

And I don't believe it is as cruel as burning him up alive in a railway wreck, or—"

"Perhaps the moment of falling, when you shook him off your skirt was ages long to his experience of time. Perhaps the instant that the shadow of your foot hung over him was lifelong."

"Oh, perhaps, and perhaps—it is all perhapses!"

"Well, it isn't 'perhaps' that it is an absurdity for us with our finite intelligence to attempt to measure the purposes of an infinite intelligence."

"But that is an empty shibboleth—finite and infinite."

"Say great beyond conception then. The Maker of the universe must have been that. And it seems to me that if we can't tell the reason for the suffering we see, it is only rational, in view of the innumerable blessings we see, to take it for granted that there is a reason, and a wise one."

"There may be a reason for death. It puts an end to things," said Mrs. Flanders, pulling to pieces the rose that had been in a fold of her lace; "but tell me, if you can, the reason for all this sin and evil."

"Oh, I can't. No one can. I can only say that death is so universal that it can't be regarded by the great Dispenser as an evil; and that pain and suffering may be such concentrated purification as to be most merciful and full of love; and that even sin may be a casting off of the old serpent's skin."

"That's all so fanciful. We can't govern our lives by fairy stories. Love in pain and suffering? As if I would hurt my child, for instance!"

"You would, certainly, in order to be of service to him."

"I would have prevented the necessity of being of service, if I had been omnipotent."

"And so have missed one of the greatest joys of life."

"Dear me, it's past midnight. I am keeping you out of bed. And I suppose I am foolish to talk to you. You are so prejudiced. I never am moved a particle. And it all amounts to this—a vicious circle. For if this unknown Power is almighty, He must be malevolent; and if He is merciful He is impotent."

"If I did not know that He is almighty in love as in everything else I could not sit and hear you talk so; but I know He leans over you this moment, full of tenderness—"

"How, just how, do you know such a thing, Mary Bruce?"

"Because I am conscious of it, as much as I am of this warm air. Because I feel the love all about me. In the same way I hear music, smell this rose. Only it is with a spiritual, not a physical, perception."

"Isn't it Arsene Houssaye who says: 'There is a sixth sense—the sense of the ideal. Baron d'Holbach has only five senses? Well, God didn't give me, any more than Baron d'Holbach, this spiritual sense. It was very partial of Him.'"

"Helen Flanders, if you stopped criticizing God, and criticized your own habit of thought instead, you'd be a happier person."

"And so would you, I suppose you'd like to say."

"No. But I don't see why you wish to unsettle my belief in what gives me rest and comfort when you have nothing better to offer."

"Then it does unsettle your belief?" she asked, laughing.

"Not an atom. I don't believe I hold your hand at this moment, though I close my eyes. I know I do. Oh, yes, when you can make one single blade of grass grow, you may have the right to question as you do the power that clothes the whole earth in living green. Although I don't think you would wish to, then."

"Making grass grow isn't my business."

"The rebellious live in a dry land, Helen."

"Hark! Hark! Mary! That's Paul. Oh, oh, did you hear him fall? He's come home—not himself again!"

"The poor, poor boy!"

"Oh, my heart, what will become of him? If you hadn't seen him I never would speak of it. He is my idol. He is his father over again. I have reasoned with him, begged him, promised him. It's all no use! You see?"

"Is there nothing else to do?"

"Tell me! Tell me, if there is. I will do it!" and she wrung her white hands.

"Helen, you might pray for help."

"You are mocking me! To what? To whom? Is a shadow—"

"Assume that it is there. It will cease to be a shadow. It will become real."

"Mary Bruce, did you ever have an answer to any prayer?"

"Often. I have thought. And when I did not have the thing I asked, I had help to do without it, something sweeter always than the thing I asked. Helen, dear, let reasoning go to the winds. Only feel! Just as you love this boy, believe that God loves you. You are wandering as far away as the boy is. Don't think any more of the evils you see. Think of blessings. Think of the loveliness of the world, think of your health, your home, your intellect, of this splendid boy that was given you—"

"Given me to see him ruin himself!"

"I don't believe it. That would be monstrous.

You have tried your way, dear, now try mine. You presently will be so sure of a great, sweet, listening, helping power that you will feel a protecting arm, everywhere a divine imminence. You will love it. It will comfort you. And it will make no difference what name you use. You will feel the strength of a friend, a father, upholding you, of the Lord of love and life! Darling, try to find God and ask Him to help you." Her voice trembled, and the tears shook from her eyes as she spoke.

"Well," she said in a moment or two, "I must be off by the first train. You will be very tired, so don't come down. I will be in to say good-by."

Mrs. Flanders smiled bitterly as the door closed. "It is so easy to talk!" she said. But when her friend hung over her a moment next morning, so many sunbeams about her that she might have come out of the blue of the sky, she held her back and whispered: "Mary Bruce, there is nothing left to do. I am going to try."

Helen Flanders was not a person who did things by halves. There being, as she said, nothing else to do except to find God and such help as might come that way, she gave herself up to the search. She talked with men who made a science of the same effort. She threw aside her prejudices sufficiently to see what their faith did for some of these people. "It almost seems," she said to herself, "as if faith was the very seed of the soul, or, at any rate, as if the soul grew only as one had faith. Knowledge is so simple; but this thing called faith perpetually feeds and enfolds the soul, as Mary said it would. Oh, why didn't I learn this in the beginning? Why haven't I taught it to Paul?"

From time to time Mary Bruce had sent her the books of those who hold out the hand to help others climb. She read the gospel of St. John; and when she had read it once she read it again. And all the time she tried what prayer, of such sort as she could make, might do. Sometimes it seemed as though her petition went no farther than her lips; and she laughed at herself, and Paul still stumbled home with the fate of the sot hanging over him. But sometimes she would have said that down dark lengths of thought and feeling there was just a glimmer of light; sometimes as if in the next moment some revelation, however slight, was to be made, some good sunburst of divine warmth and light was coming. And yet, after all, she only half-believed in it.

One night Paul had come in much worse than usual.

He had stayed in bed with aching temples and shaking hands the next day, and he had said to himself that he was not going to listen to reproaches, and had sent word to his mother that he wished to be alone. He felt better toward night, and late in the evening, in his dressing-gown and slippers, he went down to his mother's room. He had not seen much of his mother in these months, having been off with a hunting party in the West, and when at home avoiding interviews when she was alone. He stepped softly now; for if any of her intimates were with her he did not mean to go in; and he pushed the door open gently and half-parted the portiere before he stopped, startled, and struck stone still.

His mother was kneeling at her table, her dark hair half-fallen about her face, which was white in the moonlight that streamed over her and shone in her uplifted eyes. To his amazement his mother, this woman who had valued herself for her common-sense, for her clear sight, for her wit, her aggressive agnosticism, was praying, was praying as if to a familiar friend, beseeching, with tears pouring over her face, help for her son's soul.

He felt in that swift instant that a sword pierced his heart. He dropped the curtain, and crept away as softly as he had come. And in all the blackness of that night no sleep visited him.

It was late the next morning when he went back to his mother's room. The place was full of sunshine, flowers and fragrance; but as he looked at her his mother seemed more than all the sunshine in the world. He went to the window and looked up into the space where the blue sky soared into infinite distance.

"Mother," he said, "I have come to tell you that, no matter at what cost, from to-day I will never drink another drop of this accursed stuff that has so nearly broken your heart and wrought my ruin!"

"Oh, Mary Bruce," the mother wrote that night to her friend, "I have had an answer to prayer! I believe, because I have seen. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. But that was not given me. I am only the wild olive grafted on. I am in the lower order of souls yet."

And Mary Bruce replied: "It is not the lower order of souls that finds its way out of darkness into light not for the sake of itself, but for the sake of another."

HER "INFLOONCE"



By Howard Markle Hoke

W'en down th' lane Matildy comes,
Th' swallows go a-twitter,
An' hollyhocks lean o'er th' fence
To see so sweet a critter.

W'en her light footsteps near the
bridge,
That's down beside th' paster,
Th' brooklet gets more purly an'
Th' ripples dance th' faster.

Th' baskets hangin' on her arms
Go to an' fro a-swingin',
Like pinions of a happy bird
To summer lan's a-wingin'.

W'ene'er she speaks, however low,
Th' bees begin a-hummin',
An' seems as if her voice had set
Th' strings of harps a-thrummin'.

If she but passes nigh th' field,
W'ere I'm betimes a-sowin',
My heart goes pulsin' like a leaf
With autumn winds a-blowin'.

If I was her an' she was me,
Each to th' other turnin',
W'y she would know then how she
sets
All 'round about her yearnin'.

An' so las' week I told her that
Th' infloonce she was sheddin'
Would lead her, sure as surs
could be,
All lovely to a weddin'.

An' w'en she asked me who 'twould
be—
Her eyes amousement spillin'—
I told her she might easy see
Some one who was most willin'.

W'en I walk 'side her up the aisle,
With maids June posies bringin',
Th' whole creation will jine in
Th' hymn th' choir's a-singin'.