

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### OPEN VISION

As Miss Roxy was leaving the dwelling of the Pennels, she met Sally Kittridge coming toward the house, laughing and singing, as was her wont. She raised her long, lean forefinger with a gesture of warning.

"What's the matter now, Aunt Roxy? You look as solemn as a hearse."

"None o' your jokin' now, Miss Sally; there is such a thing as serious things in this 'ere world of our'n, for all you girls never seems to know it."

"What is the matter, Aunt Roxy?--has anything happened?--is anything the matter with Mara?"

"Matter enough. I've known it a long time," said Miss Roxy. "She's been goin' down for three months now; and she's got that on her that will carry her off before the year's out."

"Pshaw, Aunt Roxy! how lugubriously you old nurses always talk! I hope now you haven't been filling Mara's head with any such notions--people can be frightened into anything."

"Sally Kittridge, don't be a-talkin' of what you don't know nothin' about! It stands to reason that a body that was bearin' the heat and burden of the day long before you was born or thought on in this world should know a thing or two more'n you. Why, I've laid you on your stomach and trotted you to trot up the wind many a day, and I was pretty experienced then, and it ain't likely that I'm a-goin' to take sa'ce from you. Mara Pennel is a gal as has every bit and grain as much resolution and ambition as you have, for all you flap your wings and crow so much louder, and she's one of the close-mouthed sort, that don't make no talk, and she's been a-bearin' up and bearin' up, and comin' to me on the sly for strengthenin' things. She's took camomile and orange-peel, and snake-root and boneset, and dash-root and dandelion--and there hain't nothin' done her no good. She told me to-day she couldn't keep up no longer, and I've been a-tellin' Mis' Pennel and her grand'ther. I tell you it has been a solemn time; and if you're goin' in, don't go in with none o' your light triflin' ways, 'cause 'as vinegar upon nitre is he that singeth songs on a heavy heart,' the Scriptur' says."

"Oh, Miss Roxy, do tell me truly," said Sally, much moved. "What do you think is the matter with Mara? I've noticed myself that she got tired easy, and that she was short-breathed--but she seemed so cheerful. Can anything really be the matter?"

"It's consumption, Sally Kittridge," said Miss Roxy, "neither more nor less; that ar is the long and the short. They're going to take her over

to Portland to see Dr. Wilson--it won't do no harm, and it won't do no good."

"You seem to be determined she shall die," said Sally in a tone of pique.

"Determined, am I? Is it I that determines that the maple leaves shall fall next October? Yet I know they will--folks can't help knowin' what they know, and shuttin' one's eyes won't alter one's road. I s'pose you think 'cause you're young and middlin' good-lookin' that you have feelin's and I hasn't; well, you're mistaken, that's all. I don't believe there's one person in the world that would go farther or do more to save Mara Pennel than I would,--and yet I've been in the world long enough to see that livin' ain't no great shakes neither. Ef one is hopefully prepared in the days of their youth, why they escape a good deal, ef they get took cross-lots into heaven."

Sally turned away thoughtfully into the house; there was no one in the kitchen, and the tick of the old clock sounded lonely and sepulchral. She went upstairs to Mara's room; the door was ajar. Mara was sitting at the open window that looked forth toward the ocean, busily engaged in writing. The glow of evening shone on the golden waves of her hair, and tinged the pearly outline of her cheek. Sally noticed the translucent clearness of her complexion, and the deep burning color and the transparency of the little hands, which seemed as if they might transmit the light like Sèvres porcelain. She was writing with an expression of

tender calm, and sometimes stopping to consult an open letter that Sally knew came from Moses.

So fair and sweet and serene she looked that a painter might have chosen her for an embodiment of twilight, and one might not be surprised to see a clear star shining out over her forehead. Yet in the tender serenity of the face there dwelt a pathos of expression that spoke of struggles and sufferings past, like the traces of tears on the face of a restless infant that has grieved itself to sleep.

Sally came softly in on tiptoe, threw her arms around her, and kissed her, with a half laugh, then bursting into tears, sobbed upon her shoulder.

"Dear Sally, what is the matter?" said Mara, looking up.

"Oh, Mara, I just met Miss Roxy, and she told me"--

Sally only sobbed passionately.

"It is very sad to make all one's friends so unhappy," said Mara, in a soothing voice, stroking Sally's hair. "You don't know how much I have suffered dreading it. Sally, it is a long time since I began to expect and dread and fear. My time of anguish was then--then when I first felt that it could be possible that I should not live after all. There was a long time I dared not even think of it; I could not even tell such a

fear to myself; and I did far more than I felt able to do to convince myself that I was not weak and failing. I have been often to Miss Roxy, and once, when nobody knew it, I went to a doctor in Brunswick, but then I was afraid to tell him half, lest he should say something about me, and it should get out; and so I went on getting worse and worse, and feeling every day as if I could not keep up, and yet afraid to lie down for fear grandmamma would suspect me. But this morning it was pleasant and bright, and something came over me that said I must tell somebody, and so, as it was cool and pleasant, I walked up to Aunt Roxy's and told her. I thought, you know, that she knew the most, and would feel it the least; but oh, Sally, she has such a feeling heart, and loves me so; it is strange she should."

"Is it?" said Sally, tightening her clasp around Mara's neck; and then with a hysterical shadow of gayety she said, "I suppose you think that you are such a hobgoblin that nobody could be expected to do that. After all, though, I should have as soon expected roses to bloom in a juniper clump as love from Aunt Roxy."

"Well, she does love me," said Mara. "No mother could be kinder. Poor thing, she really sobbed and cried when I told her. I was very tired, and she told me she would take care of me, and tell grandpapa and grandmamma,--that had been lying on my heart as such a dreadful thing to do,--and she laid me down to rest on her bed, and spoke so lovingly to me! I wish you could have seen her. And while I lay there, I fell into a strange, sweet sort of rest. I can't describe it; but since then

everything has been changed. I wish I could tell any one how I saw things then."

"Do try to tell me, Mara," said Sally, "for I need comfort too, if there is any to be had."

"Well, then, I lay on the bed, and the wind drew in from the sea and just lifted the window-curtain, and I could see the sea shining and hear the waves making a pleasant little dash, and then my head seemed to swim. I thought I was walking out by the pleasant shore, and everything seemed so strangely beautiful, and grandpapa and grandmamma were there, and Moses had come home, and you were there, and we were all so happy. And then I felt a sort of strange sense that something was coming--some great trial or affliction--and I groaned and clung to Moses, and asked him to put his arm around me and hold me.

"Then it seemed to be not by our seashore that this was happening, but by the Sea of Galilee, just as it tells about it in the Bible, and there were fishermen mending their nets, and men sitting counting their money, and I saw Jesus come walking along, and heard him say to this one and that one, 'Leave all and follow me,' and it seemed that the moment he spoke they did it, and then he came to me, and I felt his eyes in my very soul, and he said, 'Wilt thou leave all and follow me?' I cannot tell now what a pain I felt--what an anguish. I wanted to leave all, but my heart felt as if it were tied and woven with a thousand threads, and while I waited he seemed to fade away, and I found myself

then alone and unhappy, wishing that I could, and mourning that I had not; and then something shone out warm like the sun, and I looked up, and he stood there looking pitifully, and he said again just as he did before, 'Wilt thou leave all and follow me?' Every word was so gentle and full of pity, and I looked into his eyes and could not look away; they drew me, they warmed me, and I felt a strange, wonderful sense of his greatness and sweetness. It seemed as if I felt within me cord after cord breaking, I felt so free, so happy; and I said, 'I will, I will, with all my heart;' and I woke then, so happy, so sure of God's love.

"I saw so clearly how his love is in everything, and these words came into my mind as if an angel had spoken them, 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.' Since then I cannot be unhappy. I was so myself only this morning, and now I wonder that any one can have a grief when God is so loving and good, and cares so sweetly for us all. Why, Sally, if I could see Christ and hear him speak, I could not be more certain that he will make this sorrow such a blessing to us all that we shall never be able to thank him enough for it."

"Oh Mara," said Sally, sighing deeply, while her cheek was wet with tears, "it is beautiful to hear you talk; but there is one that I am sure will not and cannot feel so."

"God will care for him," said Mara; "oh, I am sure of it; He is love itself, and He values his love in us, and He never, never would have brought such a trial, if it had not been the true and only way to our

best good. We shall not shed one needless tear. Yes, if God loved us so that he spared not his own Son, he will surely give us all the good here that we possibly can have without risking our eternal happiness."

"You are writing to Moses, now?" said Sally.

"Yes, I am answering his letter; it is so full of spirit and life and hope--but all hope in this world--all, all earthly, as much as if there was no God and no world to come. Sally, perhaps our Father saw that I could not have strength to live with him and keep my faith. I should be drawn by him earthward instead of drawing him heavenward; and so this is in mercy to us both."

"And are you telling him the whole truth, Mara?"

"Not all, no," said Mara; "he could not bear it at once. I only tell him that my health is failing, and that my friends are seriously alarmed, and then I speak as if it were doubtful, in my mind, what the result might be."

"I don't think you can make him feel as you do. Moses Pennel has a tremendous will, and he never yielded to any one. You bend, Mara, like the little blue harebells, and so the storm goes over you; but he will stand up against it, and it will wrench and shatter him. I am afraid, instead of making him better, it will only make him bitter and rebellious."



"He has a Father in heaven who knows how to care for him," said Mara. "I am persuaded--I feel certain that he will be blessed in the end; not perhaps in the time and way I should have chosen, but in the end. I have always felt that he was mine, ever since he came a little shipwrecked boy to me--a little girl. And now I have given him up to his Saviour and my Saviour--to his God and my God--and I am perfectly at peace. All will be well."

Mara spoke with a look of such solemn, bright assurance as made her, in the dusky, golden twilight, seem like some serene angel sent down to comfort, rather than a hapless mortal just wrenched from life and hope.

Sally rose up and kissed her silently. "Mara," she said, "I shall come to-morrow to see what I can do for you. I will not interrupt you now. Good-by, dear."

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There are no doubt many, who have followed this history so long as it danced like a gay little boat over sunny waters, and who would have followed it gayly to the end, had it closed with ringing of marriage-bells, who turn from it indignantly, when they see that its course runs through the dark valley. This, they say, is an imposition, a trick upon our feelings. We want to read only stories which end in joy and prosperity.

But have we then settled it in our own mind that there is no such thing as a fortunate issue in a history which does not terminate in the way of earthly success and good fortune? Are we Christians or heathen? It is now eighteen centuries since, as we hold, the "highly favored among women" was pronounced to be one whose earthly hopes were all cut off in the blossom,--whose noblest and dearest in the morning of his days went down into the shadows of death.

Was Mary the highly-favored among women, and was Jesus indeed the blessed,--or was the angel mistaken? If they were these, if we are Christians, it ought to be a settled and established habit of our souls to regard something else as prosperity than worldly success and happy marriages. That life is a success which, like the life of Jesus, in its beginning, middle, and close, has borne a perfect witness to the truth and the highest form of truth. It is true that God has given to us, and inwoven in our nature a desire for a perfection and completeness made manifest to our senses in this mortal life. To see the daughter bloom into youth and womanhood, the son into manhood, to see them marry and become themselves parents, and gradually ripen and develop in the maturities of middle life, gradually wear into a sunny autumn, and so be gathered in fullness of time to their fathers,--such, one says, is the programme which God has made us to desire; such the ideal of happiness which he has interwoven with our nerves, and for which our heart and our flesh crieth out; to which every stroke of a knell is a violence, and every thought of an early death is an abhorrence.

But the life of Christ and his mother sets the foot on this lower ideal of happiness, and teaches us that there is something higher. His ministry began with declaring, "Blessed are they that mourn." It has been well said that prosperity was the blessing of the Old Testament, and adversity of the New. Christ came to show us a nobler style of living and bearing; and so far as he had a personal and earthly life, he buried it as a corner-stone on which to erect a new immortal style of architecture.

Of his own, he had nothing, neither houses, nor lands, nor family ties, nor human hopes, nor earthly sphere of success; and as a human life, it was all a sacrifice and a defeat. He was rejected by his countrymen, whom the passionate anguish of his love and the unwearied devotion of his life could not save from an awful doom. He was betrayed by weak friends, prevailed against by slanderers, overwhelmed with an ignominious death in the morning of youth, and his mother stood by his cross, and she was the only woman whom God ever called highly favored in this world.

This, then, is the great and perfect ideal of what God honors. Christ speaks of himself as bread to be eaten,--bread, simple, humble, unpretending, vitally necessary to human life, made by the bruising and grinding of the grain, unostentatiously having no life or worth of its own except as it is absorbed into the life of others and lives in them. We wished in this history to speak of a class of lives formed on the

model of Christ, and like his, obscure and unpretending, like his, seeming to end in darkness and defeat, but which yet have this preciousness and value that the dear saints who live them come nearest in their mission to the mission of Jesus. They are made, not for a career and history of their own, but to be bread of life to others. In every household or house have been some of these, and if we look on their lives and deaths with the unbaptized eyes of nature, we shall see only most mournful and unaccountable failure, when, if we could look with the eye of faith, we should see that their living and dying has been bread of life to those they left behind. Fairest of these, and least developed, are the holy innocents who come into our households to smile with the smile of angels, who sleep in our bosoms, and win us with the softness of tender little hands, and pass away like the lamb that was slain before they have ever learned the speech of mortals. Not vain are even these silent lives of Christ's lambs, whom many an earth-bound heart has been roused to follow when the Shepherd bore them to the higher pastures. And so the daughter who died so early, whose wedding-bells were never rung except in heaven,--the son who had no career of ambition or a manly duty except among the angels,--the patient sufferers, whose only lot on earth seemed to be to endure, whose life bled away drop by drop in the shadows of the sick-room--all these are among those whose life was like Christ's in that they were made, not for themselves, but to become bread to us.

It is expedient for us that they go away. Like their Lord, they come to suffer, and to die; they take part in his sacrifice; their life is

incomplete without their death, and not till they are gone away does the Comforter fully come to us.

It is a beautiful legend which one sees often represented in the churches of Europe, that when the grave of the mother of Jesus was opened, it was found full of blossoming lilies,--fit emblem of the thousand flowers of holy thought and purpose which spring up in our hearts from the memory of our sainted dead.

Cannot many, who read these lines, bethink them of such rooms that have been the most cheerful places in the family,--when the heart of the smitten one seemed the band that bound all the rest together,--and have there not been dying hours which shed such a joy and radiance on all around, that it was long before the mourners remembered to mourn? Is it not a misuse of words to call such a heavenly translation death? and to call most things that are lived out on this earth life?