

RACHEL

(Still at the glass):

He *was* rather nice, wasn't he, Ma dear? — for a man?

(Laughs).

I guess my reason's a vain one, — he let me do all the talking.

(Pauses).

Strong? Strong? Ma dear, is his mother the little woman with the sad, black eyes?

MRS. LOVING

(Resuming her sewing; sitting before the machine).

Yes. I was rather curious, I confess, to see this son of hers. The whole time I'm fitting her she talks of nothing else. She worships him.

(Pauses).

It's rather a sad case, I believe. She is a widow. Her husband was a doctor and left her a little money. She came up from the South to educate this boy. Both of them worked hard and the boy got through college. Three months he hunted for work that a college man might expect to get. You see he had the tremendous handicap of being colored. As the two of them had to live, one day, without her knowing it, he hired himself out as a waiter. He has been one now for two years. He is evidently goodness itself to his mother.

RACHEL

(Slowly and thoughtfully):

Just because he is *colored!*

(Pauses).

We sing a song at school, I believe, about "The land of the free and the home of the brave." What an amusing nation it is.

MRS. LOVING

(Watching Rachel anxiously):

Come, Rachel, you haven't time for "amusing nations." Remember, you haven't practised any this afternoon. And put your books away; don't leave them on the table. You didn't practise any this morning either, did you?

RACHEL

No, Ma dear, — didn't wake up in time.

(Goes to the table and in an abstracted manner puts books on the bookcase; returns to the table; picks up the roll of sheet music she has brought home with her; brightens; impulsively)

Ma dear, just listen to this lullaby. It's the sweetest thing. I was so "daffy" over it, one of the girls at school lent it to me.

(She rushes to the piano with the music and plays the accompaniment through softly and then sings, still softly and with great expression, Jessie Gaynor's "Slumber Boat") —

Baby's boat's the silver moon;

Sailing in the sky,

Sailing o'er the sea of sleep,

While the clouds float by.
Sail, baby, sail,
Out upon that sea,
Only don't forget to sail
Back again to me.
Baby's fishing for a dream,
Fishing near and far,
His line a silver moonbeam is,
His bait a silver star.
Sail, baby, sail, etc`
Listen, Ma dear, right here. Isn't it lovely?
(*Plays and sings very softly and slowly*):
"Only don't forget to sail
Back again to me."
(*Pauses; in hushed tones*)
Ma dear, it's so beautiful — it — it hurts.

MRS. LOVING

(*Quietly*):
Yes, dear, it is pretty.

RACHEL

(*For several minutes watches her mother's profile from the piano stool. Her expression is rather wistful*):
Ma dear!

MRS. LOVING

Yes, Rachel.

RACHEL

What's the matter?

MRS. LOVING

(*Without turning*):
Matter! What do you mean?

RACHEL

I don't know. I just *feel* something is not quite right with you.

MRS. LOVING

I'm only tired — that's all.

RACHEL

Perhaps. But —

(Watches her mother a moment or two longer; shakes her head; turns back to the piano. She is thoughtful; looks at her hands in her lap).

Ma dear, wouldn't it be nice if we could keep all the babies in the world — always little babies? Then they'd be always little, and cunning, and lovable; and they could never grow up, then, and — and — be bad. I'm so sorry for mothers, whose little babies — grow up — and — and — are bad.

MRS. LOVING

(Startled; controlling herself, looks at Rachel anxiously, perplexedly. Rachel's eyes are still on her hands. Attempting a light tone):

Come, Rachel, what experience have you had with mothers whose babies have grown up to be bad? You — you talk like an old, old woman.

RACHEL

(Without raising her eyes, quietly):

I know I'm not old; but, just the same I know that is true.

(Softly)

And I'm so sorry for the mothers.

MRS. LOVING

(With a forced laugh).

Well, Miss Methuselah, how do you happen to know all this? Mothers whose babies grow up to be bad don't, as a rule, parade their faults before the world.

RACHEL

That's just it — that's *how* you know. They don't talk at all.

MRS. LOVING

(Involuntarily):

Oh!

(Ceases to sew; looks at Rachel sharply; she is plainly worried. There is a long silence. Presently Rachel raises her eyes to Raphael's "Madonna" over the piano. Her expression becomes rapt; then, very softly, her eyes still on the picture, she plays and sings Nevin's "Mighty Lak A Rose")—

Sweetest li'l feller,

Ev'rybody knows;

Dunno what to call him,

But he mighty lak' a rose!

Lookin' at his Mammy

Wid eyes so shiny blue,

Mek' you think that heav'n

Is comin' clost ter you!

W'en his dar a sleepin'

In his li'l place

Think I see de angels

Lookin' thro' de lace.

W'en de dark is fallin',

W'en de shadders creep,

Den dey comes on tip-toe,

Ter kiss him in his sleep.

Sweetest li'l feller, etc.

(With head still raised, after she has finished, she closes her eyes. Half to herself and slowly)

I think the loveliest thing of all the lovely things in this world is just

(almost in a whisper)

being a mother!

MRS. LOVING

(Turns and laughs):

Well, of all the startling children, Rachel! I am getting to feel, when you're around as though I'm shut up with dynamite. What next?

(Rachel rises, goes slowly to her mother, and kneels down beside her. She does not touch her mother):

Why so serious, chickabiddy?

RACHEL

(Slowly and quietly):

It is not kind to laugh at sacred things. When you laughed, it was as though you laughed — at God!

MRS. LOVING

(Startled):

Rachel!

RACHEL

(Still quietly):

It's true. It was the best in me that said that — it was God!

(Pauses).

And, Ma dear, if I believed that I should grow up and not be a mother, I'd pray to die now. I've thought about it a lot, Ma dear, and once I dreamed, and a voice said to me — oh! it was so real — "Rachel, you are to be a mother to little children." Wasn't that beautiful? Ever since I have known how Mary felt at the "Annunciation."

(Almost in a whisper)

God spoke to me through some one, and I believe. And it has explained so much to me. I know now why I just can't resist any child. I have to love it — it calls me — it — draws me. I want to take care of it, wash it, dress it, live for it. I want the feel of its little warm body against me, its breath on my neck, its hands against my face.

(Pauses thoughtfully for a few moments).

Ma dear, here's something I don't understand: I love the little black and brown babies best of all. There is something about them that — that — clutches at my heart. Why — why — should they be — oh! —

pathetic? I don't understand. It's dim. More than the other babies, I feel that I must protect them. They're in danger, but from what? I don't know. I've tried so hard to understand, but I can't.

(*Her face radiant and beautiful*).

Ma dear, I think their white teeth and the clear whites of their big black eyes and their dimples everywhere — are — are

(*Breaks off*).

And, Ma dear, because I love them best, I pray God every night to give me, when I grow up, little black and brown babies — to protect and guard.

(*Wistfully*).

Now, Ma dear, don't you see why you must never laugh at me again? Dear, dear, Ma dear?

(*Buries her head in her mother's lap and sobs*).

MRS. LOVING

(*For a few seconds, sits as though dazed, and then instinctively begins to caress the head in her lap. To herself*).

And I suppose my experience is every mother's. Sooner or later — of a sudden she finds her own child a stranger to her.

(*To Rachel, very tenderly*).

Poor little girl! Poor little chickabiddy!

RACHEL

(*Raising her head*).

Why do you say, "Poor little girl," like that? I don't understand. Why, Ma dear, I never saw tears in your eyes before. Is it — is it — because you know the things I do not understand? Oh! it *is* that.

MRS. LOVING

(*Simply*).

Yes, Rachel, and I cannot save you.

RACHEL

Ma dear, you frighten me. Save me from *what*?

MRS. LOVING

Just life, my little chickabiddy!

RACHEL

Is life so terrible? I had found it mostly beautiful. How can life be terrible, when the world is full of little children?

MRS. LOVING

(*Very sadly*).

Oh, Rachel! Rachel!

RACHEL

Ma dear, what have I said?

MRS. LOVING

(Forcing a smile):

Why, the truth, of course, Rachel. Life is not terrible when there are little children — and you — and Tom — and a roof over our heads — and work — and food — and clothes — and sleep at night.

(Pauses).

Rachel, I am not myself today. I'm tired. Forget what I've said. Come, chickabiddy, wipe your eyes and smile. That's only an imitation smile, but it's better than none. Jump up now, and light the lamp for me, will you? Tom's late, isn't he? I shall want you to go, too, for the rolls and pie for supper.

RACHEL

(Rises rather wearily and goes into the kitchenette. While she is out of the room Mrs` Loving does not move. She sits staring in front of her. The room for some time has been growing dark. Mrs` Loving can just be seen when Rachel reenters with the lamp. She places it on the small table near her mother, adjusts it, so the light falls on her mother's work, and then lowers the window shades at the windows. She still droops. Mrs` Loving, while Rachel is in the room, is industrious. Rachel puts on her hat and coat listlessly. She does not look in the glass).

Where is the money, Ma dear? I'm ready.

MRS. LOVING

Before you go, Rachel, just give a look at the meat and see if it is cooking all right, will you, dearie?

RACHEL

(Goes out into the kitchenette and presently returns):

It's all right, Ma dear.

MRS. LOVING

(While Rachel is out of the room, she takes her pocket-book out of the machine-drawer, opens it, takes out money and gives it to Rachel upon her return):

A dozen brown rolls, Rachel. Be sure they're brown! And, I guess, — an apple pie. As you and Tom never seem to get enough apple pie, get the largest she has. And here is a quarter. Get some candy — any kind *you* like, Chickabiddy. Let's have a party tonight, I feel extravagant. Why, Rachel! why are you crying?

RACHEL

Nothing, dear Ma dear. I'll be all right when I get in the air. Goodbye!