CHAPTER VIII. THE KINDRED SPIRITS

THE morning sunlight shining in at a badly curtained window; a clumsy wooden bed, with big twisted posts that reached to the ceiling; on one side of the bed, my mother's welcome face; on the other side, an elderly gentleman unremembered by me at that moment--such were the objects that presented themselves to my view, when I first consciously returned to the world that we live in.

"Look, doctor, look! He has come to his senses at last."

"Open your mouth, sir, and take a sup of this." My mother was rejoicing over me on one side of the bed; and the unknown gentleman, addressed as "doctor," was offering me a spoonful of whisky-and-water on the other. He called it the "elixir of life"; and he bid me remark (speaking in a strong Scotch accent) that he tasted it himself to show he was in earnest.

The stimulant did its good work. My head felt less giddy, my mind became clearer. I could speak collectedly to my mother; I could vaguely recall the more marked events of the previous evening. A minute or two more, and the image of the person in whom those events had all centered became a living image in my memory. I tried to raise myself in the bed; I asked, impatiently, "Where is she?"

The doctor produced another spoonful of the elixir of life, and gravely repeated his first address to me.

"Open your mouth, sir, and take a sup of this."

I persisted in repeating my question:

"Where is she?"

The doctor persisted in repeating his formula:

"Take a sup of this."

I was too weak to contest the matter; I obeyed. My medical attendant nodded across the bed to my mother, and said, "Now, he'll do." My mother had some compassion on me. She relieved my anxiety in these plain words:

"The lady has quite recovered, George, thanks to the doctor here."

I looked at my professional colleague with a new interest. He was the legitimate fountainhead of the information that I was dying to have poured into my mind.

"How did you revive her?" I asked. "Where is she now?"

The doctor held up his hand, warning me to stop.

"We shall do well, sir, if we proceed systematically," he began, in a very positive manner. "You will understand, that every time you open your mouth, it will be to take a sup of this, and not to speak. I shall tell you, in due course, and the good lady, your mother, will tell you, all that you have any need to know. As I happen to have been first on what you may call the scene of action, it stands in the fit order of things that I should speak first. You will just permit me to mix a little more of the elixir of life, and then, as the poet says, my plain unvarnished tale I shall deliver."

So he spoke, pronouncing in his strong Scotch accent the most carefully selected English I had ever heard. A hard-headed, square-shouldered, pertinaciously self-willed man--it was plainly useless to contend with him. I turned to my mother's gentle face for encouragement; and I let my doctor have his own way.

"My name," he proceeded, "is MacGlue. I had the honor of presenting my respects at your house yonder when you first came to live in this neighborhood. You don't remember me at present, which is natural enough in the unbalanced condition of your mind, consequent, you will understand (as a professional person yourself) on copious loss of blood."

There my patience gave way.

"Never mind me!" I interposed. "Tell me about the lady!"

"You have opened your mouth, sir!" cried Mr. MacGlue, severely. "You know the penalty--take a sup of this. I told you we should proceed systematically," he went on, after he had forced me to submit to the penalty. "Everything in its place, Mr. Germaine--everything in its place. I was speaking of your bodily condition. Well, sir, and how did I discover your bodily condition? Providentially for you I was driving home yesterday evening by the lower road (which is the road by the river bank), and, drawing near to the inn here (they call it a hotel; it's nothing but an inn), I heard the screeching of the

landlady half a mile off. A good woman enough, you will understand, as times go; but a poor creature in any emergency. Keep still, I'm coming to it now. Well, I went in to see if the screeching related to anything wanted in the medical way; and there I found you and the stranger lady in a position which I may truthfully describe as standing in some need of improvement on the score of propriety. Tut! tut! I speak jocosely--you were both in a dead swoon. Having heard what the landlady had to tell me, and having, to the best of my ability, separated history from hysterics in the course of the woman's narrative, I found myself, as it were, placed between two laws. The law of gallantry, you see, pointed to the lady as the first object of my professional services, while the law of humanity (seeing that you were still bleeding) pointed no less imperatively to you. I am no longer a young man: I left the lady to wait. My word! it was no light matter, Mr. Germaine, to deal with your case, and get you carried up here out of the way. That old wound of yours, sir, is not to be trifled with. I bid you beware how you open it again. The next time you go out for an evening walk and you see a lady in the water, you will do well for your own health to leave her there. What's that I see? Are you opening your mouth again? Do you want another sup already?"

"He wants to hear more about the lady," said my mother, interpreting my wishes for me.

"Oh, the lady," resumed Mr. MacGlue, with the air of a man who found no great attraction in the subject proposed to him. "There's not much that I know of to be said about the lady. A fine woman, no doubt. If you could strip the flesh off her bones, you would find a splendid skeleton underneath. For, mind this! there's no such thing as a finely made woman without a good bony scaffolding to build her on at starting. I don't think much of this lady--morally speaking, you will understand. If I may be permitted to say so in your presence, ma'am, there's a man in the background of that dramatic scene of hers on the bridge. However, not being the man myself, I have nothing to do with that. My business with the lady was just to set her vital machinery going again. And, Heaven knows, she proved a heavy handful! It was even a more obstinate case to deal with, sir, than yours. I never, in all my experience, met with two people more unwilling to come back to this world and its troubles than you two were. And when I had done the business at last, when I was wellnigh swooning myself with the work and the worry of it, guess--I give you leave to speak for this once--guess what were the first words the lady said to me when she came to herself again."

I was too much excited to be able to exercise my ingenuity. "I give it up!" I said, impatiently.

"You may well give it up," remarked Mr. MacGlue. "The first words she addressed, sir, to the man who had dragged her out of the very jaws of death were these: 'How dare you meddle with me? why didn't you leave me to die?' Her exact language--I'll take my Bible oath of it. I was so provoked that I gave her the change back (as the saying is) in her own coin. 'There's the river handy, ma'am,' I said; 'do it again. I, for one, won't stir a hand to save you; I promise you that.' She looked up sharply. 'Are you the man who took me out of the river?' she said. 'God forbid!' says I. 'I'm only the doctor who was fool enough to meddle with you afterward.' She turned to the landlady. 'Who took me out of the river?' she asked. The landlady told her, and mentioned your name. 'Germaine?' she said to herself; 'I know nobody named Germaine; I wonder whether it was the man who spoke to me on the bridge?' 'Yes,' says the landlady; 'Mr. Germaine said he met you on the bridge.' Hearing that, she took a little time to think; and then she asked if she could see Mr. Germaine. 'Whoever he is,' she says, 'he has risked his life to save me, and I ought to thank him for doing that.' 'You can't thank him tonight,' I said; 'I've got him upstairs between life and death, and I've sent for his mother: wait till to-morrow.' She turned on me, looking half frightened, half angry. 'I can't wait,' she says; 'you don't know what you have done among you in bringing me back to life. I must leave this neighborhood; I must be out of Perthshire to-morrow: when does the first coach southward pass this way?' Having nothing to do with the first coach southward, I referred her to the people of the inn. My business (now I had done with the lady) was upstairs in this room, to see how you were getting on. You were getting on as well as I could wish, and your mother was at your bedside. I went home to see what sick people might be waiting for me in the regular way. When I came back this morning, there was the foolish landlady with a new tale to tell 'Gone!' says she. 'Who's gone?' says I. 'The lady,' says she, 'by the first coach this morning!'"

"You don't mean to tell me that she has left the house?" I exclaimed.

"Oh, but I do!" said the doctor, as positively as ever. "Ask madam your mother here, and she'll certify it to your heart's content. I've got other sick ones to visit, and I'm away on my rounds. You'll see no more of the lady; and so much the better, I'm thinking. In two hours' time I'll be back again; and if I don't find you the worse in the interim, I'll see about having you transported from this strange place to the snug bed that knows you at home. Don't let him talk, ma'am, don't let him talk."

With those parting words, Mr. MacGlue left us to ourselves.

"Is it really true?" I said to my mother. "Has she left the inn, without waiting to see me?"

"Nobody could stop her, George," my mother answered. "The lady left the inn this morning by the coach for Edinburgh."

I was bitterly disappointed. Yes: "bitterly" is the word--though she was a stranger to me.

"Did you see her yourself?" I asked.

"I saw her for a few minutes, my dear, on my way up to your room."

"What did she say?"

"She begged me to make her excuses to you. She said, 'Tell Mr. Germaine that my situation is dreadful; no human creature can help me. I must go away. My old life is as much at an end as if your son had left me to drown in the river. I must find a new life for myself, in a new place. Ask Mr. Germaine to forgive me for going away without thanking him. I daren't wait! I may be followed and found out. There is a person whom I am determined never to see again--never! never! never! Good-by; and try to forgive me!' She hid her face in her hands, and said no more. I tried to win her confidence; it was not to be done; I was compelled to leave her. There is some dreadful calamity, George, in that wretched woman's life. And such an interesting creature, too! It was impossible not to pity her, whether she deserved it or not. Everything about her is a mystery, my dear. She speaks English without the slightest foreign accent, and yet she has a foreign name."

"Did she give you her name?"

"No, and I was afraid to ask her to give it. But the landlady here is not a very scrupulous person. She told me she looked at the poor creature's linen while it was drying by the fire. The name marked on it was, 'Van Brandt.'"

"Van Brandt?" I repeated. "That sounds like a Dutch name. And yet you say she spoke like an Englishwoman. Perhaps she was born in England."

"Or perhaps she may be married," suggested my mother; "and Van Brandt may be the name of her husband."

The idea of her being a married woman had something in it repellent to me. I wished my mother had not thought of that last suggestion. I refused to

receive it. I persisted in my own belief that the stranger was a single woman. In that character, I could indulge myself in the luxury of thinking of her; I could consider the chances of my being able to trace this charming fugitive, who had taken so strong a hold on my interest--whose desperate attempt at suicide had so nearly cost me my own life.

If she had gone as far as Edinburgh (which she would surely do, being bent on avoiding discovery), the prospect of finding her again--in that great city, and in my present weak state of health--looked doubtful indeed. Still, there was an underlying hopefulness in me which kept my spirits from being seriously depressed. I felt a purely imaginary (perhaps I ought to say, a purely superstitious) conviction that we who had nearly died together, we who had been brought to life together, were surely destined to be involved in some future joys or sorrows common to us both. "I fancy I shall see her again," was my last thought before my weakness overpowered me, and I sunk into a peaceful sleep.

That night I was removed from the inn to my own room at home; and that night I saw her again in a dream.

The image of her was as vividly impressed on me as the far different image of the child Mary, when I used to see it in the days of old. The dream-figure of the woman was robed as I had seen it robed on the bridge. She wore the same broad-brimmed garden-hat of straw. She looked at me as she had looked when I approached her in the dim evening light. After a little her face brightened with a divinely beautiful smile; and she whispered in my ear, "Friend, do you know me?"

I knew her, most assuredly; and yet it was with an incomprehensible after-feeling of doubt. Recognizing her in my dream as the stranger who had so warmly interested me, I was, nevertheless, dissatisfied with myself, as if it had not been the right recognition. I awoke with this idea; and I slept no more that night.

In three days' time I was strong enough to go out driving with my mother, in the comfortable, old-fashioned, open carriage which had once belonged to Mr. Germaine.

On the fourth day we arranged to make an excursion to a little waterfall in our neighborhood. My mother had a great admiration of the place, and had often expressed a wish to possess some memorial of it. I resolved to take my sketch-book: with me, on the chance that I might be able to please her by making a drawing of her favorite scene.

Searching for the sketch-book (which I had not used for years), I found it in an old desk of mine that had remained unopened since my departure for India. In the course of my investigation, I opened a drawer in the desk, and discovered a relic of the old times--my poor little Mary's first work in embroidery, the green flag!

The sight of the forgotten keepsake took my mind back to the bailiff's cottage, and reminded me of Dame Dermody, and her confident prediction about Mary and me.

I smiled as I recalled the old woman's assertion that no human power could "hinder the union of the kindred spirits of the children in the time to come." What had become of the prophesied dreams in which we were to communicate with each other through the term of our separation? Years had passed; and, sleeping or waking, I had seen nothing of Mary. Years had passed; and the first vision of a woman that had come to me had been my dream a few nights since of the stranger whom I had saved from drowning. I thought of these chances and changes in my life, but not contemptuously or bitterly. The new love that was now stealing its way into my heart had softened and humanized me. I said to myself, "Ah, poor little Mary!" and I kissed the green flag, in grateful memory of the days that were gone forever.

We drove to the waterfall.

It was a beautiful day; the lonely sylvan scene was at its brightest and best. A wooden summer-house, commanding a prospect of the falling stream, had been built for the accommodation of pleasure parties by the proprietor of the place. My mother suggested that I should try to make a sketch of the view from this point. I did my best to please her, but I was not satisfied with the result; and I abandoned my drawing before it was half finished. Leaving my sketch-book and pencil on the table of the summer-house, I proposed to my mother to cross a little wooden bridge which spanned the stream, below the fall, and to see how the landscape looked from a new point of view.

The prospect of the waterfall, as seen from the opposite bank, presented even greater difficulties, to an amateur artist like me, than the prospect which he had just left. We returned to the summer-house.

I was the first to approach the open door. I stopped, checked in my advance by an unexpected discovery. The summer-house was no longer empty as we had left it. A lady was seated at the table with my pencil in her hand, writing in my sketch-book!

After waiting a moment, I advanced a few steps nearer to the door, and stopped again in breathless amazement. The stranger in the summer-house was now plainly revealed to me as the woman who had attempted to destroy herself from the bridge!

There was no doubt about it. There was the dress; there was the memorable face which I had seen in the evening light, which I had dreamed of only a few nights since! The woman herself--I saw her as plainly as I saw the sun shining on the waterfall--the woman herself, with my pencil in her hand, writing in my book!

My mother was close behind me. She noticed my agitation. "George!" she exclaimed, "what is the matter with you?"

I pointed through the open door of the summer-house.

"Well?" said my mother. "What am I to look at?"

"Don't you see somebody sitting at the table and writing in my sketch-book?"

My mother eyed me quickly. "Is he going to be ill again?" I heard her say to herself.

At the same moment the woman laid down the pencil and rose slowly to her feet.

She looked at me with sorrowful and pleading eyes: she lifted her hand and beckoned me to approach her. I obeyed. Moving without conscious will of my own, drawn nearer and nearer to her by an irresistible power, I ascended the short flight of stairs which led into the summer-house. Within a few paces of her I stopped. She advanced a step toward me, and laid her hand gently on my bosom. Her touch filled me with strangely united sensations of rapture and awe. After a while, she spoke in low melodious tones, which mingled in my ear with the distant murmur of the falling water, until the two sounds became one. I heard in the murmur, I heard in the voice, these words: "Remember me. Come to me." Her hand dropped from my bosom; a momentary obscurity passed like a flying shadow over the bright daylight in the room. I looked for her when the light came back. She was gone.

My consciousness of passing events returned.

I saw the lengthening shadows outside, which told me that the evening was at hand. I saw the carriage approaching the summerhouse to take us away. I felt my mother's hand on my arm, and heard her voice speaking to me anxiously. I was able to reply by a sign entreating her not to be uneasy about me, but I could do no more. I was absorbed, body and soul, in the one desire to look at the sketch-book. As certainly as I had seen the woman, so certainly I had seen her, with my pencil in her hand, writing in my book.

I advanced to the table on which the book was lying open. I looked at the blank space on the lower part of the page, under the foreground lines of my unfinished drawing. My mother, following me, looked at the page too.

There was the writing! The woman had disappeared, but there were her written words left behind her: visible to my mother as well as to me, readable by my mother's eyes as well as by mine!

These were the words we saw, arranged in two lines, as I copy them here:

When the full moon shines On Saint Anthony's Well.