

THE HOUSEKEEPER



Christmas 1908

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Una of the Garden

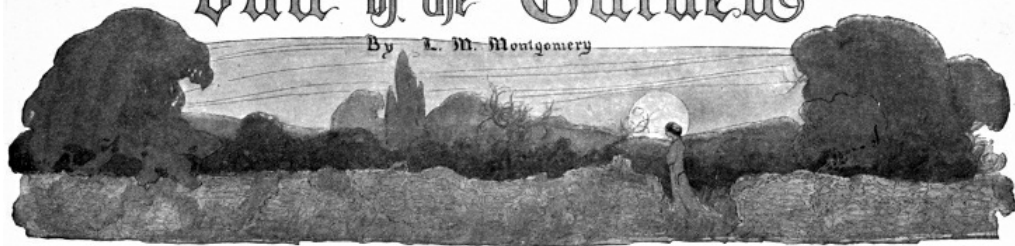
L. M. Montgomery

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Vua of the Garden

By L. M. Montgomery



Chapter I.

Un hour after his pupils had gone home Eric Murray came out of the old stone schoolhouse at Stillwater and locked the door. He had lingered behind to solve some problems for his advanced students and now the sunlight was slanting in warm yellow lines through the thick maple grove to the west of the building. A couple of sheep were nibbling the lush grass in a far corner of the playground; the bell one of them wore tinkled faintly and musically on the still, mellow May air. The scene was very peaceful and pastoral—almost too much so, the young man thought with a slight shrug as he stood on the worn steps and gazed about him. How was he going to put in a whole month here, he wondered, with a little smile at his own expense.

“Father would chuckle if he knew I were sick of it already,” he thought as he walked across the playground to the road. “Well, the week is ended at any rate. I’ve earned my own living for five whole days and that is something I could never say before in all my twenty-five years of existence. It’s an exhilarating thought. But teaching a district school is distinctly *not* exhilarating, at least, in such a well-behaved school as this where the pupils are so painfully good that I haven’t even the traditional excitement of thrashing obstreperous big boys. Everything seems to go by clockwork. Larry must have been a model driller. I feel as if I were only the big cog in an orderly machine. Well, I can surely stand it for a month. Then I’ll tell the pater he can have his own way with me and that he was right and I was wrong.”

He swung into the road with a whistle and walked with a free, easy stride, that was somehow suggestive of reserve strength and power, down the long slope of the hill. The maples crowded thickly to the roadside on either hand and beneath them were beds of tender green, curly young ferns. Here and there a wild plum hung out its feathery bloom like a banner of springtime. The air was fragrant and balmy with wandering breezes. Now and then Eric met some callow lad on horseback or a shrewd-faced farmer in a cart, who nodded and called out cheerily, “Howdy, Master?” He knew most of them already but at the foot of the hill he met two people he did not know. They sat in an old-fashioned, shabby wagon and were watering their horse at the brook.

Eric surveyed them somewhat curiously. They did not look in the least like the ordinary run of Stillwater people. The boy had a distinctly foreign look in spite of the blue-checked shirt and homespun trousers which seemed to be the regulation workaday outfit for the Stillwater farmer lads. He was lithe and long-limbed, with a head of thick, silky, black curls and long, slender hands. His face was delicately

featured and olive-tinted, save for the cheeks which had a dusky, crimson bloom that would not have shamed a girl's. His mouth was red and full and his eyes large and black. He was a handsome fellow but the expression of his face was slightly sullen.

The other occupant of the wagon was a man of about sixty, with iron-gray hair, a harsh-featured face, and deep-set eyes. His mouth was close lipped and relentless and did not look as if it had ever smiled. Indeed, the idea of smiles could not be connected with this man, it was incongruous. Yet there was nothing repellent about the face and there was something in it that attracted Eric's attention, for he rather prided himself on being a student of physiognomy, and he felt sure that this man was no ordinary Stillwater farmer of the genial, garrulous type with which he had become familiar. Long after the old wagon, with its oddly assorted pair, had gone lumbering up the hill Eric found himself thinking of the stern, heavy-browed man and the black-eyed, red-lipped boy.

Eric Murray himself was good to look upon, tall, broad-shouldered young fellow that he was, with steady, grayish-blue eyes and thick, wavy chestnut hair. He had been the most popular member of his graduating class that spring and the most envied, for his father was a millionaire and Eric was his only son.

Mr. Murray, senior, was a good-hearted, choleric old gentleman who loved this boy of his with the dead mother's eyes better than anything else on earth and his business next. It had always been an understood thing that Eric was to go into the firm when he was through college and fit himself to carry on its many enterprises. Eric had assented to this without any particular thought, regarding it as a matter of course. But during the preceding winter he had taken a sudden notion that he would like to go in for law. Full of this idea he had gone home to his father and abruptly told him so. If Mr. Murray had kept his temper and discussed the affair reasonably he would probably have soon induced Eric to drop what was after all only a young man's passing whim. Instead, Mr. Murray grew unwisely angry, thumped and denounced, and finally issued an ultimatum to the effect that Eric might go and study tomfoolery if he liked but that he need not expect any assistance in so doing.

"I will earn my own way through, then," Eric had retorted hotly.

He flung himself out of his father's presence in a rather petulant state of mind. He felt that he had been unjustly treated and it angered him. It was time, he said to himself, that his father ceased treating him like a boy who must always be told what was good for him. He would show him that he was able to stand on his own feet.

The next day he received a letter from Lawrence West, a former Academy classmate who was teaching in an up country district. West wrote that his health would not permit him to return



*IT HURT HIM THAT ANY WOMAN SHOULD LOOK AT
HIM LIKE THAT.*

to his school duties after the spring vacation in May and he had been unable to find a substitute. He asked Eric to take his place.

"It will be only for four weeks, until the last of June," he wrote. "The school year ends then and there will be plenty of teachers looking for the place. I have a couple of pupils preparing to try the Academy entrance examinations and I do not like to leave them in the lurch. But the doctor has ordered me off and there is nothing else for it unless you can help me out. Come up and take the school for the rest of the term, you petted son of luxury. It will do you good to learn how rich a man feels when he is earning forty dollars a month by his own unaided efforts."

Eric had laughed and written Larry that he would go. He went at once. His parting with his father was friendly enough. Mr. Murray shook his son's hand and brusquely told

him to take care of himself, write often and come home when he had worked off his yeasty ideas and was prepared to be sensible.

During the week he had already spent in Stillwater's green seclusion and tranquility, Eric's anger had cooled and his ruffled pride had become smooth. He was ready to laugh at himself. After all, he had made a mistake. There were many lawyers in the world, perhaps too many, but there were not too many good, honest

men of business, ready to do clean, big things for the comfort and betterment of humanity, to plan great enterprises and carry them through with brain and courage, to manage and control, to aim high and strike one's aim. That was what he was fitted for and that was what he would do. Meanwhile, for four more weeks he would teach in the Stillwater school as well and worthily as might be. Eric liked to do all he attempted to do in a reliable, clean-cut fashion, leaving no loose ends. So he planned and thought as he walked along. His plans and thoughts were practical; romantic visions played no part in them. The witchery of the spring was all about him in the earth and air and sky; he felt it and loved it and yielded to it as anyone of clean life and sane pulses must do; but he was not beguiled by it into lightly turning to thoughts of love. It thrilled his ambitions rather than his emotions.

Eric had succeeded to Larry's abiding place as well as his desk. He boarded with Robert Williamson and his wife, an elderly couple who lived on the hill opposite the school. Eric greatly liked Mrs. Williamson, a quiet woman who looked after him in a motherly way. She talked little and her face was marked by the traces of outlived pain. He liked her husband somewhat less, Robert, or Bob, as he was commonly called despite his sixty years. Williamson was a talkative, gossipy man who liked to have a finger in every one's pie. They supposed Eric to be a poor college student earning his own way through like Larry West. Eric did not disturb this belief although he said nothing to contribute to it.

The Williamsons were at tea when he went in. Eric hung his hat on the whitewashed wall and took his place between window and table.

"You see we're busy waiting for you," said old Robert. "You're late this evening, Master. You've missed Alexander Tracy. He was here to ask you up. You'll need to stand in with him for he's got a son that may brew up trouble when he starts in to school. Seth Tracy's a young imp."

"Perhaps I met Mr. Tracy," said Eric. "Is he a tall man with gray hair and a dark, stern face?"

"No, he's a round jolly fellow, is Alec. I reckon the man you met was Thomas Marshall. I saw him driving down the road too. *He* won't be troubling you with invitations up—small fear of it. The Marshalls ain't sociable, to say the least of it. Mother, pass the biscuits to the Master."

"Who was the young fellow he had with him?" asked Eric.

"Neil—Neil Marshall."

"That is a Scotch name for such a face and eyes. I should rather have expected Guiseppe or Angelo. The boy looks like an Italian."

"Reckon it's likely, seeing that's what he is."

“How happens it that an Italian boy with a Scotch name is living in a place like Stillwater?”

“Well, Master, it was this way. About twenty-two years ago a couple of Italian pack-pedlars came along and called at the Marshall place—a man and his wife. The woman took sick there and old Janet Marshall took her in and nursed her. A baby was born and the woman died. Then the father disappeared and was never seen or heard tell of afterwards and the Marshalls were left with the youngster on their hands. They kept him and brought him up. Folks advised them to send him to the orphan asylum but the Marshalls were never fond of taking advice. They called the child Neil and he’s always lived there. Folks don’t like him. They say he ain’t to be trusted. It’s certain he’s awful hot-tempered and when he went to school he nigh about killed some of the boys he took a spite to. But then I reckon they tormented him a lot. He’s a great hand at the fiddle and likes company but they say he takes sulky spells. ’Twouldn’t be any wonder, living with the Marshalls. They’re all as queer as Dick’s hat-band.”

“Father, you shouldn’t talk so,” said Mrs. Williamson, rebukingly.

“Well now, mother, you know they are. You know they never were like other people. They live away up yonder, Master; half a mile in from the road, with a thick spruce wood ’twixt them and all the rest of the world. They never go anywhere and nobody ever goes there. There’s just old Thomas and his sister Janet and a niece of theirs and this here Neil. They are a queer, dour, cranky lot and I will say it, mother. There, give your old man a cup of tea.”

Chapter II.

Shortly before sunset that evening Eric went for a walk. He liked to indulge in long tramps through the Stillwater fields and woods in the sweet mellowness of the spring weather. Most of the Stillwater houses were built along the shore road and about "the Corners". The farms ran back from them into solitudes of woods and pasture lands.

Eric struck southwest in a new direction and walked briskly along. The spruce wood in which he finally found himself was pierced with arrows of ruby light from the setting sun. He went through it walking up a long purple aisle where the wood flooring was brown and elastic under his feet and came out beyond it on a scene that surprised him. No house was in sight but he found himself looking into a garden, an old garden, evidently long neglected and forsaken. But a garden dies hard; and this one, which must have been a very delightful spot once, was delightful still, none the less so from the air of gentle melancholy that seemed to pervade it—the melancholy that invests all places which have once been the scene of joy and pleasure and are so no longer, places where hearts have throbbed and eyes brightened and merry voices echoed; the ghosts of these things seem to linger in their old haunts.

The charm of the place took sudden possession of Eric as nothing had ever done before. He was not given to fancies, the practical, business-like young fellow. But the garden laid hold of him and drew him to itself and he was never to be quite the same again. He went into it through the little gap in the low stone dyke around it; and so, unknowing, went forward to meet all that life held for him.

The garden was large and square, bounded on all four sides by the stone dyke which was so old that its crevices were full of ferns and many wild leaves and vines. At regular intervals along the dyke were tall spruces with the evening wind singing in their tops and in the southwest corner was a thick plantation of young firs that had evidently grown up of themselves. Most of the garden was grown lushly over with grass but the old paths were still quite visible and were bordered by stones and large pebbles. In the center, between two high rows of lilac trees, outblossoming in purple, was a large, square bed all ablaze with the starry spikes of the "June lilies", as the country people call the white narcissus. Their penetrating, haunting fragrance distilled on the evening air and met him on every soft puff of wind no matter where he walked. In the very center of the bed was a clump of tall white and purple irises. The corners of the garden were gay with thickly growing yellow daffodils. Along the southern side grew another hedge of lilac trees and just inside the gap by which he had entered was a tall white lilac bush. Eastward there were several branching bird

cherries snowy with bloom; and everywhere, as it seemed, grew clumps of “bleeding heart”, tremulous with spikes of rosy flowers. There were many rosebushes also but it was too early in the season for roses.

At each side of the garden was a bench formed rudely out of surf-worn red sandstone from the shore. Eric walked across the garden and sat down on the one behind the southern lilac trees. From where he sat he now got a glimpse of a house about a quarter of a mile away, its gray gable peeping out from a dark spruce wood. It seemed a dull, gloomy place and he did not know who lived there. He had a wide outlook to the south over far hazy fields and misty blue hills and valleys. The air was very sweet with the breath of all the growing things and of the bed of mint upon which he had trampled. Robins were whistling, clear and sweet and sudden, in the woods.

“This is a veritable ‘haunt of ancient peace’,” he quoted. “I could fall asleep here and dream dreams. What a sky! Could anything be bluer? And such frail white clouds that melt away as you look at them! What a dizzying, intoxicating fragrance lilacs have! I wonder if perfume could set a man drunk. Those narcissi—what’s that?”

Across the mellow stillness, mingled with the croon of the wind in the trees and the calls of the robins, came a strain of delicious music, so beautiful and fantastic that Eric held his breath in astonishment and delight. Was he dreaming? No, it was real music, the music of a violin played by some hand inspired with the very spirit of harmony. He had never heard anything like it; and he felt quite sure that nothing exactly like it ever *had* been heard before—that that wonderful music was coming straight from the soul of the unseen violinist and translating itself so into those most airy and delicate of sounds for the first time. It was an elusive, haunting melody, strangely suited to the time and place; it had in it the sigh of the wind in the spruces, the eerie whispering of the grasses at dewfall, the white thoughts of the narcissi—all the soul of all the old laughter and song and tears and gladness and sobs the garden had ever known in the lost years; and besides all this there was in it a pitiful, plaintive cry, as of some imprisoned thing calling for freedom, for utterance.

At first Eric listened mutely and movelessly, lost in wonderment. Then a very natural curiosity overcame him. Who in Stillwater could play a violin so? And who was playing so here in this deserted old garden, of all places? He rose and walked along the lilac hedge, going as slowly and silently as possible, not to interrupt the player. When he reached the bed of June lilies he stopped short in new amazement and again was tempted to think he must be dreaming.

On the stone bench under the big branching white lilac tree a girl was sitting,

playing on an old brown violin; her eyes were on the faraway horizon and she did not see Eric. For a few moments he stood there and looked at her; and the picture she made photographed itself on his vision to the last detail, never again to be blotted from his book of remembrance.

He had, in his twenty-five years of life, met hundreds of pretty women, scores of handsome women, a scant half dozen of really beautiful women. But he knew at once, beyond the possibility of question, that he had never seen or even imagined anything so exquisite as this girl of the garden. Her loveliness was so perfect that his breath almost went from him in his first delight of it.

Her face was oval and delicately tinted, marked in every line and feature with the expression of absolute purity found in the angels and Madonnas of old paintings, a purity that had in it no faintest stain of earthliness. Her head was bare and her thick, jet-black hair was parted over her brow, “one moonbeam from the forehead to the crown”, and hung in two long braids over her shoulders. Her eyes were of such a blue as Eric had never seen in eyes before, the tint of the sea in the still, calm light that follows after a fine sunset, and they were fringed with very long silken lashes and arched over by most delicately black eyebrows. Her collarless dress of pale blue print revealed her smooth white throat; the sleeves were rolled up above her elbows and the hand that guided the bow of her violin was perhaps the most beautiful thing about her, perfect in shape and outline, firm and white, with taper, rosy-nailed fingers. She was about eighteen years old apparently.

Suddenly she turned her lovely eyes on Eric. The change in her was startling. She sprang to her feet, the bow slipping from her hand and the music breaking in mid-strain; every hint of color fled from her face and she trembled like one of the wind-stirred narcissus.

“I beg your pardon,” said Eric hastily, “I am sorry I have alarmed you, but your music was so beautiful that I forgot that you were not aware of my presence.”

He stopped in dismay for he realized that the expression on the girl’s face was one of terror, not merely the startled alarm of a shy, childlike creature who had thought herself alone, but absolute terror. It was betrayed in her blanched and quivering lips and in the wide blue eyes that stared back into his with the expression of some trapped wild thing. It hurt him that any woman should look at him like that—at him who had always held womanhood in reverence for the sake of the mother he had loved in boyhood.

“Don’t look so,” he exclaimed, thinking only of calming her fear and speaking as he would to a child. “I won’t hurt you. You are safe—quite safe.”

In his eagerness to reassure her he took an unconscious step forward. Instantly

she turned and without a word or sound fled up the garden, through a gap in the western dyke and along what seemed to be a lane beyond, arched over with misty white wild plum trees. Before Eric could draw his breath she had vanished from his sight among the firs.

He stooped and picked up the violin bow.

“Well, what a mysterious thing!” he said aloud. “Am I bewitched? Who—what was she? Can it be possible that she is a Stillwater girl? And why should she be so frightened at sight of me? I never thought I was a very hideous person but this is certainly no temptation to vanity. Perhaps I’ve wandered into an enchanted garden and been outwardly transformed into an ogre. There is something uncanny about it apparently. Anything might happen in such a place.”

He glanced about it with a whimsical smile. The light was fading and the garden was full of soft creeping shadows and silences. It seemed to wink sleepy eyes of impish enjoyment at his perplexity. He laid the violin bow on the stone bench.

“Well, there is no use in my following her and I have no right to, even if it were of use. But I wish she hadn’t fled in such terror. Eyes like that were never meant to express anything but tenderness and trust.”

All the way home he pondered the mystery of who the girl might be.

“Let me see,” he reflected. “Old Mr. Williamson was describing the Stillwater girls for my benefit the other evening. I think he said there were four handsome ones in the district, Florrie Woods, Melissa Bell, Jennie Scott, and Clara May Ferguson. No, no, that girl couldn’t be a Florrie or a Melissa or a Jennie, while Clara May is completely out of the question. Well, there is some bewitchment in the affair. I’d better forget all about it.”

Eric found that he couldn’t forget all about it. The girl’s face haunted him, the mystery of her tantalized him. He might have asked the Williamsons about her but somehow he shrank from that. The next evening, with a little shrug at himself, he wandered southwest over the fields again. He found the garden easily. He had half expected *not* to find it the same still, fragrant grassy spot. It had no occupant; and although he lingered there for an hour no one came. But the violin bow was gone from the stone bench.

The keenness of his disappointment surprised him, even vexed him. What nonsense it was to be so worked up because a little girl he had seen for five minutes failed to appear! He called himself a fool and left at last in a petulant mood.

For two days he refused to let himself think of the garden. The evening of the third found him in it again, again to be disappointed. He went back determined to solve the mystery by open inquiry. Fortune favored him for he found Mrs.

Williamson knitting alone in her kitchen in the dusk.

"Mrs. Williamson," he said with an affectation of carelessness, "I stumbled on an old deserted garden back behind the woods over there the other evening—a charming bit of wilderness. Do you know whose it is?"

"I suppose it must be the old Connors garden," answered Mrs. Williamson after a moment's reflection. "I had forgotten it. It must be twenty years since the Connors moved away. Their house and barns were burned down and Mr. and Mrs. Connors sold the land to Thomas Marshall and moved to town. Mrs. Connors was very fond of flowers."

"There was a young girl in it, playing on a violin," said Eric, annoyed to find that it was an effort to speak of her and that the blood mounted to his face as he did so. "She ran away in alarm as soon as she saw me although I do not think I did anything to frighten or vex her. I have no idea who she was. Do you know?"

Mrs. Williamson did not make an immediate reply. Finally she said, with a tone of new interest in her voice, "I suppose it must have been Una Marshall, Master. And if it was you've seen what very few people in Stillwater have ever seen. And those few have never seen her close by. It's no wonder she ran away, she isn't used to seeing strangers."

"I'm rather glad if that was the reason," said Eric. "I admit I didn't like to see a girl so frightened of me as she seemed to be. She was so terrified that she never uttered a word but just ran like a deer to cover."

"She couldn't have said a word in any case," said Mrs. Williamson quietly. "She's dumb."

Eric sat in dismayed silence for a moment. That beautiful creature afflicted in such a fashion! Oh, it was horrible. He felt a pang of almost personal regret.

"Impossible," he cried at last, remembering. "Why, she played the violin exquisitely. I never heard anything like it. It's impossible that a deaf mute can play like that."

"Oh, she isn't deaf. That's the strange part of it. She can hear as well as anybody and understands everything that is said to her. But she can't speak a word and never could, or at least so they say. But nobody knows much about her. Janet and Thomas never speak of her and Neil won't either. He's been well questioned but he won't say a word about Una ever and gets mad if folks persist. I think it's terrible the way she has been brought up; but the Marshalls are strange people. Mr. Murray, I kind of reproved pa for saying so, you remember, but it is true. They have strange ways. And you've really seen Una? What does she look like? I've heard that she was handsome."

"I thought her very beautiful," said Eric briefly. "But *how* has she been brought up, Mrs. Williamson? And why?"

"It's a sad story. Una is the niece of Thomas and Janet Marshall. Her mother was Margaret Marshall, their sister. Margaret was a great deal younger than Janet and Thomas; she was the second wife's child. Her mother died when she was born and Janet brought her up. I knew Margaret Marshall well once. We were girls together and real good friends before she turned against all the world. She was a strange girl in some ways even then but I always liked her. She was very pretty and a little vain and very proud—oh, she was very proud. She was smart too and taught school over at Radnor. It was there she met a man named Ronald Fraser. He was a stranger and nobody knew much about him. But he was very handsome and taking and all the girls were in love with him, so it was said. Old James Marshall, Margaret's father, didn't approve of him much but Margaret coaxed him around—she could do pretty near anything with him, he was so proud of her—and he finally gave in and consented for her to marry Ronald Fraser. They had a big wedding, Margaret always liked to make a display and I think she wanted to show off her fine husband to the girls who were envying her. They went to live at Radnor and for a little while everything was well. Margaret had a nice house and was gay and happy. Then—well, then Ronald Fraser's wife turned up, looking for him, his real wife. Oh, it was true enough—she proved it. Ronald Fraser wasn't so much to blame, he had really thought his wife was dead, but there was a terrible scandal of course and he went away and Margaret came home to her father's house. From the day that she went in over its threshold she never came out until she was carried out in her coffin three years ago; and not a soul ever saw her again outside her own family. I went to see her but Janet told me she would not see me. It was foolish of Margaret to act so. She hadn't done any real wrong and everybody was sorry for her and would have helped her all they could. But I reckon pity cut her as deep as blame would have done, because she was so proud, you see, and had held her head so high. They say her father was hard on her too. Janet and Thomas felt it as well. Not many people had ever been in the habit of going to the Marshall place but the few that had soon stopped for they could see that they were not welcome. Old James Marshall died that winter. Una was born in the spring but nobody ever saw her. She was never sent to school or taken to church. Margaret Marshall died three years ago and everybody in Stillwater went to the funeral but they didn't see her. The coffin lid was screwed down; and they didn't see Una either. It was thought perhaps Janet and Thomas would take her out after her mother was gone but they didn't, so I suppose they agreed with Margaret about the way she'd been brought up. I've often felt

sorry for the poor girl and I don't think her people did right by her even if she was mysteriously afflicted. She must have had a very sad, lonely life. If you don't want to be pestered with questions about her, Master, you'd better not let on you've seen her."

Eric was not likely to. He had heard all he wanted to know and more. So this girl was at the core of a tragedy! And she was dumb! Oh, the pity of it! He tried to put her out of his thoughts but he could not. The memory of her beautiful face drew him with a power he could not resist. The next evening he went again to the garden although he called himself a fool for it.

Chapter III.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS I-II:—Eric Murray, having disagreed with his father about a choice of profession, leaves home and takes a village school for a friend who has fallen ill. Despite the friendship of the people and the care of the couple with whom he boards, the task is becoming irksome, until one evening he strolls into an old-fashioned garden. Here he finds a strangely beautiful girl playing a violin. She flees when she sees him. Eric learns that her name is Una and that she is a niece of James Marshall, who has an adopted son, Neil, thought to be a gypsy. Una's past is clouded. Her mother, in perfect innocence, had married a man whose wife afterwards appeared. Eric also learns that Una is dumb.

When he emerged from the spruce wood and entered the garden his heart gave a sudden leap. She was there, bending over the narcissus bed in the center of the garden. He stopped, not wishing to frighten her again. When she lifted her head he expected to see her shrink and flee. But she did not do so; she only grew a little paler and stood there, watching him intently. Seeing this, he walked slowly towards her and when he was so close to her that he could hear the nervous flutter of her breath over her parted lips he said gently,

"Do not be afraid of me. I am a friend and I do not wish to disturb you."

She seemed to hesitate a moment, then lifted a little slate that hung at her belt, wrote something on it rapidly and held it out to him. He read, "I am not afraid of you now. Mother said all men were wicked but I do not think you are. I have thought a great deal about you and I have been sorry that I ran away."

He realized her entire innocence and simplicity. Looking earnestly into her still troubled eyes he said,

"I would not do you any harm for the world. All men are not wicked although it is too true that some are so. My name is Eric Murray and you, I think, are Una Marshall. I thought your music so very lovely the other evening that I have been wishing ever since that I might hear it again. Won't you play for me?"

The vague fear had all gone from her eyes and suddenly she smiled—a merry, girlish, wholly irresistible smile. Then she wrote,

"I am sorry I cannot. I have left my violin at home. But I will bring it to-morrow evening and play for you if you would like to hear me. I should like to please you."

Again that note of innocent frankness! What a child she was—what a beautiful, ignorant child, utterly unskilled in the art of hiding her feelings! But why should she

hide them? They were as pure and beautiful as herself. He smiled frankly back at her.

"I would like it very much and I'll be sure to come. And now won't you give me some flowers?"

She nodded with another little smile and began to pick them. He watched her lithe, graceful motions with delight. When she came to him, radiant, her arms full of the white narcissus, a line of a favorite poem darted into his head.

"Here by God's rood is the one maid for me."

The next moment he was angry with himself for his folly. She was a child and a child set apart by her sad defect. He must not let himself think nonsense.

"Thank you. Come and sit on the old bench—here, where you were sitting that night I frightened you so badly."

She sat down beside him and looked frankly in his face. There was no boldness in her glance, only the most perfect trust and confidence. Had there been any evil in his heart those eyes must have searched it out and shamed it. But he could meet them unafraid. Then she wrote, "I was much frightened. You must have thought me very silly. But I had never seen any man except Uncle Thomas and Neil—and you are very different from them. I was afraid to come back the next evening although somehow I wished to. I sent Neil back for my bow. I could not do without it. I cannot speak, you know. Are you sorry?"

"I am sorry for your sake. But you can speak through your music."

She looked pleased.

"How well you understand," she wrote. "Yes, I cannot speak or sing as other people can but I can make my violin say things for me."

"Do you compose?" he asked. But he saw she did not understand him. "I mean, did anyone ever teach you the music you played here that evening?"

"Oh no. It just came as I thought. When I was very little Neil taught me to hold the violin and the bow and the rest all came of itself. It was Neil's violin but he gave it to me. Neil is very good to me but I like you better. Tell me about yourself."

The wonder of her grew upon him. How lovely she was! What dear little ways and gestures she had—ways and gestures as artless and unstudied as they were effective. And how strangely little her dumbness seemed to matter after all! She wrote so quickly and prettily, her eyes and smile gave such expression to her mobile face, that voice was hardly missed.

They lingered in the garden until the shadows crept up to their feet. Eric told her of his life and the life of the outer world in which she was girlishly, eagerly interested although it was plain to be seen that she did not think about it as anything she might

ever share herself. Her questions about it were direct and incisive. She had read a good deal, he found out, of poetry and history. She did not know what a novel meant.

“I never read any poetry while mother was alive,” she wrote. “She taught me to write and read and I read the Bible and some of the histories. After she died Aunt Janet gave me all her books. They were poetry and I thought it so beautiful. It was music put into words.”

He promised he would bring her some books to read and her great blue eyes gleamed with interest and delight. He found out that she did not consider her life a lonely one. Her violin was all the company she had ever wished for.

“At least, until very lately,” she wrote. “But I like to read and hear about the people out in the world and the things that are done there. It must be a wonderful place.”

“Wouldn’t you like to go out into it and meet those people for yourself?” he asked, smiling at her. At once he saw that, in some inexplicable way, he had hurt her. She snatched her pencil and wrote, with such swiftness and energy of motion and expression that it almost seemed as if she had exclaimed the words aloud,

“No, no, no. I do not want to go anywhere away from home or see strangers ever, ever—I could not bear it.”

He thought that possibly the consciousness of her defect accounted for this. Yet she did not seem sensitive about her dumbness and made frequent casual references to it in her written remarks.

At last the lengthening shadows warned him that it was time to go.

“You won’t forget to come to-morrow night and play for me?” he said, rising reluctantly.

She answered by a quick little shake of the head and a smile that was eloquent. He watched her as she walked across the garden and along the wild plum lane. At the corner of the firs she waved her hand to him before turning it. He went home very thoughtfully. That night Mrs. Williamson looked at him sharply.

Una was sitting on the stone bench under the white lilac, with her violin in her lap, when he went to the garden the next evening. As soon as she saw him she caught it up and began to play an airy delicate little melody. When it was finished she looked up at him with flushed cheeks and questioning eyes.

“What did that say to you?” she wrote.

“It said something like this,” said Eric, falling in with her humor smilingly. “Welcome, my friend. It is a beautiful evening. The sky is very blue and the flowers are sweet. The wind and I have been here alone and the wind is a good companion

but I am glad to see you. It is an evening on which it is good to live and wander in a garden. Welcome, my friend.”

She dropped her bow and clapped her hands, smiling like a pleased child.

“You are very quick to understand,” she wrote. “That was just what I meant. You are quicker than Neil. He is often puzzled. And I am puzzled to understand his music. Sometimes it frightens me—it seems as if there were something in it trying to take hold of me.”

Somehow Eric did not like her references to Neil. The idea of that handsome boy seeing her every day, talking to her, sitting at the same table with her, dwelling under the same roof, filled him with distaste. He put the thought away from him and flung himself down in the long grasses at her feet.

“Play for me, please,” he said. “I want to lie here and listen to you.”

“And look at you,” he might have added. He could not tell which was the greater pleasure. Her beauty delighted him; and her music enthralled him. This child had genius; but it would be wasted. He found himself thinking resentfully of the people who had been her guardians and who were responsible for her strange life. They had done her a wrong. How dared they doom her to such an existence? Who knew but her defect of utterance might have been cured if it had been attended to in time? Nature had given her a royal birthright of beauty and talent but their selfish neglect had annulled it. What divine music she lured out of the old violin—merry and sad and gay and sorrowful by turns, music that fairies might have danced to and music that might have mourned over the grave of a dead hope! As he listened he realized that the whole soul and nature of the girl were revealing themselves to him through her music—her beauty and sweetness, her maiden dreams and childhood reveries. There was no thought of concealment about her; she could not help the revelation she was unconscious of making.

At last she laid aside her violin and wrote, “I have done my best to give you pleasure. It is your turn now. Talk to me about anything.”

He gave her the two books he had brought her—a volume of poetry unknown to her and a modern novel. He had half hesitated over the latter; but the book was so fine and full of beauty and he thought it could not bruise the bloom of her innocence ever so slightly. Then he talked to her and the minutes passed swiftly. There was just then no world for him outside that old garden with its narcissi and its shadows and its crooning winds.

Once when he told her the story of some college prank she clapped her hands together and laughed aloud—a musical, silvery clear peal. It fell on Eric’s ear with a shock of surprise. He thought

it strange that she could laugh like that when she could not speak. Wherein lay the defect that barred her from speech? Was it possible that it could be remedied?

"Una," he said gravely, after a moment's reflection, during which he had looked up at her as she sat with the long, white-flowering branches of the lilacs swaying above her and a shower of ruddy sunlight falling through the dark spruce wood on her bare silky hair, like red jewels, "do you mind if I ask you something about your inability to speak? Will it hurt you to talk of the matter with me?"

She shook her head. "Oh no," she wrote. "I do not mind at all. I am sorry I cannot speak—that is all."

"Then, Una, tell me this. Do you know why it is that you cannot speak? Were you ever taken to a doctor to have your throat and tongue examined?"

"No. I do not know at all why I cannot speak. I asked mother once and she told me that it was a judgment on me for her sin and she looked so strangely that I was frightened and I never spoke of it to anyone again."

"You can laugh naturally. Can you make any other sound?"

"Yes, sometimes. When I am pleased or frightened I sometimes make little cries. But that is only when I am not thinking of it at all. If I *try* to I cannot make a sound at all."

This seemed to Eric more mysterious than ever. "Do you ever try to speak, to



*"PLAY FOR ME, PLEASE," HE SAID. "I WANT TO LIE
HERE AND LISTEN TO YOU."*

utter words,” he asked.

“Yes, very often. But I never can. Do not look so sorry, my friend. I am very happy and I do not mind so very much not being able to speak. I must play to you again—you look too sober.”

She laughed, picked up her violin, and played a tinkling little melody that sounded to Eric as if she were trying to tease him. He smiled but the puzzled look recurred to his face many times that evening. Her case certainly seemed a strange one and the more he thought of it the stranger it seemed. That she should only be able to make sounds when she was not thinking about it struck him as something very peculiar.

“I wish David Baker could examine her,” he thought.

Chapter IV.

For the next three weeks Eric Murray seemed to himself to be living two lives, as distinct from each other as if he were a double personality. In one, he taught the Stillwater district school diligently, solved problems, argued on theology with old Robert Williamson, called at the homes of his pupils and took tea in state with their parents, went to a dance or two, and played havoc, all unwittingly, with the hearts of the Stillwater belles. But this life was as a dream; he only *lived* in the other, which was spent in an old garden, grassy and overgrown, where the minutes seemed to lag for sheer love of the spot and the June winds made wild music in the old spruces. Here every evening he met Una; they read books together and talked of many things; often she played to him and the old garden re-echoed with her lovely fantastic melodies.

At every meeting Una's beauty came home afresh to him with the old glad thrill of surprise. He learned to watch for the welcoming light that leaped into her eyes at sound of his footstep. She always showed that she was glad to see him with the frank delight of a child watching for a comrade. She was never in the same mood twice but she was always charming. Thrawn and twisted though the old Marshall stock might be it had at least this offshoot of perfect grace and symmetry. Her mind and heart, utterly unspoiled of the world, were as beautiful as her face. All the uglinesses of existence had passed her by, shrined in her double solitude of upbringing and muteness.

She was quick and clever. Delightful little flashes of wit and humor sparkled out occasionally. She could be whimsical, even charmingly capricious. Sometimes innocent mischief glimmered in the unfathomable blue depths of her eyes. She assimilated the ideas in the books they read eagerly and thoroughly, always seizing on the best and rejecting the false and spurious with an unfailing intuition at which Eric marvelled. Hers was the spear of Ithuriel, trying out the dross of everything and leaving only the pure gold.

In manner and outlook she was still a child; yet now and then she was as old as Eve. An expression would spring into her laughing eyes, a subtle meaning reveal itself in her smile, that held all the lore of womanhood and all the wisdom of ages. Her way of smiling enchanted him. The smile always began far deep down in her eyes and flowed outward to her face like a sparkling brook stealing out of shadow into sunshine.

She told him all about her life. She often mentioned her uncle and aunt but her mother rarely. Of Neil she wrote frequently at first and seemed very fond of him;

later she ceased to mention him. Perhaps she discerned what Eric did not know himself—that his eyes clouded and grew moody at the mention of Neil's name—for she was marvellously quick to catch and understand every fleeting change of expression in his face and voice.

Once she asked him naively, "Are there many people like you in the world?"

"Thousands of them," answered Eric laughing.

She looked gravely at him. Then she shook her head in the quick, decided little manner he found so charming.

One evening, when the faraway hills and fields were scarfed in gauzy purples and the intervalles were brimming with golden mists, Eric carried to the old garden a little limp volume that held a love story. It was the first of its kind he had ever read to her; it was a beautiful and passionate idyll, exquisitely told. He read it to her, lying in the grass at her feet; she listened with her beautiful hands clasped on her lap and her eyes on his face. It was not long and when he had finished he shut the book and looked up at her questioningly.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

Very slowly she took her slate and wrote. "Yes, I liked it. But it hurt me too. I did not know before that a person could like anything that hurt her. And I do not understand it very well. It is about love and I do not know anything about love. Mother told me once that love was a curse and that I must pray that it would never enter my life. She said it very earnestly and so I believed it. But that book teaches that it is a blessing. Which am I to believe?"

"Love, real love, is never a curse, Una," said Eric gently. "There is a false love which *is* a curse. Perhaps it was that your mother knew and so was mistaken. There is nothing in the world—or in heaven either as I believe—so truly beautiful and noble and wonderful as love."

"Have you loved?" asked Una with the directness of phrasing necessitated by her mode of communication that was sometimes a little terrible.

"No," said Eric, honestly as he thought, "but everyone has an ideal of love whom he hopes he will meet some day, the ideal woman of a young man's dream. I suppose I have mine in some sealed, sacred chamber of my heart."

"Your ideal woman would be very beautiful, like the woman in the book?"

"Oh, yes, I am sure I could never care for an ugly woman," said Eric, laughing a little as he sat up. "But the sun is going down—time certainly does fly in this enchanted garden. I believe you bewitch the moments away, Una, and some day I shall waken from a supposed half hour's lingering here to find myself an old man with

white hair and ragged coat as in that fairy tale we read the other night. Will you let me give you this book? I would never commit the sacrilege of reading it in any other place. See, I'll write your name in it—that quaint, pretty name of yours—'Una', 'Una of the Garden',—and the date of this perfect June day. Then when you look at it you will always remember me and the white buds on that rosebush and the quaint old song the wind is harping in that spruce."

He held the book out to her but to his surprise she shook her head with a deeper flush on her face.

"Why won't you take it, Una?"

She took her pencil and wrote slowly, unlike her usual quick motions.

"Because I do not want to read it again. It is about love and there is no use in my learning about love, even if it is all you say. Nobody will ever love me, I am too ugly."

"You—ugly?" said Eric. He was about to go off into a peal of laughter at the idea when a glimpse of her half averted face checked him. On it was a bitter, hurt look, such as he remembered seeing once before.

"Una," he said in astonishment, "you don't really think yourself ugly, do you?"

She nodded without looking at him, then wrote, "Oh, yes, I know I am. I have always known it. Mother told me I was very ugly. I am sorry. It hurts me much worse than not being able to speak. I suppose you will think that very foolish but it is true. That is why I did not come back to the garden for so long, even after I got over my fright. I hated to think that you would think me ugly. And that is why I do not want to go out into the world and meet people."

Eric's lips twitched. In spite of his pity for the innocent and real suffering displayed in her eyes he could not help being amused at the idea of this beautiful girl believing herself in all seriousness ugly.

"But, Una, do you think yourself ugly when you look in a mirror?" he asked, smiling.

"I have never looked in a mirror," she wrote. "I never knew there was such a thing until after mother died and I read about it in a book. Then I asked Aunt Janet and she said mother had broken all the looking glasses in the house when I was a baby. But I do not mind. I knew I was ugly and I did not want to see myself. I would not look in a mirror if I had one."

Eric smiled again. A girl of nineteen who had never looked in a mirror! A certain little whimsical wish took possession of him and he did not hasten to tell her she was beautiful, as had been his first impulse. Instead he merely said slowly,

"I don't think you are ugly, Una."

“Oh, I am sure you must,” she wrote protestingly. “Even Neil does. He tells me I am kind and nice; but one day I asked him if he thought me very ugly and he looked away and would not speak. So I know. Do not let us speak of this again. It makes me feel sorry and spoils everything. I forget it at other times. Let me play you some good-bye music and do not be vexed because I would not take your book. It would only make me unhappy to read it.”

“I am not vexed,” said Eric, “and I think you will take it some day—after I have shown you something I want you to see. Never mind about your looks, Una. Beauty isn’t everything.”

“It is a great deal,” she wrote naively. “But you do like me even although I am ugly, don’t you? You like me because of my beautiful music, don’t you?”


“I like you very much, Una,” said Eric, laughing a little again, but with a tender note of which he was unconscious in his voice. Una, however, was conscious of it and she picked up her violin with a pleased smile. He left her playing there and all the way through the dim, resinous spruce wood her music followed him like an invisible guardian spirit.

“Una, the Beautiful,” he murmured. “And yet, good heavens, the child thinks she is ugly—she with a face more lovely than ever an artist dreamed of. I wonder why Neil has never told her. Perhaps he doesn’t want her to find out.”

Eric had met Neil Marshall at a country dance a few evenings before where Neil had played the violin for the dancers. Influenced by curiosity he had sought the lad’s acquaintance. Neil proved to be talkative and friendly, but at the first hint concerning the Marshalls which Eric skillfully threw out his face and manner changed. He looked secretive and suspicious, almost sinister. A sullen look crept into his large black eyes and he drew his bow across the violin strings with a discordant screech, as if to terminate the conversation. Plainly nothing was to be found out from him about Una or her grim guardians.

Chapter V.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS:—Eric Murray, having disagreed with his father about a choice of profession, leaves home and takes a village school for a friend who has fallen ill. Despite the friendship of the people and the care of the couple with whom he boards, the task is becoming irksome, until one evening he strolls into an old-fashioned garden. Here he finds a strangely beautiful girl playing a violin. She flees when she sees him. Eric learns that her name is Una and that she is a niece of James Marshall, who has an adopted son, Neil, thought to be a gypsy. Una's past is clouded. Her mother, in perfect innocence, has married a man whose wife afterwards appeared. Eric also learns that Una is dumb. Eric pays another visit to the garden and finds Una. She writes that she is not afraid of him. Their intimacy grows and he brings her books to read and she plays upon the violin. He discovers that she has never seen herself in a mirror, as all have been turned to the wall in her strange home. He also learns she has been taught to believe that she is ugly of feature.

 ne evening in late June, when Eric came downstairs, thinking of the garden and the girl who would be waiting for him there, Mrs. Williamson met him in the hall. There was a troubled look on her kindly face and she spoke hesitatingly.

“Mr. Murray—perhaps it isn’t any of my business—but it isn’t because I want to meddle. It’s only because I think I ought to speak. Are you going back to the old Connors garden to meet Una Marshall?”

For a moment an angry flush burned Eric’s face.

“Perhaps I am, Mrs. Williamson,” he said coldly. “What of it?”

“Then, sir,” said Mrs. Williamson, “I’ve got to tell you that I don’t think you’re doing right. I’ve been suspecting all along that that was where you went in the evenings, but I haven’t said anything. Do Una’s uncle and aunt know that you are meeting her there?”

“No, I don’t suppose they do. But, Mrs. Williamson, you surely don’t suspect me of meaning any harm or wrong to Una Marshall?”

“No, I don’t, Master. I don’t think for a minute you’d do her any willful wrong. But you may do her great harm for all that. She can’t know anything about the world or about men and she may get to think too much of you. That might break her heart maybe because you couldn’t marry a dumb girl like her; and so I don’t think you

ought to be meeting her in this fashion. It isn't right, Master. Don't go to the garden again."

Without a word Eric turned away and went upstairs to his room. Mrs. Williamson heard him shut his door and went back to her work in the kitchen with a sigh. Her husband came to the door and sat down on the step to enjoy his evening smoke.

"What's got the master, mother?" he asked presently. "I hear him striding up and down his room 'sif he was caged. Sure ye didn't lock him in by mistake?"

"Maybe he's worried the way Seth Tracy's acting in school," said Mrs. Williamson, with some of the serpent's wisdom.

"Shucks, he needn't. Seth'll quiet down as soon as he finds he can't run on the master. He's a rare good teacher—good as Mr. West was. The trustees are hoping he'll stay for another term. They're going to ask him at the school meeting to-morrow and offer him a raise in the supplement."

Upstairs in his little room under the eaves Eric Murray was in the grip of the most intense emotion he had ever experienced. Up and down, to and fro, he walked with set lips and clenched hands. Mrs. Williamson's words had torn away the delusive veil with which he had bound his eyes. He was face to face with the knowledge that he loved Una Marshall with the love that comes but once and is for all in all. He knew that he must choose between two alternatives—either he must never go to the garden again, or he must go as an avowed lover to woo him a wife. Worldly prudence, his inheritance from a long line of thrifty, cool-headed ancestors, was strong in Eric and he did not yield speedily or easily to the dictates of his passion. Would it not be an unwise marriage from any standpoint? Then something stronger and greater and more vital than wisdom or unwisdom rose up in him and mastered him. Una, beautiful, dumb Una, was, as he had once involuntarily thought, "the one maid" for him. Nothing should part them. The very thought of never seeing her again was so unbearable that he laughed at himself for having counted it a possible alternative.

"If I can win Una's love I will ask her to be my wife," he said, going to his window and looking out to the wooded southwestern hill behind which lay his garden. It was quite dark now and one great pearl-white star, as clear and beautiful as Una's eyes, was glimmering over it. "Her misfortune will only make her dearer to me. It is so strange to think that a month ago I did not know her. It seems to me that she has been a part of my life forever. I wonder if she was grieved because I did not go to the garden to-night—if she waited for me. I wonder if she cares for me. She doesn't know it if she does. It will be my sweet task to teach her what love means—

and no man has ever had a lovelier, purer pupil.”

At the annual school meeting the next afternoon the trustees asked Eric to take the Stillwater school for the following year. He unhesitatingly consented. That evening he went to Mrs. Williamson as she sat knitting by the kitchen window.

“Mrs. Williamson, I’m going back to the old garden to see Una again to-night.”

She looked at him reproachfully.

“Well, Master, I’ve no more to say. But you know what I think of it.”

“I intend to marry Una Marshall if I can win her,” he said.

An expression of amazement flashed across her face. She looked scrutinizingly at the firm mouth and steady grey eyes for a moment. Then she said in a troubled voice,

“Do you think that’s wise, Master? I suppose Una is pretty and good; but she won’t be a suitable wife for you—a girl that can’t speak. What will your people say?”

“I’ve no people except my father. When he sees Una he will understand. She’s all the world to me, Mrs. Williamson.”

“As long as you believe that there’s nothing more to be said,” was the quiet answer. “I’d be little afraid if I were you, though.”

“My only fear is that she won’t care for me,” said Eric soberly.

Mrs. Williamson surveyed the clean-limbed, well-featured young man shrewdly.

“I don’t think there are many women would say you ‘no’, Master. Well, I wish you well in your wooing. I hope you won’t have any trouble with Thomas and Janet. They are so different from other folks there is no knowing. But take my advice, Master, and go and see them about it right off. Don’t go on meeting Una unbeknowns to them. And take care of Neil. People say he has a notion of Una. He’ll do you a bad turn if he can, no doubt.”

“I intend to take your advice,” said Eric gravely. “I should have done so before. It was merely thoughtlessness on my part. As for Neil, I’m not afraid of him. He couldn’t help loving Una—nobody could.”

“I suppose every young man thinks that about his girl—if he’s the right sort of a young man,” said Mrs. Williamson with a little sigh.

Una was in the garden when he arrived and he lingered for a moment in the shadow of the spruce wood to gloat on her beauty with delighted eyes. The garden had lately overflowed in waves of old-fashioned caraway and she was standing in the midst of its sea of bloom with the lacelike blossoms swaying around her in the wind. She wore the simple dress of blue print in which he had first seen her; silk attire could not have better become her loveliness. She had woven herself a chaplet

of half-open white rosebuds and placed it on her dark hair where the delicate blossoms seemed less wonderful than her face.

When Eric stepped through the gap she ran to meet him with outstretched hands, smiling. He took her hands and looked into her eyes with an expression before which hers for the first time faltered. She looked down and a beautiful blush stained the virginal curves of her cheek and throat. His heart bounded, for in that blush he recognized the banner of love's vanguard.

"Are you glad to see me, Una?" he asked.

She nodded and wrote in a somewhat embarrassed fashion,

"Yes, I was afraid you would not come. You did not come last night and I was so sorry. Nothing in the garden seemed nice any longer. I couldn't even play. I tried to and my violin only cried. I waited till it was dark and then I went home."

"I couldn't come last night, Una. I stayed home to learn a new lesson. I'm sorry you missed me—no, I'm glad. Can you understand how a person may be glad and sorry for the same thing?"

She nodded again.

"Yes. I couldn't have understood it once but I can now. Did you learn your new lesson?"

"Yes, very thoroughly. It was a delightful lesson when I once understood it—I must try to teach it to you some day. Come over to the lilac bench, Una. There is something I want to say to you. But first will you give me a rose?"

She ran to the bush and after careful deliberation selected a perfect, half-open bud and brought it to him.

"It is as beautiful as—as a woman I know," he said.

A wistful look came into her face at his words and she walked with drooping head across the garden to the bench.

"Una," he said seriously, "I am going to ask you to do something for me. I want you to take me home with you and introduce me to your uncle and aunt."

She stared at him as if he had asked her to do something wildly impossible. Understanding from his face that he meant what he said, a look of dismay dawned in her eyes. She shook her head almost violently and seemed to be making a passionate, instinctive effort to speak. Then she caught up her pencil and wrote with feverish haste,

"I cannot. Oh, I cannot. Do not ask me to. You do not understand. They would be very angry—they do not want to see anyone coming to the house. And they would never let me come here again. Oh, you do not mean it!"

He pitied her for the pain and bewilderment in her eyes, but he took her soft

hands in his and said firmly,

"Yes, Una, I do mean it. It is not quite right for us to be meeting each other here as we have been doing. You are too innocent to understand this, but believe me, it is so."

She looked questioningly, piteously into his eyes. What she read there seemed to convince her for her face turned very pale and an expression of hopelessness came into it. Releasing her hands she wrote slowly,

"If you say it is wrong I must believe it. I did not know anything so pleasant could be wrong. But if it is wrong we must not do it any more. Mother told me I must never do anything that was wrong. But I did not know this was wrong."

"It was not wrong for you, Una. But it was a little wrong for me because I knew better,—or rather should have known better. Some day you will understand fully. Now, you will take me to your friends and after I have talked with them it will be all right for us to meet here or anywhere."

She shook her head.

"No," she wrote, "uncle and aunt will tell you to go away and never come back. And they would never let me come here any more. Since it is not right to meet you I will not come, but it is no use to think of going to them. I did not tell them about you because I knew that they would forbid me to see you but I am sorry since it was so wrong."

"You must take me to them, Una," said Eric firmly. "I am sure things will not be as you fear when they hear what I have to say."

Uncomforted, she wrote forlornly,

"I must do it since you insist but I am sure it will be no use. I cannot take you to-night because they are away. But I will to-morrow night. And after that I shall not see you any more."

Two great tears brimmed out of her big blue eyes and splashed down on her slate. Her lips quivered like a hurt child's. Impulsively Eric put his arm about her and drew her head down to his shoulder. As she cried there, softly, miserably, he pressed his lips to the silky black head with its coronal of roses. He did not see two burning black eyes that were looking at him over the old dyke with hatred and passion blazing in their depths. Neil Marshall was crouched there, with clenched hands, watching them.

"Una dear, don't cry," said Eric tenderly. "You *will* see me again—I promise you that. I don't think your uncle and aunt will be so unreasonable as you fear but even if they are they shall not prevent me from meeting you."

Una lifted her head and



*HE TOOK A STEP NEARER ERIC AS IF HE WOULD
ATTACK HIM.*

looked at him wistfully.

"Oh, you don't know them," she wrote. "They will lock me up in my room. That is the way they always punished me."

"If they do I'll get you out somehow," said Eric laughing.

She allowed herself to smile but it was rather a forlorn little effort. She did not cry any more but her spirits did not come back to her. Eric talked gaily but she only listened in a pensive absent way as if not hearing him. When he asked her to play she shook her head.

"I can't think of any music to-night," she wrote. "I must go home for my head aches and I am very stupid."

"Very well, Una. Now, don't worry, little girl. It will come out all right."

Evidently she did not share his confidence for her head

drooped as they walked across the garden. At the entrance to the wild plum lane she paused and looked half reproachfully at him, her lips quivering, her eyes filling again. She seemed to be bidding him a mute good-bye. With an impulse of tenderness he could not control Eric put his arm about her and kissed her on the sweet tremulous mouth. She started back with a little involuntary cry; a burning blush swept over her face and the next minute she had fled swiftly up the darkening lane.

The sweetness of that involuntary kiss clung to Eric's lips as he went homeward, half intoxicating him. He knew that it had opened the gates of womanhood for her; never again would her eyes meet him with their old unclouded frankness. When next he looked into them he would see there she knew the consciousness of his kiss.

Behind her in the garden that night Una had left her childhood.

Chapter VI.

When Eric betook himself to the garden the next evening he felt rather nervous. He did not know how the Marshalls might receive him and certainly the reports he had heard of them were not encouraging. Even Mrs. Williamson, when he told her where he was going, seemed to look upon him as one bent on bearding a lion in his den. "I hope they won't be very uncivil to you, sir," was the best she could say.

He expected Una to be in the garden for he had been delayed by a call from one of the trustees; but she was nowhere to be seen. Impatiently he walked across to the plum lane; but when he reached the gap he stopped short in sudden dismay. Neil Marshall had stepped from behind the dyke and stood confronting him, with blazing eyes and lips that writhed with an emotion so great that at first it prevented him from speaking.

With a thrill of dismay Eric understood what had happened. Neil had discovered them—had probably betrayed them. How unfortunate that it had happened before he had had time to explain! It would probably prejudice Thomas and Janet Marshall still further against him. So far, his thoughts, when Neil's pent-up passion suddenly found vent in wild words.

"So you've come to meet her! But she isn't here—she never will be here again! I hate you—I hate you—I hate you!"

His voice rose to a shrill scream. He took a step nearer Eric as if he would attack him. Eric looked him steadily in the eyes with a calm defiance before which his hot passion broke like foam from a rock.

"So you have been making trouble for Una, Neil," he said contemptuously. "I suppose you have told her uncle and aunt that she has been meeting me here. Well, you have saved me the trouble of doing it, that's all. I was going to tell them myself to-night. I don't know what your motive in doing this has been. Was it jealousy—or have you done it out of malice to Una?"

His contempt quelled Neil more effectually than any display of anger could have done.

"Never mind why I did it," he muttered sullenly. "It is no business of yours. And you've no business to come sneaking around here. Una won't meet you here again."

"She will meet me in her own home then," said Eric sternly. "Neil, you are a very foolish, undisciplined boy to behave as you have done. I am going straight to Una's uncle now to explain everything."

Neil sprang forward in his path.

"No—no—go away," he implored wildly. "Oh, sir—oh Mr. Murray—please go away. I'll do anything for you if you will. I love Una—I'd give my life for her. I can't have you coming here to steal her from me. If you do—I'll kill you! I wanted to kill you last night when I saw you kiss her. Oh, I saw you—I was watching. I had followed her—I suspected something. She was so different—so changed. She seemed to forget that I was there. I knew something had come between us. And it was you—curse you!"

He was working himself up into a fury again—the untamed fury of the Italian peasant thwarted in his heart's desire. It overrode all the restraints of his training and environment. Eric, amid all his anger and annoyance, felt a thrill of pity for him. The boy—he was only a boy—was miserable and beside himself.

"Neil, listen to me," he said quietly. "You are talking very foolishly. It is not for you to say who shall be Una's friend. Now you may just as well control yourself and go quietly home. I am not at all frightened by you and I shall know how to deal with you if you persist in interfering with me. I'm not the sort of person to put up with that, my lad."

The restrained power in his tone and look cowed Neil. The latter turned sullenly away and plunged into the shadow of the firs.

Eric, considerably ruffled by this unexpected and unpleasant encounter, pursued his way along the lane which wound on by the belt of woodland in twist and curve to the Marshall house. His heart beat as he thought of Una. What might she not be suffering? Doubtless Neil had given an exaggerated and distorted account of what he had seen and probably her dour relations would be very angry with her, poor child. Anxious to avert their wrath from her as soon as might be he hurried on, almost forgetting his meeting with Neil. The angry outburst of a jealous boy mattered little, he thought. What did matter was the fact that Una was in trouble which his own thoughtlessness had brought upon her.

Presently he found himself before the Marshall house. It was an old, low-eaved, shingled building with sharp gables, stained a dark grey by long exposure to wind and weather. The little yard in front of it was grassy and prim and flowerless; but over the low front door a luxuriant rose vine clambered in a riot of color and blossom which contrasted oddly with the general bareness of its surroundings. It seemed to fling itself over the grim old house as if intent on bombarding it with an alien life and joyousness.

Eric knocked at the door, wondering if possibly Una might come to it; but a moment later it was opened by an elderly woman, of rigid lines from the hem of her dark print dress to the crown of her iron gray hair. Her face was worn and wrinkled

but possessed a certain harsh comeliness of feature which neither age nor wrinkles had destroyed; and her deep-set gray eyes were not devoid of suggested kindness although they now looked at Eric with an unconcealed hostility.

Eric lifted his hat.

“Have I the honor of speaking to Miss Marshall?” he said.

“I am Janet Marshall,” said the woman stiffly.

“Then I wish to talk with you—and with your brother.”

“Come in.”

She stepped aside and motioned him to a low brown door opening on the right.

“I’ll call Thomas,” she said coldly, as she went out through the hall.

Eric walked into the parlor and sat down. It was the most old-fashioned room he had ever seen. The solidly made chairs and tables of some wood grown dark and polished with age made even Mrs. Williamson’s “parlor set” of horsehair extravagantly modern by contrast. The painted floor was covered with round braided rugs. On the table was a lamp and some theological volumes contemporary with the square-runged furniture. The walls, covered with dark, diamond-patterned paper, were hung with faded engravings, mostly of clerical-looking personages in gowns and bands. But over the undecorated mantel, in a ruddy glow of sunset light striking through the window, hung one which caught and held Eric’s eye to the exclusion of everything else. It was the enlarged “crayon” photograph of a young girl and in spite of its crudeness of execution it was easily the center of interest in the room. Eric at once guessed that this was Una’s mother for, although quite unlike Una’s spirited, sensitive face in general, there was a subtle resemblance about brow and chin. The face was a very handsome one, suggestive of velvety black eyes and vivid coloring, but it was its expression rather than its beauty that fascinated Eric. Never had he seen a countenance expressing more intense and stubborn will power. Margaret Marshall was dead and buried; this picture was a cheap and inartistic production; yet the vitality in it dominated its surroundings still. What, then, must have been the power of that will in life? Eric realized that this woman could and would have done whatsoever she willed unflinchingly and unrelentingly. She could stamp her personality and her desire on everything and everybody around her. Many things in Una’s upbringing and temperament became clear to him.

“If that woman had told me I was ugly I should have believed her,” he thought. “I should never have dreamed of questioning or disputing anything she said. The strange power in her face is almost uncanny. Pride and stubbornness are its salient characteristics. Well, Una does not resemble her mother in any respect.”

His reflections were interrupted by the entrance of Janet and Thomas Marshall.

The latter had evidently been called from his work. He nodded in silence and the two sat gravely down before Eric.

"I have come to see you about your niece, Mr. Marshall," he said abruptly, realizing that there would be small use in beating about the bush with this grim pair. "I met your—I met Neil Marshall in the Connors garden and I found that he has told you that I have been meeting Una there."

He paused. Thomas Marshall nodded again but did not speak, and never took his steady eyes from the young man's flushed countenance.

"I fear that you have formed an unfavorable opinion of me on this account, Mr. Marshall," Eric went on. "But I hardly think I deserve it. I can explain if you will allow me. I met your niece accidentally in the garden three weeks ago and heard her play. I thought her music very wonderful and I fell into the habit of coming to the garden in the evenings to hear it. I had no thought of harming her in any way, Mr. Marshall. I thought of her as a mere child and a child who was doubly sacred on account of her affliction. But recently I—I—it occurred to me that I was not behaving quite honorably in encouraging her to meet me thus. Yesterday evening I asked her to bring me here and introduce me to you and her aunt. We would have come then if you had been home. As you were not we arranged to come to-night."

"Yes, she told us so," said Thomas Marshall slowly, speaking in a strong, vibrant voice. "We did not believe her. But your story agrees with hers and I begin to think we were too harsh with her. But Neil's tale made us very angry—and we have no reason to be over-trustful in the case of strange men, Master. Perhaps you meant no harm—I'm willing to believe it, sir. But there must be no more of it."

"I hope you will not refuse me the privilege of seeing your niece," said Eric eagerly, "I ask you to allow me to visit her here. But I do not ask you to receive me as a friend on my own recommendations only. I will give you references—men of standing in Chelton. If you refer to them—"

"I don't need to do that," said Thomas Marshall quietly. "I know more of you than you think, Master. I know your father well by reputation and I've seen him. I know you are a rich man's son, whatever your whim in teaching a country school may be. Since you have kept your own counsel about your affairs I supposed you didn't want your true position generally known and I held my tongue about you. I know no ill of you, Master, since now I believe that you were not beguiling Una to meet you unknown to her friends of set purpose. But all this doesn't make you a suitable friend for her, sir. The less she sees of you the better."

Eric almost started to his feet; but he swiftly thought that his only hope lay in bringing Thomas Marshall to another way of thinking. He had got on better than he

had expected so far; he must not now jeopardize what he had gained by rashness.

"Why do you think so, Mr. Marshall?" he said, regaining his self control with an effort.

"Well, plain speaking is best, Master. If you were to come here and see Una often she'd most likely come to think too much of you. Then, when you went away, she might break her heart for she is one of those who feel things deeply. She has been happy enough, though I know well that folks condemn us for the way she has been brought up. And we don't want her made unhappy, Master."

"But I love your niece and I want to marry her if I can win her love," said Eric steadily.

He surprised them out of their self-possession for a moment. Both started and looked at him as if they did not believe their ears.

"Marry her! Marry Una!" exclaimed Thomas Marshall incredulously. "You can't mean it, Master! Why, she's dumb—Una is dumb!"

"Her dumbness matters nothing to me as far as that goes although I deeply regret it for her own sake," answered Eric.

The older man leaned forward and looked at the floor in a troubled fashion, tapping his calloused finger tips together uneasily. He was plainly puzzled by this unexpected turn of the conversation.

"What would your father say?" he queried finally.

"I've often heard my father say a man must marry to please himself," said Eric with a smile. "If he felt tempted to go back on that opinion I think the sight of Una would convert him. But, after all, it is what I say matters in this case, isn't it, Mr. Marshall? I am strong and well educated and not afraid of work. I can make a home for Una in a few years even if I have to depend entirely on my own resources. Only give me the chance to win her, that is all I ask."

"I don't think it would do, Master," said Thomas Marshall, shaking his head. "Of course, I daresay you—you—" He tried to say "love" but Scotch reserve balked stubbornly at the terrible word. "You think you like Una now. But you are only a lad—and lads' fancies change."

"Mine will not," broke in Eric vehemently. "It is not a fancy—it is the love that comes once in a lifetime and once only. I may be but a lad, Mr. Marshall, but I know that Una is the one woman in the world for me. Oh, I'm not speaking rashly nor inconsiderately. I've weighed the matter well and looked at it from all aspects. And it all comes to this—I love Una and I want what any man who loves a woman truly has the right to, the chance to win her love in return."

"Well!" Thomas Marshall drew a long breath that was almost a sigh. "Well, if you

feel like that, Master,—Janet, woman, what shall we say to him?”

Janet Marshall had hitherto spoken no word. She had sat rigidly upright in one of the old chairs under Margaret Marshall's insistent picture, with her toil-worn hands grasping the carved arms tightly and her eyes fastened on Eric's face. At first their expression had been guarded and hostile, but as the conversation proceeded they gradually became almost kindly. Now, when her brother appealed to her she leaned forward and said eagerly,

“Do you know that there is a stain on Una's birth, Master?”

“I know that her mother was the victim of a very sad mistake, Miss Marshall. I admit no stain where there was no conscious wrong doing.”

“Well, then,” said Janet almost triumphantly, “since neither that nor her dumbness is any drawback in your eyes, I don't see why you shouldn't have your chance. Perhaps your world will say that she is not good enough for you but she is—she is —” this half defiantly. “She is a sweet and innocent and true-hearted lassie. Thomas, I say let the young man have his will.”

Thomas Marshall stood up as if he considered the responsibility off his shoulders and the interview at an end.

“Very well, Janet. And may God deal with him as he deals with her. Good evening, Master. I'll see you again and you're welcome to come and go as suits you. But I must go to my work now.”

“I'll go up and send Una down,” said Janet quietly.

She lighted the lamp on the table and left the room. A few minutes later Una came down. Eric rose and went to meet her eagerly but she only put out her right hand with a pretty dignity and while she looked into his face she did not look into his eyes.

“You see I was right, Una,” he said. “Your uncle and aunt haven't driven me away.”

She smiled and went over to the table to write on her slate.

“They were very angry last night and said dreadful things to me. I could hardly believe it when Aunt Janet came up and told me you were here and that I might come down. But I am glad that they have forgiven us.”

She did not tell him how glad she was nor how unhappy she had been over the thought that she was never to see him again. Yesterday she would have told it all to him frankly and fully; but for her yesterday was a lifetime away—a lifetime in which she had come into her heritage of womanly reserve and dignity. The kiss that had passed between them, the words her uncle and aunt had said to her, the tears she had shed for the first time on her sleepless pillow—all conspired to reveal her to

herself. She was no longer a child to be made a dear comrade of. She was, though quite unconsciously, the woman to be wooed and won, exacting, with sweet innate pride, her dues of allegiance.

Chapter VII.

Shenceforth Eric was a constant visitor at the Marshall house. He soon became a favorite with Thomas and Janet, especially the latter. He liked them both, discovering under all their outward peculiarity, sterling worth and fineness of character.

Of Neil he saw little. The Italian boy avoided him or, if they chanced to meet, passed him by with sullen, downcast eyes. Eric did not trouble himself much about Neil, but Thomas Marshall bluntly told Una that she must not make such an equal of Neil as she had done.

“You’ve been too kind to the lad, lassie, and he’s got presumptuous. He must be taught his place.”

Most of the idyllic hours of Eric’s wooing were spent in the old garden. It was a wilderness of roses now—red roses and pink roses and white roses and pale yellow roses, roses full-blown and roses in buds that were sweeter than anything on earth except Una’s face. Their petals fell in silken heaps along the old paths or clung to the lush grasses among which Eric lay and dreamed while Una played on her old brown violin. Eric promised himself that when she was his wife her wonderful gift should be cultivated to the utmost. Her power of expression seemed to deepen and develop every day, growing as her soul grew, taking on new color and richness from her ripening heart. To Eric, the days were all pages in an inspired idyll. He had never dreamed that love could be so mighty, that the world could be so beautiful. All his life was for the time being bounded by that garden where he wooed his sweetheart. All other ambitions and plans and hopes were set aside in the pursuit of this one aim, the attainment of which would enhance all others a thousandfold, the loss of which would rob all others of their reason for existence. His own world seemed very far away and the things of that world forgotten.

His father had written him a testy letter on hearing that he had taken the Stillwater school for another year. But running through its testiness was a chord of regret and longing to which Eric’s heart responded. He wrote a filial letter in return, promising to come home and be a good boy at the end of the year.

“I’ll go into the business with heart and soul then, dad,” he wrote, “but I want to have this one year for myself.”

It could not long remain a secret in Stillwater that “the Master” was going to the Marshall place on courting thoughts intent. Mrs. Williamson kept her own and Eric’s counsel; the Marshalls said nothing; but the secret leaked out and great was the surprise and gossip and

wonder. One or two incautious people ventured to express their opinion of the Master's wisdom to the Master himself, but they never repeated the experiment. Curiosity was rife. A hundred stories were circulated about Una, greatly exaggerated in the circulation. Wise heads were shaken and the majority opined that it was a great pity. The Master was a smart young fellow; it was too bad that he should take up with that queer dumb niece of the Marshalls who had been brought up in such a heathenish way. They guessed Neil Marshall didn't like it. He seemed to have got dreadful moody and sulky of late. Thus the buzz of comment and gossip ran.

Those two in the old garden did not heed it. Una knew nothing of gossip.

Stillwater was as much of an unknown world to her as the city of Eric's home. Her thoughts strayed widely in the realm of fancy but they never wandered out to the little realities that hedged her strange life around. In that life she had blossomed out, a fair, unique thing. There were times when Eric almost regretted that one day he must take her out of her white solitude to a world that, in the last analysis, was only Stillwater on a larger scale, with just the same pettiness of thought and feeling and opinion at the bottom of it. He wished he might keep her to himself forever in that old spruce-hidden garden where the roses fell.

One day he indulged himself in the fulfillment of the whim he had formed when Una had told him she thought herself ugly. With Janet's co-operation a mirror was brought to the house and hung in the parlor.



"LOOK—LOOK—LOOK—DID YOU EVER IMAGINE ANYTHING FAIRER THAN YOURSELF, DAINTY UNA?"

"There hasn't been such a thing in the house for twenty years, Master," said Janet, looking at it rather dubiously, as if, after all, she distrusted its pearly depth and richly carved frame. "I never saw such a big one. I hope it won't make her vain. She is very bonny but it may not do her any good to know it."

"It won't harm her," said Eric confidently. "When a belief in her ugliness hasn't spoiled a girl, a belief in her beauty won't."

Janet did not understand epigrams.

"I can't think what made her suppose she was ugly, Master."

"Her mother told her so," said Eric rather bitterly.

"Ah!" Janet shot a quick glance at the picture of her sister. "Margaret was a strange woman, Master. I suppose she thought her own beauty had been a snare to her. Well, have your own way. You would have it anyway, I think, lad. You are one of those men who always get their own way."

Eric went to look for Una and found her in the rose garden.

"Come down to the house, Una; I have something beautiful there to show you," he said with boyish pleasure shining in his eyes. "I want you to go and put on that muslin dress you wore last Sunday and pin your hair up in the same way you did then. Run along—don't wait for me. I want to pick some of these lilies."

When Eric returned to the house with an armful of the long-stemmed white August lilies that bloomed in the garden Una was just coming down the steep, narrow staircase with its carpeting of homespun drugget. Her marvellous loveliness, brought out into brilliant relief by the dark woodwork of the dim old hall, almost took away his breath. She wore a trailing, clinging dress of creamy tinted fabric that had been her mother's. It had not been altered in any respect for fashion held no sway at the Marshall homestead and Una thought that the dress left nothing to be desired. Its quaint style suited her admirably; the neck was cut slightly away to show the round white throat and the sleeves were long, full "bishop" ones out of which her beautiful, slender hands slipped like flowers from their sheaths. She had crossed her long braids at the back and pinned them about her head like a coronet; a late white rose was fastened low down on the left side.

"A man has given all other bliss
And all his worldly wealth for this—
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips,"

quoted Eric in a whisper. Aloud he said:

"Hold these lilies on your arm—so. Now, give me your hand and shut your eyes.

Don't open them until I tell you."

He led her into the parlor and up to the mirror.

"Look," he cried proudly.

Una opened her eyes and looked—straight into the mirror where, like a lovely picture in a dark frame, she saw herself reflected. For a moment she was bewildered. Then she realized what it was. The lilies fell from her arms to the floor and she turned pale. With a little low, involuntary cry of delight she put her hands over her face.

Eric pulled them boyishly away.

"Una, do you think you are ugly now? Look—look—look—did you ever imagine anything fairer than yourself, dainty Una?"

She was blushing now and stealing shy glances at the mirror. With a smile she took her slate and wrote naively,

"I think I am pleasant to look upon. I cannot tell you how glad I am. It is so dreadful to believe that one is ugly. But why did mother tell me that I was?"

"I think, perhaps, she found that beauty was not always a blessing, Una, and thought it wiser not to let you know you possessed it. Come, let us go back to the garden now. The mirror will hang here; it is yours. Don't look into it too often or Aunt Janet will disapprove. She is afraid it will make you vain."

Una gave one of her rare musical laughs which Eric never heard without a recurrence of the old wonder that she could laugh so when she could not speak. She blew an airy little kiss at her mirrored face and turned from it smiling.

On their way to the garden they met Neil. He went by them with averted face but Una shivered and involuntarily drew closer to Eric.

"I don't understand Neil at all now," she wrote nervously. "He is not nice as he used to be and sometimes he will not answer when I speak to him. And he looks so strangely at me, too."

"Don't mind Neil," said Eric lightly. "He is probably sulky because of some things I said to him when I found he had spied on us."

That night before she went to bed Una stole into the parlor for another glimpse of herself by the light of the dim little candle she carried. She was still standing there dreamily when Aunt Janet's grim face appeared in the shadows of the doorway.

"Are you thinking that you are bonnie, lassie? Aye, but remember it is handsome is that handsome does," she said with grudging admiration—for the girl with her flushed cheeks and star-like eyes was something that even dour Janet Marshall could not look upon unmoved.

Una smiled softly. "I'll try to remember," she wrote, "but oh, Aunt Janet, I am so glad that I am not ugly. It is not wrong to be glad of that, is it?"

The older woman's face softened. "No, I don't suppose it is, lassie. A comely face is something to be thankful for. The Master thinks you are wonderful bonny, Una," she added, looking keenly at the girl.

Una started and a scarlet blush burned over her face. The expression that flashed into her eyes told Janet Marshall all she wished to know. With a half sigh she bade her niece good night and went away. Una ran fleetly upstairs to her dim little room that looked out into the spruces and flung herself on her bed, burying her burning face in her hands. Her aunt's words had revealed to her the secret of her heart. She knew that she loved Eric Murray—and the knowledge brought with it a strange heartbreak. For was she not dumb?

Chapter VIII.

Eric noticed a change in Una at their next meeting—a change that troubled him. She seemed aloof, abstracted, and almost ill at ease. When he proposed an excursion to the garden he thought she was reluctant to go. The days that followed convinced him of the change. Something had come between them. Una seemed miles away in spirit. He had a bad week of it but he determined to put an end to it by plain speaking. One evening in the garden he told her of his love.

It was an evening in August and the garden was in its prime of lavish splendor. Everywhere there were lilies, white lilies and gorgeous tiger lilies, tawny and crimson spotted. Una was sitting on the old stone bench where he had first seen her. She had been playing for him but her music did not please her and she laid the violin aside with a little frown. Perhaps she was afraid to play—afraid that her new emotions might escape her and reveal themselves in the music. It was difficult to prevent this, so long had she been accustomed to pouring out all her feelings unhindered in harmony; the necessity of restraint irked her and made of her bow a clumsy thing that no longer obeyed her wishes. More than ever at that instant did she long for speech—speech that would conceal and protect where dangerous silence might betray.

In a low voice that trembled with earnestness Eric told her that he loved her—had loved her since the first time he had seen her in the old garden. He spoke humbly but not fearfully, for he believed that she loved him and had little expectation of any rebuff.

“Una, will you be my wife?” he said, taking her hands in his.

Una had listened with averted face. At first she had blushed but now she had grown very pale. When he had finished speaking and was waiting for her answer she suddenly pulled away her hands and, putting them over her face, burst into tears and noiseless sobs.

“Una, dearest, have I alarmed you? Surely you knew before that I loved you. Don’t you love me?” Eric said, putting his arm about her and trying to draw her to him. But she shook her head sorrowfully and wrote with compressed lips:

“Yes, I do love you, but I can never, never marry you because I am dumb.”

“Oh, Una,” said Eric smiling, for he believed his victory won, “that doesn’t make any difference to me—you know it doesn’t, sweetest. If you love me that is enough.”

But Una only shook her head again. There was a very determined look on her pale face. She wrote, “No, it is not enough. It would be doing you a great wrong to

marry you when I cannot speak and I will not do it because I love you. Your world would think you had done a very foolish thing. I have thought it all over since something Aunt Janet said made me understand and I know I am doing right. I am sorry I did not understand sooner, before you learned to care so much."

"Una, darling, don't let such an idle fancy disturb you for a moment. Don't you know that you will make me miserably unhappy all my life if you will not be my wife?"

"No. You think so now and you will feel badly for a time. Then you will go away and you will forget me after awhile and then you will see that I was right. I will be very unhappy, too, but that is better than spoiling your life. Do not plead or coax because I will not change my mind."

Eric did plead and coax, however, at first patiently and smilingly as one might argue with a dear, foolish child, then with distracted earnestness when he began to realize that Una meant what she said. It was all in vain. Una grew paler and paler and her eyes showed her suffering. She did not even try to argue with him but only listened patiently and shook her head. Say what he would, entreat and implore as he might, he could not move her resolution a hair's breadth. Yet, he did not despair; he thought her love for him must conquer. He did not understand that it was the very intensity of her love that gave her the strength to resist him. It held her back unflinchingly from doing him what she believed to be a wrong.

The next day Eric sought Una again and renewed his pleadings, but in vain. Nothing he could say was of any avail against her sad determination. When he finally realized that her resolution was not to be shaken he went in his despair to Janet Marshall. Janet listened to his story with concern and disappointment plainly visible on her face. When he had finished she shook her head.

"I'm sorry, Master. I hoped for something very different. But if Una says she won't marry you I am afraid she will stick to it."

"But she loves me," cried the young man. "And if you and her uncle speak to her—perhaps you can influence her—"

"No, Master, it wouldn't be of any use. Una is as determined as her mother was when once she makes up her mind. She has always been good and obedient for the most part, but once or twice we have found out that there is no moving her if she does resolve upon anything. It is because she thinks so much of you and she is afraid you would come to repent having married a dumb girl."

"I can't give her up," said Eric stubbornly. "Something must be done. Perhaps her defect can be remedied. Have you ever thought of that? Have you ever had her

examined by a doctor qualified to pronounce on her case?"

"No, Master, we never took her to anyone. When we first began to fear she was never going to talk, Thomas wanted to take her somewhere and have her looked to. But her mother wouldn't hear of it. She said that it was no use—that it was her sin that was visited on her child and that it could never be taken away."

"And did you give in weakly to a morbid whim like that?" asked Eric impatiently.

"Master, you didn't know my sister. We had to give in—nobody could hold out against her. She was a strange woman and a terrible woman in many ways after her trouble. We feared to cross her lest she might go out of her mind. Besides, we didn't think ourselves, it would be much use to try to cure Una. It was a sin that made her as she is."

"Nonsense! Where was there any sin? Your sister thought herself a lawful wife."

"I am not meaning that, Master. That wasn't where Margaret did the wrong. You don't know the story. I am going to tell it to you and you will understand then why Una is dumb and why it isn't likely there can be anything done for her. Una doesn't know the truth and you must never tell her. Margaret was a very proud, high-spirited girl and very stubborn, too, Master. But I would not have you think she was unlovable. She had her faults; but she was bright and merry, too, and we all loved her. You know the story of her marriage. Our father was a proud man and her misfortune cut him to the heart. He hadn't been very willing for her to marry Roland Fraser and when she came home in disgrace she hadn't set foot over the threshold before he broke out railing at her. He called her a hard name, Master. Oh, he was too hard—even though he was my father I must say that he was too hard on her, broken-hearted as she was. And he was sorry for it—the moment it was out of his mouth he was sorry for it. But the mischief was done. I'll never forget Margaret's face, Master. It was full of anger and rebellion and defiance. She clenched her hands and went up to her room without saying a word, all those mad feelings surging in her soul and being held back from speech by her sheer stubborn will. And, Master, never a word did Margaret say from that day until after Una was born—not one word, Master. Nothing we could do for her softened her—and we were kind to her, Master, and gentle with her and never reproached her. But she would not speak to anyone—she just sat in her room and stared at the wall with awful eyes most of the time. Her father implored her to speak and forgive him but she never gave any sign that she heard him. That's not the worst, Master. Father sickened and died. And on his death-bed he asked Margaret to forgive him and speak one word to him. Master, she wouldn't! And yet she wanted to speak—but she wouldn't! Her stubbornness wouldn't let her. Oh, it was hard and dreadful. She saw her father die

and she never spoke the word he prayed for to him. *That* was her sin, Master,—and for that sin the innocent was punished. After Una was born Margaret softened and broke through her silence when she felt her baby at her breast. She spoke and wept and was herself again—until—until she found that Una was never going to speak. We thought then she would go out of her mind. Indeed, Master, she was never quite right again. But that is the story. Una can't speak because her mother wouldn't."

Eric had listened moodily, his chin in his hand and his eyes on the floor. Now he got up and paced restlessly to and fro in the dark, spruce-shadowed old kitchen where they were.

"It's an extraordinary story," he said. "It is hard to believe—that such could have been the cause of Una's dumbness, I mean. But even if it were so something may be done for her. At all events, we must try. I have a friend who is a physician. His name is David Baker and he is a very skillful specialist in throat diseases. I shall have him come here and see Una."

"Well, have your way," assented Janet. Plainly she had little faith in the possibility of anything being done for Una.

But a rosy glow of hope flushed over Una's face when Eric told her what he meant to do.

"Oh, do you think he can make me speak?" she wrote eagerly.

"I don't know, Una. I hope that he can and I know he will do all that mortal skill can do. If he can cure you, will you promise to marry me, dearest?"

She nodded. The grave little motion had the solemnity of a sacred promise.

"Yes," she wrote, "when I can speak like other women, I will marry you."

Chapter IX.

The next week David Baker came to Stillwater. He was a few years older than Eric but the two had always been close friends. Eric would have trusted David with his life.

David was an ugly man with a clever, irregular, charming face and a voice that was as soft and musical as a woman's. He looked curiously at Eric when the two young men were alone in the latter's room.

"Now, Murray, I want to know what all this is about. You wrote me a letter entreating me, in the name of friendship, to come to you at once. Accordingly, I come post haste though muchly puzzled about the mysterious patient, sex unknown, whose throat and vocal organs you want examined. Explain why you have inveigled me hither."



*SO DEEP WAS HIS ABSTRACTION THAT HE WAS
CONSCIOUS OF NOTHING AROUND HIM.*

"I want you to do me a service, David," said Eric quietly. "I didn't care to go into details by letter. I have met in Stillwater a young girl whom I have learned to love. I have asked her to marry me, but, although she cares for me, she refuses to do so because she is dumb. I wish you to examine her and find out the causes of her defect and if it can be cured. She can hear perfectly and all her other faculties are entirely normal. In order that you may better understand the case I must tell you her history."

This Eric proceeded to do. David Baker listened with grave attention. Whatever his opinion of Eric's wisdom in falling in love with a dumb girl of Una's antecedents he kept it

to himself. Very soon the strange case enlisted his professional interest to the exclusion of all other thoughts. "It is very curious," he said when Eric had finished, "and very unusual, but it is not totally unprecedented. There are some similar cases on record I believe. Well, I will see if anything can be done for this girl. I cannot express any opinion on the matter until I have examined her."

The next morning Eric took David up to the Marshall place. As they neared the old garden a strain of music came floating through the resinous morning arcades of the spruce wood—a wild, sorrowful, appealing cry, full of indescribable pathos, yet marvellously sweet.

"What is that?" exclaimed David, starting.

"That is Una playing on her violin," answered Eric. "She is a positive genius in that respect and improvises wonderful melodies."

When they reached the garden Una rose from the stone bench to meet them, her lovely, luminous eyes distended, her face flushed with the excitement of mingled hope and fear.

"Ye gods!" muttered David helplessly. He could not hide his amazement and Eric smiled to see it. The latter had not failed to understand the significance of David's previous silence regarding the affair and knew that his friend considered him little better than a lunatic.

"Una, this is my friend, Dr. Baker," he said. Una held out her hand with a smile. Her beauty, as she stood there in the fresh morning sunshine among her sister lilies, was something to take away a man's breath. David, who was by no means lacking in confidence and generally had a ready tongue where women were concerned, found himself as mute and awkward as a schoolboy, as he bowed over her hand. But Una was charmingly at ease. Eric smiled to remember how different this was from his first meeting with her. He realized how far Una had come since then and how much she had developed.

With a little gesture of invitation Una led the way through the garden to the wild plum lane and the two men followed.

"Eric, she is divine," said David in an undertone. "Last night—well, to tell you the truth, I had a rather poor opinion of your sanity. But now I'm consumed with a fierce envy. She is the loveliest creature I ever saw."

Eric introduced David to the Marshalls and then hurried away to his school. On the way down the Marshall lane he met Neil and was half startled by the glare of hatred in the Italian boy's eyes. Pity succeeded the momentary alarm. Neil's face had grown thin and worn; his eyes were sunken and feverishly bright; he looked

years older than on the day Eric had first met him. Prompted by a sudden impulse, Eric stopped and held out his hand.

"Neil, can't we be friends?" he said. "I am sorry if I have been the cause of inflicting any pain on you."

"Friends! Never!" said Neil passionately. "You have taken Una from me. I shall hate you always."

He strode fiercely up the lane and Eric, with a shrug of his shoulders, went on his way.

The day seemed interminably long to him. David had not returned when he went home to dinner; but when he went to his room in the evening he found his friend staring out of the window.

"Well?" he said impatiently, as David wheeled around but still kept silence. "What have you to say to me? Have you discovered what is the matter with Una?"

"There is nothing the matter with her," answered David slowly, flinging himself on a chair by the window.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Her vocal organs are all perfect. As far as they are concerned, there is absolutely no reason why she should not speak. After all, I can't express my conclusion in any better words than Janet Marshall used when she said that Una can't speak because her mother wouldn't. That is all there is to it. The trouble is psychological, not physical. Medical skill is helpless before it."

"Then there is no hope?" said Eric in a tone of despair. "You can do nothing for her?"

"I can do nothing for her; but I do not—exactly—say there is no hope."

"Come, David, I am in no mood for guessing riddles. Speak plainly, man."

David frowned reflectively.

"I don't think I can make it plain to you. It is not very plain to myself—and it is only a vague theory of mine, of course. I can't substantiate it by any facts. In short, Eric, I think that it is possible that Una may speak sometime—if she ever wants to badly enough."

"Wants to! Why, man, she wants to as badly as it is possible for anyone to want anything. She loves me and she won't marry me because she can't speak. Don't you suppose a girl under such circumstances would 'want' to speak as much as anyone could?"

"I don't mean that sort of wanting, no matter how strong the wish may be. I mean a sudden, vehement, passionate inrush of desire, physical, psychical, mental, all in one, mighty enough to rend the invisible fetters that hold her speech in bondage. If

any occasion should arise to evoke such a desire, I believe that Una would speak—and, having once spoken, would thenceforth be normal in that respect.”

“All this sounds like great nonsense to me,” said Eric restlessly. “I suppose you have an idea what you are talking about, but I haven’t. And it practically means that there is no hope for her—or me. Even if your theory be correct it is not likely that such an occasion as you speak of will ever arise. And Una will never marry me.”

“Don’t give up so easily, old fellow. Women have been known to change their minds.”

“Not Una,” said Eric miserably. “I tell you she has all her mother’s unfaltering will and tenacity of purpose, although Una is free from any taint of pride or selfishness. I thank you for your sympathy and interest, David. You’ve done all you could—but, heavens, what it would have meant to me if you could have helped her!”

With a groan, Eric flung himself on the bed and buried his face in the pillow. It was a bitter moment for him; but athwart his own despair came the thought of Una.

“Did you tell her what you have told me?” he asked.

“I told her that I could not help her. I said nothing to her of my theory—it would have been of no use.”

“How did she take it?”

“Very bravely and quietly. But the look on her face—Eric, I felt as if I had murdered something. She bade me a mute good-bye with a pitiful smile and went upstairs. I did not see her again although I stayed to dinner at her uncle’s insistence. Those old Marshalls are a queer pair. I liked them, though. They are strong and staunch—good friends, bitter enemies. They were sorry I could not help Una; but I saw plainly that old Thomas Marshall thought I had been meddling with predestination in attempting it.”

Eric smiled mechanically.

“I must go up and see Una. You’ll excuse me, won’t you, David? My books are there—help yourself.”

But when Eric reached the Marshall house he only saw old Janet who told him that Una was in her room and refused to see him.

“She thought you would come and she left this with me to give you, Master,” she said, handing him a little note. It was very brief and blotted with tears.

“Do not come any more, Eric,” it ran. “I must not see you because it would only make it harder for us both. You must go away and forget me. You will be thankful for this some day. I shall always love and pray for you.”

“I *must* see her,” said Eric. “Aunt Janet, be my friend. Tell her she must see me for a little while, at least.”

Janet shook her head but went upstairs. She soon returned.

"She says she cannot come down. You know she means it, Master, and it is of no use to coax. And I must say I think she is right. Since she won't marry you it is better for you not to see her."

Eric was compelled to go home with no better comfort than this. In the morning, after a restless night, he drove David Baker to the station; it was Saturday so that he did not have to teach. In the afternoon he again went to the Marshall place determined to make another effort to see Una and overcome her resolution. But the result was the same and Thomas Marshall said gravely:

"Master, you know I like you and I am sorry Una thinks as she does, though maybe she is right. I'd be glad to see you often for your own sake; but as things are I must tell you plainly you'd better not come here any more. It will do no good, and the sooner you and she get over thinking about each other the better for you both. Go now, lad, and God bless you."

"Do you know what you are asking me to do?" asked Eric hoarsely.

"I know I'm asking a hard thing for your own good, Master. It is not as if Una would ever change her mind. Tush, Janet woman, don't be weeping. You women are foolish creatures. Do you think tears can wash such things away? Master, if you take my advice, you'll give up the school and go back to your own world as soon as may be."

Eric went home with a white, set face. He had never thought it was possible for a man to suffer so. What was he to do? It seemed impossible to go on with life—there was no life apart from Una. Anguish wrung his soul until his strength went from him and youth and hope turned to gall in his heart. He never afterwards could tell how he lived through the following Sunday nor how he taught school as usual on Monday. His body seemed to him an automaton that moved and worked and spoke mechanically while his tortured spirit, pent up within, endured pain that left its impress on him forever. Out of that fiery furnace of suffering Eric Murray was to go forth a man who had put boyhood behind him and looked out on life with eyes that saw into it and beyond.

On Monday evening he went again to the old garden. He had no expectation of finding Una there for he thought she would avoid the spot. But he could not keep away from it, although the thought of it was added torture and he vibrated between a wild wish that he might never see it again and a sick wonder how he could go away and leave it, putting it out of his life as if it had never been—that strange old garden where he had met and wooed his love, watching her develop and blossom under his eyes like some rare flower, until in the space of three short months she had passed

from exquisite childhood into still more exquisite womanhood.

As he crossed the pasture field before he entered the spruce wood, he came upon Neil Marshall fence building. Neil did not look up as Eric passed and Eric hardly was aware of his presence.

The garden was very silent and dreamy in the thick yellow sunshine of the September evening. There were few flowers now; most of the lilies, that had queened it so bravely along the walks a few days before, were withered. The grass had grown long and sere and unkempt. But in the corners the torches of the goldenrod were kindling and a few pale blue asters nodded here and there. The garden kept its own strange attractiveness, as a woman with youth long past still preserves an atmosphere of remembered beauty and innate, indestructible charm.

Eric walked drearily and carelessly about it and finally sat down on the old dyke in the shadow of the overhanging spruce boughs. There he gave himself up to a reverie, poignant and bitter sweet, in which he lived over again everything that had passed in the garden since his first meeting with Una. So deep was his abstraction that he was conscious of nothing around him; he did not hear stealthy footsteps behind him in the dim spruce wood; he did not even see Una as she came slowly around a curve in the plum lane.

Una had sought the old garden for the healing of her heartbreak if healing were possible for her. Years seemed to have passed over her in those few days. Her face was pale and strained, with bluish, transparent shadows under her large eyes. She walked slowly and absently like a woman in a dream.

She had no thought of seeing Eric there and as soon as she perceived him she stopped short, the blood rushing wildly over her face. The next moment it ebbed, leaving her white as marble. Horror flashed in her eyes—blank, deadly horror.

Behind Eric, Neil Marshall was standing, tense, crouched, murderous. Even at that distance Una saw the look on his face, saw what he held in his hand, and realized in one dizzying flash of understanding what it meant.

All this photographed itself on her brain in a second. She knew that by the time she could reach across the garden to warn Eric it would be too late. Yet she must warn him—she must—she *must*! A mighty surge of desire seemed to rise up within her and overwhelm her like a wave of the sea—a surge that swept everything before it in an irresistible flood. As Neil Marshall, slowly and vindictively, with the face of a demon, lifted the axe he held in his hand, Una sprang to the top of the stone dyke.

“Eric! Eric! Look behind you! Look behind you!”

Eric started up, confused, bewildered, as the voice came shrieking across the garden. He did not in the least realize that it was Una who had spoken, but he blindly

obeyed the command. He whirled around and saw Neil Marshall, who was looking, not at him but past him at Una. The Italian boy's face was ashen, his eyes filled with terror and incredulity. The axe, lying at his feet where he had dropped it in his unutterable amazement at hearing Una's cry, told the whole story. But before Eric could utter a word Neil turned and fled like a hunted creature into the shadows of the spruce wood. The next moment a girlish form flung itself upon Eric's breast, laughing and crying in the same breath.

“Oh, Eric, I can speak—I can speak! Oh, it is so wonderful! Eric, I love you—I love you.”

Chapter X.

“It is a miracle,” said Thomas Marshall in an awed tone.

It was the first time he had spoken since Eric and Una had rushed in hand in hand, like two children intoxicated with joy and wonder, and gasped out their story together to him and Janet.

“No miracle,” said Eric. “David said it might happen. I had no hope that it would. He could explain it to you if he were here.”

Thomas Marshall shook his head.

“I doubt if he could, Master—he or anyone. It is near enough to a miracle for me. Let us thank God reverently and humbly that He has seen fit to lift His curse from the innocent. Your doctors may explain it as they like, lad, but they won’t get much nearer to it than that. It is awesome, that is what it is. Janet woman, I feel as if I were in a dream. Can Una really speak?”

“Indeed I can, uncle,” said Una with a raptured glance at Eric. “Oh, I don’t know how it came to me—I felt that I *must* speak and I did. And it is so easy now—seems as if I could always have done it.”

She spoke naturally and easily. Her voice was very clear and soft and musical, without a trace of the Scotch accent of her uncle and aunt.

“Oh, I am so glad that the first word I said was your name, dearest,” she murmured to Eric.

“What about Neil?” said Thomas Marshall gravely, rousing himself from his abstraction of wonder. “What are we to do with him when he returns? This is a sad business.”

Eric had almost forgotten about Neil in his overwhelming amazement and joy.

“We must forgive him, Mr. Marshall. It was only an evil impulse—and think of the good that has resulted from it.”

“True, Master, but that does not alter the terrible fact that the boy had murder in his heart—that he would have killed you. And we have cared for him and instructed him as our own. It is a hard thing and I do not see what we are to do. We can’t act as if nothing has happened. We can never trust him again.”

But Neil Marshall solved the problem himself. When Eric returned home that night he found old Robert Williamson in the kitchen, regaling himself with a lunch of bread and cheese after a trip to the station.

“Good night, Master. Glad to see you are looking more like yourself. I told the wife it was only a lovers’ quarrel, most like. She’s been worrying about you. But what kind of a rumpus was kicked up at the Marshall place to-night?”

Eric started. What did Robert Williamson mean? How could he have heard?

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Why, us folk at the station knew there must have been a to-do of some kind when Neil Marshall went off on the harvest excursion as he did. You know this was the night the excursion train left. There was a dozen or so fellows from hereabouts went. We were all standing around chatting when Lincoln Frame drove up full speed and Neil Marshall jumped out of his rig. He just bolted into the office, got his ticket and out again and onto the train without a word to anyone and as black looking as the old Scratch. We was all too surprised to speak till he was gone. Lincoln couldn’t give us much information. He said Neil had come to their place about dark, looking as if he was being chased, and offered to sell that black filly of his to Lincoln for sixty dollars if Lincoln would drive him to the station in time to catch the excursion train. The filly is Neil’s own and Lincoln had been wanting to buy her, so he jumped at the chance. Neil had brought the filly with him and Lincoln hitched up and took him to the station. Neil hadn’t no luggage of any kind and wouldn’t open his lips the whole way up, Lincoln says. We concluded him and old Thomas had had a row. D’ye know anything about it? Or was you so wrapped up sweethearting that you didn’t hear or see nothing else?”

Eric reflected rapidly. He was greatly relieved to find that Neil had gone. He knew that he would never return and that this was the best for all concerned. Old Robert must be told part of the truth, at least, since it would soon be known that Una could speak.

“There was some trouble at the Marshall place to-night, Mr. Williamson,” he said quietly. “Neil behaved himself badly and frightened Una terribly—so terribly that a very surprising thing happened. She has found herself able to speak and can speak perfectly.”

“God bless my soul, Master, what an extraordinary thing!” ejaculated old Bob. “Are you in earnest? Or are you trying to see how much of a fool you can make of the old man?”

“No, Mr. Williamson, I assure you that it is no more than the simple truth. Dr. Baker had told me that a shock might cure her. As for Neil, he has gone and I think it well that he has.”

Not caring to discuss the matter further, Eric left the kitchen. But as he mounted the stairs to his room he heard old Robert muttering like a man in hopeless bewilderment:

“Well, I never heard of anything like this! Them Marshalls are an unaccountable lot and no mistake. I must wake up mother and tell her about it or I won’t be able to

sleep.”

Now that everything was settled, Eric was anxious to give up teaching and go back to his own work. True, he had signed a contract to keep the school for a year, but he knew that the trustees would let him off if he procured a suitable substitute. He resolved to teach until the fall vacation, which came in October, and then go. This would involve a full explanation with his father and Eric was pondering how he might best make it.

“I’ll write him a letter to-morrow and tell him about Una,” he decided.

Mr. Murray, Senior, answered this letter in person. A week later Eric, coming home from school, found his father sitting in Mrs. Williamson’s prim parlor. Nothing was said about Eric’s letter, however, until after tea. When they found themselves alone Mr. Murray spoke abruptly.

“Eric, what about this girl? I hope you haven’t gone and made a fool of yourself. It sounds remarkably like it. A girl that has been dumb all her life—a girl with no right to her father’s name—a country girl brought up in a place like Stillwater! Your wife will have to fill your mother’s place—and your mother was a pearl among women. Do you think this girl is worthy of it? It isn’t possible!”

“Don’t pronounce judgment until you have seen her, father,” said Eric smiling.

“Humph! Well, I shall look at her with the eyes of sixty, mind you, not the eyes of twenty-five. If she isn’t what your wife ought to be, sir, you’ll either give her up or paddle your own canoe. I shan’t aid or abet you in making a fool of yourself, mind that.”

Eric bit his lip but only said quietly, “Come with me to see her, father.”

They went around by way of the main road and the Marshall lane. Una was not in when they reached the house; she was up in the old garden, Janet said. They sat and talked awhile with Janet and Thomas. When they left the old man said:

“I like those people. They are rugged and grim, but there is good stock in them—native refinement and strong character. But I hope your young lady hasn’t got her aunt’s mouth.”

“Una’s mouth is like a love song made incarnate in sweet flesh,” said Eric enthusiastically.

“Humph!” said Mr. Murray. “Well,” he added tolerantly a moment later, “I was a poet too for six months in my life while I was courting your mother.”

Una was standing in the middle of the garden as they entered it, out she came shyly forward to meet them, guessing who the tall, white-haired old gentleman with Eric was. As she approached Eric saw with a thrill of exultation that she had never looked lovelier. She wore a dress of her favorite blue, simply and quaintly made as

all her gowns were, revealing the perfect lines of her slender, supple figure. Her glossy black hair was wound about her head in a simple coronet and her face was flushed daintily with excitement. She looked like a young queen crowned with a ruddy splash of sunlight that fell through the old trees.

“Father, this is Una,” said Eric proudly.

Una held out her beautiful hand with a shyly murmured greeting. Mr. Murray took it and held it in his looking so steadily and piercingly into her face that even her frank gaze wavered before the intensity of his keen old eyes. Then he drew her to him and kissed her on the forehead.

“Eric,” he said huskily, “I’d have never forgiven you if you hadn’t fallen in love with her.”

THE END.



TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

Some photographs have been enhanced to be more legible.

[The end of *Una of the Garden* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]