

## CHAPTER XV. MORE GOSSIP

On the evening after Mrs. Myra Murray of the over-harbour section had been buried Miss Cornelia and Mary Vance came up to Ingleside. There were several things concerning which Miss Cornelia wished to unburden her soul. The funeral had to be all talked over, of course. Susan and Miss Cornelia thrashed this out between them; Anne took no part or delight in such goulish conversations. She sat a little apart and watched the autumnal flame of dahlias in the garden, and the dreaming, glamorous harbour of the September sunset. Mary Vance sat beside her, knitting meekly. Mary's heart was down in the Rainbow Valley, whence came sweet, distance-softened sounds of children's laughter, but her fingers were under Miss Cornelia's eye. She had to knit so many rounds of her stocking before she might go to the valley. Mary knit and held her tongue, but used her ears.

"I never saw a nicer looking corpse," said Miss Cornelia judicially. "Myra Murray was always a pretty woman--she was a Corey from Lowbridge and the Coreys were noted for their good looks."

"I said to the corpse as I passed it, 'poor woman. I hope you are as happy as you look.'" sighed Susan. "She had not changed much. That dress she wore was the black satin she got for her daughter's wedding fourteen years ago. Her Aunt told her then to

keep it for her funeral, but Myra laughed and said, 'I may wear it to my funeral, Aunty, but I will have a good time out of it first.' And I may say she did. Myra Murray was not a woman to attend her own funeral before she died. Many a time afterwards when I saw her enjoying herself out in company I thought to myself, 'You are a handsome woman, Myra Murray, and that dress becomes you, but it will likely be your shroud at last.' And you see my words have come true, Mrs. Marshall Elliott."

Susan sighed again heavily. She was enjoying herself hugely. A funeral was really a delightful subject of conversation.

"I always liked to meet Myra," said Miss Cornelia. "She was always so gay and cheerful--she made you feel better just by her handshake. Myra always made the best of things."

"That is true," asserted Susan. "Her sister-in-law told me that when the doctor told her at last that he could do nothing for her and she would never rise from that bed again, Myra said quite cheerfully, 'Well, if that is so, I'm thankful the preserving is all done, and I will not have to face the fall house-cleaning. I always liked house-cleaning in spring,' she says, 'but I always hated it in the fall. I will get clear of it this year, thank goodness.' There are people who would call that levity, Mrs. Marshall Elliott, and I think her sister-in-law was a little ashamed of it. She said perhaps her sickness had made Myra a

little light-headed. But I said, 'No, Mrs. Murray, do not worry over it. It was just Myra's way of looking at the bright side.'

"Her sister Luella was just the opposite," said Miss Cornelia. "There was no bright side for Luella--there was just black and shades of gray. For years she used always to be declaring she was going to die in a week or so. 'I won't be here to burden you long,' she would tell her family with a groan. And if any of them ventured to talk about their little future plans she'd groan also and say, 'Ah, I won't be here then.' When I went to see her I always agreed with her and it made her so mad that she was always quite a lot better for several days afterwards. She has better health now but no more cheerfulness. Myra was so different. She was always doing or saying something to make some one feel good. Perhaps the men they married had something to do with it. Luella's man was a Tartar, believe ME, while Jim Murray was decent, as men go. He looked heart-broken to-day. It isn't often I feel sorry for a man at his wife's funeral, but I did feel for Jim Murray."

"No wonder he looked sad. He will not get a wife like Myra again in a hurry," said Susan. "Maybe he will not try, since his children are all grown up and Mirabel is able to keep house. But there is no predicting what a widower may or may not do and I, for one, will not try."

"We'll miss Myra terrible in church," said Miss Cornelia. "She was such a worker. Nothing ever stumped HER. If she couldn't get over a difficulty she'd get around it, and if she couldn't get around it she'd pretend it wasn't there--and generally it wasn't. 'I'll keep a stiff upper lip to my journey's end,' said she to me once. Well, she has ended her journey."

"Do you think so?" asked Anne suddenly, coming back from dreamland. "I can't picture HER journey as being ended. Can YOU think of her sitting down and folding her hands--that eager, asking spirit of hers, with its fine adventurous outlook? No, I think in death she just opened a gate and went through--on--on--to new, shining adventures."

"Maybe--maybe," assented Miss Cornelia. "Do you know, Anne dearie, I never was much taken with this everlasting rest doctrine myself--though I hope it isn't heresy to say so. I want to bustle round in heaven the same as here. And I hope there'll be a celestial substitute for pies and doughnuts--something that has to be MADE. Of course, one does get awful tired at times--and the older you are the tireder you get. But the very tiredest could get rested in something short of eternity, you'd think--except, perhaps, a lazy man."

"When I meet Myra Murray again," said Anne, "I want to see her coming towards me, brisk and laughing, just as she always did

here."

"Oh, Mrs. Dr. dear," said Susan, in a shocked tone, "you surely do not think that Myra will be laughing in the world to come?"

"Why not, Susan? Do you think we will be crying there?"

"No, no, Mrs. Dr. dear, do not misunderstand me. I do not think we shall be either crying or laughing."

"What then?"

"Well," said Susan, driven to it. "it is my opinion, Mrs. Dr. dear, that we shall just look solemn and holy."

"And do you really think, Susan," said Anne, looking solemn enough, "that either Myra Murray or I could look solemn and holy all the time--ALL the time, Susan?"

"Well," admitted Susan reluctantly, "I might go so far as to say that you both would have to smile now and again, but I can never admit that there will be laughing in heaven. The idea seems really irreverent, Mrs. Dr. dear."

"Well, to come back to earth," said Miss Cornelia, "who can we get to take Myra's class in Sunday School? Julia Clow has been

teaching it since Myra took ill, but she's going to town for the winter and we'll have to get somebody else."

"I heard that Mrs. Laurie Jamieson wanted it," said Anne. "The Jamiesons have come to church very regularly since they moved to the Glen from Lowbridge."

"New brooms!" said Miss Cornelia dubiously. "Wait till they've gone regularly for a year."

"You cannot depend on Mrs. Jamieson a bit, Mrs. Dr. dear," said Susan solemnly. "She died once and when they were measuring her for her coffin, after laying her out just beautiful, did she not go and come back to life! Now, Mrs. Dr. dear, you know you CANNOT depend on a woman like that."

"She might turn Methodist at any moment," said Miss Cornelia. "They tell me they went to the Methodist Church at Lowbridge quite as often as to the Presbyterian. I haven't caught them at it here yet, but I would not approve of taking Mrs. Jamieson into the Sunday School. Yet we must not offend them. We are losing too many people, by death or bad temper. Mrs. Alec Davis has left the church, no one knows why. She told the managers that she would never pay another cent to Mr. Meredith's salary. Of course, most people say that the children offended her, but somehow I don't think so. I tried to pump Faith, but all I could

get out of her was that Mrs. Davis had come, seemingly in high good humour, to see her father, and had left in an awful rage, calling them all 'varmints!'"

"Varmints, indeed!" said Susan furiously. "Does Mrs. Alec Davis forget that her uncle on her mother's side was suspected of poisoning his wife? Not that it was ever proved, Mrs. Dr. dear, and it does not do to believe all you hear. But if I had an uncle whose wife died without any satisfactory reason, I would not go about the country calling innocent children varmints."

"The point is," said Miss Cornelia, "that Mrs. Davis paid a large subscription, and how its loss is going to be made up is a problem. And if she turns the other Douglasses against Mr. Meredith, as she will certainly try to do, he will just have to go."

"I do not think Mrs. Alec Davis is very well liked by the rest of the clan," said Susan. "It is not likely she will be able to influence them."

"But those Douglasses all hang together so. If you touch one, you touch all. We can't do without them, so much is certain. They pay half the salary. They are not mean, whatever else may be said of them. Norman Douglas used to give a hundred a year long ago before he left."

"What did he leave for?" asked Anne.

"He declared a member of the session cheated him in a cow deal. He hasn't come to church for twenty years. His wife used to come regular while she was alive, poor thing, but he never would let her pay anything, except one red cent every Sunday. She felt dreadfully humiliated. I don't know that he was any too good a husband to her, though she was never heard to complain. But she always had a cowed look. Norman Douglas didn't get the woman he wanted thirty years ago and the Douglasses never liked to put up with second best."

"Who was the woman he did want."

"Ellen West. They weren't engaged exactly, I believe, but they went about together for two years. And then they just broke off--nobody ever know why. Just some silly quarrel, I suppose. And Norman went and married Hester Reese before his temper had time to cool--married her just to spite Ellen, I haven't a doubt. So like a man! Hester was a nice little thing, but she never had much spirit and he broke what little she had. She was too meek for Norman. He needed a woman who could stand up to him. Ellen would have kept him in fine order and he would have liked her all the better for it. He despised Hester, that is the truth, just because she always gave in to him. I used to hear him say many a



time, long ago when he was a young fellow 'Give me a spunky woman--spunk for me every time.' And then he went and married a girl who couldn't say boo to a goose--man-like. That family of Reeses were just vegetables. They went through the motions of living, but they didn't LIVE."

"Russell Reese used his first wife's wedding-ring to marry his second," said Susan reminiscently. "That was TOO economical in my opinion, Mrs. Dr. dear. And his brother John has his own tombstone put up in the over-harbour graveyard, with everything on it but the date of death, and he goes and looks at it every Sunday. Most folks would not consider that much fun, but it is plain he does. People do have such different ideas of enjoyment. As for Norman Douglas, he is a perfect heathen. When the last minister asked him why he never went to church he said "Too many ugly women there, parson--too many ugly women!" I should like to go to such a man, Mrs. Dr. dear, and say to him solemnly, 'There is a hell!'"

"Oh, Norman doesn't believe there is such a place," said Miss Cornelia. "I hope he'll find out his mistake when he comes to die. There, Mary, you've knit your three inches and you can go and play with the children for half an hour."

Mary needed no second bidding. She flew to Rainbow Valley with a heart as light as her heels, and in the course of conversation

told Faith Meredith all about Mrs. Alec Davis.

"And Mrs. Elliott says that she'll turn all the Douglasses against your father and then he'll have to leave the Glen because his salary won't be paid," concluded Mary. "I don't know what is to be done, honest to goodness. If only old Norman Douglas would come back to church and pay, it wouldn't be so bad. But he won't--and the Douglasses will leave--and you all will have to go."

Faith carried a heavy heart to bed with her that night. The thought of leaving the Glen was unbearable. Nowhere else in the world were there such chums as the Blythes. Her little heart had been wrung when they had left Maywater--she had shed many bitter tears when she parted with Maywater chums and the old manse there where her mother had lived and died. She could not contemplate calmly the thought of such another and harder wrench. She COULDN'T leave Glen St. Mary and dear Rainbow Valley and that delicious graveyard.

"It's awful to be minister's family," groaned Faith into her pillow. "Just as soon as you get fond of a place you are torn up by the roots. I'll never, never, NEVER marry a minister, no matter how nice he is."

Faith sat up in bed and looked out of the little vine-hung

window. The night was very still, the silence broken only by Una's soft breathing. Faith felt terribly alone in the world. She could see Glen St. Mary lying under the starry blue meadows of the autumn night. Over the valley a light shone from the girls' room at Ingleside, and another from Walter's room. Faith wondered if poor Walter had toothache again. Then she sighed, with a little passing sigh of envy of Nan and Di. They had a mother and a settled home--THEY were not at the mercy of people who got angry without any reason and called you a varmint. Away beyond the Glen, amid fields that were very quiet with sleep, another light was burning. Faith knew it shone in the house where Norman Douglas lived. He was reputed to sit up all hours of the night reading. Mary had said if he could only be induced to return to the church all would be well. And why not? Faith looked at a big, low star hanging over the tall, pointed spruce at the gate of the Methodist Church and had an inspiration. She knew what ought to be done and she, Faith Meredith, would do it. She would make everything right. With a sigh of satisfaction, she turned from the lonely, dark world and cuddled down beside Una.