

It is very lovely here; the garden is a wilderness of roses; the river below murmurs ever a sweet song in our ears,—pleasant I deemed it once. Now it sounds like a mournful cadence from the grave, and seems ever singing a “miserere” for my lost Ernestine Lillian, my lost baby!

Thus, weak, faithless creature that I am, I turn even God’s beautiful gifts into a cause for sorrowful remembrance and mourning.

The children enjoy the wildness of this country exceedingly, and never weary of clambering the mountain’s side, and losing each other in the woods; all day long they have been out with Sandy.

How thankful I am he came instead of Milly, who knows every inch of this country, and would distract me by her grief, beside letting the children know where they are, which is not necessary.

Estelle did not dream, until I told her, where we were, although she spent a year with me when I was first married.

Mrs. Lawrence has sent an invitation to Carrol and Lester to come; there is also a brother of her husband’s here with his wife and a son of about Howard’s age, just home from his first vacation at the naval school of Annapolis; he is a wild boy, a great pet of his cousin Ada’s, who is his especial darling. The children find him the greatest addition to *their* party, as he is forever getting them into some trouble and mischief.

There are two or three families living within a mile or two of this place, of whom Mrs. Lawrence hopes great things in the way of variety, although the rest of us are well pleased with our present quiet.

Then, too, the city of P— is so conveniently near, she has no dread of the solitude the rest of us covet. She is so charmed with the spot, as well she may be, that she has decided to purchase at once, and Ada has already christened it “Rosedale,” with which I have headed my leaf.

Oh, I think the sky is more fair here, the flowers more sweet and luxuriant, than anywhere else in the whole world. Oh, though it has brought some pain to breathe this air again, yet I am glad, I am thankful to be here.

God is very good to me, granting me many, many mercies.

Oh, the sunbeams gliding softly down upon me, stealing

silently but tenderly through the forest trees, tell me a tale of hope, sing a sweet song of Espérance, and rest me even while they pain.

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CHAPTER XLVIII.

JULY 22.

THE other day a gay party started out to walk to the “Lion’s cave,” a few miles up the mountain.

On their return, Stuart and Clare were as usual with Marion, as they came running down the rocks she stumbled, and falling, struck her forehead near the temple, so very near that now when we look at it, we shudder to see it, and say, “Thank God, it was not lower down.”

Although not much hurt, the blow stunned her; both sprang forward to lift her up, and while Clare held her, Stuart, with his usual quick decision, leaped over a fence and hastened towards a brook which gurgled near by.

When he returned, bringing his hat filled with water, he beheld Clare with passionate gestures striving to restore Marion.

“Darling, precious May, speak to me.” These, and a thousand like words of wild love uttered in tones of the most thrilling entreaty, broke upon Stuart’s ear, and as he stood still for one instant watching the kisses rained upon her cheek, and listening to the words Clare’s eloquent Italian tongue poured forth, he learned a truth which blanched his cheek, and sent a chill to his very heart.

For no brother’s love spoke in such a way, none but a lover’s lips could rain such kisses, so wild, so passionate, and with a sickened heart, Stuart stood, unmindful of the aid he had brought, watching with folded arms and ashen cheek the scene before him.

Suddenly, the delicate eyelids quivered, the faint rose-tint came into the white cheeks of the fainting girl, and with a smile, she murmured:

"I am better now, dear Clare, better now."

Stuart waited for no more; turning with fleet steps, he sought the woods, uttering but one word:

"Lost! lost! lost!"

Gently and tenderly in his arms, Clare brought May to me. Forgetful of the cause of her having to be thus borne, forgetful of all, save that he had at last told her, at least by tones and actions, the deep love of his heart; told her at last what had burned within him so long, and which he dared not speak. In silence, with a tenderness which is so natural and beautiful in him, he placed her on a lounge, and kneeling down, said:

"Marion, my Marion, may it be?"

She smiled sweetly, but very faintly, and leaning over him pressed a kiss upon his brow. He bowed his head, and with a smile of unutterable love, said:

"God bless thee, my Marion."

Then, with his old vehemence, he turned to where I stood, a silent, amazed spectator:

"May it be, Aunt Bertha, will you let me be your son indeed?"

"If Marion gives you to me, Clare," I answered with a smile.

"Will you, darling, will you?"

"If she wants you, Clare," she said in a low voice, and then turned so pale, I thought she would faint again.

"I plague you, my own. In my new-found happiness, I neglect my treasure. Oh, I did not dare to hope such joy could ever be mine."

And then hurriedly he related to me May's mishap, and I sent him away, while I bound up my darling's wound, and soothed her to repose.

I must own this affair has amazed me. I never have been blind to the possibility of an attachment growing up between some of these boys and girls, brought thus for years together, but never May and Clare. I own that this has surprised me.

Clare, foolish fellow, is wild with joy; but Marion, my little one, who clings so closely to those she loves, who always needs so much petting to make her happy, is so cool and undemonstrative, she astonishes me. To my urgent question, as to "whether she is sure she knows what she has promised," she answers:

"It is very pleasant to be loved by Clare, mamma."

But Clare with his shining eyes filled with tears, said in his sweet humble way:

"Am I worthy, Aunt Bertha? am I worthy?"

And as I laid his head down upon my shoulder, and listen to the long account of how this love has grown up within him, I clasped him more closely to my heart, and said truly from the depths of that heart:

"Yes, my boy, worthy of the best I have."

And then I think the comfort which showed itself in his bright face, was a very good reward for my words.

"What will Stuart and the rest say?" he asked after a pause. And I know not why, but those first three words sent a sense of painful disappointment through my heart. But I will not give it place, but calm myself with the thought:

"It is only because you thought and hoped it would be the other way, this most likely is the best."

For a long while we sat there alone, the rest were too busy to miss us. We three said many sweet things to each other in the bright moonlight, then we sent our weary Marion to bed, "for having been so naughty as to get a fall and a lover all in one day."

A little while after, Stuart came in "from a long ramble in the woods," he said, "and tired enough."

"Only an excuse to get an extra degree of petting," I assured him as his head lay on my knee.

"As if I did not get that any way!"

"Well then I shall give you something more, a piece of news," I said gaily.

He gave a start, and I thought as the moonlight shone across his face he was very pale; but he answered in a gay tone:

"No news to me. I am an old friend of Clare's, and generally ferret out his secrets as soon as he has them."

"But you did not know this? Surely, Stuart, you have never suspected this one secret of my life?"

"Yes; but only to-day, Clare. So do not be so amazed."

"How, then? Who told you? May?"

"Both of you, as I brought, like a goose, water to bathe

the faint one's brow,—as if there was need, when lips above her were raining such a storm of kisses upon it.”

This speech jarred me. I knew not why. The words were not like Stuart, or the light, careless tone, either.

“You seem to esteem this which has come upon your brother and sister as a light thing, Stuart. I deem it so great, so sacred a change for our precious May, I can scarcely bear to speak of it, even seriously.”

“Forgive me, forgive me! I am not careless. I did not mean it, Aunt Bertha.” And he turned his face from the moonlight, and lay very quiet for an instant: then, springing up, he said:

“But I must not be here, idling my time away. I have a letter to write.” And he turned toward the door, when, suddenly coming back, he said, holding out his hand to Clare:

“Nay, I think my long walk has walked off with some of my brain; for I have left it all this time before congratulating you. You have won a jewel, my brother: may you wear it well, and be happy as you deserve to be!” And, with a grasp of the hand he held, so quick and hard as to make Clare wince, he turned to go.

“What is the matter, Arty? You give a fellow the grip of a giant! How pale you are! Are you sick?”

“Pale, you love-lorn laddie? Has love made you blind already? Why, according to the popular fallacy, all should be *couleur de rose*; or perhaps that hue is only thrown round the lady herself. I profess entire ignorance. ‘Bueno noche.’” And he was gone.

“Oh! Aunt Bertha, I think he does not like it. He thinks I ought not to be trusted with May's happiness, does he not? Do you not think so?”

“Foolish boy! I am sure he did not hint at such a thing. Unsatisfied lover, you think if all the world is not as extatic as yourself at your happiness, they are not content.”

“But he did act strangely. I do not know how, but there is a something unexplainable in his manner, which would keep me, I know not why, from going to him to-night as usual, and telling him all that is in my heart.”

“That, dear Clare, is not the fault of your listener, but

of the thing to be told. This love creeps into the heart, bringing a new train of hopes and fears with it.”

“And you do not think Stuart is displeased?”

“I think he has tired himself out with this long walk of his, and gone to bed more weary than he liked to own to us. But my happy young lover must go too, for although your new possession may be food and sleep for you, a poor old lady, like myself, requires something more substantial.” And, with a kiss, I sent him off.

Dear boy! dear May! Their joy is a good thing, and yet, I know not why, there is a weary pain at my heart,—foolish, unreasonable, I know full well, yet I cannot help it. Let me take what train of thought I will, I always find at the end, “If it were only Stuart, instead of——” Then I reproach myself for unkindness toward the dear child whom it is. I had a strange doubt come over me last night, but this morning, Stuart's face, bright as usual, only a shade paler, from his foolishly long walk yesterday, dispelled it at once. May looks pale and quiet, but her accident explains that sufficiently at present.

JULY 25.

This week has brought a large addition to our quiet party. Jennie and her husband, together with a half dozen young people as wild as it is possible to imagine, and evidently bent upon having their full meed of country pleasures.

All of our own party have avoided the once coveted enjoyment of boating this year, with a shudder of painful memory, not from dread of another accident, but from sorrowful recollections of what that pleasure had bereft them.

But the new comers have no terrors of the past to make the bright smooth stream an evil thing to them, and ere they had come down for a day, were merrily sailing in the gaily decked boats which had thus far wooed temptingly in vain.

Now we have boating again by moonlight and starlight as of old; but Louise's friends content themselves with riding parties, pic-nics among the mountain gorges, or pleasant moonlight strolls along the fair banks, it is as lovely as

a dream, and the days seem scarcely long enough for their pleasures.

We seem in for love makings this summer, or at least for the development of them. Last night Dora came in from a walk with Harley, who, by the way, came down last Saturday with Howard for a couple of weeks enjoyment and freshening up.

Where I sat sewing Dora came, with her soft eyes beaming gladness, and in her quiet way whispered a love song into my ear. Oh, I am so glad, so thankful. I have wished a thousand times it might be, but scarcely dared hope it.

"Harley, my brother Harley, I am so pleased, so thankful," I said when he came a while after her into my room.

"I knew you would be, dear Bertha, and Dora has promised me, to only love you more, that you were my first love," he said in a voice of deep emotion.

"I tell him you were mine too, dear friend. Oh, Mr. Raymond, you could never have loved her better than I have done since the very first."

"Could I not?" he said with a grave smile, "then we will talk of it never more. Bertha is my sister," and he laid his hand tenderly upon her's. "Dora has said she will be my wife," then he added more gaily, "but who is Mr. Raymond?"

"Forgive me," she said, blushing deeply, "the other seems so sacred. I have never said it, save at night sometimes, in a whisper."

"Dora, my Dora," he said quickly, clasping her hands, an expression of pain coming over his face, "do not think of me thus, you shame my weak heart."

We have decided, this, as well as our other engagement, shall be kept a secret among a few of us, until we return home.

Ada and Carrol, I and the rest thought, were attached to each other, indeed we had concluded it was a settled affair; and in truth Ada half confessed an understanding between them to Marion last winter. But this summer, although she plays the hostess to perfection, she gives him no more of her attention; she is a sad flirt, I fear, although she declares with tears, she is no such thing.

However that may be, Lester this summer is her cavalier especial; at first they sought each other for the sake of the

lost one so dear to both; but lately, I sometimes think Ada has found a balm for Harry's wounded heart.

When I see him walking in the moonlight, or bending tenderly (seemingly) over Ada, I think of that time last summer when with white lips he cried:

"Pity me, pity me, Mrs. Percy."

But he is young, and Ada is very bewitching and lovable, and I am glad if she can give him comfort, it is far better thus, than that he should "gaze ever mournfully into the past," a living friend may be better for him than a dead love.

But I have no idea of Carrol's being unkindly used, that he is, I do not know, he is a proud fellow, and keeps his own counsels better than any of the others.

My sweet Marion, with all her new-found happiness, is sadly out of health this last few weeks, and like a timid bird that she is, bides ever by my side.

"I am tired, dear Clare, do not mind me, I shall do so much better alone, with only mamma. I am not quite well, I think, for the gay talk and movements of the rest, give me a dizzy headache," she will say almost every evening.

And very sadly, but because she wills it, Clare leaves us; but my boy's heart is heavy I know, and he understands this querulousness, so unlike her old manner, which has lately come over May, as little as I do, and it grieves him sadly.

Why is it? I wonder, what is the cause? perhaps my May droops so sadly, because our old home lies so near, and yet so very far away.

I think we will not come here another summer, the trial is almost too hard to bear, no wonder it wearies my gentle darling.

JULY 27.

TO-DAY, Mr. Lawrence brought up from the city, to the infinite delight of his sister-in-law, and to our great surprise, Mr. Marstone, whom we thought still in Europe. But he tells us, both he and Mr. Livingstone returned a couple of weeks since.

"I was called home on urgent business." And he added, smiling, "Rolf and I have come to take it as a matter of course, by some means or other, we must spend a part of our summers with your pleasant party. You know this is the fourth summer we have been in company."

"We will expect you, both bag and baggage, for the next two months, then," said Mrs. Lawrence. "I am so glad to have you back once more, I shall not allow you out of my sight for a single day."

"Thank you kindly, dear madame; but we shall not be able to accept your invitation in toto. But I doubt not you will see quite enough of us."

"Why, where will you stay, then?" asked she.

"My own estate," said he, with an expressive glance at me, "lies but eight miles back of this."

"Is it possible? But then that is over the mountain; you cannot come so far, as often as we will need you. Besides, where will be the use, when we have plenty of room?"

"Thank you again; but my presence is required there, and I must forego the pleasure of accepting your kindness. Besides, by the river it is only four miles from this pretty place, which Miss Ada's taste has well named Rose-dale,"—with a bow to her. "From my place, which another fair lady, years ago, called 'The Grange,' our boats will bring us thither in a short space. The river makes such a bend for a few miles about here, that, were it not for a projecting rock or two, and a wilderness of forest trees, you could discover from this piazza, the village at the head of which my bachelor mansion stands."

"I think we will pay you a visit some of these days, if it is such a pleasant distance, Mr. Marstone," said Mrs. Lawrence. "Call upon our new neighbor."

"I believe I will have to decline the honor," he said,

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lightly, "for I fear my establishment would at present hardly do to receive ladies in. What did you say, Miss Ada?" he said, coolly refusing to hear Mrs. Lawrence's declaration,

"That will be all the more inducement for us to come over, and get you into better habits."

"Then you know all about this part of the country,—all its beauties?" said Ada.

"No, I am sorry to say I do not, Miss Ada; my old home lies far away. I only claim this by inheritance from an uncle, who left it me five years ago, and since then, various duties have called me constantly away from it, sometimes in this country, but oftener in Europe, as you are aware. So I have had small opportunity of making myself at home here."

Marion, and Cora, (who at last knows where she is,) rose quickly, and went silently from the room. Mr. Marstone, with a start, and a look of distress upon his face, turned to me with a glance of deprecation, saying:

"Pardon my heartlessness." And, with a tact and power which I think I rarely saw equaled, engrossed the attention of the company so entirely, that not only the subject was changed and apparently forgotten, but I had time to quiet myself before seeking my poor weeping Birdie.

Afterward, as I was seated alone in the little "boudoir" which, because I have expressed a fondness for it, has been given up by the rest, with a delicacy and kindness I cannot find words to tell, to my especial use, Mr. Marstone passed the window, and paused irresolutely upon seeing me.

"I see you know us, Mr. Marstone," I said, holding out my hand; "but please do not betray our connection with this neighborhood to any one else."

"Indeed I will not, Mrs. Percy. Forgive my having so rudely thrust my knowledge of your former history upon you this morning."

"It is no matter, except that we can hardly bear to have it much talked about. It is a memory of the past, and we hold the past very sacred, for the sake of one who has left us."

"I know, I know. I saw that one once, years ago, when I was a boy, and he in the first flush of his young manhood. Ever after he was the idol of my ambitious dreams the

acme of all good was with me ever after to be like him, who was so great, so honored, so beloved."

"Did you know papa then, Mr. Marstone?" asked a voice very softly, behind me.

"Only through others, and one interview with him in Washington, years ago, Miss Marie."

"Then you knew us from your recollection of him, I presume?"

"Only, Miss Leanore. I knew her instantly as Walter Percy's daughter, before I heard her name. That night, you remember, years ago, when you were children, at Mrs. Chalton's, when Miss Leanore sang for me in preference to Livingstone, 'because she liked me best for my name's sake,' she mystified him, but not me, for I had the key to the mystery."

"We think Howard like papa, Mr. Marstone, do not you?"

"Exceedingly, Miss Marie, but not nearly as like as your sister. Howard has a little of your mother's gentleness, I think, blended with his other self; but Miss Leanore is a true 'Percy,' proud, so very proud," he said, in a musing sort of way.

"Yes, we know she is, and you would make her more proud still, did you tell her what you have just told us; she glories in her true Percy looks," said May, with a smile: "but you do not know how beautifully that haughty spirit bows before those she loves. Oh, we know she is cold and proud, but at home we never see it, she is a very dove for gentleness to those she loves."

"I doubt it not, I know it must be so," and his eyes flashed suddenly, and his cheeks glowed. "It is the kind of pride one glories to see, the kind of love which when one owned, they would die rather than lose an atom of," he said this in a deep tone as though he felt it; but added immediately in a gayer tone:

"But, Mrs. Percy, do you know I half thought when we left the continent, to hear an announcement of an engagement between your beautiful daughter and my friend Livingstone, they were '*con amore*,' I assure you."

"I pray God not! I trust you are mistaken!" I said, in dismay at the idea.

"Perhaps I am, indeed I know now there is nothing of

an understanding between them, for Rolf has assured me of that."

Oh he could not know what a pang the thought of my pure, high-minded girl being caught in the meshes of that worldly man, gave my heart; but I do not believe it, I will not give such an idea room for an instant.

My darling's high soul would surely recoil from that gay, scoffing (I fear), half-infidel man; she would never cast the treasure of her pure heart at his feet, no, no! God will protect her. Yet I am glad she is beyond his fascinations.

Harley and Howard started for home to-day, very determinedly declaring:

"We only came for two weeks, and so we will only stay that time."

So we were obliged to submit, especially as it is for Howard's benefit, they should be quietly at home. How can I ever be grateful enough to Harley for thus devoting to my boy, the time almost any other lover would deem sacred to his mistress.

His parting gave me a pang—and yet I trust I have mistaken his meaning—it cannot be that love for me has lived through years unseen. He had bidden us good-bye, when suddenly coming back to my room, a look of anguish upon his face, he said in a quivering tone:

"Bertha, I am like the children, and come to unburden myself before I go. I have a haunting pain, a sense of wrong-doing at my heart which tortures me almost beyond endurance. I feel as though I was making a pretence of affection, playing a part towards Dora which is not true."

"Harley, what do you mean? when she is so content, so happy, my poor lonely Dora, so very happy, and I deemed you were as well!"

"And I do love her, not perhaps as I should, not as she deserves to be loved who has so fondly given me—so unworthy—her whole heart's first affection. Would God it was otherwise; but I have not deceived her; she knows the weak treacherous heart I have. I have tried faithfully to make her understand what a quiet brother-love I have for her, it contents her now; but in the long-coming years, will it suffice her? will her happiness be sure? for myself, there can be but one fate, learned years ago; either way it will be the same, a barren plain, a light beyond, a joyless

life, a blessed hope; but dare I link her fate with mine? will she not weary of the tie which binds her? will not the chain, tightened by years, gall when it is too late? would it not be safer for her, that she endure the sorrow I know it will be to her, to give up the prospect of our union now while there is time, rather than learn to loathe it in coming years?"

"Oh, Harley, what do you mean? My poor Dora, do not darken her young life by another shadow, shield her in your true arms, be her guide henceforth, she loves you beyond all earthly things, let me plead for her. Oh, Harley, I have revered and loved you so long, do not destroy my faith in you. I love to think you more worthy than almost any one beside; but I could not were you false; be brave, be true, Harley!"

"I will! God help me, I will! I only desire to do right, and have from the first; it was that, which, when a chance word showed me Dora's love, made me meet it tenderly." Then taking my hand tightly within his own—"Dora shall be my wife; but, Bertha, you will be my sister still, thus I can endure all things."

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CHAPTER L.

"She was a being radiant as the dawn,  
When it comes forth with flush of glory on."

VIVIAN LEE.

JULY 20.

THERE had been an excursion to a pretty glen a few miles distant, called "Clan-Alpine's Glen," and all had come back well tired. For a while the house was quiet, taking what Gracie called,

"A good resting-time after our toils."

It was just before sunset; the drawing-rooms and piazzas were being well filled again; some, with their "resting-

time" not quite over, were half reclining upon sofa or divan, others sewing or conversing in the deep windows, and others still pacing up and down the piazza or lawn.

Mr. ——— (I forget his name) brought a beautiful shell to show me. A group gathered round to inspect the specimen, and listen to his remarks upon it. When he was through, I asked him to keep it by him, to show Stuart and Clare when they came back from their fishing excursion; then I sent Cora to the woods for the children, who were staying out too late.

Presently, the boys (I forget to call them gentlemen sometimes) came, and again we were engaged in the varied hue of the beautiful shell before us, Marion sitting on a low stool at my feet, and the rest standing round. Suddenly, some one interrupted, with the exclamation from the far window,

"Ah, there is a new arrival!" But this was too common an occurrence to elicit notice. A few moments after, there was a stir in the hall, the bustle of new-comers, and then a servant asking,

"Where is Mrs. Lawrence?"

At the same instant, Stuart and Clare, springing forward, exclaimed in a breath:

"Nora! Uncle!"

I sprang up, with the single word upon my lip,

"Where?" but before I realized their words, a tall, slight figure sprang forward, with the words:

"Here, my mother!" and in an instant, Nora's dear arms were about me.

"Mamma, precious, darling, pretty mamma, I am so glad, so glad!" And in an instant her face was buried in my lap, as she knelt before me.

Surprise and joy for a moment overwhelmed me, and I sank trembling into a seat which Stuart placed quickly for me.

"My child! my Leanore!" It was all I could say, as I pressed kiss after kiss upon her fair brow, as she knelt before me. Thus for a moment we gazed at each other; then springing up, she clasped her arms round Marion.

"My sweet sister! my May-flower!"

"Nora, my queen!" was the soft reply. "God love thee, my sister!"