outside and watched the Vicar through the window. I stepped through the doorway and was frightened. They all seemed so quiet, like things I never knew. Ole Dodson was there, but he never sat like this beside the fire. Teeny Gifford sat primly, looking upwards, and I almost heard her say "sneathen" and wondered if she was ill. Even Nebuchadnezzar was chewing upon a book and did not wail, and Mrs. Gifford looked pained. I wondered where I might sit. There was no spot vacant, so I sought the shadows where I might stand unnoticed. The Vicar raised his hands and his lips opened and he said:

"Suffer little children to come unto me."

I walked very slowly down the aisle. The Vicar saw me and his jaw hung open. I was soiled and dishevelled, but I clutched my blossoms and went straight up to him and held them out. He reached out one white thin hand and took the flowers, and he looked dazed but continued:

"For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

There was an awful silence. I was frightened and looked up to the Vicar, who stood staring first at the flowers and then at me. I saw the sexton start as though to come forth, but the Vicar held up his hand. Then there sounded whisperings and rustlings and a commotion among the congregation. The Vicar stood very straight and silent. Then he stooped and took me up and sat me upon the great height where the Big Book lay, and he turned very slowly to his flock, and I looked at him and his eyes looked like Sally Trueblood's. His lips were very grim and he said:

"Let him without sin cast the first stone."

Then he lay one arm about me and I remember he talked, and his pale face flushed, and he said things about love and gentleness and pity and giving and blind virtue. And then he ceased and held his hand up to pray, and he did not shut his eyes. And he said things softly, but clearly. And he

spoke endearingly, and when he had finished, I said clearly, like I always said for Sally Trueblood: "Amen, dear God."

The Vicar bowed his head and held me to him.

The meeting was over and the villagers went out of the chapel as one man. Never turning—even Mrs. Gifford and her flock—they left us. The Vicar saw it and his eyes glistened and I heard him whisper: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

I kissed him and whispered: "You see, I am Sally Trueblood's brat."

"Yes," he answered. "Yes, I see."

"She never came," I went on, "because she said eyes hurt her."

"Yes," he answered. "Yes, I see."

"Eyes do hurt, don't they, Vicar Gifford?" I asked. "Do you think God wanted me? She told me He did and when you said it, I just came."

He was fingering my blossoms.

"Yes," he answered. "Yes."

"She told me about the chapel. She told me how she used to sit and love God, inside. Then she told me that eyes had made walls that she could not climb, and then she had made a chapel in her heart. We went in there every day. But the village did not know."

He was listening and took out a linen and wiped his eyes. The chapel was all quiet now. Even the sexton stood without waiting. I sat wondering, for I had never dreamed that the Vicar might touch me.

"Where are you going?" the Vicar asked.

"I do not know," I answered. "You see, she is out there in a box. The 'Coffin' Gifford made it. She is playing a game called 'waiting' with me." And I showed him the little note. He read it slowly and did not look up. I went on:

"Mrs. Gifford said there would be no Christian there, but I was there. You see, I am a heathen. Teeny told me and I think Miss Willoughby knows it. I saw Mrs. Gifford folding up some shiny black. Do you suppose she put it upon my beautiful Sally Trueblood? She wouldn't, would she?"

The Vicar bit his lips and did not answer. I continued:

"I put a bird in the pit. She won't be lonely, for it will sing when it's warm; and I tucked larkspurs under the sods, and you know she told me that every larkspur bell tinkled fairy whispers. The pink ones were the love fairies, and the white ones were angel fairies, and the purple were king fairies."

"Yes," the Vicar murmured. "I see."

"She told me that one did not have to come to the chapel, for these fairies sung every day when the bloom time was and their little echoes came all the winter time. You see, she says God does not want us lonely, so He talks all the time. I think I shall live just here, if it's God's house. He brought Sally Trueblood here. Yes, I shall stay."

The Vicar stood up slowly and took me by the hand and led me without. The sexton came up and made to lock the great door. They spoke softly one to the other, and the Vicar finally turned and said:

"This is God's house. You may stay."

They did not tell me how I was to stay, or where, but I was happy and I ran down the path and said aloud over the mound:

"Listen, Sally Trueblood, listen! I shall live with God. The Vicar says so. Do you hear? Do you?"

And there sounded such a beautiful song from a tall tree near. I stood and listened and the bird sang and sang. I was hungry and I started and leaned over the mound and whispered:

"Listen, listen, Sally Trueblood! I am hungry. Wait! I shall return almost now. Wait! I shall only go down the roadway to Ole Dodson and ask him to give me a sup. Wait! Wait!"

And I wheeled and stepped swiftly out the gate and into the path that led to the village. I remember that the houses seemed mournful. Even the smoke that curled was black, and the children of the village sat stiffly within the door's opes with solemn faces. I passed the house of Rudy Strong and even Rudy was washed and shone, and I called:

"Hi! Hi! Rudy!"

But he shook his head mournfully

"Why?" I called.

He cupped his hand and hissed hoarsely:

"It's Sabbat', and the dame'd crack my neck if I bended."

I stood and watched Rudy's misery and laughed and danced upon my toes and called:

"I shall go to the mead and see the red calf." And I turned and ran swiftly toward the mead's way.

CHAPTER VI

I WAS well upon the path when I met "Coffin" Gifford and saw that he hastened villageward. I stopped and wondered whatever had betided that caused "Coffin" Gifford to hasten. I resolved to follow him and find out. He did not see me and I followed, skidding hither and yon down the deserted streetway. He turned when he came to the shop of Ole Dodson and knocked upon the closed shutters. Ole did not answer and I sat upon a sod and waited. He knocked once more and the shutter rattled and Ole peeped out. I heard "Coffin" Gifford speak kindly to Ole and it was something about Reuben Passwater. I wondered if it was a box they were speaking of, and I went over the way and pulled at "Coffin" Gifford's long-tailed coat and asked:

"Is Mr. Reuben a deader?"

He brushed me away, much as one would brush a fly, and strode along the path swiftly towards the Misses Snifly. Ole Dodson had shut the shutter with a snap and left me staring. I followed "Coffin" Gifford to the Sniflys'. The Snifly house looked very much like Miss Snifly. It was flouncy, and had a little lattice window at the roof that looked like Miss Snifly's two white teeth that protruded. It was a wee-tiny-bit-little house and was like Miss Snifly's bonnet at the roof and the smoke curled out like the feather that went "pst, pst, pst."

"Coffin" Gifford stepped upon the step, and I know it was fancy, but I seemed to see the house tilt up. He bent his long neck when the door was opened and humped in. I was disappointed, so I sat down and made a little house of pebbles and waited. Sally Trueblood told me that waiting was like water. When you were thirsty you drank and when you was curious you waited. So I waited. After a while the door opened and "Coffin" Gifford humped out

and Miss Snifly followed. Her flounces fairly trembled and her cheeks flamed and I heard him shout to the deaf Miss Snifly!

"Reuben Passwater has disappeared."

You see, Sally Trueblood was right. I had waited. I sidled up the short path to the door and timidly called to Miss Snifly:

"Where did he go?"

She did not answer, and "Coffin" Gifford walked very fast down the streetway toward Passwater's. At this point I noticed that the village was stirring, and streams of Sabbath blacks crawled toward Passwater's. I knew I did not dare to follow. Miss Patricia with Mr. Reuben was bad, but Miss Patricia without Mr. Reuben was worse.

I turned very slowly toward the inn, thinking of Delicia Prue and knowing that my friend, hunger, was walking with me. When I came to the old familiar spot, my little throat swelled. I did not know why, but I wanted to throw my arms wide and run right up the stairs and burst the door open and just put my head upon Sally Trueblood's shoulder and tell her, tell her, tell her, all about the awful aching. I would go. I started to run, and without stopping ran up the stairway and through the still unlatched door into the little room where we had loved.

It was bright and quiet, except for a little cricket that chirped and chirped and chirped. Somehow it seemed to cheer me. I sat down by the dead hearth and picked up one of the broken branches that she had laid there. I remember her own fingers had curled about this very one and I kissed it. I wondered had she put a little loaf upon the shelf with perhaps some honey. I got from off the bench and tiptoed over to the shelf. It was bare. I began to cry and I said aloud:

"Sally Trueblood, they don't want me. The Vicar knows it. Their eyes hurt."

And I sobbed aloud. Then, drying my eyes, I went to the little box and thought I should take it to God's house where I was to live. I slipped my hand over the patches in my cape that she had sewn there and began weeping once more. Then my hand fell upon a hood. It was a blue one and had been beautiful. It was hers when eyes didn't hurt

her, and pinned to this was another note. I unpinned it and crushing it in my hand, took my box and fled. I would go to Miss Patricia's. Mr. Passwater had said I should sleep there. So I trudged, bearing my box—all that I possessed, —to Miss Patricia's.

There was a goodly gathering about the door and when I made my appearance there was a commotion. They did not speak to me, but they spoke to each other. The door was open and I stepped timidly through it, still holding to my box. Miss Patricia was weeping and Miss Snifly and Mrs. Kirby were lending their kerchiefs. I do not know but this is fancy, but it seemed to me that Miss Patricia looked happier weeping than I had ever seen her. She did not notice me. I sat down my box and went up to her just as I would have gone up to Sally Trueblood when she wept and I said:

"Miss Patricia, I hope I did not make you unhappy. You know they do move. Mr. Reuben said so."

She sat up very straight and spoke Sally Trueblood's name and a word that I did not know, but those that heard looked shocked and I felt ashamed. It was not one of the words Rudy Strong knew. He knew three and he always went behind something to say them. Miss Patricia said this out right straight and told them to put me out. I turned and took up my box and I said slowly:

"Never mind. I don't care, and Sally Trueblood shall not know. You see, I am to live with God."

I trudged out with my box and I do not recall all that I did that last part of the afternoon, but I do remember that I went to Gifford's and found the doors shut and that the inn had been locked when I returned. Then I had gone to Ole Dodson's, but the shutters were up and by this time it was most dark, and so quiet. I heard the cows lowing and the fowls making ready to sleep. There were no village children upon the streetway. I passed Rudy Strong's, but it was dark.

I wondered where I should go. I put down the box and sat upon it and wept. Then suddenly the little note in my hand came to my mind. I opened it. It was very dim light, but I read three words, "Are you playing?" My heart leapt. I was playing! I forgot! Then something happened. Something warm and soft rubbed against me. It

was Gifford's pink-nosed cat. I just took it up and loved it. It was warm and felt like Sally Trueblood's hair, and I said:

"Have you supped? I smell mutton."

He made a long mew, and I stroked him and I said:

"Was it nice and brown? It smells like that."

He made another long mew.

"I guess you have sup at morning and mid sup and perhaps eve sup?"

It mewed. I sighed, for I never remember but one sup and what Sally Trueblood had called "the evening's jest."

The cat strolled slowly down the path and I took up my box and followed him. He went to the chapel and I saw that the sexton had a light. It was dark by now and as I went in the gate I was a little afraid. I followed the chapel wall about until I had come to the sextonage where the light shone. I looked through the shutter that was turned and I saw the sexton bended over a great bowl of something that steamed. I remember him now. He had high cheeks and they were long and he had a mole, but it was a nice mole, and he had a funny big nose just like a hump, and long white hair. He was whistling. My heart felt lighter.

I knocked and I heard his steps coming swiftly, though he was tottering a bit. "Damp," he told me after. He opened the door and light streamed out from his candles. The cat marched straight in and I followed. He went to the fire. So did I. The sexton bolted the door and rubbed his hands and his kind lips were smiling and he said:

"Noo, noo, now. I been waitin' long. What kep' ye?"

"What?" I asked.

"What kep' ye?" the sexton asked once more.

"Oh, lots of things," I answered. "Why?"

"Shoo now. I had the porridge steamin' 'alf evenin'. Aye, since sunnin's out."

I looked at him wide-eyed and answered:

"But I did not know you had porridge. Oh, I am hungry!"

He came over to me and took my box and made a great deal over it, saying:

"What now hast thee, little lady? A box? My, my, my!" And he patted my hand.

"Yes," I answered. "It's my box."

"And what be in ut?"

"I do not know," I answered. "Sally Trueblood made it up."

"Well, well now. Sally Trueblood. Well, well now. Ye don't mean it! Not the beautiful lady, Sally Trueblood?"

I flung my arms out and swept upon him.

"Yes, yes," I cried. "Do you know her? She is beautiful, isn't she?"

"Shoo, shoo. But 'e be hungerin'. Come, lass, come."

I went up to the table slab where two pewter bowls steamed and two grey loaves beside them. There were ladles, too. I sat upon the bench he drew up, very primly, and I ate very mincingly. He watched me and urged that I take copiously.

"Fill 'e oop. Gang. Fill 'e oop!"

I raised my brows and said, looking as much like Miss Willoughby as I could: "Sir?"

He looked rather puzzled. I sipped daintily. The cat was rubbing about my legs that dangled down from the bench. The sexton's lips, I believe, twitched and he said slowly:

"P'raps I be addressin' one no' o' my station."

"Yes," I answered. "I am Lady Lilyfinger. My coach was delayed by the shower. Be off like a good man and bring a sup, say of some old mould."

"Eh?" the sexton grunted and sat twirling his great thumbs. "Aye, I see. Aye."

And he bowed very low and went to a half tub and took out water and poured it in a mug and came back laughing. I laughed, too.

"Then you play! Oh, isn't it fun?"

He sat down and looked into the low fire and did not answer. I had finished and got off the bench and said:

"I think I shall go now, thank you."

"Where?" the sexton asked.

"What?" I asked.

"Where?" the sexton asked once more.

"Well, I do not know. I think I shall sleep with Sally Trueblood."

I took up my box and the sexton got up and lay his hand, such a big hand, so gently upon me.

" Na, na," he whispered. " Bide 'e here."

" No, the Vicar said I should live with God in the chapel."

" Na, na," the sexton answered. " Dwell 'e here. See! I'll kindle oop the fire and such a tale! " And he made a great mouth. I fell.

I stood waiting, a little loth to stay yet fast failing in my resolution to go.

" Is it about the sea ? " I asked.

" Na, na," the sexton said and shook his head slowly, bending over the fast dying fire to throw on more wood, and very slowly sat down upon the settle. " Na."

" Then I guess I shall go. I fancy the sea."

" Na, na," the sexton said. " I shall tell 'ee o' Obadiah Willoughby."

I sat down upon my box and blinked.

" He is a deader," I stated and shook my head. " I don't like deaders. Did Obadiah Willoughby have a long black box ? "

" Na, na," the sexton said. " Come."

And I got off my box and walked up to him.

" May I sit upon your knee ? "

He lifted me up. The cat leapt to my arms and we three sat facing the fire.

" Is it a long story ? " I asked.

" Na, so long."

" Well, did Obadiah Willoughby have steel-blue eyes ? "

" Na, they be brown."

" Then, I don't want to hear of Obadiah Willoughby."

I was stroking the cat and the sexton cleared his throat and stared long into the fire and said."

" A-e—yes, it is o' the sea."

" Well," I answered, " but his eyes are brown. Did Obadiah Willoughby sail ? "

The sexton shook his head. " Yea."

" Then did he come back with a chest of gold ? "

" Na, he ne'er did return," the sexton said.

" What ? " I said. " But you told me he lay beneath the big stone that reads ' Obadiah Willoughby. At Rest,' and I fancied his stomach made the mound high. Well, tell me about him, but *do* have his eyes steel-blue."

The sexton cleared his throat once more and I nestled

down and the cat tucked his head in my neck's curve and purred.

"'Ee see," the sexton said, "he war a wildish 'un and there be them that called him a devil."

I sat up very straight and got down from the sexton's lap.

"I shall not listen to such a tale," and took up my box. The sexton seemed to understand and said.

"Then we roast apples, eh?"

And he brought out two yellow ones with black specks all dotty on them. I sniffed and he set them very deliberately before the fire. I watched but would not go near. They smelled beautifully. I licked my lips and wondered if the tale was a good one. I sat down beside my box and I just let my head rest upon it a little while. Then I forgot and I was out upon a sea sailing upon one of the yellow apples with my little note that read, "Are you playing?" Then—well, there was not any then.

CHAPTER VII

I WAKED in the morning in a little cot. It was white and clean and there was a lattice over it, with a little traily vine that made the sunshine dance, and there was a bird swinging upon it, and I sat up and said: "Who are you?"

He eyed me but did not answer. And I climbed up to the lattice and he flew away. I sat upon the side of the cot wondering about the day before and where Mr. Passwater was and why I was here. Then the cat came and I remembered. I found my clothes folded very carefully and discovered that I was in my sleeping garment. I hastened and dressed and ran to the door, for the sexton was not there.

I opened the latch and looked out. It was very early and the sun was a beautiful rosy gold, all painting up the white stones, and the tangled grasses glistened and sounded out a chorus of scraping wings. I saw the sexton bending over the new mound and went to the spot. He was digging a pit and making ready to set a willow.

I watched his great hands lovingly spreading the mealy earth about the slender root and his lips were smiling. I shouted

" It's morning, Mr. Sexton. Look, it's beautiful morning ! "

He was still stooping over the willow and looked up and his pale eyes were starlike. He smiled and reached one clay-stained hand up to his cap and doffed it and stood up, and I remember that the sun shone upon his white locks and the wind blew them about his face and he pointed to the willow.

" Oh, did you put it there for me ? " I cried. " She will love it and perhaps it will grow up to be a tall swayey tree and the birds will nest in it."

The sexton nodded and asked had I supped. I shook my head " no," and he said :

" I ha'e set the bowls. 'Tis fresh milk and a white loaf."

I ran swiftly within and caught up the bowl and loaf and ran without and cried :

" May I sit beside Sally Trueblood and just eat this with her ? "

He nodded and turned slow and went to the sextonage. I found a stone and sat down beside the new mound. I held up the loaf and whispered :

" Think of it, Sally Trueblood, white bread ! And milk ! "

And I supped long and licked my lips. Two birds fluttered down and lighted upon the mound and I cast them crumbs. I ate very slowly and drained the bowl of the milk and sat watching the shadows and lights play like living things among the stones and paths. I heard a step leading to the chapel and sat the bowl down and swiftly ran to the great gate. It was Miss Snifly and I called, " Morning, Miss Snifly ! "

She turned, stared at me, tossed her head and flounced on. I was hurt and stood a long time watching her go her way. The tears started up and I felt lonely. Then there sounded the call of Rudy. I saw two dogs scurrying up the roadway and the dust rising as they came, and following them, his hair blowing wildly, and shrieking, was Rudy. I climbed up the iron fence and pressed my face through but did not call. Rudy spied me and shrieked : " Hi, Hope, hi ! " I did not answer and with one hand wiped off my cheek some of the drops that had slipped out. He left the dogs and came running up to the fence where I stood and held out a dead rat.

"Wuggles killed 'im," he stated, his eyes shining in pride. I shuddered and hid my eyes.

"Aw, it's a big un. Look, he bit him through."

"Throw it away!" I shrieked. "Oh, Rudy, throw it away!"

"Na," Rudy answered, "I'm goin' to put it in the path to Ole Dodson's shop. Oh, my eye, but won't the wimmin dodge!"

Suddenly he saw that I had been weeping and he stood, the limp rat in one hand and the other scratching his head.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

I began to whimper and answered:

"I don't know, but Miss Snifly passed and I called, "Morning, Miss Snifly,' and she sniffed and did not answer."

"She is a rotter!" Rudy stated. "Hope, Rube Passwater's gone."

"Where to?" I asked.

"Dunno, but they be sayin' down at Ole Dodson's that the Vicar had no more 'an washed afore the Sniflys and Kirbys and 'Coffin' Giffords and all come on him. I heard 'em sayin' that they'd unfrock him."

I stood terrified. Unfrock the Vicar! I saw him, in my young mind, stark naked.

"They wouldn't Rudy," I cried. "They wouldn't. Miss Snifly would never get over it."

"Oh, I dunno," said Rudy. "Where you goin'?"

I stood staring toward Gifford's and did not answer.

"I found a eave up the meadow way. Come on."

"No," I answered.

"Aw, you needn't be proud cause the deader's yours!"

"She's no deader," I answered.

"Yes, she is," Rudy taunted, and I flew at him. He slipped through the great gate and I sped after. We ran for some way down the village path, Rudy calling, "Deader! Deader! Deader!"

I stumbled and fell. My knee was bruised and I sat where I fell and gave vent to tears and sobs. Rudy did not await my resuming the chase, but sped on and I did not care to follow. The Vicar was upon my mind. I got up rubbing my knee and dried my eyes when Mrs. Kirby, upon her way

to the shop, passed. I ran to meet her, still rubbing my knee, and called:

"They would not unfrock the Vicar, would they, Mrs. Kirby?"

"Mind your manners, and leave elders be," she answered acidly.

I stood staring and my lip trembled. I turned very slowly and walked back to the chapel yard, found the stone of Felicia Trueblood and sat down in its shadow. I did not wish to see any man or woman. I was hurt. The Giffords' cat found me and slept a long while in my lap. I did not want to play in the sunshine, but to hide away where I could see Sally Trueblood's smile and dream of her. Somehow within me it seemed, when I was near the mound, I was with her. When the sun was high I could not stand the heat and went into the sextonage.

The sexton was gone but there was a bit of hare and a loaf upon the table. I wandered about the sextonage and found many things that showed that some one had known the sea who lived there. There was a beautiful mass of sea-weeds and a great shell and some small ones and I found a silver buckle upon which was traced faintly, "O. W." It was wrapped in a linen kerchief such as gentlemen wore. It was fine and soft and the buckle was a throat clasp. "O. W.!" I wondered what this was and rubbed it upon my woollen skirt. It shone beautifully and I pinned it upon my breast. Then I went to the little chamber where I had slept. The sun shone through the lattice faintly now, but was glowing bright without.

I found my box and sat upon the floor to unpack it. First, there was the blue hood upon which I had found the note. I kissed it and held it up and from out its frill hung one long trailey hair. It was Sally Trueblood's. I let it lie upon my hand and put it carefully back in the hood. Then there was the feather. It was not beautiful now but long and wispy. It had belonged to the hood, Sally Trueblood told me. Then there were the slippers, white and buckled of gold. They had such thin little soles. I stretched out my leg and looked at my foot, then at the slipper. My stockings were grey-knit,—she had made them,—and my shoes were buskins. I slipped off my worn shoes and donned the slippers.

Then there was a locket, a little flat locket. It hung upon a worn ribband. Its back was silver and upon it was traced "G. W." I turned it slowly over in my hand and faced a miniature, a gentleman whose chestnut hair hung well upon his shoulders. It waved at the temples and brow and his lips were fearless and smiling. It was a pleasant face. I liked it and I looked to see whether his eyes were steel-blue. They were not. They were brown. Then I discovered the ribband and a note pinned to it. I took it to the light and read:

"The great bee, Hope. Say it slowly: He will come."

I stood looking at the gentleman long and I liked him very, very much. He seemed to just know me and I said:

"Mr. Bee, I am Sally Trueblood's brat."

Then I just kissed the gentleman and hung him about my neck. There was a silken skirt, much frayed but it had a long tail, and a little ring of silver, two hearts linked. Upon one was scribed O, and upon the other, S.

You see, Sally Trueblood had taught me to letter. We had great games of spelling. When it was dark, she would spell, H–O–P–E and I would call, "Hope"; L–O–V–E, and I would call, "love;" Y–O–U, "you," I would laugh. Then I would spell, and when it was light she would write very, very much with a quill and stain. There was a small ook all written full in the box, but I did not seem to care or this. Then there was the quill and some stain, some little garments much too small for me, and a little curl, all flaxen. This was all.

The sexton had laid out all of my clothing, which was little. I took up the hood and the quill and took out from the hood the trailey hair and wrapped it around the quill. Then I packed back the box, except for the skirt of silk with the long trail and the hood and feather. In these I arrayed my small person. I preened long, lifting my skirt as I had seen Miss Willoughby lift hers, though mine was scant except for the tail. The hood was much too large and flopped about my small face. So, gorgeously bedecked, I stepped forth to the chapel yard. The slippers would scarcely stay upon my feet and the skirt tripped me many times, but I stepped as haughtily as all of these smaller matters would permit toward the mound of Obadiah Willoughby.

Here I bowed and let down my long trail and strode about, arching my brows. I spoke in a strained voice, asking after Mr. Willoughby's health. Then I remembered I moved regally toward the mound of Willie Pimm Passwater and I recall that I called him a good child and spoke familiarly of his sister, Patricia. I seemed to relish this and sneered the word "Patricia." I lost a slipper and sat flat upon the ground in my silk to put it on, arising and mopping my face, for the hood was warm. I remember watching my shadow and how the feather, that I had stuck in it tipsily, nodded. I passed on and found a shadow and sat to rest. Then the thing that undid me happened. The Giffords' cat had caught a bird before my very eyes and I had made to run and had fallen within a rose bramble. I fought blindly and was scratched unmercifully. I cried aloud and finally extracted myself from its thorny embrace much tattered and bleeding.

Then the game seemed to vanish and I stood looking every way, but no one was in sight. I could hear my heart thumping and I went and hid behind the stone of Felicia Trueblood. The evening drew on and still I sat and I knew that the little me could never be the same.

I sat long, until the shadows had vanished and a grey hung about the chapel walls and o'er the walls of the sextonage. Still I feared to seek from my hiding, but sat longer, waiting I know not what, still arrayed in the silken skirt and hood, the feather hanging limp upon one shoulder. I seem to see myself even now and feel the fear that filled up my breast. I was filled of a great why, so dark, so deep-rooted that its shadow would ever follow me.

Why had Miss Snifly turned and not answered my "morning"? Why had Miss Patricia called me a brat? Why did they bite their lips when I told them that I was Sally Trueblood's brat? Why did the Vicar speak of casting stones and guilt and sin, and why had they gotten up and left us, and why had the Vicar stood so white? Was it Sally Trueblood? What had she done? No, it was never Sally Trueblood, for she was so beautiful, so very, very good, so very, very patient. No, 'twas never Sally Trueblood.

I got up very slowly and walked to the new mound and I knelt and whispered:

"Sally Trueblood, are you listening? Why did you leave

me? Why do eyes hurt? They do, Sally Trueblood. Oh, they do. Your brat knows it."

But silence answered me, and a great aching clutched my throat, and I drew a long sob. Then the great chilling fear crept over me and I beat my small fists upon the sods and cried:

"You must not leave me! You must not! No, no, Sally Trueblood! You must not." And I sunk weeping.

CHAPTER VIII

I WEARIED and lay upon the sods looking up, and the grey overhead became sparkling, and the sparkling cheered me, I remembered the hole in the inn's roof and the little star that sparkled there. Then I sat filled of wild thoughts. Miss Patricia came to my mind, and I do not know why, but I felt a great pity within me for her tears. I wondered where Mr. Reuben was, and was she lonely, and my heart ached. I forgot her moles and only remembered her weeping.

The sexton had come from the village and lighted the candles. I saw their pale light streaming through the shutters, but Miss Patricia and her grief were upon me. I would go to Miss Patricia.

I stood up from the shadow that clung to the stone of Felicia Trueblood and looked about the chapel yard. The stones tipped in ghastly whiteness this way and that. I was fear-stricken and shivered and looked up. The stars were sparkling and my heart leapt. I turned in my wondrous robes and stepped into the pathway out the great gate and turned into the path to the Passwaters'. I remember that a great loneliness crept over me. I seemed so small. I heard a singing in some house deeper within the village and I knew that some housewife was doing up the pewter. I wondered why the whole village seemed so very quiet. Pale lights streamed out of the shutters, but they were not for me. I swallowed a great lump and I remember that my throat made a sound that was not a sob, but a sigh clutched by an aching throat. I began to run and tripped, for the slippers were very large, and I sat down and took them off and ran in my grey stockings. I would go to Miss Patricia. The very earth seemed to press loneliness upon me. I looked up to the sky and it

seemed so very, very, very high. I wondered where, up there, Sally Trueblood was. Did she see me? I made my lips speak her name:

"Sally Trueblood! Sally Trueblood! Why do you not come?"

I turned down the path to the inn, and when I had come to it, there was no light beneath the eaves, and I stood long, my eyes very round, watching. Then the tears, hot and stinging, filled in upon me and I wept. I could not keep my lips firm. They trembled and my throat worked. There was a light in the inn's great room and Peter Goff was stirring the great pot that hung, but the fire seemed dead and the shadows were mournful—not the wonderful ones that skipped that I loved to watch. There was nothing about the inn that held me and I looked once more to the eaves and blew a kiss. Then I turned with a quaking heart and sped to Passwaters'.

I remember that the little house was prim and straight and rather thin, like Miss Patricia. There was a prim little picket about the yardway and a gate that hung very straight. I seem to recall it was the only one that hung so in the village. It was here that I became conscious that a stone had worked its way into the foot of my stocking and was hurting. I sat down upon the gravel way when I had opened the gate and removed the stocking and the stone. Then, in one stocking and the wonderful silken skirt and hood and feather, the slippers clutched to my bosom and the locket and pin upon my breast, I marched up to the door of the Passwater abode and knocked.

I seemed to believe that Miss Patricia was sorrowful, and away down within me came the fancy that if I should seek her when she was sorrowful she would unbend.

I listened. There was no sound. I could hear my heart thumping and I reached forth one hand and smote the door once more. It snapped open and out from the dark pit came one word, "Well!" I echoed it tremorously, "Well." A hand shot forth and clutched me and I was dragged to the Passwaters' sitting-room. There was a fire smouldering and Mr. Reuben's comfort-feet* beside it. I noticed this, and his house wrapper hung upon the back of the great chair,

* Slippers.

and the hassock was drawn up. I also remember that the bottle of port and the mulling cup stood beside it.

I leaned over toward the fire, for the night air was chilly, and Miss Patricia released her hold upon me and pointed to the hassock. Then she saw that I was stockingless upon one foot and she caught sight of something that seemed to startle her, for her little round eyes popped out and then in and then out again. She wheeled and brought forth two new candles and I knew that something wonderful had caused this. She lighted the candles from a taper she held in the fire and placed them upon the table that was covered with the woollen scarf. Then she turned very slowly and snapped out: "Come here!"

I stood up, blinking in the new light, and trod over the garlanded carpet, and I remember that the straw beneath tickled my soles. Miss Patricia clutched me and I remembered a story that Sally Trueblood told me of a goblin that had claws of iron. Miss Patricia's fingers seemed to sink into my flesh. She stared not at me, but at my bosom, and I heard her breathe very softly two words that were not clear, but Miss Patricia's voice trembled and her eyes were wet. She took one hand from my shoulder and it shook, and she touched the locket that hung with the beautiful gentleman's face toward her, as though it were hot. I wondered what made Miss Patricia so very white and I said:

"That is Mr. Bee."

Miss Patricia did not answer me, nor ask more, but sat down in the great armchair and stared very long into the smouldering fire. I did not speak, for I knew Miss Patricia was like Sally Trueblood when she did not wish me to speak.

I heard the bird hopping in its wicker and an ember fell from one log and sent up sparks that were very merry, but even this did not start Miss Patricia. Her jaw hung open and her moles were quiet. I sighed a long sigh and cleared my throat, but still Miss Patricia did not move.

I arose, and I seem to see myself now as I write, one bare foot and the grey stocking, still clutching the slippers and the hood flopping about my face, with the feather now hanging rakishly from the side. I went up to Miss Patricia and set the slippers down very quietly. Then I laid my stockings beside them and wiped my hands upon the silken skirt. Then

I touched one of Miss Patricia's hands and crept up to her and laid my cheek upon her arm and said:

"We are twins, aren't we, Miss Patricia? You are sorry and I am sorry. You are alone and so am I. Where is Mr. Reuben?"

Miss Patricia did not bend nor answer. I crept a little closer and I said:

"Would you just like to put your head right here?" and I laid my hand upon my breast. "Sally Trueblood said there was sunshine here."

Miss Patricia still sat very straight and I looked to the fire. There was a thin fire-log with a straight back and it looked like Miss Patricia. I stood waiting and patted her hand.

"You know you could just put your head right here and I could love away the sorry."

Miss Patricia did not bend. Then my heart thumped and I just threw my arms wide and flung them about Miss Patricia's neck and cried:

"I love you! Oh, I love you!" And I kissed Miss Patricia's thin lips and then—it happened.

I never knew that Miss Patricia's cheek was so soft, nor that she could hug, but it *was* soft and she *could* hug. And there were beautiful shiny tears all over her cheeks. I say they were beautiful because they were. They made Miss Patricia's eyes young. I was afraid to move, so I laid my cheek up to Miss Patricia's and I said:

"Let's cry." And we did.

It was very quiet and the smouldering fire sent such little creepy shadows up and o'er the ceiling as my head lay upon the shoulder of Miss Patricia. I was weeping, and so was she. She sighed, so did I. I was afraid to move, for I feared she would suddenly cry out, "Well!" And there was such a warm, warm feeling within my breast, for I was with Miss Patricia and she held me and I knew that she was not the Miss Patricia that snapped, but that she was the Miss Patricia that loved and was lonely.

I sat very quiet, listening. The fire snapped and crackled in its embering. I watched little thin blue smoke ribands climb up the chimney and waited. Then I looked to the wicker where the bird was silent and saw that he was sleeping, his head beneath his wing. Miss Patricia had loosed her arms

about me and sat now wiping her eyes. I wiped mine and smiled, a sunshine smile, just like Sally Trueblood loved. She did not smile, and I waited longer. She looked to the locket and lay her hand upon it and whispered:

"How came you by it?"

"It is Sally Trueblood's. It is Mr. Bee."

"No, no," said Miss Patricia. "It is—— Where did Sally Trueblood get it?"

"I do not know," I answered, "but you see it was in my box with this," and I touched the silk skirt, the blue hood and the feather that now fell down my back.

Miss Patricia only now seemed to see that I was arrayed in the beautiful robes of Sally Trueblood. She set me upon my feet and arose and surveyed me from top to bottom and her lips opened and she said, "Well!"

"They are beautiful, aren't they?" I asked.. "See! This is her hood. You see, it was beautiful, she said, and this feather hung long and flowing from the side. She wore this before eyes hurt her, and this," and I touched the locket. "I do not know the gentleman, but I like him. He has such a smile. It makes one feel like laughing right back. But his eyes are brown. I do not like brown eyes. You see, my eyes are brown, like his, she says. I like steel-blue eyes. Oh, I wish his eyes were steel-blue! I love steel-blue eyes. Don't you, Miss Patricia?"

Miss Patricia did not answer me and I ran on:

"You see, Sally Trueblood loved brown eyes. They were true, she said. I think she meant Mr. Bee's. They are true, aren't they, Miss Patricia?" I asked, as I turned the locket that I might look at the smiling face that showed there.

Miss Patricia snapped, "No."

I started and said: "Yes—um, but I believe they are, for she told me so and she never, never lied."

Miss Patricia would not look at the gentleman, but sat staring at the fire. One arm still lay about me and I rested my head upon her shoulder again, sighing. She did not speak for a long while, and I remember that I sat wondering what the sexton was doing and if he missed me, but he did not come. But I remember that within me came the feeling that there was no one who missed me, or who would welcome me. Then I stroked Miss Patricia's hand and my eyes seemed

heavy. I saw Mr. Reuben's house wrapper waiting him and I felt that Miss Patricia was sorrowing that he had gone. I remarked softly:

"Don't you think Mr. Reuben will come? Rudy Strong told me that he heard at Ole Dodson's that the village said that he had ridden away upon your tongue, but of course this is not true, is it, Miss Patricia? Of course it is not, for I saw your tongue. I know you wonder why I came. Well, listen! I knew you loved me. Do you know how?"

Miss Patricia shook her head "no."

"Well, because you see you didn't *have* to give me the Scotch cake or the plum. It was very nice Scotch cake." Miss Patricia smiled. "I liked it. The plum was a big one. And I said right down in me, 'Miss Patricia is like a thunder shower. The sun's there.'

"You see, Sally Trueblood always said we made our own clouds. That was why we did not see the sun. Well, I made clouds over you when I came to see your moles. I am sorry, but they did move."

Miss Patricia sat very straight and did not vouchsafe a reply. She let me down and went over to the candles and blew them out. Then she stirred the embers and laid a log on the glowing bed. It smoked and soon was burning. She sat in the great armchair. She turned to me and said: "Come here!"

I went over to her and she sat me upon her lap, and I remember that she smoothed my rumpled locks away from my brow and her hand was not hard and she said:

"Tell me, when do you first remember Sally Trueblood?"

"Always," I answered. "Always and always."

"No," said Miss Patricia. "When do you first remember her?"

"I remember her," I said, "when they wore pinafores. She told me they wore pinafores. She told me she had two beautiful eyes and she was afraid of the dark. You see, I used to play with her. She could make such wonder-games."

"No," said Miss Patricia. "No. You do not remember Sally Trueblood in pinafores."

"Yes, but I do. You see, you do not know, Miss Patricia. *I* know."

"Yes, I understand," Miss Patricia answered, "but when do you remember Sally Trueblood after eyes hurt her?"

"I did not know her then. You see, she told me that the Sally Trueblood in pinafores had died. Then was she a deader, Miss Patricia? I did not know what she meant when she said that Sally Trueblood who wore pinafores had died. She told me that and said she meant that the pinafore baby had grown up, and then she said that tongues had killed her. So we always whispered when we spoke of the Sally Trueblood that eyes hurt."

Miss Patricia was listening and nodded.

"You see, there was Sally Trueblood who hid in the broken bowl. That meant she was ill."

Miss Patricia was listening. I was encouraged and went on:

"You see the bowl was broken and she could stay just as long as it held. Oh, but Miss Patricia it did not hold! She has gone like Mr. Reuben and it doesn't do any good to wait."

Miss Patricia hugged me close and I said:

"You are sorry, aren't you?"

She nodded.

It was growing late and yet we sat. Miss Patricia asked after a bit:

"Who came to the eaves to see you?"

"Not one soul," I answered. "Only the sun and the moon. She said they were wise and knew no thing as wicked. She said that when you could look straight at the moon, you were sure that you never were forgotten and we always waited the big moon, for it was company."

Miss Patricia was staring at me and I did not know how to continue, but I was full of Her and I went on:

"Oh, Miss Patricia, you should just have seen her eyes and her lovely locks and the lips where kisses grew in bunches like grapes, all sweet and dewy, she said. She always let me lie upon her bosom when night came."

"How?" said Miss Patricia.

"Like this," I answered, and cuddled close.

"Then she kissed me," I ventured.

"How?" asked Miss Patricia.

"Like this," I said, and I circled Miss Patricia's neck and kissed her full upon the lips.

" Then I weighted her lids for sleeping."

" How? " asked Miss Patricia. And I kissed both Miss Patricia's lids.

" Then I prayed," I said.

" How? " said Miss Patricia.

" Like this," I answered, and I slipped to the floor and knelt at Miss Patricia's knee, laying my cheek upon her folded hands and looking into her eyes, as I did into Sally Trueblood's.

" O dearest God, read my heart. It is all there. Bless the hungered. Give ease to them that suffer. Make me pure and keep Sally Trueblood." Then I whispered: " O, please do not let the shadows follow her."

Then I rose and explained:

" You see she told me about the shadows. She told me and she said I should ask God to let His sun shine upon them."

" Yes," said Miss Patricia. " Yes. Kneel down." I did. " Now," said Miss Patricia, " ask Him to let the sun shine upon Miss Patricia."

I said it again and then I kissed her and I said:

" He will. Just wait."

Then she kissed me and took me up and I lay upon her breast and watched her eyes. They were little, but they were soft now, and very deep. I do not remember how long we sat so, but after a time I heard a humming. It seemed a long way off. Then I remember some one saying, " baby," and that they kissed me, and I waked in the morning in the guest room with Willie Pimm Passwater's china dog!

CHAPTER IX

I WAS bewildered and got from off the tall bed quickly and sought the Passwaters' sitting-room. The table was spread for two. There was a bowl of warm milk and some meal bread, flaky and nutlike. I was clad in one of Mr. Reuben's shirts, but my heart was light, for I had a new love. There was a new fire and the room was a little chill. I remember drawing up my toes and sitting upon the hassock with my feet beneath me, watching the fire, with the china dog clutched to my heart.

The door opened and a dull person came in, a young girl whose face showed that she was slow and sluggish.

"Mornin'," she nodded.

"Mornin'," I nodded back. "Who are you?"

"Tidy Timpkins."

"Tidy Timpkins," I repeated. "What a funny name!"

"Yessum," she answered, and tittered.

She stood, with a great mug of steaming water held before her in both hands, staring at me, and did not move to put it down.

"You had better put that down," I said. "Miss Patricia is coming. I hear her."

"Yessum," she answered, and set the mug of hot water upon the table. Miss Patricia entered and looked with a keen eye about.

I watched her and I knew that I did not dare to say, "Mornin', Miss Patricia," and smile, but that I should wait; for the grim Miss Patricia was back. She busied about the room, righting up. I saw her pick up Mr. Reuben's comfort-feet and put them away. Then she came back to the fireside and took up his house wrapper and folded it very slowly. This she laid in a great chest that sat beneath the window's ope. Then she returned and took the bottle of port and mulling bowl to the inner room. Still I waited.

Tidy Timpkins sniffed, wiped her nose upon her hand's back, pursed up her lips, whistled a long soft whistle and went swiftly out. As she reached the door she turned and winked and pulled her mouth corner down.

Then she closed the door and left me. The bird was awake and fluttering wildly about in his wicker. I sat upon the hassock, my feet tucked beneath me, and when Miss Patricia returned she found me thus. She placed a stool beside the table where the morning's sup was laid and made a sign to me to come. I got from off the hassock and she seemed to realize that I was not dressed.

"Bring your clothes," said Miss Patricia. "Run along now. Hasten."

I ran barefoot over the garlanded carpet to the guest room and returned with my clothes. Still I hugged the china dog. Miss Patricia took it from me, went to the what-all and placed it upon its accustomed shelf. She returned to me and I stood

waiting until she should speak to me, not about clothes, but to me. She went about dressing me and I remember that her hands were not hard; that she fastened my garments tenderly and when she would finish one, she patted my shoulder or my back. This encouraged me and I whispered, as she leaned over me:

"I found the dog. Thanks."

She nodded and turned me slowly around until I faced her. Then she brushed my locks very smooth and tied them up with a cherry-coloured ribband that she got from a basket that stood upon the table. I sighed and looked up to her and said:

"Is it mine? Oh, it is beautiful!"

She nodded and pointed that I should go and bring her a bowl that stood in the guest room. I went and did as she had told me with her nod and sign. She went without and brought forth the bowl filled with water and a cloth and washed my small face and dried it. Then she bent down and left a very thin kiss upon my cheek.

"Thank you," I said, and sat down very primly at the table and waited.

Miss Patricia came and sat down before me. I waited. She poured some hot milk in my bowl and gave me a little loaf of white bread. I still waited. Miss Patricia looked at her bowl and picked at her loaf. Then she said, as though she was not addressing me: "Willie Pimm always liked a bit of salt in his porridge."

I tasted mine, a very little sup, and I said:

"Please, may I have salt?"

She handed me the salt and I said:

"Would you please just put in just what he would like?"

Miss Patricia got up and came about to my side and tucked in a bit of linen at my neck, then she took up the salt and with her own hands put a pinch in my porridge. I watched her and I saw that her hand shook and her lips trembled.

"Thank you, Miss Patricia," I said. She did not answer.

I took up my loaf, as she sat down again in her place, and I broke it and let its broken bits lie about my bowl. Miss Patricia frowned. I started. I knew I was wrong.

"Willie Pimm wouldn't do it, would he?"

"No," said Miss Patricia. "He ate from his loaf and supped his porridge slowly without noise."

Miss Patricia had not taken porridge, but had taken copiously of the hot water. She sat a long while crumbling her loaf, and I saw and snickered. Miss Patricia reddened and brushed the crumbs up in her cupped hand. Then she arose and said:

"Call Tidy Timpkins. Tell her to rid up."

I called Tidy, who came rubbing her lips that still showed circled of the white of milk and were crumby. Miss Patricia spoke a very few words to Tidy, who listened wide-eyed, gulping. Then she bade me bring my hood forth and went to the inner room and came back with a shawl over her head and her white apron.

I stood watching Miss Patricia tightly wrapping the shawl about her smoothed locks, and I tied the beautiful blue hood of Sally Trueblood as I watched. Miss Patricia stiffened her back and opened the door. I watched her, wondering would she bid that I follow her. She turned when she had opened the door and made a sign and tossed her head, so I knew she would have me follow. I walked very slowly, watching Tidy Timpkins brush up the crumbs and held out a small damp hand to Miss Patricia. She took it very suddenly and drew me to her and I remembered that my neck cracked. I did not speak but followed on a run, for Miss Patricia stepped swiftly down the village way. I remember that I could not keep up and I feared to speak, so I ran breathing hard and wondering where we were going. Miss Patricia turned Gifford-way and I remember that as we passed the corner there were Miss Snifly, Mrs. Kirby and Pious Gifford, and that they stood talking and shaking their heads very much.

They saw us and drew close together. Miss Snifly raised her brows and drew her shawl tighter, nor turned that she speak. Mrs. Kirby arched her neck and said: "*Good* morning, Miss Patricia."

Miss Patricia sniffed and snapped: "Good enough!"

Mrs. Kirby cast a sidelong glance at Miss Snifly, who did not deign to look our way. Mrs. Kirby ventured once more:

"Where are you going this *beau*tiful morning, Miss Patricia?"

" Well, I'm on my way," Miss Patricia retorted and jerked me on.

Miss Snifly's flounces bobbed and trembled and she remarked one word very loudly and that was: " Well ! " And her little bonnet's feather said: " Pst ! Pst ! Pst ! "

All of this I recall and that when we got to the Gifford house the shutters were up and the yellow cat had come from the sextonage and lay asleep in a new sunlight that had just crept over the eaves. Miss Patricia horrified me by exclaiming: " Scat ! Scat ! "

The cat arose, yawned, bowed very low and arched, then rambled very slowly, leaving the steps to Gifford's door free that we might climb up and knock. Miss Patricia knocked very hard, and pressed her lips thin as she knocked. I remember that I wondered what all of this was about. The door opened and Mrs. Vicar Gifford stood within it and Nebuchadnezzar upon her hip. Miss Patricia did not speak but went within. Mrs. Gifford's jaw hung open. I saw that Mrs. Vicar Gifford had been weeping and I wondered had they unfrocked the Vicar. I crept over to her side and whispered:

" They didn't, did they, Mrs. Gifford ? "

" What ? " she asked. And Miss Patricia snapped: " Speak when you are spoken to ! "

I did not heed, but continued:

" But they just couldn't ! Think of it, Miss Patricia ! "

Miss Patricia did not listen and Nebuchadnezzar set up a new wail and Miss Patricia's words and mine were drowned.

The cat came in through the door that still stood open, for Mrs. Gifford seemed overcome by our visit and a little loth to speak. She watched Miss Patricia and hunched Nebuchadnezzar to a new position upon her hip. Then she spoke very slowly:

" This is too much, Miss Patricia. The village has seen too much now of this child and her mother."

I remember that my heart shrunk up so very little. Then I stood and listened as I heard it pounding. Mrs. Gifford continued:

" It is not enough that a good man should hold up vice before his flock, but that a virtuous woman like yourself should bring her to the roof of a woman of family. It is too much. We have seen too much of them both."

I stood and I remember that something that had never filled up my breast filled it up, and after this I learned to call it hate. I could feel my cheeks flaming and my throat was dry and my tongue felt too big. Then I spoke out and said :

" Mrs. Gifford, you never saw my Sally Trueblood. You never knew her. You took her beautiful red from her cheeks, and you let her sit in the twilight and sew, and her lovely eyes were red and the twilight lay beneath them. I saw it, and I asked her what the purple was and she told me it was twilight. I saw it, and oh ! I saw the shiny black, and you put it on her. I know it. I asked the Vicar and he bit his lips. You did it, and you said there would be no Christians there. And they put her in the black box, and oh ! you don't know, Mrs. Gifford, how empty the eaves are ! You don't know ! And you don't know how lonely the shadows ! Oh oh, if you only knew ! "

And I recall that I was wringing my hands and weeping and Miss Patricia stood very grim. Then she pointed to me and said :

" Listen ! Now listen ! It will do you good."

I shrank and flew up to Miss Patricia, clasping her about the limbs and weeping, right in the middle of her white apron. Miss Patricia snapped again :

" What have you to say ? What have all you villagers to say ? "

There was silence. We stood, one looking to the other. Miss Patricia spoke again :

" Well, what do you say ? "

Mrs. Gifford seemed to be dazed still and sat down and began to sway with Nebuchadnezzar. I waited fearful and sunk my head in Miss Patricia's apron that I might not see Mrs. Gifford's eyes, for they looked as though they would hurt me. Then Nebuchadnezzar ceased his wailing only to lay and make sounds that sounded like : " Gawk ! A-gawk ! " Mrs. Gifford smoothed his fat head and murmured : " It's a shame ! "

Then a thing happened which I shall never forget. Something within me burst and I was frightened with the thing that was upon me. I began to scream in loud, cutting tones :

" Oh, take me away ! Oh, take me away ! Oh, do not let her look at me so ! I know now what Sally Trueblood

meant. I know how eyes hurt. Oh, Miss Patricia, why did she leave me? Why do they not want me? Why do they not speak to me but leave me alone? Look! What have I done, Miss Patricia? Take me up! Take me up! Oh, take me to the Vicar. He knows that eyes hurt."

And I flew at Mrs. Gifford, my small fists clinched, and I beat upon her knees and shrieked:

"Do not look at me! Do not look at me! You took her lovely smile! You took her beautiful eyes.! You took them all! Give them back!"

Then Miss Patricia came to me and bent down to where I stood beside Mrs. Gifford, still crying, the tears streaming down my small cheeks and my hands beating upon Mrs. Gifford's knees. She took me to her just as Sally Trueblood used, close, so that I tucked my head upon her breast and hid my tears. It was not a soft breast, but it was a kind one and Miss Patricia's hands seemed lovely as they stroked my rough locks. She whispered: "There! There! There! It is no use. Come!" And without speaking to Mrs. Gifford she swiftly took me to the Vicar's study and opened the door unannounced.

I remember that the sun shone through the window and the Vicar was at his desk and he did not hear us. His head was raised and his hands were before him upon the desk and he spoke endearingly and his eyes were open. I do not know what he said to God, but it was ended with the words: "Thank Thee for the light."

Miss Patricia waited, and when she saw that he was speaking to God she bowed her head and I bowed mine. The three of us seemed speechless. Then the Vicar turned slowly and said:

"Miss Patricia, I see the harvest of thorns has no terror for you."

Miss Patricia did not answer, but sat me upon a great chair that stood in one corner and swept to the desk side. Then I forgot them, for I found a print with beautiful pictures upon it and sat wrapt in it. I remember some of the words they spoke. They were about Mr. Reuben and the village. I recall, too, that Miss Patricia spoke of Reuben as though she knew he would return, but did not wish him to. "He has gone," she said, "to see——" Then the

words sunk to very little above a whisper and I did not catch the name, but they spoke of the Willoughbys and the going of some one who did not come back. Then Miss Patricia whispered something that I caught about the locket, for she looked at it hung upon my neck and the Vicar turned too that he see. I had a long wait, but finally Miss Patricia arose and came over to the great chair and laid one hand upon my shoulder and I stood up and she said to the Vicar:

"The child shall stay under Reuben Passwater's roof, for when Reuben Passwater commands it means law. We shall wait him——" She bit her lip and I saw her eyes hung of tears and her lips trembled. She hesitated and went on: "—together." The Vicar nodded and said:

"It is the right thing."

Then Miss Patricia folded her shawl closely about her and took my hand. She went on to the Vicar:

"I suppose that the village will wonder. Well, let 'em. They take me with her or not. And I don't care which."

The Vicar nodded and Miss Patricia went on:

"The poor baby! I suppose she cried her lovely eyes dim up there, and we, oh Lord! what did we do? We buried her alone—not a sister there! For my part I shall go each Sabbath to her grave before the village eyes, and what's more, I shall not enter the Sabbath house until the village comes for me unless she—" and Miss Patricia squeezed my hand very hard—"is welcomed. I heard all of the talk of the unfrocking, but I knew that the Willoughby bags was a thing they could not move, so I did not fear for you, Vicar." I wondered what this meant and Miss Patricia ran on: "But listen, Vicar! they can unfrock you of love, and God knows that's worse than clothes."

The Vicar stood up and folded his long, thin hands and within them clasped his huge black cross. Then he spoke and said:

"They may not deny me love." And he held up his cross. "The scourging is naught, Miss Patricia."

"Right you have spoken," Miss Patricia said. "And we shall stand, shall we not, before the village?"

The Vicar nodded, and Miss Patricia snapped: "Then it's done!"

She wheeled and left the Vicar's study as swiftly as she

had entered it. I hung along by one arm, wondering where we would go next. Miss Patricia did not stop in the Giffords' sitting room, nor turn toward Mrs. Gifford, until she had come to the door and opened it, and then she turned and faced Mrs. Gifford, who sat, still clasping Nebuchadnezzar who was busily chewing her kerchief and leaving it soak up his crystal streams. Miss Patricia pressed her lips very thin and shot the words:

"You need not see me, Mrs. Gifford, unless you see her." And she shoved me before her. "Good-bye!"

We swept down the Giffords' pathway to the gate, which stood ajar, and the yellow cat followed us. I remember that I thought of the fact that Miss Patricia had called "Scat!" to it, and I remember that I laughed, for it followed her just as I had.

I followed Miss Patricia, still laughing within me. I knew that I should not ask her where we would go from the Giffords', so I kept my silence and waited. We swung down the chapel path and I knew that Miss Patricia would call upon the sexton and fear set within me. Would she then deliver me to the sexton and leave me? Oh, if this should be, just when I thought that Miss Patricia had let the sunshine in that I had asked dear God to shed! Still I felt that I should not speak, yet within me came the desire to cry and my lips opened and I heard the words pouring out:

"Oh, Miss Patricia, are you going to leave me with the sexton? It is very lonely. Only Sally Trueblood in the chapel yard is there. The sexton is good, but oh, Miss Patricia, he does not know the little, little girls!"

Then I remember that Miss Patricia's hand closed very tightly upon my own and she shook her head "no." Then I forgot my fear and I recall that the Giffords' cat ran before us. This I recall and that it swept very swiftly past to climb a small youngling tree that had been set along the roadside, to up its sides and spat and run faster up the way.

When we had come to the chapel yard, Miss Patricia said very crisply to me, "Wait here!"

I stood wondering, and I remember that I cleared my throat that ached and said:

"Miss Patricia, when you come back, will you go to Sally Trueblood with me?"

"What?" snapped Miss Patricia.

"Go to Sally Trueblood," I responded. "She is yonder, just where the sun is dancing so, and the beautiful big brown butterflies are playing."

Miss Patricia bit her lip and replied, "Yes." Then she swept up to the sextonage and knocked and was let within.

It was here that the shrill whistle of Rudy sounded. I ran to the high wall of the sextonage and waited, making the call shrill that he might hear me. He came. This time he was bearing a basket filled of broken bowls and pottery. Atop this were four small birds, each showing his oped bill that looked as if he had just swallowed the yelk. Rudy was triumphant. He breathed hard and I knew that this was a wonderful adventure. His brow was covered with glistening drops and his hair clung damp to his head. His smock was open almost to the waist and two beautiful bleedy scratches showed upon his legs.

"Rudy Strong," I ejaculated. "Where have you been?"

"You could never guess," he answered, wiping his brow upon his smock sleeve and stooping, with his free hand taking up damp earth and smearing his bloody sores.

"You got them in the hollow in the thornbush. You did, Rudy Strong, I know you did, for you showed me the nest long 'fore now!"

"Naw," Rudy answered, spitting upon his sore and smearing more earth. "Naw, I didn't."

"Where, then!" I begged.

He pointed to the tall tree that stood over the grave of Willie Pimm Passwater. I flew at him. There was a dreadful mixture and the bowls and pottery were spilled. I came out of the fray with two birds that were acting strangely. Rudy held the others and they hung their necks very long and one of them did not move. I cried aloud:

"Look you, Rudy Strong, they are all mussed."

"They're dead. That's what," Rudy shot at me, "that's what! You see, girls always make musses."

"Give them here this minute! They belong to Willie Pimm Passwater and he is dead. Yes, he is a deader, or else he would lick you. Yes, he would, and you should have four scratches."

I remember that the birds I clutched were in their last struggle and I seemed to realize that they were dead. Rudy threw the two he held to the ground and I swept upon them, gathering them up and holding all four in my cupped hands. Rudy was disgusted and did not mince words to tell me so. I swept very haughtily to the grave of Willie Pimm Passwater and Rudy shouted:

"Oh, my eye, but you will be just like her. The village is boiling over and besides they say that Miss Patricia has the yarn for the knitting of the whole thing."

All of this sweeps through my mind as I write. This and the queer feeling that was upon me. What would my new life be with Miss Patricia? Would they teach her how eyes hurt, just because I was Sally Trueblood's brat?

Then Miss Patricia came out of the sextonage with a very grim face and a small sack. Rudy Strong saw her and fled. I was still clutching the birds and Miss Patricia came toward me, holding out her hand.

"Will you come now?" I said. "Come and I shall tell her all about the sunshine."

Miss Patricia saw the birds and looked horrified.

"What have you done?" she asked in her sharp tone.

"I saved them," I replied.

"Saved them," Miss Patricia gasped, "they are dead!"

"Yes," I replied calmly, holding them to my cheek, "I know, but I saved them."

"Put them down," she commanded.

"No," I answered. "They belong to Willie Pimm Passwater. They do."

"What?" Miss Patricia snapped.

"Yes, they do. Rudy Strong took them out the tall tree yonder and I saved them."

"Then come along," Miss Patricia said, and we went to the grave of Willie Pimm Passwater and I knelt before that small mound. Miss Patricia stood very tall and straight and I noticed that there was a long grave with a stone that read: "Reuben Passwater." And another that was simply carved: "Patricia." I watched Miss Patricia, and I saw that her eyes were glistening and I stood up and went to her side and tucked my hand in hers and I whispered:

"Then you do know just how lonely it is, don't you?"

"Yes," said Miss Patricia. "Come. I would see Sally Trueblood."

"No," I answered. "I shall put the birds here upon Willie Passwater. Was he a tall lad, Miss Patricia?"

"No," answered Miss Patricia, "he was very, very much like you. Come."

"Was he very, very much like me, Miss Patricia?"

She wheeled and answered, "Yes."

"How did he do? Did he whistle like this?" And I puckered my lips and made a faint whistling.

"No," she answered, "he was a very brave little lad and stood with his legs apart and took long strides."

I resolved to stride very, very long hereafter. Then I put the birds upon the mound and we turned toward Sally Trueblood's spot. When we came to it, Miss Patricia stood a long time looking upon the sunken spot that had been a mound. There was no stone—just the little withered willow that the sexton had set. Miss Patricia stooped down and touched it.

"It will grow tall and sway," I said. "Now listen." And I stopped over the mound and whispered:

"Sally Trueblood! Sally Trueblood! Are you listening? Miss Patricia's eyes do not hurt. She cannot see you, but listen, Sally Trueblood! I asked dear God for sunshine for her and He sent it. Didn't He, Miss Patricia?"

Miss Patricia answered: "Yes," and I may fancy it, but I believe she spoke to Sally Trueblood.

"And listen, Sally Trueblood! We shall come often and often, almost all the time. And Miss Patricia has beautiful pewter all shiny and we had warm porridge at break-sup. Warm porridge, do you hear? And Miss Patricia's cheek is soft, and she can hug, just like you, only not so sweet. Please," I said and looked up to Miss Patricia.

"No," she answered, "not so sweet. Not one-half so sweet."

"You see, she is going to play with me while I wait. Aren't you, Miss Patricia?"

"Yes," she answered, "play." And her lips smiled very grimly.

I was kneeling upon the sod beside the mound and I remember that my hands slipped over the earth and I thought

of Sally Trueblood's curls. And I wondered if they were there in the pit; if her lips were there; if she really, really was there. Miss Patricia watched me and did not speak more. I noticed that she was clutching a white kerchief and that her other hand seemed to twitch. She was breathing shortly. I looked up at her eyes and she answered me, for I knew from out of them that my day was hers.

"Shall we just sit down here, Miss Patricia, and dream shadow-dreams?" I asked. "Oh, I am happy! Yes, I am, but there is still something, something, very, very empty about me. Is she there?" I said and fled to the mound.

"Yes."

"Really, really, really?" I asked once more.

"Yes," said Miss Patricia.

"Oh, I cannot, cannot believe it, Miss Patricia," I cried, getting up and running to her side. "Oh, let's dream shadow-dreams, please! For Sally Trueblood said when you were hungry you could fill up with shadow-dreams."

"No," said Miss Patricia, "there is the bake and there are many things to do. Come. Shadow-dreams must be poor filling. That is what is the matter with your legs."

And Miss Patricia grasped my hand and we went swiftly from the chapel yard, although I turned every now and then to smile back to Sally Trueblood, and I whispered, "Not for long, Sally Trueblood."

We went down to the main street of the village and I recall that Rudy was playing in the midst of a mob of youths and as we passed he did not speak, but when we were on our ways he called:

"Heathen! Heathen! Deader! Deader! Ya! Ya! Ya!"

And the chorus took it up. Miss Patricia stooped, left free my hand, stooped and took up a huge stone. This she threw with great force among the lads and stooped for another, but they had gone e'er this. Aside from this there were no events upon our way to the house of the Passwaters, save that doors opened very slyly as we passed, and heads showed in the windows that were opened. I knew that Miss Patricia knew this, yet she did not turn her head and we went straight to the gate and into the Passwater house.

When Miss Patricia had taken off her shawl and folded it

very carefully and laid it back in the chest, she called to me. I marched up very slowly and stood before her. She took my hand and went to the still lighted fire and drew up the great chair. Then she unfastened the hood that I still wore and she lay it upon her knees; then took my hands both in her own and said very slowly:

"You are a keen child. Now, listen! The first thing you are to learn, is that you do not know. Do you hear?"

"Yessum," I answered. "Do not know what?"

"That is it. Understand, you do not know."

"But I do know lots and heaps of things."

"Yes," Miss Patricia answered. "That is it. And the village must not know what you know. So you do not know. Do you see?"

I learned to know that Miss Patricia often did this—did not explain, but suddenly let herself speak out and supposed that you knew.

"Oh," I answered, "then I am to tell them that I do not know when I do know. This is not right. I cannot do it, Miss Patricia. Sally Trueblood would call that a lie."

"It is," answered Miss Patricia, "but—well, we must lie, if that is lying. But I do not call building a fence about one's ground a lie."

"I cannot build a fence, Miss Patricia. I don't know how, but I do know a lie."

"Listen," Miss Patricia said, and I recall that she was patting my hands. "You are to do this for Sally Trueblood."

"No," I cried. "She would never, never ask me to lie."

"No," Miss Patricia answered. "I know she would not, but listen! She told the village nothing, and they killed her. You told me that she said eyes hurt her. Now, listen! You must keep your little tongue shut up close, like she shut herself away. You see, you and I are playing this game of waiting. Do you understand? There is something that Sally Trueblood knew that the village wants, and we can keep it, just you and Miss Patricia."

"Oh, I see," I said, "I know. It's the burn in her heart. Oh, yes, and we must not tell of Sally Trueblood, but just have her together. Oh, won't it be beautiful! We

can talk to her and they will not know. Just as we used to play in the eaves."

"Yes," said Miss Patricia. "Yes. So you do not know, do you?"

"No," I answered.

Miss Patricia sat a long while staring at the blue hood and stroking my hands. Then she snapped suddenly:

"Where did your mother go at the evening when she had finished the game with you?"

"I do not know," I answered.

"That will do," Miss Patricia remarked and got up, bidding me to fold away my hood and put it away with my clothes in the guest room, and return. And when I had done this Miss Patricia had put on a fresh white kerchief that folded over her breast and a white linen apron. Upon her knees rested a new cloth and in her hands threads and needles.

"What is that?" I asked, as I came up to her.

"Your sampler," she answered.

"Oh, can I make 'God' in red worsted?"

"No, you had better build earth before you try to make the sky," she answered.

She bade me sit and gave to my hand thread and needle. Then she set me hemming. Oh, do I not recall the hemming! I never knew how wonderful a hem was before. There seemed to be lengths and lengths of it. Then there was the backing, which was even worse. My neck ached and the cloth was daubed with many spots of red. I sucked one small finger until it shrivelled, but Miss Patricia did not see me and sat sewing, sewing, her needle clicking and pulling, clicking and pulling. Then she would scratch something with her needle's point and I recall that it made little shivers run up my back. We had been sitting such a long time that I forgot everything except the ache in my neck. Then I sighed very long and I said:

"Miss Patricia, I guess,—of course I am wrong,—but I guess you do not remember how it feels to be a little girl. Do you?"

Miss Patricia stopped and laid her sewing in her lap and answered:

"You may go now to the guest room and lay away your sampler, then come with me."

I did as I was bidden and returned. Miss Patricia took me to the inner room, which was a kitchen. It was so spotless I was afraid to step. I never saw such pewters and brasses. Oh, they were lovely! And Tidy Timpkins was rubbing and singing something about a lost brother. She stopped as we entered and I remember that I wondered how, in such a clean place, such a very dirty person could be, but I did not ask Miss Patricia and she went to a tall cupboard in one corner and opened it. Oh, the smell!

Miss Patricia took down a sweet loaf, all spotty-plummy, and cut a thin slice. My heart fell. Then she cut another and I recovered. I reached out both hands and took a slice in each, saying, "Thank you, please." Miss Patricia gasped but said nothing and cut another slice. This she gave to Tidy and I knew that Tidy knew that I had two, but I afterwards found that I need not fear for Tidy. Miss Patricia left us. Tidy sniffed at the nose and wiped it upon her hem. Then she took up her slice and said:

"Tain't so much, but it's more nor nothin'."

I did not answer, but began to eat. Tidy sat upon the floor and ate very slowly, pushing out the plums and licking her dirty fingers.

"I s'pose you are to stay?" she ventured.

"I do not know."

"You don't?" Tidy sniffed again.

"No," I answered.

"Well, I guess Sephira Gifford won't know neither," Tidy stated. "She is poppin' to know."

We sat still, eating, and Tidy ventured once more:

"You came from the eaves, didn't you?"

I did not answer, and Tidy leaned closer and whispered:

"Sephira says that Reuben Passwater went to the eaves. Did he?"

"I do not know," I answered. And I heard the inner door close very softly.

Then Miss Patricia called me and I was bathed and measured for some new garments that had a queer look. The cloth was wrinkled and I think it must have been some garment of Miss Patricia's. I know it was very much like what she wore and afterwards this was fashioned in a style that was of Miss Patricia's youth. As she measured I remember that I asked

what it was and she answered, " A pinafore." And I had been happy, for Sally Trueblood wore pinafores; but I know she did not look as I did. And I have always hated pinafores since mine came to life.

CHAPTER X

THE days that followed were spent in first the break-sup, after a brisk cold wash. Then sampler. Then learning, which was long, very long. It seemed mornings were longer even than evenings. Then I was taught to smooth the beds and brush and polish and given the linen keys to count the stacks. All of this had settled down to be exactly alike each day. Then the next Sabbath came. I was not allowed to leave the house without Miss Patricia, and when the Sabbath came I wondered would she go to the chapel.

She dressed in her best black and arrayed me in a black pinafore that was offset with some braid, and tied my locks up with the cherry ribbon. I had put the locket about my neck and Miss Patricia saw it and said crisply:

" Put that away."

I had found something very strange. I did not tell Miss Patricia, but it haunted me. When Miss Patricia had shown me the press in which to keep my clothes, I had taken out a drawer to pack it and, slipped down at the back, was a little ivory, thin and yellow. I turned it over and there was a laughing face upon it. Such a beautiful face, just like Sally Trueblood! The hair was all tumbly curls and the neck was slender and curved, but the eyes were brown. When I had found it I kissed it and I said:

" Sally Trueblood, I know you." And it laughed at me.

Who was she? I liked to put the beautiful man beside her and just love them. But Miss Patricia, as all of this was sweeping through my mind, bid that I follow her. We went to the chapel and I expected her to enter, but she did not. She swept before the village eyes into the chapel yard and stood beside the mound of Sally Trueblood, holding my hand. And we stood there all through the meeting.

We had stood very long and I recall the singing and the droning of the Vicar's voice and the moaning of them that were " filled of the spirit." Still Miss Patricia stood staring

at the mound of Sally Trueblood. I pressed her hand and whispered:

"Miss Patricia, you go within. I shall stand here. You see, I have always been out here each Sabbath, but you should go."

"No," said Miss Patricia, and I feared to speak more.

Then they had stopped their singing and I heard the voice of Vicar Gifford raised in the last word of the service, and the tramping of their feet. Still Miss Patricia did not move. I waited and I heard the door open and the Sabbath flock stepping upon the gravel way. They did not turn into the chapel yard, as was their wont on Sabbath morning, but filed along the high fence and stared over at us as we stood. Miss Patricia did not look up, but I did, and I whispered:

"Miss Patricia, please wait and go in. The Vicar has not come out."

"No," said Miss Patricia. "This village knows Patricia Passwater, and they know her."

I was miserable, but I knew that my pleading was in vain. I heard Teeny Gifford snicker as she saw my pinafore, and somehow I hated it less, for it seemed to me as some part of Miss Patricia—some little part that was lonely. Teeny nudged Sephira and they both snickered and I haughtily arose and spread my scant skirt and curtseyed. They swept past and then something very strange happened. Miss Snifly came through the gateway of the chapel yard and came toward us. Her head was very high and I recall that her nose was lifted up as though she scented something. Her little feather was not psting, psting, but was trembling. And the fringe upon her Sabbath shawl trembled, too, in the shaking of her flounces. Her hands were crossed upon her stomach and she trod daintily down the grass-grown path. Miss Patricia did not see her, but I did and did not speak of it to Miss Patricia; for I knew what I knew. Miss Snifly came to the side of Miss Patricia and stood very straight, her nose still up and said haughtily:

"Patricia, my dear, I crave your pardon, but you are a fool!"

Miss Patricia bristled and turned sharply about and snapped:

" Well, who asked *you* ? "

Miss Snifly did not deign to answer. Miss Patricia glared and went on :

" That is no new thing. It is something that I have known for a long time. There's some excuse for me if I am a fool, but how about you, you up-nosed saint ? Patty Snifly, you are not steeped in wisdom that I ever heard of. This shows it," and Miss Patricia touched the flounces. " It's time that you pruned."

Miss Snifly gasped and opened her mouth to speak, but Miss Patricia left her no time, but shot more at her, saying :

" When Patricia Passwater wants your opinion, Miss Snifly, she will call upon you for it, and I may as well tell you now, I know why you are here and I shall save you the trouble to speak. If I choose to worship in the cow's pen, I shall do so and you needn't seek me. Is that clear ? " Miss Snifly gasped again. " Well," went on Miss Patricia, " if it is finished, good morning ! " And she grasped me by the hand and swept me past Miss Snifly out the chapel gateway and on the roadway home.

I recall this, and that I had a feeling that they were showing Miss Patricia how eyes hurt. We went silently through the gateway and down the little path, and I remember that my heart warmed, for it was home now. We went in the little house and Miss Patricia took her shawl from her head as she always did, and folded it as she always did, and put it in the chest as she always did, and sat down in the great chair as she always did, and then she turned to me and called.

I went to her and she saw I was fighting tears. She unloosed my Sabbath pinafore and I recall that her hands rather clung to it.

" Miss Patricia," I said, " I love my pinafore. Do you know why ? "

" No," said Miss Patricia. " Why ? "

" Because you love them. I can tell. I saw it when you held this one up and looked at it. Do you know your eyes looked shiny and your cheeks were red and you bit your lip. Yes, you did, Miss Patricia ! " And she blushed.

I hugged her then. I stood before her very sober and I said :

" Miss Patricia, listen ! Don't keep me here. Just let me live with God. God don't care about eyes. You see, they look at *you* now. Why, Miss Patricia? Why? I cannot understand. Sally Trueblood never, never hurt them. Did she ? "

" No," said Miss Patricia. " Never mind. You need not live with God as long as Patricia Passwater has a roof. If He objects, I guess He will take the roof down. Run along now. You may dream those dreams if you wish to. I shall see to the sup."

I turned slowly and went over to the what-all and lay my hand upon the china dog.

Every morning I woke up with it in my hands. Each evening it was mine ; each morning it was taken from me and placed upon its accustomed shelf, and I knew I might not claim it then. I always love to think that it was Willie Pimm Passwater's through the day.

I was standing just touching it when a knock sounded. Miss Patricia stood up and stared at the door. Tidy Timpkins wiped her nose upon her hem, slicked her bushy locks with her palms and pulled down her pinafore. I say pinafore, but I defy one to name it.

Miss Patricia looked down upon her grey dress, for she had clothed anew in her house gown and wore a bit of white frill at her neck, pinned with a black onyx with a little gold dove on it. She laid her thin hands upon her cheeks and felt over her smooth head lest one lock was awry. We stood one looking unto the other. The knock sounded once more. The bird fluttered wildly and my heart was thumping. Miss Patricia walked slowly toward the door and drew the bolt. Then she stood and called :

" Who is there ? "

The knock sounded once more, and Miss Patricia opened the door full wide and stood within it. And I shall never forget her face ! A tall gentleman almost filled up the door space. He wore grey smalls, and a huge coat flung open, with a beautiful cape about the shoulders, and a lilac waistcoat. And such a frill !—just like little boily clouds in the spring—and a great hat. And I knew him !

" Stephen ! " said Miss Patricia shortly, and held one hand up under her heart.

"Patricia," he answered, still standing and taking off his great hat. I saw that his hair was chestnut and lay in beautiful waves.

It was Mr. Willoughby. Miss Patricia did not bid him enter, and I saw that she was in some great distress. I went up to her side and tucked my hand in hers, that hung very limp. She did not look at me, but stood staring helplessly at Mr. Willoughby.

"May I enter, Patricia?" he asked.

She swayed and stepped back and said:

"The door is open."

"Then I take it that I may," he answered and swung his lithe body through the doorway, and I remember that his stick was topped of a great golden ball and two streamers of grey. I was overcome entirely. My feet got in my way.

Miss Patricia walked without bending through the small hallway that led to the sitting room. When she had come to the centre of the room, she turned and did not bid Mr. Willoughby be seated. He stood, and I recall that his lips spread in a very bright smile; every tooth seemed to laugh. He bowed very low from his waist and stood up again very straight and said:

"Since I am not to be a guest, Patricia, I shall but state my mission and be gone."

"Very well," Miss Patricia answered.

"I think,"—Miss Patricia looked keenly at Mr. Willoughby. —"I think," she repeated, "we understand each other, Stephen."

He smiled again, that contagious smile that made your backbone laugh, and said—and I just loved his mouth:

"Patricia! Ever and ever, Patricia!"

He swung with long strides over to the what-all and stood. I watched him and watched his coat skirts swing. He clasped his stick behind him and his broad shoulders—oh, they were beautiful! Sally Trueblood told me of such a pair. I knew them. Miss Patricia was pinching the black woollen table cover between her thumb and fingers and she fingered with her free hand at her throat. Suddenly Mr. Willoughby laughed and swung, circling upon his heel, still laughing; for he held within his hand a stone, a triangular stone, and I

wondered what made him laugh. He looked at it and pushed his chestnut locks and addressed the stone:

"Again we meet, eh? Well I remember thee," and he touched a scar upon his temple. "A gruesome token, Patricia in truth, eh?" And he roared.

I recalled the Sabbath morning and how Miss Patricia had hurled the stone and I knew what I knew. It was here that Mr. Willoughby suddenly stopped short in the very middle of a peal of laughter and stared at me. Miss Patricia saw it and grasped my hand. As I came to her and stood very rigid, Mr. Willoughby's eyes seemed to start forth. Then he smiled a sort of flitting smile as though he had cast off something and said:

"Who are you?"

"I do not know," I answered.

"What?" he asked, raising his brow.

"She has spoken the truth," snapped Miss Patricia. "If you have done, begone."

He still held the stone and looked at it and then to Miss Patricia and he spoke earnestly:

"Patricia, what has come over you? Have you blotted out all the sun? What does it mean? This seems to speak." And he held up the stone.

"Trash and trumpery," Miss Patricia snapped. "Out with it! What brought you here?"

Mr. Willoughby looked at me and then to Miss Patricia. And Miss Patricia spoke very softly to me:

"Go to the guest room and await."

I trudged very slowly out the room, stopping upon the threshold and taking one more look at Mr. Willoughby. Then I cried out:

"Where is she, Mr. Willoughby?"

"Oh," he said suddenly, his face lighting, "I recall. You sat beside the fire at the 'Grey Eagle,' did you not?"

I stood very red and Miss Patricia's eyes were upon me.

"I do not know," I said, and shut the door.

Mr. Willoughby did not stay very long and Miss Patricia called me. When I came from out the guest room, I saw that Miss Patricia had been weeping, and I went up to her and cast my arms about her, and I said:

"What makes you sad? Oh, please, please leave me go!

Wherever I am is always sorrow. I love you, Miss Patricia, I do, and oh, let me go ! "

Miss Patricia sat before the dead logs long and rested her head upon the back of the great armchair. Miss Patricia rested her head ! It makes me sad even to think of it.

CHAPTER XI

ALL of this was so very, very long ago and yet I see myself, wide-eyed upon the tangled path, with no hand but Miss Patricia's, and yet something, something that I cannot describe, that ever seemed to follow me, bending close and whispering, " Are you playing ? " I know now that these days were happy ones. I know now many, many things, yet I love to turn to the little me that blindly followed the tangled path.

Days followed days and I cannot recall just how long following Mr. Willoughby's visit occurred, but one morning Miss Patricia said : " Bring out your best smile." I smiled at her. " That will do," said Miss Patricia. I cuddled against her side.

" Listen ! " she said. " We shall go upon a visit. Do you hear ? "

" Yessum," I answered.

" And should they question you as to your name, what would you say ? "

" I do not know," I answered.

" That will do," answered Miss Patricia. " See to it."

Then Miss Patricia took my face between her hands and looked very deep into my eyes. I looked back straight.

" Sit down," said Miss Patricia.

I did as I was bidden. Miss Patricia went into the inner room that was hers. I remember this room. It was a dark one and the shutters always were closed and it smelled musty. There was a high-waisted dressing table with two candlesticks and short candles. The chairs wore petticoats and the bed was hard and high and covered with a red cloth and curtains. There was a sewing basket and a wax ball in it full of thread ends and broken needles. There were two paintings, dark, very dark, of a gentleman and a lady in oval circlets. I

only remember these just now because the lady's eyes were like Miss Patricia's. And I always wanted to just feel the wax ball, but her eyes always followed me.

Miss Patricia went into this room and returned bearing a small chest. This she put upon the floor and I arose and went to the spot. Miss Patricia sat upon the floor beside it. Think of it! She sat upon the floor. And I followed her example. She felt down deep within her pocket, which I had forgotten to mention before now, and brought out a little key, all rusted. Her hand was shaking and she laid it upon her palm and looked at it. It was so little, and so rusty, and I just wondered what it knew.

Then Miss Patricia started to unlock the small chest, but she stopped and bit her lips and wiped her eyes upon a fresh linen. Then she swallowed hard and shut her eyes and grasped the key, and suddenly stared at the chest, and unlocked it. She slowly raised the lid. I remember the thrill that swept up my spine. The little hinges squeaked and shed powdered rust. I was breathing hard and I saw Miss Patricia's hands shake. It—I mean the chest—was lined with some grey stuff and had a little bouquet print pasted in the top. It was filled of something soft. Miss Patricia tenderly lifted up something and shook it and I shrieked, for it was a little white pinafore that had turned a beautiful pale yellow, like a tired white rose.

"It's a pinafore, Miss Patricia!"

Miss Patricia nodded and gave it to my hands, and sat with her head bowed and looking down. It was a filmy thing, wrought by some hands that had loved, for its fashioning was frail and delicate. And two faded bows of blue were upon the shoulders. I kissed it and threw my arms about the neck of Miss Patricia and I said:

"I love it! It is you, little you!"

She did not look up, but her fingers sought within the chest and brought out a small case of morocco. This she snapped open and before my eyes lay a necklace of pale coral, and a bracelet of the same. They were small and wonderfully wrought and clasped of gold. I took one look and I cried:

"Oh, may I touch them?"

Miss Patricia nodded. I took up the bracelet and upon the clasp were the letters, "S. T."

" But these are yours, Miss Patricia."

" No," she answered.

" Then whose ? " I asked.

Miss Patricia shot a sidelong look at me and said :

" I do not know."

" Oh, I see," I answered.

I sat a long time fingering the soft stuff. Then Miss Patricia lifted out a circular of woollen, and it was scalloped and beautiful grey. Miss Patricia arose and without explanation began to disrobe me and bade that I bring water ; and she washed me, and brushed my locks and made them up in a new way. They were tied together at the end with a blue ribband, faded to match the ones on the shoulders, and brought up at the nape of my neck. And the ribband was bound about my brow and tied in a bow just at the part. I recall that I laughed at the new feeling and fingered the bow. Then Miss Patricia put some white stockings upon me and tiny slippers that tied with blue. Then she clothed me in the pinafore of filmy stuff. It was wrinkled, and so soft, like Sally Trueblood's cheek, I thought. Then I saw that Miss Patricia was not looking at me, but sat sobbing. She pointed to the corals and said :

" Put them on. I can't."

" Oh, please ! " I cried. " See ! " I opened the packet and held them forth. " Oh, please, Miss Patricia. You are looking at clouds. See ! I am, oh, so very happy ! "

" Yes," said Miss Patricia. " Yes, I know, but I can't. Put them on."

I did so slowly and stood before her. She stared a long time, threw up her hands and let forth an awful sob and ran from me to her room. I stood stricken and I walked to the guest room and tiptoed and looked at the reflection. And I saw something there very strange. It was Sally Trueblood with brown eyes and a blue bow upon her brow. I was frightened, for I remembered the ivory with the maiden and the brown eyes.

Then Miss Patricia's door opened and Miss Patricia came forth arrayed for travel—her best blacks, her bonnet, her mittens and her chain of gold. She was the grim Miss Patricia now, and I knew I must not speak of what had been. She shut the chest as though it was nothing to her took up the

circular and went back to her room, to return with a huge bonnet, all frills and little bows that were faded, too. This she tied upon my head and circled me in the grey circular. I felt very grand, but I suppose I was a pathetic little figure, like some straying dream come back to the new day.

I stood before Miss Patricia and I knew that I looked very much like something that was very dear to her, for she gazed upon me when she had made me ready and her eyes were very soft. There sounded without the rattle of wheels upon the gravel streetway and through the open shutter I saw that a chaise waited us. It was one of those hollowed-out affairs that wobbled very much and to it was tethered a grey nag whose hip-bones stood high and whose neck hung low. My heart was beating high and I flung my arms wide and cried out:

"Do we go in a chaise? Is it far? Will we be gone long? Shall I sit beside him?" and I pointed to the lad who drove the nag.

He was a fat person whose neck was short and whose cheeks surprised his shoulders by wattling upon them. He sat trailing a thong over the nag's back, and I recall that I could see the nag's flesh trembling up and down like summer lightning. Miss Patricia did not answer me and suddenly everything seemed to drop away from me. I stood looking down at the pinafore, and circular and then to the slippers. And I felt at the bonnet, but they did not fill up the great empty thing that was creeping upon me. I turned slowly to Miss Patricia and I said:

"Miss Patricia, I cannot go. Oh, please, please, no!"

Miss Patricia kneeled down beside me and I began to cry.

"There, there," said Miss Patricia, "dry your eyes. It is not for long."

"How long, Miss Patricia?" I asked.

"Perhaps two or three days; perhaps a fortnight."

"Never!" I cried. "Oh, can't you see Sally Trueblood would be lonely? I told her not for long. I cannot go."

Miss Patricia stooped close to me and took me to her and said:

"Listen! Sally Trueblood shall not be lonely. I shall go and visit her each day. This thing must be done."

" Why ? " I asked.

Miss Patricia leaned close to me and whispered, " I do not know."

Somehow I connected all things that were hidden beneath " I do not know " to be something pertaining to Sally Trueblood.

" Then if it must be, Miss Patricia," I said, " it must be." And I dried my eyes and Miss Patricia whispered :

" You are a very brave child. Remember, all that I ask is for her."

" Oh, then, come ! " I cried. And we went from the room through the small hallway and out to the chaise.

I wondered who would stay with Tidy Timpkins and I asked Miss Patricia. She had answered me that she would return. I was afraid to ask more, but climbed into the chaise and tucked my full pinafore skirt about me and wrapped in the circular. Miss Patricia followed and sat very straight. She had spoken to the lad who drove. Evidently he knew our destination. Within me I was Lady Lilyfinger. The nag had disappeared and four prancing chargers drew us upon our way. We swept gaily down the main village streetway and I recall the gaping ones that watched us upon the way. I did not speak to Miss Patricia of this, but I knew that she knew. We passed the chapel yard and I blew kisses over the back of the chaise and called out :

" All for you, Sally Trueblood ! Wait ! Wait ! Not for long ! "

Miss Patricia did not remonstrate at my outcrying, and the chaise swung about the outskirts of the village and I watched the road creep upon us. The banks were browning now and few late flowers flamed their flanks. The sky was very blue and deep, and little clouds were frightened and hidden away high, high up. The road lay golden before us, all dusty. And ashen dust had fallen upon the petticoat of shrub and leaf that skirted it. I saw all of this and I knew that the winter was coming and somehow there came to me the words, " Wait the Mayin'."

I wondered what the " Mayin' " would bring. I wondered what the winter, too, would bring. Not Sally Trueblood. No, she was gone. My little head hung and I found that the salt was upon my lips from the tears that began to trickle.

Then a shrill call came out a hedgerow, and of course this is fancy, but I thought it said, " Are you playing ? "

" I am ! I am ! " I cried. " Oh, Miss Patricia, I am playing ! Did you hear him ? " And the nag jogged on.

A very long roadway had slipped beneath us and evening came on. The sun sank deep golden, almost tawny, red. The fields took on the glow and the sky seemed a golden thing, like some cloth of heaven spread and bending down to touch the earth. Then the grey followed that was rosy-grey. And the evening began to sound. The birds chattered in the trees and fieldways. The crickets chirped and scraped and the winged things took up their garish singing.

Then there was a turn in the roadway and we swept the graceful line and turned into a hollow and followed along a low hedge, through a narrow way to a shrub-grown spot. There was a growth of wild hedge almost shutting away the wall that stood high about the house that hid within tall trees, only showing the great gables and turrets.

Miss Patricia had not spoken through the whole drive, but sat very grim, and I had been lonely. The coming evening had deepened my loneliness. I smelled the cool breath of night, fast creeping upon the evening, and there was a cool quiet over this secluded spot when our chaise rattled up to the great gate and stopped. I swallowed an aching lump. I tried to speak, but another rolled up to take the place of the one I had just swallowed. Miss Patricia stood up and the nag sneezed and the chaise swayed. I almost fell out and Miss Patricia clutched me.

" Is this the place ? " I whispered. Miss Patricia nodded.

She descended from out the chaise, took from her very deep pocket her purse, paid the driver a shilling, snapped her purse rings and spoke one word—" Wait."

There seemed to be no one who welcomed us, or even looked for our coming. The ivy had grown so thick over the wall and gateway that it seemed a part of the hedge. Miss Patricia reached through the bars and found the latchet. This she opened with some difficulty and the gate creaked open reluctantly. Of course this is fancy, too, but I seemed to feel that the gate knew me. Miss Patricia still clung to my hand and we stepped briskly down the shadowed path, overgrown overhead, where pale glimpses of the silvering sky showed

through and the whirring and chatter of nestlings sounded. It was so quiet. I heard a rook screech and it echoed again against the tall turret.

Then we came to the great mansion, stony grim yet mocked by the cling of ivy that lovingly crept its walls and seemed to try to shut the windows' opes. There was an archway and a great oaken door, studded of spikes, and a huge knocker, the head of a great bear whose tongue clattered. There was a lantern which showed that it had not been lighted for time and time. Ivy had crept over the oaken doorway, until it was almost hidden, and the bear's head looked like a wild thing hidden in its midst. The huge bolts were opened and hung as though they had wearied of guarding.

Miss Patricia walked up to the door and made the bear's tongue clatter. We waited long. Then there sounded the scraping of an inner bolt and the door trembled and opened ever so slightly and a very white face peered around its opening and a voice spoke, " Who is there ? "

It was growing darker and shadows hung close in upon the walls. Miss Patricia stepped up to the one who had spoken and said something softly and the door opened slowly, full-wide, showing a dark hallway with a broad stair at the back. A candle tree burned dimly upon the newel post and sent tired, tired lazy shadows lopping about. I was frightened, and the one with the white face stood mutely that we pass. He was clothed in " knees " and white leggings, and his neck-cloth was bound, like a white swathing, about his throat. He held his eyelids down, nor looked at Miss Patricia or myself. I felt that he must be a very great personage, perhaps Sir Lilyfinger. I curtseyed as I passed him and he did not look.

Then I let my eyes sweep the walls. There were candle brackets set here and there and strange things on every side. I think I did not know what frightened me about them, but I *was* frightened. All the portraits were swathed in white cloth. The doors were black and shut, and the great stairway looked drowsy and tired as though should you tread upon it would be a wrong thing. In truth it looked as pompous as the one with the white face.

Then it was that the gentleman, for it was a gentleman, coughed and stepped before us. He seemed to know our mission and trod lightly up the stairway. We followed,

and I saw our shadows now cast upon the dark wall. Miss Patricia's was crinkly, not at all like her. We turned at the landing where there hung a great thing which was shrouded white, too. A short step led to a narrow hallway that seemed strange after the broad stair. Here the gentleman lighted a candle and went before us. We passed several doors exactly alike and turned them to what I knew must be one of the turret wings. There was a damp smell about the place and it was cold.

The gentleman stopped before a narrow door and knocked. My heart was thumping. I clung to Miss Patricia, who ventured no word of explanation. The knock was answered by a thin, silvery voice that shook ever so little, like one who had sobbed. The gentleman opened the door. The place was bright with candles. There seemed to be scores of them. It smelled strongly of the burning wax, but spite the brightness, shadows hung the corners. And within one of these I saw a tiny form much bent, clothed in delicate flowered cloth. The sleeves flowed and were filled of some soft frills. The neck was low and left bare a pitiful pair of shrunken shoulders. A small ruffed cap, bearing bright streamers, sat upon the silver locks, that were thin and lay in slender silver rings about a white brow. The hands that showed amid the sleeve frills were delicate and thin. And they spoke little fragments, for they suddenly reached up to pat one of the slender curls, or darted o'er the frills, or lay a second over the heart. The eyes were blue, steel-blue. And they told something, not in their lights, but in their shadows. Then there was the smile, too bright, too bright.

I watched her and she did not speak, but went swiftly over to the side of the hearth that stood at the west wall and where a dead fire lay. Then I saw something very strange. Little garments lay upon all the chairs and a cradle sat beside the hearth. She bent over the cradle and whispered sweet nothings, to nothing! Then she looked up at Miss Patricia and flashed the too bright smile and said:

"I am waiting, you know, waiting!"

My heart leapt! I had stood behind Miss Patricia, peeping out until now, and I stepped forth. The little lady stopped short, clasped her hands beneath her heart and cried, "Felicia!" I started and wondered what this meant.

" Who are you waiting for ? " I asked.

She came faltering up to me and lay her hand upon me and pointed to the cradle and whispered :

" I am waiting for my Hope."

" What ? " I cried.

" I am waiting for my Hope," she whispered, and caught a little garment up and kissed it.

" Oh ! Oh ! " I whispered. " I am Hope."

The little lady came close and looked at me with great shadowed eyes.

" No. No," she said. " Hope has never been born."

Then she laughed and pinched my cheek and said :

" Felicia, be to bed ! You must."

I looked to Miss Patricia. She nodded to the little lady and laid one finger to her brow and shook her head. I was frightened and I went up to Miss Patricia. She lay her hand upon me and whispered :

" Do just as your heart bids you. Here you may know."

I did not understand. The little lady was rocking the cradle and I saw that she was happy again and whispering in her song softly the nothings. Then she called, " Hope." I went up to her and held forth my hand. Then I smiled and I said :

" May I wait with you ? You see, I am waiting, too."

She stood and watched me for a long time. Then she whispered :

" What are you waiting for ? "

" Sally Trueblood," I answered.

She held up her finger and said : " Sh ! Sh ! Sh ! "

I knew that I had done a thing that was not right and I turned to Miss Patricia. She shook her head and I was at a loss to know what to do, but this was not for long, for the little lady began to hum and went about the little garments, taking them up and fingering them much as a young mother would. I sat down upon a hassock that stood beside the fire and was looking at the little cradle when I realized that we were alone, the little lady and myself.

It was well that the thing that did happen, happened. For I am sure that I should have started up and fled, crying out in fear, but the little lady sunk in a great chair and began to weep. Her pitiful little shoulders rose and fell and there

sounded the sobs that were deep, deep. I knew just how it hurt, and I fled to her and flung my arms about her and kissed her and I said:

"Oh, let me wait with you! Please, please! I know just how your heart hurts. Oh, you are lonely! I know it!"

The little lady laid her delicate hand upon my shoulder and dried her tears. Then she started up and whispered:

"Go! Go! See! my Hope is sleeping."

And she sped over to the cradle and swayed it. I walked slowly over to the spot and peered within. There was nothing there but the yellowed linen, and she bade me sway the cradle and went over to a great chair and sat. It was very still in the room save for the creaking the cradle set up. I stood long until I was very weary. Then I quietly pulled up a hassock and sat upon it, but still I swayed the little lady's Hope.

I do not know why, but I loved the little cradle and I felt the little babe was there. I did not move save for the swaying-swaying. And then I left the great house and found a green field where I played with the little Hope. Oh, the joyous dancing we had! And always, always it seemed, we were to be together, the little lady's Hope and little me. Then the beautiful day ended and in the midst of a joyous dance I found myself in the middle of a great poster, dancing. A very stout person was watching me. Her cheeks were round and red and her eyes were bright and blue. She had a very round breast, a very round head and a very round stomach, and two little round fat hands with dimples over them. She wore a perky white cap that seemed to laugh at her plain face. I rubbed my eyes and smiled at her.

"Potts," she said.

"What?" I asked.

"Potts," she again repeated.

"Pots?" I said. "What pots?"

"I am Potts," she said.

"Oh," I remarked, and sat down. "I am glad to know you, Potts. Would you please tell me how I got here?"

"Potts," she said once again.

I connected Potts with my question and understood.

"Where is she?" I asked.

"Turret," said Potts.

"Oh," I answered. "Is she sad?"

" Mad," said Potts.

" What made her mad ? " I asked.

Potts did not answer, but whisked me off the bed and brought out a press and lifted the lid. It was filled with little pinafores, all very fine and beautiful. She selected one and made me ready, when she washed my face, brushed my locks and made them up just as they had been. Then she clothed me in the pinafore. It was a soft yellow and braided in brown. There were russet buskins to match, tied with yellow. I looked at my frock and then to Potts.

" Porridge," said Potts, and shoved me before her.

We passed out the great room where the poster stood. It was all flowery and hung of chintz. Through a long hallway we passed into the great dining hall where a long table stood. It would have seated a score, and servants stood ranked at the head. Potts shoved me between the lines toward the long table, lifted me to a high chair much too large for me, and then she curtseyed and left me.

I was filled with confusion. I knew how eyes hurt in a new way. I was so very small sitting there, and the great ceil seemed so high up and dark. The windows' shutters let a little brightness in, but the room frowned at it. The bowl that held my porridge was of silver and upon it was a great " W." I tried to swallow soundlessly, but I fear that I gulped. I kept my eyes upon the porridge and only looked now and then down the long table and toward the spot where they did not stand. There were wonderful carved cupboards. There were swords and armours. There was a banner, golden-fringed.

I had finished the porridge and some one lifted me down, another wiped my chin and still another took my bowl and departed with it. I turned and looked at them, but they did not respond to my smiles and I walked slowly out and down the lonely hall to an open doorway some way down. Then I resolved that I would peep beneath the swathing of the portraits. So I tiptoed across the great floor toward where one hung and I climbed upon a chair and lifted up the cloth. It fell upon the floor and left me facing—oh, what do you think ? What do you think ? The gentleman upon my breast. I was standing, staring upon him, and I said : " Oh, morrow, Mr. Bee ! " when Potts came and said, " Come ! "

I got down from the chair and held forth my hand and I said:

"Where?"

"Turret," said Potts.

"East?" I asked.

"West," said Potts.

I knew she would say west, for I knew the west wing was the turret that the little lady occupied. Potts stopped and turned me about and surveyed me minutely. She perked my pinafore in spots, spat upon her thumb and smoothed my brow locks.

"Am I all just right?" I asked.

"Right," said Potts.

Then she grasped my hand and we went down the same hallway that had looked so dark the night before, up the great stair that creaked mournfully, past the great swathed thing that hung at its landing and then through the narrow way into the narrow door which was the door to the turret room. Potts knocked. I heard a brisk step and the swish of silk. The door opened and the little lady stood before me.

"Good morning, Potts," she said.

"Morning," said Potts and curtseyed.

She shoved me in and closed the door. There was a pale light in the room that still smelled of the many candles. A light fire had been kindled and burned with a pale blaze, and sent blue smoke up the chimney. The shutters had been opened ever so slightly and little beams of sun timidly sought through and fitfully shone upon the floor, as though they were frightened. All about the humpy candles stood and their streaming ends looked like tears dripping. I stood and looked at all of this, then to the little lady, who was humming now and had taken up some sewing, a little garment. She sat down before the fire upon the low hassock and kept her foot upon the cradle and swung it to the rhythm of her humming. I saw that she was not so old as I had thought, but that the sun had forgotten her and the moon had found her. I saw it upon her brow. Her cheeks were hollow, but burned with two bright spots, and her lips were thin, as though she had pressed them dry. She bent over the cradle and smiled the too bright smile and said:

"You are there. Yes, yes." And she hummed on.

I went over to her, for she seemed to forget me. And I leaned over the cradle and looked. She stopped her swaying and her humming and looked at me, and her eyes seemed to be hunting in some far-away spot for something she had forgotten.

" Good morning," she said. " I remember you. Oh, yes, I left you—let me see—out on the mead at the Mayin'. I remember you, but you have faded."

" Have I ? " I asked.

" Yes," she said. And went on humming.

I stood waiting. Then she bit a thread and sat staring at the little garment and I saw that she was troubled. She leaned toward me and whispered :

" Oh, keep my Hope sleeping. It must not wake. They would be ashamed."

I wondered what to say and remembered what Sally Trueblood had told me—that when you did not know what to say you should just think. Then the sunshine tricked me, for it shone boldly in when a shutter blew open.

" Oh, come, let's go out in the sunshine. Oh, there is such a beautiful garden ! " I said, sniffing the out-air.

The little lady ran to a shadow in the corner and hid her face.

" Shut the shutter," she hissed. " They must not see."

" Oh," I said, " shut the beautiful sun away ? No."

Then she whispered : " My Hope will wake. There is but one way to keep it sleeping, and that is to seal it up. I dare not."

She arose and stepped toward the sunlight that lay so warm and golden upon the grey floor. And her great eyes lighted and the shadows fled and I saw the smile dim and I heard her whisper :

" Ah, the May sun ! " And she held her hands forth that the beams might fall upon them, and she kissed them.

Then the pitiful shoulders began to heave and she shut the shutter, leaving the room dim once more, and I heard her sobbing, sobbing. I went slowly over to her side and I whispered :

" I know. I know. Eyes hurt you, too. Sally Trueblood told me about eyes. She told me and I know."

At the mention of Sally Trueblood's name she ceased her

weeping and looked at me, and what I saw frightened me. It was Sally Trueblood, with silver locks.

"Who are you?" I whispered.

"I am lost," she answered. "Ask them. They will tell you."

Then I loved her. I do not know why, but I found that her hands were Sally Trueblood's and her cheeks, too. And her eyes, but the smile was not.

"Oh," I said, "listen! I know. Let us play. Are you lost?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Then come. Let us go out in the garden. Perhaps we may find your smile, your really, really smile. Perhaps it is hidden there in some late marigold and then,—let us see,—I know! We will seek, you and little me, out there, and find you." And I laughed and laughed. "What will you say when we find you? I know I shall love you."

"But my Hope," she whispered.

"She-e-e. It is sleeping. Let it sleep. You see, Hope will sleep till you waken it. Sally Trueblood said that. Oh, please, please! I know there are rooks' nests up in the tall trees. I saw their shadows. And it's late, it's not Mayin'. It's the gold time. Larkspurs have nearly hid. I found the last in the chapel yard and I gave them to her. Come!" And I took her hand and she followed me.

Her steps were faltering. I opened the door. Still she followed, nor did she raise her eyes to the walls, but followed like one blind. We went slowly down the narrow hall and through the dark passage to the great stair, down them and through the great hall, and no person was there. It was quiet, so very quiet. I went to the great door and slipped the bolt. It was hard to slip and I was red with the exertion. The door opened and festoons of ivy almost transparent hung and waved almost upon our heads. I clutched at one beautiful tendril and wound it to a wreath and I whispered that she bent and I put it upon her head.

Then something happened. We were without. The little lady threw up her arms and her hands were pitiful. Like little white-winged birds, they fluttered above her head. And she sunk upon her knees and her great eyes looked out upon the day. Her lips parted and her bosom heaved. She looked

like a little broken thing. Then I touched her. She did not look, but her lips were moving and I knew she was speaking to dearest God. I just knelt down, too, and talked to Him. I know now that we must have been a queer pair—the little lady, all dressed in silks and frills and her neck bare and thin, and my small self clothed in the old pinafore with the buskins upon my feet, and a blue bow upon my brow, kneeling there in the sunlight alone.

CHAPTER XII

THIS was but a beginning, for many, many times we did this. The garden knew us. Even after it was dead we still had flowers, for we brought them in our hearts.

Always in the morning Potts came and said, "Turret." And always I was arrayed as upon the first day in a pinafore. And I went to the west wing and we went through the same conversation about her Hope, who always seemed to be sleeping. And we always left it and played in the garden. And when we came back she would whisper, "Do you think it has waked?" And I would assure her it was sleeping. She called me "Felicia" and said I was faded. She told me that she had forgotten me, then that she remembered me. And would never let me speak of Sally Trueblood, though I tried, and this made me lonely. I spoke once of her to Potts, who had not listened, and I afterwards learned that I should not speak of her at all.

There were many things that I found out in the mansion. There were the servants. One who always took my porridge bowl, I called him "Hooks." And the other, who with his thumb and fingers always wiped my chin, I called him "Tongs." They never spoke. I knew there were others in the house, for I heard bottles, and when I had supped, often I had seen, at a later time, lights in the dining-hall; but I never met one of these.

I recall that upon each morning I saw that the little lady had seemed stronger. She would wait my coming impatiently, even running with her faltering steps to meet me. The young winter had come suddenly. Frost clung the paths. The ivy turned darker and the garden was dead. The rooks were noisy and the birds were going.

I think it must have been a fortnight after my arrival when a thing happened which I shall not forget. I had had my morning bowl in the usual custom and was pinafored and upon my way with Potts, when we turned the hall's way that led to the turret, I saw something that I recognized. It was a figure that flitted swiftly in the shadows to a door beyond us, suddenly opened it and closed it just as suddenly. But this time we were beside the door and I saw that whoever this was had caught her petticoat in the door. And it was Miss Willoughby's. I had smoothed it. I called:

"Oh, Miss Willoughby! I am here." And I knocked.

The door opened suddenly again and I caught sight of her face. Her eyes were swollen and red. She jerked her petticoat free and shut the door in my face.

"Potts," I said, "that was Miss Willoughby."

"No?" said Potts, like a question.

"Yes," I said, "it was Miss Willoughby."

"Miss Willoughby," said Potts, like a faint echo. "Willoughby," she repeated aloud.

Then we went to the turret room and I resolved to tell the little lady, but she was not there. All the shutters were open. The candles were still standing burned low. The little garments were gone and the cradle swathed in white. I wondered if her Hope had waked and I turned to Potts.

"Where?" I said.

"Dead," said Potts.

"Dead?" I repeated.

"Dead," said Potts and nodded.

"When?" I said.

Potts did not answer, but pointed to the casement where the shutters stood open wide.

"Night," she said then, and I wondered what she meant.

Then something caught my eye. It was a scrap of the flowered silk clinging to the casement. It waved softly upon the crisp morning air and the sun beamed down upon it and it waved again.

"Not there," I said, for a sudden fear had seized me. I remembered that the casement was many yards above the gravel path of the garden.

"There," said Potts.

" Where did you find her ? "

" Below," said Potts.

" Oh, was she broken ? "

" Broken," said Potts.

I sat down upon the hassock beside the dead fire and I saw that the little room was full of sunshine. The cradle stood mute and I reached out and swayed it, and I whispered :

" I know. You found the green field and the Mayin'. I know." And I swayed it again. I was weeping, for I felt that I had lost something. For was not her Hope and little me always to abide together ?

" Where is she ? " I whispered to Potts.

" Below," said Potts.

" Take me," I said.

Potts grasped my hand and we went below to the great room where the portraits hung all swathed in white, save one which I had uncovered, and he smiled down upon the gloom like youth smiles at age. I looked at him. Then my eyes sought about the great room. In the centre she lay. It was the little lady, only very white. The bright spots were gone. There was a bruise upon one cheek and a little streak of red stained the mouth's corner, where still the too bright smile clung. I saw this and I was chilled. I saw this and that her hands were clasped over a little garment. I went to her and clung to Potts who came with me and I whispered :

" She-e-e ! Do not wake. I shall watch your Hope."

I touched one of her delicate hands and it was cold.

" May I kiss her ? " I asked Potts.

" Yes," she answered. And I bent down and kissed one silver lock where the moon hid.

" What is her name ? " I asked Potts.

" Name ? " repeated Potts.

" Yes," I said. " Who is she ? I love her."

Then there resounded a step and we turned and I saw Miss Patricia standing in the doorway, her hands held forth, and I saw that she too had been weeping. I fled to Miss Patricia's arms. She stooped to gather me in.

" Oh," I cried, " she is broken."

" Yes," whispered Miss Patricia.

" Oh, I am so sorry," I went on.

"Yes," said Miss Patricia. "There, there! She was broken long, long ago."

"Come," I said. "Isn't she beautiful? She! she has just a little of her Hope in her hands." And I pointed to the little garment.

Miss Patricia bit her lip and began to weep. Then her eyes raised and she saw the smiling gentleman and wheeled grasping my hand, and swept from the room. I did not question, for I had learned many things since I had lived in the eaves. It seemed so long ago.

We turned when we had passed through the hallway door and came face to face with Potts, who bore linens to some wing of the old mansion. Miss Patricia drew up before her and looked as though she would speak.. Potts stood with her eyes down, the linen upon her round stomach, waiting.

"Where are you going?" said Miss Patricia, wiping her eyes that still flashed even though they were filled with tears.

"West," said Potts.

Miss Patricia started and waited, but Potts did not offer further conversation. Miss Patricia looked sternly at Potts and said:

"Potts, I am sorely tempted to shake you to see if you would spill more than one word."

Potts curtseyed and did not answer. Miss Patricia gasped.

"Do you know me, Potts?" she asked.

Potts curtseyed once more and murmured:

"Patricia."

"What?" said Miss Patricia.

"Miss Passwater," said Potts.

"Very well," said Miss Patricia, "remember it."

I stood watching them and wondering that Miss Patricia at this time would stand and carry on such a conversation with Potts, but I remembered that Miss Patricia was Miss Patricia. Potts still stood. Miss Patricia took my hand firmer within her grasp and swept past Potts, saying:

"I shall see you in the dining hall later."

We went to the hall and waited. I did not venture to speak to Miss Patricia more, but she watched me as though she looked for me to question her. However, I thought best not to speak, so I watched Miss Patricia. When

we had been sitting for some time, she beckoned me from the tall chair I had sat upon and I went to her side.

" You are wondering what all of this means," said Miss Patricia.

" Yes," I answered.

" Then why do you not ask ? " said Miss Patricia.

" Well, you see, Miss Patricia, I know you, and I know that Sally Trueblood said one might ride him to woe upon his tongue. So I just waited. But I am so sorry, so very, very sorry. Oh, Miss Patricia, I shall never, never forget the garden, nor the little lady, for somehow I do not know but I feel that I am the little one she lost. I know it is fancy, but she looks like Sally Trueblood—Sally Trueblood in the moonlight."

" Yes," said Miss Patricia. " Yes, I see. Go on."

" There shall always, always be a lonely here, Miss Patricia," I said, touching my breast, " when I think of the weeping candles and the dark west wing. Oh, come, let's go to the turret. I do so want to see the little cradle. I feel it is lonely for her humming."

" Very well," said Miss Patricia, arising.

And we went upon our way to the turret room. We did not come upon any other of the household, not even the servants. When we came to the turret room, a sudden gust of cold wind blew open the narrow door. It was dark now, but I could see through one of the shutters' opes that the sun had gone, for the whole sky was grey. It was a winter sky and the little room that had been so beautifully bright with the lighted candles and the too bright smile was pitifully desolate. Then my heart warmed, for the wind came up again and swept with its chilling bite through the open door and set the little cradle swaying.

" Oh, Miss Patricia," I cried. " Look ! It is still sleeping." And I ran to its side and whispered : " Sleep ! Oh, please sleep ! "

Then I heard something that startled me. It was Miss Patricia. She had suddenly crumpled up in a great chair and was sobbing wildly. I went to her and laid my arms about her heaving shoulder and I said :

" Oh, Miss Patricia, tell me. What is wrong ? Is it little me, or is it my beautiful Sally Trueblood that brings you all

sorrow? Oh, please tell me. I know the look in your eyes. It is coming. It was in the little lady's. It is in Miss Willoughby's; it was in Sally Trueblood's, and I know that look. I do so want you to be happy, but, Miss Patricia, let me go. Oh, do not suffer! Please! Please! I shall go up to the eaves and beg Delicia Prue to just leave me the pot's dregs." I was weeping and Miss Patricia still sobbed. "Oh, was it something about me that made the little lady's eyes so empty? They frightened me, Miss Patricia, but I loved to see her look away off as though she saw some Mayin' I never had seen."

"She saw it," said Miss Patricia. "Yes, she saw it."

"Who is she?" I asked.

Miss Patricia bit her lip and looked at me steadily.

"I do not know."

It was then that I saw something I had never seen before in the little room. It was an oil of a gentleman with mild eyes and something very familiar about him. Miss Patricia saw I was looking at him and turned very red. I did not speak of this, but I resolved to remember.

"Might I just open the lattice, Miss Patricia? Just a little? It seems so lonely."

I was whimpering and the tears were trickling down my cheeks. Miss Patricia nodded. I went to the lattice and opened it and there sounded again the voice of a hedge songster, "Are you playing?" I turned and went to Miss Patricia, who I knew was very miserable.

"How long do we stay?"

"Until Potts comes to the dining hall. Come," she said.

I closed the lattice and laid my hand upon the cradle. Then I followed Miss Patricia through the narrow door and she let me shut it. I did so, softly, and my heart was heavy. We went to the dining hall, where Potts was waiting. She had a pack, a large one, all made ready that we should take it. I knew, for she nodded at it to Miss Patricia as we entered.

"Very well," Miss Patricia snapped. She was grim now. "We go when the chaise has come."

Potts nodded. Miss Patricia went to a window ope and bade Potts follow, which she did, and they stood in low conversation for some time. At least Miss Patricia seemed to have very much to say and Potts lost a word now and then.

I was clothed in the pinafore that I had donned upon my first coming to the mansion. Miss Patricia sent Potts for my circular and I wondered where the little filmy pinafore had been taken, and if it was in the pack and was I to wear away the yellow one braided in brown. But they did not seem to care about all of these things and the wonder within me was not given voice. I simply waited. I could hear steps overhead. I smelled candles, lighted ones. I looked about the great dining hall and I loved it. It seemed such a wonderful place. I had sat there many times, dreaming dreams. I had fought wondrous battles in the armour; I had seen the banner flying and heard the lances click; I had seen gore spilled over the stone floor and I loved to walk among the armours and speak with them. I knew many things about the mansion where the doors were open. Some of them had been bolted to my inquiries. I should never forget the mansion and I had a lonely feeling at leaving it.

I wondered if the little lady was a "deader," a really deader, and I resolved to tell Rudy Strong, if she were, that I had seen one. Then there came to me the thought of the great room where she lay clasping her Hope, and her bruised cheek, and the little line of red that seemed to trickle from her mouth's corner, and the foolish little frilly dress that seemed to be so gay. And I was frightened, and glad when the chaise was announced by Potts, who came back after leaving Miss Patricia, following the long conversation, and dropped one word and it was, "chaise."

Potts stood, looking straight ahead, and Miss Patricia took my hand and did not turn. I was loth to leave, even though I was frightened and feared to stay beneath the roof where I seemed to be alone save for the servants, and heard the footfall of others who did not show themselves before my eyes. Miss Patricia and my pack, with my small self, were safely within the chaise when there came over me such a wonderful feeling, all melty. I stood up and looked to the turret.

"Oh, Miss Patricia," I whispered, "look, look! There is a rook upon the chimney. Oh, Miss Patricia, will she be lonely? Will they put her in a pit just like Sally Trueblood? Oh, please tell me! I cannot leave her. She is all broken, Miss Patricia. Don't you think if I would kiss the bruise

it would heal? Sally Trueblood said love would mend bruises."

"No," said Miss Patricia. "No; she is sleeping, and I think her breaking is all mended."

"But her little Hope."

"Oh," said Miss Patricia, "play a game and just be her little Hope."

"That would be beautiful, Miss Patricia. Oh, I would love it and I shall always love her."

And I sat down beside Miss Patricia. The fat lad struck the nag's slanty rump. It sneezed and pricked up its ears and set off at a lanky trot. The chaise wabbled upon its way and I sung a little lilt as it swung along. Then I looked to Miss Patricia. She was a very grim Miss Patricia and I knew I had best just sing on. Then I forgot to sing, for I had suddenly become lonely. I got up and kneeled upon the seat of the chaise and looked back at the mansion that now showed but as gables and turrets, set within billowing browns and reds and dark greens, and here and there stark limbs showed. I watched the gables sink in the green, deeper, deeper, deeper till there was but one tall chimney and one turret's point. Then I said aloud:

"Good-bye, little lady! I shall be your Hope. Good-bye. Oh, sleep and find the green field. I found it and I danced there." And I blew a kiss back and I said: "Good-bye to the old days. You dark walls, I shall know you, for I do know you now. I know," and I still was speaking aloud, "I know that you are sealed up, just like Sally Trueblood's heart, but you are full of love. I know what I know." And I blew a kiss and smiled, and I wished that my smile would just find the little lady.

I blew another kiss and just wished it, too, would find the little lady to rest upon her silver locks. We were swinging now down the roadway, farther, farther from the old place. I sat down and watched the bushes and undergrowth slip by. There was a cold crispness in the air that made one feel like singing, yet there was something in the golding leaves and shrubs and their flaming crests that showed red, that made one sorrow, for they were ripening to fall. Even now I could see, when a sudden gust of cold air came, their whirling as they swept before us in the roadway and fell beneath

the trees. There was a queer sound upon the air. It was the rustling of the little leaves. It seemed to me that they were fretful that they should go upon their wondrous journey. And I wondered if the old trees would be lonely.

I did not speak to Miss Patricia of this, for she seemed loth to speak and sat looking straight ahead. The lad had offered conversation in small fragments which had met little encouragement from her. I swung my feet, and traced letters in the dust that fell upon the chaise dash. A new feeling seized me as we came at last to the sight of the village. It was a something that bounded up and filled me with joyousness. I know now that it was the greeting of a home.

I never had this feeling about the Grey Eagle inn, for it mattered not how glad I was that I should come back to her, always there was the fear, a new kind each day. Sometimes it was her cough; then there had been the days when her eyes were red and when she spoke words aloud, not to me. Then there were the times that I remembered when she had not left the eaves; when we had never left except at the dark to wander down some secluded way, and return in the dark. Then she had had a purse. It was heavy and she used to count clinking things, and I watched it flatten. Then the look came. Then I met my friend, hunger. You see, she said, since we had to know him we should make him our friend. Well, we were over-friendly at times, and she used to laugh and say our friend came too often. We gamed him and we used to say, one to the other, in whispers, that we hoped he would not tarry long. Then the Grey Eagle would stew and he would limp away. Sometimes he ran. That was when they gave us the pot dregs. I remembered this and a new feeling came.

I knew that I should sup at the little table with Miss Patricia; I knew there was a fire-log and a great poster that still frightened me. It never softened and always was grim.

The nag had suddenly picked up his trotting and the leathers rattled. We crossed a small stream and I looked into its crystal sheen and saw myself, all wriggly, leaning over the chaise side. The nag drank long and sighed in groans. Then the lad had made to set him ahead, but he would not and sunk his nose deeper and sipped in a squeaking

sound. A strong jerk brought his head up and I heard the wafer trickle from his nose and lips. Then we were upon the way down the village street. We passed the chapel yard and I leaned out and called:

"In the morning, Sally Trueblood, I shall come and I shall tell you of the little lady."

Miss Patricia touched me and said, "Sh!"

We went past and finally drew up at the house of the Passwaters'. The fowls, which were Miss Patricia's pride, were stalking perchward and set up a clatter as we drew up. Tidy Timpkins was in the doorway, her arms wound up in her apron. She screamed a welcome and we alighted. Miss Patricia penced the driver and we went within. I sat down upon the great chair and watched the low fire. The room was dark save for its light and the bird had already gone to rest.

Miss Patricia turned the glass, patted the table cover, took off her shawl and bonnet, untied mine and took off my circular. Then she sat down and we sat a long time and neither spoke. Then Tidy came in, bearing a new candle, and this she gave to Miss Patricia, who lighted it at the fire and set it upon the table. I noticed that there was loaf and some cold meat, a bit of green and no milk for my bowl, nor for Miss Patricia's hot water. Miss Patricia spoke to Tidy of this and Tidy answered that the Stebbins 'lowed that they had none, at least for unrighteous folks.

"Eh?" said Miss Patricia. "Stebbins said that?"

"Yessum," said Tidy.

"Well," snapped Miss Patricia. "Then we shall—— Oh, very well," she went on, and turned to me. "Come along and sup."

"What shall we do?" I said.

Miss Patricia smoothed the table cover, helped herself to a bit of meat and green, and said very deliberately:

"Never let your tongue ride to the village. It's sure to come back overpacked."

Tidy stood twisting her apron corner and stepping upon her own foot. She sniffed and licked her upper lip.

"Yessum," she put in. "And the Hackets 'lowed as they'd best not draw no more wood."

Miss Patricia stood up and her face flamed.

" Well," she said, " this village knows Patricia Passwater, *they think*. But they have very much to learn. We shall see who is up and over in this place. These praying saints shall have an eye-opening."

This was but the beginning. We were shunned on every side. Even Tidy Timpkins forsook us and I was put to the kitchen to scour and to bake and " tend " as Miss Patricia called it.

CHAPTER XIII

THE winter wore, and it was no new thing to see the village pass and whisper, nor look our way. We went to the chapel yard in the blinding snows and sleets, and in the wind and rain, and stood, each Sabbath morning. All through this but one lent aid and this was Vicar Gifford, who had suffered even as we had suffered, for at Sabbaths only few sought the chapel and whisper had it that but for the Willoughbys he would be sent upon his way.

There had passed the harvest feasts and the field dances, and I had seen the youth of the village joyous, but their joyousness had brought something new to me—a heavy heart. Miss Patricia was kind, even gentle, and many times when I watched some party pass, sleighing or off to the snow slides, she would pat me, or say, " Wait ! Wait ! "

We were lonely, Miss Patricia and little me, yet we had so much, for there were the evenings when we would sit and I would tell her of Sally Trueblood and the eaves and of so many things that seemed to creep upon me out of some place I had forgotten. At times Miss Patricia went to the village and purchased, but I was shut in—kept not by her from the village, but by the village. I feared their eyes, they hurt me, and their whispers cut like blades. They jeered at my pinafores and my queer headdress. They called me—I shall not write the word—and I have waked in the night with it ringing in my ears. Life now was not a beautiful game. I learned so many things that seemed to make clouds over Sally Trueblood's smile.

I seem to see, as I write, little me, like some young bird, flitting in the spring, and then I lose the little bird and see that winter come and I am no longer little me, but a frightened

thing, beginning a new path, all unknown, with no hand to lead me like Sally Trueblood's, who held the witching wand and touched the thorns that they might bloom for me. Above all of this, something came to me that left me reft of all my sun. The mound became a mound. No longer was She there. I knew within me that their eyes had frightened her away and I *wanted* her to go. I remembered the morning I sought the mound and said aloud:

"Oh, Sally Trueblood, go! go! I cannot stand their eyes upon you! Just leave me your smile, Sally Trueblood, just a little one, and go! It is a very long game—" I was weeping—"but your elf shall play it."

I knew now. I knew that some words were arrows. Well, I just forgot them, and made beautiful ones to cover them up. Mr. Reuben had taught me this first lesson. When I left the chapel yard this morning, I left the last of little me. I think I buried it in the pit to warm and sing some new day.

There was something I have forgotten to tell, and this was that many times, as I went to the chapel yard, not upon the Sabbaths when Miss Patricia always went with me, but at the lone times when I loved to go and look upon the mound, just as I had loved to dream of the eaves and the time when she was there, then I had come often upon Sephira Gifford. We had never spoken, but in her eyes I saw a look of kindness and understanding. Once she had opened the chapel yard gate for me and she had said nothing but smiled. I took that smile home with me and I kept it a long time.

I became more silent through the days, and at the night often I have lain within the grim bed and taken out, from that quiet land we trod alone, all the Grey Eagle days and played with them, putting them back only like worn toys, waiting to be loved once more. I could not give them up. I grew to do my task with my hands, silently, while I trod paths the village never showed. Miss Patricia offered me no explanation of our mysterious trip to the mansion, and, strange as it may seem, the village knew little, even of Sally Trueblood, and less of the mansion, save that it was shunned and shut and had been for long and long.

Then the time of happiness came—the time when our love takes new root, when a little Babe comes down from the Great Unknown and lies upon the breast of earth and cries

out for loving; when the shadow of Winter takes wings of love and flies away, leaving the spring of love upon the day. Oh, I know now that the Babe wails vainly, oft, oft, for I know many things taught by many days. Yet I thank Him who sends the Babe that I have learned the things.

I recall that at this time the carollers sung; that each house swarmed of neighbours; that when the Night of Nights fell, I was filled with a teeming joy—something beautiful, as though I saw Sally Trueblood's smile. The day had been a cold one. The snow stood high and capped the village houses and banked the road's way, and when the night fell one could hear shouts of happiness and callings of joy from lip to lip. I had listened, and I saw that look in Miss Patricia's eyes. Her lips were thin and I saw how it hurt, and I smiled a sunshine smile. It was quite dark and we could see through our windows, when the shutters were opened, burning brands trailing the paths and the voices of the carollers singing, singing. And it seemed that the sky was deep and an echo of happiness sounded there, but that our little house was just outside.

We listened to their happiness, Miss Patricia and I. And I remember that late they were still singing. We sat before the fire, Miss Patricia in the great chair and I upon the hassock at her feet. I saw the light of the fire plying the shadows like golden shuttles, and the glass was slipping upon the table and the bird slept. I leaned my cheek upon Miss Patricia's knee and I felt her hand slip over my locks and lie upon my other cheek. And then—oh, I scarce can write it—but she began to sing, in a quavering voice, a carol. I listened and my heart froze. I got upon my feet and flung my arms about her and kissed her and cried:

"Oh, please, please, no! I love you, Miss Patricia, but *she* sang that one. She sang it, Miss Patricia, with smiling lips and weeping eyes. Oh, why do I always just *listen* to happiness? It is like being so thirsty and hearing the rain that will not find you." And I sunk upon my knees and laid my head upon Miss Patricia's knees and sobbed.

"There, there," said Miss Patricia. "Wait! wait!"

"Yes, yes," I answered, "it is a game, a very, very long game. She used to leave me rest my head upon her bosom when the evening came."

"How ? " said Miss Patricia.

" Like this," I answered, and laid my head upon Miss Patricia's bosom.

As I did it something fell from her kerchief fold. It was my locket with Mr. Bee upon it. I did not touch it, nor look. She swiftly tucked it back and I went on.

" And I always watched the shadows grow tired with her as we sat listening to the winds that sung and bore fragments of their singing, those of the village, who in their happiness forgot."

Then I had grown weary-sorry and I arose and weighted Miss Patricia's eyes with kisses, that she sleep. And I went to the guest room, my own now, and there upon the grim bed lay a packet. I untied a lover's knot and before my eyes was a great star in sweet-cake, sugared red. I loved it. It was so unlike Miss Patricia. I went softly back to the sitting room and stopped, for Miss Patricia was before the fire, the little chest upon the floor, and crushed to her breast the little pinafore of filmy stuff. And she was sobbing. I returned softly to the guest room and I said aloud : " Sally Trueblood, why ? "

The faint light shone through the open door from where the candle was lighted. It flickered over the walls and the room's corners were quite dark. I stood clasping the star sweet-cake and I sank upon my knees and buried my head within the grim poster's skirt. It never before had seemed to soften, but as I knelt I became more broken and it seemed to fairly lend itself to me. I sobbed within its great breast, and I remember that I tried that I should not cry aloud, for had not Miss Patricia made me the cake ? Then I arose and looked once more toward the hearth where Miss Patricia knelt. She was still upon her knees, but her eyes were upraised and her lips were moving, and I knew she was speaking endearingly to Dearest God. And I, too, sunk upon my knees and I looked up to the dark ceil and my lips made sweet sounds like those Sally Trueblood made when she spoke to Him, and I said :

" Dearest God, why ? "

Then I arose and put the sweet-cake beneath my pillow and made me ready for sleeping. I opened the window shutters ever so slightly so that I might watch the brands

crawling the snowy path and just game a little little. It was a strange game. I remember that I had lain very long and watched a great fire that the villagers had builded up. They were dancing about it and casting pine upon it so that I could tell when new fuel had been cast.

Then I found the Morning had come, and it was a beautiful blue Morning with a golden skirt, and her arms were wide, and upon her lips was Sally Trueblood's smile. Then the Morning bended down and whispered: "Are you playing?"

I awoke, crying out:

"Yes, yes, yes!"

But the room was quite dark and very cold. The candle was gone and my hands were clasped over Willie Pimm Passwater's china dog. I brought myself up upon my elbow and peeped through the shutter's ope. The villagers had gone, but the moon stood white and high, and I thought, as I gazed up at her, that she was the keeper of the kingdom's gate; that the golden white was her crown and the silver-strung rays the tapered wings. And I saw the starry host dancing, dancing. And I whispered, "Oh, let me just play with you."

And I lay back upon my pillow, still hugging the dog, and I recall that I slipped my hand beneath my pillow just to touch the cake. And I whispered:

"Miss Patricia, I do love you. I shall drive away the look." And I sighed, and I did not intend to sleep, but he met me and led me away.

Morning came, but it was not the golden morning. She was robed in grey and silver and snowy white and a little scarlet. I heard Miss Patricia lighting the fire and I went, before I had dressed, into the sitting room, and held my arms wide and cried:

"Miss Patricia, dearest God did not give me one little thing that I might give you, but this," and I flew to her and clasped her neck and kissed her and said, "I love you." Then I saw that she had been weeping.

"Is the wood all gone?" I asked.

She shook her head and sat down. "Then what?" I asked. Miss Patricia did not answer; but she took me to her and sat for some time stroking my brow. Then she said slowly:

"Can you be very brave?" And before I could answer, she went on: "Yes, you can. I know it. Listen! There is little to eat."

"What?" I said. "Did he find me here? I thought he had forgotten me. Oh, I am glad I shall find out just how deep I am. You see, Sally Trueblood said hunger bit you way down deep and we waited to see how deep."

"Yes," said Miss Patricia, "but listen! We shall have to eat the house!"

"What?" I said. "Eat the house!"

"Yes," said Miss Patricia.

"Oh, Miss Patricia, you are joking. We just couldn't. We would get splinters in our teeth."

But I saw that Miss Patricia was not laughing and I went to her and said:

"Tell me. Just put your head here," and I laid my hand upon my bosom, "and tell me."

"I mean it," said Miss Patricia. "We shall have to give up the house."

"Give up the little house? Miss Patricia, I do not understand."

"Well," said Miss Patricia, "Mr. Reuben is detained."

"He is coming then?" I asked.

"Yes," said Miss Patricia.

"When?" I said.

"I do not know," said Miss Patricia.

"What?" I asked. "Miss Patricia, he said, when he left me at the Grey Eagle inn the first night when I came to call, he said,—I was standing in the archway and I heard him,—'Sarah Trueblood.' Did he know her?"

"No," said Miss Patricia. "No, no. Come! It is enough that we face loneliness and hunger."

"Yes," I put in. "We shall just wait until they knock. Let us be, oh, so happy to-day. I tell you. Let's go to the chapel yard. I know where there is a great bush of holly and it is all rubied over. Let us go and make such beautiful wreathes and take them to Willie Pimm Passwater and Obadiah Willoughby and Felicia Trueblood and Sally Trueblood and Patricia Passwater and Reuben Passwater and one down where there is no villager that goes. You know the one, Miss Patricia."

" Yes," said Miss Patricia, " I know "

" Shall we ? " I asked.

Miss Patricia nodded and arose and went about the making of our breakfast.

CHAPTER XIV

We busied about laying the table and making ready that we sit. Miss Patricia walked briskly. I remember the room so very well as I write. It was still cold and the fire crackled. When one went toward the window's ope one's breath showed like smoke. Miss Patricia had pinned a woollen scarf about her and I was hunched, my hands red. What had promised to be a very grey day turned forth a beautiful sunny one and the snow showed like millions of sparkles before the bright light. When Miss Patricia had made the sup ready, we sat together at the little table and it was a queer sup, for she did not offer conversation and I spent my time listening to the fire crackling and the bird hopping in its wicker.

While we sat, a knock sounded. I jumped to my feet and ran toward the door. Miss Patricia stood up and said, " No, I shall go."

" Do you think it could be a Christ gift ? " I cried. " Do you, Miss Patricia ? I asked dearest God for it."

Miss Patricia did not answer me and went slowly to the door. The knocking sounded once more. She slipped the bolt of the doorway that led to the little hall and went within it and I heard her fumble with the outer lock. Then I heard the door open and I saw the young sun light up the hallway, and Mr. Stephen stepped in. Miss Patricia stood very straight before him and did not bid him enter. He ignored this and stepped past her and I saw that he carried a great bag. It was of leather and buckled of silver. Miss Patricia said something softly as he passed her and followed him, after shutting the outer door into the sitting room. Then she turned and softly shut the connecting door and stood before it. Mr. Stephen walked to the fire, which was weak, and I saw Miss Patricia was agitated.

" Well," she said, " what has brought you ? "

He turned and looked at me. Miss Patricia saw his look and went on :

" Never mind. She has her part in this miserable tangle. Why send her away ? "

He shrugged and sat down in the great chair. Miss Patricia did not sit down, but went to the fire and stood before the hearth, seeming to leave it to him as to what should be done or said. He had brought the bag in with him and it sat before his feet. He pointed to it and said :

" I have brought what is rightfully hers to her."

Miss Patricia did not answer. Mr. Stephen repeated his statement. Miss Patricia sniffed and tossed her head, saying :

" Mr. Stephen, you have not. The thing that is rightfully hers has been denied her."

" But, Patricia," Mr. Stephen put in. " Did we not——"

Miss Patricia interrupted him, saying :

" Don't ' Patricia ' me ! It sets me edged."

She pointed to the door and I saw that her hand shook.

" Listen ! " she said. " It is just like this. This is Patricia Passwater's roof, and she and this child are beneath it, and the village nor the uppin' ones need not think that they may come and cast in their bones for pickin' and expect Patricia Passwater to wallow in humility. Take that bag and get out ! "

" But, Patricia," said Mr. Willoughby, " where is Reuben. We have heard of this."

Miss Patricia still pointed to the doorway and she answered Mr. Willoughby without dropping her hand.

" Reuben Passwater is wherever he is and as he won't tell then get out ! I am not here to take the donations of charity and I do not want what is rightfully this child's unless it is all of what is rightfully hers. One woman died hoping and I suppose there can be two."

Mr. Stephen was fingering with the buckles of the bag and he opened it slowly. I saw something that I remembered. It was the flowered cloth dress I had seen upon the little lady that first night, and the little garments. Miss Patricia's eyes seemed to start out of her head and she was very angry. She stooped down upon her knees and shut the bag.

" So this is what you bring, Stephen Willoughby ! Well, take them back ! They belong to her. Bury them with her. They are the only things that meant life to her."

But Fel——" Mr. Willoughby bit his lip. "She is gone."

"Yes," went on Miss Patricia's voice, scarcely leaving Mr. Willoughby's words to be spoken. "She is gone, and so is Reuben Passwater and that girl and Stephen Willoughby and Marcella Willoughby. But what does all of this matter? The Willoughbys are the Willoughbys. The Lord hates a hypocrite and He does not forget one. Wait, Stephen Willoughby, wait! I could swing the balance——" But here Miss Patricia looked at me and her eyes were full of tears and she began to sob. "Go!" she said.

Mr. Willoughby arose, bowed in gallant style, laying his arm across his breast, took up the bag and waited for Miss Patricia to open the door, which she did and let him out. When he had gone she was very much upset. She walked over to the great chair and sat down.

"Come here," she said to me. I went up to her. "Go fetch your hood and make ready. Since the living will not of us, then we shall go to the dead."

I ran to bring forth my hood and when I returned Miss Patricia was bonneted and shawled. She was busy making the final touches about the sitting room. She turned the glass, fingered the table cover, turned the yellow fruits about until they faced the incoming door. She cast some ash over our small log, which I had forgotten to tell was brought up to our little house by Rudy Strong, and which I had cut.

Rudy had been faithful through all our tribulations. He had made purchases and it was through him that we received our milk, he making the purchase and bringing it to us at dark. We had been very glad to have the friendship of Rudy, which had been denied us at first. He, along with Tidy Timpkins, and the village, had forsaken us entirely until word had come out among the villagers that we were to be driven out. Then he had come one night when the dark had just settled and called:

"Hi! Hi, Hope!" And I had gone out, so glad to hear his familiar call. He had told me that he was just the same and had offered me a new kitten which, he said, was "almost good," having lost but one eye, and I had been delighted. Rudy was a joy, and also a pain, for he brought the village tongues to us. I had heard from his lips that his uncle,

Mr. Strong, knew that Reuben Passwater had gone because —well, the village was whispering it behind their hands and he couldn't tell a girl.

I learned, too, that Sally Trueblood was called a thing that I did not understand, but I knew by the flushing of Rudy Strong, when he said it, that it belonged with his three words. I know now that all of these things made a deep shadow upon me, but then I did not know it. It was all strange to me. I did not understand. I seemed to accept all of these things as though they were due me, for I had never known the freedom of fellowship. Always I had known hiding and glances and fears and whispers.

I was thinking of these things when Miss Patricia was finally ready and bade me come. We left our little house and went without. The little firs were peaked of snow and stood sparkling in the sun like great sugar-sprinkled tarts. I can hear the crispness of that morning. Every twig crackled and the wind rattled over the snow. The village was happy, for the chimneys smoked, and I knew that fires were burning and that the morning had brought wondrous feasts to preparation.

We went down the village way to the usual head-popping accompaniment and withdrawals. We passed the inn and I saw that the coach stood before. The horses were decked in garlands of green and holly berries and scarlet blooms of the winter tide. At their heads hung streamers of gay ribbons and the coach stood, waiting Lady Lilyfinger, I thought. Just as we came to the doorway of the inn, some one opened it. Oh, the smell! All plummy and spiced, and there was a savoury! I knew it, for it had that strong scent that makes one wish that his stomach was just a big pot. I wondered if the speckled goose had given up. He had fled thrice when Peter Goff had sought him. And I pulled my hand free and just leaned close as we passed and peeped to the inn room. Oh, the fire! It was merry; it was beautiful! The beams were wound of mistletoe and spruce spines plumed, and the heat made it smell, and oh, I did want to go within! Then I looked up to the eaves, and somehow, oh, I was empty, and the fire was not beautiful, and my feet were cold! Then I looked to Miss Patricia and I saw she was having a very hard time not to cry, and I said:

"'Aren't we happy?"

Miss Patricia looked at me and her thin lips opened and one word came forth. It was, "No."

"Do not make it any worse," she went on.

I understood, but Sally Trueblood had told me that when one made believe just a little bit like a fib, the fairies witched it and it was not sinful. I was afraid Miss Patricia believed that I was lying, and I said:

"Miss Patricia, that wasn't just exactly a fib. You see, it was just a joke."

Miss Patricia smiled, very wanly, I thought. I have seen that smile on Sally Trueblood's lips and I never liked it.

We had passed the inn when we came upon Dawson. She had a huge basket upon her arm out of which trailed a long goose neck. I had forgotten to tell you of Dawson. You see, she was a thing about the village that they had all needed. It was like this. You sent for Dawson and when morning came you had a new baby. All the village knew her basket and I almost feared to look, for I was afraid she would come to Miss Patricia's and I was too much.

I knew Dawson. She was always kind, and Sally Trueblood told me once that she knew things about me that no one knew. Miss Patricia noticed how I drew back and she turned to me and said:

"Come along. What is the matter?"

Dawson was coming our way, her broad face beaming like a great red apple. Her hair was always done up like a stem. At least, one wisp always stuck straight up. I think that is why I liked to think she looked like an apple. Sally Trueblood used to go and see Dawson, and I always believed that that was one of the things that flattened her purse. Dawson was now beside us and her hands were red with cold, folded over what should have been her waist. You see, Dawson lopped over. Her shawl was wide open and her head was wrapped in a comforter. I remember that her breath made a great white cloud about her face, and she called, while her lips spread and her little sharp teeth shone, "Mornin'!" Then the smile fled and Dawson drew a long face and came up almost to Miss Patricia and she pointed to the village, then to the sky, and rolled her eyes and said:

" Them as is lowly, Miss Patricia, should never drink the ale of their betters. The Lord is just."

" Who said He wasn't ? " said Miss Patricia.

" Yessum," went on Dawson, as though Miss Patricia had not spoken. " As I was tellin' Hobbs Dawson this very mornin', the Lord is just and the lowly is lowly. God taketh in the sinners and the sinners take in God."

Miss Patricia's lips were about to smile. I saw it.

" Well, Dawson," she said, " is that all ? "

" Yessum," said Dawson. " The Lord is just. Them that has fergit and them that fergit has. But them villagers they don't understand. I says to Hobbs, says I, the Lord is just." Miss Patricia stood waiting and Dawson leaned closer. " Hobbs is took worse," said she. " It's his liver."

" Yes ? " said Miss Patricia, in a sympathetic voice.

" He's full up o' bile," said Dawson. " I tells him so this mornin', Miss Patricia. Good-mornin' ! We as is humble should keep so. The Lord is just. Dawson brings 'em trash and there's them as takes it in. The Lord is just."

Miss Patricia stood very straight and I whispered :

" She won't go to your house, will she, Miss Patricia ? "

" No, thank God ! " said Miss Patricia. " That old raven has croaked at every birth and death since I can recall, but Dawson is Dawson," she added and smiled.

Miss Patricia stood watching her go, waddling through the snow, the basket swinging upon her round hip, and Miss Patricia said softly, as though to herself :

" Now I suppose she will visit the Sniflys. ' I met her and she was broke—almost failin' broke.' My dear," she said to me, " don't forget how to just play, for when you forget it you can never learn again."

I squeezed her hand and I remember that I asked what Dawson meant by " the Lord is just." She always put that after everything she said, even the finishing of a herb brew, or of a loaf. Every task was finished with that saying. Miss Patricia had answered me in these words :

" I do not know, and I am quite sure she does not know either. Dawson is Dawson, just like a cow is a cow. After all, her hands make up what her tongue lacks, and at some times her tongue makes up what her hands lack, so an even measure is Dawson's."

After this meeting we had gone to the chapel yard and woven the wreaths and visited with them that lay beneath the mound, whose bright smiles were not chilled, but lived within us. And I found that Sally Trueblood had left me the smile, even though I could not find her there. I told Miss Patricia about the mound and I said :

" Miss Patricia, I am glad, for, you see, the pit is not her and the black box is not her. They did not keep her there. I saw her fly away on two golden wings that morning, and she waved to me as she went, and turned, and I saw her beckon. I know she is playing still."

We returned about the middle of the afternoon. It grew dark early and an unusual thing happened. The post boy found our door with a packet sealed in red. Miss Patricia was very much excited and lighted two candles. I did not ask about the packet, but went about the tending in the kitchen and made ready the loaf and hot water. When we had seated that we sup and I had waited for Miss Patricia to speak, she suddenly looked at me and said :

" Well, we need not eat the house."

" Why ? " I cried. " Oh, I am glad ! You see, dearest God did it."

" Yes," said Miss Patricia, " I think He did."

" Why ? " I asked again.

" Never mind," said she. " We shall have to be very careful, but the house is ours."

CHAPTER XV

THAT was settled, I knew, and I remember that we spent our usual evening. Then I remember many, many just alike. The cold wore to warm and still we were alone. They did not seek us and we kept just to ourselves. And the chapel yard was our chapel. I learned to be very swift with my needle. I loved it, for I had always seen her sewing. I learned to be even more silent. I found out from the spilling tongues that Sally Trueblood was called " the brat's mother." I had never called her this. She taught me to say " Sally Trueblood," and I loved it. I loved her lips when she said it. I learned that the Willoughbys were high stock ; that their sire had been a wrathful one ; that their mother was a frail, dainty creature,

who shrunk beneath the wrath of the sire until she could not bear it and had given up. Marcella, they had called her. I heard of the mansion. It was called Grisley Hall by the villagers and was " bansheed."

I see myself grow taller. My pinafores came up and my legs lengthened beneath them. Still I wore them, and my wrists got longer beneath the sleeves' cuffs. I read to Miss Patricia now out of the Word of God, aloud, and I forgot to question, becoming dull as to what would happen and why, living the strange days like a little stranger. Rudy was my champion through it all. Then *he* became strange. I do not know why, but my legs got longer before him and my ears would burn. I awoke to new things. Little me was gone. Her games, like the worn Grey Eagle days, were back in the quiet land.

I knew now how long a loaf should bake ; how a stitch should lay ; how a bed should be smoothed, and all of such things, but I forgot to look up the chimney to run away in fancy with the steaming smoke from the kettle and to wonder why it climbed the black pit to see the sky.

Miss Patricia was still Miss Patricia to me, ever kind, never explaining, never entirely melting, but tantalizingly sweet, then grim. She grew frail, her hands thin, her cheeks sunk deep, and I saw that she was whiter, and her moles—they were dear things now ! I loved them. They were part of her. Just like thorns they were and her heart was a bloom. All of this I recall and also that within me came a new fear. What should Miss Patricia leave me ! It was then that I was no longer the tall slim child, but a youthed woman, with much I had learned that made new thorns upon which to tear my heart against what I had learned before.

The days sped not upon the bright hours that I had known, for the thing that I learned made the heart heavy and thereby the feet laggard. I shall tell here a thing that came upon me that made the days more fearful. Miss Patricia seemed to fade before me. She grew less brisk about the house, leaving to my hands the tending of the bird, the turning of the glass and the laying of the woollen cover that had always been her pride. It was no new thing to find her asleep, perhaps beside the fire, or, in the summer tide, in some shadow afar from the window's ope, where she had always been in the habit of sitting.

Her eyes, too, grew dimmer and she seemed to contain something which ate deep within her. I found her biting her lips, and her thin hands upon her lap twitching or pinching the cloth of her skirt. When I would come upon her so, she would start and seem to bring herself back from some far place where I had not been.

During this time we had no word of Mr. Reuben. I had spoken to Miss Patricia of this thing often and she would simply say with finality, "Reuben is detained." Ever we waited. Each evening his wrapper was brought forth, the bottle of port set upon the table and his mulling cup beside it. Miss Patricia did not mull her port, nor did she sit beside the fire, as she had always done when Mr. Reuben was there. Rather would she draw her chair back to the shadow when the fire was lighted, or sit in the gloom if it was summer time. Even the spring did not tempt her.

It had been a long winter, I recall, following a time that seems to me but empty days of tending, baking, bringing up wood, sewing, and forgetting, with no thing to fill up the emptiness. The spring came late and the chill clung even after the green had come. Miss Patricia seemed more frail than ever before and I was overcome one morning when I found her upon her bed and not arisen with the first day's break, lying very pale and motionless. When I had knocked in fright she had bidden me enter and I had done so. I knew her far too well to exclaim when I beheld her so. I stood waiting. She lay very quiet and coughed. After I had stood for some time, she reached forth one of her thin hands and bade me come beside her.

"It is nothing. You understand? It is nothing."

"Yes, Miss Patricia," I answered. "I see."

"Very well," said Miss Patricia.

"Will you arise?" I asked.

"No," said Miss Patricia.

Then she lay quiet and did not offer more conversation. I sat beside her on the bed.

"Open the shutter," she commanded.

I arose and went to the shutter and opened it, and the misty room was flooded with a white sunlight and a gust of cold air entered.

"Is it too cool?" I asked.

"No," said Miss Patricia. "Now that I think of it, I shall arise."

"Very well," I said. "Shall I bring your dressing gown?"

"Yes," said Miss Patricia.

I went to the press and brought forth the gown, which I laid upon the foot of the poster and went to the side of Miss Patricia. She made to arise and I saw she was far too much spent. She looked keenly up to my eyes and I pretended I did not notice her efforts.

"Wait," she said, "I shall be but a moment. I think it is —well, perhaps it is age."

"No," I cried. "Never, Miss Patricia!"

"Yes," she said. "You see, age is not youth when it comes to carrying a pack."

"Yes," I answered, "I know, but it could never be age."

"I think," went on Miss Patricia, not noticing my remark, "I think Reuben will come shortly. Do you not?"

I stopped before her, fearing to answer. She had never asked me one thing of Reuben, nor had she one time intimated that she thought that I might be interested in his going.

"Well!" she snapped.

"Yes, yes," I answered hastily. "Oh, yes, I think he will."

"That is a lie," said Miss Patricia.

"Yes," I answered.

"Well! It is well you can tell the truth," went on Miss Patricia. "I like you for that thing."

"Yes," I put in.

Then Miss Patricia lay very still, seeming to forget me, and I saw that she was summoning all the strength she had. She arose upon one elbow and went very white. She looked pitifully to me and her lips moved. I caught the words, very tremorously spoken amid her struggle to sit:

"I cannot! I do not understand! Hope, help me!"

Suddenly my blood froze. I saw that she could not move her limbs.

"Miss Patricia!" I gasped.

"Never mind," she said softly. "I think they are just—" she bit her lips—"tired. There is baking to-day—I—I—I——" then she sunk.

I stood before the thing that had been Miss Patricia—frail, withered thing; not the Miss Patricia whose words

cut and who carried herself proud before the village, even in their wrath upon her. And I sunk upon my knees, sinking my head upon the great poster and laying my hands upon her pitiful hands. And I looked at her sweet face. It *was* sweet. The thin lips seemed to have a halo about them, hanging apart from them, yet theirs—a new light, something that spoke softly and seemed young. The eyes were closed and there was a regalness about the head, as though it had struggled to keep upright.

It was upon me now. I knew for days she had struggled for me, for me, for me! And I laid my cheek to hers and wept, and I said:

"Oh, my sweet, my sweet, I never knew! Oh, I know now! I know! Your very armour is fallen away. Oh, and I thought that you did not understand! Oh, awake, awake, Miss Patricia! Let me tell you! Take me in, away deep in your heart! Oh, Miss Patricia!"

I was weeping now and stroking her cool brow frantically.

"Awake! I want to tell you! Oh, how I do want to tell you how I love you! I want to know what sealed your lips! Tell me! Tell me! Tell me!"

She slowly opened her eyes and then shut them.

"Are you coming back to me?" I whispered. "Oh, please!"

She patted my hand weakly and I said:

"Now we shall begin to know each other, Miss Patricia. I thought that She had forsaken me, but I know now She is with me. I know that I can know you better by remembering her, and in forgetting her I have forgotten to know you."

She did not answer and seemed to sink again, and I realized it was not a time for words, but that I should have to seek the village and some hand to aid. Where should I turn? Wildly I thought of the villagers and each one came to my mind with some taunt, some look, some slight, some vile remark, and my flesh crept. Wilder thoughts came to me. I remembered that Miss Patricia said we should have to be very careful. And I wondered where she had got the slender remittance that had kept us in the little house, and who had relieved her. Oft came the fear of having—here I simply had to smile—"to eat the house," but the thought of this and the smile seemed to set my tears aflow.

I hastened to the inner room and brought forth a damp cloth that I might bathe Miss Patricia's face, which had gone so white. And when I had bathed her for some time, she moved slowly and still was too weak to speak. I was almost mad. I watched the roadway for some passerby, but no one came. I walked from the bed to the sitting room shutter scores of times.

I remember now how my heart seemed to swell until it overfilled my panting bosom; how the moments dragged; how the hours seemed like years of drouth and storm, filled with wild dreams that even now seem to grin at me through the misty years that have passed since that time. It was now upon me, the dreaded day, for Miss Patricia had left me, left me alone. Miss Patricia, who lay so white upon the poster in the musty room, so like her old self, was a new thing—a something that would creep into my heart upon a new path, a babe. I knew it. Even now my hand seemed to itch to comfort her, and I knew that my new days would be filled up of the tending, not to the household and the linens, but Miss Patricia. How these things swept through my head as I watched the roadways, seeing no comer and wondering how I would go to the village and to the villagers asking some of them to succour her. I could have done this had I been asking aid for myself, but Miss Patricia! Never! I could not see her head bend. Something in the frail body that lay there before me seemed to tell me that I must hold the day. How was I to do this thing?

The morning wore until the midday came. Still I was afraid to leave Miss Patricia; even to leave the room longer than to go to the shutters and look to the roadway, or to the village in the hope that I might see some one, and I prayed that this one would be somebody strange. Then the long afternoon came and the sun hid and lent itself to the dulling of the pain that seemed like a keen-edged blade in my heart. I settled down to be just a miserable young thing whose throat ached; who had but one thing that hurt sorer and that thing her heart.

I had put my bonnet upon my head and resolved time after time that I *would* go. Then I would turn and look at Miss Patricia, and though she lay with her eyes closed I knew that I must not, for had not her lips locked to the village? Then

I must not bring them to her when she was low. It was now dark, when she seemed to regain her strength so that she might speak with me without the panting. She had beckoned me and I had been weeping beside the fire, which I kindled, as the night's coming brought a cool that crept. Miss Patricia had said when I went to her :

" Light a candle and come here."

" No, Miss Patricia," I answered. " You must be very quiet. I shall light the candle in the sitting room."

" You shall light the candle and come here ? "

" Yes," I answered, and dutifully went that I do her bidding.

When I returned with the lighted candle she looked keenly to my eyes and I saw that she was searching me to know what we should do.

" Have you ? " she asked.

" No," I answered.

" Then we have been alone through this time ? " she whispered.

" Yes," I answered.

" You are very brave," she added, and lay back upon her pillow, breathing very hard.

" What would you have me do ? " I asked.

She turned slowly toward me and said :

" Go to Vicar Gifford and tell him."

" Yes," I nodded and said it aloud.

" Go to Vicar Gifford and tell him," she repeated.

I went and brought forth my bonnet, which I had cast upon the table. Then I went to her side and stood.

" Do you think I should leave ? " I asked.

" Yes. It is nothing." Then I went.

I remember that I passed through the little hallway that I have told you of, the one that had smelled of mutton the first evening. I remembered that night, and as I went out the outer door I seemed to see Mr. Reuben's bent form before me and my small self following him, pattering, pattering. The whole outer evening seemed filled up of that night. I went past the inn, and I remembered that the fowls had screeched and that I had stood in the archway. Then I remembered what I had said to her. The very words came back, and I could see myself, in the reflected light from the inn's lanterns, bending over her. I saw her white face and the dark shadows

that lay beneath her eyes, and I even smelled the sweet scent from her hair. Then the words came, " Sally Trueblood, I am your brat."

Then there seemed to set up a carol and I heard but one word sung in everything, sweetly, sorrowfully, wickedly, vengefully, mercilessly, and this word was " brat." I seemed to carry it through all my happy hours. I had heard it in every cadence since I could remember. I was not listening to the evening of the village, even though there seemed to be overmuch life there, for the way had shown very lighted when I had looked that way before I sought it. I had forgotten the village. I had forgotten everything in the memory of that night. I was filled up of it, and suddenly I heard my own voice and knew that my lips were moving and the words I heard were, " Which is the way ? "

Then I was brought up, for I had walked full against some one who did not show clearly in the darkness of this little path that led up by the side of Snifly's house to the Vicar's. I was aghast and stood shrinking before one very tall, who had great shoulders. I could see this against the grey of the over-sky. The one bowed very low from the waist and spoke in a gentle voice, saying :

" This is a misfortune."

I stood staring and did not answer. The stranger bowed once more and laughed, saying :

" I beg your pardon. I should say it is good fortune."

I was filled with horror, for I did not know this man. I did not look twice, but turned and sped very fast down the path till I was panting with the run, until I got to the Vicar Giffords'. There I stood before the gate that had stuck the morning that I had gone to tell them that Sally Trueblood slept. I was frightened at the stranger, and more at the task I had come upon. Should I face Mrs. Gifford who had spoken against her ? My heart was thumping loud. Then something queer happened. I remembered the broad shoulders of the stranger. I did not stand before the gate-way long, but I did tarry just a little. Then I resolutely opened it and went down the same path that had led me to my new day. For when I had gone down that path with the words of Sally Trueblood, telling them that she had slept, I had begun my new day.

I remembered all of this as I walked down the gravel way. I even recalled the little bird that had been such a frightful thing to me. I recalled how it had let down its little white curtains before my eyes, and, strange as it may seem, still the pair of broad shoulders came creeping into this eve-dream of the past. My heart made a leap. How strange that he should say that I was good fortune. I laughed to myself and I said, almost aloud, " Oh, stranger, you surely have never met good fortune, or you would know her face ! " I think that those shoulders did more to strengthen me than anything that might have happened—or was it the words? Good fortune ! They had such a new sound. I scarcely knew when I had come to the door of Vicar Gifford's house. I found it blandly flat and piously closed. I stood before it, and it was surely something I could not account for, but my heart was not thumping. I knocked and I felt my neck arch. There was a faint light within and I could hear Mrs. Gifford singing to Nebuchadnezzar, who still, though his legs lay upon the floor, was a doughy child and at the age of bawling and mother-skirting. There sounded the step of Mrs. Gifford when I had knocked and the door opened. I could see the same old prints upon the wall, and Nebuchadnezzar hanging over some page and mumbling aloud syllables, and I knew he was accomplishing learning. The light shone upon me and I could see Mrs. Gifford's face dimly. She stood peering close that she might be sure who I was, then she drew up piously and said :

" What misfortune brings you ? "

I laughed. Think of it ! I laughed, and I said, " Misfortune brings me to your door, yet strangers meet me and call me good fortune."

She gasped and I think she thought I was flighty.

" You need not speak, Mrs. Gifford. I understand. I would speak with the Vicar."

She shrugged and turned toward the Vicar's study door, pointing me the way. She then turned to Nebuchadnezzar and sent him from the room, believing, no doubt, that I would contaminate him. Somehow this did not sting me. Mrs. Gifford did not follow me to the Vicar's study and I entered it to find the Vicar quilling a page. He turned, and his thin lips spread in a smile. He was quite white now and his hands

were so thin, and they shook. I went to the desk's side and sat beside him, upon the very chair I had occupied on the morning of Miss Patricia's visit. The Vicar turned and smiled once more.

" What is it ? " he asked.

" I have come from Miss Patricia," I said. " She is ill. I do not know where to go. I could not ask Mrs. Gifford and she lends her hands even to the lowliest, but that is different. They are not—" I bit my lip—" like me. And not like Miss Patricia, who has taken me in. I understand, dear Vicar, I understand. Yet, understanding, wait for understanding."

The Vicar's eyes looked so very far away and he said, slowly :

" You say you understand ? My dear, I lost my understanding one Mayin'."

I started and my jaw hung open.

" Then you know, Vicar, you know ? You know the mansion ; you know the thing that lashes them ; that comes even to succour me ? Oh, is it right ? Is it right that you, who have a nearness to Dearest God, should keep the truth and leave me but the waiting for the understanding ? "

I had fallen childishly back to speaking of the God in the words of Sally Trueblood. I was her little child before the teacher, and his words blinded me. I forgot everything. I was before one who might tell me. I flung myself upon my knees before him and cried out :

" Oh, Vicar Gifford, as you once lifted me up to the height of the Word, lift me up now ! You have suffered, too. Why ? "

The Vicar sat very still and fingering his great black cross. Then he lifted it up toward me and he raised his eyes and his voice was endearing, and he said :

" One died upon this to keep the secret of God, and to leave its holy halo to us. I cannot betray His love."

" What has all of this to do with some awful thing that has lain like a shadow upon us all ? "

" Nothing," said the Vicar, " except that I may sup new strength by thinking these thoughts."

" Who was Sally Trueblood ? " I cried suddenly

" She was not Sally Trueblood."

" Then who ? " I cried.

Then the Vicar leaned close and said :

" We have kept this thing. Oh, will you leave your youth to break the rusted locks ? Wait ! Wait ! We should not seek the morning, but wait it."

I arose. Then I was still to be kept waiting. It was a game. I left the matter there, feeling that it would be sinful to lift the curtain from that May. I seemed to see it like a youthful maid, weeping, and hiding its face. Then I remembered that I had let self come before one who needed my succour and I said :

" Vicar Gifford, I am sorry ; but what shall I do ? We shall have to have aid."

The Vicar sat long with his head upon his hand, looking at the pages before him. Then he turned slowly and said :

" Go back to Miss Patricia and when the morning comes I shall make some provision. Wait again."

" Can you not come with me back to her ? "

He arose and slowly made ready to accompany me. When we passed through the sitting room of the Giffords' they were gone. It was quite empty and the candle burned dimly. We left together, and it was a very quiet journey to the little house where Miss Patricia lay. I shall never know, perhaps, what she said to the Vicar, for she asked that they be left alone. And after he had gone she called to me and I sat beside her through the late hours into the early ones. I remember that a little spider let itself slowly down from the ceil, then climbed swiftly up again the strand to let itself down once more. I watched this scores of times and all through the time I tried to unravel my tangled days ; but like the spider's weaving I let myself down but to travel back, and never anchored.

I think I must have been nodding and perhaps lending my hand to sleep when I heard a timid knock. It was very early morning, faint grey. The candle had burned quite low and smoked. Miss Patricia was lying peaceful, but ghastly white. I arose, rubbed my eyes and shook myself that I might wake, when I realized it was no hour for a visitor, the last hour of real night and the first hour of new morning. I was a little frightened, but I went to the outer door and asked :

" Who is there ? "

There was no answer, and I slowly slipped the bolt and looked out. The faint light did not make clear my visitor, but I opened a little wider the door and the candle glow showed Sephira Gifford. She did not speak, but she smiled, smiled a smile of understanding. I threw up my arms and ran to her. She gathered me in and hugged me close, laying her cheek upon mine and murmuring sweets to my ear.

" How could you ? " I said. " How could you ? You know they——"

" Never mind," she said. " I heard you calling."

" I never called," I answered her.

" Oh, yes, you did," she said. " I couldn't sleep for it."

Then I understood, and I just hugged her close and I said :

" I knew you a long time ago. I have that smile of yours right here," and I touched my heart.

" I know it," she said, " but listen——" She stopped.

" Call me Hope," I said.

" Listen, Hope. What may I do ? I heard you to-night and I know, oh, I know ? You see I am one of those that they do not understand, too."

She was in the sitting room now and I was busily straightening up, picking up the clothing that had been cast about when I had returned, and making a new light. Sephira turned to me and held out her arms and she said :

" Come here, sister mine."

I went to her arms and she kissed me and went on :

" Go and sleep and forget. I shall sit here awake and your trust shall be mine."

I kissed her in return and I seemed to collapse. Suddenly I went weak and I sat down and sobbed wildly. Sephira brought me a fresh sup and smoothed my brow, touching me with a touch I had almost forgotten. Then she firmly told me to be abed. And I went, to sink into a deep sleep with no dreaming. I was awakened in the morning by loving arms and a damp kiss upon my own lips. I was drowsy drunk and I remember coming back to the day, saying :

" Sally—oh, it's you, not S—— ! "

" How is Lady Lilyfinger ? " she whispered, and kissed me.

I threw my arms about her and said :

" Then you, too, have a treasure box of hers ? "

" Yes, yes," she said, " and what it contains has made my days of misunderstanding understandable."

Then she drew a long face and looked ridiculously like Miss Snifly and said :

" The wage of sin is heavy."

My laughter burst forth. I could not help it. Then I whispered :

" How is she ? "

" Sleeping," she said. " And I think she is upon the mend."

I shook my head and bit my lip and began to weep.

" She is all I have," I said.

Sephira smoothed my locks and brought my clothing that I should robe.

" Come," she said. " I seem to remember something some one told me about meeting the crawling day with running legs."

I looked to her and smiled, for I knew that that some one had been Sally Trueblood. She smiled and nodded. She went before me, when I had clothed, to the sitting room. The table was spread with some late blossoms, lying at the plates. They were pink larkspurs, the love fairies, I remembered.

" Where are the king-ones ? " I asked.

" Well," said Sephira, " I do not think they abide in this village, but I have heard that they did venture in sometimes. We shall wait. Eh, Hope ? "

And I recall that suddenly I remembered that pair of great shoulders. The voice of Miss Patricia, calling, " Hope ! Hope ! " disturbed my thoughts and I sped to her side. I read in her eyes a look of surrender, brave surrender, happy surrender, peaceful surrender, with the same gleam of regal ness lighting it up. She smiled wanly and reached up he hand, and I went to her and knelt beside the bed. Miss Patricia looked beyond me and I saw that her eyes had found Sephira, who watched from the sitting room.

" Who is this ? " she asked.

Sephira Gifford," I answered. " She came to me last night when I was tired, and oh, Miss Patricia ! so very sorrowful."

Miss Patricia smiled once more and said:

"I am glad, my dear. Miss Patricia is Miss Patricia, isn't she? She knows it, but—well, my dear, she cannot help it. Go bring me Willie Pimm Passwater's china dog."

The stinging tears filled in upon me. I stumbled upon my way to the what-all and took the china dog from its accustomed shelf, and I kissed it and took it to her. She reached her thin hands for it and took it tenderly.

"He loved it," she said and patted it. "That will do; just leave me."

Oh, what dreams did you bring forth, you little china dog? Out from your eyes of paint did she read the old days when her thin hands lay upon you? Did you feel their seeking, and did they fade and become two rosy ones, sprinkled o'er of dimples? Oh, you little china dog, I know now where you are. I may even touch you, but I am fearful; for I would write these lines and my eyes would dim. I will not look upon you, though I love you. I remember, how I found her later, sleeping, with you folded to her breast and a true mother-smile upon her faded lips. This was when we had made ready her breakfast and went together to her bedside. Sephira looked to me and I looked to Sephira.

"She is sleeping," I said. And Sephira had answered, "And dreaming."

We both kissed her and she had waked to be very fretful, seeming to believe that Reuben was coming, and she had bidden me repeatedly to go to the window.

It had been a slow thing to bring her back to quite herself, except that she never, never would stand again. And oh, you, my sister Sephira, who stood by me through these troublous times! My angel of brightness, a messenger straight from Dearest God! And you, oh, Sally Trueblood, you who have faded and seem more a child to me than ever—one who was my stronghold! I know now. You are Youth, and knowing that helps the understanding. I see you now, like some morning of the Mayin', wrapped in mist, with the fretting smile of youth, stifled!

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN Miss Patricia had come to herself and once more our little household might go on upon its regular path, then Sephira had gone back to the Vicarage, to be more misunderstood and frowned upon by the village. I saw her shrink before the same lash and—oh, I would that I did not have to record this, but I saw that look in her eyes.

Then followed days alike, save for the elements. I found more to do. My days were very busy, for all that was done was for my hands. I do not recall that youth stirred in me. I seemed like some waiting shadow, waiting to cloud some beauteous May.

I grew to hate myself for this and it hurt me sore, for in this new feeling I felt that I was betraying Sally Trueblood, who loved me. I sought the chapel yard and often spoke with the sexton, who was now doddering and whose mind was like a field that lies beneath the clouds. I would go when the day was done and often sat long, when it was warm, beneath the trees, courting from out the dead world living comfort.

It was upon such an evening that I had stayed longer than was my wont; that the late moon had toppled up, showing her face golden through the trees' tops, and the stones had seemed living things and the paths bright and shadeful-tempting. I had been sitting beside the stone of Felicia Trueblood and I had laid my cheek to it and was clasping my knees and looking deep to the moon, when I was aware of another's presence. A little chill of fear crept over me and I turned my head cautiously, glancing up into a smiling face bending over me, and I saw that the shoulders were broad.

"Again, good fortune," he said.

I did not answer but arose and faced him. There was the climbing moon to help me see, and what I beheld was a gentleman in the cloth of gentlemen, with such a smile as sets you smiling. I am afraid I smiled.

"This is a strange visiting place for good fortune," he said.

"You do not know me. I am Miss Fortune. Yes, Miss

Fortune, almost all Miss Fortune. Do you know, it is strange that my feet are mates ? "

He threw back his head and laughed heartily and then shook it and said :

"No! No! You are mistaken. Miss Fortune never had—I crave your pardon, lady—such a face."

I turned from him and he stepped toward me.

" What brings you here," he asked, " if I may be so bold ? I have followed you eve after eve."

I pointed to the little mound. That was all earth had to show of her. And he looked upon the shadowed spot.

" Who ? " he asked.

I hesitated and replied :

" The one who bore me."

He turned and pointed to the gateway and said slowly :

" This gate leads to the land of heavy hearts, does it not ? "

" Yes," I answered, " yet it is the opening unto the land of comfort." And I lay my hand upon the stone of Felicia Trueblood.

What new thing was upon me ? Never did the chapel yard, wrapped in the golden moonlight, seem so beauteous. New scents filled the air. A soft breath clung every leaf and they quivered. I felt it. Within me was a fretting of expectancy. The gentleman watched me and I saw, when I turned to him, that he, too, had laid his hand upon the stone of Felicia Trueblood.

" What may I call you ? " he asked.

" Hope," I answered.

" No," he said, and his voice quivered like some lute string's stirring. " Hope is winged."

" Hope is winged ! " I repeated this slowly and I remember looking up to the climbing moon and seeing that it hung o'er the mound of Sally Trueblood, beaming, beaming silver-gold, and seeming smiling. Again I repeated the phrase, " Hope is winged," and I recall that I sighed deeply. Then I seemed stiffocated with the sweet of the evening, for the sweetness of the damp began to creep up from the earth where the green stood heavily wetted with the coming dews.

" Ah," I said, " Hope is winged, but I fear that she oft

does not fly upon her wings spread wide, but that she beats her way upon a broken wing."

He leaned toward me in the bright light and I saw that his face was lighted up with a wondrous light.

"What thing has left bitters upon sweet lips?" he asked.

I held up my hand in sign that he should not ask me this thing. Then I remember that it came upon me, the thing that had never fallen before. Within came the jeering of the village tongues, their taunts, and the one word that made of me a thing, not a woman, free and pure, but a thing, the wreck of some tempest-tossed love. Oh, the frightfulness of the blow! I stood beneath this lash quivering. Then the folly of my fears fell over the wounds. What was I that I should ever believe that such a one, a gentleman of the cloth, should even bend to me? The old feeling of the empty days came back. I stood like a dumb thing and turned slowly, making my way down the path, neither turning that I might look at him who stood looking upon my going.

Then he called, and the word was not an unknown one, but "Hope." I remember that I turned then and that I walked slowly back to where he stood and I said:

"You do not know me. I am but a shadow of one of these," and I touched one of the stones. "She lies there." I pointed then to the mound of Sally Trueblood. "She lies there," I repeated, "and I am but a shadow that remains. Forget me. To-morrow's sun will make me no more for you."

Then, then—oh, this hand shakes that I record this, but he leaned toward me and took my hands in his and he said nothing, yet I saw the bared heart of love in his moonlit eyes. And the new fear came again. I knew that fire should never have been kindled, and I fled wildly. I fled, catching my skirts upon the briars, and turning not. He followed, but I sped before him, sinking into the first shadows and even now I hear the throbbing of my heart as I watched him pass, within me the knowledge that he was seeking me. I waited long, listening to his footfalls crushing the earth until they had faded, and then I went upon my way to the little spot that was now home.

CHAPTER XVII

THIS was upon a night that is far, far away from this day, that I recall these things. Ah, how loth I am to bare it. What then was so sweet a sup is now—oh, my dears, I shall tarry this!

I came at last to the little gate that hung so primly, and I saw the candle that flickered through the shutters. I knew that Miss Patricia would be sleeping, perhaps with the Word open upon her knee and her finger pressed to the last sweet words she had read.

I took a new heart into the little hall and the sitting room that had known the tragic days of my early youth. Even though I smarted sore from the freshness of the feeling that had come upon me, the youth-wine would burn, and I found myself snuffing the candle and humming. I did not see the little room so dimly lighted, but the chapel yard, golden bathed, and the gleaming white stones, and I smelled the scent of the herbs and grasses and felt a new leaping of my heart as I read love's eyes.

Miss Patricia *was* sleeping. She was so frail, yet so regal, and I read her face as I stood beside her chair and laid my hand upon the arm. The candlelight softened the lips that would have shown firmly, even grimly, pressed. There was a new smile. I know this smile now, though I did not then. It is the greet-smile of the New Morrow. I recall that as I stood there so long ago I was wrapped in wonder at this. I did not know Miss Patricia in the first days of this new day's coming. So in my youth I bent and kissed her, little knowing that I too had bended my head beneath the sun of her new morning; for her lips spread in a gentle smile, and even in my youthfulness I saw.

She was loth to waken now, seeming to find behind sealed eyes new lands. I remember that she raised her hands and that they shook. And I saw that she had tucked the china dog of Willie Pimm Passwater within her frock folds. I kissed her hands and did not look at the little dog.

"Where have you been?" she said.

"To the chapel yard," I answered, "to see Her."

She did not answer, but I saw that her eyes were misty and I knelt beside her, as was my custom, and I said:

"She let my head rest upon her bosom when the night came."

"How?" she whispered.

"Like this," I answered, and rested my head upon the shrunken bosom of Miss Patricia, and I heard her heart singing. And I knew it sang, "I love you! I love you!" Then I "weighted her lids" for sleeping and made to roll the chair to her room that I might make her ready for slumber. We did not speak more. I unrobed her and rerobed her in her sleeping garment, and I lighted a scented candle upon the press and turned, when I had her quite ready for dreams, to say good night. She held her thin arms up and I went into their circle. She kissed me and said softly:

"I think Reuben is coming."

I nodded. Then she held forth the china dog and said tremorously:

"You take it to-night."

It was a fortnight later that Miss Patricia was again laid low. I was forced to seek the village to buy wood and cloth. It was upon one of these mornings when the sky flames in red and the purple of dawn clings the rims of the hill crests; when lowering clouds hang the west way and show that storm will sweep. I had arisen early and made the little house right and was upon my way into the village.

Though my days were now full of Miss Patricia and the shadow that seemed to be falling slow upon me, still a greater gloom seemed to settle. My nights were filled with fear, the new fear; for since that night when I had walked full upon the stranger he had been like some of the things that had been denied me. The chapel yard held the brightness that I longed for, but there was the awful shadow of fear that he should know, not of me, but of *her*.

Oh, my dear, my dear, I would keep you shut there in the eaves! I would keep you away from their eyes! I would hide the thing that you kept hidden, even beneath the twilight that life wrote beneath your eyes! How might one so gentle, so beautiful, so all-forgiving, so patient, so child-like, leave such a shadow?

This swept my day-dreaming as I went upon the village

path where I would meet them upon my way who would frown, and this frown was born of this shadow. I caught myself choking a sob and I recall that my womanhood struggled with this great question. Within me I knew that Sally Trueblood was a thing, if their tongues spoke true, that I should shun in others. Yet, even as this bitter thought welled up within me, I seemed to see little me fleeing into her outstretched arms and kissing her smiling lips and reading in her eyes not sin, but sorrow.

Oh, Sorrow, I know now that you are the wine of the cup of sin! But why? Why? Why? Why? A sinking sickness swept me. Then I was the wine! And my weeping must finish the filling of the cup. This is not His will, but the wage earth cries out for. Oh, I know now! I know now that the spectre of sin points his pester-finger at life and its shadow is a living thing.

I was coming upon the inn's path. The sunlight played upon the old roof where I had dwelt with her. Oh, those days, so dear, so few! I see her little form, swaying in some dance, some mimic folly, for my childish glee. I see her sweet lips laugh thousands of ripples, spilling countless smiles —and above them two sorrow-heavy eyes. I see the lonely eyes when we watched happiness pass us by, scarcely nodding. Then this was a life of sin! This then was sin! If this be true, then, sin, I love thee!

Then the fear came, for to my heart came the joy of the stranger's smile, and the old days like a cloud o'erhanging. Within me my heart froze in bitterness. I wondered why I had been called to live those days. Had I sought that I might come to such a path? Hate bit me, and then—oh, the agony!—I saw her, frail, smiling, and heard her say, "Are you playing?" And I answered aloud:

"Sally Trueblood, if the Why was great enough that you bore it, then willingly do I."

I went past the inn, not raising my eyes; for Peter Goff stood without with some young swains who sat or stood about the inn's doorway, and I heard them mumbling and laughing softly as I passed. I sought Ole Dodson's, for Ole had proven a friend. I might go to him and he would seek that which I would purchase, for me. I had reached the shop when I came upon Rudy Strong, a tall man-lad now,

eye-bashed and foot-gawked. He doffed his cap and twirled it upon his first finger, blushing quite scarlet, and I saw that he would speak.

"Good morning, Rudy," I said.

"Mornin,' " he answered, as was his wont.

Then he leaned toward me and said very low:

"Hope, when you have finished, may I walk with you?"

"Yes," I answered.

"To the mead?" he asked.

"No," I said. "Miss Patricia is ill and I must return quickly."

Rudy nodded and I went within the shop of Ole Dodson and made my purchases through his kindness. When I had finished, I rejoined Rudy, who took my parcels and a basket that I bore and went with me down the path toward home once more. We had started well upon the way and Rudy seemed loth to begin conversation. Suddenly he said:

"Do you know, Hope, that there is overmuch whispering among the villagers?"

"Yes?" I said.

"Yes," he repeated, "I thought I had best tell you."

"Thank you," I answered.

"You understand?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"Then you will stop going to the chapel yard?" he asked.

"No," I replied.

"But you must, Hope. There is something I must tell you."

"No, Rudy," I said, "you cannot. You might not say it to a girl. I understand, but since I live alone and they leave me alone, why need they care?"

"Who is he?" Rudy asked, as though I would understand.

"Who?" I asked innocently.

"You know, Hope, who I mean. The one who meets you in the chapel yard."

I remember that I could scarcely keep from smiling when I answered:

"Then you, too, visit the chapel yard, Rudy?"

"No," Rudy answered, "I do not, but the village knows."

"I am very glad," I said.

"Who is he?" Rudy asked again.

"Rudy," I said, "I am about to tell you something that you will not believe, but it is true."

"What?" he asked.

"I do not know who he is," I answered.

Rudy gasped and turned toward me.

"Hope," he said, "what do you mean? You meet a man in the chapel yard, evening after evening, and yet you calmly state that you do not know who he is!"

"That is true," I answered.

"Why did you not ask him?" he asked.

I stopped and wondered why I did not. Then I knew why and I answered:

"I was afraid."

Rudy looked as though he thought I had gone mad. Then he said:

"He is——"

"Hush," I said, "I do not want to know who he is."

Here Rudy gave to my hands all he bore for me and turned from me, leaving me in the path alone, nor did he turn, and I knew what was within his heart. He too believed that I was a thing doomed. The tears blinded me. My beautiful dream vanished. It was broken like the little bird I found in the path at the vicarage. I saw it again let down its little white curtain. I walked so swiftly and the thing that had come to me had sent me in such a whirl that I was before our little gate before I knew it, and there I stopped and my heart melted. Oh, Miss Patricia, you were my haven! Here I could go and shut them away and there would be no rebuking.

I went in and found her reading the Word and stroking the china dog. I kissed her and did not speak of what had befallen me upon my visit to the village. No heart had opened to my secret; even Miss Patricia did not know him, my stranger. Sephira Gifford often came upon me in the chapel yard and we would sit, arms entwined, beneath the trees and speak the things that youth feeds upon—dreams, flower-strewn dreams, the where-paths of youth! Sephira, too had a secret. It was not mine. We read the secrets aloud, but told nothing. The secret of Sephira, I knew, was Rudy. The village now looked upon him as heir to Mr. Strong's

gold sacks. Rudy was "lawing" and the village wagged its head at his monstrous learning. I knew Sephira's secret, yet I did not speak of it, lest I might mar its sweet sacredness; for I also knew that the village looked upon Sephira as a wayward one and unfit for a pious household. And Mrs. Vicar Gifford looked upon Rudy as a lawless lad, for his friendship to me and to Miss Patricia.

The Vicar came each Sabbath, much to the displeasure of the village, to visit Miss Patricia. The Sniflys never came. Mrs. Kirby looked upon us as some contagion. Mrs. "Coffin" Gifford, I knew, had long looked to the house with a business eye, and Levinia Coffin Gifford was soft-eyed for Rudy.

I stopped here to tell of this, and I was thinking of it as I busied at the making of our mid-sup. It was a quiet meal and I had brought forth my sewing after it was finished and Miss Patricia's hands had lain idle. As I sewed, I think she nodded, and in the middle of the long afternoon she waked and seemed filled of some new strength. At the coming of the twilight I did the accustomed thing, lighted the candle, brought forth Mr. Reuben's robe, his "comfort-feet" and his mulling cup and port. Miss Patricia had me roll her chair up to the table and I sat beside her. When we had finished our eve's sup and had supped our bowls of hot water together, I remember the quietude of the little house. The empty wicker hung beside the window and I fancied I heard the bird hopping. The candles flickered and showed brighter as the darkness came.

We had read from the Word, and I had sung one of the songs that Sally Trueblood had taught me. We were sitting, I watching the candle flicker, and I think Miss Patricia was watching the flames of the low fire and nodding. I had been dreaming, too, of the chapel yard, when I suddenly looked up to see a bent figure unloosing a greatcoat before the fire. I stood up and watched, fright-stopped. The figure leaned over the fire, rubbing its hands, then reached for the dressing gown, robed in it, took up the mulling cup and the bottle of port and went to mulling. I smelled the heated wine and my lips seemed frozen. Miss Patricia sat up very straight and said:

'Stand from the fire, Reuben. Your woollens are smoking."

"Yes, yes, my dear," the bended form replied, and stood up, turning its face toward the light—shrunken, gaunt, great hollow eyes and the locks white, silvered white!

He sat down upon the settle, and stirred the port that steamed, sipped slowly, licking his lips, then turned to Miss Patricia. She sat straight, regal straight, her hands pinching her frock folds, and she said slowly:

"She slept in the guest room, Reuben."

"Yes, my dear," he answered. "Where is she?"

I stepped from the shadow and the light fell upon me. He arose slowly and his lips parted in a gasp. He let fall the mulling cup and said hoarsely, "Sarah!" Then I saw that his outstretched hands shook and that his lips worked. Then his knees seemed to give way and he sobbed out:

"I—ah, God!—I've failed!"

He staggered to the knees of Miss Patricia and laid his weary head upon them. I was filled of wonder and fearful to speak, seeming again like a shadow and wishing that I might flee. Miss Patricia flashed her eyes to me and pointed to my room.

"Reuben," she said, "what do you mean? Go and tighten the shutters."

I turned toward my room and watched him arise and go about the room to tighten the bolts, to return and stand bowed before Miss Patricia. He waited her word and I stood, hoping that I might learn what had kept him and what had sent him away. Miss Patricia touched his sleeve and said:

"You are weary, Reuben. It is time for sleep."

"Yes, my dear, yes," he answered, and held forth his hand that she should arise.

Then it was that her lips trembled and she shook her head and pointed to her limbs. Mr. Reuben started and seemed to understand. Then he flung up his arms and bowed his face in his clutched hands, sobbing.

I left them then. I do not know why, and it is my sorrow now, for when the morning came I found him lying with his face upon his clutched hands and the little ivory to his lips, dead. Shall I ever forget the awful moment? Oh, the anguish of it!

I stood before the face of Reuben Passwater's soul, and it

was like a smiling child. In death his lips smiled. A little bruise showed where the ivory had pressed, and I wondered if the face upon it did not press, even to bruising, into his heart. Wildly I sought within me for the thing to do. I feared to go to Miss Patricia and tell her. She was still sleeping. She had not spoken to me of Reuben's coming when I had unrobed her the night before. I had heard them speaking in low tones long and long. Then she had called and I ministered to her, kissed her, and left her as usual.

I recall that I walked to the sitting room and saw Mr. Reuben's greatcoat lying where he had cast it. I turned toward Miss Patricia's door and went up to the threshold. Then I saw that she was awake. I stood, my lips mute, my eyes wild, and I tried to speak; but no word would come. I swallowed and licked my lips and said, with great effort:

"He is——"

"Dead," said Miss Patricia. "I know."

I turned to her in questioning.

"He failed," she said. "Reuben Passwater failed, and he told me that night when he left——" Here she sank back again overcome.

I had known that she had not been strong enough to be up and about, though she had bidden me each morning to make her ready, and to roll her to the sitting room where she would sit with anxious eyes as though she expected something. I had known that this something was Mr. Reuben. How we had waited, each silently. She, with some knowledge that chafed her waiting, and I consumed with wonder at what mysterious part Mr. Reuben played in my life drama. And now he had come and gone and she was broken more.

I seemed dull, stupid, and fought my way through a mental fog. I knew that I must go to the Vicar. I brought out damp cloths and brought Miss Patricia back. She seemed lifeless and her lips made soundless words. I spoke softly when she waked and told her that I must go to the Vicar and would hasten. She only nodded and looked vacantly to me. I bound my head up in a comforter and cast Miss Patricia's shawl about me and made my way out and villageward.

My feet seemed to bear me on and my mind was filled with visions, and they were of Mr. Reuben's dead face and Miss

Patricia, my broken Miss Patricia. I was walking past the inn when I heard the rumble of the coach wheels and I slowed my steps that I might look upon the travellers who would descend and sup at the hand of Peter Goff. Through the open door I smelled the stew and it brought back the old days. The driver swung his long thong and it snapped over the backs of the beasts that drew the great coach. He drew them up and descended. I was watching. I saw him open the door to let the passengers come forth and vaguely I remember that I wondered who they were.

First came forth a gentleman and something familiar about his carriage made my heart start. I saw him reach out his hand to a one within the coach, and Miss Geneva Willoughby came forth. She was ill, frail as some primrose that blows beneath the young moon. She held a kerchief to her lips and coughed. The gentleman was Mr. Stephen Willoughby. He was fuller at the waistband, but still a daring tilt of his head and a swagger swing to his shoulders spoke youth. His eyes fell full upon me and lighted.

He went within with Miss Willoughby and I found myself staring stupidly at the inn's door, unable to move, and lost in the dream of that first night when they had entered my path. I was brought to myself by the fact that I felt some one draw me with the eyes and I found myself staring straight into the eyes of Mr. Stephen Willoughby and seeing something there that was never in any eyes that I had ever beheld. I felt the blood mount my temple and I was filled with confusion. His lips spread in a slow smile tainted of the same thing that was in his eyes. My lips opened in spite of myself and I said:

"Mr. Willoughby, I believe——" He started, then laughed and leaned toward me. "You," I said, "know me, Mr. Willoughby?"

"No," he answered. Then his eyes took on a fierce look and he seemed to recognize me, for his lips said aloud, "The brat of the eaves!" And taking forth his purse he weighted it in his palm and cast a sidelong glance to me and said:

"This for a kiss."

I reached forth my hand to take the purse. He laid it in my palm. Then I recall how my hands shook as I unloosed the purse latchet and poured into my palm the coins. They

were gold. I looked upon them steadily, then to him, and with all the strength within me I threw them in the face of Mr. Stephen Willoughby!

He staggered back, staring at me with a look of wickedness. I turned sick-hearted to my path and left him picking up the coins and saying things aloud that I would not listen to. The driver of the coach was laughing and beating an inn's lout upon the back, for they had seen what had transpired. I turned, vainly hoping that Miss Willoughby had seen, too, and I saw him enter the inn and went then upon my way toward the Vicar's. I would not tell the Vicar what had happened, but "the brat of the eaves" sung in my ears, and the look that had accompanied it swept me with shame.

I had walked for some way and was turning down the path past Snifly's, when I passed a group of village lads who were quoiting. As I came up to them I heard their remarks and saw their eyes sweeping me and I burned with shame. One of them came alongside me and circled my waist, whispering something that I did not hear. It was here that I gave way, cast the comforter from my head and the shawl upon the earth and turned upon them. They jeered. I took up the metal discs that had fallen to the earth when they had sought me and I began to cast at them.

Miss Patricia's lesson had been well learned. Villagers came forth. The Sniflys opened their sacred front doorway and stood in pious horror. Ole Dodson ran forth and the village men came to the spot. I stood very straight and I pointed to the path that I would have to tread to reach the Vicar's. Then I said clearly:

"Listen, all of you! If there is a man among you, listen! That path is mine and I intend to trod it alone. I have spoken this and if there is any of you who deny me——"

A shout arose. Miss Snifly, older, sourer, leaned over her fence and hissed:

"Shameful! But to be expected from one of the stripe."

I was blinded with rage. I began to throw the discs and stones that I had gathered in my wrath. I stood before them like a beast at bay. Then I heard my voice rise up. I was not aware of what I said, for my throat was letting forth the things that I had pent up through the years I had suffered.

"It *is* shameful!" I cried, "It *is* shameful! So shameful

a thing that every man and woman of you should go and hide your faces. It is not enough that you have killed her, and left her not even peace in her sleeping, but that you have held me up and through me have made others suffer. It is not enough that you have done all of this, for she was unclean, one of the stripe—" I looked to Miss Snifly—" unfit for such virtue as yours, yet her dying hands sewed for you, her dying eyes hungered for you, her dying heart bled for you, her dying hour was apart from you. All of this is not enough, but you continue to lay on your lash. Yonder, in the little house that you have driven her to since she opened her arms to me, is Miss Patricia, whom you have turned from, leaving her, too, to suffer your merciless lash! Lay it on! Lay it on! Reuben Passwater is dead. He died, I know it, fearing your tongues. Lay it on! Lay it on! You have shut your God in the chapel, then forsook even Him. Why?" I screamed. " Because the Vicar touched me."

I was wild, panting. I turned to the circling faces and read there dull fear and, beneath, a smouldering fire of rebellion.

" Lay it on!" I screamed it louder. " Miss Patricia will die without you."

I was sickened and filled with the thorns that had pierced through those days of waiting and suffering, and I said louder still: " I know you!"

Then the crowd about me parted and some one came swiftly through the ope, beating upon the backs of them who would have held him away. I looked up to confront the rage-swept eyes of my stranger. Then I began to weaken, and shook until I might not speak. I saw Miss Snifly's head toss and a titter swept them that crowded about. He towered over them. I stood mutely before him. He spread his arms wide and looked about the faces that pressed upon us and they shrunk, turning that they leave us with parting jeers and laughs that spilled out of the cup of wickedness.

They shrunk before him, for he was not of them. Neither was I. Never before had I so keenly felt this thing. He did not speak, seeming to wait that I should do so, and I stood long, looking toward the chapel yard. Then I hung my head in the great wave of shame that overcame me, and made that I go upon the way—not to the chapel, but I made that I should. Then I felt the eyes of him burning upon me

and I turned. He smiled slowly and offered me his arm.

"No," I said, "no, leave me. Do you not see? Shall I have to speak what I have so hidden from you? Do you not understand? I am unfit. I do not know why. I cannot understand. I am very, very lone, but I shall have to bear it. You see, they will not leave me be. I have hidden from them. I have trod the streetway but in the shadow time. I have left them alone. Nothing have I asked of them; nothing have they offered me."

I was weeping and beating my breast and he leaned toward me.

"Then you came. I know now that I should not have smiled, but when youth beckons, when earth offers her sweets and you are lone, lone, and no one cares, oh, would you not just smile at happiness? Oh, leave me," I went on. "Never mind. To-morrow will make me forget. I learn every morning to forget. You see, it is wrong. You cannot come to the chapel yard. They would know, and though they will not of me still I must pay."

He was making signs that I should cease and pointed to the chapel way.

"Come," he said, "to the land of heavy hearts. Come!"

"No," I answered. "No, I cannot. I have come for the Vicar. Mr. Reuben Passwater is dead and Miss Patricia is low. What shall I do? The Vicar—I must go to the Vicar."

"No," he answered. "Go home."

I stood staring wildly at him and he pointed me my way. I do not know why I did the thing that I did do, but I turned and went back to the little house where Mr. Reuben lay and Miss Patricia awaited me.

CHAPTER XVIII

I REMEMBER that the day wore on, and no hand came to aid. Early in the young eve, just a little after mid-sup time, "Coffin" Gifford came with two of the village men, and they had knocked, and I remember "Coffin" Gifford's pious face, and that his first words were, "The hand of the Lord hath fallen." The two were with him, I still remember, for

certain glances, that were nothing short of leers, they cast me. I had busied about the little house; had ministered to Miss Patricia, who seemed not to understand now what had happened, for when I had returned she had asked me of Reuben, had he slept.

I cannot recall the long hour that the villagers and "Coffin" Gifford stayed beneath the little roof that was ours. I do recall certain things that came to my grief-fogged mind vividly, like lightnings playing storm-clouds. I remember Miss Patricia's peaceful smile, the same smile that she had worn all those weary years. It came back feebly, struggling as though it would befriend her, making this great cloud just a fancy; for I knew that she did not realize what had befallen.

When they had finished the last service they might offer Mr. Reuben, I heard them come slowly out of the little room beside the kitchen that was his, into our sitting-room. I had left the side of Miss Patricia and gone weeping to meet them. "Coffin" Gifford stood very solemnly in the centre of the room, beside the table covered with the woollen scarf. I did not speak, for I saw that he had something that he would say. He fumbled with his coat collar, brought forth his kerchief, shook it carefully out, ran his fingers about its hem, selected the centre spot, lifted it slowly to his nose, and blew a bugle blow. I can see the veins upon his forehead swell and his face crimson. Then he heaved a deep sigh, wiped his eyes upon another carefully selected spot, folded the kerchief and lay it upon his palm; then carefully tucked it back in his hip pocket, leaving his hands clutched beneath his coat tails and rocking first upon his heels and then upon his toes, and licking his lips.

I stood and I fear that I smiled. I know I did inwardly. I seemed to take a keen pleasure in all of this detail. "Coffin" Gifford cleared his throat and turned toward the two villagers who stood gawking. "Of course——" He cleared his throat in a mighty, "Ahem." "Of course, Miss——" Here he flushed and ahemed again. "Of course—I should say—you could scarcely expect the chapel to be opened. The good folk—ahem!—the brothers of the faith, could scarcely —ahem!—be expected to officiate. You understand, Miss."

I was frozen with a new cold, the ice of hate, which is far

sorer suffering than hate's fire. I swallowed, clutching my heart that I thought would leap out. Then I opened my lips and started to speak, " W-w-w-w-what ? "

My teeth chattered, upon edge. I was seized with a chill of agony. " Coffin " Gifford licked his lips once more and began to sway, tipping upon his toes, then upon his heels, swinging his coat tails. I recall that he shook his head from side to side and let forth a sort of pity-groan, and then that he reached out his clammy hands and laid them upon me, saying :

" Make yourself steady, Miss, steady."

I can still recall the feeling of sickness that swept me as I felt his flesh touch me.

" Leave me be," I said, putting one hand to my head, that I might still its tempest ; for it seemed like some awful storm was within it. " Leave me be," I said again weakly, sitting down in the great armchair.

My head fell upon Mr. Reuben's coat and it seemed to send new strength through me. I turned and seemed to be quite myself once more, but I could not make my lips form one word. The villagers still stood as though rooted to the floor and " Coffin " Gifford seemed to be ill at ease. I arose, and steadied myself by the back of the armchair. Then I pointed to the door.

" Of course," said " Coffin " Gifford, " we will bear the corpse forth, but as to the chapel—well, you understand, it will not be expected."

" No," I answered. " It is not to be expected. I understand. I understand. It would never do. The good folk might touch——" Here I went into a peal of laughter and wildly strove to stop, but I could not. It seemed that the evil one was tickling me. " They might——" Here I laughed once more and swayed until I feared I would swoon. " They might touch—" here another peal of wild laughter— " sin ! " I giggled and sat swaying and laughing and weeping all at one time. " Coffin " Gifford's eyes shot out, then went in. He gasped and swallowed.

" Most unaccountable, unaccountable ! " he ventured, and turned to the two who stood and gawked. " My dear Miss, at what hour would you have him borne to his resting place ? " This was said in the Vicar's most prayerful tone.

"To-morrow—in the morning," I said. "And say you to the village I do not expect the chapel opened."

Then they left me solemnly, the villagers, I know in my heart, believing me to be wild, and "Coffin" Gifford full of what he had seen that he might open to the village. I can see them now, going down our prim little pathway, and opening the little gate that now did not hang so primly. Like birds of prey, like shadows, they went through and I knew that they would return for the prey.

I had gone to the window to watch them go, with a sickening feeling that the time that slipped from now till morning would take from me all that remained of some one who, I knew not how, was a great, wise friend. I think that Miss Patricia had made me know this by the feeling she had borne in upon me of Reuben's strength, and it is queer that my only memory of him was so mild—a man of few words, with a faded smile and faded eyes, and Miss Patricia the dominant one. Yet the Mr. Reuben that Miss Patricia showed me was a new man, for she did nothing that she first did not say, "Reuben would say," or "Reuben would advise," or "I would consult Reuben," or "when Reuben comes we shall consult him." In Mr. Reuben I felt that we had a stronghold, a man of the house, though Miss Patricia held the rein. And now it was over. His greatcoat lay where he had cast it, upon the armchair. His hands had cast it there. He had come after the long waiting. Miss Patricia had seen him. I had seen him. We had waited so long, so long, for this, the something in our hearts that I cannot define, but it seemed that when Mr. Reuben came would be the time when wondrous things would be. Why I know not, save that Miss Patricia, when she spoke of his return, showed within her eyes a look of suppressed pride. Now it was over. Like so very many things in my life, it had come but to leave me emptier. It was over. Mr. Reuben, who had seemed so real, was no more, and through me he had gone. For what?

He had taken me in his arms upon that night so long ago and I knew that his cheek had pressed mine. Why? And the little ivory—Sally Trueblood with brown eyes. Ah, Mr. Reuben, even then I knew that your heart had those same eyes, that same sweet face, within it.

Then I heard Miss Patricia cough and I started up. It

was growing late and the shadows were long. I righted up the little sitting-room and stood wondering what way I should turn. Then again the awful fear seized me. I fled to the place where Mr. Reuben lay. He was upon his couch. The little bruise upon his lips from the ivory still showed. His hand had clutched over the little ivory bit and through the fingers I saw the smiling face. I saw his child-smile. His very face seemed wreathed in a new joy and that joy was a full understanding. The answer was upon his lips. The shadows hung about the canopy of his couch, and I looked into the dark and I wondered what hovered there, for I felt that he was listening. I leaned over him and laid my hand upon his cold brow. His silver hair fell back lovingly.

"Mr. Reuben," I said, "oh, Mr. Reuben, did I do this? In that May did you, too, lose the thing that you never could find?"

Then I knelt down beside him and laid my head upon the couch and I prayed to Dearest God, He whom Sally Trueblood showed me, He who would know. And I said, when I had finished:

"Sally Trueblood, oh, I see your frail hands bearing the bowl that was o'erheavy! Oh, Sally Trueblood, I know the full weight now of the thing, and I swear that I shall finish its bearing until it is done, before the sight of earth, to the last drop within me! I swear it!"

Then I stood before the new Mr. Reuben and I said:

"I do not know the path that failed you, Mr. Reuben, but I do know the failing was not yours. I pledge you, Mr. Reuben, my faith."

Then I stood, wrapped in the frightening thoughts of what my new day would be. Miss Patricia coughed once more. Then it came upon me that I was alone. I wondered, "Would they, could they, leave me thus!"

Then—oh, the sweetness of sisterhood!—Sephira came; Sephira, with her loving eyes, her hungry eyes—for Sephira knew the emptiness of love-hunger. Sephira came with her circling arms, her gentle tone, her kisses, and her youth. I might bury my head upon her soft bosom and weep, mingling my tears with hers. We were one, Sephira and myself, though I always felt that when Sephira was with me

I was Sally Trueblood's little me. I showed her what had been. I told her of Mr. Reuben's coming. I told her of the village wrath that I had stood, but this she had heard and—bless her !—hid from me. This I know now.

With the aid of Sephira and her ministering love I passed that long night. Miss Patricia fell into a sort of sleep in which she spoke of Reuben and called, " Felicia." Then I heard her say, " Reuben, I understand." Then she repeated words that I think Mr. Reuben had said to her. They were about " going " and " the seeking of "—her lips would work but no word would come. Sephira had promised, when I had wearied, that she would wait and listen so that she might tell me all. When I had lain down and was in a fretful sleep I heard a thin voice calling, " Hope ! Hope ! "

I answered, sitting up sleep-bewildered, and fleeing to the sitting-room where Sephira stood, making a sign to me not to speak suddenly, and I knew that Miss Patricia did not know that I had retired. I answered :

" Yes, Miss Patricia," and went softly to her room.

The candle—there was but one—sent its shadows winging about and fluttering over Miss Patricia's pale face. I went to her side and I saw that she was not as she had been when she had slept. She patted my hand, nodding and smiling a wan smile as she fought for breath.

" I could not sleep, Hope. I—I—thought," here she looked down, " if you would just bring his little dog. I think——"

" Yes," I said. " Yes, I shall, my dear. I know you can sleep then."

Again I went for the little dog—the little thing of china and paint that held prisoned in its hollow a little living creature that came forth when she caressed it. I kissed it and looked into its painted eyes, and what I saw there I have never read in any man's. I took it to her. She held forth her trembling hands and her face lighted up. I watched her caressing fingers close about it. I heard her sigh and saw the fluttering smile of peace come ; then settle.

Sephira waited me in the sitting-room. I went softly out, leaving my loving glances to caress my dear, who lay quiet now. Sephira stood looking at me questioningly. I stood before Sephira and I took her to me and I said :

"Sephira, that shadow is deepening. She is going. I know it. And then,—oh, Sephira!—what?"

"Wait! Wait!" said Sephira. "Wait! It is not morning, and morning surely comes, Hope."

"Yes," I answered.

Then we sat down together, I upon the great armchair, leaning my cheek to Mr. Reuben's greatcoat, Sephira beside his door, and we waited,—waited,—waited. Oh, the endless, endless hours that now seem but fretting moments!

Morning came surely and found me weary, bent and weary. I struggled to wake through my wake-sleep, for I was not surely sleeping. My friend but led me a little way to leave me come back and wonder. He was no longer my joyous friend who showed me gay games and wondrous dreams. He left me barren paths filled with whys, whys, whys.

I waked and saw that the new light had filled the little room. Sephira sat upon the hassock beside Mr. Reuben's door, smiling brightly.

"Go! Go!" I said. "If they should know!"

Sephira started.

"Know?" she questioned. Then she flushed and said: "Oh, yes; I shall go."

We arose and I stood talking with Sephira of what would be.

"Who will come?" she said.

"I do not know," I answered. "I am playing a game of waiting she taught me, and I cannot do one thing to change the relentless thing that oppresses me. So I shall wait."

"Oh, they will come," Sephira said.

"Yes," I answered, "I suppose so."

Then she kissed me and left. I made ready some hot water and a bit of porridge, also browned before the fire a slice of grain-loaf. Then I went to wake Miss Patricia. I would sup alone, of course, yet I felt I must see her. I stepped softly to her door. She had not wakened. I did not enter, but went once more to the little table spread that we had sat beside and supped from often and often. I had little craving for the bread that I sat and crumbled to bits. In my heart I was pondering the great why.

It was while I was playing with the crumbs and wondering what would come that a knock sounded. I arose, startled, and I could scarcely bring myself to go to the door. The

knock came again and I stepped slowly to the door and opened it. Before me stood Miss Snifly. I gasped, and a sickness swept me. It was my first impulse to shut the door, but I seemed to lose control of my hands and stood staring and saying nothing. She drew herself up primly and in her most iced tone, emphasized by the little feather's psting, psting, said :

" The duty to a neighbour is a heavy yoke. Death brings one to this knowledge, Miss, and Patty Snifly knows her duty."

The little feather was wagging ridiculously. It was then that the whole miserable affair seemed to set me again filled up of mirth. I could not keep from laughing. I stood before her grinning like a simpleton, then burst into titters. Then I found my tongue and said :

" Then your duty yoke led you here, Miss Snifly ? "

She nodded and I stood aside that she might enter. We went slowly to the sitting-room and Miss Snifly sat upon the very edge of the great armchair in a most uncomfortable fashion, crossing her mittened hands and eyeing her surroundings. I sat down upon a hassock and did not offer further conversation. Miss Snifly drew her shoulders high and said, stiffly :

" So Reuben Passwater died as he lived, a fool ? "

I stood up and faced her.

" Yes," I answered, " yes. Would you like to see him ? "

Miss Snifly stood up suddenly and nodded, and I thought I read a wicked little gleam in her eyes. I went to the spot where Mr. Reuben lay and opened the door. I had turned the shutters ever so slightly and a faint sunlight was stealing through. Where it lay upon the floor it seemed to make the shadows about it even darker. I pointed to where he lay.

" Look," I said, " look ! That is Mr. Reuben."

Miss Snifly leaned over as though she was inspecting something unclean, holding her skirts back. Then I saw that her face softened just a little, and I thought that the softening was a wicked one. It was as though in his sunken cheeks, his frailness, his shrunken temples and gaunt eyes, she glutted.

" They will not open the chapel," she said, tossing her head. " How could you expect it after your shameful conduct before the youth of the village ? "

"I do not," I answered. "Fools and the like of me are unfit."

I lay my hand lovingly upon Mr. Reuben's clenched one and the little ivory laughed up at me. Miss Snifly saw it and a wave of colour mounted into her pallid cheeks.

"I said he was a fool," she said aloud, "and now I know it."

I stood shaking and I said:

"Miss Snifly, you have left us. We fools have not sought you. Why come upon us in such a time? Come!" I beckoned her and went to where the door of Miss Patricia's room stood open and she showed weak, white and sleeping. I turned to Miss Snifly.

"There," I said, "she lies. This is part of your neighbourly duty. It is too late. You may not undo what you have done, and may the great God in His compassion forgive you. You may not awaken Mr. Reuben who has slept. You may not offer your hands nor hearts to her, for she will not know you. You may not blot out, you villagers, what you have written here." I laid my hand upon my breast over my heart. "Oh, you, with your tongues, have flayed happiness until it lies dim-eyed and dying. Look upon her and go," I said. "We have lived alone and we shall finish this so."

Miss Snifly let her jaw hang and shrugged, seeming to be astonished that I should not embrace her for her piety and her leaving herself down to my level.

"Go!" I said. "The chapel shall be closed. It has been closed to all of you. You will not seek it. You have left the Vicar go almost alone to Sabbaths and to prayer. Do you think that you have shut God behind the door of your chapel? No!" I shrieked. "He is standing beside us here and weeping, Miss Snifly. I know it. Now go!"

"But the service!" she said, aghast.

"The service?" I answered. "What you have denied, dearest God will give freely. Listen! In His unsullied day we shall go forth. In His earth we shall lay Mr. Reuben. From our hearts we shall speak and He will hear. Do you hear me? And no noble had such a song of gladness as the chapel-yard birds offer up. You may not deny him this. Take your God home with you, Miss Snifly. Leave me mine. Go? Go! Go!"

I was shoving her before me. We reached the door and I pushed her out and shut it. I stood with my back to the closed door, my hand still upon the latch, and the fire of rebellion swept me high. The sickness at the thought that I had suffered before the eyes of the one of all of them from whom I would have kept my secrets! He knew now that I was shamed. He knew that I was a thing to be held up before the village eyes and taunted for the shame. Then it came to me. What shame? What had I done? Yet they were upon me. A new resolve formed. I would live before their eyes. I would cast the caring to the winds. I would show them that I would live as I wished, asking no man, caring for no man. My heart seemed to tremble.

I sat down upon the floor where I had been standing, and was tracing with one finger upon the carpet and thinking, when they came with the box. I heard their steps and I knew what it was. I arose and opened the door and waited. They came, "Coffin" Gifford and three villagers, this time, bearing the long, black thing, the sight of which brought back that morning so long ago in the chapel yard when I had laid my larkspur upon just such a box. I was weeping. Suddenly I thought of the chapel yard and wondered had any one spoken that the pit should be made ready. I leaned toward "Coffin" Gifford and asked this. He kept his eyes upon the box for a minute and then raised them asidelong and grinned, flushed, and looked knowingly to the villagers.

"Your young man," he answered.

Oh, the agony of shame! Shall I ever forget it? I did not speak but let them make ready the body of Mr. Reuben for the last rest.

Still Miss Patricia lay silent with sealed eyes, breathing softly and too fast. I closed the door and went to the great chair and waited. Then it was that the outer door opened and my stranger came in. I arose, covered with confusion.

"Oh, please go, go! If they should ever know!"

He smiled slowly and said:

"Never mind, I am going with you."

I was dumb. Here was the only hand to aid me, the only eyes to read sympathy from. I was hungry. I was wild for companionship. I knew that Sephira could not come and

the village would not. I sat down dumbly and looked at the floor.

"Are you ready?" he said softly.

I started and arose and my lips answered:

"No, no! Oh, must I go before them? You saw?"

"Yes," he answered.

"And still you come?" I asked.

"Yes," he said once more. "Make you ready. They are coming."

I frantically caught up a shawl and bonnet, I think they were Miss Patricia's. Then I turned to one of the villagers and said:

"Would you stay, just until I return?"

He nodded and grinned. "Coffin" Gifford, my stranger and the two others bore the box out the little doorway through which Mr. Reuben and my small self had passed upon that first night. I followed alone. I could not weep. It seemed as though I was carrying some awful pack far too heavy, and I just must reach the summit. I must not break before them. I must go down the village street before their eyes. I did not know we had gone even upon the way. My feet were bearing me without my knowledge. We were at the chapel yard gate before I realized it. Then I raised my eyes, and—oh, oh, the joy! The Vicar was there, bent and tottered, but smiling! He held his hand to me and I almost heard his lips say: "Suffer little children to come unto me," and I wept afresh.

CHAPTER XIX

We followed the black box through the arch. I shall not record the agony of grief and rebellion that warred within me through the little service. When it was finished the Vicar and my stranger lingered after the villagers and the sexton's apprentice finished the filling of the pit. The Vicar stepped slowly and we followed him. We had passed through the chapel gate and went upon the road's way and had reached the inn when I realized that some one had confronted us. I was frightened and clung to the arm of my stranger. The Vicar stood aside. I heard some one say "Stephen" and looked up to see Mr. Stephen Willoughby.

I was stricken. Mr. Willoughby was angered. He drew himself up and with his awfullest voice said :

" What does this mean ? "

The stranger stood tall and flushed and did not answer. Mr. Stephen Willoughby brought out his glove and struck the cheek of him. He still stood silent. Again Mr. Willoughby struck him. Then his lips whitened and his face crimsoned and I saw his hands working and his breast heaving. Then he said :

" I cannot ! Not that."

Mr. Willoughby laughed an unpleasant laugh and sneered :

" Why ? " he asked.

" Father ! " my stranger gasped.

" Never," said Mr. Stephen Willoughby, " after this. Have you forgotten that you are a Willoughby ? "

" Yes," my stranger answered, " but I cannot forget that I am a gentleman."

He bowed low before me and offered me his arm once more, saying softly :

" I shall come to the inn later, sir."

And bowing took me upon the way. I was wildly trying to understand. Then this was what Rudy had meant. At the thought of what had happened the day before I was again filled of the shame and felt that I could not look upon this man who was the son of Stephen Willoughby. I freed my hands and stood before him.

" Oh, why did you not tell me ? I cannot, cannot bear it ! "

" Forgive me," he said.

" We both shall have to forgive," I answered, " and forget. It cannot be."

Then I read his eyes. They were not Stephen Willoughby's eyes. The shoulders were like and something in the carriage, yet—oh, frailty !—I could not hate him. I smiled and I knew that this was fuel to the fire. We went upon the way. The Vicar had departed. After we had left the side of Stephen Willoughby we walked silently, and when we had come to the little house, he stopped, laid his hand upon the gateway and said :

" To-night ? "

I did not raise my eyes nor answer.

" To-night," he said and touched me. I knew he meant the chapel yard and the beautiful dreams and I nodded, then went swiftly within the gateway and entered the house.

It was silent and empty. The door to Mr. Reuben's little room stood open. His couch still showed his last resting place. His greatcoat lay just as he had left it. Even the mulling cup and the unfinished port. I remember the feeling of unreality that seemed to oppress me. I felt as one who waked in his sleeping. The villager cleared his throat and I was brought back from my vacant moments to see him standing before me, grinning. I knew that he was one of the younger lads of the village and, no doubt, had been among them that had taunted me. I knew the grin and all that it meant. I could not speak without betraying my fearful feeling of abhorrence, and when I brought myself to speak my voice shook.

" Has she waked ? " I asked.

He grinned again and did not answer my question, but stood shuffling and said :

" It's well to have a man about."

I began to shake anew and I went to the doorway that led to the little hallway and opened it, pointing to the outer door, and I said, " Go ! " feeling in my skirt's fold for a purse that I offer him a coin. I found it and brought out one of the metals and offered it. He shook his head and went shuffling out, grinning with that tell-all look. I was weeping with shame.

I went, when I had cast off my bonnet and shawl, straight to Miss Patricia's side. She stirred and I knew she was awake. I did not speak but went to bring forth a little broth and some crumbs that she might sup. She was too weak to sit alone, so I lifted her upon my arm and ministered the broth with my own hand. She ate it, a vacant look in her eyes and a tremorous smile playing about her thin lips. It seemed so strange. Here was the little me that had come into this house so long ago and so unwelcome to her, the only creature to lend her loving aid. And she the only one to return my love. Did I say the only one ? Well, I know much now that I did not know then.

I spent the remainder of the afternoon thinking—alone, it seemed to me, for Miss Patricia seemed gone. My days

had begun to be filled up of so much mystery that I feared a new one's coming. I think that the thing that cut me deepest and hurt me sorest was one word I had heard spoken by my stranger, and that was " father." It was as though a door had opened and I had seen into something that I hoped beautiful, and found misery awaiting me. I wondered what the Willoughbys knew. Miss Willoughby had said she did not know Sally Trueblood, nor Miss Patricia; yet Mr. Stephen had come and they did know one the other. The whole net seemed built up of lies. Who had been the frail little lady whose Hope still seemed a little living babe to me? Why was Miss Willoughby there? How had Stephen Willoughby come by the garments she had worn and her little Hope's babe clothes?

I was sitting, pondering all of this, and scarcely knew that the twilight had settled. Miss Patricia had lain quietly, her lids shut, and I had waited her waking wearily. I was sitting wrapt in the tangle of my days when the knock that I had hoped for came. I went to answer it and found Sephira, with a basket laden of sweets, a loaf and some cold mutton.

" I knew you would be unfit. Is she awake? "

" No," I answered. " Sephira, I am glad you have come, for I am almost mad."

" What is it, my dear? " said Sephira, circling my waist and laying her cool cheek to mine. " Tell me."

" No," I answered. " I cannot, but, Sephira, I will tell you one thing. I went into a May day and was caught in a shower. It is no use. I shall forget and finish the living of the understandable days. I shall count nothing by my own pleasure."

Sephira's eyes widened. She looked to my eyes searchingly and laughed a little snatch of a laugh and said:

" Hope, you are not understandable."

" Listen, Sephira. This is the last time. Will you stay? I must go. It is finished, after this, but now I must go."

Sephira nodded and I hugged her.

" She will not awaken until it is late and I shall come, not late, but early."

Sephira nodded again and I went to the shutter and saw that the moon was coming; that it was a heavy one, all

opped of fullness. My heart was leaping and joy tickled at my throat. I was righting my locks with my hands and went to bathe my red-wept eyes. I remember that I lighted the taper and went to the guest room; that I looked in the reflector. There I saw myself striving to be myself, all twisted and wriggling my face, and I laughed a little, then bit my lip; for the old memory came with the reflector, of my first night in this room.

When I was refreshed I went back to the sitting-room where Sephira had laid the table for our sup at a later hour, for she knew that I would hasten. She was now busied in Mr. Reuben's room. I heard her steps and saw her casting the coverlids. I did not tarry, but swiftly threw the shawl around me and said softly:

"Soon, Sephira, soon. Wait me."

"Surely," she answered. And I went out the hallway and through the outer door.

Oh, you moon that came slow, shall I ever forget you? Or your pale golden light that shed so softly over the little village, making it shine with the mystic touch of dearest God? Never before had I felt that He so caressed the earth. It was quiet, cool quiet. Only some cricket chirped, or winged creature scraped his edged song. The earth seemed so small, the heavens so great, and I so lone. Shall I ever forget how in my agony of loneliness I turned my eyes to the well-known paths where I was not welcomed, where I was shunned, up to the sky where the moon, like some wise mother, smiled her wisdom-smile?

A great sob rolled up to be swallowed. My eyes were blinded with tears, and then in the moon's smile I found an old, old friend; for had *she* not trod with me and the game, smiling with us? How we had sat beside the window, the little shuttered one upon one thong, and watched her climb. What gay games in the brightness we played, making the stars our knights and ladies, and the moon their kingdom. How we would each point out a star and call it some fanciful name, watching it each eve until it disappeared upon its journey to the kingdom, we believed. The knights we warred, watching for them at each eve's coming and counting the clouds their vanquishers. Ah, I remember when for most the eves our gaming was amid the stars.

I was walking down our pathway, thinking of all of this, doubting my own heart with its own first problem. I opened the gateway and went swiftly to the village, knowing that they were watching me. Still the golden light, shedding upon the path, cast my shadow so that it followed me ridiculously squat. I wished that it would leave me. When I came to the chapel yard I stood at the gateway loth to enter. I saw him standing beside the mound of Sally Trueblood. Still I stood. I saw that a candle burned within the sextonage. Its beams fell from the shutters like golden threads. I heard the well-known flutterings o'erhead and the scolding of the nesters. Then I went slowly down the briared path to his side. He wheeled and said:

"Hope, you have come?"

I nodded in the bright light and I said:

"Yes, to her," and I pointed to the mound.

"She is gone," he said, "and I am here."

"No," I answered. "Do you see the moon? Look! Upon her face I read the same smile that I know I shall always read. It is true with her."

We stood, both looking to the little mound so pitifully small, just earth. Gone, yet I know some tide when some new eyes shall read this, a wonderful vine shall grow from this earth, loving each crumbling stone that stands about. I know that the moon shall stand just as it did then and the vine shall tremble with loving. I could not then understand how so much beauty, so much joyousness, so much love, could die. I know now it *could* not.

He watched me. I knew that he was fearful to speak of what had been. I looked to him and said:

"Well, it is over, like all happiness of mine. It, too, is dead."

"No," he answered. "No, Hope, it cannot be. I cannot be blamed for that that I hold no part of."

"But you are a Willoughby," I answered.

He bowed.

"That is too much," I said. "You did not tell me."

"No," he answered.

"Why?" I asked.

He looked into my eyes deep and I saw that he was striving not to speak.

" You feared to tell me," I went on, " because you knew who I was. You knew that I feared for you to ask. You knew all of this. You did not know that Stephen Willoughby had shown me a thing that I never saw; that he, knowing her,—for he does know, I know it,—knowing her—" I choked—" shame, would have shamed me before the village eyes. That is a Willoughby, and you are of that."

He was beseeching me to stop, but I was kindled with the thought of my shame and went on: " What does he know of me? What does Miss Willoughby know? Geneva Willoughby," I went on. " Why did they come to the mansion when she died? "

" Who? " he asked.

" I do not know," I went on. " The little lady who rocked her Hope."

His jaw hung open. He caught me by the shoulder and cried: " What do you mean? "

" Who are you," I asked, " that I should tell you? Stephen Willoughby your father—who is your mother? "

He stood very straight and pointed to the stone of Felicia Trueblood. I read it in the bright light, kneeling: " Unto him who readeth this know ye that all bitterness hath an end."

" God grant it," I said and arose.

" Felicia Trueblood! She is not a Willoughby."

" No," he answered.

" Then you, too? " I gasped.

He turned slowly and said:

" I may not answer. Hope, can you trust me? "

I drew up, looking to the moon, still smiling, and I remember shrugging and saying:

" Trust a Willoughby? No! "

He came toward me there in the deeper shadow by the stone, where I had stepped once more, and I said:

" I hate you! If she is your mother, why did she cause Her to weep? "

" I cannot answer, Hope," he said. " I am waiting."

I began to laugh foolishly and sat down swaying and saying over and over, " Waiting! Waiting! "

Then I arose and I remember that I turned to leave, saying:

" We wait alone until each may tell all. Waiting, sir, is

a long word and I have learned each letter; and the hand of Willoughby, methinks, is the taskster. Sir," I curtseyed, "it is farewell until we may tell all."

Then I ran. It seemed that happiness fell from me like garments as I fled. I had felled my love. I saw him dying, reaching out and smiling, and I had smitten him, but I said aloud as I ran:

"Sally Trueblood, I know, I know, I know that waiting, the cup you bore, wined with shame and brimmed with longing, is bitter, bitter!"

I was sick. I ran stumbling upon my way and I saw that the moon was shining, but it seemed dimmer. I ran through the paths to our house and went to the doorway to open it and steal softly through the hallway to the sitting room. The candle was lighted, and Sephira, my sister Sephira, was upon her knees before the great chair, weeping. I spoke, "Sephira!" She caught at her breast and arose. Her cheeks flamed, thin, paled.

"Hope, oh, Hope! I want you! Now you have come, how can I tell you?"

I went to her. She was shaking. Her eyes looked wild and I saw that she hung her head.

"Is it Miss Patricia?" I asked.

"No," she answered.

"What then?" I said.

"Nothing," Sephira said, brushing back her locks and laughing. "I think I was dreaming."

I looked straight into Sephira's eyes and I said:

"What do you mean, Sephira?"

"Nothing. Nothing," she answered. "Did you meet him?"

"Yes," I said, "and it is over. I cannot tell you, Sephira, how empty my heart is."

Sephira sank upon the hassock and her sweet eyes had a sorrowful look. She sighed deeply, clasped her hands about her knees and did not speak. I watched her, and I knew that there was something between us that was not a mere shadow. I thought perhaps she had been filled of the village gab and knew that they had new tales of my wrongdoings. I sat down in the great armchair and waited that she speak, but she did not, seeming to be lost in thoughts of her own. After

we had been sitting for some time she seemed to shake off the feeling and smiled brightly, but I thought her eyes were still shadowed with the thing I felt. I still waited. She arose and went to the little table where the sup stood, made ready by her hands. She sat down upon the chair and I sat before her. She offered me of the bread and a bit of the mutton. I sat crumbling the bread and trying to swallow the mutton that grew larger as I chewed upon it. Sephira ate quickly, biting suddenly from the bread bits, making an unusual feint of being bright, I thought. I recall that she upset a mug of milk, and blushed; then laughed too much.

When we had been sitting for some time she arose and came to my side, laid her arm around my neck and kissed me and said:

"Hope, do you love me?"

I took her hand, which was very cold and shaking, in mine and answered:

"Sephira, like a sister. No creature is so close. You have been like a sun in my gloomy days—my stronghold, my sister."

She kissed me. I even now can feel her warm lips upon my cheek and tears spring as I write.

"I am glad! glad! glad!" she said. "I need you, Hope."

"Why, Sephira?" I asked.

"Because," she said, "I am lonely."

"What do you mean, Sephira? There is something which you have not told me that is upon you. What is it?"

"Nothing," she said and laughed a queer little laugh that ended in a catching of her breath.

I stood up and held her by the shoulders, trying to make her look deep in my eyes, but she would not. I shook her ever so little, and I said:

"Sephira, it's Rudy!"

She turned very white.

"No," she said. "Rudy is gone."

"What?" I went on. "What do you mean? I saw him but yesterday."

She nodded and I saw that tears were welling up into her eyes.

"When did he go?" I asked.

" I do not know," she answered.

" What ! " I cried. " He left you and did not tell you where he was going ! "

Again she nodded.

" Did you not see him, Sephira ? "

She shook her head, " no," and sunk upon the chair and wept. I leaned over her and circled her with my arms.

" Never mind, dear," I said. " He will come back. Don't you know it ? "

She shook her head once more and wiped her eyes upon her shaking hands, then looked up to my eyes and I saw she had fear in hers.

" What is it, Sephira ? Tell me."

" He went, Hope, and did not say even farewell."

" Rudy did that ? " I said. " Sephira, he did not."

" Yes," she said and arose, sped to the door, opened it and ran into the night.

I stood mutely before the door that shut with a snap and there was a feeling upon me that was new. Then Sephira, too, was suffering this through me. It had been that the village had taunted her through me and Rudy had left, no doubt, because they were wagging. I sat down dumbly, within me my new sorrow and the newer sorrow of Sephira. Then it was that Miss Patricia waked and my hands were busied in the ministering to her and my heart stilled a little of its aching. In a joy of service I lost my own sorrow.

When it had grown late, very late, and Miss Patricia had again slept, I sat down by the shutter in my little room and unfastened the latch to swing the shutter open. The moon was gone and the stars were palely beckoning me. There was a faint grey light about the sky's rim and I saw down our pathway a shadow. I got up and lighted a candle. Then I heard my name called, " Hope ! Hope ! " I stopped and did not answer and blew the candle out, standing still and my heart thumping. Then it was that Stephen came to my shutter and called once more.

" Go ! " I said.

" No, no, Hope, I must see you."

" Wait," I said, " she is sleeping. I will come."

Then I went through the sitting-room and out the door to join him.

Shall I bare my heart here? Shall I write the beautiful things that I have so long hidden? No, no, my dears, I shall keep them and take you back with me to my little room where, when we had said good night, I had returned. And I shall tell you that my sorrow had fled. I had drunk only the purity of love's wine and it had strengthened me. I could not, could not, slay love, who sought me, and I smiled, only smiled, little knowing—but wait!

CHAPTER XX

I THINK a fortnight had slipped away, filled with the usual ministering to Miss Patricia, the lonely days with her, sometimes vaguely trying to remember and put together some vagrant dreams, then quite herself, uncannily elusive as though she guarded something and feared I would find it—this and her pitiful clinging to the little dog and the stories of Willie Pimm Passwater that seemed to come anew to her now. This was the only thing she spoke freely of, and I grew to expect him to walk out from some shadow and say in his prim, mannerful way, some of the quaint things she told me of his saying. He seemed real and I got to feel that he was some company. Then there were the nights when Stephen came, now to our little yard, and later Sephira, who left with the light and seemed not the bright Sephira that had sought me with her comforting, but a little frightened thing that shot furtive glances and started and covered her confusion with coughing or a laugh. I had grown to dread her coming and I did not mention Rudy, the thing I knew lay upon her heart, fearing I might tear her beautiful cloth of romance. I think that I had begun to love the evenings. The hours of labour and waiting sped upon the wings of my joy. At times I warred within me that Stephen was a Willoughby, that I could not hope; then that one evening that we had spent together beside the mounds of Sally Trueblood and Felicia Trueblood would come back and comfort me. I seemed to feel that he, too, was beneath a shadow and I shut my heart to all that welled up against our happiness to turn to those evenings and forget.

It was upon a certain morning that I was forced to seek the

village when I passed Dawson upon the way. She had stopped me and with her round eyes looked me over from top to foot.

" Mornin', " she said.

" Good morning, Dawson."

" Yes," she answered, " a very good un."

I saw that she was bursting to tell something and without my invitation she started :

" He's a gentleman, ben't he, is Samuel Willoughby ? "

" Samuel ? " I said.

" The young un," she went on.

" You do not mean Mr. Willoughby, Dawson, do you ? Stephen Willoughby ? "

" Oh, be it Stephen ? Well, it don't make him any better. The hand of the law will find old Willoughby yet. He's a rogue, he is, I says. Only this mornin' I says to Hobbs Dawson, ' He's a rogue, he is,' and Hobbs nods back, he does. Yes, the Lord is just, Miss. Them's my words, but the likes of you a-mixin' with the Willoughbys. It breeds trouble, I says, does I."

" What do you mean, Dawson ? " I asked. " The Willoughbys are rogues, yet even such as I may not mix with them ? "

She nodded. " Ye see, if her hands hadn't been red——" and she nodded again, knowingly.

" Whose ? " I said.

" Sally's," said she. " She killed him."

I grasped her fat arm and shook her.

" What do you mean, Dawson ? Oh, my heaven, what have you said ? Is it not enough ? "

" Them's my words, Miss. I said 'em to Hobbs Dawson this mornin', I did. She done it, she did, and there's them that knows it, else why the eaves, I says, says I. Why ? "

I stood rocking my arms and my head felt as though it would burst. My tongue was frozen. I stood helpless. Dawson waddled upon her way, still murmuring, " The Lord is just," and I awoke to the fact that I was standing wildly beating my breast and rocking forward, gasping :

" Oh, Sally Trueblood, Sally Trueblood, why ? why ? Oh, why ? Dearest God, oh, dearest God, why ? " I frantically cried. And then I saw her sad eyes and her smiling lips.

I seemed to shrink. I looked upon the house and swept

the village with my glance, wishing that I might flee and hide like some wounded thing. Then it came upon me that I must go upon the duty that had brought me to the village which was a visit to Ole Dodson, who kept the shop where the coach left the post. It had been that I had been bidden to go upon each fortnight and bring forth a sealed packet to Miss Patricia. I had noticed that the seal bore an "S." It was very business-like and Ole Dodson fingered it much each time, looking at me as though he wondered if I knew the thing and who had sent it. I did know that this packet was the slender fund that came and kept Miss Patricia and myself, but I did not know who sent it. Often I had wondered but feared to speak to Miss Patricia and ask. Always she would say at the time the packet should come:

"I think you shall go to Ole Dodson and see. Of course it may not be there, but see."

And I understood. When I would return Miss Patricia would dismiss me and alone would open the packet, and I had never afterward seen even the parchment that had encased it. But this was so small a thing and so like the greater things of my life that I wondered little. I recall, as I said before, that morning, and then I seem to sink my memory into a greyness of happenless days.

Sephira came as always, and Stephen, and little I cared, I think, save that they come. Miss Patricia seemed not to rally and seemed now to care little to rouse save for a bit of sup, or some fragmentary conversation, usually about some small household matter, or, if it were a little chat, of Reuben, whom she seemed to expect, or of Willie Pimm Passwater. And always, when she had wearied, I went for the little china dog. These were small things, but they were not only my day but my whole world.

My love had brought about a wonderful change in me. While I was happy with my stolen happiness, still the womanhood of me rebelled, not for myself, nor for Stephen, but for something that seemed to be buried deep within me. I did not think of the future, but of the now. But when the future knocked at my heart bitterness arose. The haunting thing the words of Dawson had aroused, walked with me like a shadow. I would wake in the small hours crying out. I grew thinner and could not spend my days in my tasks, but

often would find myself staring out the open shutter with my heart like ice and my hands shaking. Miss Patricia had made my days so alike that the smallest thing seemed great and now I was bereft almost of reason trying to understand. For whose days were fuller than mine of small things that seemed so great?

With the words of Dawson came a new fear, for I knew that the thing the village hid was not Sally Trueblood's shame alone but the shadow of death, and that death done at some hand, and they knew whose hand, or believed they did.

But even this was not the greatest thing. There came a thing so dark, so fearful, so haunting, so misery-bearing to me, that fear was my shadow. I could not tell Stephen, so this was mine alone. Oh, shall I forget the night that brought me this thing with all its hideousness? I cannot bear to write and the tears well up so that I scarce can see the page. Oh, will you take this new agony with me and bear with me until I may tell you all?

There were the lonely days that I hid from the village eyes, fearing them, knowing well how they hurt; fearful that they might see me, fearful to hear their tongues drip, and all of this time I feared my sister, my sweet Sephira, most. And then, one night, fortnights hence, she came weeping to the door of the little house, holding her arms out and with tearful voice, saying:

"Oh, Hope, I have come to you to be with you, to love you!" And I knew that we would share this agony, Sephira and myself.

I cautioned her not to speak aloud, fearing Miss Patricia might hear. We went into the room that was mine and I lighted a candle. Then we sat circling each other with loving arms, upon the great poster, and I remember that I thought of the night when I feared it would snap, "Well!" I remember the shadows that flitted o'er us; I remember Sephira's weeping eyes and my own; I remember that she had told with a shaking voice that the door of the vicarage was closed to her, and this on my account. Mrs. Gifford had found that she came, and the Vicar—well, he too had bidden her go. She was helpless before me, and I, who was to them the cause of her misery, could only take her to me and promise to be her stronghold, knowing what her lips did not utter.

I did not go to meet Stephen this night, but sat with Sephira clasped in my arms until the hour was very late. We two together, helpless, yet before me the greatest question ever confronting woman. I recall how the past years came fresh to me as we sat there, Sephira's head upon my shoulders. I recall the Vicar upon that morning when I had gone to the chapel and heard his words so clear, " Suffer little children to come unto me." Oh, the Vicar is no more, and that day so far, far, but the love he planted within me is still growing. I could not blame him. He, too, was hiding something. I knew it. I knew he suffered alone, and oh, the agony that this too should fall upon him. They did not know this agony. They but knew, at least Mrs. Gifford had known, that Sephira had defied the lawful word of piety and had strayed to mix with one of the stripe such as I.

I may record here that each night, when the dark came, it brought the Vicar tottering, but this the village did not know. But I knew that even this must not be. Stephen must not come. We must face this alone. How all of this was to be accomplished I did not know, but I prayed, prayed as never before, to be shown.

Can I ever forget the fear-chill that crept me ? Even while my lips spoke the words of prayer I was consumed with fear and fright. I clasped Sephira to me, sobbing, and could only murmur over and over, " Oh, Sephira, Sephira, my sister, my sister ! " She wept, shaking and frightened before me. I saw that the shadows of twilight were deep about her eyes ; her little mouth whose smile was so sweet showed tightened, strained. The lips she bit, and I could see her little white teeth gleam as she worked them upon her tender flesh.

I did not ask why. I knew there was a why, but it was not mine. To Sephira, I knew, it was a great why, perhaps beautiful, then hideous ; perhaps robed in shame, but a great why, a bigger why than Sephira ; but to me it would be just a shadow in which she could hide and not so big that it might hide her. So I left her the great why. She sobbed like a little child, sinking her soft locks upon my cheek where they swept me pleadingly. My hand caressed her neck and I rocked to and fro, holding her close and not speaking.

While I sat thus I remembered Sally Trueblood. It all

came so clearly. Had this been her lot? Had she, oh, had she, been frightened, with no loving arms to comfort her and a little life just dawning to a sunless day? Oh, had her lips strained to smile to this coming little life? They had always smiled. I knew it. Yet there was something about the wild eyes and set face of Sephira that choked me. I clutched her to me and within my heart something burst—a new light, I think, one that showed me Sally Trueblood's greatness. Then a great thing came stealing over me and my lips made the words aloud, "Oh, God!" and I knew that I was before one of His great mysteries, that even now a new life was dawning feebly, to what? Oh, God! to what? No welcoming arms, no spot offered whereon to lay it naked e'en! The hearts of earth's pit stone-sealed, and yet the same breath that should bring the first wail brought the first smile. The agony of bitterness welled in fearful storms up to my heart's anguish, the bitter waters sweeping me about until I stood up with my arms about Sephira, clutching her in defiance, and I said:

"Oh, God, it is Thine and mine, and I am arm-hungry!" And I leaned to Sephira, whispering: "They shall not know Sephira. They shall not!"

And she clung to me, still weeping, her eyes raised piteously, the tears streaming her cheeks, bathing her lips and falling upon her soft bosom. I knelt down before her and touched her, and I said:

"You are alone, Sephira, alone, you and the little babe, with dearest God. It is not mine to ask you. I cannot understand, but oh, my sister—" I threw my hands out—"take my hands! They are yours; and my heart, could I take it from my bosom. I cannot understand, nor shall I ask you, but I can understand what a woman should—that the valley of birth is the valley of death, and I would trod it with you, my dear. Oh, I know the hunger of empty days, I know the rod of 'piety,' I know the face of 'sanctity,' and I know that they are goads to the path of folly. Oh, Sephira, if youth has love, then youth does not hunger or know the fretful grind of spirit-emptiness. Oh, Sephira, Sephira, a mother's smile may fill a woman up so that she may not look upon the face of folly." And I thought of Sally Trueblood, and her arms, and what true love really was.

When it was late I went to the duties that were my custom, and ministering to Miss Patricia, and when I returned to the little room the shutter stood open, Sephira lay upon the poster and the pale starlight showed her sleeping, her lips open and her arms flung wide. She lay dejectedly, forlornly asleep, and the righteous slept in the village.

I awoke in the morning and shook me that I might free of the feeling that I had dreamed a hideous dream. Then my heart sickened and I knew that it was useless. Sephira was still sleeping beside me. I turned and looked upon her. She seemed never before so frail. One dark strand fell over her bosom and her hand was circled listlessly beside her cheek. I arose softly and made ready to set upon this day and make some way that the monstrous thing I had undertaken be gone through with. Within me came the thought that the village did not know. If they could only be brought to believe that it was not her misfortune but mine. What matter would this be to me? They believed me of the stripe. They looked for this. It would satisfy them.

I told this to Sephira when she awoke and cautioned her not to step from the house, to keep within the walls. This she promised and I felt secure. Then I waited the night when the Vicar would come. I told him that he must not come again, that they must believe that Sephira was gone. This he promised. And Stephen—well, how might I take this to him? So I smiled at my love and did not tarry, but left him. All of this was accomplished, and I had set out one night to seek an aid that I might make purchases and keep myself close. This led me to the abode of the Timpkins'. Tidy was now a tall girl-woman whose child ways still clung. She twisted her apron, just as of yore, and eyed me furtively when I had accosted her as she drew milk from a bowl with a smaller one, slowly counting as she dipped. I had not spoken to Tidy for years, though I had seen her grow from thin legs and knee frocks to thinner legs and lengthened frocks, thence to a miss's gown and the dignity of tucked-up hair.

"Tidy," I said, when I had got over the accustomed greetings of one who has not known the other's company for a time, "do you remember the plum loaf?"

She nodded.

"And Miss Patricia's thin slice?"

She nodded again, but did not speak that I might lead forth upon her word.

"Could you, Tidy," I went on, "do for me some things that I sorely need done?"

She stood gawked, twisting her apron, and said portently "But the village?"

"They must not know," and I showed her a coin.

Tidy agreed, in short, to do this, and glibly offered to come and aid in the "ridden up." I think I know now that it was in the hope of knowing much that the village guessed at. However, as Tidy only did the purchases it was not necessary that she enter the house. When all of this was settled I began the waiting, a new one, and this one lonelier than any before.

CHAPTER XXI

I THINK it must have been perhaps the end of the summer's tide. Miss Patricia was quite spent. Each morning she seemed weaker and I watched the creeping shadows coming, coming—one of death and one of life. Slowly, slowly, the days slipped. Surely, surely, death approached. Slowly, slowly, life came knocking. Hidden there we waited—each for something not the other's; one for death, one for life—yes, and mayhap death.

But now Sephira had stopped her weeping and sat listlessly looking through the shutters, her throat working and her lips trembling, her hands idle. I could not bring myself to speak of the babe to her, but I went to the little chest that Sally Trueblood had packed for me and brought out the little, little yellow garments, all brown-stained with tear rust. I crushed them to my breast in my agony of hunger and I offered these freely to the little naked stranger who trod an unknown path to us.

I remember that I took them reverently in my hands and pressed them to my bosom, and that I took them with no word to Sephira, where she sat, and I laid them lovingly upon her knees. I remember this, and that she looked upon them and her eyes started, her throat swelling, and that she shrieked a fright-cry that still leaves a bleeding wound in my heart. She flung them from her and sunk upon her knees and cried out:

"Oh, God, not this! It cannot be! Surely, surely, it is not right, oh, God, not right! It should be me, me to suffer!" And she beat her bosom and took up a garment and held it before her eyes and wildly kissed it, crying softly, "My poor, poor baby! My little, little child!"

Then she sank, such a weak Sephira, all broken, weeping and clutching the garment. I, too, sank beside her and wept, comforting her, for in my love I had wounded her. Thank God, Miss Patricia was too spent to know all that transpired. It was an easy task to hide, but I knew, I knew that the hounds with their lapping tongues were upon the way; that they knew where the fox had fled; that they would have his brush. I had listened to Tidy's tongue that I might know.

They had begun to seek the Sabbath house since it had been noised about that the eldest of the Vicar's flock had disappeared. Word was among them that the wrong was upon her, but no tongue might tell all. Yet in their hunger for the filth to lap they sheepishly began to seek the chapel for prayer and the gospel. Not since that fateful morning had the Vicar looked upon such a gathering as a Sabbath now brought. Mrs. Gifford piously wept and prayed, telling of the wayward Sephira, and intimating with shrugs and eyebrows raised that she had perhaps come into service at Lady Gregory's. Not with her truthful tongue would she speak this, but lead the willing lambs to look upon the trap to fall if they chose.

All of this I knew, and the anger that welled up within me mounted higher. Here in my arms was one of them, the good Vicar's daughter. With the rod of piety she had been beaten to her fall. Even the Vicar had not filled her youth-days with the things that walled out folly. In his trials he had forgotten Sephira. Mrs. Gifford had never looked upon her as a good and pious child. Every bright or happy impulse that came to her had been quelled with frowns or sharp words. God had been shown to her as a frowning monster. When the Vicar made Him smile then Mrs. Gifford frowned, and Sephira forgot the smile but remembered the frown. She had fallen before them, and now what would they do? Lash her, I knew. And though the Vicar would have ministered his gentleness they would not allow it. The

stripe was upon her. Never before had this thing been so hideous. I could not understand.

Sephira wept on, and I could hear that there were drops falling upon the roof. It only added to my loneliness. I heard them and thought of that night at the eaves with her, and I felt the same chill at my heart, but for another cause. I quieted Sephira, attending to the things that awaited my accustomed round, and had made ready for sleep. I went to the shutter and looked through the opening. It was a chill night. The rain now was sweeping with sudden gusts and I could hear it splash upon the walls. Then I tired and went to my rest.

I do not think I had been sleeping long when I awakened with the horror of realization upon me. I shall not record here the agony of the thing, but the waking brought the old waiting to an end. I was alone, with no hand to uplift. Miss Patricia was sleeping. I looked at Sephira and smiled. I knew that the thing was upon us, and I knew that I had brought the knocking of life by the thing I had done that night. It was too much. Sephira had given way. The long waiting, the agony of shame, and then the knowing, the fullness of knowing, that had come to her that night, had overcome her. Sephira had awakened and with stiffened lips had spoken. I had arisen and clothed. Wild thoughts were sweeping me. I cast about within me for some plan that I might pursue. But one came, and that was Dawson. I must seek her. I should have to go alone.

It was dark, raining, and the peals of thunder sounded amid the sweeping waters. Fear slowed me. I tried to find a lantern, an old one that had belonged to Mr. Reuben, a great iron thing with a wick. This I finally found and lighted, and with a shawl bound about me I stood, my teeth chattering with fear ; with Sephira wailing that she would not leave me go, for she too was overcome of fright. Wild-eyed she pleaded with pale lips that I not leave her.

" Sephira," I had answered, " it must be. I shall be gone but a little time. Wait ! Wait ! "

And I ran from the room, unbarred the door and sped out into the sheeting rain that blinded me. I was wet to my skin in but a few moments. Ploughing my way through the thick mire, I sought an out-path from the village where

Dawson's house stood. Wildly I ran, almost falling upon the slippery clay, and shaking in the wet cold. The lantern showed but a little light, and this afforded little aid as the rain blinded me.

Upon this journey I could think of but one thing, and that was the Vicar. I saw him upon that morning when he had taken me up to the height of the Word, when they had cast me from them, when I was alone and the shadow of shame upon me. He had done this for me and now, now—oh, the stirring joy !—I could do for him.

I found the house of Dawson and knocked, and was answered after a long time by a candle held aloft over the head of the capped Hobbs Dawson. I can see him now, in the window's ope under the eaves, with the point of his cap falling rakishly over one shoulder, and his nose and chin hooked together. He looked, peering down into the darkness, and the candle sputtered in the drops, flickered, and went out. I heard heavy scraping within of bare soles, and the scraping of the bolts, and Dawson opened the door ever so slightly and popped out her head.

" What be it ? " she called.

" It is Hope, Dawson," I answered. " Leave me in."

" Who ? " said Dawson.

" Hope," I called again. But the rains and the wind swept my voice off amid the darkness.

" Hey ? " said Dawson.

" Hope," I called again, and stepped up and held my failing lantern up.

" You ! " said Dawson, falling back and opening the door. " Lors ! I says to Hobbs Dawson this very even, when the cat sneezed in its cream, it'd be ill luck I said, I did, or rheumatiz, er 'tizic. And it's ill luck and I know it. What brought ye ? And in this rain ! "

I gasped after this long preamble and shook the drops from my dripping hair and stood panting and trembling.

" Come," I said. " Come, Dawson, I need you."

" Hey ? " said Dawson, blinking.

" Make you ready ? " I said. " Dawson, it's now I need you."

" Who's took ? " said Dawson.

" Make you ready, Dawson," I went on. " And for

heaven's sake, make haste! I will answer when we have arrived."

"But Hobbs is bad in his back," said Dawson, complacently folding her hands over her abdomen.

"Oh, will you please hasten, Dawson?" I said, clutching her. "It's Sephira. She's ill. Ill—do you hear? I need you."

Dawson's eyes gleamed. Then the lantern went out and we were in darkness. It seemed an age before Dawson found a candle and lighted it slowly. Then she turned toward me and opened her mouth to speak. I caught up some garments that lay upon a hassock beside the hearth and cast them over her. I did not allow her to speak more, but with my own hands made her ready. She stood gasping before me when I caught up the candle and placed it in my lantern. Then I caught her by the fat hand and with my whole strength pulled her toward the door.

"But Hobbs?" she said.

"Never mind Hobbs," I answered. "You are coming."

"Sephira Gifford?" now she said.

I did not answer but opened the door and we were upon our way, much to the astonishment of Dawson.

After we had set upon the way I remember nothing except the great thing that led me on, a greater thing than I had ever before followed blindly. I slipped amid the wet earth, falling to arise, always holding to the hand of Dawson, and at times with difficulty, for the flesh slipped. I could hear her breathing hard, and when the dark showed me that we had come to the spot where our little house stood and I could see a faint light streaming out the shutter's crack, I knew that Sephira was waiting and more fear shook me.

I shall not tell you all of the awfulness of our coming. I recall that I sat like one frozen in our little sitting room, waiting! waiting! waiting! I could hear the steps of Dawson, and the silence seemed alive with great sounds that I know now must have been the creaking of the woods and the snapping of the floor at the thudding of Dawson's soles. After, I think it must have been but a little while but it seemed, oh, a whole lifetime, Dawson came out of the little room where Sephira lay.

I arose. I could hear the thumping, thumping of my heart.

It deafened me, and my lips strove to make a word but none would come. I heard my throat croaking and all that came forth was " Dawson ! " Then I saw that she had a candle, and her round eyes were frightened. She held the candle over her head and with her free hand fumbled at her breast. Again I strove to speak and the word came once more, huskier, " Dawson ! "

" She-e-e," she said, and came swift-waddling toward me. She reached forth her hand and touched me and whispered something that I could not hear. Then, with great effort, I brought myself together and leaning close I said :

" The babe."

" Dead," said Dawson.

I gasped and pointed toward the little room. " Sephira ? "

" Dead," she said.

I threw my hands up and seemed to sink into nothingness. I know now that I fainted. When I came back to the desolate room from that blessed land of naught, Dawson was kneeling beside me, chafing my hands. Then I felt my cords tighten and I reached to my throat that ached. I could not speak and sat dumbly staring at the little door where the pale light streamed through, flickering, flickering, and a sudden gust of wind snuffed it.

I even now feel the tightening about my heart and see the darkness that filled the little chamber where the taper had burned so dimly. Dawson gasped and started and I arose. I could not step nor could I make more words. My hands seemed helpless. I turned to touch Dawson, but she seemed afraid and shrunk from me to sink in the great armchair. Then with a great effort I croaked :

" Dawson, she is dead ? "

" Dead," answered Dawson.

I sat down upon the hassock helplessly. What that moment meant to me I cannot record, for I was filled up with such thoughts that I could not catch them as they trooped through my bewildered brain. Then I heard the drops that fell steadily without. I heard them trickling from the eaves and heard the distant thunders. I remembered that night so long past when I had listened to just such a storm and played that wondrous game that even now I was left to play and alone.

The candle lopped its blaze and a tiny stream of smoke climbed the brightness to sink into the dark. I watched it long, never speaking, and my heart seemed gone. I felt that the day had ceased; that I might never arise again nor face the coming days that I felt would dawn emptily. Again I struggled to my feet and went to the side of Dawson and touched her. She started and shivered. Then I said:

"Dawson, come! She is alone."

I lighted another candle and with trembling hands felt my way across the room by clinging to the chairs and table and whatever stood in my path. When I had reached the door, that stood just a little open, I stopped, fear-stricken. The candlelight spread upon the floor just before me. I knew that another step would disclose what was within. I could step just another step and I would be before Sephira. Oh, I could not! I could not! I began to weep and my lips cried out, "Sephira, Sephira, my sister!" Some strength that I could not account for seized me. I opened the door wide and walked into the room. The candle spread over the dim place, lighting its gruesome fullness. The great poster stood mournful, I thought. The white coverlid spread smoothly over a still form. Upon the pillow rested the tired little head of my sister, Sephira. Over the sweet face was a warring something, as though in her tears she had smiled and forgotten to finish the smile but fled. Upon her breast lay one white hand, still now, the hand that had caressed me that very night.

I stepped closer, my heart nearly stopped, and I touched the coverlid and drew it back from the form ever so slightly, to behold a tiny form beside her. Before them I stood, beating my temple with my free hand. I hurriedly placed the candle upon the press and returned to stand rapt. I had feared this. I had feared to look upon Sephira, who had not feared to seek me.

I had feared Sephira, who now lay mute, with her great why answered. Before me she had victored. I knew that dearest God would not ask the why. I knew it. I sank down and lay my hand upon her cold one, and I shall not record here the things that I communed with her.

How long I sat and watched the light swim the shadow and fancies float like webs, drear days most of them, but

dear days all of them. I had sat long, long, when Dawson came to the doorway and whispered a call. I arose and followed her to Miss Patricia's door, where I bade Dawson leave me and entered the silent room. When I came again to Dawson I bade her sit the night through in the sitting room, and I forgot to listen even to her answer except that I vaguely understood she would do my bidding. I remember that I turned dumbly back to the little room where Sephira lay. Sephira! Little Sephira! Never before had she seemed so frail, so lone.

The great Stranger within his dark cloak had come. They who should have been near were where? The little figure seemed so childlike, so innocent. The smile about the thin lips was not a mother-smile, but a smile of youth, a bewildered smile, as though youth had come upon death and had not understood. The little hand lay so childlike-curled, so pleading. The breast whereon the little head of her love-born pressed seemed too youthed. The awfulness of it all came over me as I stood. I could not bring myself to think of the morning that even now was tiptoeing to peep within the window.

I leaned over the poster and called softly, "Sephira," and was answered by that quizzing smile. Yet behind the smile the surrendering silence told me that Sephira knew her answer. I sat down, waiting again, waiting for the morning, and with little knowledge of what I should do. The Vicar! I remembered him and I began to weep afresh. I could not go to the Vicar. I could not. Then I named over the villagers to myself and a great voice called out, "No! no! no!" It was an early hour, I know. I had sat through years, it seemed, watching with fascinated eyes Sephira's face, that, as morning came, seemed serene, as though the short voyage had left her wearied and with the night she had fled.

I was sitting, as I told you, when I heard the tolling, the tolling that told me the Sabbath was dawned. I arose, went to the shutter and looked through. The day was come. It was young day, like Sephira, joyous, yet clouds that stood told me the joyousness, like hers, would end early. Dawson coughed and I turned to blow the candle taper out. The room was shrouded in a silver-grey light and the new sun was knocking, in lights and brightnesses, at the shutter. I drew

the coverlid over the sweet face of Sephira and within me her secret was locked. I should not tell. I would go, I knew not where, for aid; but I knew when the full light had come I must seek the village.

Dawson knew nothing except the gossips' words, and "near-truth is lie's brother." I had forgotten myself. I was entirely wrapped in a new horror that had come. Dawson had spread a sup and I walked with stiffened limbs to the sitting room and sat down upon the great armchair.

Then the storm broke. I was filled with frenzy. I began to scream aloud and tear at my clothing. I wept and chattered. Dawson stood before me bewildered. I railed, and with strained voice hurled abuses. My locks were loosened. I remember fastening my fingers among them and tearing at them. To me the village seemed a jeering, hideous mob, driving Sephira like a wounded fawn before them. Again and again I screamed: "They have done this! They have done it, and they shall pay!"

I shall never know what possessed me then, and even now, as I write, I seem another self. It seemed to me that my feet bore me, but were not mine; that my lips spoke but were not mine. I could not stop.

Dawson shivered. I started up, flung the chair from me so that it overturned the sup that lay upon the little table, ran to the door, tore open the latch and with my whole strength burst the door open. I all but fell, righted myself, then plunged down the pathway. I can feel the Sabbath's cool and stillness upon me, yet it seemed to me that the village shrieked and that the air stifled me. The hour now was not early. I knew it by the empty houses. I fled down the miry way. My garments were soon wet with the muck. I stumbled and slipped on, my locks flying wildly and my garments torn and displaced.

I ran to the inn. It was empty. Nothing was in the great room but a piece of mocking sunlight that lay lazily upon the floor. I passed beneath the eaves to the stair-arch that led to the upper eaves. With my clinched hands I beat upon the wood in frenzy. I spat upon it, for to me it was torture to her. A prison—worse, a shamed place! Then I found that I was laughing wildly and I ran on past the well-known houses

—the Snifly's, righteously closed, the Giffords', likewise righteously closed; past the shop of Ole Dodson, and then past Rudy Strong's.

I hid my eyes within my hair and sped on. I do not think any plan was mine. I was wild. Then I saw the chapel yard lying peacefully beneath the trees. The white stones grinned, mocking, I thought. I could not hear the birds, nor could I see the peaceful shadow. All of it was hideous. I stopped, spent, beside the gateway. Then I heard a droning. It was the Vicar, and the village bowed before Him in prayer. Then I began to walk slowly, like one in a dream, toward the chapel. I mounted the stairway. I heard them. Vaguely I sought them, hardly knowing what I was doing. I seemed led by some unknown hand. Then the droning stopped suddenly and I saw that the Vicar stood staring at me. They arose and their eyes, like hungry mouths, devoured me. I was seized by a chill. I could hear my teeth chattering. I could not speak. Then I forgot them, and I saw the Vicar's eyes, and my stiffened lips parted, and I heard an unknown voice say, "Sephira!"

The Vicar bent down. He was tottered, and I croaked once more, "Sephira!" I do not remember then, but when I began to know again I was lying upon the steps that led to the Vicar's height.* Mrs. Gifford was standing over me and I will not speak what she was saying. When she saw that I was come back, that I might hear, she went on:

"Before the face of a virtuous village comes again a woman of the stripe—one who has come out of such a life! One whose mother was a wanton comes to the chapel to defile the holy spot with her wantonness. It's shameful!"

Miss Snifly was drawn up beside her and they were staring at me with contempt. I was beneath their feet. Then strength came, and I arose and stood before Mrs. Gifford, and I said clearly:

"Where is Sephira?"

Mrs. Gifford shrugged and looked most knowing. Then I turned to the villagers and I heard my voice soaring up clear, and I remember that I called aloud once more:

"Where is Sephira Gifford? You have driven her before you like a wounded thing! Where is she? You——"

Then I was stopped by Mrs. Gifford, whose cheeks flamed and whose eyes shot fire. She stood before me and the villagers gaped about.

"What has brought you here?" she said aloud so that all of them might hear. "It is known among the villagers, your shame and young Willoughby's. In your condition I think it would be a modest thing that you should hide."

I stood stunned, trying to understand.

"What?" I stammered.

Mrs. Gifford drew up haughtily.

"You need not hide behind your words, Miss," she said. "It is common talk, and even the elders spoke of seeing to it that when you have shown your shame that you be driven forth."

I understood now. The lash sunk down deep to an exquisite pain, an exultant pain. I was glad. I began to laugh in her face, and I know that in my frenzied condition I must have been an awful sight.

"Drive me forth?" I screamed. "Drive me, you men, if you are men, drive me! But first, woman,"—I addressed this to Mrs. Gifford—"where is Sephira? I know! I know! I know!"

Mrs. Gifford's face went white. She gasped, and the village pressed upon us.

"Listen!" I screamed. "I know!"

Their voices began to hum about me. I could hear the men's gruff tones and women whining. Somewhere a voice called, "Where?" I turned and wildly waving my arms shouted:

"Follow me and I will show you!"

I grasped Mrs. Gifford's hand, then Miss Snifly's, and with a strength I never knew dragged them along. The mob followed us. Pressing like waves, beating us wildly, they swept down the village street, the men shouting, the women running and clinging to their children, dragging them along. I was at the lead and a strength within me that no thing but death could conquer. I dragged Mrs. Gifford, and saw that Teeny with her pious face was following weeping. I remember the taunt, "sneathen," and again I burst into my frenzied laughing. I was a thing, not a woman, a wild thing, a beast! My voice seemed to set them afire.

When I would shout their voices too shouted higher, louder.

We at last reached the little gate. I tore it open and dragged my victims through. They swept like waters over the little fence. Hounds, lapping, they were! When we were before the door I stopped and turned. Then I pointed to the closed doorway and I shouted:

"Sephira is there! Dead! Dead! Dead! Now go and look upon your work! You, Mrs. Gifford, with your honey-prayers, what have you bought but your own comfort, which was a hiding place for your sin? Go and look upon her! Go and look upon her! Hear me, all of you who have flayed her to this! Look upon her! You who have laid on the lash since the first day I remember. Do you think I forget —I who have suffered? No, but in this hour, I remember Sally Trueblood, and thank God I am her brat!"

Then I flung up my arms and sunk down before them and cried out:

"Oh, dearest God, forgive them! I learned from the lips of Sally Trueblood Thy forgiveness and I know it. Oh, forgive them! Forgive them!"

I was moaning. I could not speak, and they stood before me mute. Then I heard my voice again rising and it said:

"Only forgive them! Forgive them!"

Then frenzy seized me again and I stood up to call out once more:

"May He hear me, and may my prayer be granted, but, oh! I cannot forgive you! You, who have lashed her and me and now Sephira, look upon me! Look upon me— Sally Trueblood's brat! You branded me,"—here I beat my breast,—"and you have done more!"

I ran through the door that I flung open and through the sitting-room. They followed slowly, crowding in. I was across the room in a few strides and threw open Miss Patricia's door."

"Look!" I said. "You refused her the chapel; now bid her come! It is too late!"

She lay, her eyelids closed, peacefully, with the little china dog clutched to her bosom, and I knew she was gone. I had known it since my last ministering. They stood awed. The men bared their heads and the women hung theirs. I

went to the other door and through it, went to the shutter and flung it wide. The sun poured in. Then I lifted the coverlid back and their eyes beheld Sephira and her newborn shame. And God's sun sped in and covered the still ones gladsomely. I went to them and pointed to Sephira and I said:

"Look! Is not sin beautiful before *you?* Do you call *this* God's work? No!" I screamed. "*This* is His work—these eyes that are sealed, these sweet lips, and these arms that were so loving! And this," I touched the little form, "ah, it was but your lash, made flesh! It is *your* sin! And *her* sacrifice. She has paid. Now *you* pay!"

With my hands I grasped Mrs. Gifford and Miss Snifly and dragged them toward the door. The whole of them who had followed me had stopped gaping, afraid before what they saw. Mrs. Gifford stood white-faced, her hands working at her bosom. I saw that she was paying. Then, weakly, I turned toward them that had followed and I said:

"Go! Go, and God forgive you! I say this in full hoping that He will. I have learned to say it, not from you, but from Sally Trueblood."

They went from us, shamedly, heads hanging.

CHAPTER XXII

I RECALL how I stood gazing after them. It seemed that I should never again look upon the bright day and be gladsome. They had sullied even my happiest time to come, for the shadow of this thing would fall, I knew. Mrs. Gifford was sobbing, and Miss Snifly stood staring with glazed eyes upon the form of Sephira and the tiny form that lay upon her bosom. I turned to them and found my lips stiffened. They would not move. I stood beside the table that I had overthrown, and looked from the open doorway where Miss Patricia lay, to the spot where Sephira—quiet now, and with the babe seemed living, too young for death to know. I heard Dawson cough and saw her frightened face looking from the kitchen. She beckoned me and pointed to Mrs. Gifford and Miss Snifly. I motioned to her that she should remain where she was. Then I spoke. I think I had meant

to be wicked-tongued to Mrs. Gifford when she raised her eyes to Miss Snifly and I saw no purposeful wickedness but folly, pious folly.

It was a pitiful face, as though it looked from some strange dreaming; as though caught at selfish prayer. Some dire distress had come and like a child she looked, her eyes showing the hint of what she deemed was injustice. I knew that the depth that I would have sunk the sting could not be reached; that Mrs. Gifford was shallow, and her shallowness was filled up with her praying and piousness. She did not speak to me but looked to Miss Snifly and said, "Patty!"

Miss Snifly drew away. "It's shameful, Victoria, shameful! What is the village coming to, overrun of rats and vermin? I say it's shameful! If the creature had been kept from the young folk; had been put in her proper place, which was far enough, I say this would never have happened, Victoria."

Mrs. Gifford listened and I saw her eyes forget their sorrow. They narrowed, and she nodded. Her cheeks flamed and she breathed hard. I knew at that moment she was blaming me with the thing that was upon her. I knew it. Miss Snifly spoke to me, leaving Mrs. Gifford looking on with narrowed eyes and firm-pressed lips. What she said I am loth to state, and I know that I shall not say it as she did. She drew up with a gleam of triumph in her eyes, and with malicious sneering and a show of enjoyment, said:

"I suppose you know whose work this is?"

I did not answer her. There was an awful rumbling in my head and I could not see for a moment.

"Well," said Miss Snifly. "Well, Miss, I don't think you do."

"It's a pretty pot of fish, it is!"

Dawson was drawing into the room. I could see her and I think I smiled a sort of foolish smile, but it was a smile. And I said:

"Come in, Dawson. It is better that you should hear it first hand, then you may repeat it just as it is. Go on," I said to Miss Snifly.

"Well," she said, and I saw her little feather wisping and, in spite of the awful moment, I smiled again. "I know, Miss, that you do not know—that is, you do not truly know."

"I have not asked," I answered.

"Perhaps," she went on, "it would interest you to know that your young Mr. Willoughby has done this."

"No! No!" I cried, and my heart almost stopped. In my starting I had grasped Sephira's shawl that lay upon the press and I saw a tiny scrap crumpled within its folds. I took it up and slowly smoothed it. There was a few slender lines upon it. Sephira's hand had traced them and they said:

"Hope, can you forget? Can you seal your lips?"

With shaking hands I began to tear it to bits and I let them fall slowly like small flakes upon the garlanded carpet. Each tiny scrap was an iced bit to my heart. I looked to Patty Snifly. She was enjoying my misery. I knew it.

"Well," she said, "what have you to say?"

Mrs. Gifford's eyes were gleaming and I saw anger was upon her. Then I leaned toward them and said clearly:

"Nothing."

"Do you believe this?" Miss Snifly asked.

I stared straight into her eyes and said:

"You ask me this, when you with your own lips have told me, Miss Snifly?"

Then it was that Mrs. Gifford burst forth in the wrath that would have been fit for a bumboat's woman. The Willoughbys suffered most and myself. I said that I would not repeat all that was spoken, and I shall not, but their words shamed me beyond endurance. Even before their dead and mine they could not hold their wrath. Miss Snifly, in a high-keyed voice, told that the whole village was full of the shame of Sephira, and they pointed their fingers to Stephen Willoughby, for had they not seen him go to the chapel yard each night, and Sephira, too.

"It was known!" she shrieked. "And that good and just man, the elder Willoughby, had called vengeance upon his son. Indeed, the time was set when they would meet before the eyes of the village and it was to be blades. His was a righteous anger, was the elder Willoughby's. Indeed, such a worthless son should be banished or made to pay with his life."

I listened and I could not speak. They wore themselves weary, and still I stood before them like a foolish thing,

trying not to listen and Dawson, like a fat tabby, lapping up the cream. And once in a while she would ejaculate :

" It's his likes, it is. Them's my words. I says 'em to Hobbs Dawson, and him it is as can tell ye. But I says, says I, the top cream mixin' with the skimmins makes a mess o' both."

Dawson had just finished this edifying statement when a knock sounded, the knock of a firm hand. I sped to the outer door, and before me stood Stephen. Panic swept me. He looked within, stepping slowly up the two steps that led to the little hallway. When he was before the sitting-room door he saw not Sephira, nor Miss Patricia, but Mrs. Gifford and Miss Snifly and Dawson. Miss Snifly spied him and with her bouncing little steps met him with the words :

" Well, can you deny ? "

Stephen laughed a little and turned to me. I looked straight into his eyes and never before did I try so hard that mine might speak to him.

" Stephen, you cannot, cannot," I repeated the word, " deny it. Can you ? "

He walked slowly into the sitting-room and I led him to the doorway and pointed to Sephira. He flushed crimson and I saw his hands open and shut. Then he bowed his head and answered softly, " No." Then Miss Snifly grew from her short self to a tall, wicked thing. She strutted across the room to the side of Stephen and with a voice that rasped, said :

" Look upon your work, monster ! Look upon it ! "

And then they came—the whole village, wildly screaming, throwing stones and cursing. They swept upon the little house and tore the shutters open. I saw the light come streaming in upon Sephira and even this did not stop them. Their voices arose louder and more threatening. " Coffin " Gifford was at the lead and they bore upon their shoulders—some of the village men—the Vicar, whose long white locks flowed and whose face seemed vacant. They burst through the door and seized Stephen. They bore him struggling out to the steps and then there were wild voices crying out for his life. It was then that I realized that I too was within their hands. My cheek was bleeding and my clothes torn. Then shame overcame me, for I saw that my bosom was

bare and scarred. I strove to cover my wounds and my flesh, but they tore at me madly. My hair still streamed and the tattered clothing held but poorly.

They brought us together, Stephen and myself. Then I saw Stephen Willoughby, his father, was leading them, in his accustomed greys with his lavender waistcoat and his tall stick and his great hat and with his wicked face. I looked to Stephen, my Stephen, who reached one hand out to me and with his own strength broke from his persecutors and tried to aid me. Before their eyes he took me to his breast, circled me about with his great arms, and, his head high, he looked to them; and they mocked him, pointing to the room where Sephira Gifford lay. Then they rushed upon us and tore us apart, bearing us down the main streetway.

Then it was, when they had come to the spot before the inn, that Stephen Willoughby, his voice low and oily, spoke to "Coffin" Gifford and those that seemed in the lead, and they sent up a shout. It was to be blades between Stephen and his father, before the eyes of the village. They were wild. I was near Stephen and I whispered:

"Oh, my love, what shall you do?"

He touched me and said:

"Nothing."

"You would not lift your blade against him, would you?"

"No," he answered.

Then I knew that the other blade could and would do its work.

It was beautiful, the day, so bright, but the stillness of Sabbath was gone. They had forgotten God. They were mercilessly seeking to revenge upon some flesh their own sin. Some one brought blades. The paces were marked off. I saw my Stephen, his naked breast heaving and his sinuous arms twitching, grasp one, and I saw his father cast his garments to his white linen, bare his neck of its swathing, and grasp the other. Then I saw nothing but blackness, for I shut my eyes; but I could not leave them shut and opened them once more to see Stephen Willoughby advancing and my Stephen raise his blade and sink it into the soft earth. There followed a quiet like the quiet a cat holds before it springs.

I heard a report, loud and clear, and saw Stephen Wil-

loughby begin to sink. His eyes rolled awfully and he gasped hoarsely but could not speak. I saw them that crowded about part, and Rudy Strong stood before them with a smoking fire-piece. I was terror-stricken. Stephen went to his father's side and leaned over him. He was quite dead.

Then I saw Rudy, tall and young, with his eyes like two dark hollows, and I knew that many days had made them so. I saw he shook like one palsied and he tried to speak. Then he lunged forward, stumbled, caught himself and came to the side of the fallen Willoughby. With an old gesture, he wiped his brow with his hand's back and I saw his fingers twitching as he laid them upon his shaking lips, and he said, as he leaned over:

"D—— you!" Then he turned like a beast, his eyes blazing, and shrieked, "And you, every rotted one of you!"

And with a swing he lay his arms about the shoulder of the bended Stephen and made him arise and he said:

"Your hand, Willoughby. God forgive me!"

The village stood before us shamed, yet madness was among them. They turned upon me and I was swept like a bit of waste upon waters. Their vengeance seemed to demand that I be offered up, and with bared heads and naked hands Stephen and Rudy fought their way through flesh. Men were thrown and bit and torn. Always one arm was about me, once Rudy's and then Stephen's. Always they fought, and when I no longer knew what was about me, it was finished. I found when I awoke that we were within the little sitting-room.

I had had a dream. I recalled a nest that hung by a hair at the thornbush where the woodway lay. I recalled the nester who flew the mornings through, busy, busy, building, building. And then the evenings when its mate circled, circled, seeking for the softer stuff that should lie at the nest's heart. I recalled this and their gladsome summer, and their young, and their crooning-singing that foretold the night's coming. Then their gladder note that heralded the morning, and their mourning when the young were lost.

Oh, I recalled all of this and remembered that this was to-day and the same life went on. Oh, I recalled this and I knew that the Earth was like unto this. I recalled that this had been long, long ago, when Sally Trueblood and I had

sought the night's blooms, that I had known their singing, and when we went the field's way in the morning's first light and the village might not see. It was then I had known their morn songs. Then I had learned what life was. She had told me that the nest *would* hold, and I wakened with a sweetness upon me, remembering how they had sung long and through the storms and brightness.

A feeling of new strength came over me at the thought of this life lesson learned so long ago. I was bewildered at first and could not believe that the awful day was come once more to me. Stephen bent over me and Rudy was chafing my hands. They showed the vestiges of the battle through which we had passed. I looked to Stephen and said :

" Oh, why did I ask you to do the thing I did ! "

He did not answer. Then I remembered the feeling that prompted me to the act. It was a fear that he would speak one word that might tell Sephira's secret, or betray something that would be enough for them to understand.

" Did you know, Stephen ? "

" Yes," he answered softly. " Yes, Hope, and I could not deny it."

" You knew that Rudy——" I gasped and looked at Rudy, who stood very white-faced, his jaws working.

" I knew, Hope," Stephen answered. " I had come to tell you."

" Not Rudy ? " I asked, catching at Rudy's hand.

" No," answered Stephen.

" Who then ? Oh, I see it now ! It was your father ? "

Stephen nodded and sat beside me. I was horror-stricken. I could not understand. I turned to Rudy.

" And you, Rudy ? " I asked.

" Oh, Hope, I left when I knew, for I knew what would happen. It has come to pass, even though I did run away."

" How, Rudy, how ? " I asked.

He sat upon the hassock that he pulled to the couch side and let his head sink into his open palm, covering his face, and I saw the bright drops come slipping through his loosely closed fingers. Stephen made a hollow sound to clear his throat and when he spoke one could hear the muffled man-tears in his voice.

" It is too much, Hope. I shall tell you. When I have

finished I shall go, for I know that you will never again look upon the face of a Willoughby. The Vicarage, you see, is retained, or was, by Stephen Willoughby. The Vicar has idly lived his years trusting to the maintenance of the Willoughby fund. I shall not hide the hideous thing in words, Hope. You knew Stephen Willoughby. God forbid that I speak his name in such a tone, I who am his son, but I cannot but bare my heart. Sephira was young, trusting and sweet, and he held the purse high. Again the Vicar's mildness and trusting was the very thing that made it possible. Sephira spent her youth that he might not know the bite of poverty and banishment."

Here Stephen arose and passed his hands to his burning brow. I was sick! sick! sick! I looked to Rudy. His hands now shook and his eyes sought my face. I reached my hands out to him and he bounded toward me, crying out:

"Hope, I have lost her! I who would have laid down the worthless days God has allotted me to have known one hour that I might have called her mine."

"Rudy, Rudy," I whispered, "you must go, go! Do you understand? They will be upon you."

Stephen wheeled and came to the side of Rudy, laying his arm about him and clasping his hand.

"Man," he said, "I would give this life to undo what is done, but it is of no use. Hope is right. Go far, man, far!"

Stephen pressed a purse in Rudy's hand and said louder, "Go!"

Rudy looked upon his torn and dishevelled clothing, then to me. I arose and went to the press and brought out Mr. Reuben's greatcoat. Stephen threw it about Rudy and hastily made way to the door. It was growing dark and Rudy stepped to the greyness, turning to look steadily into my eyes and say:

"Hope, I shall return. I cannot stay, but I shall return."

Then we were alone. Stephen stood before me. I was glad that Rudy had not seen Sephira.

"Stephen," I said, "he has gone believing that there is something that will bring him back, and that something is Sephira. Oh, it is fearful!"

"No," Stephen answered. "A man must possess, somewhere, a love that calls.

"Yes, yes," I said. "I know. I know. Oh, Stephen, if it were not for her and her love that calls, calls, how might I live?"

I saw that he would have spoken of our future and I hastened to say:

"No, no, Stephen, this is not the time. What shall I do? They will come, soon, soon, for Sephira. I know it. Oh, I cannot, cannot think. Let me see— It was raining— Yes, I heard the dog arise and shake himself— Oh, I wish the lights would be still— They climb, climb, climb the ceiling to slip back, back, back—. It's the inn's lamp— Wait!" And then I knew nothing more.

CHAPTER XXIII

How long it was I know not until I awoke one morning feeling strangely light, as though I was skimming through some great height. My eyes had opened but I could not make myself acquainted with my surroundings. I was in a very gay room, hung of flowered cloth. The canopy over my head was tufted sky blue and each puff was buttoned down. I think I had laid for some time trying to count the puffs and wearying at the counting of the buttons. The window was open. I could see the morning through the white muslin curtains, and the breeze waved the bed curtains, which were partly drawn. These were of flowered stuff. I do not recall that the fact that I was in strange surroundings troubled me much. I tried to raise one hand and it was so queerly heavy. Then I forgot again and there seemed a long time when I would come back to the flowered room and through the open window hear a voice calling, "Are you playing? Are you playing?"

Vaguely I seem to remember that this was something that I had heard before. Then I would forget again. Upon one of these mornings I awoke once more to see a monster beside my bed. I tried to make my eyes tell me where I had seen the face before, but I could not. The effort seemed to make me sick and I slipped away again with a vague memory of some one saying: "Mornin'."

Then I felt something cool upon my face and I thought that I was out in the rain, slipping and stumbling, trying to

bring Dawson. I think I talked some of this, for I heard "Yes, yes," at times, and felt a hand patting me. After an age of this, it seemed, another morning came when I waked myself. I looked about the room and knew that I was again in the great house where the little lady had been. I saw that some one was standing beside the window. The shutters were not fully open. I called and was answered by one word, "Comin'."

She opened the shutter and came, softly as her great bulk would permit, towards the bedside. I knew her. Her face was rounder and pinker. Her hair was still quite brown, but threaded with silver. She stood before me, her hands clasped as of yore upon her stomach.

"Well?" she said.

"How did I come here, Potts?" I asked.

"Chaise," she answered.

"What?" I asked.

"Chaise," she repeated.

"But how?"

"Horse," she replied.

"Who brought me, Potts?" I asked.

"Driver," she answered.

"That will do, Potts."

"Yes," she curtseyed. "Water?" she asked.

I shook my head and seemed again to take up my floating through space. Then again came the darkness.

But soon the time came when I was myself for some time, but a new self, very weak and childlike. I found that my cheeks were sunken and that my locks were gone. No person entered the flowered room except Potts, who never told me more. The nights were queer. Many times I lay with the candle lighted beside me gracefully waving its blaze. Alone I would wonder why I was here and why no one came to explain. Upon one of these nights I think I had slept. I awoke suddenly with the knowledge that some one was bending over me—some one whose hands were thin and soft, for they caressed me; some one who was weeping, for a drop fell upon my cheek; some one in a filmy white robe tied with blue at the throat; some one who coughed, for the cough had waked me. I turned and gazed up into the sweet face and I think I smiled, and I know I said:

"Sally Trueblood, is it you?"

And I heard a soft whisper say:

"Hope."

Then I arose upon my elbow and looked into the face of Geneva Willoughby.

"Miss Willoughby!" I said, and I heard my own voice like a distant echo.

She did not answer me but stood up and caught at her heart. I tried to raise myself up but could not, for weakness was heavy upon me.

"Miss Willoughby," I said once more. "Then you know me?"

"Yes, yes," she answered. "Wait, wait! Do not stir, for——" Here she broke off. "Lie still," she went on "and do not——" Here she left the room.

I lay back upon my pillow, wondering, wondering, wondering what and who had brought me here. What was this mystery that set them all to riddling! I think I had lain some minutes when Potts returned, I thought from an inner room, for it seemed I had only wakened from a short sleep since I had spoken to her last.

"Potts," I said.

"Yessum," she answered, and came to the bedside.

"That was Miss Willoughby—Geneva Willoughby," I said.

Potts nodded.

"Answer me, Potts. How am I to take it? Yes?"

"Yes," said Potts.

"Is she ill, Potts?" I went on.

"Ill," answered Potts.

"What has made her so, Potts? Is she, too, sad?"

"Sad," said Potts, and folded her hands over her stomach, standing staring at the shutter as though she would never speak again.

"Who brought me here, Potts?" I asked, bringing myself up on an elbow, which was about all I might do.

"Chaise," said Potts and relaxed once more into her silent stare.

"Who!" I said, beginning to become excited. "Who Potts, not what."

"Chaise man," said Potts.

I sank down, weakly wondering why dearest God had ever

created one like Potts. Potts did not heed me, nor did she seem to care what became of me or my questioning. She turned briskly, unfolded her hands carefully from her stomach, brushed her rounded thighs downwards and left me to return with some fearful mixture. I smelled it even before she reached me and a sick feeling crept up my neck. I remember that I turned my head away, that Potts came to my side, grasped me by the shoulder and held forth the mug.

"There," said she.

"Oh, Potts, not now. I am really quite, quite ill at the thought."

"There," said Potts once more, giving me a clutch and bringing the mug to my lips and tipping it until the sickening fluid touched them. I shut both my eyes and gulped down the awful thickish gruel. I gasped when it was over and I recall even now the bitter taste that cut me. I sputtered and wiped my lips with my shaking hands.

"What is it, Potts?" I said.

"Gall."

"It is terrible!" I cried.

"Yes," said Potts, calmly wiping the mug's rim upon her apron and leaving me.

I lay wondering why I had ever waked to such a bitter day, bitter both inwardly and outwardly. Then slowly, miserably, came realization. Miss Patricia—Stephen—the whole awful tragedy I had passed through, and a frightful thing seized me. I began to shriek and cry. I found myself beside the great poster upon the floor, trying to arise but my limbs would not bear me up. I remember that I had one thought and that was of the little lady who had jumped from the casement. But the whole world left me again, and when I knew once more what was happening Miss Willoughby was beside me, her hands upon mine, her eyes very red from crying.

She sat upon the high chintz chair and I thought at first that she was in a huge bouquet. Then she stroked my burning brow and spoke softly, and I remember that she said that I should be very quiet, that when I was stronger she would speak; that she needed me, I knew little how much; that she loved me, I knew little how much, and that if I loved her I should be very quiet and wait. This I did. I seemed to know she spoke truly. I saw how very frail she was and I

felt that I must hasten and make me strong. I pressed her hand to my cheek and kissed it and I whispered:

"Say to Sally Trueblood, 'Miss Willoughby's compliments.'"

"Oh, I remember, I remember!" Then I heard her say softly, "Oh, if I had only known!"

I leaned toward Miss Willoughby's head, which she laid beside my hand upon the pillow. She looked very steadily into my eyes.

"What do you mean?" I said. "If you had known what?"

"There, there," she answered, sitting up and dabbing her finger tips to her eyes.

"What is all of this miserable affair, Miss Willoughby? Ever since that eve at the inn the shadow has clung to me. Never before had I known it save when she coughed, or when I saw twilight very heavy beneath her eyes. But that night, the night that Reuben Passwater told me of the elf, ever since then, beside me, tall, dark, forbidding, even in my happiest moments, stands the shadow, and it will not smile but hides its face. I know, Miss Willoughby, that the same haunting thing has written twilight here," and I laid my finger beneath her eyes. "I know that the fearful hand of this shadow opened the door of Miss Patricia's little house the night that I went within to see the moles work. This shadow followed Mr. Reuben. It drove him away by following him. It has clouded every day and I know that the little creature that lived yon," and I pointed toward the turret wing, "feared it, too. Even the little cradle was not empty, for it was filled with the awful shadow. Tell me! Tell me!"

Miss Willoughby's eyes were standing forth until the whites gleamed. Her breast was panting.

"Hush," she whispered, "hush! Listen! She-e-e! Do you hear me?"

I nodded. She leaned very close to me and I saw her eyes had a too bright gleam. "Since they found him,—oh, I cannot tell you! Oh, God! shall I ever forget? The stain is still there! Oh——" she moaned, and rocked her slender form back and forward.

I was sitting up in the great bed and it seemed that my

ears would burst. I reached forth one hand and, weak though I was, shook her sleeve.

"Go on!" I said.

"But the waiting is not over," she whispered. "She-e-e!"

"What?" I gasped. "Not finished? Sally Trueblood is dead. The little lady is gone, too. Her hope even is gone. Yes, and this is not enough, but Miss Patricia, Mr. Reuben, even Sephira Gifford and her babe! Now, who is next? Not finished?" I screamed and began laughing. "Finished!" I shrieked.

Miss Willoughby got up suddenly, ran toward the door and shut it, drew the blind of muslin and stood listening. I threw my hands over my head and cried out:

"Oh, God! Oh, God! what is all of this?"

Potts knocked at this moment. Miss Willoughby listened, then slowly went toward the door and opened it. Potts stood staring at the darkened room, went swiftly over to the shutters, threw them wide, put back the muslins and turned puffing toward Miss Willoughby. Their eyes met. I saw Miss Willoughby raise her brow.

"East wing," said Potts. "Bad."

Miss Willoughby gathered her skirts within her slender hand and swept out into the great hallway.

"Potts," I cried, "is Stephen Willoughby here?"

"No," said Potts.

"Then where is he?"

"Dead," said Potts.

"No, I do not mean the master, Potts, but Stephen."

"Dead," said Potts.

CHAPTER XXIV

I DO not know what followed and remember nothing until I found myself one morning clothed in a queer little frilled dress, wandering about the garden. It was very early spring and only the tender shoots were showing. I recall that I could not remember where I was. I seemed to believe that I was Felicia Trueblood. I knew this when I found myself making my way up to the turret and, before I really knew, I was rocking the empty cradle.

I recall now that I was sitting upon the hassock in the barren room, the little cradle swaying beneath my hands when my eyes raised to the wall and I saw Reuben Passwater's mild eyes looking into mine. I heard my lips say, "Mr. Reuben, what is a brat?" Then I was frightened, for it seemed that he was there and I knew that I should have to tell him that Miss Patricia was gone. But something in the kind eyes and the gentle face was like a new wine to me. I awoke and stood staring about. I saw that Geneva Willoughby was sitting beside the shuttered window, clothed in black. She arose and held her arms out to me. I went into them and then there came back to me Potts' words. I looked deep into her eyes, steel-blue eyes, but shadowed with a new shadow. I knew. I knew.

"Oh, I cannot trace the words, my dears, but it was true. I sat down slowly upon the floor and Miss Willoughby sank to the gaily covered chintz chair that she had just arisen from. I could not speak then. I was shaking. I wanted to be apart. I arose in my misery and walked to the little cradle, and I recall that I said, "You shall not be empty. Will you receive my hope?" My hand began to sway the little cradle and I learned what comfort the little lady had known. Everything was gone. My day was empty, but here was my hope, still a little babe. It could not die. I began to fancy how it looked, this little babe, and I knew it had Sally Trueblood's eyes, Sally Trueblood's lips, Sally Trueblood's smile, Sally Trueblood's curls, Sally Trueblood's love. This was all that was left. I arose and I smiled to the vacant hearth and I said aloud:

"Sally Trueblood, I'm playing."

I staggered with the great weight that left me when I had said the words. I turned towards Miss Willoughby and I saw that she was sobbing. I went to her and laid my arms about her sweet form and I said:

"Oh, Miss Willoughby, listen! This is mine, too. Let me help you. Oh, listen! I shall help you by showing you how much I love him. Oh, I love him so that I am glad. It is true. Look into my eyes. See! I am smiling. I am so sorry that I was weak. Forgive me. Listen! When you are lonely, I shall be beside you. When you are sleeping——" I stopped. Then I remembered and I said

"There shall be an elf upon your pillow and it will be me."

"My dear! My dear!" she said, and held me close. "Oh, my dear!"

Then I heard steps in the hallway.

"Come!" she said.

I arose and she led me through the narrow way to the great hall. We descended to the landing of the great stairway and there hung the great white swathed thing. I stopped.

"Uncover it," I said.

Miss Willoughby went forward slowly and with a swift movement made the white cloth slip from its hanging. Before me was the smiling face that was within my locket, and upon a ribband about his neck upon his dove-cloth waistcoat hung the locket. I stood before him and somehow, I do not know why, but love leapt through every fibre of me. I curtseyed before him and whispered, "Sire!" I heard a shrill cry and Geneva Willoughby had fallen. I stooped over to help her to arise. She lay limp within my arms, her eyes closed. I was facing the beautiful face of the portrait. I looked into his eyes and I said: "You are not the shadow."

I bent down to look upon Miss Willoughby's sweet face, and my locks, which hung thick and about my shoulders, fell upon her white cheek. I saw her lids open and her eyes looked up into mine. Then her lips moved and she spoke softly:

"No, no, no!"

I pressed her to my bosom and with my new strength lifted her that she might rise. We stood before the portrait, we two who would have to face the whole miserable affair alone. She pointed to the smiling face that looked down from the dark canvas. I turned toward her and my eyes sought hers.

"Miss Willoughby," I said, "his smile tells me that I must wait, too. It seems to me that his smile has the whole waiting of centuries behind it. It is enough. I shall wait."

Then I let my arm circle her and with my free hand I spread my gay skirt and curtseyed to the gentleman. Then I said softly:

"Come! Come, Miss Willoughby!"

"No," she whispered, "no. Go to the west wing, where

Potts is waiting, and sleep. Sleep, my child, for the morning will be overfull."

My heart was pounding wildly.

"Morning shall bring much?" I questioned.

"Yes," answered Miss Willoughby. "Yes, very, very much. Hope, Hope——" She stopped and laid her slender hands upon my cheeks lovingly. Then she kissed my brow. "Hope," she went on, "she who named you, named you rightly. You are hope and more, for you are steadfastness, and hope waits for steadfastness. Oh, my sweet, the great God has made you whole! Oh, my dear, I am glad, glad, for I need you, need you, need you!"

I leaned toward her, the frail Miss Willoughby, who seemed like some beautiful dream of Miss Willoughby of my youth, and touched her sunken cheeks with my fingers, and I whispered:

"I am here. All that is yours is mine, even he who is lost unto us. Oh, would you just hold me close and lean your cheek to mine and smile; smile, Miss Willoughby, so that I may believe that Sally Trueblood's living hope has left just a little sun in your mournful heart? Oh, Miss Willoughby, hold me close, close, for my heart is gone!"

"I know, I know," she whispered. "In the morning, Hope, we shall speak of this."

Then I stood before her and it all came over me how empty the morning would be.

"No, do not speak of it. Let me seal it up, this empty pit where my heart has been. Oh, let me seal it up with my memory, like Sally Trueblood's little mound."

She pressed me to her heart and we let our lips meet. Then I turned down the great hallway. It had grown dark. There was a sound of winds in the great trees that buried our manor within their embrace. I saw that the servants had lighted the wall brackets. They held their gruesome arms high and the flames swayed and sent their wavering light through the thick gloom. I saw the shadows wallowing upon the floor. I walked among them and the light embraced me, to leave me and dance to some deeper shadows like some phantom dancer who would tempt me.

Suddenly a gust of wind blew open a door upon the west side of the great hall and I smelled the new musty breath

of emptiness. Darkness seemed to flow like a living stream from the open door. I shrank and shuddered, I knew not why. The door that opened into the little lady's chamber stood at the end of the hallway, yet I feared to pass this new-opened door. Fearing I stood, quaking, staring at the place. Then a new strength came and a feeling that I must go in.

I went to one of the candle brackets and took out a candle. I remember that the wax caked upon my hand's back as I tipped it. Still shaking I stepped unsteadily toward the door. Darkness greeted me, deep darkness, with a breath, a panting breath; still I stepped surely toward the door and stood within it. The candle sent a weak light across the great room and I saw dull reds and dark woods. Slowly I stepped within. I could hear my own breath and see the candle shake in my hand. I coughed and the great empty room echoed it like a hiss in my ear. Then I stepped firmer toward the centre of the place and my glance fell upon the floor at my feet. Then I gasped aloud, for upon the dull red of the floor covering gleamed a sinister stain, deeper, darker, fearfuller, and I knew this was the stain that Geneva Willoughby had spoken of.

I jumped from it as one would jump from a serpent, and suddenly I heard a voice from the depths of the shadow in the far corner, a sweet voice, a loving voice, but a tired voice.

"Sarah," it said. "Sarah! Sarah!" it called.

I dropped the candle, and was standing in a great place in deep darkness.

I was terror-stricken. Fear encased me like ice. Then I seemed to slip away, but I heard my own voice in shrill peals crying out. After, it seemed, hours, I heard steps within the hallway and saw new candles being borne toward the open door, where before had shone only the weird flickering of the hall arms. I heard the click of a bolt and felt a sudden gust of air. Then I recall Miss Willoughby within the door, a candle held high, and the rotund Potts following her. I saw that Miss Willoughby's face was white and frightened, but even in my fear I turned to survey the great room, which was a bedchamber. The bed showed that some one had rested recently in it, but it was quite empty.

Miss Willoughby came toward me where I stood and

laughed foolishly. The candles now lighted the room quite brightly. I saw that the great bed was draped in the scarlet that touched everything in the place. Upon the chairs' backs were great "W's," woven of gold, now tarnished and showing black, but glistening here and there where it still remained untouched by age. The bed curtain bore the same emblem. The curtains were of rich stuff, scarlet, and the under side was of golden colour. Upon a long table stood a golden candle tree with many candles. All of this I saw in my swift searching glance. Upon the table lay something that caused me to gasp. It was a locket like the one I possessed, exactly, bearing the same letters, I surmised, and upon a ribbon like mine. Carefully, slowly, secretively, I let my hand slip along the table edge until it was within my grasp. Miss Willoughby did not see. She again touched me and whispered:

"Come, come, you are ill!"

"Yes," I answered. "Ill, very, very ill."

I did not speak of the one who had called, "Sarah." I had learned from the great manor of wisdom of fools, which is silence. I let my hand lie in Miss Willoughby's free one and she led me away, down the hallway, where the light beckoned wildly as the candles were borne along. I was filled with joy, for within my purse pocket I knew was the locket. They took me to the gay chintz room. I do not recall what happened. I was filled up but with one desire and I did not listen or look. The locket was mine.

Potts busied overlong at the accustomed tasks. She insisted on unloosing my stays and making me ready for sleep. When I had watched her with unseeing eyes and listened to her tramping, tramping for so long that I felt that I should burst, she finally left me, making that she would take the candle. I called and bade that she leave it. She curtseyed, said nothing, and sat it upon the small table beside the shutter and left me.

I arose and went to the door to see that it was closed securely. Then I sped to my frock, which was hanging like a fainting me over the chair's back. I slipped my fingers through the folds of the skirt and found the pocket. Yes, it was there. My heart was thumping. I shut my hand upon it. I was afraid to look. Slowly, fearfully, I went to the

candle and opened my hand. The back was toward me. I looked to the lettering. It was the same as upon that that Sally Trueblood had left me. Then I turned it slowly over and out from the silver rim laughed forth Sally Trueblood! Sally Trueblood, with her blue eyes clear and childlike, and her sweet lips smiling, without the shadow! Sally Trueblood, my darling, with lips that spoke to me even from the tiny case and said, "He will come. Say it slow, Hope. He will come!"

I knelt down and with feverish haste reached within my bosom and brought forth my locket. I laid this one beside the other and, from a wrapping where I had hidden it, the little ivory, Sally Trueblood with brown eyes. I looked long upon them, these three who, I knew, held the secret of the waiting. The smiling gentleman, the great bee, oh, I loved him! Yet he had laid upon me the curse of shame. I looked into his eyes. They were fearless eyes, honest eyes. They were deep, but clear deep. I looked to his lips. They were smiling, frankly, openly, honestly. Then to my darling's, but my heart stopped. I could not search her face for evil. In my heart I could not find strength even to look at the sweet, smiling face with the thought upon me. I turned it up toward me and held it close and whispered, "My dear! My darling!" I laid the locket upon my cheek and kissed it and drank out of the eyes that smiled back at me.

"Oh, my darling, I know, I know that the threads may be tangled, and you wearied at the task of unravelling them, but I know your sweet hands never, never snapped the thread. They only wearied, my dear. My dear, I know, and I shall unravel it for you."

I was bending over my treasure, her sweet face, that I might look upon it, when my miseries came upon me. I seemed to see Stephen standing fearlessly before the mob, and myself so quaking and frightened, clinging to him. Then my heart froze. Stephen was gone! gone! gone! My eyes fell upon Sally Trueblood's laughing face and I thought of her when he was gone, the great bee, and I said, "It's a game of waiting, waiting, but I must know."

It grew very late and silence was upon the house. Still I sat, and within me was a resolve to go forth in the manor

and know what the shut doors held. The candle was low. It was the only one in my chamber and I knew that Potts would take the bracket candles with her lest they burn too low and cause the flames to spring. I should have to make the candle show me the way. I felt sure they of the household were sleeping. Cautiously I arose from my knees where I had been so long, and with my shaking hands I tied up the treasures and put them once more into my bosom. Then I went to the candle and softly to my door. It opened silently. I stepped into the great lonely hall. It was pit dark and the night air was cool. I was clothed but in my sleeping garment and my feet were bare. I went to the very door that had opened and I stood before it. I tried it, but it was firmly bolted. From here I went to the next and turned the latchet. It sprung suddenly and creaked open. The light was dimmed with the suddenness of the door's opening. I shielded it with my cupped hand and stepped within, closing it after me.

I stopped, holding the candle high, and my eyes turned slowly about. If the room that I had entered before had been gloom itself, here was happiness. Filmy laces hung the bed posts, hung over pale colour of rose. The curtains were drawn and the lacy coverlid showed and the huge pillows of some sheeny stuff. The curtain bands were of pale blue. Beside the great bed was a tiny hassock upon gold legs, slender ones that turned gracefully out, then in. It was ridiculously small and beautiful. Across a tall-backed chair of the same golden stuff hung a filmy wrapper of webby lace. The gilded press stood at one side. Very pompous, it was, its drawers set high from the floor, upon slender legs too, as though it had puffed up its breast and sat back. A tiny desk was at one corner and a quill, like one I had seen, made of a peafowl's feather set within a quill.

I went slowly about, holding the candle so that I might see. I touched the wrapper and it fell softly, as though it was weary, upon the floor. I had just arisen from plucking it up when I heard the same tired voice call, "Sarah!" Panic seized me. I hurriedly went to the table, loosed from a bracket a candle end and placed my burning one in its place. Then I swiftly returned to the wrapper and threw it about me. It fell long upon the floor. It was soft and

beautiful. There I stood, and my eyes raised to a shimmering light upon the wall where a huge reflector hung. I gasped and swayed, then threw out my arms and bounded toward it, crying out, " Oh, my darling ! " But the face did not smile in return and I stopped, shaking, for it was only my own reflection.

I stood looking straight into my own eyes and I began to weep, but this showed me Sally Trueblood weeping, and I smiled again. The candle's blaze was loving upon the air, leaping up to embrace the darkness, then shrinking low, ashamed.

Some sound startled me. I stood, fear-chilled, listening. The door that led into the scarlet room slowly opened. I saw it in the reflector. A dark figure stepped into the room as the door swung back. I saw the light fall upon the cloth of the garments and I knew that it was of rich stuff, deep plum. A white ruff gleamed and I fearfully sought the face in the reflection. Without turning I gazed and saw a tall gentleman with a gay swing to his air. In his hand gleamed something I took to be a snuffbox. The hands were very white. I forgot the face in the movement of the hands.

Then the light suddenly flamed and I saw the smiling gentleman of my locket, only his chestnut hair was white at the temples. The locks were the same that my locket showed. I was overcome with a strange feeling. I saw that the lips did not smile now, but were drawn very thin and firm and that his eyes had not twilight but midnight beneath them.

He stepped in the pale light and a queer, fanciful smile played his face. He started suddenly, then turned toward me. I heard the snuffbox fall and a gasp. Then a bitter laugh and the words, " Fancy, fancy, what a demon thou art ! " Then a deep sigh and the sound of the hands falling upon his sides.

I was watching feverishly every move. I was hungry, hungry, hungry to know. This, then, was " the great bee," who had not come to her. I turned slowly about, and I remember that my face felt drawn and my lips were stiff and my hands helpless. I saw him lean forward and I felt I should shriek out against him and the wrong he had done her. Then I remembered that this was her love, and I,

he believed, his fancy. Then I was Sally Trueblood, and she would smile. So I smiled and some strength, not mine, held out my arms. He sprang toward me, his face illumined, and hoarsely I heard him whisper:

"Sarah, have you forgotten? I bade you hope, keep hope."

My lips opened and I heard them repeat, "Hope! Yes, yes!"

Can I ever efface the one glimpse I had of heaven oped?

With faltering steps he came toward me. Slowly the distance shortened until but a step remained. I saw his hand reach toward me and within my soul something stirred. It was Sally Trueblood's dead love. I was her. Upon her waiting flesh his hand fell and I knew that the waiting for her was over. I felt his arms close about me and I heard him whisper:

"You are not gone?—dead?"

"Dead?" I answered. "No, my hope is living."

He kissed me full upon my lips and I knew that I had received one of God's mysteries, for her. I heard his voice trembling and calling her name over and over, and I lay within his arms like one swooned. Sealed was my soul, sealed my ears and my lips, for I was drinking at her fountain. Then I heard a wild cry. The door shut suddenly and the candle was out. With a quick movement I was free of his arms and feeling my way in the darkness to the door's opening. There was a fearful storm without. I could hear the winds raging and the lightning set a faint light now and then like a blue dawn through the shutters. I heard him calling, but heeded not; for wrath was now within me.

I found the door and silently opened it. It was black without and the lightning's flash now and then made little light within the great hall. I could see the doorway, even when I had passed well upon my way, by the lightning. I heard steps that told me he was following. Swiftly I sped, although I was fearful that I should fall, and I found my way to the turret room of the little lady. The door was not bolted and I went within.

The wind was now raging. I could hear the trees bend-

ing and now and then the crash as some limb was stripped from the trunk. The thunder was frightful, and I stood panting beside the closed door almost afraid to be alone, yet more afraid to go once more to the great hallway lest he should see me. I felt that I might not look again upon him, this man who had forsaken her. The feeling that I should love him, for her, was gone. I was now filled of a feeling of abhorrence. All the womanhood of me cried out against him.

I heard the rain sweep the shutter in sheething sounds. Slowly I walked to the window's ope and with my fingers turned a shutter ever so slightly. A sudden blinding flash turned the without into a land of greenish moonlight. The trees seemed like wild things imploring the sky.

It was in the sudden flash of light that I saw a chaise was drawn up in front of the manor. I saw the outlines as the lightning faced the sky. I waited for another flash. It came, a wicked one that whipped the breast of grey and left a white light for a minute upon the earth. I saw the nag drawn up in the rain and the glisten of the wet hide and the chaise. Then it was gone. I waited once more, and again the lightning played my friend and I saw a small, dark figure emerge from the chaise, wrapped in a black coat or cape, and speed toward the great arch. I closed the shutter and turned, feeling my way back to the doorway. I opened the door and listened. I knew it was near morning and that when the storm broke the grey light would come; but the hallway was still black when I stood within it, listening.

Below I could hear stirring steps that told me that they were awake now and disturbed. There was no sign that the gentleman had followed. The doors were closed, I found, as I felt my way down the hallway that I might return to the room where Potts had left me. Then I saw that the candles were being lighted in the lower hall. I heard a call and then the gratings of the bolts upon the out-door. I leaned over the stairway and listened. I heard the door opened and saw the shadow of Hooks upon the wall. I felt the wet air as the gust of wind drove it in, and heard the shriek of the storm as they shut it out. Then a stamping of feet and the muffled voice of some one who was unwinding his mantle and shaking free of drops.

I caught the words, " Strong, of Strong & Strong." The gentleman cleared his throat gruffly and blew his nose in a bugle sound. Strong ! I turned the word about in my mind. Strong ! The old inn came back to me, and another storm, and the little black gentleman who was called Strong— Rudy's uncle, Mr. Strong, of Strong & Strong. The latter Strong had been so proudly added since that time. That whole eve at the inn came back to me as I stood there listening to just such a storm again. I remembered how I loved the light ; and the gladness that had filled me as I saw the coach had come and had looked upon Miss Geneva Willoughby. And I wondered what fate had brought about the strange fact that I was again beneath the same roof with Geneva Willoughby and Mr. Strong.

I turned and made my way to the room of gay chintz, and this with some difficulty as the darkness made the way long and tedious. At last the goal was reached. I turned the latch and was within. I saw the faint gleam of grey at the shutters like some gaunt stranger that would come within. The storm was dying. I could hear the heels of the thunder's chargers as they ran away. I was so weary, so frightened, so sick-swept, so miserable, with this new feeling upon me. I walked to the great bed and sat upon it and leaned back just to rest my weary head when my old friend sleep came and led me away.

CHAPTER XXV

It was a happy journey, but he left me in the morning and I opened my eyes upon a new day alone. I know now that I was a bit wrong. My memory was clouded at first. I could not piece together the broken bits that floated by me. I recalled the storm and I made to arise but I felt heavy and weary. So I turned upon my side, and it was then that I realized I was still in the filmy robe. I lay looking upon it, in the dim light that now filled the room, and I wondered what all of this meant. Then the sick feeling came once more as though I had done some fearful thing, or more as if I had long looked for some great pleasure and it had fallen short.

The beautiful halo I had built about my whole story had

been dispelled. I could not fancy beautiful things. He was there beneath this roof and I also was beneath it. He, who had wronged her and me, was there, and more, his air was not sorrowful.

I sat up slowly and stared about me, pressed my brow and started, for I heard the step of Potts. Hastily I arose and freed myself of the lace robe and hid it beneath the coverlids. When the door was opened I was lying peacefully sleeping to the eyes of Potts, and it was only after she spilled two "Mornin's" that I awoke slowly.

With my waking, the night before seemed upon me. I say my waking, although I had lain long with wide eyes until Potts had knocked. But I think that through this long miserable quietude I had not been fully aware of my surroundings. I seemed to be dazed, waiting for morning yet not knowing what I should do. But when Potts had knocked I had resolved to be about finishing my search for the truth.

"Potts," I said, as I rubbed my eyes, "who is below?"

Potts wiped her fat palms upon her round stomach, slowly raised her hands to her sleek head and rubbed her locks behind her ears. Then she stepped toward the press and with the greatest care dusted some imaginary dust from its surface without answering.

"I hear voices, Potts," I said.

She nodded.

"Is it Mr. Strong?"

"Strong," replied Potts and came toward me with her eyes searching me, I thought.

"Be gone, Potts!" I commanded. "I shall robe alone."

Potts curtseyed, slipped her hands beneath her waistband and ran her fingers about her waist; then with one fat forefinger she wiped her nose and left me.

I arose and sat upon the side of the great bed, looking upon my bare feet and thinking where they had led me in the darkness of the night. Then I got upon them and clothed. I had a feeling at my heart that I was upon the threshold of the door that would lead me through the mystery. And more, the terror of the thought that I should again face the gentleman that I had met in the scarlet room set my heart

quaking. I had forgotten my own agony at the loss of Stephen and the losing of my love, in the solving of this mystery which had followed me since the night at the inn.

When I was quite ready I went to the door and made my way to the stairway. There I stopped, for I heard a man's voice speaking. I leaned forward that I might hear and I heard the voice of the gentleman who had kissed me in the beautiful rose room.

" No, no," I heard him say, " my dear Geneva, I was quite awake. She stood before me. I tell you I had my hands upon her flesh. No, no, I am quite sure I was not dreaming."

Then Miss Willoughby's voice broke in : " But, my dear brother, it is impossible."

Slowly I began to descend the stairs. The light was now within the house and the great canvas upon the landing smiled down at me as I passed, but the lips were not drawn and the smile was the smile of waiting, but not of weary waiting that I had seen upon the same lips. I was sure they were the same lips.

As I turned the way to descend the stairs that led toward the hall, I saw a dark figure, a small gentleman who I knew was Mr. Strong, turning toward the dining hall. I recall him now. He seemed so very small and black, and walked upon his toes as though his opinion of himself was greater than he, and that he would raise himself to meet it. He carried his high hat and a lawing bag. I watched, standing very still, and I waited until I might hear what happened.

Mr. Strong went to the hall and I heard his voice, too large a voice for so small a gentleman, give greeting. He paused at the open door, put his great hat upon his breast and bent low. I remember that his coat tails stuck out almost straight behind him. He looked most like a cock robin plucking a worm. I heard Miss Willoughby's voice bid him enter and I saw him snap open and strut within. With slow steps I made my way down the stair and walked softly to the door to the dining hall. I shrunk to the wall and listened. Miss Willoughby's voice arose and I knew she was addressing Mr. Strong. It was but a word, which I took to be a murmur of the gentleman's name, and I wondered if they had not met before, Strong and this man. I heard them arise and knew by the sounds that they had

clasped hands. Mr. Strong cleared his throat. I drew nearer the door, and even leaned that I might peep within.

Strong was seated, his lawing bag open upon his knees. Miss Willoughby sat apart, a little toward the great table, her hands clasped loosely within her lap. The smiling gentleman was leaning toward Mr. Strong with, I thought, an anxious look upon his face.

"Mr. Willoughby," said Mr. Strong. I started. "Mr. Willoughby," repeated Mr. Strong, as he unrolled a long script with a massive seal upon it, "it is my painful duty to remind you that I am an officer of the law. It grieves me sorely"—here Mr. Strong again cleared his throat and rolled his eyes upward. "I am commissioned, my dear Mr. Willoughby, by Brumby & Brumby to insist that the sum be paid. Two thousand pounds, in short, my dear sir. I trust this will not inconvenience you."

I saw Miss Willoughby lean forward also, and Mr. Willoughby stood clasping his hands behind his back and an ugly look upon his face.

"It is preposterous!" he said. "Impossible! Impossible!"

Mr. Strong slowly rolled the parchment to a slender roll and squinted through it toward the window, cleared his throat and said deliberately:

"Of course, if the facts be known——"

Mr. Willoughby lunged toward him and Mr. Strong stood and excitedly tapped the towering man playfully upon the shoulder.

"Of course, of course this is but a jest, my dear sir, merely a jest. Of course you shall pay."

"You wolves would even have the bone!" said Mr. Willoughby. It is gone far enough. I tell you I never paid this money. I knew nothing of it."

Mr. Strong laughed and shrugged and let his glance sweep the room carefully. Then he said:

"I fear I could not convince my worthy friends, Brumby & Brumby, of this, Mr. Willoughby."

Miss Willoughby coughed and arose, going to the side of Mr. Willoughby. She laid her hand upon his coat sleeve and said softly:

"It is of no use, my dear; we are undone."

"Never!" he replied. "Geneva, what think you I care for their tongues? There is nothing to lose, nothing. All that I ever possessed is gone! I have borne the stain unjustly, God knows, but borne it and I lost! What is more, losing even this life. God knows I know not what is done or undone, but I shall know what shall be done."

Mr. Strong unrolled his parchment and made to read it very closely, crossing his ridiculously small legs and rubbing his chin over with a ridiculously small hand; but I could see that he was watching Miss Willoughby. Miss Geneva walked from the table's side to the open shutter and stood looking out into the garden. Mr. Willoughby came to the side of Mr. Strong and I saw his beautiful hands were fretful. He plucked at his frill and seemed loth to begin. Finally he said:

"See here, Strong, you know that I have nothing to do with this."

Mr. Strong raised his eyebrows very high, pulled his thin lips down and asked innocently:

"Truly? Then I am to take it that although the old gentleman was found in your bedchamber, and you, under liquor, beside him, even with the blade within your hand and his blood upon your linen, that you have nothing to do with it! This *is* amusing, most amusing, if I may venture to state, Mr. Willoughby. I shall tell this to Brumby & Brumby. No doubt these worthy gentlemen will believe you."

Mr. Willoughby's eyes were filled with anger. I saw that he would lay hands upon Mr. Strong and cast him forth, but by great effort he stood and with a stately bow he asked:

"Have I the honour to address the apothecary?"

"Sir!" said Mr. Strong, standing up.

"I feel the need of a bleeder," said Mr. Willoughby.

Mr. Strong sat down, and I saw that he too was angered. The silence grew for a time, then Mr. Strong, his oily manner resumed, smiled obligingly upon Mr. Willoughby and remarked:

"Amusing, most amusing. But to resume, Mr. Willoughby. The two thousand pounds."

Mr. Willoughby clasped his hands behind him and I saw his knuckles whiten.

"I tell you once and for all, Strong, it is impossible, pre-

posterous! I shall not pay it. I do not know what arrangement Stephen has had with you, but at his death it ended."

Mr. Strong waited a bit and then resumed, as though not noticing Mr. Willoughby's remarks:

"Mr. Stephen Willoughby, that honourable gentleman, has put within the hands of Brumby & Brumby, who, as you know, may deliver into the hands of authority, certain facts, Mr. Willoughby, facts. You understand? Facts!" and he smacked his lips. "These facts, Mr. Willoughby, it grieves me sorely to inform you, concern yourself. Mr. Stephen Willoughby, your worthy brother, in doing this merely defended himself from needless blame, unfounded blame. Of course, since the facts, the facts," he repeated, smacking his lips once more, "were present——" Mr. Willoughby stood silent. "I think," went on Mr. Strong, "that since that—let me see—it was May—your worthy brother has put into the hands of my worthy co-workers, Brumby & Brumby, certain funds befitting their trust."

Here Mr. Strong, holding the long script in his hands, folded them across his ridiculously small stomach and let himself rise and fall upon his toes and heels. I heard Mr. Willoughby breathing very hard. Then I heard him hiss:

"He did this? For what? Geneva, do you hear this?"

She nodded without turning,

"If," went on Mr. Strong, "if, I say if, Mr. Willoughby, these facts, facts, should be discounted, then why, I say why, Mr. Willoughby, have you absented yourself?"

Mr. Willoughby sat down very suddenly upon one of the great chairs and heaved a deep sigh, letting his hands fall together before him. He did not answer, and I stood breathlessly listening. I was at the hall of justice for him whom my love would spring to and my hate fretted over.

Mr. Strong arose once more and folded his script, for he had sat down when he had finished his questioning. I saw him busy at his bag that he was making ready to go. I heard a sudden sound and saw Mr. Willoughby spring upon Strong.

"D—— you, Strong, d—— you and your kind! I could——"

"Cut my throat," said Mr. Strong.

Mr. Willoughby let his hands fall and stood silent a moment. Then added, " Yes."

" Very likely," said Mr. Strong. " I shall tell this also to my worthy friends, Brumby & Brumby.

Mr. Willoughby's eyes gleamed. I saw that he knew that the fox had nipped the fowl. Mr. Strong righted his rumpled feelings by dabs at imaginary displacement of his raiment. He shook his leg and stooped to right his garter, which was worn far too low beneath the knee over his woollen leggings which buttoned in humps. Why the woollens I could not know, for it was still warm of the early season. Then with deliberation he went on :

" Of course, my dear Mr. Willoughby, certain unfortunate facts are evident, such as the fact, we will say, that you are the eldest Willoughby. Unfortunate, most unfortunate ! I dare say, even you will admit it. Then, too, another, just as grievously unfortunate. The Willoughby estate was in default. Most unfortunate, Mr. Willoughby, most unfortunate, since you represented Obadiah Willoughby, the elder. Most unfortunate, I repeat. And again——" Mr. Strong here cleared his throat and began his sinking and rising upon his toes and heels. " Certain holdings, we will say, in metals, Australia, ahem ! were known to you, and these holdings have not been found in Obadiah Willoughby's effects. Unfortunate, Mr. Willoughby, it grieves me to state."

" But I went——" started Mr. Willoughby, and suddenly stopped.

" Yes," said Mr. Strong, " unfortunately ! "

Miss Geneva turned and I saw her eyes were blazing, that her lips were firmly pressed. She came to Mr. Strong and laid her hands upon his sleeve and I heard her say :

" We shall come, Mr. Strong, to-morrow, to your abode. We shall come. I say we."

Mr. Strong stood taller and bowed stiffly, with authority, I thought, as though he had filled up of " unfortunate " diet and was full. I heard the tremor in her voice and I saw that Mr. Willoughby for some reason might not speak ; although I could tell that he was bursting with wrath, and it looked like honest wrath. Mr. Strong started toward the door.

I ran swiftly down the hallway to the first door and opened it and stood in the great room where the same face as my

locket's smiled down upon me—where the little lady had lain. I listened and heard Mr. Strong go through the great door, the rattle of a chaise and its going until it faded away. Then I softly opened the door and went into the long hall once more. I could hear the voices of Miss and Mr. Willoughby and I followed the sound back to my hiding place. I saw that they were standing before the opened window and I looked upon the scene their eyes beheld. The garden was sunken here, a bit of brook valley, and, beyond, a flank of high woods amid which a gable showed. Mr. Willoughby stood with his arm encircling Miss Willoughby's frail form and I saw they were gazing across the garden way, past the hill's rise, to the gable. Their heads were lifted, and I lifted mine and saw.

"Patricia," said Mr. Willoughby reflectively, "dear Patricia!"

Miss Willoughby repeated it: "Dear Patricia!"

"Who is there?" Mr. Willoughby asked.

"It is empty," sighed Miss Geneva, "even of a caretaker."

Mr. Willoughby sighed and I heard him say:

"It is strange, Geneva, how one's heart stays young and how the earth grows old. Do you know, I can see the great bough of the tryst tree where we played. Patricia! dear prim Patricia! I think there are letters upon the scarred sides of the old comrade, 'O. W.' and 'P. P. P.,' which—" here he laughed and it sounded like a laugh that had come through years,—"which we said stood for Patricia Prim Passwater."

Miss Geneva did not answer and they stood long, gazing, I knew, to the land of childhood, and in my fancy, I saw Miss Patricia, too prim to be even a little child. I could not imagine her strided upon a bough.

"And Reuben," said Mr. Willoughby. "Geneva, there's a man! He left her, dear Patricia, to find me, and she, God bless her! waited that he might find me."

Miss Geneva nodded.

"I shall see Reuben," said Mr. Willoughby. "I shall grasp his hand."

"No," said Miss Geneva. "No, Obadiah, Reuben is gone. And Patricia."

He whirled and took her shoulders within his man's clasp and I saw that the man-agony had swept him. I stood waiting and for some unaccountable reason I suddenly sneezed. They started and Mr. Willoughby listened. I made no sound and he laughed a bitter laugh and said :

" It is a land of wraiths and I have tarried too long. Sit down, my dear Geneva."

They made their way to the table and drew up two chairs in which they seated themselves and carried on a conversation which was in low tones. I caught a word now and then.

" Strong has been sent to beat the bush. They will ride in later." Then some low murmurs. " What do I care," went on the voice of Mr. Willoughby, " for their hectoring ? God ! Geneva, all of this is nothing compared to——" I lost the words. Then, later, came : " She believed me." " I do not know." " It is impossible ! She would not ! " " No ! No ! " Then Miss Willoughby's voice, " But the child——"

" What ? " I heard Mr. Willoughby almost shout. " This——" Then more murmurs. " He may be a cur, but not that, not that ! " Then more murmurs and Miss Willoughby's voice, " Gentlewoman."

" But," broke in Mr. Willoughby, " you had seen her."

" No," answered Miss Geneva. " No, my dear brother."

Then murmuring once more.

" Even the devil," went on the voice of Mr. Willoughby, " would not party to this trick. I tell you it is a mistake. Look ! " He felt in his bosom and brought out a bit of worn script. " Read it," he commanded Miss Willoughby, after smoothing it. " Does it not state it clearly ? " She nodded, " Then forget this hideous thing. It cannot be. Forget it, and do not mention it again. I have stood too much. I cannot dare think this. Wait ! wait ! wait ! "

I was fascinated, but I saw they were coming toward the hall. I fled to a wing, seeking Potts that I might sup. I found her in the linens, counting, and even at counting she stopped after each count. She turned as I came into the great closet and put her hands upon her round hips.

" Well ? " she said.

" Potts," I answered, " some hot water, please, and a scone."

She nodded and went to the inner place where she might procure them. I went then to the dining hall and waited. There was no sign of any other person about. Hooks came in with the water and Tongs followed with the scone. I sat down and they served me in silence, and as I supped I thought of the other times I had so sat, and all that had occurred and I wondered why I was here and who had brought me and who had welcomed me. How did they know me, or that I was of them? for even I did not know this. I thought of Stephen and I wondered how the dreadful thing had happened. I resolved to seek Miss Geneva and ask her. I finished my bit of scone and supped the last of the water, then arose and went to the chintz room. I knew that Miss Geneva would seek me later and I waited her. She came, rather pale and I saw she was over-wrought. She kissed me and called me " Hope " and patted my shoulders.

" Miss Willoughby," I said, " I must ask, though I know I shall open wounds. Did you know Sally Trueblood ? "

" No," she answered. " I was go——" I started. " I cannot tell you now, my sweet. This place is beneath a grim grasp. We must wait."

" Oh ! " I shrieked. " I too can keep my lips and my heart. I have done it for her and I can for you. Miss Willoughby, oh, please, please tell me ! Tell me, even though I can't bear to hear. Who, who brought me here ? "

" Stephen," she whispered.

" He brought me here ? " I repeated.

She nodded.

" And then ? "

" Oh, my sweet, it was fearful, the storm and his wild ride. He promised, promised he would return when he had met them, your persecutors. He was found below, just before the great door, with a blade in his heart and this in his hand." And she reached into her bosom and brought out a folded linen. There was a small dark stain at the edge, and an emblem bearing the letters " O. W." I looked at it and my heart froze. I saw Mr. Strong upon his toes and heels and heard my own lips murmur, " unfortunate." Miss Willoughby clutched me.

" Do you see, Hope ? It must be silence and waiting."

" Who did this ? " I asked.

Miss Willoughby looked deeply into my eyes and said :

" Wait ! It will all be right. Wait !"

I walked to the shutter and looked without. It was bright and the young greens were tender, soft. The sun illumined them so that they shone bright and glistening. Miss Willoughby waited that I should speak. I turned and I recall the look she cast upon me, one of sorrow and of not understanding. I came toward her and I said :

" You told me that this morning would be full."

' Yes," she answered, " yes, Hope, but like so many that I have expected to be full, it must wait again."

I held the scrap of linen in my hand and looked upon it once more.

" Do they know of this ? " I asked.

" I do not know," she answered. " They have come. Even Strong has spoken queerly, and I fear, fear, Hope, for the worst."

" But Strong has gone. I saw him come in the storm and I heard him go this morning."

She nodded and said : " I have promised that we would go to him."

" Will you go this morning ? " I asked.

" No," she answered, " I have promised that we would go to-morrow but——" She stopped and turned toward the door.

I, too, started, for I heard the knocker of the great outer doorway. She came toward me and clung. I circled her waist about with my arm and we stood listening. We heard the bolts loosed and the door opened and once more the voice of Mr. Strong, which betrayed his excitement. He addressed Hooks who had let him in.

" Say that Mr. Strong has returned," he said. " Say that he has returned," he repeated deliberately.

Then I heard a gruff voice say, " Yes," and a thin one echo it.

Miss Willoughby's eyes were wide as she looked to me.

" Hope," she said, " what does it mean ? "

" I do not know, but come."

We went to the stairway, down to a point where we could peer below without their knowing. Mr. Strong was bobbing about in his excitement. To one side stood a great bulk

whose chin lay in one fold of fat upon its bosom. Two little swollen hands were laid across the huge stomach, scarcely meeting. His great hat set well down upon his ears, which tipped outward beneath the brim. The eyes were small and beady. The huge legs were in smalls that seemed fairly to burst and the cloth of his raiment was sombre black, offset by an orange waistcoat. I could not see his neck's swathe, if there was one.

At the other side stood a tall individual with a slight hump, a long face with a longer chin than most men's. The lips were mere thin lines and the eyes were dull. One long bony arm was laid across the narrow trunk and the other elbow rested upon it, while the deathlike hand plucked at the chin whiskers, which were stubby over his face.

Miss Willoughby waited. Hooks went to some inner room and then came back and mounted the stairway. Miss Willoughby whispered, "Wait," and went to meet him. He turned and she followed him below. Mr. Strong came to meet her.

'Miss Willoughby," he said softly and bowed after the fashion of a gentleman. "Miss Willoughby," he repeated, drawing himself up to his full height and strutting toward the two ill-assorted beings, "my friends, Brumby and Brumby."

"Brumby," came forth gutturally from the throat of the great bulk. "Brumby," piped the other. And they bowed, one tilting loppingly, the other puffing and but nodding.

"My friends Brumby and Brumby," repeated Mr. Strong, rubbing his hands.

Miss Willoughby drew herself up and bowed stiffly, first to the great bulk, then to the wreckage. Then I heard her clear voice address Mr. Strong:

"Mr. Strong, would you be so kind as to state the mission of this visit. Why am I honoured by the presence of Messrs. Brumby and Brumby? I believe I told you that we would come to-morrow."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Strong. "I spoke of this to my friends, Brumby and Brumby. Did I not, gentlemen?"

"Yes," choked the great bulk, and the wreckage echoed it.

" I told them," went on Mr. Strong, " of your intentions, Miss Willoughby."

" Quite so," supplemented the bulk.

" Quite so," the wreckage again piped, and as his mouth opened he displayed long narrow yellow teeth.

After his last edifying remark he removed his tall hat and gracefully scratched his head with the long, thin, finely pointed small finger of the hand he employed, Then he carefully fitted the great hat upon his small head and carefully resumed his plucking of his whiskers. Mr. Strong clasped his hands beneath his coat tails and swung them back and forward.

" My dear Miss," he said, " my dear Miss, this, this," he smacked his lips and licked his teeth, " is a most unfortunate mission."

Miss Willoughby did not show by any outward sign that she was at all perturbed.

" I may say it grieves me sorely, my dear Miss, to state that certain facts which have come into the hands of my co-workers have necessitated this action. I may say, my dear Miss, it concerns the death of young Willoughby."

Miss Willoughby still did not speak.

" Young Willoughby," the great bulk repeated after Mr. Strong.

" Mr. Willoughby," piped the wreckage.

Mr. Strong paused and waited.

" May I," he went on after the wait, " have the honour of addressing Mr. Obadiah Willoughby ? "

Miss Willoughby nodded and went toward the great room where the portrait hung that had smiled down on me. She opened the door and pointed the way, murmuring something which I took to be a bidding to wait. She would have left them when they had filed in in their confusion ; but when she turned they followed her back into the great hall. She seemed to see their confusion and pointed to the oaken seats that stood beside the wall in the hall. This enabled me to see them when she left.

The greater Brumby sat down, or rather eased down, and rocked. The other Brumby folded up and fitted himself to the square edge of the oaken seat. The greater Brumby sat, his hands nearly meeting over his stomach, and let his

eyes open and close slowly until they finally stayed closed. His small, wet, red mouth hung open. Mr. Strong did not seat himself, but made flourishes at the air with a linen kerchief that he dabbed at his nose. I knew he was enjoying every minute. Miss Willoughby did not return immediately and Mr. Strong seemed to listen. When satisfied that there was no one about, he went to the side of the greater Brumby and nudged him in his flabby stomach. Brumby opened his eyes and rubbed them with his swollen knuckles.

" Brumby," said Mr. Strong in a whisper, which came to me clearly. " Remember ! Facts. Facts."

" Facts," said Brumby stupidly, and the wreckage became animated and repeated, " Facts, facts, facts."

" This," said Strong, " is to be won by facts. A fact," he went on, " is a thing, anything, which you know all of and which the other man knows nothing of. The thing, Brumby, for you and your worthy kinsman to do, is to keep these facts within your hands."

Brumby nodded. The wreckage licked its thin lips.

" My dear sir," said Mr. Strong, " you have no doubt learned that one must deal in facts like one deals in horse flesh. I recall a certain nag I parted with to Robson. Needless to say the nag's spavin brought no price, but I expected none. The spavin had not been evident but the fact nevertheless was present."

The wreckage clapped his thin deathlike hands upon his bony knees and I imagined I heard him rattle. The greater Brumby licked his lips and shut his eyes tighter. Mr. Strong nudged his flabby stomach and bobbed about, chuckling to himself.

Miss Willoughby returned. She was much disturbed, I could see. Her voice faltered and she hesitated to speak. Mr. Strong leaned toward her and asked:

" Mr. Willoughby will give us the pleasure of an interview ? "

" No," she said. " No, I fear—I should say, no. Mr. Strong, I shall have to request you to leave us. Mr. Willoughby is indisposed. He cannot see you."

" What ! " said Strong. " What ! Willoughby refuses ! Tell Willoughby that the information possessed by Messrs. Brumby and Brumby shall be laid within the hands of the

law before morning. I may add, Miss Willoughby, that it is well known that the last man to be seen in the garden yon was Obadiah Willoughby upon the night of young Willoughby's death."

I started, and, God knows how, but my hand opened and the bit of linen fell out of it, to fall just before Mr. Strong. Mr. Strong stared upon it, stooped and took it up. Miss Willoughby caught at her heart and gasped, and it was quite evident to me that Mr. Strong saw her confusion and that Brumby and Brumby also had seen it. Mr. Strong slowly opened the linen and looked upon the emblem.

"O. W.," he said softly. "And what is this?"

His eyes narrowed. Miss Willoughby, overwrought as she was, was unable to withhold her shaking and her fear. Mr. Strong walked to the Brumbys and displayed the kerchief.

"Look! look you, gentlemen! Look upon this!" and he pointed to the letters and the stain.

"It is mine," said Miss Willoughby. "Oh, please, it is mine."

Mr. Strong laughed a short, ugly laugh.

"Miss," he said, "order Obadiah Willoughby to come, or I shall not be accountable."

The Brumbys were now upon their feet and the three stood like birds of prey.

"I cannot," said Miss Willoughby, "I cannot."

"What?" said Mr. Strong. "Why?"

Miss Willoughby did not answer.

"I say bring him forth," said Mr. Strong.

"I cannot," she answered. "He is gone."

"Gone!" cried Mr. Strong.

"Gone!" echoed the bulk.

"Gone!" piped the wreckage, standing, all three agape.

Miss Willoughby drew herself up and waited, nor did she offer to speak. Mr. Strong strutted up to her and with a malicious grin snapped his fingers beneath her very nose. Miss Willoughby drew back but did not offer to speak. Mr. Strong began to sink and rise upon his toes and said very deliberately:

"That, Miss Willoughby, that," here he snapped his fingers once more, "for the chance Mr. Obadiah Willoughby has with

the law. We shall search the place. Do you hear me, my dear friends, Brumby and Brumby ?—search the place."

"Search it," said Mr. Brumby. "By all means," said the wreckage, already curving his angles about like a weasel.

Miss Willoughby looked upon them as one might upon some hideous sight, and indeed they were hideous.

"Sirs," she said, "my dear sirs, it is useless."

"We shall see, we shall see," said Mr. Strong.

"Yes," said Brumby, puffing, and I heard the voice of the wreckage sounding out from beneath one of the hall seats.

"My dear Miss," said Strong, "I repeat, my dear Miss, if the knowledge is yours, if you possess the facts as to your brother's whereabouts, it is but wisdom that you should tell." He was carefully inspecting the kerchief, letting one of his small forefingers rest upon the stain. "This," he said, "and this—" and he looked to Miss Willoughby—"my dear Miss, are most unfortunate facts."

"Mr. Strong," said she, "if you would be so kind as to go, I promise that my brother and I shall come to the place of your appointment to-morrow."

"Never!" said Brumby the bulk. "Never!" excitedly chimed the wreckage. "Indeed no!" said Mr. Strong. "My dear Miss, a fact is like a bird and must be captured when well within the hand."

Miss Willoughby thought for a moment and then her face lightened. "I beg of you to excuse me for a moment," she said, and without their answer she left them, to return shortly bearing a purse which she opened and displayed some gold coins.

Mr. Strong gasped, lay his hand upon his heart and motioned her away. "I hope," he said, "I hope, Miss Willoughby, that my eyes betray me. Will you look, Mr. Brumby, and you, Mr. Brumby ?"

The bulk looked, his eyes popping and his breath coming hard. The wreckage could not stand straight but seemed drawn toward the purse. His eyes glistened and his yellow teeth gleamed. Mr. Strong left his one hand beneath his coat tails and the other he slipped within his bosom, then he raised himself up to his highest and with an air of injury shook his head, saying :

"My dear Miss, you have mistaken us. Think you my friends, Brumby and Brumby, would touch bribe? Never! Never! I may say in truth they would die first. Would you not, Brumby?" he asked, addressing the bulk.

"U-m-m, yes," said the bulk doubtfully. The wreckage shut his eyes and swallowed and did not echo it.

"No," said Mr. Strong, "no, no, never! I dare say I speak the heart of my co-workers; they could not be induced to touch such moneys. But," he said, "my dear Miss," he smacked his lips once more, "you have said to-morrow, to-morrow at my place of appointment. I reconsider—in fact, I shall allow it. My co-workers, being men of tender hearts, would insist that I reconsider. Would you not, my friends?"

Brumby nodded. Brumby did likewise, their eyes never leaving the purse. Mr. Strong picked up his great hat and carefully rubbed it about, then with more care placed the kerchief, elaborately placed it, in his bosom.

"Gentlemen," said he, "gentlemen, you have heard the lady's word. Shall it be yes to her request? Yes, gentlemen, yes?"

"Yes," Brumby grunted, and the wreckage nodded. Miss Willoughby walked to the great newel and laid the purse upon it.

"Very well, then," she said, "to-morrow, to-morrow. Good day, gentlemen, until to-morrow."

She bowed stiffly and left them.

I was watching. Strong turned toward the door, never deigning to look toward the purse. The bulk turned likewise, following. Then I saw the wreckage reach forth one death-like hand and the purse was gone. Hooks at this moment came to the hall that he might show them forth. Mr. Strong bowed stiffly before he stepped out. Brumby did likewise and the wreckage passed from my view still clinging to something he clutched beneath his waistcoat.

Then to my surprise I saw Mr. Strong excitedly return and shout to Hooks: "Mr. Strong would speak with Miss Willoughby. Bid her, sir!"

Hooks turned bewildered to the stairway, but Miss Willoughby, having been within hearing, came forth.

"Miss," said Strong, "my dear Miss Willoughby, I know

you will pardon the suggestion, but, my dear Miss, I may well warn you of the dishonesty of servants. I trust this will forewarn you."

Hooks gasped and for once in his well-ordered life made an audible sound.

"Yes," said Miss Willoughby, 'yes, Mr. Strong, I am forewarned."

Then Mr. Strong bowed deeply and with a withering look at Hooks swept out. The door shut after them and I heard the bolt slip. Then I descended swiftly, laughing. Miss Willoughby, too, was laughing and we met to encircle our arms about each other and laugh together. I saw Hooks draw himself up to his highest and, with his lip drawn down almost over his chin, come to us.

"Your pardon, Miss," he said, "but them robbers is liars."

Miss Willoughby nodded and said: "I know, I know. Never mind."

Then we stood before each other and I said: "Is he gone? Oh, do you think what I have done will harm him?"

"Wait, wait, Hope. Yes, he is gone, and I fear, I fear sorely."

"Oh," I said, "cannot the waiting be finished? Oh, will you not tell me, tell me something of this awful tangle?"

"Come," she said, "come to the garden. I shall unlock my lips of what I may"

CHAPTER XXVI

I CANNOT forget the feeling of wonder that swept me when I felt that at last I was upon the brink of the stream of mystery. I recall that we walked slowly out of the manor from the entrance that led from the side where the coach might stop beside the dining hall. The garden lay sunny. Prim rows of old herbs, and here and there fresh-faced blooms smiled up as though they had kept heart through their waiting. Miss Willoughby seemed wrapped in her thoughts as though she was weighing well what she would say. I recall the sweetness of the spot that seemed to be alive with voices, even to my listening ears that would have heard even more wonderful story, yet so like.

We walked down a shadowy way beside the brook's path. We listened beside the little brook, and I wondered had its voice too sounded amid the joys that once had been the manor's; and it occurred to me that it had even in the dark-time sung its song just so silvery gay and plashing merrily. Only winter might stop its tongue, and even then I knew that the water beneath the ice would tickle it until it burst and came forth laughing. And I know now that in spite of my anxious moments I smiled, and I felt within me that that was the greatest gift that Sally Trueblood had conferred upon me, that of smiling when I should not. I know now that he who takes a smile upon his path never meets age, at least to speak to. He may nod but he is afraid of a laugh.

Miss Willoughby had stopped gazing now into the little ripples that flowed away from us over the pebbles and through the fallen leaves and mosses.

"Miss Willoughby," I said, "you told me you would speak."

"Not now, Hope, not now. Come."

"But," I said, "you said the garden."

"Yes," she answered, "but come, I would show you some thing."

She led me down the brook's side to where some great stones made the crossing. Then she held her hand that I should follow and we crossed the brook to the other side and followed an old path up through the little shrub-grown meadow to the flank of woods. The way was glossy-green and sunlit. I remember the twigs that snapped and the tiny flowers that scattered beneath our feet. I smelled the sweet of wood and heard the rustling of the high branches that whispered unknown things. Now and then the path was veiled with some trailing vine that seemed to wish to shut away the scene beyond—garlands of tender green, some scarlet blooms, wild woodbine with white green buds not yet burst, that told that later the path would be like a fairyland of scent and bloom.

Suddenly the path ended in a low growth of matted shrubs that showed they had lately been torn afresh. But a short space and a tall stone wall rose forbiddingly. It was sparsely covered with vine, a russet ivy with scarlet tendrils. The gateway had sunk and fallen apart, and I cannot account for the

feeling, but to me it was just like Miss Patricia's heart. The great hinges had gaped and fallen at their guarding. The bolts, some of them, lay in powder of their own rust. The path to the great house that stood well back was a thorn growth of what had been a rose garden. Even a few early blossoms were ragged, as though the thorns were loth to let them bloom. We stood beside the fallen gateway and Miss Patricia came to my mind so very clearly. Prim Miss Patricia, with her little house of wood and stone and her little shrine of what I knew were the dearest things to her!

"This," said Miss Willoughby, "this, Hope, is the old abode of the Passwaters."

"You knew them?" I asked.

"Yes, and no," said Miss Willoughby. "I have known—oh, Hope, it is so very hideous! Listen," she said, and drew me to one side where one of the great stones had fallen out and we seated ourselves upon it.

"Who am I, Miss Willoughby?" I asked bluntly.

She turned troubled eyes upon me.

"I do not know," she answered. "The shadow has been so long upon me. In my youth I knew nothing but that I might possess my heart's desire."

"But, Miss Willoughby, you told me you did not know Patricia Passwater that night, nor Mr. Reuben, and I heard you with my own ears say, 'Dear Patricia.'"

"Yes," said Miss Willoughby. "I repeat it—dear Patricia. You see, Hope, I am the only Willoughby who is a woman. Stephen is—was,—" she corrected,—"younger yet, after Obadiah. I know not why, Hope, and I fear to believe what seems the motive, but after my mother's death I was sent to an uncle, who employed a tutor and gave me the advantages befitting a lady. There came a time, Hope, when longing came, longing to return to those who ever seemed so near and dear. I spoke of this to my uncle, and begged that Obadiah, who was my most loved, should be bidden to fetch me back. After endless waiting, and missives that told so little of what I hungered for, even the dear ones that Obadiah wrote failed to come. I received no word save from Stephen, who spoke of father's failing health. My uncle was a widower, and the loneliness grew unbearable. Finally I wrote to Stephen and told him I must return. Well, Hope, you met me that night

that night when I had not yet returned to the manor to finish the filling up of agony ; for Stephen had told me of my father's going and also of the hideous shadow that cloaked our sunny home. He laid upon the dearly beloved to my heart, Obadiah, the finger of guilt. And this, Hope, was my home-coming, little knowing I was leaving the happiness of not knowing for the agony of knowledge. I remember, Hope, that night and the storm, the beating rain and the bright fire in the inn, that seemed a little blaze to that that burned my heart. I remember, my dear, that night, and you, who came with the look of hunger in your youthful eyes that I knew so well. My dear, I knew ! I knew ! I knew ! Did I tell you in some way, Hope ? Did you know ? "

" Yes," I answered. " Yes, Miss Willoughby. I knew when you said, ' Say to Sally Trueblood, Miss Willoughby's compliments.' Oh, Miss Willoughby, do you know what it meant ? Do you know ? Oh, I knew, small though I was, that it was a glittering garment, soft and warm for her little stricken soul."

I sobbed just a little. I could not help it. Then I said : " How did you know, Miss Willoughby, when Mr. Stephen brought me that I was the little one of the inn ? "

" Because," she looked deep into my eyes, " because I never forgot your eyes, and because you repeated oft and oft, ' Sally Trueblood's brat.' "

I hung my head. Sickness swept me.

" Oh," I gasped, " and you know it ? Oh, Miss Willoughby, you have never suffered this. You cannot know what it means to be the lash that has cut your mother to death. Even—oh, Miss Willoughby ! " I cried, " even when I think of her there," I pointed to the skies, " I want to shrink, for I shall have to follow her. I am a thing she cannot undo, and I cannot destroy without making the stain deeper. Oh, Miss Willoughby, I saw Sephira Gifford and her babe. I held it with my hands. I saw it. Oh, is this God's work ? I cannot believe it. He put here," I beat my breast, " pure loving. He put here desires that would lead me, if the world would not frown. He has made me whole. No, I cannot believe it. It is they, the hounds that scent horrors and lap filth ! They hunger for rot and they consume any victim that is helpless ! Who am I ? Sally Trueblood's brat. What was she ? Oh,

just a spring morning full of gladsomeness and love. She could not know sin, I tell you! I saw her eyes, and her soul. Where is he who should stand before the hounds and flay them with his honourable name? He——" I stopped. "Well, the earth cares little where a man trods." I laughed bitterly. "Do you suppose that he knew what that tattered little soul that hid itself away with its shame, suffered? No. His honourable name is his cloak. He would lend it, but might not give it. Likewise his honour, Miss Willoughby. He was honourable, but wore his honour like a gentleman his linen, to be discarded if in danger of soiling."

I was wrathful. My heart was welling.

"Miss Willoughby," I said, "some of the things I am saying befit not a gentlewoman. At least I am gentle born. That much I know, but this agony of shame and shadow breeds bitterness, even though one tries to hide it. Shame! shame! shame! I have read it upon the skies, upon the fields, upon lips and in eyes. Shame! shame! shame! It is the echo of every pebble and the song of every day. Yet I have tried, I have tried to smile, oh, Miss Willoughby, for her. I would not let her know how it hurt."

Miss Willoughby was listening closely and she patted my hand. I leaned close to her and I whispered:

"I do not know why, Miss Willoughby, but I have always loved you. I have lived until now upon that night at the inn. Oh, God, Miss Willoughby, is it wicked that I should hate him who begot me? If she was a wanton,—oh, I cannot say it!—but if she had been, it was worse; for he who shames the shamed,—oh, Miss Willoughby, I know that God is wrathful over such a man. Even in folly, Miss Willoughby, to shame a shamed thing! Buy with his honour more shame for a wanton! Make his honourable blood live a nameless life in the body of shame!"

"Hush," said Miss Willoughby, "hush, Hope! What are you saying? Are you mad?"

"Mad? Mad?" I cried. "No; I am merely throwing open the pit that the light may shine upon the maggots. Oh, God, if women only knew that honourable smiles spent beneath honourable paths buy but dishonourable sighs! I am one of them, Miss Willoughby. Somewhere in this world walks he who begot me. I am beneath him, an idle moment

that lived too long. Look at me! Where may I turn, Miss Willoughby? I was hounded out of the village. I have lived beneath their jeers, their gibes, their lashes, at the hand of charity of one that they forsook in return. Now where may I turn? Stephen is gone. There is no living creature who cares. Yet let me make one move and they will care enough to lay on the lash afresh—deeper should I touch one of theirs. What debt do I owe? I may drag my father's honourable blood to the level of the shame he knelt to once. I may defile this God-given body for revenge, but who would suffer? Only Sally Trueblood in my heart.

"Don't you see I'm cursed doubly with the knowledge of the power of revenge and the awful fate that made her its victim, and gave me the knowledge of her, so pure, so patient, so beautiful, so holy, that I feel that with her I walked with God? And I cannot turn, for her hand is clutching my heart strings. Miss Willoughby, I know, I know the lash for such men. If the holy God would open the heavens and leave the eyes of the babes that they begot look upon them steadily, hungrily, pleadingly, namelessly, oh, they would fall! Make a man look upon his sin and he will know it. We,—my kind, Miss Willoughby, the pity of it!—are unlike you all, except in the one quality, and that is suffering."

Miss Willoughby's head hung. Her lips trembled and she would not look at me.

"Oh, forgive me," I said. "I have said more than I should, but I am in anguish, Miss Willoughby, for I feel that I am near him, this man."

"No!" she shrieked and got to her feet.

I stopped before her. We stood long before the old gateway, looking up the thorny path.

"You have not told me, Miss Willoughby," I said.

"I forgot."

"Tell me now."

"Yes, yes," she panted. "I shall, Hope, but an awful aching is here. I, too, am fearful. I have told you that the Passwaters lived here. These old trees upon the path know the young of the Willoughbys and them. Love played in the ranks of youth. I know this by the missives that came before the shadow fell. Stephen and Patricia, I believe,

loved fearingly. At least, Hope, there were times when Patricia loved him and times when she did not. They were far older than I; but I heard of this, as I said before, and Obadiah, my beloved, too, played at hearts with her. I think, I think now, that Patricia loved him.

"Then there came to the house of the Passwaters two younger children of a distant relative who had died, leaving them at the mercy of fortune, even though they had been of high rank and much means. I speak of this, Hope, I know not why, save you would have me tell you. I recall that Obadiah wrote of Felicia. The Potsdam post brought certain moneys to the Passwaters which was a bequest from a wilful relative who had, in a moment of whim, left to the first female bearing the name Patricia a fortnightly income. This was small, but to the youthful minds great riches. I speak of this because at the coming of these younger children Patricia had straightway set this apart as theirs."

I was listening, wondering, hoping.

"Then," she went on, "Stephen later wrote more frequently of Felicia. Then, later, bitterly of Reuben Passwater, who, I took it, was too much concerned in one or the other of the maids. I recall that Obadiah had written of one of them, I cannot recall now what he called her, but I do remember he said she was most like a living sunbeam, that her feet never stopped from tripping, and that her eyes, too, danced, and her hands were such little timid things. It seems all so very long ago. Just children, yet it is not long. Let me see." She thought for a moment. "I think it was after I had heard this from Obadiah that there was a time when no word came. It was early season and I wondered why I had not been remembered by these loving brothers, who grew so very huge in my mind and who stayed so very small in my heart. Then there came another missive from Obadiah, a joyous one, telling of the May dance and the——"

There sounded the crackling of the twigs that betold a step. Miss Willoughby suddenly stopped and clutched my arm.

"Come," she said. "Come, Hope, we may not tarry."

"Who is it, Miss Willoughby?" I asked. "Do you know?"

"Yes, but you must not see him—must not, Hope, must not! Not yet, not yet! Believe me." Come!"

"I cannot understand," I said. "What are you hiding? What is this fear? I have lived beneath the roof these days and days and have not laid eyes upon a soul but yourself and Potts and the servants."

I watched Miss Willoughby's face. I saw her lips open and that she was about to speak. The step sounded nearer. She turned and with my hand in hers sped down the path through the thickets into the woods without speaking. When we had come through the woods into the shrub-grown meadow that led to the brook where we should cross and go into the garden, I did not offer to speak but resolved that I should have a word just as soon as we had come to the garden once more. We went hurriedly and Miss Willoughby was quite spent when we finally stood within the garden and made our way to the arch where the great bear knocker hung. There we stood.

"Hope," she panted, "you say you have not seen a soul save myself and the servants?"

I did not answer.

"Answer me," she said.

I hung my head and thought what I should tell.

"That is not quite true," I stated.

She stood looking very deeply into my eyes and then said deliberately:

"Then you did see him?"

I nodded.

"I see," she said softly. "Then he was not dreaming." And her eyes glinted with a sudden light. "Did you," she went on, "did you—did he——" she stammered. "Did you see him and did he look—never mind," she finished.

"I know, Miss Willoughby, what you would say. No, he did not look, if that was he, like one that I should hope to see; for he whom I wait for is a nobleman and would walk in no shadow."

Miss Willoughby reddened.

"Hope," she said, "listen. Believe me. I shall yet tell you all that I know, but I am fearful, dear, fearful even to speak that my shadow might hear. There is a web about

the manor and tightly woven. I cannot tell you now, but you must keep heart and believe in me."

I saw a long shadow fall upon the little path that led about the turret, and I shrank into the shade beneath the ivy. Miss Willoughby walked toward the shadow and waited. Obadiah Willoughby turned the turret path and seemed searching for something,

"What is it, my dear?" said Miss Willoughby.

"Nothing, nothing, Geneva—my linen—— It was a very old——" Here he hesitated. "A gift long ago, Geneva. Nothing, nothing, but, dear, like an old dream."

Miss Willoughby said something softly and locked her arm within his and they left, going into the side entrance while I stood hidden in the ivy. I stood there maddened at the thought that again fate had dashed my cup of knowledge. And once more I resolved to make the search, if it must be so, alone and by foul means. Softly I made my way to the entrance at the side. It was unbolted. Softly I stepped within. Miss Willoughby was seated in the dining hall beside the table once more and Obadiah at her side. I followed the wall into the hall and they did not hear nor see me. Once more I took up my silent waiting for their words. I listened to their voices, that sounded softly, for some time before I could discern words.

"To-morrow—I have promised," said Miss Willoughby.

"But, Geneva, this is wrong!"

"Yes, yes," she answered, "but they threatened. I tell you they have watched the place, God knows how long, for you. Even Stephen's plan did not turn them from their search."

"What plan?" said Obadiah.

"Oh, I cannot tell you."

"Geneva, we may not mince matters. I shall and must know all of the awful tangle. What are you saying?"

"The burial," she answered, "the burial and the tomb that they might believe you dead."

"Good Heavens?" said Obadiah, springing to his feet. "He did this? What ever beset the man? Geneva, what thing could cause a man to follow such a course? It cannot be possible that he would murder the sire and follow that heinous act by a plan so hideous as this

seems. It cannot be. There is something that we do not understand. Surely Stephen had some motive other than greed."

Miss Willoughby did not answer and I waited that he might speak more. He arose and walked slowly about the great table with his hands clasped behind his back. I heard him cough and then he stopped.

"Geneva," he went on. "I tell you they cannot make us stand beneath a pack of lies."

Then I heard Miss Willoughby arise and she went to his side.

"Obadiah," she said, "can you answer me? What happened that night?"

"Stephen and I," he cleared his throat, "had spent the early eve at the inn. Cups, to be sure, Geneva, but not more than befit a gentleman."

Miss Willoughby was listening. I leaned so that I might see them clearer. I saw that she was watching the face of Obadiah Willoughby as though she would read his soul.

"We returned early. You will remember I have told you this before."

"Yes," she said, 'but try, try, Obadiah, to recall every movement."

He sat down and looked up the wall and down slowly.

"I had hoped,—in fact, you have seen her chamber, fitted as I would have it for her."

She nodded and said quickly:

"Yes, yes. Go on. Obadiah, there is a thing that you have not told me. I know it. I have heard it from the lips of others. There was dishonour, I believe."

He stood once more and a frightful look swept him. He wheeled, his eyes blazing, and drew his clutched hands above his head. Then he let them drop and a helpless look took the place of the fearful one.

"Then it is true," she said.

I stood, almost panting aloud, for his answer. He came to the side of Miss Geneva Willoughby and clasped her to him.

"Geneva," he said, "I may not answer yet."

"Answer me! Reuben Passwater loved her. Did he not?"

"Yes," he answered. "Yes. God knows I know now more than I, who deemed myself a man who knew a man's love, did then."

Miss Geneva looked with wrath upon Obadiah and commanded:

"Tell me! I cannot stand more, Obadiah. Tell me!"

He stopped.

"It was May," he answered. "I told you, it was May, but a fortnight before this hideous thing happened, the night of the May's first day. Geneva, it is hard to remember, but I shall for your sake make the thing come from my lips. In a great game of merrymaking we had waited the late hours. One by one they had departed until," his voice sunk to a softer key, "Felicia and Stephen—" I lost the rest; then— "myself were alone. Well, we went to the vicarage and the thing was done. Done," he repeated, then seemed to forget that he was speaking.

Shall I record the joy that leapt within me? Yet I was afraid to believe and seemed stifled with fear.

"Done," I heard him say once more, "or rather begun."

Miss Willoughby was listening intently, biting her lips, and her hands were clasping and unclasping in her lap.

"Geneva," he said sharply, "I had rather not speak of it. You little know what these years of agony have meant. To be a man and know that a thing rides you that you may not free yourself of. Heavens! It was enough that my hope should be dashed, and in the name of truth why should it have been dashed by such a thing as dishonour?"

Miss Willoughby leaned toward him and I saw her eyes glittered.

"Obadiah," she said, "what has kept you silent? If you were guiltless, why did you not speak?"

He stood and with his tapering hands pressed his brow at either side.

"I have not finished," he answered. "Listen. Do you believe that I left because of fear of any man or of law? Geneva, I say d—— any man and the law, but, good heavens! he told me that Reuben Passwater——"

I saw him stand very straight and fling his hands one upon the other and sink into one of the chairs beside the table and sob. Miss Willoughby stood up. I saw her sway

and step to his side, reaching out one of her delicate hands and laying it lovingly upon the bent head. Her eyes were filled of fire and her lips were thin and I heard her say hoarsely:

"Reuben Passwater! Obadiah, it cannot be that Stephen would do this. Look at me—answer me! Was this all?"

He raised his head and laid his cheek against his clutched hand.

"I was a young fool, Geneva. But he told me to come and he would show me, and I saw, I tell you, I saw! Then,—well, I went, beneath the cover of guilt, which at the time I did not fully realize."

Miss Willoughby waited for him to continue, but he sat silent and she seated herself beside him and I saw her brush her locks with a weary gesture from her temples.

"But Obadiah," she said in a tired voice, "it was dishonourable to leave the woman."

"Dishonourable," he said in a bitter tone. "Geneva, I am beginning to wonder what honour is. I was fevered, in a cup. I can recall the ride to the manor from the inn and certain conversation as to the estate. Stephen had told me he had been chancing and was 'I.O.ed' beyond hope. It had been his wish that we not betray the marriage, fearing the wrath of the sire. Willingly we had all pledged. For a time I was happy in a fool's heaven. Then the thing happened. I cannot recall the home-coming of that night but later I seem to remember sitting in Stephen's bedchamber and that we had a bit of port, after which all seemed to forsake me. I remember nothing until it was quite morning and Potts shook me. You know the rest, Geneva, that even Stephen believed me guilty. God knows, I cannot tell you how the sire came to be in my chamber."

Miss Willoughby was pacing slowly up and down behind the chair now where Obadiah sat.

"The day following," he went on, "Stephen told me that feeling was high against me in the village but that we might keep the matter quiet until I might make away. I had hastened to her and told her. I had told her to keep strong and if guilt fell upon me to deny me; that I would not hold her to her promise; for heaven knows I would not have dragged this upon her. She was sorely shaken and clung to

me in fright, swearing her faith. I had left her saying: 'I may be driven to leave, but'—Geneva, this is like walking in a tomb! But I told her that if this should happen I would return surely, surely. Then it was that I fell victim of my deep affections and refused to leave, and, damn him! he told me. Long after I left this came—" he reached once more into his bosom and brought out the parchment—"from Stephen, saying that in December she had died in her shame."

I heard a long-drawn moaning sigh and saw him suddenly arise and turn like a wild thing and say:

"I cannot, cannot go on!"

Miss Willoughby was weeping and held her arms forth. He turned from her and said:

"I shall go without. Ring for some hot brew and I shall return presently."

I stood dumb. Within me I was afraid to believe. When he had left Miss Geneva I went into the dining hall and addressed her.

"Miss Willoughby," I said, "I shall beg you that I be allowed to go to the village."

She turned toward me and her eyes were soft and tearful.

"Yes, yes," she answered, as though she had not heard me and was merely repeating the words.

She started and brushed her hand across her eyes as though she was brushing away a web.

"To-morrow," she said, "to-morrow, Hope."

"Miss Willoughby," I went on, after she had answered me. "I cannot remain here. I cannot understand why I have been here so long, and now that this fear is upon me I can no longer remain, I tell you."

She seemed still not to listen to me. I touched her arm and she started.

"Yes, yes," she said, "I know, I know."

"Listen!" I said loudly. "I repeat, Miss Willoughby, I cannot remain beneath this roof. Let me go—any way that is out of this tangle. What I have just heard has wakened wild things within me, yet fear is stronger than hope. I wish to go to the village, to Miss Patricia's. I am—I do not know what the feeling is unless it is home-hunger. I must go. I cannot bear even to wait the morning."

She was listening and I saw that her mind was working fast; that she was thinking not of what I said but was listening. She sat down wearily and brushed her brow across with a slender hand that shook.

"Wait," she said, "wait, just a little, Hope. I—I—am so weary. It all seems such a tangle. If only they would speak. If I knew what Strong knew and the Brumbys, and if only dear Obadiah would tell me all. I feel that there is some greater thing than has already been told. Surely there was, else why, after that awful night, the madness—oh, Hope! I wonder if I shall be strong enough to see this thing through."

Suddenly her lips began to tremble and great tears welled over her cheeks and her little hands folded pitifully upon her breast, plucking at her throat's frill. Then it was that I realized that I was not alone in suffering, and that hers was even so great as mine, and the selfishness of my actions came over me. I fled to her side and gathered her to my breast, kissed her cheek and begged her to forgive me.

"There, there," I said. "See! I am smiling a sunshine smile. I forgot, just for a little; I forgot that I said we would face this together. Look at me."

I pressed her closer and kissed her white brow, then looking deep into her steel-blue eyes and saying:

"I shall help you. I shall wait, though it is yet longer, longer than all my waiting. Will you tell me when the waiting is over? I shall not ask you again, but wait until your lips tell me. I shall not hate him until you tell me to, because, because you love him and because—" I choked with tears—"he is like Stephen."

She reached her hands to my cheeks and pressed my face between them, kissed me full upon the lips and her eyes spoke to my very soul. She then turned and called to Hooks, bidding him bring the hot brew and I knew that Obadiah Willoughby would soon return.

"I shall go," I said. "I cannot look upon him—yet."

I then went to the chintz room above and waited until it was growing dark and no one came. Even the evening's sup was late and Potts did not bid me. So, when the last of day had come, I slowly made my way down to the dining hall. It was quite empty. In the great hearth had been

kindled a log which had burned itself in two and fallen down tipsily, one end tilting up to the chimney's place and the other lopping off the firedog, smoking blue and white puffs. Embers had belched well across the hearth stones. I walked toward it and watched the shadows weave a tapestry for my feet. No sound disturbed the silence, save the wicked little snaps that the embers made.

I stood beside the great stones that reached to the ceil. The light from the fire scarcely lit the shadows beside the hearth, but sent forth a wavering brightness in an irregular pattern over the centre of the room. I was thinking of the inn and my shadow journeys and found myself marking off a castle with one toe upon the hearth's ash. I stopped short, arrested by the sound of a rasping voice speaking hoarsely, as though not to be heard save by the one addressed. I did not turn. The voice sounded again, " Miss Willieby ! " I was afraid, yet I wondered what this meant. He seemed to expect her to know him.

" Yes ? " I answered, without turning.

" 'E needn't for to go. 'E's dead, is Strong."

I thought my heart would leap from my bosom.

" What ? " my lips said, and I turned, not intending to, to find myself alone and see the doorway swinging.

I was wild with what I had heard. Then they might not persecute him longer. I fled through the dim light to the upper halls and found the door to Miss Willoughby's chamber. I knocked and the door was immediately opened by Miss Willoughby, who held a candle branch. Her eyes were swollen and I saw that she had been weeping sorely. I could scarcely speak.

" Oh," I said, " oh, he is dead ! "

There was a shriek.

" No ! " I shrieked louder. " Strong, Strong is dead ! "

Miss Willoughby steadied herself by clutching the door, which had swung from her hand.

" What ? " she said. Then her lips parted and she went off into peal after peal of laughter.

I stood staring, knowing what had happened. She was overcome, poor dear, and I took the candle branch from her hand and lay my arm about her. She stopped and looked at me steadily.

" Are you sure ? " she said.

" He told me so. He called me ' Miss Willieby.' It was a gruff voice."

She stood silent before me. Then reached forth her hand and took my arm in her grasp.

" Part of the waiting is over, Hope," she said. " I shall tell you all when I may prove all. Hope, until now we Willoughbys have lived by the law of our kith. Look," she said, and displayed, hanging from her neck upon a silken cord, a shield, small and with an emblem, two clasped hands and over them the one word, " Truth." Beneath them a broken sword. I looked at it and somehow, I know not why, but my head raised and I felt the blood leap at my heart. I held forth my hand and she laid hers within it. We understood.

After this I had gone below and found Potts, had eaten some cold meat and black bread, then returned to my little couch in the chintz room, bearing a candle that Potts had given me. I recall that night only as a dream and the dream only as two clasped hands with the word, Truth, above them and the broken sword beneath.

CHAPTER XXVII

MORNING came at last, after I had waked even before the daylight had come and lain long. I wondered if we would go now to the village, since the promised visit to Strong's would be useless. Then, like two puppets, came to my mind the Brumby bulk and the Brumby wreckage. No fear was mine at the thought of the bulk. One need not fear a man whose wit and wisdom are his undergarments, but give a fool wits and a sling of wisdom and beware lest he fell the milk cow ! Even while this passed through my fancy I saw the wreckage plucking his chin whiskers, and then fear knocked at my door. When the light had come I arose and had just walked to the shutter and turned it when Pott knocked.

" Yes," I called. " Come." And the door opened to show me Potts, whose face showed more silence than ever.

" Mornin'." she dropped.

" Good morning, Potts," I said, and the spirit of joy which could not die within me tried its little wings. " It *is* a good morning," I added.

She did not answer, but walked to the clothes press and began bringing forth clean linen.

" Isn't it ? " I asked.

Still no answer.

" *Isn't* it ? "

More silence.

" Good mornin', Miss," I said ; " yes, it is."

I jumped across the floor in lively steps upon my bare toes and twirled about, laughing. Potts slowly arose. Her arms were full of garments. She stood, stared, then dropped them all and ejaculated one word : " Mad ! "

" No," I said, " Potts, not mad, just glad."

" Ump ! " said Potts and with a look of disgust added, as though she fully understood, " Mad ! "

" Is Miss Willoughby arisen ? " I asked.

Potts nodded.

" And Mr. Willoughby, the gentleman ? " I said.

Potts knelt down and went about the sorting of linen without so much as letting me know she had heard. I watched her carefully folding and packing and lifting and sorting for some time, then that spirit of joy fluttered up and flew out.

" Potts," I said, " Mr. Strong is dead."

There was a sudden sound and Potts had sat down ever so hard. Then I began to laugh and I laughed so very hard that I ached and Potts—oh, will you enjoy it as I did—turned about upon her round haunch and laughed too. I sprang to my feet and gasped.

" Mad, Potts ? "

She shook her head " no " and sputtered, amid a laugh, " Glad ! "

Then she stopped suddenly ; her face closed up like a pair of shutters and sealed out everything. She returned to her sorting and did not even so much as stop one moment until all was tidied. Then she arose and without looking at me went out. I was consumed with joy, for I knew that way down deep within that round bulk was a laugh, and something else, for where there is a good laugh there is a heart.

I robed slowly, for the open shutter was such a comrade. Without, oh, there was nothing but happiness! The sky was truth, the fields and woods, clasped hands, and the stones, broken blades, and I said aloud: "Sally Trueblood, I know you are there." I blew a kiss through the open shutters and stood with both my arms out—and perhaps you would think they were empty, but they were not!

I saw that happiness was free and the only coin to buy it was a hungry heart. There was a brisk breeze swaying the wood's flank and I saw the ivy was trembling, but the day, and what it would bring, came back to me, and I turned from the shutters and laid my hand again in the hand of Fear. When I was finished and ready to go below I went to the shutter, just to blow another kiss to happiness, then followed Fear down to the great hall below, to play at blind-buff with my fate. I met Miss Willoughby coming from the feasting hall. She was already clothed for a journey and greeted me with the words:

"Make you ready."

"But I must sup," I said.

"Yes," she answered and pointed to the great table where already the steam arose from my sup.

"Am I to go?"

"Yes," she answered.

"But he?"

"Has ridden on," she answered.

"Then I go with you?"

"Yes."

"Wh—— No," I hurried on, "I shall not ask."

I went to the great table and hurriedly took of the brew and bread and a little fruit, which was unusual. Hooks stood beside me and watched my every move. I was uncomfortable, just as I had been those many years ago. When I had finished he bowed stiffly and took from the table the bowl and crumbs. I knew that Miss Willoughby had had the liquored apple made ready for me and I ate it, knowing this was her thoughtfulness.

I hastened then to the hall and found Miss Willoughby waiting. The great door was open and through it, a little way down, I saw a chaise, or coach, for it was closed, awaiting us. She had brought a cape and hood for me which I

put about me without question. My hands seemed to move and I was doing the things that fell for me to do without thought of what its finish would bring. When I awoke from my dreaming we were upon the way. I was rocking about in the coach, watching the road's flank slip by. Miss Willoughby touched me and said:

"We go to the official abode of Messrs. Brumby & Brumby."

My eyes questioned though my lips did not.

"No, he has gone to the Vicar's."

I sat staring out the coach window. My heart was pounding wildly. I was almost at the point of swallowing my tongue to keep from speaking when I know Miss Willoughby saw my efforts and smilingly answered my unasked question.

"No, Hope, I do not think this is the end of the waiting yet."

I sighed and I think my hands beat one upon the other. I recall that I drew the cape closer about me and sank back into the deep-cushioned seat. Then it was that I wondered who had brought me to the manor when I had passed my season's visit in the turret and lived each day with the little lady. Miss Patricia had taken me there, but who had told Miss Patricia that I was wanted? Then I recalled the visit of Stephen Willoughby, that night before my going, and somehow I connected his visit with the one I had made to the manor. I did not speak of this at this time, thinking that I would wait and some day Miss Willoughby would tell me; for I knew that she knew all this by the fact that I had seen her at that time.

It was a long drive. The nag that had been the best of the pair gave way in the knees and went lame, which made it longer. We met few upon the way and those we did meet stared round-eyed and watched the coach as far as their eyes could follow. At last the time grew quite late, almost dark. Our nag was now scarcely able to walk and the driver seemed loth to make the remainder of the road. However, by coaxing with the promise of coin, he did finally agree, at the sacrifice of his horse flesh and with many sighs, to make it on. When we reached the outskirts of the village the lights were being lit. They showed here and there

among the shadows in the silvering eve. Scent of fresh stews and brews came trailing over the field's ways, telling they were making their evening sups. I was quite hungry. I wondered where we would first go. Miss Willoughby stopped my wondering by bidding the driver to make the inn.

"First, Hope, for sup," she said.

A queer, cold feeling came over me and something crept up to my throat and almost stifled me. Thoughts swept through my fevered brain wildly. The inn! I should go with Miss Willoughby to the inn! How strange! How very strange! In my fancy I saw my forlorn self showing Sally Trueblood how Miss Willoughby's gown had clung and how her feet arched like the nag's back. As we drove through the last shrubbed roadway that led past the chapel a sweet feeling came to me. I leaned out and peered through the veil of young evening to the chapel yard. The stones gleamed, and such a beautiful silence seemed to hover over the spot. I smiled and my lips called:

"Sally Trueblood, are you there?" And I heard a late songster:

"Are you playing? Are you playing?"

I think I sobbed. Then, I think, I laughed. I drew back once more, not caring to look upon the old familiar scenes. Then we stopped. I saw that the great inn's lamp was lighted. I saw the shadows swing and heard the creaking as the wind cradled it. Then I heard the clattering of Peter Goff's shoes. I saw his bent form come out the great dark cavern of the inn's door, and saw his face as the light fell upon it, and he wore his come-open-personally smile. He bowed and bobbed about, then called in a cracked quaver for a lad to hold the horses. The lame nag had sagged sadly at one hip and hung its head. I heard the trappings rattle and the horses moan long breaths as if they were quite spent. I pulled the hood well over my face, and I am afraid that my back arched and that my head lifted high to think of being quality to Peter Goff. I know that I drew my skirts away lest he might touch them, and even though my face was hid in the hood's shadow I was sure that my mien was haughty.

Miss Willoughby waited that I might help her, and I

turned with elaborate grace and offered her my hand, brushing aside Peter Goff, who would have done the service. We two, Miss Geneva Willoughby and myself, again at the inn! This was singing like a little persistent song in my inner being. I did not lift my eyes, when I had helped her out of the chaise, to the little window above. I was afraid, for I knew that my fancy would die. So I walked, still haughtily, beside Miss Willoughby into the inn, Peter Goff following, rubbing his hands and inquiring:

"Port? Port, Miss?"

"Yes, yes," said Miss Willoughby, "Port and a sup."

Peter Goff went shuffling away mumbling. I sat down in a chair with a skin spread over it. I seemed to be dreaming. I could not fully realize that I was really in the old inn. I heard Peter Goff return with mugs. They clattered. Then I smelled port, and all of this I listened to and did not look upon because I was fascinated by the fire, my old, old friend. Miss Willoughby touched me. I arose but did not look at her.

"Hope," she said. "I know what you are thinking."

We walked then to the hearth's side and sat in one hearth seat, looking into the fire. Her arm was about me. I slipped my hand into hers and I said:

"Dogs is dogs."

She smiled and neither of us spoke again until we were bidden by Peter Goff to sit, and we then arose and went to the oaken slab which was the table, whereon was spread some bright pewter, earthen mugs and a bottle of port. There was cold round and black bread, damp and smelly. I thought of Delicia Prue and her pots and, oh, I did so wish I might go out and beg for the goose's grister! We sat, Miss Willoughby and myself, and she poured out the port. Think of it! Port in Peter Goff's inn! I could scarcely sup it for laughter, for I knew Peter Goff would rather have thrown it away than to waste it on such as me. I do not think that I ever ate in my whole life with such relish. I remember that my little finger curled daintily and that I took tiny morsels and broke my bread with great elegance. I fancy that even my voice betrayed my exalted position. But all of this came to an end by such a small thing. Some one passed the great doorway and coughed. I started up

and clutched my bosom. Then all my happiness fled and I fell forward, my head upon the slab, weeping.

Miss Willoughby arose and came to my side, laid her hand upon me and said softly:

"I should have known, Hope. Forgive me. But I, too, wished to turn back on the path of memory. Come, my dear," she said and we went to the hearth.

Peter Goff then came and we had words with him as to sleeping quarters. I knew there was a guest's wing which lay behind the inn. It was arranged and Miss Willoughby coined Peter. Then it was that we asked the aid of some lad that might take us to the official abode of the Brumbys. Peter Goff had called the same lad who had held the horse and they had brought forth a lantern. Then I recall that we went upon the way, I holding the arm of Miss Geneva Willoughby. I recall our grotesque shadows as we followed the lantern's light through the streets. I did not look. I did not wish to see.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FINALLY the journey came to an end just below the shop of Ole Dodson where a queer little house stood. It was heavy at the roof and lopped over. The shutters were weather-beaten and hung apart. The steps led to the scarred door that bore in newly painted letters the words, Brumby & Brumby. This showed in the lantern's light as we hunted for a knocker which was not there.

I recall the weather stains upon the door and the motes that floated in the lantern's light. I heard a sound within the walls and the piping voice of the wreckage. Then the guttural tone of the bulk. The lad who had brought us up to the spot knocked and the piping voice raised higher. The door was opened and I saw the lighted room. I say lighted, but it was a weasened light, a taper in a bowl of oil. The wreckage bent itself up until it might peer out of the narrow crack which it had opened. Miss Willoughby stepped into the light and with a cold tone said:

"Mr. Brumby, Miss Willoughby."

The wreckage was immediately animated and bowed pro-

fusely. I imagined I heard his hinges creak. Then there showed a wider crack, and the form of the bulk toward the wall where a shadow like some ominous cloud showed. Miss Willoughby waited that the wreckage bid her in. I stood looking upon the scene with the spirit of mirth welling up. I simply could not look upon the ill-assorted pair without laughing, either openly or under cover.

"We are honoured, Miss Willoughby. I may say my honourable companion and myself are indeed honoured, my dear Miss. If you would be so kind as to enter our miserable abode. I dare say," he went on, "I dare say, my dear Miss, you understand our crushed spirits at the loss of so worthy a gentleman as Strong, of Strong & Strong."

"Crushed," moaned the bulk.

"Crushed," piped the wreckage like an evil echo.

Miss Willoughby stepped up the fallen stairs to the doorway and entered. I followed her, tarrying only to bid the lad to wait with the lantern. We found ourselves in a small room fitted for use in an official capacity. I say fitted, but this is rather elaborate. A tall writing desk of some rough wood, old and age-pitted, upon tall thin legs, with a spidery stool with a cushioned seat that reminded one of the spider's belly. I think I smiled just a little when I looked upon the stool, for I tried to picture the bulk poised upon it. The taper sent the swimming light over the few furnishings, a great chair whose seat was bulged out and had been replaced by a wooden strip or two, a small hearth, much smudged, and a chair beside it that creaked without sitting upon it. Miss Willoughby stood in the centre of the place, seeming to wait that they bid her be seated. The wreckage brought forth the great chair and offered it.

"Will your honour us, Miss?" rubbing his hands that in the pale light looked like dead things.

Miss Willoughby seated herself. The bulk went to the great desk and tiptoed to reach a quill, which he carefully fitted behind his ear. Then he met, or tried to meet, his small hands behind his back and spit upon the floor. Then, when he had stood for some minutes, squinting in the shadowy light at Miss Willoughby, he grunted and clutched the stool. My jaw hung open when he finally poised himself upon t and brought out some long sheets of parchment, prepara-

tory to write, I knew. Miss Willoughby seemed to be watching these two and, I thought, measuring in her own mind their movements against what she knew of them.

"Mr. Strong," she began, "I am told is dead."

Brumby shot a shifty glance at Brumby. Miss Willoughby repeated:

"I believe I have spoken the truth, gentlemen?"

The wreckage plucked at his whiskers and nodded woefully. The bulk grunted.

"Since," went on Miss Willoughby, "since the appointment I made was with Mr. Strong, then, gentlemen, I believe you have no more in common with myself or my brother."

Brumby shot a shifty glance number two to Brumby. I was standing beside the hearth, watching. I saw the wreckage cast a glance at the bulk perched upon the stool, and that the glance spoke something I knew by the nod the bulk replied with.

"I take it, then," went on Miss Willoughby, "that our connection is at an end, gentlemen, and I shall require you to draw up a form stating the fact which you both shall sign."

The wreckage licked its lips and rubbed its hands and in an oily tone remarked:

"You jest, Miss. Do you hear, Brumby, do you hear?"

Brumby did not answer but picked his teeth with a quill, carefully surveying the bits plucked out by leaning toward the light and scrutinizing. Miss Willoughby turned her steel-blue eyes, steadily staring at the wreckage.

"I repeat," she said very deliberately, "I shall require you to draw up a form which you both shall sign stating that the matter is at an end."

The wreckage came toward her, humping its great height and smilingly displaying its long narrow teeth.

"It grieves me to state, Miss Willoughby, that as a chronicler of the law—I repeat, Miss, as a chronicler of the law, my duty lies in the furtherance of justice."

Miss Willoughby looked steadily into his fishy eyes.

"I may say my duty points, our duty points, but one course, unfortunate as it is. It grieves me, Miss, at such a time of sorrow that you should seek my worthy companion.

Brumby, and myself with temptation—temptation, I repeat, knowing our lowly station. You would seek to have us withhold certain facts, concerning your brother, from the law—the law, my dear Miss, which is our bread, our hearts, Miss, yes, and I may add our bedfellow."

Here the bulk frantically bit its nails, spitting small bits audibly. The wreckage raised its eyes at the bulk and in a mournful voice said:

"Do you hear this, Brumby? Do you hear this? Miss Willoughby has asked us to withhold facts, facts which belong to the law—to the law, I repeat, just as a bone belongs to a dog. No, no," said he, folding his height almost double, then standing once more upright and slipping his hand into his bosom. "No, I repeat, no, under no circumstance."

Miss Willoughby stood.

"Sir," she said, "sirs, I still make my demand. Strong is dead. The agreement entered into by my brother was with Mr. Strong. Mr. Strong has brought you into the case merely as tools. Do you for one instant think I do not know this?"

Here the wreckage brought its long deathlike hand out from its bosom and carefully opened a kerchief with a stain upon it.

"This," said he, "this, Miss Willoughby, along with certain unfortunate facts, are in the possession of my co-worker yon and myself. These may not be discounted by you. I repeat, our duty points but one course."

Miss Willoughby, still standing, looked coldly into the glittering fishy eyes that seemed filled of evil.

"Sir," she said, "I too, possess certain facts—we will say of bribe."

The wreckage screeched in his piping voice:

"Bribe! bribe! bribe! Do you hear, Brumby, do you hear?"

Brumby slid suddenly from off his perch and waddled to the side of the wreckage. He drew him down and whispered something. The wreckage then made his way to the hearth and took up from off the hearth's shelf a candle which he lighted from the taper and placed upon the desk beside the script and quill. The bulk brought forth a blade and took from one of the drawers on the side of the desk a new quill

which he began to fit up. The wreckage watched the movements of the bulk as though he enjoyed them, sucking his teeth, and thinking, I knew. Miss Willoughby again spoke.

"You have heard me, gentlemen. I shall not repeat, but I demand!"

"Ahem!" the wreckage.

"Um-m!" the bulk.

"Not so hasty," the wreckage went on, "not so hasty, Miss. Let me venture you had best weigh well."

Miss Willoughby did not speak, but pointed to the parchment that lay yellow in the light and the quill which the bulk had laid beside it.

The bulk sidled toward the desk, laying his pudgy hands upon the tall stool and seeming to wait for the wreckage to speak. I watched from my shadow this evil two. I knew that could we undo them then the path would be near clear. The wreckage flourished the kerchief before the eyes of Miss Willoughby and said:

"Perhaps, Miss, you will deny that this is the property of your brother, Mr. Obadiah Willoughby, that arch fiend. Think of it, my dear Brumby, a brother who would slay a brother's child, and worse, worse, worse," he piped, "his own father!"

Miss Willoughby stood very straight and her glance was steady, although I knew her poor heart was all but bursting.

"We shall not speak of all this," she said. "Mr. Brumby, I again repeat my demand. If you, and you," she added, looking at the bulk, "refuse, the fact that I possess shall be given over, and more, I shall have you within the hands of the law for your outrageous connection with this affair. Before I leave this roof you shall write. You have taken bribe. You are paid and I demand my return."

Brumby looked to Brumby and the wreckage let its death hands pluck up and down over its waistcoat. Then I heard a wicked laugh, a sort of crow's chuckle.

"But," spoke the wreckage, "but, Miss," drawing the words as though he would wound her and the words were a long keen knife. "But a fact must be proven, proven; Brumby, you attest it."

Proven," said the bulk. "Ahem! proven."

This is quite true," she answered, "and I shall require you to prove every fact you claim to possess this night and now."

"But the bribe, Miss! Why should we prove when you have threatened? We require, we require proof of your statement."

"Very well," said she and beckoned to me. "This lady saw you, Mr. Brumby."

Brumby gasped. Brumby sputtered and gulped. They stood looking one to the other.

"But," stammered the wreckage, "I saw—— No, there was no person in the hall except your ungracious servant who has the countenance,—pardon me, Miss,—the counte nance of a rogue."

"The servant has nothing to do with the matter. I can prove my statements now. I know that you spent the night that young Stephen was murdered in a village distant from here. This I can prove. Then how may you state facts? More, that kerchief was a trap, and you and Strong fell into it."

Brumby stood, staring at the sputtering candle and the smoking wick, alternately licking its lips. The bulk edged over to his side and whispered something. The wreckage squinted up his fishy eyes and stood thinking for some time. Then his manner changed.

"Of course, of course, Miss, you will understand that my worthy co-worker, Brumby, and myself, are merely interested in the meting of justice, but our lowly station, sad to state, Miss, makes this practice hard, very hard. For, ahem! I may say—to be frank—the law pays less than the culprit."

Miss Willoughby started and her eyes flashed to mine. I nodded. She pointed to the parchment once more and said:

"Write! And beneath it your figures."

The bulk swallowed, popped his eyes in and out. The wreckage looked as though his mind was a chaos of numbers.

"Of course," he said, "you understand, Miss, in this transaction you have purchased our sympathy, merely our sympathy. Is it not true, Brumby?" said the wreckage,

nudging the bulk in the flabby abdomen. The bulk wiped imaginary tears from his poppy eyes with the backs of his pudgy little hands.

"Indeed, Miss," he grunted.

"And," went on the wreckage, "we will make the proper division upon the parchment, one-half to Brumby and the other to Brumby. Of course you will understand, Miss, that silence is precious and the price is nothing—that is to say comparatively."

Miss Willoughby nodded and remarked:

"Gentlemen, let the law guide your fingers, since you will in no way depart from the path of justice. Write."

I saw the bulk climb like a great heavy-bellied spider up the stool, poise himself, puffing, move the candle over, lick his quill, reach forth for the fluid and I heard the quill squeaking. The wreckage, like a long, lean arm, bent akimbo. I moved to the side of Miss Willoughby.

"Hope," she whispered, "read this carefully. These foxes are beating about the truth and making a liar of lies."

"Yes, yes," I whispered. "Oh, do make it quick. I shall scream aloud if I have to look upon them longer."

Miss Willoughby stood beside me and I saw her steel-blue eyes look keenly to the Brumbys. The wreckage was lopping over the desk and I could hear the squeaking of the quill as the bulk set the writing upon the parchment. Even in the pale light I could see that the wreckage was biting his tongue. Miss Willoughby drew closer to me.

"Hope," she said, "look well upon the thing he shall write, for I know within me they will undo us."

The Brumbys seemingly were busy at their task, but I knew well they were listening to what we were mumbling. Now and then the wreckage bit his nails and spit, or cleared his throat, letting the clearing come forth as a sort of moan. Finally, after what seemed to me an age, the bulk revolved upon the spider-bellied stool and held in his hand the parchment, which he scrutinized closely, tickling his nose with the feather end of the quill. He pressed his lips and smacked and leaned toward the wreckage, who came excitedly to his side. They surveyed the writ carefully together. Then I saw the wreckage shake his head mournfully from side to side.

"Never," he said, "never!"

The bulk opened its pop-eyes wide and stared inquiringly to the wreckage. Then shrugged.

"My dear," said the wreckage. "My dear Brumby, a path should be built well that one follow it in comfort. This will not do."

Then they had a whispered conversation, much to my amusement, for the bulk's whisper was hoarse and quite audible and the wreckage piped in a high key that we might not hear. Miss Willoughby, too, was amused and we drew together nudging one the other. After a long time, and after the bulk had made an elaborate change in the parchment and finally turned once more toward us, the wreckage came forth oilyly, seeming to wave his long body in a sort of shimmering movement, holding out for our inspection the parchment. It was brief, merely a few lines that stated that the parties, Brumby & Brumby, heretofore connected with the estate of Stephen Willoughby, had received in full for their services the sum of—I shudder to state this—two thousand pounds, the same that Mr. Strong had pleaded for. I read it carefully and saw no flaw. I passed it then to Miss Willoughby, who also read it and looked to me.

"I think this is well enough."

"Yes," she said. "Gentlemen, I accept this. Sign!"

Brumby bowed humbly before her, taking the parchment very gingerly from her hand and going toward the bulk, who seemed elated over something that we did not know. I knew this by his eyes, and the fact that the wreckage also seemed to be well pleased, caused a sudden thought to come to me.

"Miss Willoughby," I said softly, "they did not mention that they were to keep the facts, that they so well loved to smack over, to themselves. Think you not that you should speak of this?"

She nodded and touched me that I should be silent. I obeyed, and the squeaking quill told me that the bulk was affixing his signature to the parchment. I looked, and truly he was perched upon the tall stool, and the quill was showing over his shoulder and the wreckage was watching beside him. When he had finished the wreckage took his place

upon the tall-legged spider as though to ride, for his legs hung long over the sides and his feet hooked over the rungs that bound the sprawling legs together. I heard the quill once more squeaking and I knew that the wreckage had also affixed his signature. When he had finished he calmly licked the fluid from the quill, then slowly raised the sharpened point to his head and scratched just behind the ear, finishing this graceful action by placing it carefully behind his ear and shaking some powder over the face of the parchment. This he blew from its surface and then thumped the parchment with his forefinger, coming down from the height as he did so by sliding from the puffed cushion and unhooking his feet. I heard his piping voice and listened.

"My dear Miss, it is finished. You have purchased the sympathy of Brumby & Brumby, and think you, Miss, at the small cost! Is it not, Brumby?"

Brumby moaned. I heard Miss Willoughby make a sound that told me that she was vexed. It was a little sound in her throat. Then her voice sounded and she addressed Brumby

"You have finished the signing of this. Now, sirs, draw another parchment in which you state that you possess no fact nor any knowledge of the death of Obadiah Willoughby or Stephen Willoughby."

Brumby looked to Brumby and I saw that she had bested them. They had believed that they had made the parchment knave-fashion, but she had discovered them. I heard her speak again.

"And this, gentlemen, this parchment, shall have no price named. And furthermore you shall deliver, as part of the goods purchased at the price of two thousand pounds, the kerchief which is mine. If this thing is not done, then to-morrow I shall have you within the hands of the law."

Brumby gasped.

"But, my dear lady, do you not realize that I am a chronicler of the law?"

"Yes," she answered, "and as a chronicler you are the wine-press that presses out sour wine for the unfortunates. To-morrow I shall give you a sup of this wine. Mr. Brumby, and you, Mr. Brumby, you have reached the end. Write!"

With little ado Brumby went to the side of Brumby. They had a short conversation and once more the quill recorded, the parchment was drawn up and duly signed and Miss Willoughby had within her hands the freeing of our paths of Brumby & Brumby. Still I felt way down within me that these two oily ill-assorted beings were sinister and like ominous clouds to our days. When they had delivered the parchments into the hands of Miss Willoughby the wreckage made itself most gracious, speaking of the weather and the season, even inquiring after the health of Mr. Obadiah Willoughby. All of this Miss Willoughby declined to notice but made her ready to take our departure. I followed her when she turned toward the door, and the wreckage followed us. When we had reached the spot he, with his deathlike hands, slipped the bolt, then, with his corpse-like smile, remarked:

"You have honoured us, Miss, honoured us, Miss—indeed, yes."

Miss Willoughby turned and nodded them adieu. I followed her. The lad who waited us with the lantern came to us as we stepped from the official abode of Brumby & Brumby. Miss Willoughby said to him to be on and we followed. I turned as we walked down the path to look back at the house where the Brumbys still stood in the door, the wreckage like some long-legged insect, his arms folded over his narrow chest, and the bulk beside him, watching us on our way. Miss Willoughby was pressing my arm and I knew was excited by the trembling of her hand as it lay upon me. When we had gone some way I heard behind us the tramp of feet. Swiftly and with long strides they came upon us. I heard the piping voice of the wreckage calling, "Miss! Miss!"

Miss Willoughby stopped and I beside her. We were now beside the shop of Ole Dodson. Through the darkness the voice called and after some minutes the face of the wreckage came within the halo of light the lantern shed.

"You will forgive me, Miss, but you have forgotten. You have, of course, forgotten. It could be no other way. The sum! The sum!"

He was rubbing his hands over and smiling wickedly

"The sum, or the parchments, Miss."

"Sir," said Miss Willoughby, "neither! Good evening."

Swiftly the wreckage unwound its great height and sprung toward her. I was frightened and stood gaping. There was a sound of other feet and I heard a man's voice say, "Damn you!" and in the light of the lantern I saw Mr. Obadiah Willoughby raise his riding whip and strike Mr. Brumby over his wicked face. He staggered and fell back, but to regain his poise and hurl his bulk toward the form of Mr. Willoughby, who with great strength cast him down and delivered blows upon him. Brumby did not rise but lay sprawling in the shadow. Mr. Willoughby motioned us to speed on and the lad ran before us with the lantern and we followed to the inn.

CHAPTER XXIX

PETER GOFF was asleep beside the fire. I heard him snoring as we approached. I smelled an herb brew and I knew he had expected his quality guests back. We hastened in, following the lad.

The great inn room was lighted dimly by one great swinging cross branch of candles. They were dripping their wax upon the floor. I could watch the dropping as I walked across to the fire. Peter Goff awoke when our steps had fallen upon the floor and came to meet us, smiling his smile of welcome, and offered the benches beside the fire that we should sit, which we did, and in but a short time he came to us bearing two bowls of steaming brew which smelled of liquor. We were both quite overcome with what we had seen. Mr. Willoughby did not follow us though we sat for some time.

"Miss Willoughby," I finally said, "do you think this is the end of their cunning?"

She nodded and touched her breast where she had placed the parchment.

"Yes," she said, following the nod. "I think it is finished."

"Shall we then return to the manor?" I asked.

"No," she answered.

"Then, Miss Willoughby, I shall go to the little house of

Miss Patricia's when the morning comes. Oh, say that I shall, I so long to see and I must know certain things."

Miss Willoughby smiled sweetly, looking deep into my eyes, then with her delicate fingers pinching my cheeks.

"You may go, Hope, in the morning. You may go and you shall learn all that has happened. I think our waiting is coming to an end."

Peter Goff was putting the fire to rest, covering it up with a beautiful blanket of ash and making the logs spit angrily little scarlet sparks as he poked them into submission. He did not know that beside his hearth sat little me who had envied his dog. Somehow I took keen pleasure in thinking of his ignorance and I leaned toward Miss Willoughby, saying:

"Shall we wait?"

"No," she answered. "You shall go to your couch. I shall await alone. I must speak with Obadiah."

"But are you not fearful?" I asked, for I seemed to feel that every shadow had some grinning face that would pounce upon us.

"No," she answered and smiled a mysterious smile, patting me upon my shoulders and touching the locks that the hood had misplaced. "Sleep, Hope, and forget. I say this in full faith that it is now but a little while."

"Shall I dare go before them?" I asked, nodding toward the outer wall. She smiled again and did not answer.

"Go," she said, after a time of gazing lovingly at me. "Go, my dear, and dream a happy dream."

Peter Goff was now lighting a candle that stood in a little iron cup with a hood over it. The candle branch that hung in the ceil was dimming, as some of the candles were quite gone and others were gasping for breath. I saw Peter Goff's old face in the new candle light. The deep furrows, the withered lips that sunk in, his deep-set eyes and shelving brows, his wine-bitten nose and his palsied hand as he held it before the light. I leaned toward him and let the light fall upon my face. He looked up just in time to see me laughing, and I never shall know why I said it, but I heard my voice say, "Brats is brats, Peter Goff!"

Peter squinted, worked his lips over his toothless gums, raised his hand up to shelter his eyes, peered once more, then grunted, "Ahm damned!" Then his eyes shifted and he

turned toward Miss Willoughby bowing and bobbing and mumbling:

"" Pardon, Miss, pardon."

"Show the lady to her couch, Goff," said Miss Willoughby.

"Yes, Miss, yes," he answered, turning and leading me upon the way without again turning, though I heard a mumbled "Ahm d——!" as he went up the two stairs that led to the sleeping wing.

I followed Peter Goff as he made his way to the stairs that led to the sleeping-room wing, through the narrow hallway that was patched at either side with doors. Peter did not turn but walked totteringly before me, holding the candle aloft and now and then grumbling out, "Ahm damned!" When we had reached the end of the long hall, he opened a chamber, out of which came forth a breath of cold air as though silence had been shut within it and had begun to shake with fear. Peter stood beside the doorway, offering to my hand the candle. I took it from his gnarled fingers and laughed up into his face.

"Peter Goff," I said, "dogs is dogs, but this is one time that I sleep in the quality quarters."

Peter wagged his old head and cast a sour glance to me and I heard his gruff voice mutter and caught the words, "When the downs is up there is a mighty fallin' comin'."

I laughed after him. I don't know why I felt like laughing, but I did, and I shall not try to find an excuse in my record. I turned into the chamber and brought the candle up so that I might survey the place. The floor was quite bare and white and had been sanded until it was sunken in spots and squeaky when I stepped upon it. There was a very thin old poster with two high upper posts that stood up like the shoulders of some old maidens that I have seen, and the legs, like too, were hidden almost by the flounce of some flowery stuff. There was a press at the side of the wall and a curved legged chair stood before it. There was a bracket that stood like a little arm from the wall with a hook upon it, and I found that the candle cup with the hood possessed a hook that meant that it should be hung upon the bracket.

I can recall now the queer feeling that was mine. I was gay; my little spirit of joy was beating me from within;

but there was an aching down deep that threatened to send me into tears at any moment. I remember that I hung the candle upon the bracket, then stood in the centre of the room with my hands upon my hips. I turned my head to one side and felt a feeling of exultation. At last I knew what it meant to be above my tormentors. I was not conscious of any of the outside world. I was filled up of the joy of this, my experience. I know now that this was youth, for youth is such a sweet comrade and carries her garlands ever ready to wind them over the wounds. I was letting myself take in the joy when there came to me my old friend, Memory, and he took my heart and wrung it, then my hand, and led me up to the attic. I sank down beside the poster and hid my face in the flowered cloth and I said aloud:

"Sally Trueblood, Sally Trueblood, is it wrong that my heart just will be happy?"

Then I sat up and rubbed my eyes, and I knew that Sally Trueblood would smile, so I smiled and began to disrobe. But while I was at the task there would creep upon me the old attic and the table and the great armchair and the tiny hearth and the too little window that had first shown me the great sky. And while I was filled of hope and the excitement of finding the end to my awful waiting that I had borne since my birth, still these old memories were dear though drear. Finally I was unrobed and I made ready to sleep, turning back the coverlids. I went to the candle and blew upon it. It snuffed and at this moment there sounded a knock upon my door. I found my way to the door and called:

"Who? Who please?" I was answered by a thin, sour voice which I recognized, and I shrieked: "Delicia Prue! Delicia Prue! Oh, give me the grister!"

I opened the door as fast as the darkness and my shaking fingers would allow, and there stood Delicia Prue, more weasened, and her nose quite hooked to her chin, holding a mug of whey in one hand and a candle in the other. She came toward me and I fell upon her, crying out:

"Oh, Delicia Prue, is it true, is it true that I am again in the inn? In Peter Goff's inn and the dog is gone?"

Delicia Prue did not answer me, but came in, walked to the press, set the candle upon it and offered me the mug of whey. I took it and I said:

"Delicia, do you know that I know something that you would love to know?"

Delicia took up the end of her white apron and wiped her eye's corner.

"Them's gone, them days," said she.

"What, Delicia Prue," I cried, "gone? Oh, I know, every one of them and they're not even old."

Delicia Prue shook her head from side to side and said in her quaver:

"Na, na, na. Them's gone, them is."

"But, Delicia," I went on, "Peter Goff——" I got no further.

"I tuk him, I did," she said, and shook her head mournfully, wiping once more her watering eyes.

"You did not, Delicia Prue. No! Now, did you?"

"Yea, yea," she answered, "and a sorry takin'!"

I think I laughed a little even at her misery, and I circled her bent form with my arm and took her toward the poster. The room was quite light by the candle and I could see that the days had not dealt lightly with Delicia Prue.

"You took him," I said.

"Yea, yea, more fool me! Him and his brews! The black witch dang him!"

"But, Delicia, think of the inn!"

"Na, na, na'! 'tis the pots and brewin's and the bellies at seek, I tell 'e. 'E wadna gae ye e'en a grister. Think on it—and I tuk him!"

"But think, Delicia," I cried, "think! You are the inn's lady!"

"And a devilish lady! Wi' a chaise that be drawn by her own pegs. Na, na, na, lassie, 'e's a fool and me is bigger nor him."

She begun to wipe her eyes anew.

"How did it happen, Delicia?" I asked. "I never thought it would be."

"Nor I," she breathed, "but ye see I ceased the cookin' and he lost the taverners. It's weddin' the pot he wert." And she went off in sobs.

I caressed her little bent back, and it seemed all so strange that Delicia should have the thing she so coveted and found it so undesirable. Suddenly Delicia nudged me and looked

up, her little bright eyes glittering, and leaned toward me to whisper:

"Ah been told, I ha'e, by a seller o' charms, that Ahm to be widdered," and she stopped and smoothed her apron over her knees, keeping her eyes down, then suddenly casting them up to me. "And," she went on, "I ha'e bought me blacks."

I gasped. I think then the faint hope of this little bent creature at the freeing from a bad lot made me sorry. I patted her and I said:

"Keep them. Keep them, Delicia, and keep them in the dark lest they turn green."

She shook her head.

"So I been told," she said, "and wi' a bit o' lavender. I shall be goin' now. Do ye hear? It be Peter Goff this minute, boltin' out the starshine and he'll sift the ash and drain every mither mug that sits the table. He will, Miss, he will," and she arose. "It be a wrong thing that I should visit this upon 'e, Miss, quality as ye is. Peter's been tellin' me, but for old sake's sake and for the sake o' lights and innards, I ha'e come, and no' I go. Goo' night, Miss, goo' night, and may the holy mither watch ye."

There was a clatter. Delicia all but fell forward.

"It's the milk! I wage 'tis. He set it from the cat's sniffin' and he's forgot, he has, and upset it all. Och, och, och!" And she left me, grasping up the candle and making her way toward the inn's room. I watched her go and saw Peter Goff come toward her, and that she had a bit of bad words with him I heard. Then I closed the door.

I stood beside the closed door, listening to the mumbled sound of their voices, and I knew by the tone of Peter Goff's growl that he was angry. After a time it was silent and I groped my way to the poster's side and was about to lie down when a soft knock sounded once more. I again groped my way through the darkness to the door and unbolted it to open it, when the candle streamed through the crack and disclosed Delicia Prue, holding the candle and peering into the dark.

"Pardon, Miss," she whispered, "but would ye mind a-tellin' me, be ye a believer in charms?"

I laughed and shook my head, no.

" I am afraid, Delicia Prue, that I do not. At least I have never found any charm but a laugh or a smile that foretold truthfully."

" But I ha'e the black," she whispered.

" Keep them, Delicia, keep them."

She shook her head up and down and turned, as though satisfied, to make her way back to her quarters, never turning to say a night's blessing.

Once more I made my bolt secure and went to the poster's side and lay down. I thought to sleep, but never was a night so full of phantoms, and there was one that seemed too close and that was one whom I have been loth to mention, for the memory was too very sore—my love, my own lost Stephen. I had thought if unmaidenly to show to those about me what his going had meant to my lone heart. So much had happened since the old inn days, so many shadows had fallen in my life's field, that as I lay gazing into the darkness I was almost frightened at the many faces that my mind set, even as flashes, before me. In the velvety darkness I saw Miss Patricia, and, weirdly, Mr. Reuben and his mulling cup, and the Vicar Giffords one by one marched by, and Miss Snifly. Then I fell to imagining what time had done with them. I wondered if their faces bore the same traces that had lain so heavily upon Delicia Prue's. Then all would disappear and I would remember Sally Trueblood, with the white face and the little morning flush upon her white cheeks, and the thin scarlet lips that curved so beautifully over her white teeth, and I would see her little hands pleading, and I would almost start up with the nearness. Then, then,—well, I met my old friend, Sleep, and he took me upon another path, a dreamless one, that ended with the first pale blue of morning before the light had come and the things about one look like shadows that crouch in sleep, awaiting the light to wake them.

CHAPTER XXX

I RECALL that I lay at first wondering just where I was. I think it was the old familiar scent of ale that made the old inn again occur to me, and I knew where I was, and lay listening. I heard a cock crow, dreamy far, and anothe

take it up, and I waited, for I knew another would answer. Sure enough, after a time, I heard a chorus of cocks. Then they died down and the rattle of some chaise made me listen closer, wondering who was out at this hour. Now and then some traveller who trod the street's way spoke a word of greeting, and one had the feeling of listening and enjoying the day's waking as a thing apart, and wondering just what the hours would mean for one's self.

I don't know that any definite plan was mine. I do recall that I trusted to Miss Willoughby. Something, a nameless something, told me that I should. The light was coming on and I sat up in the poster, casting back the coverlids and springing out upon the white floor. Making my way to the shutters and throwing them a little way open I saw the chaise was making ready for the daily post ride. The lad was still sleep-stupid and the nags sneezy. I smiled a little, wondering what those very nags would bring back by post. No doubt joy to some and sorrow to others. I turned and sat upon the leggy chair and began to draw on my robes. When I was ready I opened the door into the long narrow hallway and walked toward the inn's room. I smelled a new-kindled fire and heard the snapping of the wood as the flames bit it.

When I reached the two stairs that led from the hall to the inn room I stood looking upon the scene that lay before me. The room was still dark at the ceil and at the corners' ways, but the fire made a dancing light over the dull place. Miss Willoughby was sitting before the fire, much as I had seen her so many years gone. Her hand was held before her face to shield her eyes. I saw the pink glow of her fingers as the light illumined them and I saw how worn and anxious she appeared. Peter Goff was shining mugs and the stale scent of liquor sickened one. I had upon my arm the cape that Miss Willoughby had given me for this journey, and I stepped down into the inn room and went toward the fire She started up and I went to her, embracing her, laying my cheek to hers and whispering:

"This is a good day, Miss Willoughby. My heart has told me so."

She smiled and motioned that I should sit upon the fire-bench that stood beside the hearth. I seated myself and

waited for her word, for I realized that her mood was one I might not intrude upon. Upon the table slab lay a parchment that I knew was the one signed by Brumby & Brumby, and I pointed toward it, raising my eyebrows.

" Safe," she answered, " safe, Hope."

" Shall I go as I asked that I might, to Miss Patricia's ? "

" Yes," she answered, " when we have supped."

Peter came forward now with some steaming bowls and flaky scones.

Pent within me was a desire to go through the day and tear down all the waiting, making myself possessor of the end of the thing. I looked at Peter Goff, as he laid the plate upon the table, and I sniffed the brew. I sat down in a little while and awaited Miss Willoughby. She arose and joined me. We ate in silence, she keeping her eyes upon the plate and I watching the fire. There was one thing that I intended to do. This was to get the little box that Sally Trueblood had made for me. It was at Miss Patricia's, I knew, had it not been touched, just beneath the woollens in the press with a reflector above it, in my own little room which had been the guest room. I did not speak of this to Miss Willoughby. She, after a time, remarked :

" You shall go when you like, Hope."

" Do I dare ? " I asked.

" With the cape, I think so," she answered.

I understood. I was not to go before the village freely, but to keep to myself. I felt the lash again. I wanted to ask where Mr. Willoughby had gone, or was he in the village yet, but I did not. No, I ate the last scone and relished it, for youth was mine. I would go to Dawson, I resolved, but first I would go to the little house, just to be alone with it even though I did not enter. We finished our sup, Miss Willoughby and little me ; for I felt again my little self. Then she nodded. I caught up the cape and threw it about me.

" When shall I return ? " I asked.

" When you like," she answered.

" Oh, Miss Willoughby, I am afraid, afraid of what I shall find ! Oh, do you think this is a good day ? "

" Yes," she nodded.

Then I knelt at her side.

" Kiss me, my dear, dear Miss Willoughby."

She did, upon the lips, then upon the brow, and her hand lingered at my neck. Then I turned. Peter Goff was absorbed in hooking a pot to a hanger and noticed us little. I went to the door and opened it. It was one of those sparkling mornings that just won't keep still. The shadows dance and the dew blazes and dances and the birds are busy and the fowls scratching, and even the village dogs trot like they too were on some busy errand. I hastened through the little narrow street, never turning nor looking up to see those that I passed. I recall that I turned down our way with a beating heart. Then I looked, and from out our chimney curled a little lazy smoke! I started and wonder overcame me. Then I saw that the little gate hung primly, the hedge was trimmed and the little window shutters stood open. In one of them flamed a scarlet bloom and vines hung o'er the sill. I was afraid to enter, but my feet bore me on, for my heart was hungry.

I walked down the little path, after closing the prim gate that looked like Miss Patricia's apron. The door was a little open and I stepped into the hallway. All was quiet except for a bird that hopped in the wicker. There was a kettle hung in its accustomed place, sending up its steam climbing the chimney pit. There was the black woollen cover upon the table with the yellow fruit turned toward the door. I wondered if I was dreaming. Upon the hearth's seat stood Mr. Reuben's mulling cup. I heard a sweet voice humming in some inner room. Then I forgot all save that this was home. My home! Miss Patricia's home, and Mr. Reuben's —our home!

I walked to the what-all, and there in its accustomed place sat the little china dog, staring with his paint eyes up to me.

" You! " I said, touching his little china body. " You! Oh, you little china dog, are you not glad that you are china? Oh what memories did you bring my love? Tell me, tell me! Did my hand shake when she gave you to me that night when I feared to tell Dawson that she was going? Oh, did you know? Did you know that you were always and always to carry such a pack of memories? I think I had rather be you than me, for you have made somebody happy and I have always made them sad."

Then a step sounded and I turned to see—Mrs. Gifford. I was startled into an exclamation. I saw her face go very white and she tried to speak. Then her hands flew out and she dropped them, stumbling over to where I stood. She held her arms open. I went straight into them and she stood clasping me. Then I heard her trying to whisper and caught the words:

"I have learned, I have learned, Hope, to say: 'Suffer little children.'"

"Don't," I whispered. "Don't, oh, don't! I cannot bear it!"

"No," she answered me, still clasping me to her. "I have learned. Do you know how?"

"Yes," I answered her, "I do. I, too, learned, Mrs. Gifford."

"Wait," she said. "Do you know how? Well, my dear, from Sally Trueblood, through you. I did not see," she added as she led me toward a chair, "I did not see it written in your eyes that morning, but I know that she sent you out into the village with Christ's own words in your eyes."

I was weeping and she too. Then she spread her hands out and said:

"I have waited for you. I knew you would come. They told us of your illness."

"Mrs. Gifford," I said, "I am yet waiting, playing that game I told you of, those years gone by. It has been hard."

"Yes, and lone," she added.

"It has been sweet. Miss Willoughby," I turned toward her, "tells me it is near an end, but do you know I love the waiting. I have come to feast my heart. I cannot live in the manor. Oh, this is home!"

"It is yours," interrupted Mrs. Gifford. "Miss Patricia told the Vicar."

Mine! Mine! Miss Patricia's little shrine! The little box that she kept her heart's treasure in!

I bent over and hugged the table, then kissed the yellow fruit. Then I said to Mrs. Gifford:

"Here I shall stay. It is my haven. It always shall be. Wait," I said and went to the guest room, opened the press and there, old and time-worn, stood the little box.

I took it up and hastened back. The little sitting room was quite empty save for the singing kettle and the hopping of the bird, and I knew that Mrs. Gifford knew I would be alone. I cast off the cape and took the box to the fireside and set it before the light. The room was bright with early sun but chill. I looked into the warming blaze, then turned and laid my hand upon the box, and I said:

"Come, Sally Trueblood, come! Let us, you and your brat, open this."

Sally Trueblood's brat! I recalled asking Mr. Reuben what a brat was. Then I smiled and said again aloud: "A brat is an elf."

Well, then I opened the loose cover and touched the wool of my little cape. I lifted it out and kissed the patches. Then I cast it over my arm and something heavy struck me. It was a weight at the hem. I picked it up and found there were two and they were unalike. One was flat and solid, the other hollow. With my fingers I pulled apart the rotted stitches and the weight fell out. It was a lead pellet. Hastily I pulled apart the other corner and there fell out a narrow gold band. I began to cry and I was afraid to touch it. It was so small, like her finger, yet I was fearful. In my excitement I dropped it and it rolled across the floor. I followed swiftly. Though I searched for some time I could not find it. I think I was weeping more. I know my eyes were almost blinded and that I was mad to lay hands upon it. Then I turned toward the what-all and was standing beside it when I saw that the little dog seemed to be looking toward the hearth. Oh, you cannot know the thing that bade me follow his gaze, but I did and between the hearth's stones there shone the ring.

I took it up and went to the shutter and looked within the ring, fearfully. One word shone—"Sarah." Disappointment swept me. I hastened to the box and unpacked the little garments until I came to the packet that had lain beneath the whole. It was a little leather-covered diary. The writing within it was delicate and curled. I pressed it close, repacked the box and sat down. Idly my hands turned the leaves. Oh, would I now be able to look upon this bared heart I had resolved never to look upon until I had driven out the shadow even of doubt? Lips and

hearts speak faith, yet the shadow of doubt stands, forbidding, apart. I was thumbing. I had not intended to read when I saw that the lines were shaking, that the page was blurred with drops, yellow and showing the plash. The fluid had run a little and I read :

" To-night—to-night I went—Oh, you eyes who shall yet read this, I am recording for you—I went to him to make an end of the silence. I think—oh, you eyes who are reading—that this night will leave a shadow that I may never free me of. I am fearful, for something tells me that I alone shall rest in the shadow. I meant to call him. It was late but love knows no hours. It was beside the East wing at the low window's ope of the turret room."

The lines were so shaken that I could scarcely read and my heart was stifling me.

" There was a sudden gust and the shutters blew wide. I saw Step—" and the waving lines finished the word—" raise a riding stick and it fell upon his sire. Then a spring and—oh, God, I am fearful !—he brought forth a blade and slipped it, casting the withering body from him. I was frozen !—oh, you reader—I could not move ! He turned and saw me. I am frightened. The shadows are so very dark as I write. Oh, oh, I know him, and I heard the words, ' D—— you ! Tell and there shall be two Willoughbys so ! ' Oh, I must not. I cannot open my lips." There were more tears and a line that I could not read. Then : " He must go. If he but goes then I may speak."

I turned on. Then I came upon : " Oh, loving God ! thou hast locked my lips ! He is gone and may not speak. And I know that—" an empty line—" Felicia, Felicia believes and he will not—" More emptiness, as though she had sat long, waiting. " They believe me wa—, oh, my darling, I shall not record it ! I am alone, alone, but with you I have wealth. And I shall wait, wait the May. He says he will return to us."

I recall how my eyes were streaming, that I could not see, and that my hands snapped the book shut ; that I arose and that my throat was aching. I walked to the little fire that burned in the hearth, stooped before it, leaned over the hearth seat and took up the mulling cup of Mr. Reuben. It was quite bright. Some hand had burnished it. I knew

that the hand was Mrs. Gifford's and that the heart that had spurred the hand was one of love. I sat down. I was afraid, afraid to look again to the little book. I was fearful of what one more page might disclose. While I was sitting so Mrs. Gifford returned with a soft step. I heard her and turned.

"Come," I said, "come, Mrs. Gifford. I have finished, or rather I have just begun and fear to finish."

She came toward me and stood beside the hearth's seat where I was seated. I looked up into her eyes and arose. She held her arm out and circled my waist. I turned and made my way to the little room that was my own, the guest room of Miss Patricia, which she had turned so humbly into mine. We passed through the doorway and stood before the poster where Sephira had lain. My eyes sought Mrs. Gifford's. I was afraid to speak. She nodded and patted my hand which I had tucked into hers. My lips said "Miss Patricia" and my heart was hungry to know what had happened after I had left the little place.

"Where is she, Mrs. Gifford?" I asked. "They did not——" I stopped. "They did not keep the chapel closed, did they?"

"No," said Mrs. Gifford. "I with my own hands tolled the bell."

"But she said she would never enter it unless—" I shook just a little—"they asked her and took me in."

Mrs. Gifford nodded.

"Yes," she said, "I know. We did ask her, with our very souls, and we took you into our hearts."

"And Sephira?" I asked. "And the babe?"

Mrs. Gifford sank her head upon my shoulder.

"By the side of Sally Trueblood," she murmured.

My eyes were streaming.

"And," she went on, "the babe was swathed in the garments you offered, Hope."

I sat down upon the poster and we talked, Mrs. Gifford and I, of the village. I knew that she knew something of the Willoughbys, and perhaps of Sally Trueblood, but again I was fearful. She did not offer me information and I let the conversation dwell upon the villagers, Dawson's ailings, and Miss Snifly's refusal to become softened. It grew late and still she went on upon the village gossip. It seemed that

they had known of the return of Obadiah Willoughby. Then she said later that Strong had been connected with Stephen Willoughby in certain dealings that the village looked upon as not of honourable turn; that Brumby and Brumby had been brought to the village by Strong, and that they had been known as horse traders before they had come into the distinction of being "chroniclers of the law."

All of this I listened to, putting it to what I already knew and wondering. I did not speak of Rudy Strong. Again I was wondering, wondering. Mrs. Gifford seemed to want me to know how the heart of herself and the Vicar had opened. She had seemed to be holding from me something that pressed her. She would start and redden and remain silent, breaking in a little later with something trivial of the village once more. Finally I said deliberately:

"Mrs. Gifford, did you know Sally Trueblood before she came to you to sew?"

"No," she answered.

"You did not know, then, when she came, who she was?"

"No."

"When did she first come?" I asked. "Before I had known the world, or the time when I did?—the time that Dawson knew?"

She nodded.

"The time," her lips spoke, "when Dawson knew."

"Then you knew that when I was born she did not reveal the name of my sire?"

She nodded.

"Then you knew, even before the village, that I was a brat?"

She nodded once more.

"But you took her in! Why? You refused me, and later when she was gone the village would not of me."

Mrs. Gifford seemed loth to reply.

"Tell me," I begged, "Mrs. Gifford. I cannot bear the wondering. Why has the village not spoken before? Why did not the Vicar tell me? He knew, times gone by. He told me that Sally Trueblood was not Sally Trueblood, yet he refused to tell who she was. Mrs. Gifford, why has this been?

" Because," she answered me, " because he did her a great wrong, one he could not undo, for when the time came when he might it was too late. Hope, it is an awful thing and I may not speak. The Vicar will tell you, Wait."

" When ? " I asked. " I have waited through the summers, winters and autumns. I have waited through happiness and woe. Why will they not speak, and when will he speak ? "

" Can you wait until morning, Hope ? He is ill, too ill to speak with Mr. Willoughby who has sought him twice."

" Cannot I go to him ? Oh, let me go ! Let me put my arm about him and tell him I forgive, Mrs. Gifford, for he has been one of the causes that have enabled me to live. I can always recall that Sabbath morning when his lips said, ' Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.' And I have not forgotten nor shall I ever. Do you know that it is a great thing to keep before you, Mrs. Gifford,—' of such is the kingdom,'—just to keep as a little child and wait, wait ? Oh, I recall waiting since the time when Sally Trueblood and I waited the evening star and wished that May would bring him back." I stood and hunger, heart-hunger, came upon me. " Mrs. Gifford, come with me. I am hungry to look upon the chapel yard. Come ! It is my land of dreams and my day is dreamless."

CHAPTER XXXI

SHE caught up her shawl and I drew on the cape and hood and we walked slowly from the little place, through the narrow streetways into the village. The sun was deepening its gold and the sky was quite bright of rose and gold. We walked slowly past the old familiar places, turned the street corner and were upon the little gravel path that led to the chapel. The old turret was thickly grown with green, long, swinging tendrils, swaying in the breeze from the bell's ope. I looked up as we came to the spot and thought of how very high it used to seem. I have stood upon this same path and looked up to the little turret and wondered if it was up in the sky

and if the angels rang the bell. Now it seemed square and narrow, like the village.

We walked down the yardway to the great gate. I say "great gate," but it hardly reached my chin now. There was a May-thorn, decked like a bride with a filmy lace of white trembling upon its branches. The trees were young green and the grasses thick and untrodden. I smelled the damp and the scent of the barks. The stones gleamed and seemed such tiny things, just little stones. They used to seem like great tombs to me. As we turned into the gateway I was stopped by a web that barred the way. I followed it. It was stranded from the corner of Obadiah Willoughby's stone across the grasses and shrubs, swaying as though it breathed. Something made me follow it and when I found the end it was well down the path and was unmarked save by a young willow which swept o'er the spot.

I stood beside the willow and held my hands up till I caught its graceful swaying branches within them, then I kissed them. Mrs. Gifford had followed me and I saw her go to the other side of the little mound that was covered with some creeping vine. My glance fell then upon the little bare mound that was beside the vine-covered one and I knew this was Sephira. It seemed to me that my heart would burst. I could not look upon the place which held all those whom I had so loved.

"Mrs. Gifford," I said, "I do not believe that I can bear it. This has been too much, these last days. There is more there," I pointed to the mound, "than you can ever know. To this mound I have spoken. With this mound I have communed. With this mound I have lived the old days over. And now, oh, it seems empty, so empty! And there, Sephira! It cannot be. And Miss Patricia, too, and Mr. Reuben, and the babe. And I am afraid, oh, I am afraid to see, but I know that Stephen, too, rests here."

Mrs. Gifford was weeping. Suddenly I turned and, drawn with the one feeling that I must flee, sought the sextonage. It was quite lone. I turned its corner and saw, sitting in the sun, bent and withered, the sexton. I went to his side and stood. He did not hear me, but was lost in the wondrous land of age, which tempts sleep and makes the waking hard. I touched him. He started and made to arise, clasping the

gnarled stick which he held between his knees. His watery eyes, pale and faded, looked up into mine like a babe's that did not understand. I saw that he was startled. He stood silent. I then whispered, "Sarah." Then he shook his shoulders, as though to shake off some old memory, and laughed a foolish laugh up into my face.

"It be n't," he said.

"No," I answered. "Do you know me?"

He shook his head and his eyes were again wondering.

"Listen," I said. "Do you not remember the little me who came to the sextonage and who played in the pit and buried the bird within it?"

His face brightened. Then I saw him look as though he was struggling with memories. Then he sat down, to lose himself in a wordless dream.

"You told me," I ventured later, "that Obadiah Willoughby was not there." I pointed to the mound. He nodded. "Then, where was he?"

He mouthed a bit, licking his shrunken lips, then turned his head to one side and stared at me for some minutes.

"He war awa.'"

"Yes," I answered, "did you know where?"

He nodded "yes."

"Then did you know Sally Trueblood?"

"Na," he answered.

"But," I said, "you had the cape clasp and kerchief."

He stared a bit and seemed not to listen, but continued to lick his lips and strike his gnarled stick upon the stones. I knew that my task was one that would lead to little, for the sexton seemed not to understand. Mrs. Gifford was coming. I heard her step.

"You did not know Sally Trueblood?"

"Sally Trueblood?" he repeated. "Trueblood?" he added. Then shook his head up and down as though admitting that he did know. "Know'er," he said vacantly. "When she war here." He backed his thumb toward the sextonage. "Gar bless 'er!" He tapped a bit more, then added, "Hidin', and them after her."

"Hiding?" I cried. "Hiding? What did she hide from?"

Mrs. Gifford had come up to us and I turned to her.

"Do you hear this, Mrs. Gifford? He has told me she hid here. What for? For shame? For shame? I cannot believe this. What does he mean?"

She seemed to understand and came to my side, putting her arm about me and said softly:

"Come, Hope, let us find some resting place and I will tell you what I know."

I was feverish and turned swiftly, seeking the spot where the vine-covered mound lay. I sat down by it and Mrs. Gifford did likewise.

"Now," I said, my voice trembling, "now, Mrs. Gifford, if you have any pity in your soul tell me all that you know."

She smoothed her hands over her shawl in a nervous fashion and seemed almost afraid to speak.

"Hope, first you must know that the village has been in the grasp of Stephen Willoughby since he has been at an age great enough to drive them before him. Every single household has Willoughby as its foundation, bought, stolen or cajoled. They are afraid, or were, and we, like them, grew to mould our thoughts to the Willoughbys' taste. When the old gentleman was found dead much word ran the village. Most of the villagers had but one belief, and though their tongues spoke one to the other in secret, they did not dare speak aloud and openly. Obadiah Willoughby disappeared. Naturally the village then pointed to him, but the feeling again turned toward Stephen. It was then that he told that Obadiah had displeased his sire in his choice; that in anger he had done the deed."

This I had known. "But what part did Sally Trueblood play?" I demanded. "Was she the wife of Obadiah Willoughby?"

Mrs. Gifford reddened, bit her lip, then went on:

"There is no record of it, Hope."

"What!" I gasped. "No record?"

"No," she answered, "and but a little time after Obadiah had gone Stephen Willoughby went to the home of the Passwaters and made known to them that Sally Trueblood was——" She stopped.

"I know," I added, "I know."

"And they believed it, and poor Miss Patricia, she could not understand. She did not want to touch sin."

"I know. Then?" I asked.

"She left them; went to the sextonage and hid, and the Vicar heard and went to her, but could not help her with the thing that would save her, because—well, I shall leave him tell you."

I dropped my hands heavily upon the sod beside me and my lips were still. Mrs. Gifford waited. Again my hopes were dashed. She had led me to the spot and then denied me.

"Mrs. Gifford, what prompted Stephen Willoughby to do the thing?"

"The bequest. There had been anger between the Willoughbys. The elder had found the true state of affairs, after an illness which he was not expected to recover from. The storm had broken, Hope. The village knew when Stephen had strewn the name of Willoughby in the purse of every lout who strode an inn's settle. Sober he was a Willoughby, but sodden he was,—well, a lout. There had been a rumour abroad that the choice of Obadiah Willoughby was one whose sire had been a mortal enemy to the elder Willoughby. This was true, but Willoughby was a true gentleman and they had parted with friendly words if bitter hearts, Willoughby held certain claims that belonged to Trueblood. These were of value. This much is known to the village through the gabbing. But Willoughby would not press them. This Stephen knew and when he had stripped the Willoughbys' estate of all save the land of the lordship, he set at the possessing of these. This meant that the blow would fall upon blameless ones, the only living claim being of the daughters, who, owing to the circumstances, had lived upon bounty."

"Then Stephen Willoughby struck not for honourable cause but for greed?" I said.

She nodded.

"But what thing made Sally Trueblood suffer?"

"I cannot tell you, Hope, because I do not know. She—oh, I know now the folly of the feeling against her. But the crime and the wild tales and the fact that she would not speak and that Obadiah had disappeared, all bore against her.

Hope, can you forgive me? I have known, since that day when you pointed to Sephira, what I have done. I watched Sally Trueblood stitching, stitching—putting, I know now, each thread through her own heart. And because she had fallen, I cannot tell you why, but I found myself drawn up in sanctity, yet feeling a pride that I had bent even enough to lend a small aid; feeling my own goodness and a sort of exultation in her suffering; for I would have her pay. I believed this, Hope. I believed that sin should pay. So I do now, except that I know that it does without our requirement. I was robbing my heart of love to exact payment for the gentle God, who was dealing fairly. Oh, I was wrong, wrong! I know now, Hope."

I was sitting, staring across the chapel yard, and my throat was aching. What was all of this? Why did I care what Stephen Willoughby had done or why he had done it, or where Obadiah had gone, or was he this or that? What was this to the fact that she had suffered, had paid, had never known a free glad day? And her little heart had had wings and I knew it. I turned wearily toward Mrs. Gifford, who was now weeping in her shawl's folds.

"Mrs. Gifford, never mind. You say the Vicar will tell me. There is little that I care to know, but you may be able to tell me why I was taken to the manor and who she was that sat in the turret room, rocking her little empty cradle."

She dried her eyes and nodded.

"Yes, yes; Felicia, who went mad at the May before the baby came. And, Hope, she knew, she knew that Sally Trueblood, when she looked upon you, had called you Hope. To her you were the Sarah she so loved and whom she had lost. The Vicar knew she was dying and told Miss Patricia, and she, even though her heart was full of bitterness, made the sacrifice and took you. They thought perhaps you might bring her back. And this was done through Miss Geneva. The law has been upon the manor. The eye has not ceased to watch and Stephen knew——" I stopped her here, for it seemed that my head would burst.

I brushed my brow, trying to understand how such a thing as this tangle could be true.

"But Stephen told me that his mother lay there." I

pointed toward the way where the stone stood, reading " All bitterness hath an end."

" He did not know her, Hope. This too was done to still the tongues. Stephen Willoughby was sent to London with a tutor and kept there until he was informed of certain things by tongues that knew not the bridle of the Willoughbys. He returned when you met him, and when he had met his father with query—I know this to be true, Hope—he disclaimed him as a Willoughby—swore there was no proof, and there was not. Willoughby was a Willoughby, the young one, and out of honour would not disclose what he had heard, even though Stephen feared him to the extent of disowning him. There was a bitter scene. I know this is true. And young Willoughby had sworn to make the village give up what it knew. It was then that Stephen turned and, with his cunning keened by fear, openly stated that if the village gave up what it knew then young Stephen would leave nameless."

" Stephen ! " I said softly. " Stephen ! " Then he had known what the awful thing was to feel that one is not one of blood but a thing left without a name. " But why, Mrs. Gifford ? " I cried. " This is like some awful tale of wickedness that one listens to and does not believe. Can it be that he was so wicked ? Oh, Mrs. Gifford, say that you believe that he has lied and that we may find the proof."

" There is quite enough to prove Stephen Willoughby's marriage to Felicia in the fact that she dwelt in the turret and he had openly stated the fact, but the record is torn across. The letters ' ia ' and ' Ob ' and ' y ' show, ' y ' above and further down ' Ob.' The script that remained was blurred and past tracing."

" But the Vicar knows," I said.

She shook her head uncertainly.

" Oh, Mrs. Gifford, leave me. I do not want to hear. I cannot look at the little chapel, thinking that it holds the telling and perhaps not. Why ? No, I shall not ask it. This is the game. Sally Trueblood, do you hear ? I am playing."

I turned again to Mrs. Gifford and pointed to the gateway. She nodded understandingly and made her way through it and down the path to the Gifford home. I stood for a while, wondering how Sally Trueblood could have been drawn into

such a tangle. Trusting I knew she must have been. And could I trust him? Could I trust a Willoughby, knowing what I knew? Stephen, then, was my own blood. I knew then why I loved him as I did, not with the joy of new love, but with the mantle of love which is enfolding, as one enfolds one's own. Stephen, then, if all of this was true, was mine, and God in his wisdom had foreseen. Oh, again disappointed, for, in spite of the feeling of possession, something fled, a bright something which I knew was my romance, my own first love, fleeing me. I knew that I was Sally Trueblood's very own, that no other would ever fill my heart. I do not know why I knew this, but I did, and I knew that always, always I should know hunger, hunger for the sweet wine of earth's love. I smiled, I think, with my stiffening lips, looking across the little chapel yard, knowing that my love too was buried there. Along with the bodies that had been my earth loves, the spirit of this one rested, buried even so deep as flesh.

Oh, you who read this record I here record that all of this is written not in the spirit of joy that sped my lines before, but heavily my hand moves and the weight of knowledge lags the script. I shall never again be the little me who joyfully trod the paths and whom youth stepped with, for an elder sister has replaced youth and her eyes are not merry. I was standing there in the chapel yard, watching the twilight come when she touched me and beckoned, and I saw youth laugh and flee. I think she sank amid the mounds. I was a little loth to follow this elder sister, but her touch was light and, I cannot tell you why, but I loved her sorrow-heavy eyes.

It was greying beneath the trees, and the glowworms gleamed in the damping grasses. It was still, sweet-still. I listened for the laugh of youth, but heard it not. I had stood for a long time when my feet led me to the mound of Sally Trueblood. I was standing beside it, waiting with my hand within the grasp of the elder sister, wondering where she would lead me, when some one called, "Hope." I turned, with my heavy heart aching, to look up into the face of Rudy.

"Rudy!" I gasped. "You!"

"Yes, Hope, yes."

He spread his hands and made a sweeping gesture over the chapel yard.

"They call."

"What? What, Rudy?" I said. "Who?"

"I came, Hope. I could not stop the calling that seemed to fill every hour. I came to find if the thing was done that——" He sunk his head. "I know——" he added. "Hope, I know now, and still here, somewhere in this yard, is buried the one whose voice shall call through ages. Even though the days were overheavy and she sank, I know it was in goaded purity."

"Rudy! Rudy!" I cried, and flung myself upon him. "Say it aloud! Say it again! It is true! It is! It is!"

He caught my hands and held them.

"Hope," he said, "it is a long, long roadway down the path of time since that morning when the red calf was in the mead—a long, long way, girl. I did not know when the deader had been in the village that you would rest beneath a shadow from that bright day until now; that you, when the village bit, would open your arms to her, Sephira, who wore my heart about her slender neck. I did not know that we should face together much, but, Hope, I might have known, even when I had heard the worst, that you would have been her safeguard—you who always have been tenderness and who even in youth had shrunk so from the things that seemed cruel. Hope, I am a broken man. Upon these hands is the stain of blood. I may not wash it from them. Strong is dead. His dishonourable dealings have come to an end. If God will give me strength I will undo every one of them and face the charge that lies upon me."

"Rudy, Rudy," I said, "hold my hands and pledge this. Oh, I am weary. What does it mean if I am a Willoughby? What does it mean? What do I care for a name such as that? Yet it is my right if it is mine. What shall I do? I am weary of the search. Sally Trueblood wearied so that the heaviness of the pack bore her down. I saw her smile fade and her cheeks pale. I saw her die for a name. I may have it if it is my right. Paugh! Rudy, do you know I feel I could cast it up and let the winds blow it afar?"

"I know, I know," he murmured, and he took my hand.

We walked down the pathway a few steps, once more to

the side of the mound and there we stood silently, he before his love, whose white wings were broken and still, and I beside my love, whose smile was fading, and youth, who was still.

CHAPTER XXXII

I SHALL not record here the scenes that followed. I had gone to the chapel yard for bread for my hungry heart. I found it, not in memories but in understanding. Rudy had returned fearlessly to make a stand before them. I was a Willoughby, one he had wronged in the slaying of Stephen Willoughby, yet he walked with me that night through the village streets to the inn.

When I stepped, after my farewell to Rudy, to the inn's archway, I saw that the guest room was not lighted, but the firelight made it bright. The eve was cool. I was still in the cape and hood. I saw Miss Willoughby sitting beside the fire, and before her, his head bowed upon his clutched hands, Obadiah Willoughby. I walked with a firm step up to the fireside and I said:

"Miss Willoughby, I have come to say good-bye. I cannot return to the manor. I am not of you. My heart is old. I have learned new things."

She started up, catching at my hand.

"No." I shook my head. "No, my dear. Listen; it is right. I have brought you nothing but unhappiness and woe; unwillingly, God knows, but I have brought it. Let me be. Let me stay apart. The little house is mine. I found it, like Miss Patricia, welcoming me. It knows me. I am of it. Oh, Miss Willoughby, I am unlike you all. Forgive me, but I cannot remain with you. Do not fear. I have much, much. I am not afraid of the village now. I do not expect them to give me love, but,—well, they will tolerate me, for my heart is dead and my joy will not offend them; for it, too, is dead."

I was weeping. Miss Willoughby stood and Obadiah Willoughby arose, turned, flung out his arms and stopped, staring, gasping "Sarah!" I looked haughtily into the eyes of a Willoughby. He gasped, "Sarah!" once more and stepped toward me.

"Sire, she is dead and I am her—" I choked—"Hope."

I could scarcely stand and clutched at the table slab. He stepped toward me.

"Don't! Don't!" I cried. "Oh, don't touch me! Sire, I am not a Willoughby, thank heaven, but a Trueblood! Can you deny it? Speak! Speak!" I screamed.

His jaw dropped. He clutched at his breast and lunged forward, to fall heavily at my feet. I was frozen with the ice of hate. Then I looked to the fallen man and heard Miss Willoughby's voice excitedly calling out. When it ceased, I saw Sally Trueblood's little hands pleading, pleading, and I sank and gathered the head of Obadiah Willoughby to my bosom and my lips breathed: "Sire, oh, sire, sire!" And I fell weeping upon him.

How may I record just what thoughts were mine as I bent o'er her love? How may I tell you all the warring emotions? Oh, you who read these lines, spare me, for there is yet more that I must write, and the heart, I have told you, is heavy.

Miss Willoughby at last raised me from the side of Obadiah Willoughby and I recall that my eyes lingered upon the face that was reposed. There was a patient something about the eyes and lips, and an emptiness as though the eyes had forgotten to light with the inner flame of love. I could not bring myself to speak. Miss Willoughby spoke.

"Hope, he has been overwrought."

I nodded and sat upon a settle that stood near. Peter Goff had come with some liquor that they pressed upon the lips of Obadiah Willoughby. I saw his eyelids flutter, then lift, and his eyes looked steadily into mine. With the aid of Peter Goff he arose, never taking his eyes from mine. They seated him upon a table bench and he sat with one of his beautiful hands upon his breast and pressing his brow with the other.

"I think, Geneva, that again memory is playing. Tell me, am I not dreaming?"

I stood and he started as though my movement had frightened him. Then he arose and followed me, to turn and look in a bewildered fashion to Geneva. I knew his eyes were questioning. She reddened, dropped her glance to the floor, then suddenly lifted her head and spoke clearly.

"This, Obadiah, is Hope Trueblood!"

"Hope!" he murmured dully, "Trueblood!"

Then with the grace of his courtly line, he bowed low, folding his arm across his breast and reaching for my hand. I stood very straight, nor did I offer him my hand. He too drew up, and with a look that was between wrath and pique he turned with a swift movement toward Geneva, who stood intently watching both of us.

"What does this mean, Geneva? Speak! Who is this young woman?"

She dropped her hands listlessly at her side and then with an even tone replied:

"Obadiah, I ask *you* this."

She waited. He looked with searching glance upon me, then thrust out his hands in a sort of pleading gesture.

"In heaven's name, what do you mean?"

Then it was that something arose within me. I ran with swift steps to his side, caught him by the shoulder and turned him about until his eyes were close to mine, though he was towering over me and I looking up to him.

"Mean?" I said. "Mean, sire, mean? It means that I am Sally Trueblood's—" I hesitated—"brat!" I barked. "Do you understand that? Does it cut you exquisitely? Listen, sire, it means that!"

He was staring with set eyes into mine, and I heard him gasp:

"Then it was true!"

"What was true!" I cried. "Speak, man! Do not insinuate. I am used to hearing just the evil words. I have never been spared and do not expect it from you. What was true?"

"She died in her shame," he replied, and reaching into his breast brought out the script almost worn in two. My eyes rested upon it. I read the words with the tears swimming the letters.

"In her shame!" I read the words aloud. Then the fire within me leapt up. "In her shame!" I repeated. "With no smile, yet smiling! Alone, yet hoping! 'Say it slow,' she said, 'say it slow. He is true. He will come. I am not a brat. Say it slow. Wait the Mayin'."

My eyes were streaming. Obadiah Willoughby had crum-

pled up and fallen upon the table's bench, hiding his face in his folded arms and sobbing.

"Is that shame, sire?" I said. "Look into my eyes. She said they were his eyes. Look, sire!" I caught his shoulder and like eye met like eye. "Do you see? Do you see, sire?"

He did not answer. His fingers toyed with his frill and he swallowed gaspingly.

"It means, sire, that if I am her shame, I then am yours! Are you not proud? Say what you please to me, but—" I was panting—"Heaven help you if you speak of her and harm her memory! Her flesh is gone. You have finished the work well. I, oh, I do not matter, but she—— Speak! Did you shame her? If this is true, so help me heaven, your shame shall strike you to the heart!"

"Stop! Stop! Stop!" I heard his tones ring.

Peter Goff had fallen back to the shadow and was listening. Miss Geneva had come between us.

"You do not know what you are saying. You say you are Sally Trueblood's blood? But I saw——"

"What?" I asked. "Not one thing that might turn you to believe that she was aught save the purest. Did you? Was she your wife?" I asked.

He stood for some minutes, then said:

"Yes, until——"

"She was! She was!" I cried.

I sunk upon the settle and went into peals of laughter to break off and sob and cry out, "She was! She was!"

Miss Geneva arose from beside Obadiah Willoughby and, with soft words, circled my waist about.

"Come, my dears," she said, and led the way toward the sleeping wing.

I knew that she could not leave the ears of Peter Goff and Delicia Prue to listen and we walked down the narrow hallway toward the sleeping wing.

I can never tell the feeling that was mine. I had laid hands upon the precious thing that she had sought. It was mine, yet I might not take it to her and see her smile and know her happiness.

We came to the doorway which was the sleeping room of Miss Geneva and she opened it. We went within and Obadiah

Willoughby walked to the window. It was quite dark without now. The room was lighted only by a candle that burnt in the hall bracket. Miss Willoughby called Goff, who came with lighted candles, and we sat down that we might speak. I was quite spent.

I waited that one should speak before I should intrude, for my heart was overfull and I feared my lips. Miss Willoughby arose and closed the door very softly and put the candle that Goff had brought in the candle cup that hung upon the arm on the wall. We waited in silence for some moments. Then Obadiah Willoughby turned. To me he seemed to grow old. His lips were trembling, his hands plucking at the ruff as was his wont. His eyes seemed set. They did not see us nor the room, I knew, but looked into a land that we were not a part of.

Miss Willoughby stepped toward me and circled my waist with a loving arm, touching my hand with her hand, which shook ever so slightly. I cannot tell you, oh, you who read, the anger which was still mine. Those waiting years! Those lone years for her, when she had stood beneath the lash for his. Waiting, waiting, faithfully waiting, and never, never a word to cry out against the waiting. Only gentleness dealt she unto me who was the flesh of him—sweetness, told with smiling lips, building up, I know now, a something that I might not destroy, and all of this she had borne for him. Within me was lighted up a new flame and this was a jealous flame. She had done this for him and had undone me, for without my knowing it she had built up within me a feeling deeper than I had known; for, as I stood up as Miss Willoughby had circled me about the waist, I knew that I loved him.

Oh, Sally Trueblood! Sally Trueblood, you darling! I know you have done this. It is like you, for you turned never to the earth your frown for her frowning, but your smile, which I remember. Before your love I stand gazing into eyes that look not to mine, my darling, but I know are searching, searching, for you, and may the great God, dearest God, grant that I am a little, oh, ever so little, like you. If, oh, my sweet, if I could do this for you.

I was thinking this when I found myself springing with wide-open arms across the room and flinging myself into the

arms of Obadiah Willoughby with a wild cry of—I hesitate to say delight, but it was. Can I make you understand, oh, my reader, what this meant? Obadiah Willoughby stood with his eyes gleaming emptily until I flung myself upon him, and then his arms raised slowly and crushed me. I lay weak within his grasp. I heard his heart slowly stammering, weakly stammering, and I listened, and my heart leapt, for it said, sobbing, "I love you."

As I write there stands at the side of my script a little china dog, and he may see my tears, oh, reader, for he has shared them, but spare me.

Oh, I am loth to write the things that yet must be written. If, oh, you who read, when you have looked upon these words it seems to you that I have dealt o'er tenderly with the little me who has trodden these pages before you, be merciful, for I love her. She is no more, and I have tried to prison her here. Oh, will you not love her, too? When I have written this and turned the page you too will begin to understand. Spare me, I repeat it. Think you that I write but to bare my days and hold myself up that you may know me? Ah, wait! You and I are upon the threshold, oh, you reader, and you are impatient—and I afraid. I will tell you this before we cross the threshold. I loved the little me because, because all that there was to love in her was Sally Trueblood. Wait, wait, but for a moment.

There! my eyes are dry. Let me see. I said I heard his heart sobbingly say, "I love you." Look upon this. Read it slowly, for it is the last of youth's laugh, and the elder sister with sorrowful eyes is beckoning. Wait! wait! Oh, my comrade, let me tarry. I repeat I heard his heart sobbingly murmuring, "I love you," I want to see it upon the page.

Then I heard a sob, like an aching thing that moaned, come from out his throat and he crushed me closer. Wait! you will know soon why I tarry. Then I heard him say:

"I have lied!"

He drew my head up and looked into my eyes.

"Hark you!" he said. "I have lied!"

I stood shaking. I knew that the new comrade was leading me on. My lips said, "Lied? Oh, sire!" Then I knew that the anger flame was leaping up within me.

"Lied!" I cried, leaning toward him. "Lied like a Willoughby! Sire, you are worthy of the name. Speak! What have you to say?"

"Sit down!" he commanded, and I sank, still shivering, into one of the chairs which stood near. Miss Willoughby had hidden her face. He stood, his beautiful hands working one in the other. His eyes were wild. He licked his lips and they seemed to be dry. I heard the long-drawn sob once more, and I sat, still cowering, waiting for the lash.

"So this is the end!" he said.

His hands flew out in a helpless gesture to go at the working once more.

"Listen!" he cried. "Could I humble myself even to the dust so that you could walk upon me I would do it, but I am not worthy."

"Sire," I interrupted, "you are a Willoughby."

He shut the sound from his ears by cupping his hands over them.

"Stop! Stop!" he went on. "Good heavens! do not goad me more! A Willoughby? Yes, and——"

I stood, for I feared he would fall, he swayed so. I went up to his side and with clear tones I asked:

"What think you, sire, that I care for your bitterness or your suffering? They are naught to hers. Speak! How have you lied? She was your wife?"

"No."

"Not that! Not that, sire!"

I was clinging to his arm.

"Say it! Not that! Not that! Oh, you would not lie! Say it! Say it!"

"As the heavens judge me, I believed she was. But—an end to it all! I was in a cup. O youth is a fogging wine! Youth, and a young fool's purse. I shall tell you and then,—well——" He dropped his arms limply to his sides. "I know now the motive for it all, and I see, but cannot undo, nor can I make amends such as should be made. . . . Reuben Passwater, whom I most mistrusted, came. . . . I had tried through years to forget, and live, just live, empty days. I had fled, true, but not from fear. . . . Stephen knew that Reuben loved her. It was his whip to flay me, and in my

fool's way I believed it. She loved him, I know now, but wait.

"Every penny and parcel the Willoughbys now possess belong rightfully to the estate of Sarah Trueblood. Stephen knew this, and with his knowledge came, I know now, the desire to remove any possible claim. Strong knew, and with the Willoughby money was bought. It was Stephen's arrangement that Strong should keep silent and share. . . . It was May; late the May-night. In the spell of moonlight and youth, the maids and lads returning, one by one dispersed——"

I was watching him. His eyes were glowing. He was not in the little inn's room, but back in yesterday.

"—and we, Felicia and Sarah and Stephen and myself, returned through the silence to the village. The Vicar was not there, but one who Stephen later swore was a layman, but who, under pressure, made the service. . . . God knows she was mine. With my whole being I say it. . . . Then there was the new thought of the returning. We were upon the way. I hear the nag's hoofs and feel the young dawn coming. ' Stephen suddenly changed, rode to my side and began to chide me, saying that I had known and should have warned him, that the sire's wrath would drive us both forth. Fool-like I listened, and we agreed to wait until the time when we might speak, for the sire was ill and Stephen and I knew well that he might not recover. Stephen waxed wrathful and I recall that we had words. . . . Brighton, he had called the one who had acted in the service, and with true faith I had believed he had the right. . . . I cannot recall much of what followed except,—God, what a knife memory is!—that I wakened ill and with a vague memory of all that had transpired. I went to her and begged that she forgive the scene that Stephen and I had enacted before her and her sister."

He stopped here and brushed his brow with his hand as though the whole thing oppressed him, as though he had carried it as a pack, so long that even to lift it once more was too much.

"Then followed," he went on, "the paradise of days. Reuben Passwater met me now and then and always with such a searching look that I could not understand him. I

mistrusted him. I believed he was jealous. I did not know then, as I do now, what he knew. Stephen had kept the secret, keeping Felicia silent by his promises and his grace of words. Patricia did not know. I know this, too, now. I became moody over the situation, and after a time went with Stephen to the village, as I told you, Geneva, to drown the thoughts of my endangered bliss. You know what followed—the sire, Geneva!"

He leaned toward the chair upon which I sat and rested his hand upon the back.

"Never mind what I knew or believed then, but what I know now. When I had gone to her with the truth of that affair and she had sworn her faithfulness I had not intended to leave. She had not spoken of Reuben Passwater since the fateful night. I had become fretful because she resided in the home of the Passwaters, eaten by the jealous flame that Stephen had kindled. Stephen told me of the holdings, which lay in the hands of Strong, that with the proper care might make the ebbing purse of the estate again full. These I know, now belonged to Sarah Trueblood and her sister. Sarah, upon the eve that I told her of the miserable affair that had occurred, the shadow of which has never lifted, spoke of Reuben and asked me what the thing was that I knew and should tell her. I did not understand. She was ill with the shock, clinging to me."

He looked afar. He had forgotten me. Then I heard him saying:

"The voyage is long. . . . why did he tell me? To come when I was fretting beneath the salt spread upon my wounds, the salt of jealousy, and tell me that she was not mine, and laugh?"

I was standing close to Obadiah Willoughby and listening, listening to him telling the thing I had waited for. I heard him as one in a dream hears voices that fade. I think he must have said other things, but I have recorded that that has impressed itself upon me.

"He laughed," I heard him saying, and his face was crimson and the vein upon his brow stood out like a cord and beat. I saw her in my mind, her little smile, faint and dying. Then I heard once more; the words seemed to come from another land:

"He asked me why I would claim her and boasted of talk in the inn. Enough! The night—that night, D—— it!—she, I know now, was returning to end the thing. Reuben followed her. I know this now. And Stephen knew it then. He followed them back and brought me, when he had made sure they were in the glen, to look. I saw her fling out her arms and fall upon the breast of Reuben Passwater, crying out, 'Oh, my darling! Oh, my darling!' I saw it in the May moonlight, clearly, and I did not know that she had been stopped by the hand of Reuben Passwater as she pointed a firepiece at Stephen. What I saw was enough at the moment to send me fevered to Stephen's will. I believed; God knows why, but I believed."

I stood closer to Obadiah Willoughby. I touched him. He shook himself as though he had awakened. I had not broken into his babbling sort of story, knowing what he knew not that I knew—but I had not known that Sally Trueblood would have slain Stephen."

"Who told you," I asked, "that she would have killed—killed Stephen Willoughby?"

He turned his weary eyes to mine and said stiffly:

"Reuben. He had followed her to the shutter where, before, she had seen Stephen slay the sire, and only by great effort was he able to keep her silent, and with his strength he bore her away."

"And you left then?" I said dully.

"Yes," he answered. "And she was ne."

"Stop!" I cried, my heart leaping up to my throat and my ears ringing. "Stop! You have kept the honour of the Willoughbys. Keep it, and leave me mine. Stop! You *are* a Willoughby, sire. Oh, God forgive you! Look! Can you see Sally Trueblood's hope? Look, sire, for you may not again!"

He seemed stupid, dead, a thing, before me. To me he was her great "why."

"Miss Willoughby, I say to you Sarah Trueblood's compliments!"

I curtseyed low and rose again to look upon the face of my sire. Through the mask of self I saw him as he might have been, without the blade called station. Miss Willoughby came toward me.

"Do not touch me," I said. "Oh, do not touch me! I am beaten, lashed—yes, trodden down! When hope was mine I saw her wing away. Leave me! Leave me! To be with you is worse than death. You have known this. You have let me suffer—have let Stephen die, have let Sally Trueblood die, have let Miss Patricia die, have been the handle of the whip that flayed Sephira Gifford. Even have you kept me beneath your roof because you knew, oh, you knew, I was of the precious blood. I hate you all. And you, sire, listen! In the body of shame I have walked. I have worn the garments of shame and I shall lie down in shame at the last. Oh, I am dead! You have killed me, crushed me! Yes, but listen! There is a bud here," I beat my heart over, "there is a smile here, there is still love here, and that is not of the Willoughbys, thank God, but of Sally Trueblood. Look at me—Sally Trueblood's brat! Do you hear, sire? Brat!" I curtseyed. "And you, a Willoughby!"

I turned and ran with swift steps to the door, to open it and speed down the dark hallway where the candles flickered dimly. The guest room was empty, the embers dying. There were no dreams upon the ceil. I stood for a moment gazing about, but my eyes were old. I saw the webs, the dust and darkness, and smelled stale ale. I went to the arch and lifted the bolt softly and walked out into the night. I stood there in the starlight looking up, and I felt as I did those years gone by when I had trudged to the sexton-age alone, more alone than then, for my dreams were gone. My new comrade did not smile but beckoned up the stairway to the attic. I found myself saying, "M-i-s-s G-e-n-e-v-a W-i-l-l-o-u-g-h-b-y." I came to the door in the darkness. I felt it was ajar. I touched it and it swung open. I walked slowly in. Two small patches of pulsing starlit grey showed me that the two too-little windows were open. I sat down upon the floor slowly and rocked myself back and forward, wringing my hands. Then a calm came to me and my new comrade circled me with a tender arm and smiled sorrowfully, and I seemed to hear the words:

"It is a game of waiting, Hope. Will you play?"

I think I was weeping. Then I saw, in that faraway day, the sweet face that had dwelt with me there. The light foot-

fall that was music sounded. I saw the little hands that fluttered and pleaded, and the smile that had bled, for it was wounded. The hours dragged by. Still I sat in the darkness. The inn's lamp replaced the moon and tipsily sent its light over the ceil. Then I forgot, from sheer weakness and fatigue. I sank into a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHAT was that that waked me? Singing! Glad voices! Laughter! I went to the too-small window and looked. They passed, with their arms full of blooms, singing. I saw that they sought the fields. My heart stopped. It was May! The Mayin'! My hands went forth and I reached from the window with them, but the shadow of the eaves would not let the sun fall upon them. I was afraid to look about me. My eyes pierced the bright day without. My heart was weeping. My breast ached and my throat was dry, yet I was afraid, afraid of the little figure which memory painted in the shadow about me, and with the old feeling which cut me, fear that I might wound her, I turned from the window and smiled into the shadow and I called softly: "Sir Lily-finger Dappergay." And I blew a kiss out the window and said softly: "It has come, Sally Trueblood, the Mayin'. Come with me and we shall be gay!"

I stood looking out the little window, and within me my heart was bursting, but my lips smiled. I stepped across the room. There stood the very table that she had spread so oft and oft. There in the shadow stood the little couch, and the old armchair was tipsily leaning against the wall. I stretched out my arms and breathed one word and this was "home!"

I could not tarry. The night had roped the little place with shadows that hid its barrenness, but morning came to show the gauntness and emptiness and bring the old anguish back. Oh, memory, how you linger and how we love you, and loving you, wound our hearts! I could not tarry and made my way down the narrow stairs with my empty, heavy heart, led by the elder sister who still beckoned me.

The day was sparkling. Lads and lassies gathered in groups, their hands busied at the weaving of garlands. Ropes of blossoms they bound up in long graceful lines, dancing, clasping the flowers and singing. Oh, the May was beauteous, like youth, but like youth was not for me. I knew then that I might not partake of the gladness, for there was within me the thing that seared the purity of the May.

I did not raise my eyes to look upon the streetway and I tried not to hear the sounds of the singing and the laughter of the May Day. Before, when I had been in the inn's attic, I had had no resolve as to where I should go, but now a wild feeling of loneliness bore in upon me and drove me forth. My feet without my knowledge led upon the path to the house of Miss Patricia. I was well down the little yard's path when I found what my feet had led me to. Without a thought I sped to the doorway and was again within the little sitting room of Miss Patricia where all the happiness had been mine. I sprang to the great armchair and sank within it, burying my face within my hands and sobbing wildly.

Time sped on, yet I knew not. It was perhaps quite dark when I fully awakened from the sort of stupor that had possessed me. When the darkness had touched me and I had brought myself from the land where I had sunk that I might forget, forget, forget,—oh, you who read, did I ever wish that I should forget? No day of my anguish would I part with. No memory but is dear, for through it all had youth stepped beside me and made my day happy. Then, too, there had been the smile of her.

I was wondering what I should do when I heard a knock and with some hesitation I answered it, opening the door into the fast falling darkness. I saw Miss Geneva. She had been weeping and pressed her hand to her breast while the other she held to shield her face from my gaze, even though the darkness made it almost impossible to see her. I stood wondering should I speak or should I make an end to the whole affair by refusing again to face a Willoughby. Then it was that her voice sounded, sweetly and pleadingly.

"'Hope, Hope, please, please harken!"

Still I stood, not even offering that she come in. She stepped up the rotted stairway and was within the little hallway beside me, touching my arm and pleading. It was

quite dark and grey within the place, and even though I might not see her face closely I knew that her eyes would be swollen, for her voice was thick with tears.

"Hope, Hope," she said.

"No, no, Miss Willoughby, leave me, leave me! I have suffered overmuch. I cannot bear more. Oh, do not open the wounds! Can you not see that I have reached the night, the deep, pit-dark night, of my whole life? Oh, can you not see! Can you not know, Miss Willoughby, that all through my days I have hoped, hoped, hoped that I might possess the thing that would make her little memory free; that I might make gladsome some May with her. It is May, Miss Willoughby, the May's first day, her day, the one she waited for. Listen! Listen! The joyousness is stopped. Do you hear the night? It is coming softly. Oh, harken! Do you hear? Do you? I think, I think youth is dead. Oh, go! Leave me! Leave me! I cannot look upon you. I cannot be with you. I do not wish to be near a living creature. Leave me my memories. At least they are true."

Miss Willoughby still stepped toward me. I shrank to the wall and made a gesture to repel her.

"No, no!" I cried. "Miss Willoughby, do you not know that I have been under the lash until my flesh is crying out? What think you that your words might do to ease the cutting of these years and years? I tell you I cannot bear to be near you or him. Oh, Miss Willoughby, the thing is awful; for think! even though my womanhood rises up and would cry out against the shame that has been my lot, still, away down here—" I touched my breast—"is the aching, and is the love that I cannot withhold, and it is his. Why, why, why has all this happened? Is it not enough? Shall I still linger with you, suffering? Oh, leave me!"

Miss Willoughby came to me and touched my arm, pleading that I but wait until they make the whole wrong right. I drew myself up, and in the dark that hung I could scarcely see the outline of her face, but I was glad; for I did not wish to see the hurt that I knew was in her eyes. I cowered in the shadow, and then once more drew up, unafraid of anything that might come, even her sorrowing, should I wound her.

"Miss Geneva," I said, "you Willoughbys have finished the flaying. It is of no use. Go!"

She turned, and I heard a little sob catch in her throat.

"Go!" I repeated. "And leave me until I heal the wounds and may bear more. I do not wish to wound you, but, oh, don't you see? it is too much! I cannot, cannot stand another cut!"

She did not answer me but turned once more to the doorway and made her way out. I stood staring into the darkness, silently listening to her steps upon the gravel walk until they faded into nothing. Still I stood. Beaten I was, sore at heart and suffering.

When I had stood for some time, I went into the little sitting-room and with my hands outstretched searched for a candle. I found one upon the table in its cup and took it to the fire and searched for an ember which I brought forth upon a bit of wood and held it to the candle's tip and blew upon it. It lighted, a weak little red brand that snuffed, and then I blew once more and watched a little white thread of smoke arise and curl about my head. The second breath brought the flame. I arose then with the candle held high and looked about me. Something in the little room seemed so loving, so close, so comforting. The bird waked and sent out a plaintive little cry, shaking its wings and beginning to pick at the wickers. I saw the light fall upon the old sampler and read, "God is Love."

I placed the candle upon the table and went to the wall where the sampler hung and gazed up at it for a long time. Then it came to me how I had read those words as I had sucked the plum pit and eaten the crumbly cake. Strange, but it seemed so very, very long since I had sat upon the hassock, grasping the cold pewter plate and swinging my pudgy legs. Oh, now it seemed like a recollection that had fled and been called back after the forgetting. I saw my small self sitting there and heard Miss Patricia's voice as upon that night. And Mr. Reuben as he had been, I saw. How strange! How very strange! They are gone and I, I am here, I was thinking, here. Looking up at her handiwork, I read once more, "God is Love," and I sighed and wondered why, if we knew it, we doubted it.

I walked slowly over to the great armchair and sat down. The fire was but low embers; the bird was hopping in its wicker and the candle leaned this way and that as though

sprites breathed upon it. Long I sat and then I heard, distantly, a singing. It was the last of the May day's singing, gay singing, but a little weary. Far, far it sounded. I sat listening. Fainter, fainter it sounded. My heart was hurting. I heard laughter, then more singing, as a little gust of wind brought back the fresh sound. Again it sank to softness and died. I think—I know, that my heart shall never again beat joyfully, for the dying of that May day shall ever weight it.

Again the singing young voices. I looked up in the shadow draped room, upon the wall, and read once more, "God is Love." Then I began to weep and said:

"Dearest God, I think I am broken—not weary, but broken. Oh, do you hear, dearest God? See! I am trying to smile. God is Love," I repeated, and I thought of her and I hated him. Then I thought of her smile and I loved him.

I shall forget, oh, you who read, to tell you of the tears and the aching heart and the warring that was mine. As I sat down once more in the armchair and began to count the scenes of my childhood and add them to those which had followed, hoping for the sum to tell something, I laid one hand upon the table and it touched the little book. Idly my hands opened it, but my eyes were swimming with tears and I did not read, It was then that the resolve came. I took up the book and kissed it. Then I walked to the fire and made the embers uncover and laid it upon their glowing.

"Sally Trueblood," I said, "I am locking your treasure chest. I do not want to know, my dear. I know you were true, and your own sweet lips said to me, 'Say it slow, Hope. He is true.' Then I know this is true because you have said it."

The embers ate at the rotted binding. A little vicious flame leapt and danced at one corner. Bitterly I thought, "This is you, my dear, and the flames, the earth."

The smoke arose and trailed up the chimney's pit and the flames became brighter. I saw them eating at the heart of the little script. I watched. Then I seemed to hear her calling, "Hope! Hope!" And I said aloud:

"Hope never wearies. I am your hope. Farewell, little heart, bound up in the script, farewell! Make you free I

have loosed you. Go! go to her! I would not of you, for you are hers."

The parchment fell to ash, and bits of white flakes sailed slowly but gladly up the dark, and out to the world and then—to where? Pure, white-winged thoughts of her, I knew. Upon my knees I watched the last flame die and locked my heart with the ash, resolving not to know. I would not. Let them care; I was done.

When the hearth was dead I went to the candle and reached into my breast and brought out the ivory, the little locket, and turned it slowly about until I looked into her eyes, and I smiled, and the world and the day and the joys and pain were naught. I found that upon the eve of May the waiting had ceased! He *had* come for me. It was over. It did not seem to matter what would happen ever again. I knew that I should never, never again be one with the Willoughbys. I raised the little locket to my lips and said to it:

"You, my dear, and your Hope, shall play the game of waiting. We have played ever alone and we shall finish alone."

I sank slowly into the armchair, leaning ever so slightly, so that the candle flame might light the ivory. I leaned closer to it and searched the smiling face that flashed back to me. Long, long I sat, drinking in the dreams that the little ivory set up. I tried to fancy her bright and laughing, like this, and I could, a little, just a little; but even when I was beginning to smile the old twilight fell beneath her eyes and I heard her cough and saw her sway and the little twisted smile would struggle to be born.

"It is May, my sweet," I said. And the lips looked full and curved over the little teeth in a joyous smile, but my own tears blinded me. "It is a long game, dear, a long game, but for you, for you, my dear, I shall wait. I do not believe that I might live now save that I had this waiting to bear for you. Oh, I am glad, my darling! Glad that I may do this for you."

I kissed the little locket and hid it in my bosom. Then I saw that the embers were still glowing. I arose and brought the hassock up to the fireside and the great chair I brought up to its side, and I sat upon the hassock and, I know it is fancy—oh, but what are bare days without the comrade?—

I leaned my head over until it rested upon the arm and I felt a slender hand caress my hair and I said softly :

" She would leave me rest upon her bosom when the night came." And this too is fancy, mind you, but I heard Miss Patricia say, " How ? " And I answered, " Like this." And I arose and curled myself in the armchair.

My head sank down to rest and I heard a cricket singing. I leaned over and blew upon the candle. It snuffed and I said to the embers :

" Light me through my dreams, oh, you spirit of her living words, you ash, you light that still remains ! "

And I heard a late songster singing. Then—why should I write of dreams ? But that night brought me a peace, a something that lifted the curtain of the next morning with a gentle hand and showed me a new path, a lone one, save for her memory.

CHAPTER XXXIV

I HAD wakened and turned to the coming light, and I knew that here in these walls should the elder sister and myself abide. And I knew that what befell should matter little. It was but waiting. I had got up from the great armchair slowly. My feet were strangely heavy and I knew that it was that they bore up such a heavy heart. There sounded slowly a tolling. My heart seemed to swell. The old agony of loneliness was upon me. I do not know what prompted me to do the thing that I did, but even though I had had no sup and I was weak with the long night's agony, I cast the cape about me and something seemed to lead me forth. Without a thought as to where I should go I walked straight to the inn, through the great arch and into the great inn's room. I called Goff, who came stumbling forth. I bade him bring Miss Willoughby. He shook his head and mumbled, " They be gone."

So they had gone ! Again like Willoughbys. I turned without a word and made my way back to the house of Miss Patricia. Anger was upon me. When I opened the door, Mrs. Gifford stood in the centre of the little sitting room and her eyes were frightened and her lips trembling.

"You shall come," she said. "You shall come. He has sent for you. He is very ill, Hope. Be gentle, oh, be gentle, for his sake. I ask you to be gentle. Is it too much, my dear to expect?"

I was afraid to consent to go. Again that resolve was the wall that shut me away. I seemed afraid to know what he might tell me. Mrs. Gifford was plucking at my cape and bidding me come. I turned slowly to go, within me the resolve not to listen should there be aught against her. Swiftly we made our way through the village pathways to the vicarage. I saw the old gravel pathway and the gate and the steps that were quite gone now. Mrs. Gifford opened the door and there was no one in the room which we entered. She beckoned me toward the Vicar's study. Through this we passed into a bedchamber. It was darkened and there was a scent of herbs and drugs. I walked to the bedside and knelt down. The Vicar did not move. I waited. Then a shaking hand reached forth and touched my bent head. I did not speak. The Vicar's voice seemed weak and choking.

"Hope," he said.

"Yes, sire."

"I told you to wait."

"Yes, sire," I answered.

"I——" he choked and clutched at the coverlid. "I—" again he choked—"cannot undo——" he was trying to bring himself upon his elbow.

"Sire," I said, "you have wronged her, Sally Trueblood?"

He shook his head and his eyes looked emptily up into mine.

"Willoughby—" he said, "I dared not."

He was ghastly white and his lips gaped and shook, and there sounded a rattling in his throat which choked his words.

"The Word!" he gasped, "the Word!"

I could not put together the fragments. I was too weary and sore to but listen. Mrs. Gifford came to my side and knelt. The Vicar's hand was now cold and almost motionless. He ceased to murmur and lay quite silent for some time. Then he brought himself up upon his elbow with great effort, his eyes glistening.

" Suffer little children," he said, " to come unto me ! "

The words were dying ; his jaw hung and his hand fell.

" For," said Mrs. Gifford, " of such is the kingdom of heaven ! "

And she sank her head upon the lifeless hand.

I arose wearily and stood with a dead heart, wondering, wondering, wondering why I still walked in the shadow of doubt. Mrs. Gifford raised her grief-stricken face toward me and her eyes were pleading.

" Oh," I said, " I love him, Mrs. Gifford ! I love him ! There is nothing to forgive—nothing. God forgives us all threefold each day. He is love."

Here I knew ended my path of waiting. I would never know ! Oh, my dear, you who have trod with me through these pages, when I first set the words, " The glass had slipped it thrice and still the bird hopped within its wicker," little, little I knew how hard it would be to show you the path of shame. Yet, oh, you who read, if my words have set in your heart mercy, it is not vain. I shall tell you what the coming days brought of knowledge that you may know, but I care little.

The days that followed the Vicar's going were but few until Rudy came to me, a new Rudy with a man's eyes and a man's heart. He came in the morning with certain documents which he had found were in the possession of Strong. To these documents, with a new fluid, was attached the name of Obadiah Willoughby. These were the estate of Sarah Trueblood and her sister Felicia. I had looked upon them with dull eyes. They were nothing. They could not buy her back for me, nor call back youth.

" Take them, Rudy, take them back ! I will not of them," I said. " They have bought honour. They have bought death. They have bought dishonour. They have killed me. They are spent. Do you understand ? They cannot rebuy for me."

Then it was that Rudy told me that Reuben and Patricia Passwater had lost all in the striving to make right the wrongs. They had sold their household that joined the Willoughby estate. Strong had taken from them and from the Willoughbys, making the money of one whet the blade for the money of the other. The mild face of Reuben came

to me, his patient look, and his gentleness with me that night. And Miss Patricia,—Rudy told me that she had heard the word that Stephen had circulated about the village and became wrathful with him. The village knew that she bore the shame that tongues would put upon them, in her high-headed way, keeping herself thorny and fending off thus their onslaughts. But the bitterness was deep within her when the truth had come, for Reuben knew that she loved Obadiah Willoughby, and had been broken at the truth's coming. Sally Trueblood had been too young, she knew; but when love had come to her Patricia had bowed and suffered silently.

In the chapel yard, Rudy said, stood an old stone reading, "Felicia Trueblood," and upon it the lines, "All bitterness hath an end." This was the mother of Sarah and Felicia Trueblood, who had died in poverty, and with the cough that had been Sarah's. She had been obliged to give up the babes, Felicia and Sarah, before her death, and the agony of the thing had embittered her. She too had died arm-hungry, and had hidden behind the shutters watching for the post, hoping that the Willoughby sire might relent. Then this was the emptiness that had caused Sally Trueblood to weep and to say, "Oh, you would have filled her arms, Hope." She, too, had known the losing of the one most dear. Then I knew why she had given me so much of herself to keep.

"Rudy," I had said upon this morning, "stop. I care so little to hear all of this. Tell me, what was the thing that turned them against my Stephen?"

Rudy then had told me that the Brumbys were in the law's hands. That the elder Brumby, whom I had called the wreckage, had, for the same cause, struck Stephen down, believing that since Obadiah was within their web he was the only thing that could undo them. They had not known that Stephen believed his sire's word, and would have gone, after my leading of the mob and his taking me to the Willoughby manor to Geneva.

"Then again, Rudy," I said, "this has bought." I touched the parchment. "Where is Obadiah Willoughby," I asked "and Miss Geneva?"

"They have gone," he answered. "In this," he held up

a document, "is the claim for the Willoughby estate. It is yours."

"So," I said. "Then a Willoughby for once was fair."

He placed upon the table the documents. I took them up in my hands and looked upon them and I said:

"You are my honour and my dishonour. What! What! Shall my hands touch you? No." And I cast them into the hearth. They flamed. Rudy stood and watched them.

"I have ended it, Rudy. I shall stay here upon the bounty of Miss Patricia, making my hands do little things, making all my sorrow buy happiness. I shall spend it. Oh, Rudy, what has life done to you and me? You are old in spirit, and I am dead. There is but the waiting for you and for me, Rudy; you to make a new man of yourself and I to live with my shadows."

He had turned and threw out his hands to me. I clasped them.

"Sister," he said.

"Brother," I answered. And we understood.

There had been no cause for Rudy to hide. The truth had opened the gates. There was no man but that loved him, and no woman but that looked to him with regard. Every crooked thing had been straightened. The village was free from its master. It might take up its old narrowness. It might like and dislike and deal its miserly love. Oh, you who read, this means little, just the little straws that built my castle. Somewhere, oh, I fear that upon a day when I am gone and you shall read these words, there shall be a hungry one, a little child who wears the cloak of shame. Oh, will you not lend your heart and make your arms open?

It is late, and still I linger, recording this that you may read. Days have passed and the little I have written here tells their filling. I cannot write more. I am weary. Yet, you script, I press you to my bosom and love you, each and every word. I shall wait until I am healed, and until I have followed the elder sister yet a little way, before I again record.

Little script, I found you this morning. Have you been lonely? I have caressed your pages with my fingers, for, oh, you little page, do you know, can you see, that the hand

that now traces is withered? Do you know, can you see, that the eyes that would look upon you are dim?

I am tracing these words, and I fear they are strangely written, but forgive me, for my heart makes my hand shake. I saw this morning, in the reflector, a strange face. Listen, little script! it was Sally Trueblood, with brown eyes, and—white locks. With these dim eyes I saw, and was thankful that the lips smiled.

Listen, little script! I will tell you something. It is May-day, and as I listen to the singing I laugh in my heart. Out in the sun I see the young buds. It's the Mayin'. And there, beside the doorway, sits the great armchair, turned so that he, my beloved, might look at the chapel. Oh, I am forgetting! You did not know that they brought him to me, helpless; that I took him, her love, to me. Was he mine? He was hers. Geneva wearied, but, you see, I had not finished the waiting.

We never knew the truth. But what matter? I have learned, oh, you little script, that "God *is* Love." Oh, I found in his eyes her love. I found in his beautiful hands her hands, and about his neck, her arms. Oh, I am glad, glad!

He, too, has gone, to greet the new Mayin', and I—am waiting. And there in the sun the armchair sits, turned so that his eyes might see the chapel yard. I thought I might write freely that I was healed, but, oh, you little script, I love you! but I am still afraid. I shall wait. I shall not forget you, you comrade, nor you who read. I shall but dry my tears and smile a little.

Such warm hands! Sephira, a new Sephira, whose eyes are blue and whose arms love me. She will have me leave you now. I see, coming down the pathway, Rudy, seeking her, and upon his arm Teeny Gifford, whose face is like her sister's and whose scar I love.

Farewell, little script, until some morrow hence!

Again, again my hands fall upon you. I cannot trust them, for my eyes are dimmer. I have waited for this morning and it has come. Beside me as I write stands the little china dog. Now and then I let my fingers seek it, just to touch and know it is there. I have laid upon the table, as I write, the ivories. My beloved! my sire!—oh, can I say it? And her, Sally

Trueblood, my darling! And she who bore her, whose eyes are mine! They are gone and their days track some shadowy land that somehow seems near!

Can you read this, oh, reader? Try! try! for my foolish tears are flowing and I cannot see. They are not tears of sorrow, for the elder sister has gone and at my heart is knocking Youth! I look not now upon the village save with my heart, and see love written upon every household.

Oh, my darling, are you far? Oh, my sweet, I seem to feel your hands! I have waited, my dear. I am waiting still. Oh, with the love you have given me I have walked through the shadows to the land of peace. Take my hand; it falters! Oh, let me see the page! I will write again, oh, reader, lest you forget, "God *is* Love."

My hand is faltering. Some new wine is mine! Oh, I am striving to trace the words! The truth has not been mine, my darling, and he did not know. Oh, I would bring you the truth, but I know it is yours and his. I know it all now and the shame does not matter. Shame! Who first scribed the word? Then let him cross it with the word Love.

Oh, you Earth, with your "whys," take them to dearest God. And man, oh, you who do not understand, leave them to Him.

How strange the starlight shows! I see the patch—no, it is the dripping silver drops—the inn's lamp——"

It is morning, Sally Trueblood! Open—your beautiful—eyes—and—let—me—see—the—mor——.

EPILOGUE

AND Sabbath's silence fell upon the village; and the sun stood high, and the shadows 'neath the arched trees sent dancing sunlight spraying; and the wind swept like a sweeping silence, hushing 'mid the leaves.

And the Word lay upon the height within the chapel; and the wind's stirring stirred the page, and it fluttered, to lay ope. And a shadow danced, and a sunbeam followed it; and it fell upon the page, and the words gleamed: "Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of

Heaven!" And the wind, playful, blew upon the page, and there fluttered a white bit upon the floor. And another followed, and still another. And the sunbeam danced about the gloom to fall upon the bits and the words showed: "—diah Willoughby," and beneath, "Sarah Trueblood," and upon another bit, "Stephen."

And through the chapel windows showed the mounded chapel yard; and the larkspurs nodded; and a white butterfly fluttered up! up! up!

THE END

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