

CLOSING THE DOORS.

I have closed the door on Doubt; I will go by what light I can find. And hold up my hands, and reach them out To the glimmer of God in the dark, and call; "I am Thine, though I grope and stumble and fall. I serve, and Thy service is kind."

I have closed the door on Fear. I have lived with me far too long. If he were to break forth and reappear, I should lift my eyes and look at the sky. And sing loud, and run lightly by. He will never follow a son.

I have closed the door on Gloom. His house has too narrow a view. I must seek for my soul a wider room. With windows to open and let in the sun. And radiant lamps when the day is done, And the breeze of the world blowing through.

—British Weekly.

GETTING ACQUAINTED.

Young Mrs. Redford's face was flushed and her eyes were wide. Redford laid his hand on her forehead. From the next room came the sound of a subdued sniffing.

"Matter?" he asked, with a backward nod at the door.

"She's crying," whispered his wife. "I hurt her feelings. I told her she talked to the baby too much and that I didn't like the sound of her voice and that she was making the baby nervous and—"

She stopped and turned away her face. The pillow was wet.

"And you've been crying, too," said Redford, with a gently disapproving smile.

"She got on my nerves," whispered Mrs. Redford. "Oh, Tom, I can't stand her. She's doing her best—but she doesn't know how." Her big blue eyes filled with tears.

"Guess she'll have to be bounced," said he, lightly. "Leave her to me."

Patting her cheek and smoothing her hair, he lingered, looking down at her as she lay, excited and feverish. He experienced a sinking of the heart, a wave of dejection as he wondered where this great end, for which she has lain thus in the grip of some strange malady that the doctors could not name. Half of each night he had worked over her, fighting fever, fending off chill. Each morning he had left her to go to the office, deluding himself into believing that she was a little better, only to return after a day of mental torment to take up the battle once more. And it was a losing battle—he felt it; she was growing paler and thinner and bigger-eyed and weaker every day.

He leaned over and kissed her and she threw her arms about his neck.

"Oh, Tom," she said, "I'm never going to get well. I know it! I know it!"

"Nonsense," replied he, cheerily. "People always say that just before the turn comes."

She looked at him wistfully, and, perhaps because she was weak, the chance remark gave her heart.

"Have you had anything to eat?" he asked.

"A glass of egg and milk."

"Well, I've brought a surprise package for you. It's downstairs. Can you stay awake for half an hour?"

"I can try," she replied with a trace of her old spirit. "I'm awfully hungry."

"Well, dear, you leave everything to me. To-morrow's Sunday, and Monday's Washington's Birthday. To-night I'm going to fire the nurse. I've already fired the doctor—that is, I've told him not to come again till Tuesday. And I'm going to take you in hand. Will you do whatever I say?"

"Yes, dear."

"Good!" said he, tapping her cheek. "By Tuesday you'll be in shape to spank the baby. I'll be back in a few minutes."

He went into the next room. There sat the nurse, a mere girl, red-eyed, red-nosed, dabbing at her face with a wet handkerchief rolled into a ball.

"Good evening, Miss Bell," said Redford. "How's the baby?"

"She's a dear," replied Miss Bell, and dissolved in tears.

"Would you mind going downstairs if you're going to do that?" he asked, coldly.

She rose, sniffing, and went. He walked to a basket which stood on a trunk in a corner by the window and looked down at the little occupant who was sleeping with her fists tucked under her chin. He felt he was scarcely acquainted with his own baby, he had seen her so little; and he was not quite sure that he cared. She had been the source of all the trouble. He had not had time to generate any great love for her—in fact, the chrysome nurse was the only one who had. As he looked at the little pink face and fists, however, he admitted that they were very pretty. But, as usual, he hadn't time to look at them.

He went downstairs, took a package from the hall table where he had left it, and proceeded to the kitchen. Miss Bell was sitting at a window in the dining-room. She appeared to have assuaged the fount of her tears, and he asked her to come and sit in the kitchen so that he might talk with her while he cooked Mrs. Redford's supper.

"Oh," said Miss Bell, explosively, "let me do it!"

"You don't know how," answered Redford, smiling. "I've planned this meal and I've got to cook it."

At the kitchen table, with the nurse seated near by, he unpacked his package, discovering a little fillet of steak cut very thick—he had selected it with the utmost care.

"I hope it's tender," said he, judicially. "Surely," gasped Miss Bell—"surely, you're not going to give her that!"

"I am," he answered, "and two nice baked potatoes with clear gravy, and a cup of cocoa, and this beautiful little baked custard that a kind lady gave me to-day."

"But—but—" Miss Bell was almost inarticulate. "But the doctor!"

"The doctor can go hang."

He put the custard in the icebox and the potatoes in the gas oven and lighted a burner under an old-fashioned cast-iron spider which he had found in the closet. Miss Bell watched him, speechless, fascinated.

"It'll kill her," she murmured at last.

"I'm taking the risk," he replied, grimly. "She's certainly grown no better on the slops and iron and strychnine she's been getting. I'm going to try FOOD."

Miss Bell, whose experience of men

was limited, felt a catch in her throat as she saw him calmly tie on his wife's apron that had hung for three months unused on the cellar door, and then proceed to arrange a tray with knife, fork, spoon, plate, cup, and saucer on a white dolly embroidered with forget-me-nots, all of which he selected with great care from the mahogany sideboard in the dining-room. Her head swam as she watched him test the potatoes with a fork and make the cocoa and pan-broil the steak.

"Where did he ever learn to do it!" she queried, half aloud.

Redford laughed. The interest of his occupation and the thought of his great purpose had raised his spirits.

"I've been studying a cook-book on the cars for a week," said he. "I've planned the Lady's menu for every meal for the next three days, and some of them are pretty elaborate. I can tell you. But this—with a wave toward the stove—"this is an old story. I've done it a hundred times, but over a campfire; and that requires some brains."

They fell silent.

"Miss Bell," said he at last, "I'm afraid you'll have to leave."

"Yes," she replied, readily enough, but with symptoms of tears, "I know I will. If I don't suit her I'd better go, and the sooner the better. She said some very unkind things."

"Redford uttered it with a show of heat. "You've no right to be sensitive," said he. "It's part of your profession to be thick skinned as far as your patients are concerned. You know well enough that she couldn't help it. She's some excuse to be nervous and high strung. I tell you frankly, Miss Bell, that I was pretty mad when I got home tonight and heard you sn—er, crying in the next room. There! Don't worry; I'm not angry now. I want to make a proposition. Will you go tonight and call again Tuesday morning? Then I'll tell you finally whether we'll need you any more. I'm going to stay home Monday—holiday, you know."

"Yes," agreed Miss Bell, furtively babbling at her eyes.

She rose and went toward the door, stopped, and threw up her hands. She had some curiously theatrical mannerisms of action as well as of speech. The irritated Redford. He sympathized with his wife's impatience of them. He felt that he would go insane if he had to endure them all day long.

"The baby!" she exclaimed.

"Well?"

"Who'll take care of the ba-a-by?"

"I will."

"But who'll bathe her and dress her?"

"I will." He spoke almost savagely.

"And I'll feed her," he went on, "and mix her food and sterilize her bottles and cure her colic if she has any. There, now run along. You'll have me spoiling this supper in a minute."

She left in a trance, but was back immediately. "Shall I say good night to the patient?"

"No. She's asleep."

He knew that this was a falsehood, but he was in a mood cheerfully to lie, steal, forge, or commit murder if it would do the girl upstairs any good.

"Good night, Miss Bell," he called, less gruffly.

"Good night."

In a few moments the front door closed gently and he was alone with a sick wife and a twelve-weeks-old baby.

Redford opened the door of the sick-room softly and peeped in. His wife was lying lazily, with her hands at her sides, gazing at the ceiling, waiting patiently. The difference between this pale, gray-eyed, quiescent girl and the impatient, spirited, practical girl whom he had married smote him with misgivings; but he saw with relief that the flush had left her face and that a smile was hovering about the corners of her mouth.

"Last call for supper," said he, poking in his head.

She turned her eyes upon him; they were dancing with anticipation.

"O-o-o-h!" said she, glowing over the steak and the potatoes and gravy. "You dear! you dear!" she exclaimed. "And you did it all yourself?"

"Every bit."

"Um, um, but it looks good! And where is she?"

"Gone."

"Tom! Do you mean to say that you've bounced her?"

"Yes."

She laughed. "You always were a good bouncer. Did she make any fuss?"

"Not a bit."

"But Tom—Tom—what are you going to do? The baby?"

He sat down on the edge of the bed and fed her while he talked.

"I've dedicated these three days to you and to getting acquainted with the youngster. She's our baby. She isn't Miss Bell's. I've been getting jealous. I want to have a good look at her."

"But suppose she cries?"

"The doctor's books say that she ought to cry—good for her lungs. How do you feel?"

"Bully!" It was one of his words and she said it with more spirit than she had shown in weeks. "When you came in just now I was fighting off a chill. I'm saying, I won't have it, I won't have it!"

"And you didn't and won't."

"No."

She was eating with a great zest, like a child, smacking her lips and laughing weakly. Now and then she leaned over and squeezed his hand.

"Do you think it'll kill me?" she asked.

"It'll cure you, help you to get some new blood. Now, after you're through you must cuddle down and go to sleep while I feed the rest of the family. I'm going to take her downstairs so that you won't hear her if she cries. I'll leave the bell right here in case you want me."

"I'm going to lick the platter clean."

"Go ahead."

And she did. A few minutes later Redford tiptoed into the next room, leaving his wife sleeping peacefully. It was six o'clock and near the baby's feeding time. He took up the basket to carry it downstairs. As he lifted it, the tiny sleeper threw out her arms, stirred, smiled, and subsided again.

"That was odd," he thought; "she did that to ward off danger. What does she know about danger?"

As he walked through the dimly lighted hall and down the stairs he kept his eyes fixed on the baby. She was really very pretty and appealing. In spite of her chubbiness she seemed marvelously fragile—like an alabaster figurine tinted the color of pink rose petals. He had always thought very young babies particularly homely little animals—red, shapeless, smelling of milk—but this one had a real beauty of her own and a perfume not at all disagreeable.

He put the basket on a chair against

the wall in the dining-room and went into the kitchen to warm the milk.

Suddenly there came a sound from the dining-room. The basket had creaked. In an instant he was back watching the process of the baby's awaking. It was very interesting and inimitably funny. The fragility of the little face had disappeared. It was getting redder and redder. The pink hands, about as big as rose petals, were flying around like flails; the blue blanket began to heave, the head to flop from side to side. She rubbed her nose with the backs of her fists until that immature bud threatened to disappear entirely, and she snorted and puffed like a microscopic porpoise.

"She certainly doesn't lack energy," thought he, in absorbed amusement.

Then she opened her eyes, enormous blue eyes the color of a fringed gentian, with long, dark lashes for a fringe.

"Why, she's a beauty!" he exclaimed in astonishment.

For a moment she seemed to be looking at him. Then her lip curled. Then, beginning at her toes, he could trace up her legs through her little middle the way that was coming.

He rushed madly for the kitchen. His one thought was to insert some sort of plug to stop that dismal howl, and the bottle seemed to be the natural thing to use.

But the yell came, and was a great success.

"Fool!" began the baby with some moderation, but gaining momentum. He seized the bottle from the saucenap of water in which it had been heating, and immediately put it down very quickly on the table and began blowing his fingers at it. He watched the baby the temperature of her milk had risen to the neighborhood of the boiling-point.

Meanwhile the call of the hungry infant was rising in volume. It had fallen into a regular rhythm of "Wah—wah—wah, wah, wah!" It was unbelievably full and strident, not shrill, yet by no means musical.

He hastened back to the basket. The baby's mouth presented a square cavern unadorned with teeth, her eyes were shut, and her clenched fists beat the air in perfect time with her vociferations.

"She's breaking something if she keeps that up!" thought Redford. "Maybe if I turn her over she'll feel better."

As he lifted her the baby closed her mouth and opened her eyes. Her lower lip pouted. She breathed quickly, eagerly, and made peculiar sucking noises. Redford watched, entranced. He had never dreamed that the baby could exhibit so many expressions of countenance. Then he had an inspiration.

"Hang it!" he said aloud. "I never thought to change her underpinning."

And while she continued to make sucking noises he laboriously manipulated saucy-pins and doctored until it had been so many expressions of countenance. Then he had an inspiration.

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