

"WANTED—A YOUNG PERSON."

BY FANNIE HODGSON BURNETT.

Miss ROBINA laid down her pen, and gave her work a grave look of inspection—just such a look as she had been wont to bestow upon the copy-books of the young ladies, in the good old days when "the Misses Bird's select seminary" flourished.

"Rosalinda, my dear," she said, "I think that will do."

Miss Rosalinda, who was tatting in a very short-sighted manner at the other side of the table, glanced up, blandly, satisfied, as usual.

"Certainly, Robina," she answered. "It would be very strange if it would not."

It would have been very strange if she had thought it would not. The utterances of Miss Robina Bird, were always, to Miss Rosalinda Bird as the utterances of an oracle. So, when her sister remarked that she thought her work would do, she was sure, without even looking at it, that it would.

"Wanted—a young person," read Miss Robina, with dignity. "A young person, to act as companion and housekeeper to two maiden ladies. Duties varied, but light. A comfortable home, and moderate salary offered. Address Avis, General P. O."

Miss Rosalinda nodded her head, approvingly.

"There are people who might deem it an extravagance," said her sister, oracularly, and rather as if she had one of the persons in question in her mind's eye, "but I hope we know best what we can, and what we cannot afford."

"I hope we do," echoed Miss Rosalinda.

There was a momentary pause in which Miss Robina sat up as if braced by a back-board, her aspect very politely severe, indeed; and then Miss Rosalinda broke the silence by a meek, rather uncertain query.

"Are you—are you thinking of Mrs. MacWhister, Sister Robina?" she ventured.

"Rosalinda," enunciated Miss Bird, "I never think of Mrs. MacWhister. She is not the kind of person to be thought of advantageously under any circumstances."

"No, indeed," agreed Miss Rosalinda. "Of course not, Robina; but one's mind, you know—"

Miss Bird interposed.

"One's mind should be under control upon all occasions."

"Ye-es, indeed," faltered Miss Rosalinda, and subsided into nervous tatting.

In the days of the select seminary, Mrs. MacWhister, be it known, had been the rival establishment. Mrs. MacWhister was the hard-faced, sharp widow of a Scotch clergyman, who had died young, having been—as a bold young person in the first class put it—"Mrs. MacWhistered to death." Mrs. MacWhister had been even more select than the Misses Bird. She refused pupils whose parents were "in trade," and she flourished her selectness in the Misses Bird's faces. Her young ladies had been taught to regard the rival young ladies with cold disdain. They were encouraged to out-dress them at church; and once, when the bold young person in the first class was known to have referred to the rival proprietresses as "the two old Birds," she was not reproved. In fact, as far as it was possible for the good Miss Robina to live at the point of the knife with a fellow-being, she had so lived with Mrs. MacWhister in a majestic way.

Even after her retirement from the field, soon after the sisters had given up their school, and removed to the quiet, retired square, where they now lived, she did not outlive her scars. It was her favorite fiction, that she never condescended to bestow a thought upon her whilom enemy. Hence her momentary severity of demeanor.

And yet, singularly enough, when tea had been brought in, and she had taken her second piece of toast, she opened fire, as it were, upon her own account, thereby almost disarranging Miss Rosalinda's digestive powers.

"Poor child!" she said, with most inconsistent sternness. "Poor, broken-hearted child!"

"Poor!" exclaimed Miss Rosalinda. "Child, Robina?"

"Yes," answered Miss Robina. "I am thinking of poor little Beck Stuart."

"Oh, dear, yes!" said Miss Rosalinda. "Poor thing! Only that she was not little, Robina, but rather tall for a girl of seventeen."

"She was child enough to have been little." Miss Bird went on, shaking her head. "And the thought of her makes my blood run cold in my veins! Whatever her story has been since that bitter winter's night, there is only one person who can be called to account for it. That person's name I forbear to mention."

"It was Miss Briggs who told you about it, wasn't it?" Miss Rosalinda suggested.

"Yes; it was Miss Briggs. She called my attention to her one day, as the young ladies filed past; and she told me she was an orphan, and Mrs. MacWhister's niece. She taught the younger pupils; and a bitter life she had of it, they said. Poor child! And yet her proud, young spirit held her up, and she was the life of the school, with her pretty face and gay ways. For my part, though I had never seen her clearly, I was deeply interested in her; and never shall I forget the night when Isabella Briggs came into the room, crying. You were up stairs, with Miss Giggles's work, who had the measles, and said that something dreadful had happened at Mrs. MacWhister's, and pretty Beck Stuart had just rushed past the window, white and breathless, and without any hat on, only a shawl thrown over her arm. Isabella Briggs knew more of her than I did, and she has quite a fancy for her."

"Quite a fancy?" sighed Miss Rosalinda. "Being so plain herself. I think we never had a muddier complexion, or a more crossed pair of eyes, in the house, than poor Miss Briggs's; and under-teachers are not usually fortunate in their looks. She had a great weakness for pretty faces; and, besides, the girl had lent her an umbrella once, and had a kind, bright way, she said."

"Poor child!" said Miss Robina, helping herself sternly to another piece of toast. "Poor child, indeed!"

She had barely finished speaking, before she was startled entirely out of her majesty of manner by a sound behind her, which caused her to drop her toast, and exclaim, with a little jump, "Dear me, Mary Anne! "This is really unbearable!"

The person addressed was a small maid-servant, who had been guilty of entering the room without knocking, and who, recollecting her blunder, and recognizing its enormity, stood covered with confusion.

"I beg your pardon, mem," she stammered. "I'm always forgetting, mem. It flies out of my head, like; and, if you please, mem, there's a young person."

"A young person!" ejaculated Miss Robina. "I must beg of you to be more definite, Mary Anne!"

"Yes, mem," answered Mary Anne. "If you please, mem, it's a young person as wants to see you."

"Miss Chickie, about the new dress, Robina," suggested Miss Rosalinda. "Show her into the room, Mary Anne."

Mary Anne obeyed. But it was not Miss Chickie. The "young person" was taller than Miss Chickie, and was also younger. She was a young person with a plain, black dress, and hat on, and a black veil covering her face. When she raised this veil, Miss Robina gave another little jump, and Miss Rosalinda followed her example. The face they saw was such a pretty, young face; but such a worn young face, and such a pale and unsmiling one, that it was a touching sight to see.

"I hope I am not too late," said the girl. "Miss Chickie——"

"Oh, it is about the dresses, then," put in Miss Rosalinda.

"No, madam," was the answer. "Miss Chickie heard you mention that you intended to advertise for a young person to occupy the position of housekeeper and companion, and she was so kind as to say that she thought I might fill the place. I am the bearer of a note from her."

"Pray, sit down," said Miss Robina, as she took the note.

It was quite a brief epistle. Having heard her patronesses mention their want, Miss Chickie took the liberty of recommending the accompanying young person. Her name was Snowe. She was an orphan, and had lodged with Miss Chickie for some time; and her manners were such, that Miss Chickie had become quite interested in her. She was not strong enough to sew constantly, and she was dependent upon her own exertions. Miss Chickie felt that the Misses Bird would excuse the liberty she had taken; and "remained the Misses Bird's obliged servant, Lucretia Chickie."

Miss Robina folded the note again.

"Very kind, indeed, of Miss Chickie," she remarked. "Very thoughtful. This is Miss Snowe, Rosalinda, and Miss Chickie recommends her to us strongly."

"Very kind of Miss Chickie," echoed Rosalinda.

The girl looked up at Miss Robina, a touching eagerness on her great, gray eyes.

"Miss Chickie has been very good to me," she faltered. "She takes a great responsibility upon her shoulders, in sending me here; but, if you would try me, I would not—I would not abuse her generous kindness, or yours."

"I am sure you wouldn't!" exclaimed little Miss Rosalinda, with timid enthusiasm. She saw that the gray eyes had tears in them, which seemed to have sprung there in a second.

"Rosalinda," said Miss Bird, "of course, not."

She was, under all her dignity, quite as soft-hearted and sentimental as her sister, but she

felt bound to sustain her business-like character. So she sat down near Miss Snowe, and began to ask questions.

"Rosalinda and I are no longer young," she explained, in her most practical manner; "and we begin to need rest from small cares. We thought, if we had an amiable young person to take little responsibilities upon herself: to write our notes for us, to read to us when we are tired, and to care for us when we are not well, we should find it pleasant, and a relief; and we decided to indulge ourselves."

"I should be willing, more than willing, to do all you wished," said the girl. "And it would be rest for me. If you knew what rest it would be."

Her gloved hands clasped themselves on her knee, and the look on her face scattered Miss Robina's practical coolness to the winds. She hesitated, and forgot herself.

"It was very thoughtful of Miss Chickie," she said, absently; "and I think you might suit us."

"I am sure she would," murmured Miss Rosalinda.

It was not, in the end, as strictly business-like an interview as Miss Robina would have liked to make it; and she could not help a secret regret that the classical advertisement must be sacrificed; but the pale, thin, youthful face was too much for her discretion, and the result of it was, that Miss Chickie's lodger was engaged as "house-keeper and companion to two maiden ladies."

Before a month had passed, both herself and Rosalinda had become so deeply interested for Janet Snowe, that they felt it would have cost them a great deal to dispense with her. The young face, which might have been so pretty in bloom and happiness, did not grow rounder, or less pale and sad, but it was always a sweet and patient face; and, somehow, it made itself quite dear to the two old ladies. No duty was ever forgotten; nothing was left undone, or done carelessly. Even Mary Anne's manners improved, and a certain thoughtful gentleness and gratitude made the long evenings seem very much shorter than they had been wont to seem when the two pairs of old eyes were too dim to read, or write, or sew. Ancient novel after ancient novel Janet Snowe discovered in circulating libraries, to read aloud for the delectation of Miss Rosalinda and Miss Robina, to whom modern novels were trying. Pages of Mrs. Hannah More did the Misses Bird dose gently under, and awaken, with regretful and deprecating little starts, to admire.

"I feel sure that she has an unhappy attach-

ment, or that her friends wish her to make an uncongenial marriage," said Miss Rosalinda. "She stands at the oriel window, and looks out just as Angelica Ormondsby used to do, in that beautiful novel of 'The Sufferings of the Orphan,' when Lord Mortimer was separated from her by their misunderstanding."

She was very fond of standing at the window mentioned, an oriel one, with an old-fashioned seat upon it, the old ladies noticed. She often took her sewing, and sat there, watching the children playing in the square. She seemed to like to see the little creatures. Indeed, the first time Miss Rosalinda ever saw her smile, was one morning when a manly little fellow of six or seven looked up at her, and nodded, and kissed his hand.

"Do you know him?" Rosalinda asked. "He seems to know you."

The girl had apparently forgotten her presence. She turned round, with a startled face. So Rosalinda repeated her question.

"That pretty little boy," she said, "I asked you if you knew him."

"Yes," was Janet Snowe's answer. "I know—at least we have seen each other before."

"What a manly fellow he is!" commented Miss Rosalinda. "I wonder how old he is. About eight, I should say."

"Seven in March," said the girl, with a faint glow of pleasure in her eyes. "He is very manly for his age."

"Oh," said Rosalinda, "you know him quite well, I suppose." And then she nodded, and laughed at the child herself.

She saw him often enough afterward. After school-hours, in fine weather, she always saw him playing within view of their windows, and she began to observe that it was he whom Janet Snowe was watching. But this did not strike her as singular. She watched him herself, he was such a handsome child, and such an unusual sort of child—so manly and self-contained in an old-fashioned way. Sometimes he sat on a bench, and read; sometimes he played; and, several times, when he went away, Rosalinda saw him look up at the window, as if for approval, and saw Janet Snowe press her thin little hand almost passionately to her lips, in a farewell salute.

"She is so lonely that she has learned to be fond of him," commented the old maid; and when she told Robina, Robina was quite touched, and agreed with her that this must be the case. And she added, "Now, that winter has come, she does not see him often, and I think she is sadder. I surprised her the other day, when it was snowing. She was sitting there, looking out, and,

oh, so melancholy! It made my heart ache. She feels the confinement here, I suppose."

"Rosalinda," said Miss Bird, one morning, at breakfast, after the letters had been brought in, "here is a letter from Isabella Briggs."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Rosalinda. "What does she say?"

"That she is coming to town for the Christmas holidays, and will take the liberty of paying us a visit. An old assistant of ours, my dear," to Janet, "and a most excellent young person, Miss Briggs."

"Would you call her a young person," suggested Rosalinda.

"I should not call her an old person, Rosalinda," answered Miss Robina, with dignity. "Janet, my dear, you are not looking well, this morning."

She was not, indeed—not even as well as usual. But she smiled a little as she answered.

"I do not think I am ever very well," she said. "And this is not one of my best days. It is the weather, perhaps. This deep snow keeps us all in, you know."

But lightly as she treated the matter, she did not improve as the day went on. Miss Robina thought she was feverish, and advised a saline draught. Miss Rosalinda thought she was nervous, and suggested something soothing.

"You start if the door opens," she said, "and I can see your hands trembling. If you do not get better we must send for Dr. Floyd. Robina and I have great confidence in Dr. Floyd. He is a young man, but he has had a great deal of experience." And then she wandered off into a dissertation upon Dr. Floyd, who had a story—or at least looked as if he had one.

"A romance, I am sure, my dear," she said. "He is not more than thirty-two, and his hair has streaks of gray in it, and his face is so careworn and sad, as if he had had a great trouble. We are very fond of him, Robina and I, and we always send for him, though he lives quite at the other end of the city." And she shook her head over her tatting, and sighed.

But if Janet Snowe needed something soothing in the morning, Miss Rosalinda herself needed something soothing before night. At five o'clock Miss Briggs arrived—poor Isabella Briggs—in her oft-turned merino and melancholy bonnet, and with her one shabby little trunk, looking desolate upon the roof of a shabby cab, whose driver entered into an altercation on the subject of fare, and drove off muttering anathemas upon "ladies as was not ladies." Miss Bird was up stairs when the visitor arrived; but Miss Rosalinda met her at the door, and conducted her

into the parlor, and then conducted her to her bedroom, and then conducted her back again, in a flutter of friendly feeling, and left her for a minute or so to go and bring her refreshments in the form of seed-cake and orange-wine.

It was as she was returning with these luxuries, that she received her shock. She saw Janet Snowe cross the passage, enter the door of the room in which Isabella Briggs was standing before the fire, and then she heard a cry in Isabella's voice—a little, wild, startled cry.

"Beck! Oh, Beck! Oh, my dear!"

She hurried forward, the orange wine upsetting itself upon the seed-cake on the plate. But at the door she paused, held back by a feeling something akin to fear.

Poor, shabby Isabella Briggs was holding the girl in her arms, crying over her hysterically; kissing her, and then holding her away, so that she might look at her face.

"Why did you go away?" Miss Rosalinda heard her say. "It nearly broke my heart! I wanted to care for you, in your pain. My poor girl! Oh, Beck, dear! My beautiful, poor girl!"

Janet Snowe was shaking from head to foot, and seemed scarcely able to speak.

"Hush, dear! Hush!" she said. "Don't make me break down, Bella. Don't!" And as she said these last words, Miss Rosalinda was reminded how young she was, for she said them like an over-trying child.

Miss Rosalinda began to tremble herself. The tears came into her eyes, and she slipped into the sitting-room near, and laid the cake and wine on a table.

"She called her 'Beck,'" she fluttered. "I will leave them to themselves. She—she called her 'Beck!'"

She went up to her own room, and sat down to calm herself. She wondered whether she ought to tell Robina. She wondered if she could keep the secret devoutly, if she did not. She knew she could not face the two below, and not betray herself, or at least betray that she was ill at ease.

"I am afraid to think what the mystery may be," she wept. "She called her 'Beck!' And what Beck did Isabella Briggs ever know, but that poor child at MacWhister's."

But she was obliged to go down at last, and then she was half-alarmed again by finding her position made easy for her. Janet Snowe and little Miss Briggs stood upon the hearth together, holding each other's hands. Janet was deathly pale. Isabella Briggs' nose and eyes were red with emotion and tears.

Janet made a step forward, and spoke.

"Miss Rosalinda," she said, "I have found an old friend, I thought I had lost. I owe Miss Briggs more grateful love than I can live long enough to pay her. She is the kindest friend I have on earth." And she bent down with a little sob, and kissed Isabella's shriveled hands. "I'll not tell Robina," decided Rosalinda. "I couldn't do it if I tried. It is their secret, and not mine."

So she bore the burden within her kind, sentimental little heart; and sometimes she found it a rather trying one. She was constantly afraid of betraying herself. She grew so restless, that Miss Robina began to feel anxious about her, and threatened her with Dr. Floyd.

"I shall certainly send for him, if you do not improve," she said. "You are so absent-minded, that you stare at Isabella and Janet, sometimes, until I am sure they must object to it; and when I speak to you, you almost jump. I did not think nerves were a weakness of yours, Rosalinda."

Isabella Briggs had been with them nearly a month; and as her holiday was drawing to a close, she was beginning to speak sadly of packing the small trunk.

"I have had a long rest," she said, "and I shall have to work hard to make it up. Madame Smythkins," shaking her head, "is not such an establishment as yours was, my dear Miss Bird."

It was during the afternoon, in the course of which she said this, that Miss Robina confided to her a little sisterly plan of hers.

"I know Rosalinda would not hear of such a thing, if I mentioned it to her beforehand," she remarked; "and so I have kept the matter to myself. I am anxious about Rosalinda. She is not herself; she needs attention. So, I have sent a line to Dr. Floyd, asking him to drop in this evening, in a friendly manner."

It was not a pleasant evening. The day closed in wet and dreary, and Miss Robina almost gave up the idea that her favorite would come.

"Though I have always found that I could rely upon him," she said to Miss Briggs.

But Miss Briggs could scarcely feel interested in the matter. She was in low spirits, and worked upon Rosalinda's tattling silently. They were all rather depressed, it seemed. Miss Bird forgot to ring for lights, and they sat in a circle before the fire, and had very little to say to each other. Miss Rosalinda sat in her arm-chair, and stared at the coals; Miss Robina closed her eyes, and dozed; Isabella Briggs tatted mechanically; Janet stood with a hand on the mantel-piece, and regarded her friend with heavy, wistful eyes.

But there came a change; such a change as no one of them could forget till their dying day. It was heralded by a ring at the front door-bell, by a man's voice in the hall, and then came the man himself, preceded by Mary Anne.

Miss Robina awakened, and rose to meet him, rather sleepily.

"Dr. Floyd," she said. "Rosabella, here is Dr. Floyd."

Dr. Floyd advanced, holding out his hand, and Miss Rosalinda extended hers, feeling rather nervous.

But it was never taken. Just at that moment the fire flamed up suddenly, and its brightness fell upon the white face of the girl standing near it, and then the man started forward, and Miss Rosalinda heard again the cry she had heard when Isabella Briggs had caught Janet in her arms, only this time it was wilder, and more shaken.

"Beck! Beck! Oh, God! Have I found you!"

But the girl drew back, holding up her hand in a passionate gesture.

"Don't come near me!" she said. "Don't come near me! Don't speak to me! Don't look at me!"

He would have caught her in his arms, but she would not let him. All her womanhood dropped away from her. She flung herself upon her knees at Isabella Briggs' feet, and clung to her like a child, sobbing wildly.

"Bella!" she cried out, "Keep me! Save me! Save me from him, as you saved me from myself! Don't let him touch me, Bella, or I shall die! For he is the man who broke my heart, and left me to face the world alone!"

Then little Miss Briggs was strong. She held the girl close to her breast; her little, meagre face glowed with honest anger, and her eyes flashed.

"Sir!" she said, "stand farther away from us, if you are a man at all! Leave us to ourselves. Leave my poor girl to me, as you left her to other strangers when she most needed your love and care. You are as hard as stone, and as cruel as the grave. God may forgive you, but I do not think He will."

He only stared at her, in a blind, dull fashion, and then he stretched out his hands with a groan.

"Beck!" he said. "Beck, child! Miss Robina sank into her chair.

"Beck!" she gasped. "Janet! Isabella! Rosalinda!"

Miss Rosalinda, who had naturally burst into tears, wrung her hands.

"Robina," she said, "it is poor, pretty Beck Stuart!"

The girl stirred upon Miss Briggs' breast.

"Bella," she whispered, "tell them how I have deceived them. Ask them to forgive me."

So, Isabella Briggs told them.

"Her name is not Janet Snowe," she said, the tears running down her cheeks. "Her name is Rebecca Stuart, and she is the poor child I told you of eight years ago. When her father died, she had nowhere to go but to Mrs. MacWhister. She lived with her when she kept school in Dundee, and she had a bitter life. The summer the school was moved to London, Mrs. MacWhister gave her a holiday, and she went alone, poor child, to a little, quiet, sea-side town. When she was there, she met some one she had known, and liked, when she was at her father's house. It was a young man who had been one of her father's favorites. It was that man," pointing to Floyd. "And in those days he was young, and the kind of man who is always loved, whether he deserves it or not. Because I cannot bear to speak at any length, I will only tell you that, before the holiday was over, he had persuaded her to marry him, and she thought all her sorrow was over. She was happy for just three weeks, and then he told her that he must leave her for a few days; only a few days, to attend to some money matter. Well, he kissed her innocent lips, and went away; and from that day to this she never saw him again."

She would have continued, but Beck Stuart stopped her. She lifted her face, and looked up at Floyd.

"I will tell the rest," she said. "I know it best." She spoke in a hard voice, almost as if she was repeating a lesson.

"He went away, and he did not come back. I was only a child, sixteen years old, and I believed he would. I did not know where to write. I did not know what to do; and I could only wait. So I waited until I dare wait no longer, because the woman of the house frightened me with the things she said. I left her my address, and I went back to Mrs. MacWhister's. I had nowhere else to go. Then I waited there, but nothing came—not a line nor a word. And, at last, one night Mrs. MacWhister came to me, looking like a madwoman. She said she had found me out, and I had disgraced myself forever. She would not listen to a word I said, and in my misery I think I was mad, too. She told me to go, and I caught up a shawl, and ran out into the night. I think I wandered about the streets until morning, and then Bella found me. I don't know why she cared for me, but she did.

She took me to a little house in a by-street, and then I went down upon my knees on the floor, and told her everything. She made me get up, and she cried and kissed me, and said she would try to help me, and no one should know. I made her promise not to tell. I stayed in that house for six months, and she gave me all the money she earned—I know she did. But I could not let her do it always, though she begged me to; so one morning I got up very early, and took my little boy in my arms, and I went away leaving her a letter. From that time to this I have fought for myself and Archie. It has been very hard sometimes, but I have done it. Miss Rosalinda," turning to the little old maid, "the little boy you have seen playing in the Square is my little boy. I told him to play there, so that I could watch him, because, only to see him comforts me, and makes me forget. He is different from other children, and he is all I have in the world."

She had scarcely finished speaking before Floyd held her in his arms. His face was white and wild, and his limbs shook under him; the passion of grief, and pity, and love in his eyes was terrible to see. He would not let her go; he held her close and fast.

"The mother of my child cannot refuse to hear me," he cried. "The mother of my child cannot condemn me unheard. I have that claim to plead, at least, thank God, thank God! Oh, Beck, my own! Do you think I have not a story to tell, too?"

A little moan broke from her lips.

"You left me," she sobbed; "you left me all alone."

"I left you, thinking I should hold you in my arms again in a few days, at farthest," he answered, his words poured forth with mad eagerness; "and but that Fate was so cruel to us, all would have been fair and smooth. Oh, how cruel Fate has been! The morning I bade you good-by, I thought myself the happiest man on earth. I was so full of hope and joy that I could scarcely contain myself. I was little more than a boy, and my heart was so light! When I reached London, I walked through the streets, instead of driving, and on my way I came upon a sight that stopped me. It was a woman crouching upon a door-step, moaning and shivering. I could not bear to pass her, and I stopped and spoke to her; but it seemed that she could not understand. She only looked up at me, and moaned afresh. Then I saw where the trouble lay. She was stricken with some desperate sickness, and was half-delirious. I could not go on then, so I did my best to help her. I called a

ah, and put her into it, and went with her to the nearest hospital, and did not leave her until I had seen her comfortably provided for: But, before I had accomplished this, I had made a discovery. This poor creature, whom I had supported in my arms, was stricken with the most loathsome of diseases. The house-surgeon called me aside, and told me that she was infected with small-pox, and he warned me to take all possible precautions at once. I went to my lodgings, and obeyed him in every trifle, but a dull fear seemed to seize upon me. That was why I would not write at first. I thought I would wait until the danger was over, if I escaped. But I did not escape. In a few days more I found I must give in, and then it was too late. It was weeks before my mind was clear. I lay at Death's door, and everybody deserted me but the old woman my doctor had engaged as nurse. Beck, my dear, for the sake of those childish, honeymoon days, and for the sake of the child I have never seen, say you believe me!"

She clung to him with a tempest of weeping. She held him as closely now as he had held her.

"Every word!" she sobbed. "Every word! Oh, how can I bear to hear it?"

"It was long before I could travel safely," he went on. "And though I wrote to you, I received no answer. But at last I might go, and I went; and, Beck, you were gone, and the little house stood empty."

"Empty!" she echoed.

"Empty. The woman who kept it had gone to Australia, to join her husband. She had left the house scarcely a week after you did."

Miss Rosalinda shook her head, and wiped her eyes afresh.

"Robina," she murmured, "Angelica Ormondsby——" But there her feelings overpowered her.

"I went to Dundee," continued Dr. Floyd, "though my long illness had left me a very indefinite impression of Mrs. MacWhister's address. But I did not find you. At that time, I know

now, you were in London. We had been so near to each other, my poor love, and yet so far away. Then, in my despair and weakness, I fell ill again, and was helpless for months; but from that day to this, Beck, I swear that I never gave up my search for you. I should never have given it up, save with my life. Look at my face. See the gray streaks in my hair, and tell me whether a man who had been false could bear such marks as these."

She pulled the care-lined face down, and kissed it passionately, with all the remorseful abandon of a child. She kissed his hair; she even kissed his hands, and his coat. But in a moment more her strength gave way.

"Hold me close, Jack!" she cried, calling him by the old, boyish name he remembered so well. "Hold me close, Jack, and do not let me go! The sorrow did not kill me; but I think—I think the joy——" And she fainted upon his breast.

He carried her to the sofa, and laid her down; and, of course, for the next quarter of an hour, Miss Robina, and Miss Rosalinda, and Isabella Briggs, filled the room with a wild excitement of hurrying to and fro, and running against each other, and advising a score of remedies in chorus; and when the worst was over, and the girl opened her eyes, the three grouped themselves about her, and were all fain to fan her, and to apply smelling-salts at once. But Beck only saw her husband; and when he knelt at her side, she curled her slender arm about his neck.

"Jack," she whispered, "send somebody for my baby. He is seven years old, but he is my baby yet. Send somebody for my baby."

Then Isabella Briggs stepped forward.

"Let me go," she pleaded. "He knows me. He is my baby, too, Beck."

"Yes," said Beck. "Kiss me, Bella, and go."

And Bella went, and did her errand well. And she who had saved Beck from despair and death, gave Beck's child into her father's arms, and thanked God, in her simple, kindly heart, that her work was done.

RELEASED.

BY MARIE S. LADD.

She lay with her white arms folded
Across, in a meek embrace,
And a light and beauty immortal
Spread over her pale, young face.

We felt that this world's dull prison
Held captive a soul that pined;
That the eyes that were onward gazing,
Were casting no glance behind.

And yet we prayed she might linger,
And hoped for a respite brief;
Could she but stay till Autumn,
And fade with the falling leaf.

But our love was only cheating
Conviction that gave us pain,
For a beautiful form, white shrouded,
Was soon where our love had lain.