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The Seed of the Righteous
A Love Story by
JULIET WILBOR TOMPKINS

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CHAPTER V. (Continued.)
 "It was sad," she said generally.
 "Oh, yes; oh, unbearably!" The thought of it seemed to clutch at Mrs. Cartaret's throat. "We—we who are fond of him—we must try to make it up to him, mustn't we? If there is any way we can?"
 Her intensity embarrassed Chloe. She felt in an appeal that she did not know how to answer.
 "I don't believe he is unhappy now," she ventured. "He has moods—"

"Ah, that is the artistic temperament," Mrs. Cartaret broke in. "They say that an artist is both happier and sadder than other people. Things hurt him more—you know what I mean?"
 "Oh, I know," Chloe admitted, rather dryly. Perhaps the other felt some failure of sympathy, for when she spoke again it was of a drive they must take.
 "I don't want you to be bored," she said, and such diffidence in one who had so much to give made Chloe very worshipping.

"It is wonderful here. And to be with you, Mrs. Cartaret—she said earnestly, and felt the jeweled hands on her shoulder a delicate honor as they went up to the house.
 Mrs. Cartaret played to her that evening and her music seemed to make a different person of her; or, rather, to make her that which she appeared, but so often fell short of in speech. Chloe, tears on her cheeks in the darkened room, felt a surging impulse to kneel beside her and cry out her trouble: "I have lost love! Tell me how I can go on without it!" But, as the music ceased, Mrs. Cartaret spoke.

"I always think that music sounds better in the dark—have you noticed it?" she said, and the doors of Chloe's secret slammed shut.
 The next day the outer conditions were no less charming, but Chloe's joy in them was becoming difficult to maintain. She hated Alex, never saw or wished to see him; yet with shame and anger she had to learn that there was no peace for her away from where he was. A homesick cry, "I want to go back!" sprang up in unguarded moments. Worst of all, she began to feel a fretful irritation at the most lovely lady of the house. The insistent demand for her opinion on small or settled subjects where opinion was not worth the trouble made her dread that at the next earnest, "Don't you think?" she might burst out with some wild protest. Then she took herself in hand, applying harsh names and vowing reform.

"Toto is a bad girl, Billy," she explained as she washed his happy face after the long day's playing. "You will have to scold her."
 This was a favorite game. Toto had long ago declared that if she had to do all the bathing and dressing of Billy, he in common fairness must do all the scolding of them both when they were naughty. Billy did it with uplifted forefinger and dramatic intensity, interrupted by gurgles of laughter, and the device had averted many a baby storm. Chloe had only to say, "Good yourself, Billy, good and hard!" and Billy was instantly all on the side of law and order. Tonight, however, he was inclined to be indulgent.
 "What did you do, Toto?" he asked in a comfortable and gossiping whisper.
 "I had bad, cross feelings."
 "Then Toto is tired and must lie down." This turning on her of her own frequent decree made her laugh.
 "All right," she said obediently, and placed herself on the broad couch. They had a charming big corner room, bright with rosy chintz, its casements opening on the garden and the water. Just to lie looking about it, breathing its scented purity, was enough to exorcise bad feelings. "Come and lie down with me," she begged, throwing out her arm. Billy climbed up beside her, and they were presently so deep in a story that they did not hear a light step in the hall. Chloe had come to the final, "And he told his mother he'd never, never—run away, against my wishes!" with its appropriate embrace before she was aware that her hostess, stood at the open door.

"Oh, Mrs. Cartaret!" she apologized, but Mrs. Cartaret would not let her get up.
 "I never knew how to tell stories," she said, in her eyes the wistful shadow that Chloe had seen on the beauty's face.
 "It takes a special gift—don't you think so?"
 Chloe only smiled. She felt good and happy now, lying in her pleasant room; lifted above petty irritation. The appealing grace of the slender figure drooping forward in the chair, beside her moved her to put out a warm hand.
 "It is beautiful here," she said. "You are so kind, Mrs. Cartaret! You don't know how we all feel about what you are doing for Ralston."

Mrs. Cartaret's flush made Chloe fear that she had blundered. "Ah, that is—a privilege," she said hurriedly. "Your brother has great talent." She began to unfasten the strings of a package she had brought, as though to leave the subject; then she paused, turning on the girl her look of dark intensity. "Life has been hard on him," she said. "Rare and fine spirits need protection; the world is so rough! One longs to—to make it easier. If one can—if it is right! It is so difficult to know what is—right; don't you think so? And what you think right—perhaps others will think wrong. One doesn't know what to do!"
 Chloe was silent before a dismal revelation. "Some one has objected to her backing the play—or they're going to," was her distressed thought. Words of Alex's, resolutely forgotten,

came rushing back; "Twenty or thirty thousand dollars will matter to her. How are you all going to feel if it is a flat failure?" For a bleak moment Chloe knew the whole bitterness and ignominy of dependence. She did not want this woman's money to touch her family; she did not want to be a taker of disputed gifts! Oh, if we only had our own!" was her silent cry.
 A clear and simple voice broke the tense silence. "Is 'at a present?' it asked sweetly.
 "Oh, Billy!" Chloe reproached him, but Mrs. Cartaret smiled and gave him the package.
 "Yes; it is a present for Billy," she said.
 "Did granfaver send it?"
 She looked so puzzled that Chloe hastened to explain. "He means the statue," she said. Mrs. Cartaret looked more puzzled than ever, but did not pursue the subject. Chloe had opened the box and was encouraging Billy's rapture over a gaily tasseled horse and cart.

"Oh, the lil' pony!" he was saying in utter tenderness, his curled hands uplifted before the wonder of it. "Toto, the lil' pony!" Toto's eyes, shining with laughter, begged Mrs. Cartaret to see how funny and adorable he was.
 "Mrs. Cartaret gave it to you, darling," she said. "You want to thank her, don't you?"
 Billy instantly rose and offered his broad face for the kiss of gratitude. Then he placed horse and cart on her knees that she might share with him all their beauties. She met him very earnestly; her hungeriness to make friends touched Chloe with a renewed sense of her loneliness and her disappointed motherhood. She forgave her own moment of bitterness as she watched. The precious gift of Billy's affection was, after all, a real return. She was sorry when a maid came to take the boy to his supper.

Billy also resented it. He got down on the floor with an obstinate little head shake that Chloe well knew.
 "You can take your pony with you, dear," she urged, but Billy did not even look up.
 "I don't want my supper," he said, running the horse back and forth. Mrs. Cartaret was alarmed but Chloe rose with brisk assurance.
 "Now, Billy, if you don't look out, in about two minutes you are going to be naughty," she told him. "So box both your ears, hard. Give it to them quick, darling!" There was a bare second of suspense; then the day was saved. Billy's two hands went joyously into action while his face beamed out between. Then, punished and reformed, he tucked horse and cart under his arm and gave a hand to Caroline. Mrs. Cartaret's dazed expression made Chloe laugh.

"Oh, Billy is self-punishing—I've brought him up to that," she explained. "It saves us a lot of struggles."
 Mrs. Cartaret sighed as she rose. "You really are an extraordinary family," she murmured.
 Each day grew a little harder for Chloe. Here she had everything heart could desire and nothing good awaited her in the hot town; yet by the end of the week homesickness had risen to a fever. Every waking hour was filled with a silent wail: "Oh, I want to go home!" When the last day came, she could scarcely hide her passion of re-

lief.
 "It has done you good here," Mrs. Cartaret said, and Chloe laughed joyously.
 "I never felt better," she said aloud, but her heart said, "Tomorrow—tomorrow at this time I shall be almost home!"
 It was Sunday, a day Ralston usually spent here, but rehearsals had begun, and he was not expected this week. They drove to a pretty stone church and pleasant people spoke to them afterward, but Mrs. Cartaret shrank away from them. She was breathless with shyness when they reached the motor.
 "I hope you will often stay with me," she said to Chloe. "I have been so much in my life. And the more you stay alone, the harder it is to face people, don't you think?"
 And Chloe, because she was going home and was wildly happy, felt touched, and reproached herself for the half-hearted companionship she had been giving.
 "I don't know how I shall get Billy away," she said. "You have quite won him. He is always saying, 'Let's go and find her!'"
 The lovely face was lit for a moment; then it darkened. "But you don't think I am trying to win him away from you?" she urged her hand over Chloe's. "You wouldn't think that, would you?"
 "Why, of course not! Why, I want him to love everybody!" Chloe could not make her denial emphatic enough to satisfy her inner protest. As if she wanted her baby's love limited to herself! "If he didn't love you, when you have been so dear to him—why, it wouldn't be Billy!"
 Mrs. Cartaret was so gratefully pleased that Chloe had to forgive her. She went back to her room, and from a great lady, gracious and aloof, to a poor dear who blundered so earnestly that one must protect and reassure her. Chloe did her friendly best and tried not to be relieved when they turned in at the gate. Some one was coming to meet them, rising from a long chair on the veranda.
 "Is it Ralston?" Chloe exclaimed.
 Mrs. Cartaret turned with a start; then Chloe, beside her, felt a change that was like a sharp fall of temperature. She looked from the sleek, fashionable young man, coming down the steps with an air of ownership, to Mrs. Cartaret's face, and saw that it was stricken white. It offered no greeting, and Chloe read fear there, the appalled shadow of something too bad to be true. Then there was a quiet lifting, proud or stubborn, of the graceful body. As the car stopped Mrs. Cartaret stepped down with outstretched hands.
 "Why, Donald!" She kissed him, smiling, murmuring reproaches that she had not been warned. Then she turned to Chloe. "Miss Gage, I want my son to meet you."

It seemed to Chloe that they met with a shock of emptiness. His deep bow, touched with foreignness, was covertly mocking, and hard, unevilly eyes contradicted the courtesy with which he helped her down. She stood by in helpless silence while he explained that business had brought him over on a moment's notice and that Georgette had not been able to come.
 "I knew that you would welcome me, dear mother, even without warning," he said, and Chloe, not knowing why, felt a hot desire to strike him. She turned to slip away, but a squall of joy from the garden checked her. Billy, arms out, was running to take his new love's knees into a wide embrace. A stream of conversation came with him.
 "They was a mover crab and a faver crab and a lil' baby crab," he told her, "and Carline."
 Mrs. Cartaret, very still and composed, had bent down in smiling attention, and though the reason of all this stifled dreadfulness still baffled Chloe, she knew that she must get the little boy away as quickly as possible.
 "Come, Billy; I want you," she urged, and hurried him upstairs. The son's voice followed:

"Quite a family party! The play-wright's child, I take it?"
 She did not hear the answer, for understanding had come with a shamed rush. Here was the one who had protested, who had perhaps come in person to stop the romantic backing of untested plays. Alex's bitter judgment, cast aside as prejudice, suddenly took on the dire force of public opinion. Nothing he had said could be more harsh than the judgment of this mocking young man. He could scarcely stop the play, now that it was in rehearsal, with scenery made and theater engaged; but Chloe wished he might, rather than that it should go on against his sneering protest. Alex, who loved her, had called it highway robbery. "The Gage way!" To Donald Cartaret, they—who worked so hard and meant so well—were a set of leeches fastened on an ill-defended fortune.
 "But suppose it is a great success? Suppose we make thousands of dollars for her?" she flung back at the accusing world, but they were only words; no inner conviction came to her help. The thought of lurching in Donald's presence was so intolerable that she began hastily to pack. She did not know how she could get away, and going would confirm the family guilt; but there were ordeals too horrible to be faced.
 The dreaded knock at the door made her heart vault. She opened it to send down some excuse about a headache; but it was Mrs. Cartaret who stood there. Her brave smile and the whiteness of her face filled Chloe with impulsive tenderness. She drew her in and knew just what to say.
 "Mrs. Cartaret dear, I really ought to go back home today. There is so much to do there. And I know you want to be alone with your son. There is a train at one something, isn't there? Now, if Billy and I could have a tray of lunch up here—"

A look of wan relief had replaced the forced smile. "I hate to leave you," she said; "but of course, if you really must—if you feel that way—" "I do!"
 "Then Harris can take you straight home in the car. It is so much pleasanter than the train. And Billy would like the ride." Their hands, clinging together, said things that their eyes and words denied.
 "We'd both adore it. We can be ready in ten minutes."
 "Ah, you must lunch. I will send it right up." At the door Mrs. Cartaret hesitated. "I should love to have you stay longer, another week," she said hurriedly, "only I promised your brother to come down for the rehearsals. And so between that and my son—"

"Of course," Chloe assented, adding in a ashamed whisper: "You have been so dear!"
 In a mercifully short time they followed their bags down to the car, Billy too excited over the ride to realize the parting. Chloe had hoped to escape Donald, but he stood on the steps, a courteous host, waiting to help her in. For a moment Chloe felt that she could not, physically could not, go forward; but Billy had run ahead and there was no way out. Donald turned to her with a faint smile.
 "I hope you are not letting me drive you away, Miss Gage," she said, and Chloe suddenly knew that she must be brave now, or scorn herself ever after.

She controlled an anguished impulse to stammer excuses, facing him with girlish defiance.
 "Yes, you are," she said clearly; "but I have to forgive you—I know what it must mean to get back to a dear mother whom you see so very seldom. The least I could do was to run away. Good-by, Mrs. Cartaret. We have had the loveliest time." She kissed her hostess, shook hands with Donald and then it was over. At first she could feel only her tremulous relief; but the last view of the lovely lady, so composed and white and bravely smiling, presently brought a surge of pity. It seemed heartless to leave anyone so softly defenseless alone with Donald Cartaret.
 The return home was not the happy flight that Chloe had foreseen, but the sight of her father's statue brought a dim comfort. Things were never quite unbearable under the shelter of that beloved presence. She slipped out to him by herself that night, looking up into his face with harassed eyes.
 "I am so frightened, father," she confessed. "If the play fails I can't endure it—I can't go on living! I am so ashamed! And I can't say anything. I am all alone. I'm only little Chloe. What can I do?"

Sereno Gage had no answer for her. He was still enclosed in the tattered old fence, with the dying grass at his feet, for Mrs. Gage, going through the formality of asking permission to put the plot in order, had met with an unexpected check. Some vague official, who could not be seen or reached by telephone, had made a vague request for delay.
 "If they were planning to do it themselves, they might have told me before I raised the money," she commented; but she was too absorbed in her Diet Kitchen and her family's affairs to give the matter active thought. Sabra was back, covered with new glories. Ralston's play was going on in two weeks' time. Mrs. Gage, out of her hard experience, said more than once, "It half frightens me!" But they were only words of propitiation, aimed at some jealous power. Never had she reviewed her forces with a more brilliant confidence.
 "This time next year," she began, the night after Chloe's return, but none of her children heard the rest of the sentence, each filling it out in his own way. Ralston, who had been looking at the evening paper, threw it down and went off as though moments were too precious to lose. Chloe turned with a shiver from what she saw, but Sabra was smiling.
 "People want such different things," Sabra said. "Now, to write plays or novels—I don't care how successful they were—would seem to me like playing with paper dolls. Not quite worth a grown person's time."
 (To be continued.)

CAR THIEVES BUSY.
 Council Bluffs, Dec. 12.—Car thieves are showing great activity in Council Bluffs just at the present time. Scarcely a day passes but what reports of robberies are received at police headquarters, of cars of grain or merchandise being broken into in the railroad yards here. And the thieves seem to be getting bolder in their depredations, daylight robberies being reported. Candy, whisky and merchandise are among the articles which have been missed from trains.

When you come to Ottumwa come to my place and visit and ask questions. I may ask some too and we may get acquainted. If I have anything in the implement line, pump line or wagon line that you need I will be glad to sell you but you will not be urged to buy. "Repairs for everything."

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