

## CHAPTER XL

### THE MEETING

Sally found Mara sitting in an easy-chair that had been sent to her by the provident love of Miss Emily. It was wheeled in front of her room window, from whence she could look out upon the wide expanse of the ocean. It was a gloriously bright, calm morning, and the water lay clear and still, with scarce a ripple, to the far distant pearly horizon. She seemed to be looking at it in a kind of calm ecstasy, and murmuring the words of a hymn:--

"Nor wreck nor ruin there is seen,  
There not a wave of trouble rolls,  
But the bright rainbow round the throne  
Peals endless peace to all their souls."

Sally came softly behind her on tiptoe to kiss her. "Good-morning, dear, how do you find yourself?"

"Quite well," was the answer.

"Mara, is not there anything you want?"

"There might be many things; but His will is mine."

"You want to see Moses?"

"Very much; but I shall see him as soon as it is best for us both."

"Mara,--he is come."

The quick blood flushed over the pale, transparent face as a virgin glacier flushes at sunrise, and she looked up eagerly. "Come!"

"Yes, he is below-stairs wanting to see you."

She seemed about to speak eagerly, and then checked herself and mused a moment. "Poor, poor boy!" she said. "Yes, Sally, let him come at once."

There were a few dazzling, dreamy minutes when Moses first held that frail form in his arms, which but for its tender, mortal warmth, might have seemed to him a spirit. It was no spirit, but a woman whose heart he could feel thrilling against his own; who seemed to him like some frail, fluttering bird; but somehow, as he looked into her clear, transparent face, and pressed her thin little hands in his, the conviction stole over him overpoweringly that she was indeed fading away and going from him,--drawn from him by that mysterious, irresistible power against which human strength, even in the strongest, has no chance.

It is dreadful to a strong man who has felt the influence of his strength,--who has always been ready with a resource for every emergency, and a weapon for every battle,--when first he meets that mighty invisible power by which a beloved life--a life he would give his own blood to save--melts and dissolves like smoke before his eyes.

"Oh, Mara, Mara," he groaned, "this is too dreadful, too cruel; it is cruel."

"You will think so at first, but not always," she said, soothingly. "You will live to see a joy come out of this sorrow."

"Never, Mara, never. I cannot believe that kind of talk. I see no love, no mercy in it. Of course, if there is any life after death you will be happy; if there is a heaven you will be there; but can this dim, unsubstantial, cloudy prospect make you happy in leaving me and giving up one's lover? Oh, Mara, you cannot love as I do, or you could not"--

"Moses, I have suffered,--oh, very, very much. It was many months ago when I first thought that I must give everything up,--when I thought that we must part; but Christ helped me; he showed me his wonderful love,--the love that surrounds us all our life, that follows us in all our wanderings, and sustains us in all our weaknesses,--and then I felt that whatever He wills for us is in love; oh, believe it,--believe it for my sake, for your own."

"Oh, I cannot, I cannot," said Moses; but as he looked at the bright, pale face, and felt how the tempest of his feelings shook the frail form, he checked himself. "I do wrong to agitate you so, Mara. I will try to be calm."

"And to pray?" she said, beseechingly.

He shut his lips in gloomy silence.

"Promise me," she said.

"I have prayed ever since I got your first letter, and I see it does no good," he answered. "Our prayers cannot alter fate."

"Fate! there is no fate," she answered; "there is a strong and loving Father who guides the way, though we know it not. We cannot resist His will; but it is all love,--pure, pure love."

At this moment Sally came softly into the room. A gentle air of womanly authority seemed to express itself in that once gay and giddy face, at which Moses, in the midst of his misery, marveled.

"You must not stay any longer now," she said; "it would be too much for her strength; this is enough for this morning."

Moses turned away, and silently left the room, and Sally said to Mara,--

"You must lie down now, and rest."

"Sally," said Mara, "promise me one thing."

"Well, Mara; of course I will."

"Promise to love him and care for him when I am gone; he will be so lonely."

"I will do all I can, Mara," said Sally, soothingly; "so now you must take a little wine and lie down. You know what you have so often said, that all will yet be well with him."

"Oh, I know it, I am sure," said Mara, "but oh, his sorrow shook my very heart."

"You must not talk another word about it," said Sally, peremptorily, "Do you know Aunt Roxy is coming to see you? I see her out of the window this very moment."

And Sally assisted to lay her friend on the bed, and then, administering a stimulant, she drew down the curtains, and, sitting beside her, began repeating, in a soft monotonous tone, the words of a favorite hymn:--

"The Lord my shepherd is,

I shall be well supplied;  
Since He is mine, and I am His,  
What can I want beside?"

Before she had finished, Mara was asleep.