

lean back luxuriously and be rolled through the crowded streets with its teeming life. She had her landmarks; there "the lad" had taken his first walk with her in the gardens; here was the shop in which he had bought her lilac silk; that was the bench where they were sitting side by side when he said——

And little by little the story of those years, which were to her "years of the Lord," were unfolded, and Caroline knew all that Ruth could tell about them.

Usually Caroline returned to "The Little Dustpan" for tea. Frank's place was always set.

"Yes; the hour the lad fixed 'pon come home," Ruth explained. "'I bin out waalken', an' now I'm fit for tay drinken', he did say. 'Twoulden look very purty to forget he."

If Caroline missed a day, she invariably found Ruth rocking dolefully in the shop.

"I do be gettin' old, thas wat is the matter 'long weth me," she would give as a reason for her low spirits.

By dexterous management, Caroline at last succeeded in getting Ruth to Linwood. The shutters were put up at "The Little Dustpan." Mattie received a substantial present and a holiday for an indefinite period, and after the old lady had been put to sleep with the third reading of one of Frank's letters, Caroline stood and looked at the sweet thin face on the pillows, then leaving she went into the drawing-room to write.

"Frank dear, I have just put your old sweetheart to bed—she is here at last! I have had to scheme hard for it. She has a grudge against me for sharing your affection, and believes my sole aim in life is to supplant her. But she is too tired to hold out, and is at present sleeping in the small room that opens from my own. . . .

"I am forced to tell you she is ill. I found her ill on my return, and fretting her heart out for you. Dr. Albert has met her here (in the guise of a friend of yours), and he tells me it is one of those sudden breakdowns common to those who have drawn on their vital force to its extreme limit. To Ruth there has been little repose; when not expending herself in restless exertion, she wastes herself mentally. . . . She is

strangely reticent concerning herself. Did it ever occur to you that *she has something on her mind!* . . .

"I have not mentioned your news. It would agitate her too much; to know that her lad was 'the maister' of Cairn Bray would appal her. One day, when she spoke of Cornwall, she told me of the bitter hard old man in the old house on The Fall.

"Do you think he relented at the last? That he ever missed us? Or that he know you had thrown off his weight the second time? I somehow think he knew. The newspapers gave very full accounts of 'Convict 99'—he *must* have known. Known, too, that he had spent his rage in vain; that the evil he had wrought had worked for our good, your good and mine. . . .

"I have followed you and Howard from lake to mountain: camped with you at nights round bush fires—you tell your stories well. I like all those little details of your letters.

"God bless you. . . .

"The house is very quiet as I write. I feel the significance of the closed shutters of Ruth Opie's bookstall. If I wire you 'come,' don't loiter."

A few weeks later Ruth was alone in Caroline's garden among the thyme and lavender, which she had been gathering and arranging into bunches with the neat precision characteristic of her.

It had been a drowsy autumn day, the air heavy with fragrance and the oppression of approaching storm. Caroline had been out all the afternoon, taking the occasion of the old lady's contented occupation to transact some business that was urgent.

When Ruth knew herself alone, she felt free. In the first hour of freedom she worked industriously, her small bent form stooping over the lavender; the sharp snap of the breaking stems was the only sound in the shady space. Presently she looked up with a bewildered air, walked restlessly away a few yards, then returned.

"I be picken lavender," she said dreamily. "Aw, ess."

She turned to the house, and stared at it from under lowered brows, frowning.

"Ess," she said, "picken lavender. Yes, ole right. I be Ruth Opie—picken lavender."

She passed her hand over her forehead as though to clear her brain.