

Contents

Not My Will

The Light in My Window

Not Thy Will

How Much Will Surrender Cost?

—| *Francena* H. ARNOLD

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

*A*lex and Jean Stewart stood by the playpen and, with arms about each other, watched the determined efforts of the tiny girl inside to reach the ball that had rolled away from her. She could not crawl, but she reached and wriggled and hunched herself toward it with a great effort. Inch by inch she struggled, panting with exertion until at last, when she had achieved her desire and held the treasure in her dimpled hand, she was too tired to play, but fell asleep instead with a smug little smile on her face.

The two watchers laughed at her efforts and cheered when she won. Then, as they looked at the little sleeper, Jean said, "Isn't she a persistent mite? She is that way about anything she wants. She worked all during her ride this morning to catch the Tinkertoy that I had hung on the hood of her carriage. But she finally got it."

Alex smiled proudly at his tiny daughter, then sobered at a sudden thought that came to him. "I hope she won't be like her aunt Ruth," he said with a note of pain in his voice.

His older sister Ruth had been a laughing, lovely girl, dear to the hearts of her parents and younger brother. She had a sunny disposition, and the old home echoed to the laughter of the brother and sister. During those years Alex Stewart was sure that whatever Ruth did was right. Now, looking back from the vantage point of later years, he realized how much she had imposed on his boyish affection and the strong love of her parents. When she had set her mind to a course of action she would willfully pursue it, "against wind, tide, or flood," her mother used to say. And the remonstrances of her parents, and the frequent punishments that came her way, were equally unavailing. At eighteen, against the pleadings of her whole family, she had married a man unworthy of her.

For fifteen years now Ruth had borne with a bitter, unbroken spirit the results of her willfulness. Her husband had been dead several years, but his influence on her life remained. She was still attractive and could have married again had she wished. She had money enough to have permitted her to live a life of varied interests and pleasures. But the bitterness of her spirit poisoned her entire outlook. The sins of one man had aroused her contempt for all men. The energies that should have been used for good were consumed in hatred and scorn, and the laugh that had once been so gay was now cynically sharp.

And so a tone of regret crept into Alex Stewart's voice as he admitted that baby Eleanor, even in such small matters as lost bottles and straying balls, seemed to partake of the determination of Ruth Stewart Edwards. He brushed back a soft golden ringlet from the baby brow and spoke again.

"A strong will is an asset if rightly used. Ruth could have become a beautiful woman—probably a happy wife and mother all these years—if she had used that will in a better way. I don't want to *break* Eleanor's will, but it's going to be a job to control it!"

Jean, the wife and mother, straightened the blanket over the little one and, as they turned away, said in a tone of quiet faith, "We must pray much for our lovely baby, that the heavenly Father will guide her and give us wisdom to train her."

Before the little playpen was exchanged for a walker, however, a short trip away from home ended in a tragic railroad accident, and baby Eleanor was robbed of both parents.

Aunt Ruth was the only relative left in the world to care for the mite. At first she was appalled at the task that confronted her of rearing the little orphan. But the heart that had thought itself closed forever to affection opened slowly but surely to the touch of baby hands, and soon Aunt Ruth was lavishing upon this delectable little morsel of humanity all the pent-up love of her intense nature. She began to plan and dream again—she who had thought her dreams were all past. She was glad now for the wealth that had only burdened her before, for with it she could give Eleanor every opportunity that she had once desired for herself. This baby was hers—all

hers—and she would mold and shape the young life in the way she desired it to be, and no one would tell her no!

Then began the struggle that was to last more than twenty years. And yet, despite the clash of wills, there was strong mutual love between the little girl and her aunt. The sore and bitter heart of Ruth Edwards attached itself fervently to the orphaned child, and she poured out the accumulated affection of her childless life on Eleanor, who returned in full measure all her devotion. Ruth learned to play games with Eleanor; they worked together over difficult arithmetic problems; they laughed over amusing incidents at school or at play.

And they fought. Not with angry words or loud disputation but with strong determination on both sides. Of course, when Eleanor was tiny, Aunt Ruth usually had her way, and the clashes were rare, for so great was her love for this little girl that she crossed her only when necessary. And when Eleanor did set her heart on the nice, bright red penny candy in the store window, Auntie took away the sting of refusal by buying a whole box of delicious and expensive chocolates. However, there were several memorable clashes that left both participants really ill.

One never-to-be-forgotten struggle came when Eleanor was in the first grade and sat in front of a red-headed, toothless, and altogether fascinating little boy named Jackie Dennis. Jackie was entranced by Eleanor's bobbing brown curls and showed his devotion by small gifts of gum balls and pencils, and one day he presented her with a ring he got for a penny at the school store.

The little gilt ring precipitated a crisis, for when Eleanor arrived home from school that afternoon she

proudly displayed it to Aunt Ruth and made the startling announcement that when she grew up she was going to marry Jackie Dennis. She was totally unprepared for the storm that descended upon her head.

“You must never think of that boy again. You must not walk to school with him anymore; you mustn’t even speak to him,” Aunt Ruth commanded.

“I will if I want to,” replied the stubborn little girl.

“You *must* not.”

“But I *will*.”

This struggle lasted for weeks and was still going when school closed. But it was pushed into the background by the fun of leaving the big city for the cabin in the woods to which they retired each summer.

In September Aunt Ruth had a surprise for Eleanor. They were not going back to the big house on the boulevard. Aunt Ruth had bought a beautiful new brick bungalow in the suburbs. One of the very nicest things about it, Aunt Ruth told Eleanor, was that Mike and Mary, the couple who served as handyman and cook, would live by themselves in an apartment over the garage, thus leaving the two of them living alone together. “And that’s what we’ve always wanted, isn’t it, dear?”

To Eleanor the new home was almost as good as fairyland. The lawn was lovely and green and the garden full of flowers. There were big trees with many kinds of birds, and inside the house Eleanor had the prettiest little room all to herself.

Of course, Eleanor had to go to a new school. She had been living in the new home a whole month before she realized that Aunt Ruth had won and she wasn’t seeing Jackie Dennis anymore. Then she was furious.

“I’ll run away,” she resolved. “I’ll find my way back to the boulevard and find Jackie and go live with him forever and ever.”

But before she had time to carry out her plan, Aunt Ruth gave her a bicycle, which she very much wanted, and in the fun of learning to ride, her anger faded. She met new playmates at school, too, and with so many new and engrossing interests to engage her attention, Jackie’s red hair and gum balls were at last forgotten. But a bit of resentment lay in her heart.

Then, when Eleanor started high school, she met Dale Truman. The freshman class was planning a Halloween party in the gym, and Dale asked Eleanor to attend with him. In delight she came to Aunt Ruth.

“Aunt Ruth, our class is going to have a Halloween party in the gym, and the nicest boy, Dale Truman, asked if he could take me to it. May I go with him?”

Her heart sank as she read her aunt’s face even before she spoke.

“No, Eleanor, I do not think it would be wise. If you would like to have some of your girlfriends in for a Halloween party at home, you may.”

“But, Auntie—”

“Now, Eleanor, you mustn’t try to argue. Auntie knows what is best for you,” she said with a disarming smile.

“I don’t care. I want to go. All the girls are going, and lots of them are going with boys. I think it’s mean!”

“We won’t discuss it any further,” said Ruth Edwards, setting her lips in determination.

That night Eleanor sobbed out her disappointment into her pillow. Suddenly she remembered something

she had not thought of in a long time: a little boy with his front teeth out, looking in vain for her at school. The long-buried resentment flamed up. She was naturally a straightforward child, and although very determined in her efforts to achieve her desires, she had always struggled openly and fought fairly. Lying in bed, with her cheeks wet with tears, she looked back over many incidents of her childhood and realized that most of the lovely toys and delightful trips had been bribes.

“Mike would say she drew red herrings across the trail,” she whispered. “She’s been cheating all these years, and the only way I’ll *ever* get anything like other girls is to do some cheating myself! It won’t do any good to coax. She won’t change her mind. If she’d sell the house in town and move out here just to get rid of Jackie, she’d take me to Europe to keep me away from Dale! I’ll just *have* to cheat too.”

This sudden determination made her cheeks flush in the dark. But, although she knew it was wrong, she did not consider giving up. Lying in bed she made her plan and finally fell asleep with tears on her cheeks.

Several days passed, and the party was not mentioned. Then one morning at the breakfast table, Eleanor asked casually, “Auntie, may I stay all night tonight at Rose Martello’s? She needs help with her English. Her folks don’t speak English, and it’s hard for her.”

“Who is Rose Martello, dear?” the careful Aunt Ruth questioned.

“Don’t you remember? She’s the tiny girl with black curls who played the piano so beautifully when the girls were here yesterday.”

“Oh, yes, I remember. But is she the kind of girl I would want you to associate with intimately? And does her mother want you? Rose seems all right, but I don’t like your going there when I’ve never met her mother.”

“She *is* a lovely girl, Auntie,” Eleanor hurried on. “Mrs. Martello is nice too. We’ve been there twice after school. But they are Italians, you know, and her mother doesn’t talk much English. She is bashful because of that, so even if you did call on her she would probably not want to see you. When Americans come there she stays in the kitchen and makes Rose talk to them. But she has been so nice to us girls, and I’d really like to help Rose.”

And so Aunt Ruth consented, not knowing that Eleanor had selected Rose of all her friends as the most likely partner in deceit and had offered her a dollar for each night she might spend at the Martellos’. Good Mrs. Martello, who made friends of every casual acquaintance, would hardly have recognized herself in the descriptions Aunt Ruth received—descriptions of herself that kept that lady from calling on her—and would have been shocked to know of the money that Rose was spending on ice cream and candy.

And since Aunt Ruth, always proper, insisted on Eleanor’s returning Rose’s hospitality, this bargain was very profitable for Rose in all respects. Her marks at school, too, rose steadily, for Eleanor—to mollify her conscience—insisted that Rose really study on nights when she was paying dollars of self-denial out of her allowance for the privilege of attending this or that party with a boy from school.

At another time Aunt Ruth might not have been deceived by this clumsy subterfuge, but she was relieved to

have the subject of Dale dropped so readily and was glad to have Eleanor transfer her interest to a girlfriend—even a foreign girl. She would hardly have believed it if she had been told that Eleanor’s head was not bent over a book in the Martellos’ parlor but was tossing gaily at Dale’s quips at a party or basketball game.

Eleanor tired of Dale, of course, but then there were Gordon and John and Allan and others in succession. She was pretty, and she was popular—even despite a very strict code of behavior which she had imposed on herself to help salve her conscience. “When I’m out with the boys I’ll act as if Aunt Ruth were along,” she told herself, and with characteristic determination, she did it. And so the boys respected her and thought of her not only as a lot of fun but as the right kind of girl too.

All through high school Eleanor deceived and disobeyed, even though she loved Aunt Ruth and they had wonderful times together.

“Aunt Ruth is grand,” Eleanor commented to one of her girlfriends, “but on this one subject she is just plain *crazy*. The easiest way to get along with her is not to tell her. Then her feelings aren’t hurt, and we don’t have any trouble.”

Years later Eleanor was to look back to these high school episodes with heartsick regret, realizing that it was the foundation for the heartache and tragedy of later years. It might have led to disastrous results at the time, had it not been that in her senior year she found a new interest and discovered a new world—the world that lives and moves outside and beyond the sight of ordinary human life, the marvelous world seen through the lens of a microscope.

The new science teacher at the high school had a captivating personality. He loved his work and with fascinating skill opened to Eleanor's view marvelous works of nature. He recognized in her a real student and was delighted to give extra time and effort to her. Professor Thorne showed her how the wonders seen through the microscope could be caught and held by the camera, and from that time on, Rose and the boyfriends were forgotten. Aunt Ruth was delighted with this hobby and offered to Eleanor added inducements of money and equipment. One whole room in the attic was equipped for photography, and between this and the wonderful laboratory at school, Eleanor's days and evenings were divided. She and Aunt Ruth went on trips to secure specimens, and it was not long before Aunt Ruth was as enthusiastic over her new world of science as was Eleanor herself.

One day Eleanor confided her hopes for the future. "I am going to be a scientist, Auntie—a really good one, of course. I get sick of folks talking as if the boys would all have careers and the girls would only get married. I'll show them! I'm better now at this than any of the boys, and I'm going to be the best there is. No husband or babies for me!"

Ruth Edwards's bitter heart was gladdened by that remark. She determined to send Eleanor to the best colleges and universities in America. Then they would go abroad. There would be no limit to the opportunities Eleanor would be given to encourage her in the work she had chosen to do. At long last Ruth had real use for her accumulated wealth and was glad it had not been dissipated by extravagance. Eleanor—educated, talented,

brilliant—would show the world the superiority of the intellect of woman over that of mere man. “No husband or babies for me!” Ruth still heard the words. If Eleanor had chosen science as her first and only love, then she should have every opportunity to worship at its shrine!

So she proposed. But God, as always, disposed. That fall, when Eleanor was ready for college, Ruth was not well. A visit to her doctor sent her home with troubled brow. Eleanor, not being able to extract much information from her, went to see the doctor herself and left with the knowledge that Ruth had an incurable disease. At least the doctor said it was incurable. But they would not believe that it was so. They consulted other doctors. So began a struggle of four long years against death. They visited hospital after hospital, clinic after clinic. As a last hope they took a trip of three thousand miles and returned with heavy hearts and saddened faces, not to the brick bungalow but to the cottage in the woods. There, with faithful Mary and Mike, they awaited the inevitable.

As the days passed, Eleanor’s spirit rebelled. “Why do I have to give up all I have in the world?” she asked herself. “Other girls have whole housefuls of families. Why should kind, good Aunt Ruth have to suffer? Why must anyone suffer?” Sometimes she lay awake at night pondering these weighty questions, and she thought about them many times during the day. Ruth glimpsed the struggle, and one night as Eleanor sat by her bed she said slowly, “Dear, I hope you are not going to feel too badly about all this.”

“I *can’t* feel too badly. It just isn’t *right!*” Eleanor responded heatedly.

“Well, there was a time when I felt that way too. I’m not an old woman and I still want to live, especially since you are with me. I want to help with your work. But lying here in the long nights, I’ve done lots of thinking and wondering. I’ve been pretty headstrong. All my life I’ve wanted my own way and fought to get it. Having made one big mistake, I let it turn me from the right way.”

Eleanor patted her arm. “It has been a *good* way, Auntie dear, and I can’t feel it’s right for you to have to go.”

Ruth shook her head. “I tried to make it a good way, but I wanted it always to be *my* way, and the selfish way is never a good way. I have lived entirely for myself, and the world is no better for my being—yes, I know I’ve cared for you, but that has been pure joy for me. It has cost me nothing, and I have received everything.”

She was silent for a minute, then continued wistfully, “I wish I could go back and try again. I would try Mother’s way instead of my own. She lived first of all for her Lord, then for others—and last, for herself. She was happier than I have ever been.”

Eleanor did not speak, and Aunt Ruth went on, “As I have lain here thinking of my life I have realized how futile it has been compared to Mother’s. I had a better education than she had; I’ve had more money to spend in one year than she had in her lifetime. Yet she faced death as if she were confident of God’s leading in both the past and the future and could leave everything to Him. I haven’t let Him lead me in the past, and I have no assurance He will want to take over the case now.”

Mary, standing by, murmured with a tender voice as

she straightened the tumbled pillows, "Oh yes, He will! I know Him, and it's glad He'd be to lead any lamb that called Him."

But Eleanor did not dare speak, lest the bitterness in her heart overflow. She did not want to grieve this dear aunt so obviously near death. And if Aunt Ruth could get any comfort by returning to her childhood religion, let her do it. Eleanor had nothing against religion. It was a rather good thing for the weak and those in trouble. She was sure there was a God somewhere whose duty it was to help people who weren't able to manage their lives alone. But if He did govern the affairs of mankind, as Mary often said, Eleanor felt He was being very cruel to her just now. Hurriedly she kissed her aunt good night and went to her own room to cry herself to sleep.

Waking in the middle of the night she saw a light in the invalid's room and, donning robe and slippers, hurried in to find her aunt propped up on her pillow, writing.

"I couldn't sleep." Ruth smiled. "So I am writing a letter. Mary has been with me, and she is a rare comfort. Don't worry about me, dear. I am not afraid now, and I feel much better. Don't let me forget to have you call Mr. Hastings in the morning. I want him to come out and discuss some important business. There's no time to waste. Run along back to bed, dear. I am feeling sleepy now. I will put this aside and turn out the light."

Eleanor turned away with a heavy heart, and after the house was dark again she lay through the rest of the night, sleepless and rebellious. When she looked into the room the next morning, Aunt Ruth was sleeping quietly.

Out in the kitchen Mary sang softly as she prepared breakfast.

There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains!

When she saw Eleanor she said, "The poor tired dear was sleepin' so sweet I had no thought to wake her. We'll let her get what rest she can from the naggin' pain. She'll rouse soon enough."

But she did not rouse. The doctor came, but there was nothing to be done. Before the day ended, the tired body of this so lately reconciled child of God was freed forever from the pain that had tortured it, and her spirit was safe at home in the Father's house.

On the table lay the unfinished letter. Its first words, "My dear, dear child," told Eleanor that it was meant for her, but it was only after the funeral that she could force herself to read it.

My dear, dear child:

I may not have another chance to talk to you, and there is something that must be said. If I could turn back and live the past over again, I would try to teach you many things I failed to give you in these years when I had the opportunity. My sense of values is strangely altered in the light that has just come upon me.

Of one thing I am not sorry. That is the plan for your future. As I have lain here I have begun to see a purpose in all this pain. This world is full of suffering, and this disease that has shattered me has contributed a share of it. No one has yet mastered it.

The one who does will do more for mankind than I could do if I lived a thousand years. I am not predicting that you can do all this. But you can help. With your slides and glass you can join the ranks of those who battle disease and help to conquer it. If my going inspires you to do this, I am glad to have suffered.

But I want to say more than this. Mary has talked and prayed with me. I have found the right way at last, I am sure, for I have found Christ. If only I had known Him long ago! I cannot urge you too strongly to commit your path to Christ. He will be the friend and guide you need, for He will never fail you, my child.

The letter was never finished, but Eleanor did not care. She had what she thought was the expression of her aunt's last wish, and her soul leaped to the challenge that it offered her. Then and there she dedicated her life to a battle with pain. What Aunt Ruth might have said had she been able to finish her letter did not matter. And the important business that she had wanted to discuss with her lawyer was not remembered again until years later when Eleanor wondered how her life might have been changed had her aunt been able to have that talk.

In a few days the lawyer called and, in the presence of Mike and Mary, read the will. There was a generous bequest to these faithful servants—enough to enable them to return to the place of their youth and spend the rest of their lives in comfort on the little farm they had dreamed about but never dared hope to acquire.

Everything else was given to Eleanor. Now she was free to continue her studies, to pursue the course to which she had pledged her life.

Long months ago Eleanor and Aunt Ruth had planned the course Eleanor was to follow—years of school and then laboratory, and Eleanor had always thought she knew all Aunt Ruth's wishes as to her future. But the last paragraph of the will surprised her.

“This sum of money is to be kept in trust by the said administrator of the estate, and the income given to Eleanor Stewart only until her twenty-fifth birthday, at which time the entire principal shall be turned over to her with no restrictions. If, however, at any time prior to her twenty-fifth birthday, Eleanor contracts a marriage, she shall forfeit all claim to the estate, and the entire sum shall be paid to the Xenia Laboratories to be used in medical research.”

The old lawyer glanced with troubled expression at pretty Eleanor, but she hastened to reassure him. “Don't let that worry you, Mr. Hastings. Auntie and I understood each other. I have a great work to do and shall never think of marriage, I assure you.”

*The Light in
My Window*

Francena H. Arnold

MOODY PRESS
CHICAGO

1

Another day . . . and another chance . . . and if I don't find work today I'll start home tonight. "Oh, dear God, please help me to find a job and a place to stay. I just . . . can't go home!"

With a deeply drawn breath that wavered in spite of her effort to hold it steady, the girl buried her face in the pillow and drew her coat closer about her shoulders. In the other corner of the rest room of this large railway station the young mother who had come in during the night was preparing to catch an early train. In the washroom other women and children were hurrying about. Of course they were hurrying! They were all going some place, and their trains would soon be leaving. In a minute she must get up and join them and give the impression that she, too, had to catch a train. Oh, if she only did! Wouldn't it be wonderful to *know* where you were going and to have someone waiting for you at the end of the trip? To really belong some place where folks loved you and wanted you?

It was more awful than she had dreamed it could be, to live as she had been doing for the past three days. If she had heard of any other girl doing such a thing she would have been disgusted and shocked. Yet the events of the past week had happened so unexpectedly and so swiftly that she had had to do *something*, and this was all that occurred to her. Sleeping in railway stations was certainly not a thing to be done by the kind of girl she had always thought herself to be, and she had a horrible fear all the time that the ever-present attendants would discover her secret

—that she never caught a train at all but just pretended to be stopping over, so that she could sleep on the comfortable couches of the rest room. She had not dared to stay at the same station twice, and even in this great city there were only a few such rooms as this, where she could check her suitcases in the locker and get a real rest. If she did not find a room today she would *have* to go home.

Maybe that was what she was ordained to do. Surely the circumstance of losing her job and her room both in one week was such an unusual one that it must have been decreed by fate. None of it was of her planning or even her fault. She never had liked Mr. Skeen, that assistant department manager, but she had not had any trouble with him. She had hardly spoken to him and certainly did not know he was the kind of man who would act as he had done last Monday when he had come in and found her alone working overtime. Ugh! She became sick even yet when she remembered how startled she had been when she turned from her desk and found his smirking face close to hers and his clammy hand on her arm. She could still hear his grunt of astonishment as she gave him a shove that landed him in the wastebasket. Before he could get up she had snatched her purse and fled from the room. As the elevator door had clanged behind her, she had heard the office door bang but had reached the street without pursuit and caught a bus at once. What a mess! She had thought that such things did not happen to good girls. But she had not been to blame; she knew she had not. And if it happened once it could happen again. There might be danger of finding such a man in any office. What should be done?

Who could have thought up a more improbable coincidence than to have had to leave her room at Mrs. Moon's the same night. Of course she *could* have stayed, but who would want to after finding the landlady's daughter rummaging through her suitcases and dresser drawers? Who would have dreamed that a room in a hotel or the YWCA could not be found for even one night? There had been nothing to do but go to the station, and she could not stay there indefinitely—work must be found first, and then a room, that the threatening prospect of a return home might be dispelled.

Hope Thompson, don't be a baby! You know you don't want to go home today . . . or ever! So up and at it. You have to find a place today.

She came from the washroom twenty minutes later, looking as if ready for travel, and joined the stream of humanity that was pouring from the train sheds toward the long ramp that led to the street above. Waiting on the sidewalk for the streetcar that would carry her to the heart of the city, she breathed again her waking prayer, "Please, God, help me to find a place to stay. I just can't bear to go home."

At the employment office Hope sat waiting her turn. For three days she had gone wearily from one such office to another. Several times the placement women had wanted to send her out on a prospective job. Each time Hope had been reluctant, and another had been sent instead. How could she ever dare to go into an office again to work? Some strange man might try to kiss her. She could not tell the efficient women at the placement desks about this fear, and she realized that they would not keep trying to help her if she were not willing to go out and apply for work.

The woman at this desk had been more kindly than any of the others, and Hope determined that when her turn came today she would ask if there were any places where the work would be among women only. Just now she felt very definitely and decidedly that she had no use for men!

When her turn came Hope managed, with flushing face and rapidly beating pulse, to state her unusual request. For a moment the woman looked at her in amazement, then her gaze softened. Perhaps she herself had once been a frightened small-town girl in a large city. Perhaps she had enough sympathetic understanding of human nature to recognize that the girl before her was near a complete breakdown. She spoke meditatively, shuffling the papers in the file drawer before her.

"I don't know—I can't think of such an office at all. Would you like a place in a dress shop? Have you had any experience in selling?"

"No—but I could try."

The woman shook her head. "That wouldn't do. The manager specifically asked for an experienced saleswoman. I'm afraid, my dear, that we haven't any such place. Won't you try a

large office? We have one place open . . . ” She was interrupted by a girl from a desk in another corner of the room.

“It’s that Henderson girl again. She says they must have someone today, and for you to send out the first person coming in who can boil an egg!”

The woman turned and look at Hope. “Can you boil an egg?”

In spite of her nervousness, Hope laughed. “Yes, I could even boil two at a time without disaster.”

“Would you take a place as a mother’s helper and part-time cook?”

Hope thought quickly. *A place as cook would probably mean a place to room also. She was really a good cook, although not fond of cooking. She did like to care for children, and had enough experience of that kind to satisfy anyone. It would be a place to stay while hunting for a better job.*

“Yes, I would.”

The woman looked through the file drawer again and drew out a card. “Clean—refined—good cook . . . they don’t care so much about that now, I guess. H’m . . . a Christian. Are you a Christian?”

The woman looked embarrassed at having to ask that question, but Hope answered quickly, “Oh, yes, I am. I’ve been a church member since I was thirteen. I’ve always been regular in attendance at both church and Sunday school.”

“Well, I don’t see what difference that makes to your employer, but that’s not *my* business. I’ll fill out this card, and you can go out at once.”

Fifteen minutes later Hope found herself on the streetcar. In her purse was a card addressed to *Mrs. Philip King, 1239 West Sherman Street*. As she rode along with her purse clasped tightly in her hand, and with her eyes on the streets through which she was passing, she felt a growing sense of panic at the step taken. What had she got herself into? Should she stop now before it was too late and go back and tell that woman at the agency that she must look for another cook for Mrs. King or Mrs. Henderson, or whoever it was that wanted a person to boil eggs? No, she could not do that. The agency people would not try further to help her. They would be too disgusted with her for being so fussy. Her

only alternative was to go home, and she did not want to do that. As long as she lived she did not want to go home—not even for a visit.

The district through which she was passing was a shabby one. The high buildings and busy streets of the downtown section had been left far behind. This was a region of small factories, run-down frame apartment buildings, small shops with unattractive merchandise in not-too-clean windows, and more taverns than she could count. The houses had no yards, and the front doors opened onto small porches leading directly to the sidewalks. Some of the yards were three or four feet below the level of the walk, and by the dingy curtains at the windows Hope deduced that people lived in these basement hovels. How terrible it all was! She had heard of slums and thought that they probably were somewhat like Mrs. Moon's rooming house, which had been one of a long row of brick flat buildings on a side street where the smoke of passing trains got on the curtains and where the children often played in the streets because the backyards were full of drying clothes. But this was so much worse that Mrs. Moon's neighborhood seemed to her, as she looked back on it, like a pleasant, homey suburb. How *could* anyone live here? And why should anyone in this community be wanting a cook? For she was now nearing her destination. Sherman Street was only a block south of this car line, and the next street was where she would get off.

Even after she had alighted, Hope felt that she could not go through with this crazy scheme. If there had been a car coming from the opposite direction that she could have boarded, she would have taken it back to the depot.

While waiting in indecision, she thought of her recent office experience and a fresh wave of repulsion swept over her. Then she thought of what it would mean to have to go home. No—she could not. So, turning her back on the car line and facing toward Sherman Street, she determined to at least see what lay in that direction.

The houses got no better. Some of them looked ready to fall, and if one fell the whole crazy block would tumble, just like the long row of dominoes she used to patiently line up and push down when she was a youngster. Insecure looking stairways

climbed drunkenly up the outsides of some of the buildings, and on these stairs hung blankets and clothing, while overflowing garbage cans stood on the landings, on every one of which small children were playing.

Hope shuddered. How *could* she live in such a neighborhood? Then she remembered that Mrs. King had specified that she wanted a Christian cook. There came a vision of a little old lady who might have once been wealthy and was now perhaps ill and helpless, surely poor, and who had to live in this sad place. It might be fun to help such a person. Anyway, here she was, and she would do her best.

Then she turned the corner and stopped in amazement. There was only one house in the block, so it would have to be 1239. Feeling as if she were in some fairyland, Hope crossed the street and passed through the great gate before her.

2

On either side of the broad walk a tangle of shrubs and bushes, which had not been trimmed in many years, rose like a green jungle. Great trees spread their leafy branches so densely that the August sun, which blazed fiercely down on the streets and sidewalks outside the high iron fence, seemed dim and feeble here. In the center of the large grounds, which had once been beautifully landscaped, stood the house, and as Hope advanced toward it she gazed in wonder at finding such a house in such a place.

It was of time-mellowed gray stone, full three stories tall, with a great round tower at one corner and numerous gables and turrets breaking the line of the tile roof. A wide porch with huge pillars stretched across the front, and at one side a covered drive gave entrance onto the porch. All this Hope noted as she slowly came up the walk and mounted the broad steps which, she thought whimsically, reminded her of the pictures she had seen of the approach to the Capitol in Washington. Surely no little sick, poverty-stricken old lady lived in *this* house! Over the door she saw the tarnished bronze numerals 1239—so it must be the right place. Summoning all her courage, she rang the queer old bell, then jumped in nervousness at the clangor it made.

The noise died away, and for many minutes there was only silence. Hope rang again and waited, and was on the verge of leaving when there was a patter of running feet inside, a fumbling at the door, and it opened to disclose a small boy.

"Oh, hello!" he said with a smile. "I didn't hear you at first. Will you 'scuse it, please?"

"Surely," said Hope, answering both his words and his smile. "Is this where Mrs. King lives?"

"Yes, she's my mother, I'm Chad. I had to come to the door because she's sick—just miserably sick."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I am the girl that was sent out from the employment agency. I wonder if she could see me."

"I don't know. Will you wait while I ask her? I am not supposed to ask folks in unless I know them. And I don't know you. So I'll go talk to Mother and you can wait on the porch."

Hope agreed to this frankly stated arrangement and waited while the little boy trotted back into the dimness of the big hall. In a moment he came back, saying apologetically, "Mother says, 'I'm sorry to keep you waiting.' Will you come in and see her? She hopes you won't mind."

Hope followed him across the outer vestibule which, in itself, was larger than the bedroom she had had at Mrs. Moon's, then down the length of a huge hall to a door through which Chad ushered her, saying, "Here's the lady, Mother."

"How do you do?" said a weak voice from the bed. "Get her a chair, Chad. Then you run over and get Aunt Billy."

The little fellow sped away, and Hope sat tensely in the chair. This room had apparently been a grand parlor at some time. Across one end was an old-fashioned grate and mantel, and above them a large plate glass mirror. Just now the room was serving as a bedroom. The woman on the bed was speaking.

"I'm dreadfully ashamed to greet you this way. When I get one of these headaches I can't do *anything*. My friend will be here in a few minutes, and she will explain the work. It hurts my head even to talk."

She lay exhausted after this short effort, and Hope sat in sympathetic silence. The bed was in tumbled disarray, and the bronze curls on the pillow were damp with perspiration. Mrs. King looked hardly older than Hope herself, and certainly much smaller and more helpless in her illness. The heat of the day had penetrated the recesses of even this great house, and the room seemed stifling. Hope saw a fresh spasm of pain cross Mrs. King's face and arose in quick decision.

“Mrs. King, while we wait won’t you let me help you? I know I’m a stranger, but I’m sure I can make you more comfortable.”

Mrs. King opened her eyes and smiled wanly. “I’d welcome anyone who could do that. I’m too miserable to have pride left at all. If I weren’t afraid of frightening Chad, I think I’d cry!”

Some time later when Chad and a brisk young lady came in, the bed was smoothed, the pillow had been shaken and turned, and Hope was bathing the hot head. Mrs. King lay relaxed, and when she heard the two enter she said in a drowsy voice, “This is Hope Thompson, Billy. Will you take charge of her for me? She is my new helper, and I hope she likes us well enough to stay.”

“Eleanor King, you should be spanked! I told you yesterday not to chase out in that sun. If you weren’t so sick I’d—oh, what will Phil say?”

“Probably the same things you do, only in more dignified terms. Don’t scold, Billy. I’m paying for my foolishness. And there’s a silver lining to this cloud. Miss Thompson has proved herself such a jewel that I can’t be sorry. Will you take her to her room and show her where the kitchen is? She gave me an aspirin, and I think I can sleep now.”

As Billy and Hope turned to go away, Mrs. King caught sight of the troubled face of little Chad and called him to her side.

“Don’t worry, son. Mother will be all right tomorrow.”

“But I telled Daddy I’d take care of you, and it makes my stomach feel funny when you get sick.”

“You did take care of me, dear, and Daddy will understand. Now run along with Aunt Billy and Miss Hope, and Mother will try to sleep.”

The lively young lady called “Billy” led Hope to a room across the hall and said as she threw open the door, “This will be your room, Miss—Thompson, did Eleanor say? It hasn’t much furniture yet, but if you will be patient that will be remedied. You see, they have just moved here—came only last week—and Eleanor has been having a siege of headaches. She’s a country gal and can’t take this city heat. Things are in a mess.”

“Don’t worry,” said Hope, “I can sleep on this cot. Mrs. King was too sick to talk, and I don’t know whether I’m really hired or not.”

“Sure, you are! That is, if you’ll stay! I talked to the woman at the agency just after you started out here, and she said you can cook. That’s all we’re asking at present—except, of course—you *are* a Christian, aren’t you?”

“Yes, but what difference does *that* make?” Hope somehow felt very free with this girl with a boy’s name, and dared to ask the question that had been puzzling her for hours.

“Much indeed,” said Billy promptly. “You see, this isn’t just a private home. It’s part of Henderson Institute, and all the workers must be Christians.”

Hope wanted to ask what Henderson Institute was, and whether Billy was one of the workers also, but she had no time, for as soon as the suitcases had been stowed in the corner and Hope’s hat placed on a shelf in the huge closet, Billy spoke again.

“I’ll show you the kitchen now, and I’m afraid you’ll have to shift for yourself this evening. Phil—that’s Dr. King—is away, and when Eleanor gets a headache she’s worse than useless. I can’t stay for I left thirty-seven young ’uns in charge of Anna Solinski, and if they’re all undamaged when I get back I’ll be surprised. Oh, here’s Chad. Listen, Chad, can’t you show Miss Hope the kitchen and help her find things? Sure, I knew you could. That will help Mother so she will get well fast. I’ll be back after five o’clock to see if you need any further help, Miss—oh, I’m going to call you Hope. You don’t mind, do you? I’m Billy to you, too. So long, Chad. Keep your chin up, old fellow. Mother will soon be OK, and Daddy will be home tomorrow.” She ran her hand affectionately through the tangled mop of yellow curls on his head and disappeared through a side door.

For the next few hours Hope and Chad were left alone. She had small understanding of her status here, but further enlightenment would have to wait until tomorrow when Mrs. King would be able to talk. So Hope and Chad worked together, and she found him an intelligent and industrious little helper. Back of the great hall were pantries so large that Hope wondered how a single family could ever use them.

“Oh, we don’t ’spect to,” Chad said in answer to her exclamation. “Daddy is going to get a smaller stove—just an our size one—and put it in this pantry, and that will be our kitchen. Daddy says it’s a plenty big enough kitchen for such a little mother as ours. And we are going to have this other room for our dining room. It was a—a serv . . . serv . . . I can’t say the word. But Aunt Billy says it’s a place for flowers. My Grandma has flowers, but she keeps them in the living room and the dining room and some in the kitchen window. Isn’t this a pretty dining room, Miss Hope? I like such a many windows.”

Hope, too, liked the many windows that overlooked the backyard. She tried to picture to herself how this must have appeared long ago when it was filled with ferns and flowers. It would make a pleasant family dining room, and she hoped Mrs. King would have some pretty furniture and curtains to relieve the present bareness.

Chad showed her the electric table stove on which she would be expected to cook until the new one came. The two of them had lunch together in front of the “many windows.” Then Chad, explaining that he must take a nap so that he could play outdoors when it became cooler, went into his bedroom, and Hope was left alone.

She looked about her, wondering what to do. If she knew where Mrs. King wanted her dishes and utensils placed she could unpack them from the barrels and boxes that stood in the large room that had obviously once been a dining room, but that would have to wait. She could scour cupboards, however, and this she did. She longed to go on a tour of exploration and see the other floors of this old mansion. But that, too, must wait. She peeped through the door at the other side of the pantry into the big kitchen and gasped in amazement at the great black stove, the long worktables, and the old-fashioned sink. The windows were gray with a long accumulation of grime, and the dust that covered everything proclaimed that long years had passed since this room was used. The shining cleanliness of the other rooms told her that someone had worked hard to make them habitable.

With nothing to do until Billy should come back and leave some instructions for dinner, Hope wandered to the side door and out into the yard. It was such a tangle of weeds and shrubs

that she did not go far but turned back and stood gazing about her. Beyond the tall fence, at one side, stood another large building—a gray stone church, and from this direction came the sound of children's voices singing in some merry game. Could that be Henderson Institute? And what was it anyway? That would be one more place to explore when she had time. She felt as if she were many miles and days removed from the desperate girl who had been so fearful of life that morning. She did not know just what this place was, but she did know she had fallen in with kindly Christian people and had work to do and a place to stay. Best of all, she wouldn't have to go home!