

X. THE SON OF HIS MOTHER

Thyra Carewe was waiting for Chester to come home. She sat by the west window of the kitchen, looking out into the gathering of the shadows with the expectant immovability that characterized her. She never twitched or fidgeted. Into whatever she did she put the whole force of her nature. If it was sitting still, she sat still.

"A stone image would be twitchedly beside Thyra," said Mrs. Cynthia White, her neighbor across the lane. "It gets on my nerves, the way she sits at that window sometimes, with no more motion than a statue and her great eyes burning down the lane. When I read the commandment, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me,' I declare I always think of Thyra. She worships that son of hers far ahead of her Creator. She'll be punished for it yet."

Mrs. White was watching Thyra now, knitting furiously, as she watched, in order to lose no time. Thyra's hands were folded idly in her lap. She had not moved a muscle since she sat down. Mrs. White complained it gave her the weeps.

"It doesn't seem natural to see a woman sit so still," she said.

"Sometimes the thought comes to me, 'what if she's had a stroke, like her old Uncle Horatio, and is sitting there stone dead!' "

The evening was cold and autumnal. There was a fiery red spot out at sea, where the sun had set, and, above it, over a chill, clear, saffron sky, were reefs of purple-black clouds. The river, below the Carewe homestead, was livid. Beyond it, the sea was dark and brooding. It was an evening to make most people shiver and forebode an early winter; but Thyra loved it, as she loved all stern, harshly beautiful things. She would not light a lamp because it would blot out the savage grandeur of sea and sky. It was better to wait in the darkness until Chester came home.

He was late to-night. She thought he had been detained over-time at the harbor, but she was not anxious. He would come straight home to her as soon as his business was completed--of that she felt sure. Her thoughts went out along the bleak harbor road to meet him. She could see him plainly, coming with his free stride through the sandy hollows and over the windy hills, in the harsh, cold light of that forbidding sunset, strong and handsome in his comely youth, with her own deeply cleft chin and his father's dark gray, straightforward eyes. No other woman in Avonlea had a son like hers--her only one. In his brief absences she yearned after him with a maternal passion that had in it something of physical pain, so intense was it. She thought of Cynthia White, knitting across the road, with contemptuous pity. That woman had no son--nothing but pale-faced girls. Thyra had never wanted a

daughter, but she pitied and despised all sonless women.

Chester's dog whined suddenly and piercingly on the doorstep outside. He was tired of the cold stone and wanted his warm corner behind the stove. Thyra smiled grimly when she heard him. She had no intention of letting him in. She said she had always disliked dogs, but the truth, although she would not glance at it, was that she hated the animal because Chester loved him. She could not share his love with even a dumb brute. She loved no living creature in the world but her son, and fiercely demanded a like concentrated affection from him. Hence it pleased her to hear his dog whine.

It was now quite dark; the stars had begun to shine out over the shorn harvest fields, and Chester had not come. Across the lane Cynthia White had pulled down her blind, in despair of out-watching Thyra, and had lighted a lamp. Lively shadows of little girl-shapes passed and repassed on the pale oblong of light. They made Thyra conscious of her exceeding loneliness. She had just decided that she would walk down the lane and wait for Chester on the bridge, when a thunderous knock came at the east kitchen door.

She recognized August Vorst's knock and lighted a lamp in no great haste, for she did not like him. He was a gossip and Thyra hated gossip, in man or woman. But August was privileged.

She carried the lamp in her hand, when she went to the door, and its upward-striking light gave her face a ghastly appearance.

She did not mean to ask August in, but he pushed past her cheerfully, not waiting to be invited. He was a midget of a man, lame of foot and hunched of back, with a white, boyish face, despite his middle age and deep-set, malicious black eyes.

He pulled a crumpled newspaper from his pocket and handed it to Thyra. He was the unofficial mail-carrier of Avonlea. Most of the people gave him a trifle for bringing their letters and papers from the office. He earned small sums in various other ways, and so contrived to keep the life in his stunted body.

There was always venom in August's gossip. It was said that he made more mischief in Avonlea in a day than was made otherwise in a year, but people tolerated him by reason of his infirmity. To be sure, it was the tolerance they gave to inferior creatures, and August felt this. Perhaps it accounted for a good deal of his malignity. He hated most those who were kindest to him, and, of these, Thyra Carewe above all. He hated Chester, too, as he hated strong, shapely creatures. His time had come at last to wound them both, and his exultation shone through his crooked body and pinched features like an illuminating lamp. Thyra perceived it and vaguely felt something antagonistic in it. She pointed to the rocking-chair, as she might have pointed out a mat to a dog.

August crawled into it and smiled. He was going to make her writhe presently, this woman who looked down upon him as some venomous creeping thing she disdained to crush with her foot.

"Did you see anything of Chester on the road?" asked Thyra, giving August the very opening he desired. "He went to the harbor after tea to see Joe Raymond about the loan of his boat, but it's the time he should be back. I can't think what keeps the boy."

"Just what keeps most men--leaving out creatures like me--at some time or other in their lives. A girl--a pretty girl, Thyra. It pleases me to look at her. Even a hunchback can use his eyes, eh? Oh, she's a rare one!"

"What is the man talking about?" said Thyra wonderingly.

"Damaris Garland, to be sure. Chester's down at Tom Blair's now, talking to her--and looking more than his tongue says, too, of that you may be sure. Well, well, we were all young once, Thyra--all young once, even crooked little August Vorst. Eh, now?"

"What do you mean?" said Thyra.

She had sat down in a chair before him, with her hands folded in her lap. Her face, always pale, had not changed; but her lips were curiously white. August Vorst saw this and it pleased him. Also, her eyes were worth looking at, if you liked to hurt people--and that was the only pleasure August took in life. He would drink this delightful cup of revenge for her long years of disdainful kindness--ah, he would drink it slowly to prolong its sweetness. Sip by sip--he rubbed his long, thin, white hands together--sip by sip, tasting each mouthful.

"Eh, now? You know well enough, Thyra."

"I know nothing of what you would be at, August Vorst. You speak of my son and Damaris--was that the name?--Damaris Garland as if they were something to each other. I ask you what you mean by it?"

"Tut, tut, Thyra, nothing very terrible. There's no need to look like that about it. Young men will be young men to the end of time, and there's no harm in Chester's liking to look at a lass, eh, now? Or in talking to her either? The little baggage, with the red lips of her! She and Chester will make a pretty pair. He's not so ill-looking for a man, Thyra."

"I am not a very patient woman, August," said Thyra coldly. "I have asked you what you mean, and I want a straight answer. Is

Chester down at Tom Blair's while I have been sitting here, alone, waiting for him?"

August nodded. He saw that it would not be wise to trifle longer with Thyra.

"That he is. I was there before I came here. He and Damaris were sitting in a corner by themselves, and very well-satisfied they seemed to be with each other. Tut, tut, Thyra, don't take the news so. I thought you knew. It's no secret that Chester has been going after Damaris ever since she came here. But what then? You can't tie him to your apron strings forever, woman. He'll be finding a mate for himself, as he should. Seeing that he's straight and well-shaped, no doubt Damaris will look with favor on him. Old Martha Blair declares the girl loves him better than her eyes."

Thyra made a sound like a strangled moan in the middle of August's speech. She heard the rest of it immovably. When it came to an end she stood and looked down upon him in a way that silenced him.

"You've told the news you came to tell, and gloated over it, and now get you gone," she said slowly.

"Now, Thyra," he began, but she interrupted him threateningly.

"Get you gone, I say! And you need not bring my mail here any longer. I want no more of your misshapen body and lying tongue!"

August went, but at the door he turned for a parting stab.

"My tongue is not a lying one, Mrs. Carewe. I've told you the truth, as all Avonlea knows it. Chester is mad about Damaris Garland. It's no wonder I thought you knew what all the settlement can see. But you're such a jealous, odd body, I suppose the boy hid it from you for fear you'd go into a tantrum. As for me, I'll not forget that you've turned me from your door because I chanced to bring you news you'd no fancy for."

Thyra did not answer him. When the door closed behind him she locked it and blew out the light. Then she threw herself face downward on the sofa and burst into wild tears. Her very soul ached. She wept as tempestuously and unreasoningly as youth weeps, although she was not young. It seemed as if she was afraid to stop weeping lest she should go mad thinking. But, after a time, tears failed her, and she began bitterly to go over, word by word, what August Vorst had said.

That her son should ever cast eyes of love on any girl was something Thyra had never thought about. She would not believe

it possible that he should love any one but herself, who loved him so much. And now the possibility invaded her mind as subtly and coldly and remorselessly as a sea-fog stealing landward.

Chester had been born to her at an age when most women are letting their children slip from them into the world, with some natural tears and heartaches, but content to let them go, after enjoying their sweetest years. Thyra's late-come motherhood was all the more intense and passionate because of its very lateness. She had been very ill when her son was born, and had lain helpless for long weeks, during which other women had tended her baby for her. She had never been able to forgive them for this.

Her husband had died before Chester was a year old. She had laid their son in his dying arms and received him back again with a last benediction. To Thyra that moment had something of a sacrament in it. It was as if the child had been doubly given to her, with a right to him solely that nothing could take away or transcend.

Marrying! She had never thought of it in connection with him. He did not come of a marrying race. His father had been sixty when he had married her, Thyra Lincoln, likewise well on in life. Few of the Lincolns or Carewes had married young, many not at all. And, to her, Chester was her baby still. He belonged solely to her.

And now another woman had dared to look upon him with eyes of love. Damaris Garland! Thyra now remembered seeing her. She was a new-comer in Avonlea, having come to live with her uncle and aunt after the death of her mother. Thyra had met her on the bridge one day a month previously. Yes, a man might think she was pretty--a low-browed girl, with a wave of reddish-gold hair, and crimson lips blossoming out against the strange, milk-whiteness of her skin. Her eyes, too--Thyra recalled them--hazel in tint, deep, and laughter-brimmed.

The girl had gone past her with a smile that brought out many dimples. There was a certain insolent quality in her beauty, as if it flaunted itself somewhat too defiantly in the beholder's eye. Thyra had turned and looked after the lithe, young creature, wondering who she might be.

And to-night, while she, his mother, waited for him in darkness and loneliness, he was down at Blair's, talking to this girl! He loved her; and it was past doubt that she loved him. The thought was more bitter than death to Thyra. That she should dare! Her anger was all against the girl. She had laid a snare to get Chester and he, like a fool, was entangled in it, thinking, man-fashion, only of her great eyes and red lips. Thyra thought savagely of Damaris' beauty.

"She shall not have him," she said, with slow emphasis. "I will never give him up to any other woman, and, least of all, to her. She would leave me no place in his heart at all--me, his mother, who almost died to give him life. He belongs to me! Let her look for the son of some other woman--some woman who has many sons. She shall not have my only one!"

She got up, wrapped a shawl about her head, and went out into the darkly golden evening. The clouds had cleared away, and the moon was shining. The air was chill, with a bell-like clearness. The alders by the river rustled eerily as she walked by them and out upon the bridge. Here she paced up and down, peering with troubled eyes along the road beyond, or leaning over the rail, looking at the sparkling silver ribbon of moonlight that garlanded the waters. Late travelers passed her, and wondered at her presence and mien. Carl White saw her, and told his wife about her when he got home.

"Striding to and fro over the bridge like mad! At first I thought it was old, crazy May Blair. What do you suppose she was doing down there at this hour of the night?"

"Watching for Ches, no doubt," said Cynthia. "He ain't home yet. Likely he's snug at Blairs'. I do wonder if Thyra suspicions that he goes after Damaris. I've never dared to hint it to her. She'd be as liable to fly at me, tooth and claw, as not."

"Well, she picks out a precious queer night for moon-gazing," said Carl, who was a jolly soul and took life as he found it.

"It's bitter cold--there'll be a hard frost. It's a pity she can't get it grained into her that the boy is grown up and must have his fling like the other lads. She'll go out of her mind yet, like her old grandmother Lincoln, if she doesn't ease up. I've a notion to go down to the bridge and reason a bit with her."

"Indeed, and you'll do no such thing!" cried Cynthia. "Thyra Carewe is best left alone, if she is in a tantrum. She's like no other woman in Avonlea--or out of it. I'd as soon meddle with a tiger as her, if she's rampaging about Chester. I don't envy Damaris Garland her life if she goes in there. Thyra'd sooner strangle her than not, I guess."

"You women are all terrible hard on Thyra," said Carl, good-naturedly. He had been in love with Thyra, himself, long ago, and he still liked her in a friendly fashion. He always stood up for her when the Avonlea women ran her down. He felt troubled about her all night, recalling her as she paced the bridge. He wished he had gone back, in spite of Cynthia.

When Chester came home he met his mother on the bridge. In the

faint, yet penetrating, moonlight they looked curiously alike, but Chester had the milder face. He was very handsome. Even in the seething of her pain and jealousy Thyra yearned over his beauty. She would have liked to put up her hands and caress his face, but her voice was very hard when she asked him where he had been so late.

"I called in at Tom Blair's on my way home from the harbor," he answered, trying to walk on. But she held him back by his arm.

"Did you go there to see Damaris?" she demanded fiercely.

Chester was uncomfortable. Much as he loved his mother, he felt, and always had felt, an awe of her and an impatient dislike of her dramatic ways of speaking and acting. He reflected, resentfully, that no other young man in Avonlea, who had been paying a friendly call, would be met by his mother at midnight and held up in such tragic fashion to account for himself. He tried vainly to loosen her hold upon his arm, but he understood quite well that he must give her an answer. Being strictly straight-forward by nature and upbringing, he told the truth, albeit with more anger in his tone than he had ever shown to his mother before.

"Yes," he said shortly.

Thyra released his arm, and struck her hands together with a sharp cry. There was a savage note in it. She could have slain Damaris Garland at that moment.

"Don't go on so, mother," said Chester, impatiently. "Come in out of the cold. It isn't fit for you to be here. Who has been tampering with you? What if I did go to see Damaris?"

"Oh--oh--oh!" cried Thyra. "I was waiting for you--alone--and you were thinking only of her! Chester, answer me--do you love her?"

The blood rolled rapidly over the boy's face. He muttered something and tried to pass on, but she caught him again. He forced himself to speak gently.

"What if I do, mother?" It wouldn't be such a dreadful thing, would it?"

"And me? And me?" cried Thyra. "What am I to you, then?"

"You are my mother. I wouldn't love you any the less because I cared for another, too."

"I won't have you love another," she cried. "I want all your love--all! What's that baby-face to you, compared to your

mother? I have the best right to you. I won't give you up."

Chester realized that there was no arguing with such a mood. He walked on, resolved to set the matter aside until she might be more reasonable. But Thyra would not have it so. She followed on after him, under the alders that crowded over the lane.

"Promise me that you'll not go there again," she entreated.

"Promise me that you'll give her up."

"I can't promise such a thing," he cried angrily.

His anger hurt her worse than a blow, but she did not flinch.

"You're not engaged to her?" she cried out.

"Now, mother, be quiet. All the settlement will hear you. Why do you object to Damaris? You don't know how sweet she is. When you know her--"

"I will never know her!" cried Thyra furiously. "And she shall not have you! She shall not, Chester!"

He made no answer. She suddenly broke into tears and loud sobs. Touched with remorse, he stopped and put his arms about her.

"Mother, mother, don't! I can't bear to see you cry so. But, indeed, you are unreasonable. Didn't you ever think the time would come when I would want to marry, like other men?"

"No, no! And I will not have it--I cannot bear it, Chester. You must promise not to go to see her again. I won't go into the house this night until you do. I'll stay out here in the bitter cold until you promise to put her out of your thoughts."

"That's beyond my power, mother. Oh, mother, you're making it hard for me. Come in, come in! You're shivering with cold now. You'll be sick."

"Not a step will I stir till you promise. Say you won't go to see that girl any more, and there's nothing I won't do for you. But if you put her before me, I'll not go in--I never will go in."

With most women this would have been an empty threat; but it was not so with Thyra, and Chester knew it. He knew she would keep her word. And he feared more than that. In this frenzy of hers what might she not do? She came of a strange breed, as had been said disapprovingly when Luke Carewe married her. There was a strain of insanity in the Lincolns. A Lincoln woman had drowned herself once. Chester thought of the river, and grew sick with fright. For a moment even his passion for Damaris weakened

before the older tie.

"Mother, calm yourself. Oh, surely there's no need of all this! Let us wait until to-morrow, and talk it over then. I'll hear all you have to say. Come in, dear."

Thyra loosened her arms from about him, and stepped back into a moon-lit space. Looking at him tragically, she extended her arms and spoke slowly and solemnly.

"Chester, choose between us. If you choose her, I shall go from you to-night, and you will never see me again!"

"Mother!"

"Choose!" she reiterated, fiercely.

He felt her long ascendancy. Its influence was not to be shaken off in a moment. In all his life he had never disobeyed her. Besides, with it all, he loved her more deeply and understandingly than most sons love their mothers. He realized that, since she would have it so, his choice was already made--or, rather that he had no choice.

"Have your way," he said sullenly.

She ran to him and caught him to her heart. In the reaction of her feeling she was half laughing, half crying. All was well again--all would be well; she never doubted this, for she knew he would keep his ungracious promise sacredly.

"Oh, my son, my son," she murmured, "you'd have sent me to my death if you had chosen otherwise. But now you are mine again!"

She did not heed that he was sullen--that he resented her injustice with all her own intensity. She did not heed his silence as they went into the house together. Strangely enough, she slept well and soundly that night. Not until many days had passed did she understand that, though Chester might keep his promise in the letter, it was beyond his power to keep it in the spirit. She had taken him from Damaris Garland; but she had not won him back to herself. He could never be wholly her son again. There was a barrier between them which not all her passionate love could break down. Chester was gravely kind to her, for it was not in his nature to remain sullen long, or visit his own unhappiness upon another's head; besides, he understood her exacting affection, even in its injustice, and it has been well-said that to understand is to forgive. But he avoided her, and she knew it. The flame of her anger burned bitterly towards Damaris.

"He thinks of her all the time," she moaned to herself. "He'll

come to hate me yet, I fear, because it's I who made him give her up. But I'd rather even that than share him with another woman. Oh, my son, my son!"

She knew that Damaris was suffering, too. The girl's wan face told that when she met her. But this pleased Thyra. It eased the ache in her bitter heart to know that pain was gnawing at Damaris' also.

Chester was absent from home very often now. He spent much of his spare time at the harbor, consorting with Joe Raymond and others of that ilk, who were but sorry associates for him, Avonlea people thought.

In late November he and Joe started for a trip down the coast in the latter's boat. Thyra protested against it, but Chester laughed at her alarm.

Thyra saw him go with a heart sick from fear. She hated the sea, and was afraid of it at any time; but, most of all, in this treacherous month, with its sudden, wild gales.

Chester had been fond of the sea from boyhood. She had always tried to stifle this fondness and break off his associations with the harbor fishermen, who liked to lure the high-spirited boy out with them on fishing expeditions. But her power over him was

gone now.

After Chester's departure she was restless and miserable, wandering from window to window to scan the dour, unsmiling sky. Carl White, dropping in to pay a call, was alarmed when he heard that Chester had gone with Joe, and had not tact enough to conceal his alarm from Thyra.

"T isn't safe this time of year," he said. "Folks expect no better from that reckless, harum-scarum Joe Raymond. He'll drown himself some day, there's nothing surer. This mad freak of starting off down the shore in November is just of a piece with his usual performances. But you shouldn't have let Chester go, Thyra."

"I couldn't prevent him. Say what I could, he would go. He laughed when I spoke of danger. Oh, he's changed from what he was! I know who has wrought the change, and I hate her for it!"

Carl shrugged his fat shoulders. He knew quite well that Thyra was at the bottom of the sudden coldness between Chester Carewe and Damaris Garland, about which Avonlea gossip was busying itself. He pitied Thyra, too. She had aged rapidly the past month.

"You're too hard on Chester, Thyra. He's out of leading-strings

now, or should be. You must just let me take an old friend's privilege, and tell you that you're taking the wrong way with him. You're too jealous and exacting, Thyra."

"You don't know anything about it. You have never had a son," said Thyra, cruelly enough, for she knew that Carl's sonlessness was a rankling thorn in his mind. "You don't know what it is to pour out your love on one human being, and have it flung back in your face!"

Carl could not cope with Thyra's moods. He had never understood her, even in his youth. Now he went home, still shrugging his shoulders, and thinking that it was a good thing Thyra had not looked on him with favor in the old days. Cynthia was much easier to get along with.

More than Thyra looked anxiously to sea and sky that night in Avonlea. Damaris Garland listened to the smothered roar of the Atlantic in the murky northeast with a prescience of coming disaster. Friendly longshoremen shook their heads and said that Ches and Joe would better have kept to good, dry land.

"It's sorry work joking with a November gale," said Abel Blair. He was an old man and, in his life, had seen some sad things along the shore.

Thyra could not sleep that night. When the gale came shrieking up the river, and struck the house, she got out of bed and dressed herself. The wind screamed like a ravening beast at her window. All night she wandered to and fro in the house, going from room to room, now wringing her hands with loud outcries, now praying below her breath with white lips, now listening in dumb misery to the fury of the storm.

The wind raged all the next day; but spent itself in the following night, and the second morning was calm and fair. The eastern sky was a great arc of crystal, smitten through with auroral crimsonings. Thyra, looking from her kitchen window, saw a group of men on the bridge. They were talking to Carl White, with looks and gestures directed towards the Carewe house.

She went out and down to them. None of these who saw her white, rigid face that day ever forgot the sight.

"You have news for me," she said.

They looked at each other, each man mutely imploring his neighbor to speak.

"You need not fear to tell me," said Thyra calmly. "I know what you have come to say. My son is drowned."

"We don't know THAT, Mrs. Carewe," said Abel Blair quickly. "We haven't got the worst to tell you--there's hope yet. But Joe Raymond's boat was found last night, stranded bottom up, on the Blue Point sand shore, forty miles down the coast."

"Don't look like that, Thyra," said Carl White pityingly. "They may have escaped--they may have been picked up."

Thyra looked at him with dull eyes.

"You know they have not. Not one of you has any hope. I have no son. The sea has taken him from me--my bonny baby!"

She turned and went back to her desolate home. None dared to follow her. Carl White went home and sent his wife over to her.

Cynthia found Thyra sitting in her accustomed chair. Her hands lay, palms upward, on her lap. Her eyes were dry and burning. She met Cynthia's compassionate look with a fearful smile.

"Long ago, Cynthia White," she said slowly, "you were vexed with me one day, and you told me that God would punish me yet, because I made an idol of my son, and set it up in His place. Do you remember? Your word was a true one. God saw that I loved Chester too much, and He meant to take him from me. I thwarted one way when I made him give up Damaris. But one can't fight

against the Almighty. It was decreed that I must lose him--if not in one way, then in another. He has been taken from me utterly. I shall not even have his grave to tend, Cynthia."

"As near to a mad woman as anything you ever saw, with her awful eyes," Cynthia told Carl, afterwards. But she did not say so there. Although she was a shallow, commonplace soul, she had her share of womanly sympathy, and her own life had not been free from suffering. It taught her the right thing to do now. She sat down by the stricken creature and put her arms about her, while she gathered the cold hands in her own warm clasp. The tears filled her big, blue eyes and her voice trembled as she said:

"Thyra, I'm sorry for you. I--I--lost a child once--my little first-born. And Chester was a dear, good lad."

For a moment Thyra strained her small, tense body away from Cynthia's embrace. Then she shuddered and cried out. The tears came, and she wept her agony out on the other woman's breast.

As the ill news spread, other Avonlea women kept dropping in all through the day to condole with Thyra. Many of them came in real sympathy, but some out of mere curiosity to see how she took it. Thyra knew this, but she did not resent it, as she would once have done. She listened very quietly to all the halting efforts

at consolation, and the little platitudes with which they strove to cover the nakedness of bereavement.

When darkness came Cynthia said she must go home, but would send one of her girls over for the night.

"You won't feel like staying alone," she said.

Thyra looked up steadily.

"No. But I want you to send for Damaris Garland."

"Damaris Garland!" Cynthia repeated the name as if disbelieving her own ears. There was never any knowing what whim Thyra might take, but Cynthia had not expected this.

"Yes. Tell her I want her--tell her she must come. She must hate me bitterly; but I am punished enough to satisfy even her hate. Tell her to come to me for Chester's sake."

Cynthia did as she was bid, she sent her daughter, Jeanette, for Damaris. Then she waited. No matter what duties were calling for her at home she must see the interview between Thyra and Damaris. Her curiosity would be the last thing to fail Cynthia White. She had done very well all day; but it would be asking too much of her to expect that she would consider the meeting of

these two women sacred from her eyes.

She half believed that Damaris would refuse to come. But Damaris came. Jeanette brought her in amid the fiery glow of a November sunset. Thyra stood up, and for a moment they looked at each other.

The insolence of Damaris' beauty was gone. Her eyes were dull and heavy with weeping, her lips were pale, and her face had lost its laughter and dimples. Only her hair, escaping from the shawl she had cast around it, gushed forth in warm splendor in the sunset light, and framed her wan face like the aureole of a Madonna. Thyra looked upon her with a shock of remorse. This was not the radiant creature she had met on the bridge that summer afternoon. This--this--was HER work. She held out her arms.

"Oh, Damaris, forgive me. We both loved him--that must be a bond between us for life."

Damaris came forward and threw her arms about the older woman, lifting her face. As their lips met even Cynthia White realized that she had no business there. She vented the irritation of her embarrassment on the innocent Jeanette.

"Come away," she whispered crossly. "Can't you see we're not

wanted here?"

She drew Jeanette out, leaving Thyra rocking Damaris in her arms, and crooning over her like a mother over her child.

When December had grown old Damaris was still with Thyra. It was understood that she was to remain there for the winter, at least. Thyra could not bear her to be out of her sight. They talked constantly about Chester; Thyra confessed all her anger and hatred. Damaris had forgiven her; but Thyra could never forgive herself. She was greatly changed, and had grown very gentle and tender. She even sent for August Vorst and begged him to pardon her for the way she had spoken to him.

Winter came late that year, and the season was a very open one. There was no snow on the ground and, a month after Joe Raymond's boat had been cast up on the Blue Point sand shore, Thyra, wandering about in her garden, found some pansies blooming under their tangled leaves. She was picking them for Damaris when she heard a buggy rumble over the bridge and drive up the White lane, hidden from her sight by the alders and firs. A few minutes later Carl and Cynthia came hastily across their yard under the huge balm-of-gileads. Carl's face was flushed, and his big body quivered with excitement. Cynthia ran behind him, with tears rolling down her face.

Thyra felt herself growing sick with fear. Had anything happened to Damaris? A glimpse of the girl, sewing by an upper window of the house, reassured her.

"Oh, Thyra, Thyra!" gasped Cynthia.

"Can you stand some good news, Thyra?" asked Carl, in a trembling voice. "Very, very good news!"

Thyra looked wildly from one to the other.

"There's but one thing you would dare to call good news to me," she cried. "Is it about--about--"

"Chester! Yes, it's about Chester! Thyra, he is alive--he's safe--he and Joe, both of them, thank God! Cynthia, catch her!"

"No, I am not going to faint," said Thyra, steadying herself by Cynthia's shoulder. "My son alive! How did you hear? How did it happen? Where has he been?"

"I heard it down at the harbor, Thyra. Mike McCready's vessel, the Nora Lee, was just in from the Magdalens. Ches and Joe got capsized the night of the storm, but they hung on to their boat somehow, and at daybreak they were picked up by the Nora Lee, bound for Quebec. But she was damaged by the storm and blown

clear out of her course. Had to put into the Magdalens for repairs, and has been there ever since. The cable to the islands was out of order, and no vessels call there this time of year for mails. If it hadn't been an extra open season the Nora Lee wouldn't have got away, but would have had to stay there till spring. You never saw such rejoicing as there was this morning at the harbor, when the Nora Lee came in, flying flags at the mast head."

"And Chester--where is he?" demanded Thyra.

Carl and Cynthia looked at each other.

"Well, Thyra," said the latter, "the fact is, he's over there in our yard this blessed minute. Carl brought him home from the harbor, but I wouldn't let him come over until we had prepared you for it. He's waiting for you there."

Thyra made a quick step in the direction of the gate. Then she turned, with a little of the glow dying out of her face.

"No, there's one has a better right to go to him first. I can atone to him--thank God, I can atone to him!"

She went into the house and called Damaris. As the girl came down the stairs Thyra held out her hands with a wonderful light

of joy and renunciation on her face.

"Damaris," she said, "Chester has come back to us--the sea has given him back to us. He is over at Carl White's house. Go to him, my daughter, and bring him to me!"