

CHAPTER XIX. POOR ADAM!

When Una got home Faith was lying face downwards on her bed, utterly refusing to be comforted. Aunt Martha had killed Adam. He was reposing on a platter in the pantry that very minute, trussed and dressed, encircled by his liver and heart and gizzard. Aunt Martha heeded Faith's passion of grief and anger not a whit.

"We had to have something for the strange minister's dinner," she said. "You're too big a girl to make such a fuss over an old rooster. You knew he'd have to be killed sometime."

"I'll tell father when he comes home what you've done," sobbed Faith.

"Don't you go bothering your poor father. He has troubles enough. And I'M housekeeper here."

"Adam was MINE--Mrs. Johnson gave him to me. You had no business to touch him," stormed Faith.

"Don't you get sassy now. The rooster's killed and there's an end of it. I ain't going to set no strange minister down to a dinner of cold b'iled mutton. I was brought up to know better than that, if I have come down in the world."

Faith would not go down to supper that night and she would not go to church the next morning. But at dinner time she went to the table, her eyes swollen with crying, her face sullen.

The Rev. James Perry was a sleek, rubicund man, with a bristling white moustache, bushy white eyebrows, and a shining bald head. He was certainly not handsome and he was a very tiresome, pompous sort of person. But if he had looked like the Archangel Michael and talked with the tongues of men and angels Faith would still have utterly detested him. He carved Adam up dexterously, showing off his plump white hands and very handsome diamond ring. Also, he made jovial remarks all through the performance. Jerry and Carl giggled, and even Una smiled wanly, because she thought politeness demanded it. But Faith only scowled darkly. The Rev. James thought her manners shockingly bad. Once, when he was delivering himself of an unctuous remark to Jerry, Faith broke in rudely with a flat contradiction. The Rev. James drew his bushy eyebrows together at her.

"Little girls should not interrupt," he said, "and they should not contradict people who know far more than they do."

This put Faith in a worse temper than ever. To be called "little girl" as if she were no bigger than chubby Rilla Blythe over at Ingleside! It was insufferable. And how that abominable Mr.

Perry did eat! He even picked poor Adam's bones. Neither Faith nor Una would touch a mouthful, and looked upon the boys as little better than cannibals. Faith felt that if that awful repast did not soon come to an end she would wind it up by throwing something at Mr. Perry's gleaming head. Fortunately, Mr. Perry found Aunt Martha's leathery apple pie too much even for his powers of mastication and the meal came to an end, after a long grace in which Mr. Perry offered up devout thanks for the food which a kind and beneficent Providence had provided for sustenance and temperate pleasure.

"God hadn't a single thing to do with providing Adam for you," muttered Faith rebelliously under her breath.

The boys gladly made their escape to outdoors, Una went to help Aunt Martha with the dishes--though that rather grumpy old dame never welcomed her timid assistance--and Faith betook herself to the study where a cheerful wood fire was burning in the grate. She thought she would thereby escape from the hated Mr. Perry, who had announced his intention of taking a nap in his room during the afternoon. But scarcely had Faith settled herself in a corner, with a book, when he walked in and, standing before the fire, proceeded to survey the disorderly study with an air of disapproval.

"Your father's books seem to be in somewhat deplorable confusion,

my little girl," he said severely.

Faith darkled in her corner and said not a word. She would NOT talk to this--this creature.

"You should try to put them in order," Mr. Perry went on, playing with his handsome watch chain and smiling patronizingly on Faith.

"You are quite old enough to attend to such duties. MY little daughter at home is only ten and she is already an excellent little housekeeper and the greatest help and comfort to her mother. She is a very sweet child. I wish you had the privilege of her acquaintance. She could help you in many ways. Of course, you have not had the inestimable privilege of a good mother's care and training. A sad lack--a very sad lack. I have spoken more than once to your father in this connection and pointed out his duty to him faithfully, but so far with no effect. I trust he may awaken to a realization of his responsibility before it is too late. In the meantime, it is your duty and privilege to endeavour to take your sainted mother's place. You might exercise a great influence over your brothers and your little sister--you might be a true mother to them. I fear that you do not think of these things as you should. My dear child, allow me to open your eyes in regard to them."

Mr. Perry's oily, complacent voice trickled on. He was in his

element. Nothing suited him better than to lay down the law, patronize and exhort. He had no idea of stopping, and he did not stop. He stood before the fire, his feet planted firmly on the rug, and poured out a flood of pompous platitudes. Faith heard not a word. She was really not listening to him at all. But she was watching his long black coat-tails with impish delight growing in her brown eyes. Mr. Perry was standing VERY near the fire. His coat-tails began to scorch--his coat-tails began to smoke. He still prosed on, wrapped up in his own eloquence. The coat-tails smoked worse. A tiny spark flew up from the burning wood and alighted in the middle of one. It clung and caught and spread into a smouldering flame. Faith could restrain herself no longer and broke into a stifled giggle.

Mr. Perry stopped short, angered over this impertinence. Suddenly he became conscious that a reek of burning cloth filled the room. He whirled round and saw nothing. Then he clapped his hands to his coat-tails and brought them around in front of him. There was already quite a hole in one of them--and this was his new suit. Faith shook with helpless laughter over his pose and expression.

"Did you see my coat-tails burning?" he demanded angrily.

"Yes, sir," said Faith demurely.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he demanded, glaring at her.

"You said it wasn't good manners to interrupt, sir," said Faith, more demurely still.

"If--if I was your father, I would give you a spanking that you would remember all your life, Miss," said a very angry reverend gentleman, as he stalked out of the study. The coat of Mr. Meredith's second best suit would not fit Mr. Perry, so he had to go to the evening service with his singed coat-tail. But he did not walk up the aisle with his usual consciousness of the honour he was conferring on the building. He never would agree to an exchange of pulpits with Mr. Meredith again, and he was barely civil to the latter when they met for a few minutes at the station the next morning. But Faith felt a certain gloomy satisfaction. Adam was partially avenged.