

## CHAPTER XXIV

### DESIRES AND DREAMS

Moses passed rather a restless and uneasy night on his return to the home-roof which had sheltered his childhood. All his life past, and all his life expected, seemed to boil and seethe and ferment in his thoughts, and to go round and round in never-ceasing circles before him.

Moses was par excellence proud, ambitious, and willful. These words, generally supposed to describe positive vices of the mind, in fact are only the overaction of certain very valuable portions of our nature, since one can conceive all three to raise a man immensely in the scale of moral being, simply by being applied to right objects. He who is too proud even to admit a mean thought--who is ambitious only of ideal excellence--who has an inflexible will only in the pursuit of truth and righteousness--may be a saint and a hero.

But Moses was neither a saint nor a hero, but an undeveloped chaotic young man, whose pride made him sensitive and restless; whose ambition was fixed on wealth and worldly success; whose willfulness was for the most part a blind determination to compass his own points, with the leave of Providence or without. There was no God in his estimate of life--and a sort of secret unsuspected determination at the bottom of his heart that there should be none. He feared religion, from a

suspicion which he entertained that it might hamper some of his future schemes. He did not wish to put himself under its rules, lest he might find them in some future time inconveniently strict.

With such determinations and feelings, the Bible--necessarily an excessively uninteresting book to him--he never read, and satisfied himself with determining in a general way that it was not worth reading, and, as was the custom with many young men in America at that period, announced himself as a skeptic, and seemed to value himself not a little on the distinction. Pride in skepticism is a peculiar distinction of young men. It takes years and maturity to make the discovery that the power of faith is nobler than the power of doubt; and that there is a celestial wisdom in the ingenuous propensity to trust, which belongs to honest and noble natures. Elderly skeptics generally regard their unbelief as a misfortune.

Not that Moses was, after all, without "the angel in him." He had a good deal of the susceptibility to poetic feeling, the power of vague and dreamy aspiration, the longing after the good and beautiful, which is God's witness in the soul. A noble sentiment in poetry, a fine scene in nature, had power to bring tears in his great dark eyes, and he had, under the influence of such things, brief inspired moments in which he vaguely longed to do, or be, something grand or noble. But this, however, was something apart from the real purpose of his life,--a sort of voice crying in the wilderness,--to which he gave little heed.

Practically, he was determined with all his might, to have a good time

in this life, whatever another might be,--if there were one; and that he would do it by the strength of his right arm. Wealth he saw to be the lamp of Aladdin, which commanded all other things. And the pursuit of wealth was therefore the first step in his programme.

As for plans of the heart and domestic life, Moses was one of that very common class who had more desire to be loved than power of loving. His cravings and dreams were not for somebody to be devoted to, but for somebody who should be devoted to him. And, like most people who possess this characteristic, he mistook it for an affectionate disposition.

Now the chief treasure of his heart had always been his little sister Mara, chiefly from his conviction that he was the one absorbing thought and love of her heart. He had never figured life to himself otherwise than with Mara at his side, his unquestioning, devoted friend. Of course he and his plans, his ways and wants, would always be in the future, as they always had been, her sole thought. These sleeping partnerships in the interchange of affection, which support one's heart with a basis of uncounted wealth, and leave one free to come and go, and buy and sell, without exaction or interference, are a convenience certainly, and the loss of them in any way is like the sudden breaking of a bank in which all one's deposits are laid.

It had never occurred to Moses how or in what capacity he should always stand banker to the whole wealth of love that there was in Mara's heart,

and what provision he should make on his part for returning this incalculable debt. But the interview of this evening had raised a new thought in his mind. Mara, as he saw that day, was no longer a little girl in a pink sun-bonnet. She was a woman,--a little one, it is true, but every inch a woman,--and a woman invested with a singular poetic charm of appearance, which, more than beauty, has the power of awakening feeling in the other sex.

He felt in himself, in the experience of that one day, that there was something subtle and veiled about her, which set the imagination at work; that the wistful, plaintive expression of her dark eyes, and a thousand little shy and tremulous movements of her face, affected him more than the most brilliant of Sally Kittridge's sprightly sallies. Yes, there would be people falling in love with her fast enough, he thought even here, where she is as secluded as a pearl in an oyster-shell,--it seems means were found to come after her,--and then all the love of her heart, that priceless love, would go to another.

Mara would be absorbed in some one else, would love some one else, as he knew she could, with heart and soul and mind and strength. When he thought of this, it affected him much as it would if one were turned out of a warm, smiling apartment into a bleak December storm. What should he do, if that treasure which he had taken most for granted in all his valuations of life should suddenly be found to belong to another? Who was this fellow that seemed so free to visit her, and what had passed between them? Was Mara in love with him, or going to be? There is no

saying how the consideration of this question enhanced in our hero's opinion both her beauty and all her other good qualities.

Such a brave little heart! such a good, clear little head! and such a pretty hand and foot! She was always so cheerful, so unselfish, so devoted! When had he ever seen her angry, except when she had taken up some childish quarrel of his, and fought for him like a little Spartan? Then she was pious, too. She was born religious, thought our hero, who, in common with many men professing skepticism for their own particular part, set a great value on religion in that unknown future person whom they are fond of designating in advance as "my wife." Yes, Moses meant his wife should be pious, and pray for him, while he did as he pleased.

"Now there's that witch of a Sally Kittridge," he said to himself; "I wouldn't have such a girl for a wife. Nothing to her but foam and frisk,--no heart more than a bobolink! But isn't she amusing? By George! isn't she, though?"

"But," thought Moses, "it's time I settled this matter who is to be my wife. I won't marry till I'm rich,--that's flat. My wife isn't to rub and grub. So at it I must go to raise the wind. I wonder if old Sewell really does know anything about my parents. Miss Emily would have it that there was some mystery that he had the key of; but I never could get any thing from him. He always put me off in such a smooth way that I couldn't tell whether he did or he didn't. But, now, supposing I have relatives, family connections, then who knows but what there may be

property coming to me? That's an idea worth looking after, surely."

There's no saying with what vividness ideas and images go through one's wakeful brain when the midnight moon is making an exact shadow of your window-sash, with panes of light, on your chamber-floor. How vividly we all have loved and hated and planned and hoped and feared and desired and dreamed, as we tossed and turned to and fro upon such watchful, still nights. In the stillness, the tide upon one side of the Island replied to the dash on the other side in unbroken symphony, and Moses began to remember all the stories gossips had told him of how he had floated ashore there, like a fragment of tropical seaweed borne landward by a great gale. He positively wondered at himself that he had never thought of it more, and the more he meditated, the more mysterious and inexplicable he felt. Then he had heard Miss Roxy once speaking something about a bracelet, he was sure he had; but afterwards it was hushed up, and no one seemed to know anything about it when he inquired. But in those days he was a boy,--he was nobody,--now he was a young man. He could go to Mr. Sewell, and demand as his right a fair answer to any questions he might ask. If he found, as was quite likely, that there was nothing to be known, his mind would be thus far settled,--he should trust only to his own resources.

So far as the state of the young man's finances were concerned, it would be considered in those simple times and regions an auspicious beginning of life. The sum intrusted to him by Captain Kittridge had been more than doubled by the liberality of Zephaniah Pennel, and Moses

had traded upon it in foreign parts with a skill and energy that brought a very fair return, and gave him, in the eyes of the shrewd, thrifty neighbors, the prestige of a young man who was marked for success in the world.

He had already formed an advantageous arrangement with his grandfather and Captain Kittridge, by which a ship was to be built, which he should command, and thus the old Saturday afternoon dream of their childhood be fulfilled. As he thought of it, there arose in his mind a picture of Mara, with her golden hair and plaintive eyes and little white hands, reigning as a fairy queen in the captain's cabin, with a sort of wish to carry her off and make sure that no one else ever should get her from him.

But these midnight dreams were all sobered down by the plain matter-of-fact beams of the morning sun, and nothing remained of immediate definite purpose except the resolve, which came strongly upon Moses as he looked across the blue band of Harpswell Bay, that he would go that morning and have a talk with Mr. Sewell.