

CHAPTER XV

THE HOME COMING

Mrs. Pennel, too, had seen the white, dove-like cloud on the horizon, and had hurried to make biscuits, and conduct other culinary preparations which should welcome the wanderers home.

The sun was just dipping into the great blue sea--a round ball of fire--and sending long, slanting tracks of light across the top of each wave, when a boat was moored at the beach, and the minister sprang out,--not in his suit of ceremony, but attired in fisherman's garb.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Pennel," he said. "I was out fishing, and I thought I saw your husband's schooner in the distance. I thought I'd come and tell you."

"Thank you, Mr. Sewell. I thought I saw it, but I was not certain. Do come in; the Captain would be delighted to see you here."

"We miss your husband in our meetings," said Mr. Sewell; "it will be good news for us all when he comes home; he is one of those I depend on to help me preach."

"I'm sure you don't preach to anybody who enjoys it more," said Mrs.

Pennel. "He often tells me that the greatest trouble about his voyages to the Banks is that he loses so many sanctuary privileges; though he always keeps Sunday on his ship, and reads and sings his psalms; but, he says, after all, there's nothing like going to Mount Zion."

"And little Moses has gone on his first voyage?" said the minister.

"Yes, indeed; the child has been teasing to go for more than a year. Finally the Cap'n told him if he'd be faithful in the ploughing and planting, he should go. You see, he's rather unsteady, and apt to be off after other things,--very different from Mara. Whatever you give her to do, she always keeps at it till it's done."

"And pray, where is the little lady?" said the minister; "is she gone?"

"Well, Cap'n Kittridge came in this afternoon to take her down to see Sally. The Cap'n's always so fond of Mara, and she has always taken to him ever since she was a baby."

"The Captain is a curious creature," said the minister, smiling.

Mrs. Pennel smiled also; and it is to be remarked that nobody ever mentioned the poor Captain's name without the same curious smile.

"The Cap'n is a good-hearted, obliging creature," said Mrs. Pennel, "and a master-hand for telling stories to the children."

"Yes, a perfect 'Arabian Nights' Entertainment," said Mr. Sewell.

"Well, I really believe the Cap'n believes his own stories," said Mrs. Pennel; "he always seems to, and certainly a more obliging man and a kinder neighbor couldn't be. He has been in and out almost every day since I've been alone, to see if I wanted anything. He would insist on chopping wood and splitting kindlings for me, though I told him the Cap'n and Moses had left a plenty to last till they came home."

At this moment the subject of their conversation appeared striding along the beach, with a large, red lobster in one hand, while with the other he held little Mara upon his shoulder, she the while clapping her hands and singing merrily, as she saw the Brilliant out on the open blue sea, its white sails looking of a rosy purple in the evening light, careering gayly homeward.

"There is Captain Kittridge this very minute," said Mrs. Pennel, setting down a tea-cup she had been wiping, and going to the door.

"Good evening, Mis' Pennel," said the Captain. "I s'pose you see your folks are comin'. I brought down one of these 'ere ready b'iled, 'cause I thought it might make out your supper."

"Thank you, Captain; you must stay and take some with us."

"Wal', me and the children have pooty much done our supper," said the Captain. "We made a real fust-rate chowder down there to the cove; but I'll jist stay and see what the Cap'n's luck is. Massy!" he added, as he looked in at the door, "if you hain't got the minister there! Wal', now, I come jist as I be," he added, with a glance down at his clothes.

"Never mind, Captain," said Mr. Sewell; "I'm in my fishing-clothes, so we're even."

As to little Mara, she had run down to the beach, and stood so near the sea, that every dash of the tide-wave forced her little feet to tread an inch backward, stretching out her hands eagerly toward the schooner, which was standing straight toward the small wharf, not far from their door. Already she could see on deck figures moving about, and her sharp little eyes made out a small personage in a red shirt that was among the most active. Soon all the figures grew distinct, and she could see her grandfather's gray head, and alert, active form, and could see, by the signs he made, that he had perceived the little blowy figure that stood, with hair streaming in the wind, like some flower bent seaward.

And now they are come nearer, and Moses shouts and dances on the deck, and the Captain and Mrs. Pennel come running from the house down to the shore, and a few minutes more, and all are landed safe and sound, and little Mara is carried up to the house in her grandfather's arms, while Captain Kittridge stops to have a few moments' gossip with Ben Halliday and Tom Scranton before they go to their own resting-places.

Meanwhile Moses loses not a moment in boasting of his heroic exploits to Mara.

"Oh, Mara! you've no idea what times we've had! I can fish equal to any of 'em, and I can take in sail and tend the helm like anything, and I know all the names of everything; and you ought to have seen us catch fish! Why, they bit just as fast as we could throw; and it was just throw and bite,--throw and bite,--throw and bite; and my hands got blistered pulling in, but I didn't mind it,--I was determined no one should beat me."

"Oh! did you blister your hands?" said Mara, pitifully.

"Oh, to be sure! Now, you girls think that's a dreadful thing, but we men don't mind it. My hands are getting so hard, you've no idea. And, Mara, we caught a great shark."

"A shark!--oh, how dreadful! Isn't he dangerous?"

"Dangerous! I guess not. We served him out, I tell you. He'll never eat any more people, I tell you, the old wretch!"

"But, poor shark, it isn't his fault that he eats people. He was made so," said Mara, unconsciously touching a deep theological mystery.

"Well, I don't know but he was," said Moses; "but sharks that we catch never eat any more, I'll bet you."

"Oh, Moses, did you see any icebergs?"

"Icebergs! yes; we passed right by one,--a real grand one."

"Were there any bears on it?"

"Bears! No; we didn't see any."

"Captain Kittridge says there are white bears live on 'em."

"Oh, Captain Kittridge," said Moses, with a toss of superb contempt; "if you're going to believe all he says, you've got your hands full."

"Why, Moses, you don't think he tells lies?" said Mara, the tears actually starting in her eyes. "I think he is real good, and tells nothing but the truth."

"Well, well, you are young yet," said Moses, turning away with an air of easy grandeur, "and only a girl besides," he added.

Mara was nettled at this speech. First, it pained her to have her child's faith shaken in anything, and particularly in her good old friend, the Captain; and next, she felt, with more force than ever she

did before, the continual disparaging tone in which Moses spoke of her girlhood.

"I'm sure," she said to herself, "he oughtn't to feel so about girls and women. There was Deborah was a prophetess, and judged Israel; and there was Egeria,--she taught Numa Pompilius all his wisdom."

But it was not the little maiden's way to speak when anything thwarted or hurt her, but rather to fold all her feelings and thoughts inward, as some insects, with fine gauzy wings, draw them under a coat of horny concealment. Somehow, there was a shivering sense of disappointment in all this meeting with Moses. She had dwelt upon it, and fancied so much, and had so many things to say to him; and he had come home so self-absorbed and glorious, and seemed to have had so little need of or thought for her, that she felt a cold, sad sinking at her heart; and walking away very still and white, sat down demurely by her grandfather's knee.

"Well, so my little girl is glad grandfather's come," he said, lifting her fondly in his arms, and putting her golden head under his coat, as he had been wont to do from infancy; "grandpa thought a great deal about his little Mara."

The small heart swelled against his. Kind, faithful old grandpa! how much more he thought about her than Moses; and yet she had thought so much of Moses. And there he sat, this same ungrateful Moses, bright-eyed

and rosy-cheeked, full of talk and gayety, full of energy and vigor, as ignorant as possible of the wound he had given to the little loving heart that was silently brooding under her grandfather's butternut-colored sea-coat. Not only was he ignorant, but he had not even those conditions within himself which made knowledge possible. All that there was developed of him, at present, was a fund of energy, self-esteem, hope, courage, and daring, the love of action, life, and adventure; his life was in the outward and present, not in the inward and reflective; he was a true ten-year old boy, in its healthiest and most animal perfection. What she was, the small pearl with the golden hair, with her frail and high-strung organization, her sensitive nerves, her half-spiritual fibres, her ponderings, and marvels, and dreams, her power of love, and yearning for self-devotion, our readers may, perhaps, have seen. But if ever two children, or two grown people, thus organized, are thrown into intimate relations, it follows, from the very laws of their being, that one must hurt the other, simply by being itself; one must always hunger for what the other has not to give.

It was a merry meal, however, when they all sat down to the tea-table once more, and Mara by her grandfather's side, who often stopped what he was saying to stroke her head fondly. Moses bore a more prominent part in the conversation than he had been wont to do before this voyage, and all seemed to listen to him with a kind of indulgence elders often accord to a handsome, manly boy, in the first flush of some successful enterprise. That ignorant confidence in one's self and one's future, which comes in life's first dawn, has a sort of mournful charm in

experienced eyes, who know how much it all amounts to.

Gradually, little Mara quieted herself with listening to and admiring him. It is not comfortable to have any heart-quarrel with one's cherished idol, and everything of the feminine nature, therefore, can speedily find fifty good reasons for seeing one's self in the wrong and one's graven image in the right; and little Mara soon had said to herself, without words, that, of course, Moses couldn't be expected to think as much of her as she of him. He was handsomer, cleverer, and had a thousand other things to do and to think of--he was a boy, in short, and going to be a glorious man and sail all over the world, while she could only hem handkerchiefs and knit stockings, and sit at home and wait for him to come back. This was about the résumé of life as it appeared to the little one, who went on from the moment worshiping her image with more undivided idolatry than ever, hoping that by and by he would think more of her.

Mr. Sewell appeared to study Moses carefully and thoughtfully, and encouraged the wild, gleeful frankness which he had brought home from his first voyage, as a knowing jockey tries the paces of a high-mettled colt.

"Did you get any time to read?" he interposed once, when the boy stopped in his account of their adventures.

"No, sir," said Moses; "at least," he added, blushing very deeply, "I

didn't feel like reading. I had so much to do, and there was so much to see."

"It's all new to him now," said Captain Pennel; "but when he comes to being, as I've been, day after day, with nothing but sea and sky, he'll be glad of a book, just to break the sameness."

"Laws, yes," said Captain Kittridge; "sailor's life ain't all apple-pie, as it seems when a boy first goes on a summer trip with his daddy--not by no manner o' means."

"But," said Mara, blushing and looking very eagerly at Mr. Sewell, "Moses has read a great deal. He read the Roman and the Grecian history through before he went away, and knows all about them."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Sewell, turning with an amused look towards the tiny little champion; "do you read them, too, my little maid?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mara, her eyes kindling; "I have read them a great deal since Moses went away--them and the Bible."

Mara did not dare to name her new-found treasure--there was something so mysterious about that, that she could not venture to produce it, except on the score of extreme intimacy.

"Come, sit by me, little Mara," said the minister, putting out his hand;

"you and I must be friends, I see."

Mr. Sewell had a certain something of mesmeric power in his eyes which children seldom resisted; and with a shrinking movement, as if both attracted and repelled, the little girl got upon his knee.

"So you like the Bible and Roman history?" he said to her, making a little aside for her, while a brisk conversation was going on between Captain Kittridge and Captain Pennel on the fishing bounty for the year.

"Yes, sir," said Mara, blushing in a very guilty way.

"And which do you like the best?"

"I don't know, sir; I sometimes think it is the one, and sometimes the other."

"Well, what pleases you in the Roman history?"

"Oh, I like that about Quintus Curtius."

"Quintus Curtius?" said Mr. Sewell, pretending not to remember.

"Oh, don't you remember him? why, there was a great gulf opened in the Forum, and the Augurs said that the country would not be saved unless some one would offer himself up for it, and so he jumped right in, all

on horseback. I think that was grand. I should like to have done that," said little Mara, her eyes blazing out with a kind of starry light which they had when she was excited.

"And how would you have liked it, if you had been a Roman girl, and Moses were Quintus Curtius? would you like to have him give himself up for the good of the country?"

"Oh, no, no!" said Mara, instinctively shuddering.

"Don't you think it would be very grand of him?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"And shouldn't we wish our friends to do what is brave and grand?"

"Yes, sir; but then," she added, "it would be so dreadful never to see him any more," and a large tear rolled from the great soft eyes and fell on the minister's hand.

"Come, come," thought Mr. Sewell, "this sort of experimenting is too bad--too much nerve here, too much solitude, too much pine-whispering and sea-dashing are going to the making up of this little piece of workmanship."

"Tell me," he said, motioning Moses to sit by him, "how you like the

Roman history."

"I like it first-rate," said Moses. "The Romans were such smashers, and beat everybody; nobody could stand against them; and I like Alexander, too--I think he was splendid."

"True boy," said Mr. Sewell to himself, "unreflecting brother of the wind and the sea, and all that is vigorous and active--no precocious development of the moral here."

"Now you have come," said Mr. Sewell, "I will lend you another book."

"Thank you, sir; I love to read them when I'm at home--it's so still here. I should be dull if I didn't."

Mara's eyes looked eagerly attentive. Mr. Sewell noticed their hungry look when a book was spoken of.

"And you must read it, too, my little girl," he said.

"Thank you, sir," said Mara; "I always want to read everything Moses does."

"What book is it?" said Moses.

"It is called Plutarch's 'Lives,'" said the minister; "it has more

particular accounts of the men you read about in history."

"Are there any lives of women?" said Mara.

"No, my dear," said Mr. Sewell; "in the old times, women did not get their lives written, though I don't doubt many of them were much better worth writing than the men's."

"I should like to be a great general," said Moses, with a toss of his head.

"The way to be great lies through books, now, and not through battles," said the minister; "there is more done with pens than swords; so, if you want to do anything, you must read and study."

"Do you think of giving this boy a liberal education?" said Mr. Sewell some time later in the evening, after Moses and Mara were gone to bed.

"Depends on the boy," said Zephaniah. "I've been up to Brunswick, and seen the fellows there in the college. With a good many of 'em, going to college seems to be just nothing but a sort of ceremony; they go because they're sent, and don't learn anything more'n they can help. That's what I call waste of time and money."

"But don't you think Moses shows some taste for reading and study?"

"Pretty well, pretty well!" said Zephaniah; "jist keep him a little hungry; not let him get all he wants, you see, and he'll bite the sharper. If I want to catch cod, I don't begin with flingin' over a barrel o' bait. So with the boys, jist bait 'em with a book here and a book there, and kind o' let 'em feel their own way, and then, if nothin' will do but a fellow must go to college, give in to him--that'd be my way."

"And a very good one, too!" said Mr. Sewell. "I'll see if I can't bait my hook, so as to make Moses take after Latin this winter. I shall have plenty of time to teach him."

"Now, there's Mara!" said the Captain, his face becoming phosphorescent with a sort of mild radiance of pleasure as it usually was when he spoke of her; "she's real sharp set after books; she's ready to fly out of her little skin at the sight of one."

"That child thinks too much, and feels too much, and knows too much for her years!" said Mr. Sewell. "If she were a boy, and you would take her away cod-fishing, as you have Moses, the sea-winds would blow away some of the thinking, and her little body would grow stout, and her mind less delicate and sensitive. But she's a woman," he said, with a sigh, "and they are all alike. We can't do much for them, but let them come up as they will and make the best of it."