

## PART TWO

Judith climbed the basement stairs rather slowly. Her mother was busy rearranging the disorder the hastily departing servants had left. Their departure had indeed been made in sufficient haste to have left behind the air of its having been flight. There was a great deal to be done, and Jane Foster, moving about with broom and pail and scrubbing brushes, did not dislike the excitement of the work before her. Judith's certainty that she would not be missed made all clear before her. If her absence was observed her mother would realize that the whole house lay open to her and that she was an undisturbing element wheresoever she was led either by her fancy or by circumstance. If she went into the parlours she would probably sit and talk to herself or play quietly with her shabby doll. In any case she would be finding pleasure of her own and would touch nothing which could be harmed.

When the child found herself in the entrance hall she stopped a few moments to look about her. The stillness seemed to hold her and she paused to hear and feel it. In leaving the basement behind, she had left the movement of living behind also. No one was alive upon this floor--nor upon the next--nor the next. It was as if one had entered a new world--a world in which something existed which did not express itself in sound or in things which

one could see. Chairs held out their arms to emptiness--cushions were not pressed by living things--only the people in the pictures were looking at something, but one could not tell what they were looking at.

But on the fourth floor was the Closed Room, which she must go to--because she must go to it--that was all she knew.

She began to mount the stairs which led to the upper floors. Her shabby doll was held against her hip by one arm, her right hand touched the wall as she went, she felt the height of the wall as she looked upward. It was such a large house and so empty. Where had the people gone and why had they left it all at once as if they were afraid? Her father had only heard vaguely that they had gone because they had had trouble.

She passed the second floor, the third, and climbed towards the fourth. She could see the door of the Closed Room as she went up step by step, and she found herself moving more quickly. Yes, she must get to it--she must put her hand on it--her chest began to rise and fall with a quickening of her breath, and her breath quickened because her heart fluttered--as if with her haste. She began to be glad, and if any one could have seen her they would have been struck by a curious expectant smile in her eyes.

She reached the landing and crossed it, running the last few

steps lightly. She did not wait or stand still a moment. With the strange expectant smile on her lips as well as in her eyes, she put her hand upon the door--not upon the handle, but upon the panel. Without any sound it swung quietly open. And without any sound she stepped quietly inside.

The room was rather large and the light in it was dim. There were no shutters, but the blinds were drawn down. Judith went to one of the windows and drew its blind up so that the look of the place might be clear to her. There were two windows and they opened upon the flat roof of an extension, which suggested somehow that it had been used as a place to walk about in. This, at least, was what Judith thought of at once--that some one who had used the room had been in the habit of going out upon the roof and staying there as if it had been a sort of garden. There were rows of flower pots with dead flowers in them--there were green tubs containing large shrubs, which were dead also--against the low parapet certain of them held climbing plants which had been trained upon it. Two had been climbing roses, two were clematis, but Judith did not know them by name. The ledge of the window was so low that a mere step took her outside. So taking it, she stood among the dried, withered things and looked in tender regret at them.

"I wish they were not dead," she said softly to the silence. "It would be like a garden if they were not dead."

The sun was hot, but a cool, little breeze seemed straying up from among the trees of the Park. It even made the dried leaves of the flowers tremble and rustle a little. Involuntarily she lifted her face to the blue sky and floating white clouds. They seemed so near that she felt almost as if she could touch them with her hand. The street seemed so far--so far below--the whole world seemed far below. If one stepped off the parapet it would surely take one a long time to reach the earth. She knew now why she had come up here. It was so that she might feel like this--as if she was upheld far away from things--as if she had left everything behind--almost as if she had fallen awake again. There was no perfume in the air, but all was still and sweet and clear.

Suddenly she turned and went into the room again, realizing that she had scarcely seen it at all and that she must see and know it. It was not like any other room she had seen. It looked more simple, though it was a pretty place. The walls were covered with roses, there were bright pictures, and shelves full of books. There was also a little writing desk and there were two or three low chairs, and a low table. A closet in a corner had its door ajar and Judith could see that inside toys were piled together. In another corner a large doll's house stood, looking as if some one had just stopped playing with it. Some toy furniture had been taken out and left near it upon the carpet.

"It was a little girl's room," Judith said. "Why did they close it?"

Her eye was caught by something lying on a sofa--something covered with a cloth. It looked almost like a child lying there asleep--so fast asleep that it did not stir at all. Judith moved across to the sofa and drew the cloth aside. With its head upon a cushion was lying there a very large doll, beautifully dressed in white lace, its eyes closed, and a little wreath of dead flowers in its hair.

"It looks almost as if it had died too," said Judith.

She did not ask herself why she said "as if it had died too"--perhaps it was because the place was so still--and everything so far away--that the flowers had died in the strange, little deserted garden on the roof.

She did not hear any footsteps--in fact, no ghost of a sound stirred the silence as she stood looking at the doll's sleep--but quite quickly she ceased to bend forward, and turned round to look at something which she knew was near her. There she was--and it was quite natural she should be there--the little girl with the face like a white flower, with the quantity of burnished coppery hair and the smile which deepened the already deep dimple near her mouth.

"You have come to play with me," she said.

"Yes," answered Judith. "I wanted to come all night. I could not stay down-stairs."

"No," said the child; "you can't stay down-stairs. Lift up the doll."

They began to play as if they had spent their lives together. Neither asked the other any questions. Judith had not played with other children, but with this one she played in absolute and lovely delight. The little girl knew where all the toys were, and there were a great many beautiful ones. She told Judith where to find them and how to arrange them for their games. She invented wonderful things to do--things which were so unlike anything Judith had ever seen or heard or thought of that it was not strange that she realized afterwards that all her past life and its belongings had been so forgotten as to be wholly blotted out while she was in the Closed Room. She did not know her playmate's name, she did not remember that there were such things as names. Every moment was happiness. Every moment the little girl seemed to grow more beautiful in the flower whiteness of her face and hands and the strange lightness and freedom of her movements. There was an ecstasy in looking at her--in feeling her near.

Not long before Judith went down-stairs she found herself standing with her outside the window in among the withered flowers.

"It was my garden," the little girl said. "It has been so hot and no one has been near to water them, so they could not live."

She went lightly to one of the brown rose-bushes and put her pointed-fingered little hand quite near it. She did not touch it, but held her hand near--and the leaves began to stir and uncurl and become fresh and tender again, and roses were nodding, blooming on the stems. And she went in the same manner to each flower and plant in turn until all the before dreary little garden was bright and full of leaves and flowers.

"It's Life," she said to Judith. Judith nodded and smiled back at her, understanding quite well just as she had understood the eyes of the bird who had swung on the twig so near her cheek the day she had hidden among the bushes in the Park.

"Now, you must go," the little girl said at last. And Judith went out of the room at once--without waiting or looking back, though she knew the white figure did not stir till she was out of sight.

It was not until she had reached the second floor that the change came upon her. It was a great change and a curious one. The

Closed Room became as far away as all other places and things had seemed when she had stood upon the roof feeling the nearness of the blueness and the white clouds--as when she had looked round and found herself face to face with the child in the Closed Room. She suddenly realized things she had not known before. She knew that she had heard no voice when the little girl spoke to her--she knew that it had happened, that it was she only who had lifted the doll--who had taken out the toys--who had arranged the low table for their feast, putting all the small service upon it--and though they had played with such rapturous enjoyment and had laughed and feasted--what had they feasted on? That she could not recall--and not once had she touched or been touched by the light hand or white dress--and though they seemed to express their thoughts and intentions freely she had heard no voice at all. She was suddenly bewildered and stood rubbing her hand over her forehead and her eyes--but she was happy--as happy as when she had fallen awake in her sleep--and was no more troubled or really curious than she would have been if she had had the same experience every day of her life.

"Well, you must have been having a good time playing up-stairs," Jane Foster said when she entered the big kitchen. "This is going to do you good, Judy. Looks like she'd had a day in the country, don't she, Jem?"

Through the weeks that followed her habit of "playing up-stairs"



was accepted as a perfectly natural thing. No questions were asked and she knew it was not necessary to enter into any explanations.

Every day she went to the door of the Closed Room and, finding it closed, at a touch of her hand upon the panel it swung softly open. There she waited--sometimes for a longer sometimes for a shorter time--and the child with the coppery hair came to her. The world below was gone as soon as she entered the room, and through the hours they played together joyously as happy children play. But in their playing it was always Judith who touched the toys--who held the doll---who set the little table for their feast. Once as she went down-stairs she remembered that when she had that day made a wreath of roses from the roof and had gone to put it on her playmate's head, she had drawn back with deepened dimple and, holding up her hand, had said, laughing: "No. Do not touch me."

But there was no mystery in it after all. Judith knew she should presently understand.

She was so happy that her happiness lived in her face in a sort of delicate brilliance. Jane Foster observed the change in her with exceeding comfort, her view being that spacious quarters, fresh air, and sounder sleep had done great things for her.

"Them big eyes of hers ain't like no other child's eyes I've ever seen," she said to her husband with cheerful self-gratulation. "An' her skin's that fine an' thin an' fair you can jest see through it. She always looks to me as if she was made out of different stuff from me an' you, Jem. I've always said it."

"She's going to make a corking handsome girl," responded Jem with a chuckle.

They had been in the house two months, when one afternoon, as she was slicing potatoes for supper, Jane looked round to see the child standing at the kitchen doorway, looking with a puzzled expression at some wilted flowers she held in her hand. Jane's impression was that she had been coming into the room and had stopped suddenly to look at what she held.

"What've you got there, Judy?" she asked.

"They're flowers," said Judith, her eyes still more puzzled.

"Where'd you get 'em from? I didn't know you'd been out. I thought you was up-stairs."

"I was," said Judith quite simply. "In the Closed Room."

Jane Foster's knife dropped into her pan with a splash.

"Well," she gasped.

Judith looked at her with quiet eyes.

"The Closed Room!" Jane cried out. "What are you saying? You couldn't get in?"

"Yes, I can."

Jane was conscious of experiencing a shock. She said afterwards that suddenly something gave her the creeps.

"You couldn't open the door," she persisted. "I tried it again yesterday as I passed by--turned the handle and gave it a regular shove and it wouldn't give an inch."

"Yes," the child answered; "I heard you. We were inside then."

A few days later, when Jane weepingly related the incident to awe-stricken and sympathizing friends, she described as graphically as her limited vocabulary would allow her to do so, the look in Judith's face as she came nearer to her.

"Don't tell me there was nothing happening then," she said. "She just came up to me with them dead flowers in her hand an' a kind

of look in her eyes as if she was half sorry for me an' didn't know quite why.

"'The door opens for me,' she says. 'That's where I play every day. There's a little girl comes and plays with me. She comes in at the window, I think. She is like the picture in the room where the books are. Her hair hangs down and she has a dimple near her mouth.'

"I couldn't never tell any one what I felt like. It was as if I'd got a queer fright that I didn't understand.

"'She must have come over the roof from the next house,' I says. 'They've got an extension too--but I thought the people were gone away.'

"'There are flowers on our roof,' she said. 'I got these there.' And that puzzled look came into her eyes again. 'They were beautiful when I got them--but as I came down-stairs they died.'

"'Well, of all the queer things,' I said. She put out her hand and touched my arm sort of lovin' an' timid.

"'I wanted to tell you to-day, mother,' she said. 'I had to tell you to-day. You don't mind if I go play with her, do you? You don't mind?'

"Perhaps it was because she touched me that queer little loving way--or was it the way she looked--it seemed like something came over me an' I just grabbed her an' hugged her up.

"'No,' I says. 'So as you come back. So as you come back.'

"And to think!" And Jane rocked herself sobbing.

A point she dwelt on with many tears was that the child seemed in a wistful mood and remained near her side--bringing her little chair and sitting by her as she worked, and rising to follow her from place to place as she moved from one room to the other.

"She wasn't never one as kissed you much or hung about like some children do--I always used to say she was the least bother of any child I ever knew. Seemed as if she had company of her own when she sat in her little chair in the corner whispering to herself or just setting quiet." This was a thing Jane always added during all the years in which she told the story. "That was what made me notice. She kept by me and she kept looking at me different from any way I'd seen her look before--not pitiful exactly--but something like it. And once she came up and kissed me and once or twice she just kind of touched my dress or my hand--as I stood by her. SHE knew. No one need tell me she didn't."

But this was an error. The child was conscious only of a tender, wistful feeling, which caused her to look at the affectionate healthy young woman who had always been good to her and whom she belonged to, though she remotely wondered why--the same tenderness impelled her to touch her arm, hand and simple dress, and folding her arms round her neck to kiss her softly. It was an expression of gratitude for all the rough casual affection of the past. All her life had been spent at her side--all her life on earth had sprung from her.

When she went up-stairs to the Closed Room the next day she told her mother she was going before she left the kitchen.

"I'm going up to play with the little girl, mother," she said.

"You don't mind, do you?"

Jane had had an evening of comfortable domestic gossip and joking with Jem, had slept, slept soundly and eaten a hearty breakfast. Life had reassumed its wholly normal aspect. The sun was shining hot and bright and she was preparing to scrub the kitchen floor. She believed that the child was mistaken as to the room she had been in.

"That's all right," she said, turning the hot water spigot over the sink so that the boiling water poured forth at full flow into her pail, with clouds of steam. "But when I've done my scrubbing

I'm comin' up to see if it IS the Closed Room you play in. If it is, I guess you'd better play somewhere else--and I want to find out how you get that door open. Run along if you like."

Judith came back to her from the door. "Yes," she said, "come and see. But if she is there," putting her hand on Jane's hip gently, "you mustn't touch her."

Jane turned off the hot water and stared.

"Her!"

"The little girl who plays. I never touch her. She says I must not."

Jane lifted her pail from the sink, laughing outright.

"Well, that sounds as if she was a pretty airy young one," she said. "I guess you're a queer little pair. Run on. I must get at this floor."

Judith ran up the three flights of stairs lightly. She was glad she had told her mother, though she wondered vaguely why it had never seemed right to tell her until last night, and last night it had seemed not so much necessary as imperative. Something had obliged her to tell her. The time had come when she must know.

The Closed Room door had always shut itself gently after Judith had passed through it, and yesterday, when her mother passing by chance, had tried the handle so vigorously, the two children inside the room had stood still gazing at each other, but neither had spoken and Judith had not thought of speaking. She was out of the realm of speech, and without any sense of amazement was aware that she was out of it. People with voices and words were in that faraway world below.

The playing to-day was even a lovelier, happier thing than it had ever been before. It seemed to become each minute a thing farther and farther away from the world in the streets where the Elevated Railroad went humming past like a monster bee. And with the sense of greater distance came a sense of greater lightness and freedom. Judith found that she was moving about the room and the little roof garden almost exactly as she had moved in the waking dreams where she saw Aunt Hester--almost as if she was floating and every movement was ecstasy. Once as she thought this she looked at her playmate, and the child smiled and answered her as she always did before she spoke.

"Yes," she said; "I know her. She will come. She sent me."

She had this day a special plan with regard to the arranging of the Closed Room. She wanted all the things in it--the doll--the chairs--the toys--the little table and its service to be placed



in certain positions. She told Judith what to do. Various toys were put here or there--the little table was set with certain dishes in a particular part of the room. A book was left lying upon the sofa cushion, the large doll was put into a chair near the sofa, with a smaller doll in its arms, on the small writing desk a letter, which Judith found in a drawer--a half-written letter--was laid, the pen was left in the ink. It was a strange game to play, but somehow Judith felt it was very pretty. When it was all done--and there were many curious things to do--the Closed Room looked quite different from the cold, dim, orderly place the door had first opened upon. Then it had looked as if everything had been swept up and set away and covered and done with forever--as if the life in it had ended and would never begin again. Now it looked as if some child who had lived in it and loved and played with each of its belongings, had just stepped out from her play--to some other room quite near--quite near. The big doll in its chair seemed waiting--even listening to her voice as it came from the room she had run into.

The child with the burnished hair stood and looked at it with her delicious smile.

"That is how it looked," she said. "They came and hid and covered everything--as if I had gone--as if I was Nowhere. I want her to know I come here. I couldn't do it myself. You could do it for me. Go and bring some roses."

The little garden was a wonder of strange beauty with its masses of flowers. Judith brought some roses from the bush her playmate pointed out. She put them into a light bowl which was like a bubble of thin, clear glass and stood on the desk near the letter.

"If they would look like that," the little girl said, "she would see. But no one sees them like that--when the Life goes away with me."

After that the game was finished and they went out on the roof garden and stood and looked up into the blue above their heads. How blue--how blue--how clear--how near and real! And how far and unreal the streets and sounds below. The two children stood and looked up and laughed at the sweetness of it.

Then Judith felt a little tired.

"I will go and lie down on the sofa," she said.

"Yes," the little girl answered. "It's time for you to go to sleep."

They went into the Closed Room and Judith lay down. As she did so, she saw that the door was standing open and remembered that

her mother was coming up to see her and her playmate.

The little girl sat down by her. She put out her pretty fine hand and touched Judith for the first time. She laid her little pointed fingers on her forehead and Judith fell asleep.

It seemed only a few minutes before she wakened again. The little girl was standing by her.

"Come," she said.

They went out together onto the roof among the flowers, but a strange--a beautiful thing had happened. The garden did not end at the parapet and the streets and houses were not below. The little garden ended in a broad green pathway--green with thick, soft grass and moss covered with trembling white and blue bell-like flowers. Trees--fresh leaved as if spring had just awakened them--shaded it and made it look smiling fair. Great white blossoms tossed on their branches and Judith felt that the scent in the air came from them. She forgot the city was below, because it was millions and millions of miles away, and this was where it was right to be. There was no mistake. This was real. All the rest was unreal--and millions and millions of miles away.

They held each other's slim-pointed hands and stepped out upon

the broad, fresh green pathway. There was no boundary or end to its beauty, and it was only another real thing that coming towards them from under the white, flowering trees was Aunt Hester.

In the basement Jane Foster was absorbed in her labours, which were things whose accustomedness provided her with pleasure. She was fond of her scrubbing, she enjoyed the washing of her dishes, she definitely entertained herself with the splash and soapy foam of her washtubs and the hearty smack and swing of her ironing. In the days when she had served at the ribbon counter in a department store, she had not found life as agreeable as she had found it since the hours which were not spent at her own private sewing machine were given to hearty domestic duties providing cleanliness, savoury meals, and comfort for Jem.

She was so busy this particular afternoon that it was inevitable that she should forget all else but the work which kept her on her knees scrubbing floors or on a chair polishing windows, and afterwards hanging before them bits of clean, spotted muslin.

She was doing this last when her attention being attracted by wheels in the street stopping before the door, she looked out to see a carriage door open and a young woman, dressed in exceptionally deep mourning garb, step onto the pavement, cross it, and ascend the

front steps.

"Who's she?" Jane exclaimed disturbedly. "Does she think the house is to let because it's shut?" A ring at the front door bell called her down from her chair. Among the duties of a caretaker is naturally included that of answering the questions of visitors. She turned down her sleeves, put on a fresh apron, and ran up-stairs to the entrance hall.

When she opened the door, the tall, young woman in black stepped inside as if there were no reason for her remaining even for a moment on the threshold.

"I am Mrs. Haldon," she said. "I suppose you are the caretaker?"

Haldon was the name of the people to whom the house belonged. Jem Foster had heard only the vaguest things of them, but Jane remembered that the name was Haldon, and remembering that they had gone away because they had had trouble, she recognized at a glance what sort of trouble it had been. Mrs. Haldon was tall and young, and to Jane Foster's mind, expressed from head to foot the perfection of all that spoke for wealth and fashion. Her garments were heavy and rich with crape, the long black veil, which she had thrown back, swept over her shoulder and hung behind her, serving to set forth, as it were, more pitifully the white wornness of her pretty face, and a sort of haunting eagerness in

her haggard eyes. She had been a smart, lovely, laughing and lovable thing, full of pleasure in the world, and now she was so stricken and devastated that she seemed set apart in an awful lonely world of her own.

She had no sooner crossed the threshold than she looked about her with a quick, smitten glance and began to tremble. Jane saw her look shudder away from the open door of the front room, where the chairs had seemed left as if set for some gathering, and the wax-white flowers had been scattered on the floor.

She fell into one of the carved hall seats and dropped her face into her hands, her elbows resting on her knees.

"Oh! No! No!" she cried. "I can't believe it. I can't believe it!"

Jane Foster's eyes filled with good-natured ready tears of sympathy.

"Won't you come up-stairs, ma'am?" she said. "Wouldn't you like to set in your own room perhaps?"

"No! No!" was the answer. "She was always there! She used to come into my bed in the morning. She used to watch me dress to go out. No! No!"

"I'll open the shutters in the library," said Jane.

"Oh! No! No! No! She would be sitting on the big sofa with her fairy story-book. She's everywhere--everywhere! How could I come! Why did I! But I couldn't keep away! I tried to stay in the mountains. But I couldn't. Something dragged me day and night. Nobody knows I am here!" She got up and looked about her again. "I have never been in here since I went out with HER," she said. "They would not let me come back. They said it would kill me. And now I have come--and everything is here--all the things we lived with--and SHE is millions and millions--and millions of miles away!"

"Who--who--was it?" Jane asked timidly in a low voice.

"It was my little girl," the poor young beauty said. "It was my little Andrea. Her portrait is in the library."

Jane began to tremble somewhat herself. "That--?" she began--and ended: "She is DEAD?"

Mrs. Haldon had dragged herself almost as if unconsciously to the stairs. She leaned against the newel post and her face dropped upon her hand.

"Oh! I don't KNOW!" she cried. "I cannot believe it. How COULD it be? She was playing in her nursery--laughing and playing--and she ran into the next room to show me a flower--and as she looked up at me--laughing, I tell you--laughing--she sank slowly down on her knees--and the flower fell out of her hand quietly--and everything went out of her face--everything was gone away from her, and there was never anything more--never!"

Jane Foster's hand had crept up to her throat. She did not know what made her cold.

"My little girl--" she began, "her name is Judith--"

"Where is she?" said Mrs. Haldon in a breathless way.

"She is up-stairs," Jane answered slowly. "She goes--into that back room--on the fourth floor--"

Mrs. Haldon turned upon her with wide eyes.

"It is locked!" she said. "They put everything away. I have the key."

"The door opens for her," said Jane. "She goes to play with a little girl--who comes to her. I think she comes over the roof from the next house."



"There is no child there!" Mrs. Haldon shuddered. But it was not with horror. There was actually a wild dawning bliss in her face.

"What is she like?"

"She is like the picture." Jane scarcely knew her own monotonous voice. The world of real things was being withdrawn from her and she was standing without its pale--alone with this woman and her wild eyes. She began to shiver because her warm blood was growing cold. "She is a child with red hair--and there is a deep dimple near her mouth. Judith told me. You must not touch her."

She heard a wild gasp--a flash of something at once anguish and rapture blazed across the haggard, young face--and with a swerving as if her slight body had been swept round by a sudden great wind, Mrs. Haldon turned and fled up the stairs.

Jane Foster followed. The great wind swept her upward too. She remembered no single intake or outlet of breath until she was upon the fourth floor.

The door of the Closed Room stood wide open and Mrs. Haldon was swept within.

Jane Foster saw her stand in the middle of the room a second, a tall, swaying figure. She whirled to look about her and flung up

her arms with an unearthly rapturous, whispered cry:

"It is all as she left it when she ran to me and fell. She has been here--to show me it is not so far!"

She sank slowly upon her knees, wild happiness in her face--wild tears pouring down it.

"She has seen her!" And she stretched forth yearning arms towards the little figure of Judith, who lay quiet upon the sofa in the corner. "Your little girl has seen her--and I dare not waken her. She is asleep."

Jane stood by the sofa--looking down. When she bent and touched the child the stillness of the room seemed to have got into her blood.

"No," she said, quivering, but with a strange simplicity. "No! not asleep! It was this way with her Aunt Hester."

THE END