III. Each In His Own Tongue

The honey-tinted autumn sunshine was falling thickly over the crimson and amber maples around old Abel Blair's door. There was only one outer door in old Abel's house, and it almost always stood wide open. A little black dog, with one ear missing and a lame forepaw, almost always slept on the worn red sandstone slab which served old Abel for a doorstep; and on the still more worn sill above it a large gray cat almost always slept. Just inside the door, on a bandy-legged chair of elder days, old Abel almost always sat.

He was sitting there this afternoon--a little old man, sadly twisted with rheumatism; his head was abnormally large, thatched with long, wiry black hair; his face was heavily lined and swarthily sunburned; his eyes were deep-set and black, with occasional peculiar golden flashes in them. A strange looking man was old Abel Blair; and as strange was he as he looked. Lower Carmody people would have told you.

Old Abel was almost always sober in these, his later years. He was sober to-day. He liked to bask in that ripe sunlight as well as his dog and cat did; and in such baskings he almost always looked out of his doorway at the far, fine blue sky over the tops of the crowding maples. But to-day he was not looking at the sky, instead, he was staring at the black, dusty rafters of his kitchen, where hung dried meats and strings of onions and bunches of herbs and fishing tackle and guns and skins.

But old Abel saw not these things; his face was the face of a man who beholds visions, compact of heavenly pleasure and hellish pain, for old Abel was seeing what he might have been--and what he was; as he always saw when Felix Moore played to him on the violin. And the awful joy of dreaming that he was young again, with unspoiled life before him, was so great and compelling that it counterbalanced the agony in the realization of a dishonoured old age, following years in which he had squandered the wealth of his soul in ways where Wisdom lifted not her voice.

Felix Moore was standing opposite to him, before an untidy stove, where the noon fire had died down into pallid, scattered ashes. Under his chin he held old Abel's brown, battered fiddle; his eyes, too, were fixed on the ceiling; and he, too, saw things not lawful to be uttered in any language save that of music; and of all music, only that given forth by the anguished, enraptured spirit of the violin. And yet this Felix was little more than twelve years old, and his face was still the face of a child who knows nothing of either sorrow or sin or failure or remorse. Only in his large, gray-black eyes was there something not of the child--something that spoke of an inheritance from many hearts, now ashes, which had aforetime grieved and joyed, and struggled and failed, and succeeded and grovelled. The inarticulate cries of their longings had passed into this child's soul, and transmuted themselves into the expression of his music.

Felix was a beautiful child. Carmody people, who stayed at home, thought so; and old Abel Blair, who had roamed afar in many lands, thought so; and even the Rev. Stephen Leonard, who taught, and tried to believe, that favour is deceitful and beauty is vain, thought so.

He was a slight lad, with sloping shoulders, a slim brown neck, and a head set on it with stag-like grace and uplift. His hair, cut straight across his brow and falling over his ears, after some caprice of Janet Andrews, the minister's housekeeper, was a glossy blue-black. The skin of his face and hands was like ivory; his eyes were large and beautifully tinted--gray, with dilating pupils; his features had the outlines of a cameo. Carmody mothers considered him delicate, and had long foretold that the minister would never bring him up; but old Abel pulled his grizzled moustache when he heard such forebodings and smiled.

"Felix Moore will live," he said positively. "You can't kill that kind until their work is done. He's got a work to do--if the minister'll let him do it. And if the minister don't let him do it, then I wouldn't be in that minister's shoes when he comes to the judgment--no, I'd rather be in my own. It's an awful thing to cross the purposes of the Almighty, either in your own life or anybody else's. Sometimes I think it's what's meant by the unpardonable sin--ay, that I do!"

Carmody people never asked what old Abel meant. They had long ago given up such vain questioning. When a man had lived as old Abel had lived for the greater part of his life, was it any wonder he said crazy things?

And as for hinting that Mr. Leonard, a man who was really almost too good to live, was guilty of any sin, much less an unpardonable one--well, there now! what use was it to be taking any account of old Abel's queer speeches? Though, to be sure, there was no great harm in a fiddle, and maybe Mr. Leonard was a mite too strict that way with the child. But then, could you wonder at it? There was his father, you see.

Felix finally lowered the violin, and came back to old Abel's kitchen with a long sigh. Old Abel smiled drearily at him--the smile of a man who has been in the hands of the tormentors.

"It's awful the way you play--it's awful," he said with a shudder. "I never heard anything like it--and you that never had any teaching since you were nine years old, and not much practice, except what you could get here now and then on my old, battered fiddle. And to think you make it up yourself as you go along! I suppose your grandfather would never hear to your studying music--would he now?"

Felix shook his head.

"I know he wouldn't, Abel. He wants me to be a minister. Ministers are good things to be, but I'm afraid I can't be a minister."

"Not a pulpit minister. There's different kinds of ministers, and each must talk to men in his own tongue if he's going to do 'em any real good," said old Abel meditatively. "YOUR tongue is music. Strange that

your grandfather can't see that for himself, and him such a broad-minded man! He's the only minister I ever had much use for. He's God's own if ever a man was. And he loves you--yes, sir, he loves you like the apple of his eye."

"And I love him," said Felix warmly. "I love him so much that I'll even try to be a minister for his sake, though I don't want to be."

"What do you want to be?"

"A great violinist," answered the child, his ivory-hued face suddenly warming into living rose. "I want to play to thousands--and see their eyes look as yours do when I play. Sometimes your eyes frighten me, but oh, it's a splendid fright! If I had father's violin I could do better.
I remember that he once said it had a soul that was doing purgatory for its sins when it had lived on earth. I don't know what he meant, but it did seem to me that HIS violin was alive. He taught me to play on it as soon as I was big enough to hold it."

"Did you love your father?" asked old Abel, with a keen look.

Again Felix crimsoned; but he looked straightly and steadily into his old friend's face.

"No," he said, "I didn't; but," he added, gravely and deliberately, "I don't think you should have asked me such a question."

It was old Abel's turn to blush. Carmody people would not have believed he could blush; and perhaps no living being could have called that deepening hue into his weather-beaten cheek save only this gray-eyed child of the rebuking face.

"No, I guess I shouldn't," he said. "But I'm always making mistakes. I've never made anything else. That's why I'm nothing more than 'Old Abel' to the Carmody people. Nobody but you and your grandfather ever calls me 'Mr. Blair.' Yet William Blair at the store up there, rich and respected as he is, wasn't half as clever a man as I was when we started in life: you mayn't believe that, but it's true. And the worst of it is, young Felix, that most of the time I don't care whether I'm Mr. Blair of old Abel. Only when you play I care. It makes me feel just as a look I saw in a little girl's eyes some years ago made me feel. Her name was Anne Shirley and she lived with the Cuthberts down at Avonlea. We got into a conversation at Blair's store. She could talk a blue streak to anyone, that girl could. I happened to say about something that it didn't matter to a battered old hulk of sixty odd like me. She looked at me with her big, innocent eyes, a little reproachful like, as if I'd said something awful heretical. 'Don't you think, Mr. Blair,' she says, 'that the older we get the more things ought to matter to us?'--as grave as if she'd been a hundred instead of eleven. 'Things matter SO much to me now,' she says, clasping her hands thisaway, 'and I'm sure that when I'm sixty they'll matter just five times as much to me.' Well, the way she looked and the way she spoke made me feel downright ashamed of

myself because things had stopped mattering with me. But never mind all that. My miserable old feelings don't count for much. What come of your father's fiddle?"

"Grandfather took it away when I came here. I think he burned it. And I long for it so often."

"Well, you've always got my old brown fiddle to come to when you must."

"Yes, I know. And I'm glad for that. But I'm hungry for a violin all the time. And I only come here when the hunger gets too much to bear. I feel as if I oughtn't to come even then--I'm always saying I won't do it again, because I know grandfather wouldn't like it, if he knew."

"He has never forbidden it, has he?"

"No, but that is because he doesn't know I come here for that. He never thinks of such a thing. I feel sure he WOULD forbid it, if he knew. And that makes me very wretched. And yet I HAVE to come. Mr. Blair, do you know why grandfather can't bear to have me play on the violin? He loves music, and he doesn't mind my playing on the organ, if I don't neglect other things. I can't understand it, can you?"

"I have a pretty good idea, but I can't tell you. It isn't my secret. Maybe he'll tell you himself some day. But, mark you, young Felix, he has got good reasons for it all. Knowing what I know, I can't blame him

over much, though I think he's mistaken. Come now, play something more for me before you go--something that's bright and happy this time, so as to leave me with a good taste in my mouth. That last thing you played took me straight to heaven,--but heaven's awful near to hell, and at the last you tipped me in."

"I don't understand you," said Felix, drawing his fine, narrow black brows together in a perplexed frown.

"No--and I wouldn't want you to. You couldn't understand unless you was an old man who had it in him once to do something and be a MAN, and just went and made himself a devilish fool. But there must be something in you that understands things--all kinds of things--or you couldn't put it all into music the way you do. How do you do it? How in--how DO you do it, young Felix?"

"I don't know. But I play differently to different people. I don't know how that is. When I'm alone with you I have to play one way; and when Janet comes over here to listen I feel quite another way--not so thrilling, but happier and lonelier. And that day when Jessie Blair was here listening I felt as if I wanted to laugh and sing--as if the violin wanted to laugh and sing all the time."

The strange, golden gleam flashed through old Abel's sunken eyes.

"God," he muttered under his breath, "I believe the boy can get into

other folk's souls somehow, and play out what HIS soul sees there."

"What's that you say?" inquired Felix, petting his fiddle.

"Nothing--never mind--go on. Something lively now, young Felix. Stop probing into my soul, where you haven't no business to be, you infant, and play me something out of your own--something sweet and happy and pure."

"I'll play the way I feel on sunshiny mornings, when the birds are singing and I forget I have to be a minister," said Felix simply.

A witching, gurgling, mirthful strain, like mingled bird and brook song, floated out on the still air, along the path where the red and golden maple leaves were falling very softly, one by one. The Reverend Stephen Leonard heard it, as he came along the way, and the Reverend Stephen Leonard smiled. Now, when Stephen Leonard smiled, children ran to him, and grown people felt as if they looked from Pisgah over to some fair land of promise beyond the fret and worry of their care-dimmed earthly lives.

Mr. Leonard loved music, as he loved all things beautiful, whether in the material or the spiritual world, though he did not realize how much he loved them for their beauty alone, or he would have been shocked and

remorseful. He himself was beautiful. His figure was erect and youthful, despite seventy years. His face was as mobile and charming as a woman's, yet with all a man's tried strength and firmness in it, and his dark blue eyes flashed with the brilliance of one and twenty; even his silken silvery hair could not make an old man of him. He was worshipped by everyone who knew him, and he was, in so far as mortal man may be, worthy of that worship.

"Old Abel is amusing himself with his violin again," he thought. "What a delicious thing he is playing! He has quite a gift for the violin. But how can he play such a thing as that,--a battered old hulk of a man who has, at one time or another, wallowed in almost every sin to which human nature can sink? He was on one of his sprees three days ago--the first one for over a year--lying dead-drunk in the market square in Charlottetown among the dogs; and now he is playing something that only a young archangel on the hills of heaven ought to be able to play. Well, it will make my task all the easier. Abel is always repentant by the time he is able to play on his fiddle."

Mr. Leonard was on the door-stone. The little black dog had frisked down to meet him, and the gray cat rubbed her head against his leg. Old Abel did not notice him; he was beating time with uplifted hand and smiling face to Felix's music, and his eyes were young again, glowing with laughter and sheer happiness.

"Felix! what does this mean?"

The violin bow clattered from Felix's hand upon the floor; he swung around and faced his grandfather. As he met the passion of grief and hurt in the old man's eyes, his own clouded with an agony of repentance.

"Grandfather--I'm sorry," he cried brokenly.

"Now, now!" Old Abel had risen deprecatingly. "It's all my fault, Mr. Leonard. Don't you blame the boy. I coaxed him to play a bit for me. I didn't feel fit to touch the fiddle yet myself--too soon after Friday, you see. So I coaxed him on--wouldn't give him no peace till he played. It's all my fault."

"No," said Felix, throwing back his head. His face was as white as marble, yet it seemed ablaze with desperate truth and scorn of old Abel's shielding lie. "No, grandfather, it isn't Abel's fault. I came over here on purpose to play, because I thought you had gone to the harbour. I have come here often, ever since I have lived with you."

"Ever since you have lived with me you have been deceiving me like this, Felix?"

There was no anger in Mr. Leonard's tone--only measureless sorrow. The boy's sensitive lips quivered.

"Forgive me, grandfather," he whispered beseechingly.

"You never forbid him to come," old Abel broke in angrily. "Be just, Mr. Leonard--be just."

"I AM just. Felix knows that he has disobeyed me, in the spirit if not in the letter. Do you not know it, Felix?"

"Yes, grandfather, I have done wrong--I've known that I was doing wrong every time I came. Forgive me, grandfather."

"Felix, I forgive you, but I ask you to promise me, here and now, that you will never again, as long as you live, touch a violin." Dusky crimson rushed madly over the boy's face. He gave a cry as if he had been lashed with a whip. Old Abel sprang to his feet.

"Don't you ask such a promise of him, Mr. Leonard," he cried furiously. "It's a sin, that's what it is. Man, man, what blinds you? You ARE blind. Can't you see what is in the boy? His soul is full of music. It'll torture him to death--or to worse--if you don't let it have way."

"There is a devil in such music," said Mr. Leonard hotly.

"Ay, there may be, but don't forget that there's a Christ in it, too," retorted old Abel in a low tense tone.

Mr. Leonard looked shocked; he considered that old Abel had uttered

blasphemy. He turned away from him rebukingly.

"Felix, promise me."

There was no relenting in his face or tone. He was merciless in the use of the power he possessed over that young, loving spirit. Felix understood that there was no escape; but his lips were very white as he said,

"I promise, grandfather."

Mr. Leonard drew a long breath of relief. He knew that promise would be kept. So did old Abel. The latter crossed the floor and sullenly took the violin from Felix's relaxed hand. Without a word or look he went into the little bedroom off the kitchen and shut the door with a slam of righteous indignation. But from its window he stealthily watched his visitors go away. Just as they entered on the maple path Mr. Leonard laid his hand on Felix's head and looked down at him. Instantly the boy flung his arm up over the old man's shoulder and smiled at him. In the look they exchanged there was boundless love and trust--ay, and good-fellowship. Old Abel's scornful eyes again held the golden flash.

"How those two love each other!" he muttered enviously. "And how they torture each other!"

Mr. Leonard went to his study to pray when he got home. He knew that Felix had run for comforting to Janet Andrews, the little, thin, sweet-faced, rigid-lipped woman who kept house for them. Mr. Leonard knew that Janet would disapprove of his action as deeply as old Abel had done. She would say nothing, she would only look at him with reproachful eyes over the teacups at suppertime. But Mr. Leonard believed he had done what was best and his conscience did not trouble him, though his heart did.

Thirteen years before this, his daughter Margaret had almost broken that heart by marrying a man of whom he could not approve. Martin Moore was a professional violinist. He was a popular performer, though not in any sense a great one. He met the slim, golden-haired daughter of the manse at the house of a college friend she was visiting in Toronto, and fell straightway in love with her. Margaret had loved him with all her virginal heart in return, and married him, despite her father's disapproval. It was not to Martin Moore's profession that Mr. Leonard objected, but to the man himself. He knew that the violinist's past life had not been such as became a suitor for Margaret Leonard; and his insight into character warned him that Martin Moore could never make any woman lastingly happy.

Margaret Leonard did not believe this. She married Martin Moore and lived one year in paradise. Perhaps that atoned for the three bitter years which followed--that, and her child. At all events, she died as

she had lived, loyal and uncomplaining. She died alone, for her husband was away on a concert tour, and her illness was so brief that her father had not time to reach her before the end. Her body was taken home to be buried beside her mother in the little Carmody churchyard. Mr. Leonard wished to take the child, but Martin Moore refused to give him up.

Six years later Moore, too, died, and at last Mr. Leonard had his heart's desire--the possession of Margaret's son. The grandfather awaited the child's coming with mingled feelings. His heart yearned for him, yet he dreaded to meet a second edition of Martin Moore. Suppose Margaret's son resembled his handsome vagabond of a father! Or, worse still, suppose he were cursed with his father's lack of principle, his instability, his Bohemian instincts. Thus Mr. Leonard tortured himself wretchedly before the coming of Felix.

The child did not look like either father or mother. Instead, Mr. Leonard found himself looking into a face which he had put away under the grasses thirty years before--the face of his girl bride, who had died at Margaret's birth. Here again were her lustrous gray-black eyes, her ivory outlines, her fine-traced arch of brow; and here, looking out of those eyes, seemed her very spirit again. From that moment the soul of the old man was knit to the soul of the child, and they loved each other with a love surpassing that of women.

Felix's only inheritance from his father was his love of music. But the child had genius, where his father had possessed only talent. To

Martin Moore's outward mastery of the violin was added the mystery and intensity of his mother's nature, with some more subtle quality still, which had perhaps come to him from the grandmother he so strongly resembled. Moore had understood what a career was naturally before the child, and he had trained him in the technique of his art from the time the slight fingers could first grasp the bow. When nine-year-old Felix came to the Carmody manse, he had mastered as much of the science of the violin as nine out of ten musicians acquire in a lifetime; and he brought with him his father's violin; it was all Martin Moore had to leave his son--but it was an Amati, the commercial value of which nobody in Carmody suspected. Mr. Leonard had taken possession of it and Felix had never seen it since. He cried himself to sleep many a night for the loss of it. Mr. Leonard did not know this, and if Janet Andrews suspected it she held her tongue--an art in which she excelled. She "saw no harm in a fiddle," herself, and thought Mr. Leonard absurdly strict in the matter, though it would not have been well for the luckless outsider who might have ventured to say as much to her. She had connived at Felix's visits to old Abel Blair, squaring the matter with her Presbyterian conscience by some peculiar process known only to herself.

When Janet heard of the promise which Mr. Leonard had exacted from Felix she seethed with indignation; and, though she "knew her place" better than to say anything to Mr. Leonard about it, she made her disapproval so plainly manifest in her bearing that the stern, gentle old man found the atmosphere of his hitherto peaceful manse unpleasantly chill and hostile for a time.

It was the wish of his heart that Felix should be a minister, as he would have wished his own son to be, had one been born to him. Mr. Leonard thought rightly that the highest work to which any man could be called was a life of service to his fellows; but he made the mistake of supposing the field of service much narrower than it is--of failing to see that a man may minister to the needs of humanity in many different but equally effective ways.

Janet hoped that Mr. Leonard might not exact the fulfilment of Felix's promise; but Felix himself, with the instinctive understanding of perfect love, knew that it was vain to hope for any change of viewpoint in his grandfather. He addressed himself to the keeping of his promise in letter and in spirit. He never went again to old Abel's; he did not even play on the organ, though this was not forbidden, because any music wakened in him a passion of longing and ecstasy which demanded expression with an intensity not to be borne. He flung himself grimly into his studies and conned Latin and Greek verbs with a persistency which soon placed him at the head of all competitors.

Only once in the long winter did he come near to breaking his promise. One evening, when March was melting into April, and the pulses of spring were stirring under the lingering snow, he was walking home from school alone. As he descended into the little hollow below the manse a lively

lilt of music drifted up to meet him. It was only the product of a mouth-organ, manipulated by a little black-eyed, French-Canadian hired boy, sitting on the fence by the brook; but there was music in the ragged urchin and it came out through his simple toy. It tingled over Felix from head to foot; and, when Leon held out the mouth-organ with a fraternal grin of invitation, he snatched at it as a famished creature might snatch at food.

Then, with it half-way to his lips, he paused. True, it was only the violin he had promised never to touch; but he felt that if he gave way ever so little to the desire that was in him, it would sweep everything before it. If he played on Leon Buote's mouth-organ, there in that misty spring dale, he would go to old Abel's that evening; he KNEW he would go. To Leon's amazement, Felix threw the mouth-organ back at him and ran up the hill as if he were pursued. There was something in his boyish face that frightened Leon; and it frightened Janet Andrews as Felix rushed past her in the hall of the manse.

"Child, what's the matter with you?" she cried. "Are you sick? Have you been scared?"

"No, no. Leave me alone, Janet," said Felix chokingly, dashing up the stairs to his own room.

He was quite composed when he came down to tea, an hour later, though he was unusually pale and had purple shadows under his large eyes.

Mr. Leonard scrutinized him somewhat anxiously; it suddenly occurred to the old minister that Felix was looking more delicate than his wont this spring. Well, he had studied hard all winter, and he was certainly growing very fast. When vacation came he must be sent away for a visit.

"They tell me Naomi Clark is real sick," said Janet. "She has been ailing all winter, and now she's fast to her bed. Mrs. Murphy says she believes the woman is dying, but nobody dares tell her so. She won't give in she's sick, nor take medicine. And there's nobody to wait on her except that simple creature, Maggie Peterson."

"I wonder if I ought to go and see her," said Mr. Leonard uneasily.

"What use would it be to bother yourself? You know she wouldn't see you--she'd shut the door in your face like she did before. She's an awful wicked woman--but it's kind of terrible to think of her lying there sick, with no responsible person to tend her."

"Naomi Clark is a bad woman and she lived a life of shame, but I like her, for all that," remarked Felix, in the grave, meditative tone in which he occasionally said rather startling things.

Mr. Leonard looked somewhat reproachfully at Janet Andrews, as if to ask her why Felix should have attained to this dubious knowledge of good and evil under her care; and Janet shot a dour look back which, being

interpreted, meant that if Felix went to the district school she could not and would not be held responsible if he learned more there than arithmetic and Latin.

"What do you know of Naomi Clark to like or dislike?" she asked curiously. "Did you ever see her?"

"Oh, yes," Felix replied, addressing himself to his cherry preserve with considerable gusto. "I was down at Spruce Cove one night last summer when a big thunderstorm came up. I went to Naomi's house for shelter. The door was open, so I walked right in, because nobody answered my knock. Naomi Clark was at the window, watching the cloud coming up over the sea. She just looked at me once, but didn't say anything, and then went on watching the cloud. I didn't like to sit down because she hadn't asked me to, so I went to the window by her and watched it, too. It was a dreadful sight--the cloud was so black and the water so green, and there was such a strange light between the cloud and the water; yet there was something splendid in it, too. Part of the time I watched the storm, and the other part I watched Naomi's face. It was dreadful to see, like the storm, and yet I liked to see it.

"After the thunder was over it rained a while longer, and Naomi sat down and talked to me. She asked me who I was, and when I told her she asked me to play something for her on her violin,"--Felix shot a deprecating glance at Mr. Leonard--"because, she said, she'd heard I was a great hand at it. She wanted something lively, and I tried just as hard as I

could to play something like that. But I couldn't. I played something that was terrible--it just played itself--it seemed as if something was lost that could never be found again. And before I got through, Naomi came at me, and tore the violin from me, and--SWORE. And she said, 'You big-eyed brat, how did you know THAT?' Then she took me by the arm--and she hurt me, too, I can tell you--and she put me right out in the rain and slammed the door."

"The rude, unmannerly creature!" said Janet indignantly.

"Oh, no, she was quite in the right," said Felix composedly. "It served me right for what I played. You see, she didn't know I couldn't help playing it. I suppose she thought I did it on purpose."

"What on earth did you play, child?"

"I don't know." Felix shivered. "It was awful--it was dreadful. It was fit to break you heart. But it HAD to be played, if I played anything at all."

"I don't understand what you mean--I declare I don't," said Janet in bewilderment.

"I think we'll change the subject of conversation," said Mr. Leonard.

It was a month later when "the simple creature, Maggie" appeared at the manse door one evening and asked for the preached.

"Naomi wants ter see yer," she mumbled. "Naomi sent Maggie ter tell yer ter come at onct."

"I shall go, certainly," said Mr. Leonard gently. "Is she very ill?"

"Her's dying," said Maggie with a broad grin. "And her's awful skeered of hell. Her just knew ter-day her was dying. Maggie told her--her wouldn't believe the harbour women, but her believed Maggie. Her yelled awful."

Maggie chuckled to herself over the gruesome remembrance. Mr. Leonard, his heart filled with pity, called Janet and told her to give the poor creature some refreshment. But Maggie shook her head.

"No, no, preacher, Maggie must get right back to Naomi. Maggie'll tell her the preacher's coming ter save her from hell."

She uttered an eerie cry, and ran at full speed shoreward through the spruce woods.

"The Lord save us!" said Janet in an awed tone. "I knew the poor girl was simple, but I didn't know she was like THAT. And are you going,

sir?"

"Yes, of course. I pray God I may be able to help the poor soul," said Mr. Leonard sincerely. He was a man who never shirked what he believed to be his duty; but duty had sometimes presented itself to him in pleasanter guise than this summons to Naomi Clark's death-bed.

The woman had been the plague spot of Lower Carmody and Carmody Harbour for a generation. In the earlier days of his ministry to the congregation he had tried to reclaim her, and Naomi had mocked and flouted him to his face. Then, for the sake of those to whom she was a snare or a heart-break, he had endeavoured to set the law in motion against her, and Naomi had laughed the law to scorn. Finally, he had been compelled to let her alone.

Yet Naomi had not always been an outcast. Her girlhood had been innocent; but she was the possessor of a dangerous beauty, and her mother was dead. Her father was a man notorious for his harshness and violence of temper. When Naomi made the fatal mistake of trusting to a false love that betrayed and deserted, he drove her from his door with taunts and curses.

Naomi took up her quarters in a little deserted house at Spruce Cove. Had her child lived it might have saved her. But it died at birth, and with its little life went her last chance of worldly redemption. From that time forth, her feet were set in the way that takes hold on hell.

For the past five years, however, Naomi had lived a tolerably respectable life. When Janet Peterson had died, her idiot daughter, Maggie, had been left with no kin in the world. Nobody knew what was to be done with her, for nobody wanted to be bothered with her. Naomi Clark went to the girl and offered her a home. People said she was no fit person to have charge of Maggie, but everybody shirked the unpleasant task of interfering in the matter, except Mr. Leonard, who went to expostulate with Naomi, and, as Janet said, for his pains got her door shut in his face.

But from the day when Maggie Peterson went to live with her, Naomi ceased to be the harbour Magdalen.

The sun had set when Mr. Leonard reached Spruce Cove, and the harbour was veiling itself in a wondrous twilight splendour. Afar out, the sea lay throbbing and purple, and the moan of the bar came through the sweet, chill spring air with its burden of hopeless, endless longing and seeking. The sky was blossoming into stars above the afterglow; out to the east the moon was rising, and the sea beneath it was a thing of radiance and silver and glamour; and a little harbour boat that went sailing across it was transmuted into an elfin shallop from the coast of fairyland.

Mr. Leonard sighed as he turned from the sinless beauty of the sea and sky to the threshold of Naomi Clark's house. It was very small--one room below, and a sleeping-loft above; but a bed had been made up for the sick woman by the down-stairs window looking out on the harbour; and Naomi lay on it, with a lamp burning at her head and another at her side, although it was not yet dark. A great dread of darkness had always been one of Naomi's peculiarities.

She was tossing restlessly on her poor couch, while Maggie crouched on a box at the foot. Mr. Leonard had not seen her for five years, and he was shocked at the change in her. She was much wasted; her clear-cut, aquiline features had been of the type which becomes indescribably witch-like in old age, and, though Naomi Clark was barely sixty, she looked as if she might be a hundred. Her hair streamed over the pillow in white, uncared-for tresses, and the hands that plucked at the bed-clothes were like wrinkled claws. Only her eyes were unchanged; they were as blue and brilliant as ever, but now filled with such agonized terror and appeal that Mr. Leonard's gentle heart almost stood still with the horror of them. They were the eyes of a creature driven wild with torture, hounded by furies, clutched by unutterable fear.

Naomi sat up and dragged at his arm.

"Can you help me? Can you help me?" she gasped imploringly. "Oh, I thought you'd never come! I was skeered I'd die before you got here--die and go to hell. I didn't know before today that I was dying. None of

those cowards would tell me. Can you help me?"

"If I cannot, God can," said Mr. Leonard gently. He felt himself very helpless and inefficient before this awful terror and frenzy. He had seen sad death-beds--troubled death-beds--ay, and despairing death-beds, but never anything like this. "God!" Naomi's voice shrilled terribly as she uttered the name. "I can't go to God for help. Oh, I'm skeered of hell, but I'm skeereder still of God. I'd rather go to hell a thousand times over than face God after the life I've lived. I tell you, I'm sorry for living wicked--I was always sorry for it all the time. There ain't never been a moment I wasn't sorry, though nobody would believe it. I was driven on by fiends of hell. Oh, you don't understand--you CAN'T understand--but I was always sorry!"

"If you repent, that is all that is necessary. God will forgive you if you ask Him."

"No, He can't! Sins like mine can't be forgiven. He can't--and He won't."

"He can and He will. He is a God of love, Naomi."

"No," said Naomi with stubborn conviction. "He isn't a God of love at all. That's why I'm skeered of him. No, no. He's a God of wrath and justice and punishment. Love! There ain't no such thing as love! I've never found it on earth, and I don't believe it's to be found in God."

"Naomi, God loves us like a father."

"Like MY father?" Naomi's shrill laughter, pealing through the still room, was hideous to hear.

The old minister shuddered.

"No--no! As a kind, tender, all-wise father, Naomi--as you would have loved your little child if it had lived."

Naomi cowered and moaned.

"Oh, I wish I could believe THAT. I wouldn't be frightened if I could believe that. MAKE me believe it. Surely you can make me believe that there's love and forgiveness in God if you believe it yourself."

"Jesus Christ forgave and loved the Magdalen, Naomi."

"Jesus Christ? Oh, I ain't afraid of HIM. Yes, HE could understand and forgive. He was half human. I tell you, it's God I'm skeered of."

"They are one and the same," said Mr. Leonard helplessly. He knew he could not make Naomi realize it. This anguished death-bed was no place for a theological exposition on the mysteries of the Trinity.

"Christ died for you, Naomi. He bore your sins in His own body on the cross."

"We bear our own sins," said Naomi fiercely. "I've borne mine all my life--and I'll bear them for all eternity. I can't believe anything else. I CAN'T believe God can forgive me. I've ruined people body and soul--I've broken hearts and poisoned homes--I'm worse than a murderess. No--no--no, there's no hope for me." Her voice rose again into that shrill, intolerable shriek. "I've got to go to hell. It ain't so much the fire I'm skeered of as the outer darkness. I've always been so skeered of darkness--it's so full of awful things and thoughts. Oh, there ain't nobody to help me! Man ain't no good and I'm too skeered of God."

She wrung her hands. Mr. Leonard walked up and down the room in the keenest anguish of spirit he had ever known. What could he do? What could he say? There was healing and peace in his religion for this woman as for all others, but he could express it in no language which this tortured soul could understand. He looked at her writhing face; he looked at the idiot girl chuckling to herself at the foot of the bed; he looked through the open door to the remote, starlit night--and a horrible sense of utter helplessness overcame him. He could do nothing--nothing! In all his life he had never known such bitterness of soul as the realization brought home to him.

"What is the good of you if you can't help me?" moaned the dying woman.

"Pray--pray--pray!" she shrilled suddenly.

Mr. Leonard dropped on his knees by the bed. He did not know what to say. No prayer that he had ever prayed was of use here. The old, beautiful formulas, which had soothed and helped the passing of many a soul, were naught save idle, empty words to Naomi Clark. In his anguish of mind Stephen Leonard gasped out the briefest and sincerest prayer his lips had ever uttered.

"O, God, our Father! Help this woman. Speak to her in a tongue which she can understand."

A beautiful, white face appeared for a moment in the light that streamed out of the doorway into the darkness of the night. No one noticed it, and it quickly drew back into the shadow. Suddenly, Naomi fell back on her pillow, her lips blue, her face horribly pinched, her eyes rolled up in her head. Maggie started up, pushed Mr. Leonard aside, and proceeded to administer some remedy with surprising skill and deftness. Mr. Leonard, believing Naomi to be dying, went to the door, feeling sick and bruised in soul.

Presently a figure stole out into the light.

"Felix, is that you?" said Mr. Leonard in a startled tone.

"Yes, sir." Felix came up to the stone step. "Janet got frightened what you might fall on that rough road after dark, so she made me come after you with a lantern. I've been waiting behind the point, but at last I thought I'd better come and see if you would be staying much longer. If you will be, I'll go back to Janet and leave the lantern here with you."
"Yes, that will be the best thing to do. I may not be ready to go home for some time yet," said Mr. Leonard, thinking that the death-bed of sin behind him was no sight for Felix's young eyes.

"Is that your grandson you're talking to?" Naomi spoke clearly and strongly. The spasm had passed. "If it is, bring him in. I want to see him."

Reluctantly, Mr. Leonard signed Felix to enter. The boy stood by Naomi's bed and looked down at her with sympathetic eyes. But at first she did not look at him--she looked past him at the minister.

"I might have died in that spell," she said, with sullen reproach in her voice, "and if I had, I'd been in hell now. You can't help me--I'm done with you. There ain't any hope for me, and I know it now."

She turned to Felix.

"Take down that fiddle on the wall and play something for me," she said imperiously. "I'm dying--and I'm going to hell--and I don't want to

think of it. Play me something to take my thoughts off it--I don't care what you play. I was always fond of music--there was always something in it for me I never found anywhere else."

Felix looked at his grandfather. The old man nodded, he felt too ashamed to speak; he sat with his fine silver head in his hands, while Felix took down and tuned the old violin, on which so many godless lilts had been played in many a wild revel. Mr. Leonard felt that he had failed his religion. He could not give Naomi the help that was in it for her.

Felix drew the bow softly, perplexedly over the strings. He had no idea what he should play. Then his eyes were caught and held by Naomi's burning, mesmeric, blue gaze as she lay on her crumpled pillow. A strange, inspired look came over the boy's face. He began to play as if it were not he who played, but some mightier power, of which he was but the passive instrument.

Sweet and soft and wonderful was the music that stole through the room. Mr. Leonard forgot his heartbreak and listened to it in puzzled amazement. He had never heard anything like it before. How could the child play like that? He looked at Naomi and marvelled at the change in her face. The fear and frenzy were going out of it; she listened breathlessly, never taking her eyes from Felix. At the foot of the bed the idiot girl sat with tears on her cheeks.

In that strange music was the joy of the innocent, mirthful childhood,

blent with the laughter of waves and the call of glad winds. Then it held the wild, wayward dreams of youth, sweet and pure in all their wildness and waywardness. They were followed by a rapture of young love--all-surrendering, all-sacrificing love. The music changed. It held the torture of unshed tears, the anguish of a heart deceived and desolate. Mr. Leonard almost put his hands over his ears to shut out its intolerable poignancy. But on the dying woman's face was only a strange relief, as if some dumb, long-hidden pain had at last won to the healing of utterance.

The sullen indifference of despair came next, the bitterness of smouldering revolt and misery, the reckless casting away of all good. There was something indescribably evil in the music now--so evil that Mr. Leonard's white soul shuddered away in loathing, and Maggie cowered and whined like a frightened animal.

Again the music changed. And in it now there was agony and fear--and repentance and a cry for pardon. To Mr. Leonard there was something strangely familiar in it. He struggled to recall where he had heard it before; then he suddenly knew--he had heard it before Felix came in Naomi's terrible words! He looked at his grandson with something like awe. Here was a power of which he knew nothing--a strange and dreadful power. Was it of God? Or of Satan?

For the last time the music changed. And now it was not music at all--it was a great, infinite forgiveness, an all-comprehending love. It was

healing for a sick soul; it was light and hope and peace. A Bible text, seemingly incongruous, came into Mr. Leonard's mind--"This is the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

Felix lowered the violin and dropped wearily on a chair by the bed. The inspired light faded from his face; once more he was only a tired boy. But Stephen Leonard was on his knees, sobbing like a child; and Naomi Clark was lying still, with her hands clasped over her breast.

"I understand now," she said very softly. "I couldn't see it before--and now it's so plain. I just FEEL it. God IS a God of love. He can forgive anybody--even me--even me. He knows all about it. I ain't skeered any more. He just loves me and forgives me as I'd have loved and forgiven my baby if she'd lived, no matter how bad she was, or what she did. The minister told me that but I couldn't believe it. I KNOW it now. And He sent you here to-night, boy, to tell it to me in a way that I could feel it."

Naomi Clark died just as the dawn came up over the sea. Mr. Leonard rose from his watch at her bedside and went to the door. Before him spread the harbour, gray and austere in the faint light, but afar out the sun was rending asunder the milk-white mists in which the sea was scarfed, and under it was a virgin glow of sparkling water.

The fir trees on the point moved softly and whispered together. The whole world sang of spring and resurrection and life; and behind him Naomi Clark's dead face took on the peace that passes understanding.

The old minister and his grandson walked home together in a silence that neither wished to break. Janet Andrews gave them a good scolding and an excellent breakfast. Then she ordered them both to bed; but Mr. Leonard, smiling at her, said:

"Presently, Janet, presently. But now, take this key, go up to the black chest in the garret, and bring me what you will find there."

When Janet had gone, he turned to Felix.

"Felix, would you like to study music as your life-work?"

Felix looked up, with a transfiguring flush on his wan face.

"Oh, grandfather! Oh, grandfather!"

"You may do so, my child. After this night I dare not hinder you. Go with my blessing, and may God guide and keep you, and make you strong to do His work and tell His message to humanity in you own appointed way. It is not the way I desired for you--but I see that I was mistaken. Old Abel spoke truly when he said there was a Christ in your violin as well as a devil. I understand what he meant now."

He turned to meet Janet, who came into the study with a violin. Felix's heart throbbed; he recognized it. Mr. Leonard took it from Janet and held it out to the boy.

"This is your father's violin, Felix. See to it that you never make your music the servant of the power of evil--never debase it to unworthy ends. For your responsibility is as your gift, and God will exact the accounting of it from you. Speak to the world in your own tongue through it, with truth and sincerity; and all I have hoped for you will be abundantly fulfilled."