

The Resurrection



HE whom they had always thought of as Mr. Ward, but who all this day had been a shadowy, necessary, scarcely seen and yet alleviating presence, was at the parlour door.

"I think you may——" He nodded solemnly.

They rose stiffly, the desultory talk they had been keeping up stricken with silence.

After a moment, Clara, who was nearest the door, murmured: "Shall I go first?"

She moved on, keeping hold of her husband's arm, and the others followed.

Little Jean kept close to her father, her big bright eyes very wide open. Helen was near them, hiding with an almost sullen look the pounding of her heart.

Grandpa walked by himself in a kind of stolid bewilderment. His daughters glanced at him anxiously, but did not go to him. He moved ponderously in his square-toed blackened shoes—an old man's shoes. The discomfort that he had always felt on Sundays, when Grandma had made him put on his "other clothes," was intensified, ludicrously and yet tragically. Now, for a day, he had sat around the house, pitifully out of ease in his solemn best clothes, his big scarred hands idle on his knees.

Was it Grandma who was having all this fuss made for her? That was not like her. No wonder he did not believe it.

The parlour seemed to be motionless in a strange chill.

All its well-known characteristics were curiously heightened—its order, its prim propriety, its smell of Brussels carpet and painted woodwork. Every chair was strangely significant—and the stand, the fern, the bookcase, the centre table with the Bible. All seemed new, and at the same time more familiar than ever before.

So the persons standing there felt themselves more than ever as individuals, and far more than ever as a family.

At once they were aware of an alien scent of flowers, breathlessly still. Reluctant, yet moved by a yearning inner necessity, they moved close about and looked upon her.

Here was the very essence of that blended familiarity and strangeness. Her crimped white hair was parted neatly, as always, held by her own shell combs. She wore her black silk dress. But the alien look of hot-house flowers upon her plain small person that they had seemed to know so well—and, most of all, her face . . .

Little Jean whispered: "Mamma, is it *Grandma*?"

"Yes, dear, of course. Don't you know her?"

The child did not answer. Just so, on autumn mornings, she had looked out to see her whole familiar world transfigured by the silver touch of frost. This was like frost—still, white, and wonderful.

Clara made an uncontrollable murmur.

"I never saw her look so lovely," said Lil.

The sisters—Clara, Lil, and Jennie—drew together. The three sons-in-law made a murmur of assent. Then, after a decorous interval, feeling more terribly out of place than at their weddings in this same room, they stole out, one after another.

Helen, who had come afraid, and because they said she must, stood now in awe to find this still beauty where she had expected terror.

Little Jean's wonderment was in the minds of all: Is this Grandma?

Her face, like the things in the room, baffled them with its blending of the known and unknown. The small aged

features were hers—more than ever hers. But the look . . .

"It is not herself," the daughters thought.

"It is herself," the old man felt.

They had been used to know her as a little, gentle, fluttering-voiced woman, anxiously unobtrusive, trying always with pathetic eagerness to "do for" them. They had seen her always at work—cooking for them all, mending for Grandpa, mending and sewing for them, then making things for their children, little dresses, underwear, and lastly rows and rows of knitted lace for tiny petticoats. Only a few times, when they were children, they had caught her, just at dusk, sitting alone by the kitchen window staring out at the grey light behind the apple-trees; and had crept away, feeling awed and very lonely. But mostly they had never thought of her as a person in herself. She had been Mother, and, then, Grandma.

Now the lonely feeling came back to them, deepened, and with a wondering hurt. The strange inscrutable superiority of death crushed them. They had lost their mother indeed.

Her household look was gone from her; and now, at the moment of supposed extinction, her essential self, overlaid, neglected, for years upon years, had taken radiant, calm possession. They were bewildered, filled with an obscure remorse. She who had been so simply Mother, had she, too, been something other than she seemed? The essential solitude of every human soul came over them with icy breath. And yet she was beautiful! They had the feeling of someone who stands upon a high mountain-top and sees, with an awe transcending fear, the barren sublimity of space.

Was this Grandma?

After a silent, tearful, concentrated look, that carved that still face for ever on their hearts, they touched the little girls and moved away. They could not see her again, they would have gazed for ever, but the very poignancy of the moment made it end.

But Grandpa did not move. His lips, covered with a frost of beard, hung apart. There was a pathetic puzzlement, rather than grief, in his eyes. Clara looked at her sisters, moved toward him, then went uncertainly away. He stayed on alone.

He could never have spoken, even to himself, the dim strange things that moved in his clumsy brain. It meant something, he felt. That look was a sign. But he could not make it out. Some of the hurt that his daughters had felt worked at his old heart. But mostly wonderment.

He knew, half unconsciously, this look so strange to all the rest. It was the spirit of her girlhood. It was the look that she had worn to him years ago when he had first loved her. Then too she had seemed beautiful and far away.

And her beauty, her remoteness in her white silence, smote him. She had lived their life so long—never her own. He felt a kind of fear to see the spirit that, all these years with him, had underlain the acquiescence, the seeming patience of every day. Mother—Grandma—he struggled for the old familiar feeling. It would not come.

Perhaps it was only her thoughtfulness to look so fair that the children might not be frightened. Or that sense of propriety at which he had often scoffed, to look her very best upon a great occasion. Or that foolish sentiment that women have—to take with her this look as her dearest keepsake.

But he felt that it was a sign. And strange things struggled in him for clearness. It seemed that she might wear this look to show that that religion of hers, which had meant nothing to him, was not so foolish after all—a woman's affair. Broken phrases of it went through his mind— Shall be no sorrow there— All your sorrows shall be forgotten— All shall be bliss— The Resurrection and the Life—

This look of hers . . . that vague hurt beset him. Why should she look so instead of the familiar way of their life together? The wrinkles, the hollows, the marks of care and toil, were gone, were as if they had not been. Her virgin

untouched self shone supreme. Had their whole life counted for nothing at the final test? He was awed before the great relentless artistry of death, that, putting aside the minute, daily, painful sculpturing of life, had disdained it all and found this one thing fit for immortality.

He was the one human being who had seen just this look of hers before. Something proud and tearful swelled in his dumb old heart. Perhaps he would find her so again. It meant something. Thoughts of a past—long gone—flitted through his mind. For a moment he was lifted.

And then he was not sure. He felt, as always, baffled, ill at ease before beauty. He seemed more than ever an intruder, with his big clumsy feet, in this small parlour. Her fine clothes, the ceremony, the flowers, bewildered him. He felt old and hurt and doubtful.

What did it mean? Perhaps the others knew. Or perhaps it was not true—no one else had seen.

So when Helen came to the door and said: "Grandpa, mamma says to come," he turned and, looking at the young girl with puzzled misty eyes, asked her wistfully:

"Your Grandma looks—real nice—don't she, Nellie?"