



A Song of a Single Note, by Amelia Edith

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Transcriber's note:

Text in bold face is enclosed by equal signs (=bold=), and text in small capitals is replaced by all capitals.

A list of corrections is at the end of the e-book.

[Illustration: THE SONG OF A SINGLE NOTE.]

A SONG OF A SINGLE NOTE

A Love Story

by

AMELIA E. BARR

Author of "The Bow of Orange Ribbon," "The Maid of Maiden Lane," etc.

[Illustration: Decoration]

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TO MY FRIEND,

DR. STEPHEN DECATUR HARRISON:

An American who loves his country "Right or Wrong," And who always believes she is "Right,"

THIS NOVEL IS WITH MUCH ESTEEM DEDICATED.

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PROLOGUE.

"Love, its flutes will still be stringing, Lovers still will sigh and kneel; Freedom sets her trumpets ringing To the clash of smiting steel." So I weave of love and glory, Homely toil, and martial show, Fair romance from the grand story Lived a century ago.

A Song of a Single Note

CHAPTER I.

RED OR BLUE RIBBONS.

It was the fourth year of the captivity of New York, and the beleaguered city, in spite of military pomp and display, could not hide the desolations incident to her warlike occupation. The beautiful trees and groves which once shaded her streets and adorned her suburbs had been cut down by the army sappers; her gardens and lawns upturned for entrenchments and indented by artillery wheels; and some of the best parts of the city blackened and mutilated by fire. Her churches had been turned into prisons and hospitals, and were centres of indescribable suffering and poisonous infection; while over the burnt district there had sprung up a town of tents inhabited by criminals and by miserable wretches whom starvation and despair had turned into highwaymen.

But these conditions were the work of man. Nature still lavished upon the captive city a glory of sunshine and blue skies, and winds, full of the freshness and sparkle of the great sea, blew through all her sickly streets. Wherever the gardens had not been destroyed, there was the scent of mays and laburnums, and the indescribable beauty of apple blossoms on the first day of their birth.

In front of one of these fortunate enclosures, belonging to a little house on Queen Street, an old gentleman was standing, looking wistfully in at a trellis of small red roses. He turned away with a sigh as a man dressed like a sailor touched him on the arm, saying, as he did so:

"Well, then, Elder, a good afternoon to you? I am just from Boston, and I have brought you a letter from your son."

"You, De Vries! I didna look for you just yet."

"You know how it is. I am a man of experience, and I had a good voyage both ways."

"And Robertson and Elliot and Ludlow will have a good percentage on your cargoes?"

"That is the way of business. It is as it ought to be. I do not defraud or condemn the Government. It is the young--who have no knowledge or experience--who do such things."

"What do you bring in, Captain?"

"Some provisions of all kinds; and I shall take back some merchandise of all kinds--for them who can not get it in any other way."

"To Boston again?"

"This time only to the Connecticut coast. The goods will easily go further. The trade is great. What then? I must waste no time; I have to live by my business."

"And I have nae doubt you think the 'business' on the King's service."

"Every respectable man is of that way of thinking. We carry no military stores. I am very precise about that. It is one of my principles. And what, then, would the merchants of New York do without this opening for trade? They would be ruined; and there would also be starvation. They who say different are fools; we give help and comfort to the royalists, and we distress the rebels, for we take from them all their ready money. If the trade was not 'on the King's service,' the Governor would not be in it."

"Even so! That circumstance shows it is not far out o' the way."

"Out of the way! What the deuce, Elder! I am a deacon in the Middle Kirk. My respectability and honesty cannot be concealed: any one can see them. Batavius de Vries would not steal a groschen; no, nor half of one!"

"Easy, easy, Captain! Why should you steal? It is far mair lucrative to cheat than to steal; and the first is in the way o' business--as you were remarking. But this or that, my good thanks for the letter you have brought me; and is there anything I can do in return for your civility?"

"If you will kindly call at my dwelling and tell Madame I am arrived here safe and sound; that would be a great satisfaction for us both."

"I pass your door, Captain, and I will tell Madame the good news. Nae doubt she will gie me a smile for it."

Then De Vries turned away with some remark about business, and Elder Semple stood still a moment, fingering the bulky letter which had been given him; and, as he did so, wondering what he should do, for "ill news comes natural these days," he thought, "and maybe I had better read it through, before I speak a word to Janet anent it. I'll step into the King's Arms and see what Alexander has to say."

When he entered the coffee-room he saw his son, Mr. Neil Semple, and Governor Robertson sitting at a table with some papers between them. Neil smiled gravely, and moved a chair into place for his father, and the Governor said pleasantly:

"How are you, Elder? It is a long time since I saw you."

"I am as well as can be expected, considering a' things, Governor; but what for will I be 'Elder,' when I have nae kirk to serve?"

"Is that my fault, Elder?"

"You might have spoke a word for the reopening of the kirk, and the return o' Dr. Rogers. Your affirmative would have gone a long way toward it. And the loyal Calvinists o' New York hae been too long kirkless. What for didn't you speak the word, Governor? What for?"

"Indeed, Elder, you know yourself that Dr. Rogers is a proved traitor. As a fundamental rule, a Calvinist is a democrat--exceptions, of course--like yourself and your worthy sons, but as a fundamental, natural democrats. There is the Church of England open for all services."

"Aye; and there is the Kirk o' Scotland closed for all services. What has the Kirk done against King George?"

"Must I remind you, Elder, that her ministers, almost without exception, are against the King? Did not this very Dr. Rogers pray in the pulpit for the success of the rebels? As for the Church of Scotland, she has been troubling kings, and encouraging rebellion ever since there was a Church of Scotland. What for? No reason at all, that I can see."

"Yes, she had reason enough. Scotsmen read their Bibles, and they thought it worth while to fight for the right to do so. There's your colleague, Judge Ludlow; his great-grandfather fought with Oliver Cromwell in England in a quarrel of the same kind. He should have said a word for us."

"Elder, it is undeniable that Dissent and Calvinism are opposed to royalty."

"The Kirk is not subject to Caesar; she is a law unto hersel'; and the Methodists are dissenters, yet their chapel is open."

"The loyalty of John Wesley is beyond impeachment. He is a friend of the King."

"Yet his brother Charles was imprisoned for praying for the Pretender, and nae doubt at all, he himsel' would gladly have followed Prince Charlie."

"As the Semples and Gordons *did do*."

"To their everlasting glory and honor! God bless them!"

"Will your Excellency please to sign these papers?" interrupted Neil; and his calm ignoring of the brewing quarrel put a stop to it. The papers were signed, and the Governor rising, said, as he offered his hand to the Elder:

"Our sufferings and deprivations are unavoidable, sir. Is there any use in quarreling with the wheel that splashes us?"

"There is nane; yet, if men have grievances----"

"Grievances! That is a word that always pleases, and always cheats. There are no grievances between you and me, I hope."

"None to breed ill-will. Human nature is fallible, but as a rule, Tory doesna eat Tory."

"And as for the Whigs, Elder, you know the old fable of the wolf and the lamb. Judging from that past event, Tory and Whig may soon make an eternal peace."

He went out well pleased at the implication, and Neil, after a few moments' silence, said, "I am going to register these documents, sir, or I would walk home with you."

"Much obligated to you, Neil, but I can tak' very good care o' mysel'. And I have a letter from your brother Alexander. I must see what news he sends, before I tell your mother."

He was opening his letter as he spoke, carefully cutting round the large red seal, which bore the arms of the Semples, and which, therefore, he would have thought it a kind of sacrilege to mutilate. A cup of coffee had been brought to him, and he took one drink of it, and then no more; for everything was quickly forgotten or ignored in the intelligence he was receiving. That it was unexpected and astonishing was evident from his air of perplexity and from the emotion which quite unconsciously found relief in his constant ejaculation, "*Most extraordinary! Most extraordinary!*"

Finally, he folded up the epistle, threw a shilling on the table for his entertainment, and with more speed than was usual, took the road to the west of Broadway. He had been remarkable in days past for his erect carriage, but he walked now with his head bent and his eyes fixed on the ground. There was so much that he did not want to see, though he was naturally the most curious and observant of mortals. Fifteen minutes' walk brought him to the river side, and anon to a large house separated from his own by a meadow. There were horses tied to the fence and horses tethered in the garden; and in a summer-house under a huge linden tree, a party of soldiers drinking and playing dominoes. The front door was partly open, and a piece of faded red ribbon was nailed on its lintel. Semple knocked loudly with his walking-stick, and immediately a stout, rosy woman came toward him, wiping her hands on a clean towel as she did so.

"Well, then, Elder!" she cried, "you are a good sight! What is the matter, that you never come once to see us, this long time?"

"I come now to bring you good news Joanna--Madame, I should say."

"No, no! I make not so much ceremony. When you say 'Joanna' I think of the good days, before everybody was unfriends with each other."

"Well, then, Joanna, your husband is back again; as he says, safe and sound, and I promised him to let you know as I passed."

"But come in once, Elder--come in!"

"Some day--some day soon. I am in haste at this time--and you have much company, I see." He spoke with evident disapproval, and Joanna was at once on the defensive.

"I know not how to alter that. A good wife must do some little thing these hard times; for what is to come after them, who knows--and there are many boys and girls--but I am not discontented; I like to look at the bright side, and that is right, is it not?"

Semple had already turned away, and he only struck his cane on the flagged walk in answer. For while Joanna was speaking he had casually noticed the fluttering red ribbon above her head; and it had brought from the past a memory, unbidden and unexpected, which filled his eyes with the thin, cold tears of age, and made his heart tremble with a fear he would not allow himself to entertain.

He was so troubled that he had to consciously gather his forces together before he entered his own dwelling. It, at least, kept visible state and order; the garden, perhaps, showed less variety and wealth of flowers; but the quiet dignity of its handsomely furnished rooms was intact. In their usual parlor, which was at the back of the house, he found his wife. "You are late to-day, Alexander," she said pleasantly; "I was just waiting till I heard your footstep. Now I can make the tea."

"I'll be glad o' a cup, Janet. I'm fairly tired, my dearie."

"What kept you so far ahint your ordinar time? I thought it long waiting for you."

"Twa or three things kept me, that I am not accountable for. I was on the way hame, when Batavius De Vries spoke to me."

"He's back again, is he? Few words would do between you and him."

"He brought me a letter from our lad in Boston; and I thought I would go into the King's Arms and read it."

"You might have come hame."

"I might; but I thought if there was any bad news folded in the paper, I would just leave it outside our hame."

"There is naething wrang, then?"

"It is an astonishment--the lad has sold all he had and gone to Scotland. When he can find a small estate that suits him, he thinks o' buying it, and becoming 'Semple o' that Ilk.' Alexander aye had a hankering after land."

"He has the siller, I suppose; there is no land given awa in Scotland."

"Alexander wasn't born yesterday. He has been sending siller to England ever since the first whisper o' these troubles. Ten years ago, he told me the Stamp Act riots spelt Revolution and maybe Independence; and that in such case the best we could hope for would be a dozen or mair states, each with its ain rights and privileges and government; and a constant war between them. He is a far-seeing lad, is Alexander."

"I think little o' his far sight. There are others who see further and clearer: petty states and constant war! Na, na! *It's not so written.*"

"Perhaps he is right, Janet."

"Perhaps is a wide word, Alexander. Perhaps he is wrang. Has he sailed yet? And pray, what is to become of the little Maria?"

"He sailed a week since--and Maria is coming to us."

"Coming to us! And what will we do wi' the lassie?"

"We'll just hae to love and comfort her. In a way she has neither father nor mother--the one being in the grave and the other beyond seas. She may be a pleasure to our auld age; when she was here last she was a bonnie, lovesome little creature."

"That is mair than eight years ago, and she was eight years old then; she'll be sixteen and a half, or, perhaps, nearer seventeen now--you ken weel what to expect from lassies o' that indiscreet age; or, if you don't, you ought to."

"I know she is our ain grandbairn and that we be to give her love and all that love calls for. She was the very image o' yoursel' Janet, and her father was much set up o'er the extraordinary likeness."

"I thought she favored you, Alexander."

"A little--a little, perhaps--but not enough to spoil her. If she has kept the Gordon beauty, she will be a' the mair welcome to me. I have aye had a strong prejudice in its favor;" and he leaned forward and took Madame's small brown hand, and then there was a look and a smile between the old lovers that made all words impotent and unnecessary.

Such pauses are embarrassing; the lealest hearts must come back quickly to ordinary life, and as the Elder passed his cup for more tea, Madame asked: "What way is the lassie coming? By land or water?"

"She is coming by land, with John Bradley and his daughter."

"How's that?"

"Madame Charlton's school had to be closed, and Agnes Bradley was one of the scholars. Her father has gone to Boston to bring her hame, and Maria being her friend and schoolmate, Bradley promised Alexander to see her safe in our home and care. Doubtless, he is well able to keep his word. If the Governor and the Commander-in-Chief can do ought to mak' travel safe, John Bradley will hae their assistance; but I'm vexed to be put under an obligation to him. I would rather have sent Neil, or even gane mysel'."

"What ails you at John Bradley? He wears the red ribbon on his breast, and it blows o'er his shop door, and he is thick as thack with a' the dignities--civil and military."

"I don't like him, and I don't like his daughter being friends with my granddaughter."

"He serves our turn now, and once is nae custom."

"Let alone the fact that girls' friendships are naething but fine words and sugar candy. I shall put a stop to this one at the very outset."

"You'll do what, gudeman?"

"Put my commands on Maria. I shall tell her that beyond yea and nay, and a fine day, or the like o' that, she is to have no intercourse wi' John Bradley's daughter."

"You'll have revolution inside the house, as weel as outside. Let the girls alane. Some young men will come between them and do your business for you. You have managed your lads pretty well--wi' my help--but two schoolgirls in love wi' one anither! they will be aboon your thumb--ane o' them may keep you busy."

"I shall lay my commands on Maria."

"And if Maria tak's after the Gordons, she'll be far mair ready to give commands than to tak' them. Let be till she gets here. When did she leave Boston?"

"Mair than a week ago, but Sunday intromits, and Bradley, being what they call a local preacher would hae to exploit his new sermon and hold a class meeting or a love feast; forbye, he wouldna neglect ony bit o' business that came his way on the road. I shouldn't wonder if they were at Stamford last Sunday, and if so, they would be maist likely at East Chester to-night. They might be here to-morrow. I'll ask Neil to ride as far as the Halfway House; he will either find, or hear tell o' them there."

"What for should Neil tak' that trouble? You ken, as weel as I do, that if Bradley promised Maria's father to deliver her into your hand, at your ain house, he would do no other way. Say you were from hame, he would just keep the lassie till he could keep his promise. He is a very Pharisee anent such sma' matters. If you have finished your tea, gudeman, I will get the dishes put by."

They both rose at these words, Madame pulled a bell rope made of a band of embroidery, and a girl brought her a basin of hot water and two clean towels. Semple lit his long, clay pipe and went into the garden to see how the early peas were coming on, and to meditate on the events the day had brought to him. Madame also had her meditations, as she carefully washed the beautiful Derby china, and the two or three Apostle teaspoons, and put them away in the glass cupboard that was raised in one corner of the room. Her thoughts were complex, woven of love and hope and fear and regret. The advent of her granddaughter was not an unmixed delight; she was past sixty, not in perfect health, and she feared the care and guiding of a girl of scarce seventeen years old.

"Just the maist unreasonable time of any woman's life," she sighed. "At that age, they are sure they know a' things, and can judge a' things; and to doubt it is rank tyranny, and they are in a blaze at a word, for they have every feeling at fever heat. A body might as well try to reason wi' a baby or a bull, for they'll either cry or rage, till you give in to them. However, Maria has a deal o' Gordon in her, and they are sensible bodies--in the main. I'll even do as the auld song advises:

"Bide me yet, and bide me yet, For I know not what will betide me yet."

When the room was in order, she threw a shawl round her and went to her husband. "I hae come to bring you inside, Elder," she said, "the night air is chilly and damp yet, and you arena growing younger."

"I walked down as far as the river bank, Janet," he answered, "and I see the boat is rocking at her pier. Neil should look after her."

"Neil is looking after another kind of a boat at present. I hope he will have as much sense as the rats, and leave a sinking ship in good time to save himsel'."

"Janet, you should be feared to say such like words! They are fairly wicked--and they gie me a sair heart."

"Oh, forgive me, Alexander! My thoughts will fly to my lips. I forget! I forget! I hae a sair heart, too"--and they went silently into the house with this shadow between them until Janet said:

"Let me help you off wi' your coat, dearie. Your soft, warm wrap is here waiting for you," and against her gentle words and touch he had no armor. His offense melted away, he let her help him to remove his heavy satin-lined coat, with its long stiffened skirts, and fold round his spare form the damasse wrap with its warm lining of flannel. Then, with a sigh of relief he sat down, loosened his neckband, handed Madame his laces, and called for a fresh pipe.

In the meantime Madame hung the coat carefully over a chair, and in flecking off a little dust from its richly trimmed lapel, she tossed aside with an unconscious contempt, the bit of scarlet ribbon at the buttonhole.

"You are requiring a new ribbon, Alexander," she said. "If you must wear your colors on your auld breast, I would, at least, hae them fresh."

He either ignored, or did not choose to notice the spirit of her words; he took them at their face value, and answered: "You are right, Janet. I'll buy a half yard in the morning. I tell you, that one bit o' rusty, draggled red ribbon gave me a heart-ache this afternoon."

Madame did not make the expected inquiry, and after a glance into her face he continued: "It was at the Van Heemskirk's house. I was talking to Joanna, and I saw it o'er the door, and remembered the night my friend Joris nailed up the blue ribbon which Batavius has taken down. I could see him standing there, with his large face smiling and shining, and his great arms reaching upward, and I could hear the stroke o' the hammer that seemed to keep time to his words: '*Alexander myn jougen!*' he said, 'for Freedom the color is always blue. Over my house door let it blow; yes, then, over my grave also, if God's will it be.' And I answered him, 'you are a fool, Joris, and you know not what you are saying or doing, and God help you when you do come to your senses.' Then he turned round with the hammer in his hand and looked at me--I shall never forget that look--and said 'a little piece of blue ribbon, Alexander, but for a man's life and liberty it stands, for dead already is that man who is not free.' Then he took me into the garden, and as we walked he could talk of naething else, 'men do not need in their coffins to lie stark,' he said, 'they may without that, be dead; walking about this city are many dead men.'"

"Joris Van Heemskirk is a good man. Wherever he is, I ken well, he is God's man," said Janet, "doing his duty simply and cheerfully."

"As he sees duty, Janet; I am sure o' that. And as he talked he kept touching the ribbon in his waistcoat, as if it was a sacred thing, and when I said something o' the kind, he answered me out o' the Holy Book, and bid me notice God himself had chosen blue and told Israel to wear it on the fringes o' their garments as a reminder o' their deliverance by Him. Then I couldna help speaking o' the Scotch Covenanters wearing the blue ribbon, and he followed wi' the Dutch Protestors, and I was able to cap the noble army wi' the English Puritans fighting under Cromwell for civil and religious liberty."

"And gudeman!" cried Janet, all in a tremble of enthusiasm, "General Washington is at this very time wearing a broad blue ribbon across his breast;" and there was such a light in her eyes, and such pride in her voice, the Elder could not say the words that were on his tongue; he magnanimously passed by her remark and returned to his friend, Joris Van Heemskirk. "Blue or red," he continued, "we had a wonderfu' hour, and when we came to part that night we had no need to take each other's hands; we had been walking hand-in-hand together like twa laddies, and we did not know it."

"You'll have many a happy day with your friend yet, gudeman; Joris Van Heemskirk will come hame again."

"He will hae a sair heart when he sees his hame, specially his garden."

"He will hae something in his heart to salve all losses and all wrongs; but I wonder Joanna doesna take better care o' her father's place."

"She canna work miracles. I thought when I got her there as tenant o' the King, she would keep a' things as they were left; but Batavius has six or eight soldiers boarding there--low fellows, non-commissioned officers and the like o' them--and the beautiful house is naething but barricks in their sight; and as for the garden, what do they care for boxwood and roses? They dinna see a thing beyond their victuals, and liquor, and the cards and dominoes in their hands. Joanna has mair than she can manage."

"Didn't Batavius sell his house on the East river?"

"Of course he did--to the Government--made a good thing of it; then he got into his father-in-law's house as a tenant of the Government. I don't think he ever intends to move out of it. When the war is over he will buy it for a trifle, as confiscated property."

"He'll do naething o' the kind! He'll never, never, never buy it. You may tak' my solemn word for that, Alexander Semple."

"How do you ken so much, Janet?"

"The things we ken best, are the things we were never told. I will not die till I have seen Joris Van Heemskirk smoking his pipe with you on his ain hearth, and in his ain summer-house. He can paint some new mottoes o'er it then."

She was on the verge of crying, but she spoke with an irresistible faith, and in spite of his stubborn loyalty to King George, Semple could not put away the conviction that his wife's words were true. They had all the force of an intuition. He felt that the conversation could not be continued with Joris Van Heemskirk as its subject, and he said, "I wonder what is keeping Neil? He told me he would be hame early to-night."

"Then you saw him to-day?"

"He was in the King's Arms, when I went there to read my letter--he and Governor Robertson--and I had a few words wi' the Governor anent Dr. Rogers and the reopening of our kirk."

"You did well and right to speak to them. It is a sin and a shame in a Christian country to be kept out o' Sabbath ordinances."

"He told me we had the Church o' England to go to."

"Aye; and we hae the King o' England to serve."

"Here comes Neil, and I am glad o' it. Somehow, he makes things mair bearable."

The young man entered with a grave cheerfulness; he bowed to his father, kissed his mother, and then drew a chair to the cold hearth. In a few minutes he rang the bell, and when it was answered, bid the negro bring hot coals and kindle the fire.

"Neil, my dear lad," said the Elder, "are you remembering that wood is nearly ungetable--ten pounds or mair a

cord? I hae but little left. I'm feared it won't see the war out."

"If wood is getable at any price, I am not willing to see mother and you shivering. Burn your wood as you need it, and trust for the future."

"I hae told your father the same thing often, Neil; careful, of course, we must be, but sparing is not caring. There was once a wife who always took what she wanted, and she always had enough." The fire blazed merrily, and Neil smiled, and the Elder stretched out his thin legs to the heat, and the whole feeling of the room was changed. Then Madame said:

"Neil, your brother Alexander has gane to Scotland."

"I expected him to take that step."

"And he is sending little Maria to us, until he gets a home for her."

"I should not think she will be much in the way, mother. She is only a child."

"She is nearly seventeen years old. She won't be much in my way; it is you that will hae to take her out--to military balls and the like."

"Nonsense! I can't have a child trailing after me in such places."

"Vera likely you will trail after her. You will be better doing that than after some o' the ladies o' Clinton's court."

"I can tell you, Neil," said Neil's father, "that it is a vera pleasant sensation, to hae a bonnie lassie on your arm wha is, in a manner, your ain. I ken naething in the world that gives a man such a superior feeling."

Neil looked at the speaker with a curious admiration. He could not help envying the old man who had yet an enthusiasm about lovely women.

"I fancy, sir," he answered, "that the women of your youth were a superior creation to those of the present day. I cannot imagine myself with any woman whose society would give me that sensation."

"Women are always the same, Neil--yesterday, to-day, and forever. What they are now, they were in Abraham's time, and they will be when time shall be nae langer. Is not that so, mother?"

"Maybe; but you'll tak' notice, they hae suited a' kinds o' men, in a' countries and in a' ages. I dare say our little Maria will hae her lovers as well as the lave o' them, and her uncle Neil will be to keep an eye on them. But I'm weary and sleepy, and if you men are going to talk the fire out I'll awa' to my room and my bed."

"I have something to say to father," answered Neil, "about the Government, and so----"

"Oh, the Government!" cried Madame, as she stood with her lighted candle in her hand at the open door; "dinna call it a government, Neil; call it a blunderment, or a plunderment, if you like, but the other name is out o' all befitting."

"Mother, wait a moment," said Neil. "You were saying that Maria would want to be taken to dances; I got an invitation to-day. What do you say to this for an introduction?" As he spoke he took out of his pocket a gilt-edged note tied with transverse bands of gold braid and narrow red ribbon. Madame watched him impatiently as he carefully and deliberately untied the bows, and his air of reverential regard put her in a little

temper.

"Cut the strings and be done wi' it, Neil," she said crossly. "There is nae invite in the world worth such a to-do as you are making. And dinna forget, my lad, that you once nearly threw your life awa' for a bit o' orange ribbon! Maybe the red is just as dangerous."

Then Neil took the red ribbon between his finger and thumb, and dropping it into the fire looked at his mother with the denial in his face. "It is from Mrs. Percival," he said; and she nodded her understanding, but could not help giving him a last word ere she closed the door:

"If you hae a fancy for ribbons, Neil, tak' my advice, and get a blue one; a' the good men in the country are wearing blue."

CHAPTER II.

THE FAIR AND THE BRAVE.

At breakfast next morning the conversation turned naturally upon the arrival of Maria Semple. The Elder showed far the most enthusiasm concerning it. He wondered, and calculated, and supposed, till he felt he had become tiresome and exhausted sympathy, and then he subsided into that painful attitude of disappointment and resignation, which is, alas, too often the experience of the aged? His companions were not in sympathy with him. Madame was telling herself she must not expect too much. Once she had set her heart upon a beautiful girl who was to become Neil's wife, and her love had been torn up by the roots: "maist women carry a cup of sorrow for some one to drink," she thought, "and I'm feared for them." As for Neil, he felt sure the girl was going to be a tie and a bore, and he considered his brother exceedingly selfish in throwing the care of his daughter upon his aged parents.

It was not a pleasant meal, but in good hearts depression and doubt find no abiding place. When Neil had gone to his affairs, the Elder looked at his wife, and she gave him his pipe with a smile, and talked to him about Maria as she put away her china. And she had hardly turned the key of the glass closet, when the knocker of the front door fell twice--two strokes, clear, separate, distinct. The Elder rose quickly and with much excitement. "That is Bradley's knock," he said; "I never heard it before, but it is just the way he would call any one."

He was going out of the room as he spoke, and Madame joined him. When they entered the hall the front door was open, and a short, stout man was standing on the threshold, holding a young girl by the hand. He delivered her to the Elder very much as he would have delivered a valuable package intrusted to his care, and then, as they stood a few moments in conversation, Maria darted forward, and with a little cry of joy nestled her head on her grandmother's breast. The confiding love of the action was irresistible. "You darling!" whispered the old lady with a kiss; "let me look at you!" And she put her at arm's length, and gazed at the pretty, dark face with its fine color, and fine eyes, charmingly set off by the scarlet hood of her traveling cloak.

"What do you think o' your granddaughter, Elder?" she asked, when he joined them, and her voice was trembling with love and pride.

"I think she is yoursel' o'er again; the vera same bonnie Janet Gordon I woo'd and loved in Strathallen nearly fifty years syne. Come and gie me twenty kisses, bairnie. You are a vera cordial o' gladness to our hearts."

Madame had swithered in her own mind before the arrival of Maria about the room she was to occupy--the little one in the wing, furnished in rush and checked blue and white linen; or the fine guest room over the best parlor. A few moments with her grandchild had decided her. "She shall hae the best we have," she concluded. "What for would I gie it to my cousin Gordon's wife, and lock my ain flesh and blood out o' it?" So she took Maria to her best guest chamber, and when the girl stood in the center of it and looked round with an exclamation of delight, she was well rewarded.

"This is the finest room I ever saw," said Maria. "I love splendid rooms, and mahogany makes any place handsome. And the looking glasses! O grandmother, I can see myself from top to toe!" and she flung aside her cloak, and surveyed her little figure in its brown camblet dress and long white stomacher, with great satisfaction.

"And where are your clothes, Maria?" asked Madame.

"I brought a small trunk with me, and Mr. Bradley will send it here this morning; the rest of my trunks were sent with Captain De Vries. I dare say they will be here soon."

"They are here already, De Vries arrived yesterday, but the rest o' your trunks, how many more have you, lassie?"

"Three large, and one little one. Father told me I was to get everything I wanted, and I wanted so many things. I got them all, grandmother--beautiful dresses, and mantillas, and pelerines; and dozens of pretty underwear. I have had four women sewing for me ever since last Christmas."

"But the expense o' it, Maria!"

"Mrs. Charlton said I had simply received the proper outfit for a young lady entering society."

"But whatever did your father say?"

"He whistled very softly. There are many ways of whistling, grandmother, and my father's whistle was his form of saying he was astonished."

"I hae no doubt he was astonished."

"I had to have summer and winter dresses, and ball dresses, and home dresses, and street dresses; and all the little things which Mrs. Charlton says are the great things. Father is very generous to me, and he has ordered Lambert and Co. to send me thirty pounds every month. He told me that food and wood and every necessity of life was very dear in New York, and that if I was a good girl I would do my full share in bearing the burden of life."

This was her pretty way of making it understood that she was to pay liberally for her board, and then, with a kiss, she added, "let us go downstairs. I want to see all the house, grandmother. It is like home, and I have had so little home. All my life nearly has been spent at school. Now I am come home."

They went down hand in hand, and found the Elder walking about in an excited manner. "I think I shall bide awa' from business to-day," he said; "I dinna feel like it. It isna every day a man gets a granddaughter."

"*Tuts!* Nonsense, Alexander! Go your ways to the store, then you can talk to your acquaintance o' your good fortune. Maria and I will hae boxes to unpack, and clothes to put away; and you might as weel call at De Vries, and tell him to get Miss Semple's trunks here without sauntering about them. Batavius is a slow creature. And Neil must hae the news also, so just be going as quick as you can, Alexander."

He was disappointed; he had hoped that Maria would beg him to stay at home, but he put on his long coat with affected cheerfulness, and with many little delays finally took the road. Then the two women went through the house together, and by that time Bradley had sent the small trunk, and they unpacked it, and talked about the goods, and about a variety of subjects that sprang naturally from the occupation.

All at once Madame remembered to ask Maria where she had spent the previous night, and the girl answered, "I slept at the Bradley's. It was quite twilight when we reached their house, and Mr. Bradley said this road was beset by thieves and bad people after dark, and he also thought you retired early and would not care to be disturbed."

"Vera considerate o' Mr. Bradley, I am sure; perhaps mair so than necessary. Maria, my dear, I hope you are not very friendly wi' his daughter."

"Not friendly with Agnes Bradley! Why, grandmother, I could not be happy without her! She has been my good angel for three years. When she came to Mrs. Charlton's I had no friends, for I had such a bad temper the girls called me 'Spitfire' and 'Vixen' and such names, and I was proud of it. Agnes has made me gentle and

wishful to do right. Agnes is as nearly an angel as a woman can be."

"Fair nonsense, Maria! And I never was fond o' angelic women, they dinna belong to this world; and your grandfather dislikes John Bradley, he will not allow any friendship between you and Agnes Bradley. That is sure and certain."

"What has Mr. Bradley done wrong to grandfather?"

"Naething; naething at all! He just does not like him."

"I shall have to explain things to grandfather. He ought not to take dislikes to people without reason."

"There's no one can explain things to your grandfather that he does not want to understand. I know naething o' John Bradley, except that he is a Methodist, and that kind o' people are held in scorn."

"I think we can use up all our scorn on the Whigs, grandmother, and let the Methodists alone. Mr. Bradley is a Tory, and trusted and employed by the Government, and I am sure he preached a beautiful sermon last Sunday at Stamford."

"Your grandfather said he would preach at Stamford."

"He preached on the green outside the town. There were hundreds to listen to him. Agnes led the singing."

"Maria Semple! You don't mean to tell me you were at a field preaching!"

"It was a good preaching and----"

"The man is a saddle-maker! I hae seen him working, day in and day out, in his leather apron."

"St. Paul was a tent-maker; he made a boast of it, and as he was a sensible man, I have no doubt he wore an apron. He would not want to spoil his toga."

"*Hush! Hush!* You must not speak o' Saint Paul in that tempered and common way. The Apostles belong to the Kirk. Your father was brought up a good Presbyterian."

"Dear grandmother, I am the strictest kind of Presbyterian. I really went to hear Agnes. If you had seen her standing by her father's side on that green hill and heard her sing:

'Israel, what hast thou to dread? Safe from all impending harms, Round thee, and beneath thee, spread, Are the everlasting arms.'

you would have caught up the song as hundreds did do, till it spread to the horizon, and rose to the sky, and was singing and praying both. People were crying with joy, and they did not know it."

"I would call her a dangerous kind o' girl. Has she any brothers or sisters?"

"Her brother went to an English school at the beginning of the war. He was to finish his education at Oxford. Annie Gardiner--one of the schoolgirls--told me so. He was her sweetheart. She has no sisters."

"Sweetheart?"

"Just boy and girl sweethearting. Agnes seldom spoke of him; sometimes she got letters from him."

"Has Agnes a sweetheart?"

"There was a young gentleman dressed like a sailor that called on her now and then. We thought he might be an American privateer."

"Then Agnes Bradley is for the Americans! Well, a good girl, like her, would be sure to take the right side. Nae doubt the hymn she sung referred to the American army."

"I am sure people thought so; indeed, I fear Agnes is a little bit of a rebel, but she has to keep her thoughts and feelings to herself."

"Plenty o' folks hae to do the same; thought may be free here, but speech is bond slave to His Majesty George o' Hanover, or England, or Brunswick, or what you like."

"Or America!"

"Nae, nae! You may make that last statement wi' great reservation, Maria. But we must make no statements that will vex your grandfather, for he is an auld man, and set in his ways, and he does not believe in being contradicted."

And at this moment they heard the Elder's voice and step. He came in so happily, and with such transparent excuses for his return home, that the women could not resist his humor. They pretended to be delighted; they said, "how nice it was that he had happened to arrive just as dinner was ready to serve;" they even helped him to reasons that made his return opportune and fortunate. And Batavius arriving with the trunks immediately after the meal, Madame made unblushing statements about her dislike of the man, and her satisfaction in the Elder being at hand to prevent overcharges, and see to the boxes being properly taken upstairs.

Then Maria begged him to remain and look at her pretty things, and that was exactly what he wished to do; and so, what with exhibiting them, and trying some of them on, and sorting, and putting them into drawers and wardrobes, the afternoon slipped quickly away. The Elder had his pipe brought upstairs, and he sat down and smoked it on the fine sofa Mrs. Gordon had covered with her own needlework when she occupied the room; and no one checked him or made discouraging demurs. He had his full share of the happy hours; and he told himself so as the ladies were dressing; and he sat waiting for Neil, alone with his pleasant thoughts and anticipations.

"Auld age has its compensations," he reflected. "They wouldna hae let Neil sit and smoke amid their fallals; and it was the bonniest sight to watch them, to listen to their *Ohs!* and *Ahs!* and their selfish bits o' prattle, anent having what no ither woman was able, or likely to have. Women are queer creatures, but, Oh, dear me, what a weary world it would be without them!"

And when Maria came down stairs in a scarlet gown over a white silk petticoat, a string of gold beads round her neck, and her hair dressed high and fastened with a gold comb, he was charmed afresh. He rose with the gallantry of a young man, to get her a chair, but she made him sit down and brought a stool to his side, and nestled so close to him that he put his arm across her pretty shoulders. And it added greatly to his satisfaction that Neil came suddenly in, and discovered them in this affectionate attitude.

"One o' the compensations o' auld age," he said in happy explanation. "Here is your niece, Maria Semple, Neil; and proud you may be o' her!"--and Maria rose, and made her uncle a sweeping courtesy, and then offered him her hand and her cheek. The young man gave her a warm welcome, and yet at the same moment wondered what changes the little lady would bring to the house. For he had sense and experience enough to know that a girl so attractive would irresistibly draw events to her.

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