JOSEPH AND HIS FRIEND.

CHAPTER IV.

On the following Saturday afternoon, Rachel Miller sat at the front window of the sitting-room, and arranged her light task of sewing and mending, with a feeling of unusual comfort. The household work of the week was over; the weather was fine and warm, with a brisk drying breeze for the hay on the hill-field, the last load of which Joseph expected to have in the barn before his five-o’clock supper was ready. As she looked down the valley, she noticed that the mowers were still swinging their way through Hunter’s grass, and that Cunningham’s corn was totally needed working. There was a different state of things on the Asten place. Everything was done, and well done, up to the front of the season. The weather had been fortunate, it was true; but Joseph had urged on the work with a different spirit. It seemed to her that he had taken a new interest in the farm; he was here and there, even inspecting with his own eyes the minor duties which had been formerly intrusted to his man Dennis. How could she know that this activity was the only outlet for a restless heart?

If any evil should come of his social recreation, she had done her duty; but no evil seemed likely. She had always separated his legal from his moral independence; there was no enactment establishing the period when the latter commenced, and it could not be made manifest by documents, like the former. She would have admitted, certainly, that her guardianship must cease at some time, but the thought of making preparation for that time had never entered her head. She only understood conditions, not the adaptation of characters to them. Going back over her own life, she could recall but little difference between the girl of eighteen and the woman of thirty. There was the same place in her home, the same duties, the same subjection to the will of her parents,—no exercise of independence or self-reliance anywhere, and no growth of those virtues beyond what a passive maturity brought with it.

Even now she thought very little about any question of life in connection
Rhyme Slayeth Shame.

"and you are happy, too! O, now I can tell you all,—it is Julia Blessing!"

"Ha! ha!" Elwood laughed,—a short, bitter laugh, which seemed to signify anything but happiness. "Forgive me, Joseph!" he presently added, "but there's a deal of difference between a mitten and a ring. You will have one and I have the other. I did think, for a little while, that you stood between Lucy and me; but I suppose disappointment makes men fools."

Something in Joseph's breast seemed to stop the warm flood of his feelings. He could only stammer, after a long pause: "But I am not in your way."

"So I see,—and perhaps nobody is, except myself. We won't talk of this any more; there's many a round-abo road that comes out into the straight one at last. But you,—I can't understand the thing at all. How did she,—did you come to love her?"

"I don't know, I hardly guessed it until this evening."

"Then, Joseph, go slowly, and feel your way. I'm not the one to advise, after what has happened to me; but maybe I know a little more of woman-kind than you. It's best to have longer acquaintance than yours has been; a fellow can't always tell a sudden fancy from a love that has the grip of death."

"Now I might turn your own words against you, Elwood, for you tried to tell me what love is."

"I did,—and before I knew the half. But come, Joseph: promise me this, you won't let Miss Blessing know how much you feel, until—"

"Elwood!" Joseph breathlessly interrupted, "she knows it now! We were together this evening."

Elwood fell back on the pillow, with a groan. "I'm a poor friend to you, he said: "I want to wish you joy, but I can't,—not to-night. The way things are fixed in this world stumps me, and out. Nothing fits as it ought, as if I didn't take my head in my own hands and hold it towards the light main force, I'd only see blackness, and death, and hell!"

Joseph stole back to his bed, and there silently. There was a subtle change in the heart of his happiness, which the remembered glow of that tender scene in the garden could not thaw.

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RHYME SLAYETH SHAME.

If as I come unto her she might hear,
If words might reach her when from her I go,
Then speech a little of my heart might show,
Because indeed nor joy nor grief nor fear
Silence my love; but her gray eyes and clear,
Truer than truth, pierce through my weal and woe;
The world fades with its words, and naught I know
But that my changed life to My Life is near.

Go, then, poor rhymes, who know my heart indeed,
And sing to her the words I cannot say,—
That Love has slain Time, and knows no to-day
And no to-morrow; tell her of my need,
And how I follow where her footsteps lead,
Until the veil of speech death draws away.