

## CHAPTER XLII

### LAST WORDS

The setting sun gleamed in at the window of Mara's chamber, tinted with rose and violet hues from a great cloud-castle that lay upon the smooth ocean over against the window. Mara was lying upon the bed, but she raised herself upon her elbow to look out.

"Dear Aunt Roxy," she said, "raise me up and put the pillows behind me, so that I can see out--it is splendid."

Aunt Roxy came and arranged the pillows, and lifted the girl with her long, strong arms, then stooping over her a moment she finished her arrangements by softly smoothing the hair from her forehead with a caressing movement most unlike her usual precise business-like proceedings.

"I love you, Aunt Roxy," said Mara, looking up with a smile.

Aunt Roxy made a strange wry face, which caused her to look harder than usual. She was choked with tenderness, and had only this uncomely way of showing it.

"Law now, Mara, I don't see how ye can; I ain't nothin' but an old

burdock-bush; love ain't for me."

"Yes it is too," said Mara, drawing her down and kissing her withered cheek, "and you sha'n't call yourself an old burdock. God sees that you are beautiful, and in the resurrection everybody will see it."

"I was always homely as an owl," said Miss Roxy, unconsciously speaking out what had lain like a stone at the bottom of even her sensible heart.

"I always had sense to know it, and knew my sphere. Homely folks would like to say pretty things, and to have pretty things said to them, but they never do. I made up my mind pretty early that my part in the vineyard was to have hard work and no posies."

"Well, you will have all the more in heaven; I love you dearly, and I like your looks, too. You look kind and true and good, and that's beauty in the country where we are going."

Miss Roxy sprang up quickly from the bed, and turning her back began to arrange the bottles on the table with great zeal.

"Has Moses come in yet?" said Mara.

"No, there ain't nobody seen a thing of him since he went out this morning."

"Poor boy!" said Mara, "it is too hard upon him. Aunt Roxy, please pick

some roses off the bush from under the window and put in the vases; let's have the room as sweet and cheerful as we can. I hope God will let me live long enough to comfort him. It is not so very terrible, if one would only think so, to cross that river. All looks so bright to me now that I have forgotten how sorrow seemed. Poor Moses! he will have a hard struggle, but he will get the victory, too. I am very weak to-night, but to-morrow I shall feel better, and I shall sit up, and perhaps I can paint a little on that flower I was doing for him. We will not have things look sickly or deathly. There, Aunt Roxy, he has come in; I hear his step."

"I didn't hear it," said Miss Roxy, surprised at the acute senses which sickness had etherealized to an almost spirit-like intensity. "Shall I call him?"

"Yes, do," said Mara. "He can sit with me a little while to-night."

The light in the room was a strange dusky mingling of gold and gloom, when Moses stole softly in. The great cloud-castle that a little while since had glowed like living gold from turret and battlement, now dim, changed for the most part to a sombre gray, enlivened with a dull glow of crimson; but there was still a golden light where the sun had sunk into the sea. Moses saw the little thin hand stretched out to him.

"Sit down," she said; "it has been such a beautiful sunset. Did you notice it?"

He sat down by the bed, leaning his forehead on his hand, but saying nothing.

She drew her fingers through his dark hair. "I am so glad to see you," she said. "It is such a comfort to me that you have come; and I hope it will be to you. You know I shall be better to-morrow than I am to-night, and I hope we shall have some pleasant days together yet. We mustn't reject what little we may have, because it cannot be more."

"Oh, Mara," said Moses, "I would give my life, if I could take back the past. I have never been worthy of you; never knew your worth; never made you happy. You always lived for me, and I lived for myself. I deserve to lose you, but it is none the less bitter."

"Don't say lose. Why must you? I cannot think of losing you. I know I shall not. God has given you to me. You will come to me and be mine at last. I feel sure of it."

"You don't know me," said Moses.

"Christ does, though," she said; "and He has promised to care for you. Yes, you will live to see many flowers grow out of my grave. You cannot think so now; but it will be so--believe me."

"Mara," said Moses, "I never lived through such a day as this. It seems

as if every moment of my life had been passing before me, and every moment of yours. I have seen how true and loving in thought and word and deed you have been, and I have been doing nothing but take. You have given love as the skies give rain, and I have drunk it up like the hot dusty earth."

Mara knew in her own heart that this was all true, and she was too real to use any of the terms of affected humiliation which many think a kind of spiritual court language. She looked at him and answered, "Moses, I always knew I loved most. It was my nature; God gave it to me, and it was a gift for which I give him thanks--not a merit. I knew you had a larger, wider nature than mine,--a wider sphere to live in, and that you could not live in your heart as I did. Mine was all thought and feeling, and the narrow little duties of this little home. Yours went all round the world."

"But, oh Mara--oh, my angel! to think I should lose you when I am just beginning to know your worth. I always had a sort of superstitious feeling,--a sacred presentiment about you,--that my spiritual life, if ever I had any, would come through you. It seemed if there ever was such a thing as God's providence, which some folks believe in, it was in leading me to you, and giving you to me. And now, to have all lashed--all destroyed--It makes me feel as if all was blind chance; no guiding God; for if he wanted me to be good, he would spare you."

Mara lay with her large eyes fixed on the now faded sky. The dusky

shadows had dropped like a black crape veil around her pale face. In a few moments she repeated to herself, as if she were musing upon them, those mysterious words of Him who liveth and was dead, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

"Moses," she said, "for all I know you have loved me dearly, yet I have felt that in all that was deepest and dearest to me, I was alone. You did not come near to me, nor touch me where I feel most deeply. If I had lived to be your wife, I cannot say but this distance in our spiritual nature might have widened. You know, what we live with we get used to; it grows an old story. Your love to me might have grown old and worn out. If we lived together in the commonplace toils of life, you would see only a poor threadbare wife. I might have lost what little charm I ever had for you; but I feel that if I die, this will not be. There is something sacred and beautiful in death; and I may have more power over you, when I seem to be gone, than I should have had living."

"Oh, Mara, Mara, don't say that."

"Dear Moses, it is so. Think how many lovers marry, and how few lovers are left in middle life; and how few love and reverence living friends as they do the dead. There are only a very few to whom it is given to do that."

Something in the heart of Moses told him that this was true. In this one

day--the sacred revealing light of approaching death--he had seen more of the real spiritual beauty and significance of Mara's life than in years before, and felt upspringing in his heart, from the deep pathetic influence of the approaching spiritual world a new and stronger power of loving. It may be that it is not merely a perception of love that we were not aware of before, that wakes up when we approach the solemn shadows with a friend. It may be that the soul has compressed and unconscious powers which are stirred and wrought upon as it looks over the borders into its future home,--its loves and its longings so swell and beat, that they astonish itself. We are greater than we know, and dimly feel it with every approach to the great hereafter. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

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"Now, I'll tell you what 'tis," said Aunt Roxy, opening the door, "all the strength this 'ere girl spends a-talkin' to-night, will be so much taken out o' the whole cloth to-morrow."

Moses started up. "I ought to have thought of that, Mara."

"Ye see," said Miss Roxy, "she's been through a good deal to-day, and she must be got to sleep at some rate or other to-night. 'Lord, if he sleep he shall do well,' the Bible says, and it's one of my best nussin' maxims."

"And a good one, too, Aunt Roxy," said Mara. "Good-night, dear boy; you see we must all mind Aunt Roxy."

Moses bent down and kissed her, and felt her arms around his neck.

"Let not your heart be troubled," she whispered. In spite of himself Moses felt the storm that had risen in his bosom that morning soothed by the gentle influences which Mara breathed upon it. There is a sympathetic power in all states of mind, and they who have reached the deep secret of eternal rest have a strange power of imparting calm to others.

It was in the very crisis of the battle that Christ said to his disciples, "My peace I give unto you," and they that are made one with him acquire like precious power of shedding round them repose, as evening flowers shed odors. Moses went to his pillow sorrowful and heart-stricken, but bitter or despairing he could not be with the consciousness of that present angel in the house.