

Martha Finley



*Mildred's Married
Life, and a Winter
with Elsie
Dinsmore*

Martha Finley

Mildred's Married Life, and a Winter with Elsie Dinsmore

A sequel to Mildred and Elsie



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066418229

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[MILDRED'S MARRIED LIFE.](#)

[CHAPTER I.](#)

[CHAPTER II.](#)

[CHAPTER III.](#)

[CHAPTER IV.](#)

[CHAPTER V.](#)

[CHAPTER VI.](#)

[CHAPTER VII.](#)

[CHAPTER VIII.](#)

[CHAPTER IX.](#)

[CHAPTER X.](#)

[CHAPTER XI.](#)

[CHAPTER XII.](#)

[CHAPTER XIII.](#)

[CHAPTER XIV.](#)

[CHAPTER XV.](#)

[CHAPTER XVI.](#)

[CHAPTER XVII.](#)

[CHAPTER XVIII.](#)

[CHAPTER XIX.](#)

[CHAPTER XX.](#)

[CHAPTER XXI.](#)

[CHAPTER XXII.](#)

[CHAPTER XXIII.](#)

[CHAPTER XXIV.](#)

[CHAPTER XXV.](#)

[CHAPTER XXVI.](#)

MILDRED'S MARRIED LIFE.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.

Table of Contents

"O married love! each heart shall own,
Where two congenial souls unite,
Thy golden chains inlaid with down,
Thy lamp with heaven's own splendor bright."
—Langhorne.

What a happy winter that was!—the first of Mildred's married life. Her cup of bliss seemed full to overflowing. She was very proud of her husband, and not without reason, for his was a noble character; he was a man of sterling worth, lofty aims, cultivated mind, and polished address.

They were a pair of lovers who grew more and more enamored of each other day by day as the weeks and months rolled on.

And while the new love flooded Mildred's pathway with light, the old loves, so dear, so long tried and true, had not to be given up: she was still a member of the home circle, a sharer in all its interests and pleasures, its cares and its joys.

There was no interruption of the mutual sympathy and helpfulness of mother and daughter, brothers and sisters, nor was the father deprived of the prized society of his firstborn in the family gatherings about the table or in the cosy sitting-room or parlor when evening brought rest from the toils and cares of the day; she was there, as of old, ready to cheer and entertain him with music or sprightly conversation: brighter too, and more full of a sweet and gentle gayety than of yore.

These things formed no mean or slight element in Mildred's happiness; yet there were times when it was bliss to be alone with her lover-husband in the privacy of their own apartments—the room that had always been hers and a communicating one—both of good size, pleasant and cheery, and made doubly attractive by perfect neatness and various tasteful little feminine devices in which Mrs. Keith and her daughters were thought to excel.

Mildred soon discovered that her husband was far from neat and orderly in his habits; but accepting the fact as the one inevitable yet small thorn joined to her otherwise delicious rose, she bore the trial with exemplary patience,

indulging in never a reproachful word or even look as she quietly picked up and put in place the books, papers, and garments which he scattered here and there with reckless indifference to consequences to them or himself.

Mildred thought her efforts were unappreciated if not entirely unnoticed, until one day on opening a drawer in search of some article which he wanted in haste, he exclaimed at the neat and orderly arrangement of its contents, adding, "Really, Milly, my dear, I must say with Solomon, that 'he that findeth a wife findeth a good thing.' In my bachelor days I'd have had many a vexatious hunt for things which now I always find in place, ready to my hand. It has been my daily experience since I became a benedict."

Mildred looked up in pleased surprise. "I have been half afraid my particularity about such things was a trifle annoying to you, Charlie," she said in a gratified tone.

"Not at all, but my slovenliness must have been seriously so to you," he returned, coming to her side. "I'll try to reform in that respect," he went on playfully, "and I wish that, to help me, you would impose a fine for every time you have my coat to hang up in the wardrobe, my boots or slippers to put away in the closet, or—"

"Oh, I should ruin you!" Mildred interrupted with a light, gleeful, happy laugh.

"Not particularly complimentary that, to either my good intentions or the supposed amount of my income," he returned, bending over her to caress her hair and cheek. "Besides it would depend largely upon the weight of the fine. How heavy shall it be?"

"Fix it yourself, since the idea is all your own."

"One dollar each time for every article left out of place; fine to be increased to not more than five in case no improvement is manifest within a month. How will that do?"

"Oh," laughed Mildred, "I shall certainly impoverish you and speedily grow rich at your expense."

"Come now, little lady, about how often have I transgressed against the rules of order in the two weeks that we have shared these rooms?"

"Perhaps twenty. I have kept no account; so can only guess at it."

"Well, really!" he sighed, in mock despair, "I could not have believed I was quite so bad as that. But all the more need for reform; you must insist upon the fines, Milly. I can't let you have so much trouble for nothing."

"O Charlie! as if your love didn't pay me a thousand times over!" she exclaimed, lifting to his eyes dewy with mingled emotions—love, joy, and gratitude.

He answered with a tender caress and a smile of ineffable affection.

"And then you have been so generous with money, too," Mildred went on. "Why, I never was so rich before in all my life! I've not spent a fourth part of the

hundred dollars I found in my purse the day after our wedding. And mother tells me you have insisted upon paying a good deal more for our board than she thinks it worth."

"Ah, dearest, circumstances alter cases, and with more knowledge you and mother may change your minds," he replied, half absently.

Then after a moment's silence, "This is my gift to my dear wife, and I cannot tell her how glad I am to be able to make it. My darling, will you accept it at your husband's hands?"

He had laid a folded paper in her lap.

"Thank you," she said playfully, and with a pleased smile. "I can't imagine what it is," opening and glancing over it as she spoke. "Why!" half breathlessly, as she scrutinized it with more care, then let it fall into her lap with an astonished, half-incredulous look up into his face, "Charlie, is it real?" she asked.

"Entirely so, dear Milly," he answered, with a tender smile.

"You have endowed me with all your worldly goods," she said, half in assertion, half inquiringly.

"No, my darling, not nearly half as yet. I know you thought you were marrying a poor man—at least comparatively so—but it was a mistake. And oh the delight of being able to give you ease and luxury! you who have toiled so long and faithfully for yourself and others!"

He clasped her in his arms as he spoke, and with a heart too full for speech, she laid her head upon his breast and wept for very joy and thankfulness that such love and tender protecting care were hers.

There was space for little else in her thoughts for the moment; the next she rejoiced keenly in the wealth that put in her power so much that it had long been in her heart to do for others; yet rejoiced with trembling, remembering the Master's words, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!"

If adversity had its trials prosperity was not without its perils, and a most earnest, though silent prayer went up that she might be kept from trusting in uncertain riches or setting her affection on earthly treasures.

"Tears, darling?" said her husband, softly stroking her hair. "I thought to give you joy only."

"They are happy tears, Charlie," she murmured, lifting her face, putting an arm about his neck, and gazing with loving eyes straight into his; "and yet—oh, I am almost afraid of so much wealth!" And she went on to tell him all that was in her heart.

"Ah," he replied, "I do not fear for you, your very sense of the danger will tend to your safe-keeping."

"Yes; if it keeps me close to the Master and ever looking unto Him for strength to resist temptation. Utter weakness in ourselves, we may yet 'be

strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.”

“Yes, you know Paul tells us the Lord said to him, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’”

CHAPTER II.

Table of Contents

**“Wealth heaped on wealth, nor truth nor safety
buys;**

The dangers gather as the treasures rise.”

—Dr. Johnson.

Dr. Landreth had an errand down-town. Mildred stood at the window looking after him with loving, admiring eyes. He turned at the gate to lift his hat and kiss his hand to her with a bow and smile, then sped on his way, she watching until his manly form had disappeared in the distance and the gathering darkness; for evening was closing in.

But even now she did not turn from the window, but still stood there, gazing into vacancy, her thoughts full of the strange revelation and surprising gift he had made to her within the last hour.

She would go presently to mother and sisters with the pleasant news, but first she must have a little time alone with her best Friend, to pour out her gratitude to Him and seek strength for the new duties and responsibilities now laid upon her, the new dangers and temptations likely to beset her path.

A few moments had been passed thus when her mother’s gentle rap was heard at the door of her

room. Mildred hastened to open it and to unfold her wondrous tale, sure of entire, loving sympathy in all the contending feelings which agitated her.

She was not disappointed; but while Mrs. Keith fully understood and appreciated Mildred's fear of the peculiar temptations of wealth, she took a more hopeful view.

"Dear daughter," she said, "trust in Him who has promised, 'As thy days so shall thy strength be,' and take with joy this good gift He has sent you. Keep close to Him and you will be safe, for 'He giveth more grace.'"

There was great and unqualified rejoicing among the younger members of the family when they learned the news—"they were so glad that hard times were over for dear Milly, who had always been so helpful and kind to everybody;" and so thoroughly did they believe in her goodness that they had no fear for her such as she felt for herself.

"Milly, what *are* you going to do with so much money?" asked Annis, hanging about her sister's chair; "you can never spend it all."

"Spend it!" cried Don contemptuously. "Only silly people think money was made just to spend. Wise ones save it up for time of need."

"The truly wise don't hoard all they have, Don," remarked Ada gravely.

"No; of course they must live, and they'll pay their way honestly if they are the right sort of folks."

“And if they are that,” said Mildred, with a sweet, bright smile irradiating her features, “they will feel that the money God gives them is not wholly their own, to save and to spend.”

“Oh no, to be sure! and what a nice big tenth you’ll have to give now, Milly,” exclaimed Annis. “I wish you’d find some work for me to do and pay me for it, so that I’d have more money to give to missions.”

“I’ll pay you ten cents for every hour you spend at the piano in faithful practice,” was Mildred’s answer, as she playfully drew her little pet sister to a seat upon her knee.

“O Milly! will you really?” cried the child, clapping her hands in delight; “but that will be twenty cents a day when I practise two hours, and I mean to, every day but Sunday.”

“And I make Fan the same offer,” Mildred said, catching a half wistful, half eager glance from the great gray eyes of that quiet, demure little maiden.

The gray eyes sparkled and danced, their owner saying, “O Milly, thank you ever so much! I’ll be sure to earn twenty or thirty cents every day.”

“Forty or fifty cents a day for you to pay, Milly!” Annis said in some anxiety.

“Don’t be concerned, little sister, my purse can stand even so grievous a drain as that,” returned Mildred gayly.

“Mildred,” said Ada, sighing slightly, “I can hardly help envying you the blessing of having so much

money to do good with.”

“Perhaps your turn will come; at your age I had no more prospect of it than you have now,” Mildred said, gently putting Annis aside and rising to leave the room; for she heard her husband’s step in the hall, and it was her wont to hasten to meet him with a welcoming smile. But pausing a moment at Ada’s side, “It is a great responsibility,” she added in an earnest undertone; “you must help me with your prayers and sisterly warnings, to meet it aright.”

A liberal gift to each benevolent enterprise of the church to which she belonged was the first use Mildred made of her newly acquired wealth. Next her thoughts busied themselves with plans to increase the comfort and happiness of her own dear ones; after that of friends and neighbors.

There were some of these who might not be approached as objects of charity, yet whose means were so small as to afford them little beyond the bare necessities of life. Meantime her husband was thinking of her and how he might add to her comfort and pleasure.

It was now early in November, but the woods had not lost all their autumnal beauty, and the weather was unusually mild for the time of year. They had had many delightful walks and drives together.

Now Dr. Landreth proposed a trip to Chicago, and Mildred gave a joyful assent. There would be ten miles of staging, then three or four hours of railway travel, making a journey just long enough for a

pleasure trip, they thought; and a short sojourn in the city would be an agreeable variety to Mildred at least, she having been scarcely outside of Pleasant Plains for the last six or eight years.

With a heart full of quiet happiness and overflowing with gratitude to the Giver of all good, she set about the needful preparation. No great amount of it was needed, as they were only going sightseeing and shopping; it could all be done in one day, and they would start early the next morning.

Alone in her own room, packing her trunk, her thoughts reverted to a friend, a most estimable widow lady, a member of the same church with herself, who was enduring a great fight with adversity, having an aged mother and several small children to support.

“They must be in need,” Mildred said half aloud to herself, pausing in her work. “How nice it would be to give them a little help without their knowing whence it came! Yes, I shall do it.”

She rose from her kneeling posture beside her trunk, went to her writing-desk, enclosed a ten-dollar bill in a blank sheet of paper, and that in an envelope which she sealed and directed to Mrs. Mary Selby, the lady in question.

She wrote the address in a disguised hand, and following Rupert to the outer door that evening as he was starting down-town after tea, asked him to drop that note into the post-office for her as he passed.

He readily complied, and her secret was between the Master and herself, as she desired it to be.

The little jaunt was an entire success, and the happy bride and groom returned from it loaded with presents for the dear ones at home. There was an easy-chair for father, a handsome set of furs for mother, napery for Zillah, a silk dress for Ada, a fine soft merino for each of the younger girls; beside books and a variety of smaller gifts for all, even Celestia Ann having been kindly and generously remembered.

It was a glad home-coming, a merry, happy time to all the family. And Mildred was younger, prettier, gayer in appearance and manner than they had seen her for years.

CHAPTER III.

Table of Contents

**“For true charity,
Though ne’er so secret, finds a just reward.”
—May.**

A part of the winter’s amusement at Mr. Keith’s was the making of plans for a house to be built the next summer for Dr. and Mrs. Landreth. The doctor had bought an acre of ground adjoining Mildred’s lot, and intended putting on it a large, handsome residence with every modern convenience that was attainable in that region of country.

As soon as the frost was out of the ground the work of cellar-digging and laying the foundation was begun. At that time the doctor hoped the house might be ready for occupancy the next fall; but as the weeks and months glided by that hope grew fainter under the dilatory conduct of workmen and those who supplied material, until the most he allowed himself to anticipate was that the walls would be up and the roof on, so that work upon the inside might be carried forward during the winter.

The delay was somewhat trying to both himself and Mildred, for they had a strong desire to be in a home of their own, though it was a very pleasant life they led in that of her parents.

Mildred kept up her church work; her Sunday-school teaching, attendance upon the weekly prayer-meetings, the sewing society, etc., and also her visits to the sick and the poor.

And now she had the happiness of being able to provide these last with medical attendance gratis, her husband joining her, heart and soul, in her kindly ministrations.

The two were entirely congenial, and their love deepened and strengthened with every day they lived together.

One bright April day the doctor invited his wife to take a drive with him a few miles into the country, on the farther side of the river, whither he was going to see a patient.

He always liked to have her company on such expeditions, when good roads and fine weather made the drive a pleasure; and she never let anything but sickness hinder her from going. She never wearied of his society or grudged the sacrifice of her own plans and purposes to add to his comfort or pleasure.

The intended call had been made, and they turned their faces homeward. The sun was still some two or three hours high, the air pure and bracing; not too cool for those who were well wrapped up; the delicate yellow green of the newly-opened buds was on the forest trees, while at their feet the blue violet, the purple anemone, and other lovely wildwood flowers peeped up here and there among the blades of newly springing grass, or showed their pretty

heads half hidden by the carpet of last year's fallen leaves lying brown and dry upon the ground.

The doctor several times stopped his horse and alighted to gather a handful of the delicate blossoms for Mildred.

She thanked him with appreciative words and smiles, yet half absently, as though her thoughts were intent upon something else. "Charlie," she said at length, "I should like to call on Mrs. Selby. It is a little out of our way, but I think we have time; and it is strongly impressed upon me that, for some reason, we are needed there."

"Very well, dearest," he answered, stepping into the buggy again, and taking the reins from her hands, "then we will drive there at once. There can be no harm in doing so, whether your impression be correct or not."

The horse was urged into a brisk canter, there were no more pauses for flower-gathering, and presently they drew up before the Selby dwelling—a plain, square log-house, two rooms below and two above.

As they did so, Mrs. Selby appeared at the door, drawn thither by the welcome sound of wheels.

"Oh, how glad I am to see you!" she exclaimed with tears in her eyes. "I was just asking the Lord to send me help somehow, for mother is very sick, and none of the children are old enough to go to town for a doctor. How good He is to send me just what I need!"

“Doctor and nurse both, dear Mrs. Selby,” Mildred said, pressing her hand in heartfelt sympathy, for they had already alighted, and the doctor was fastening his horse preparatory to entering the house.

He found the old lady very seriously ill, but fortunately had the needed remedies with him.

The sun was setting when he went away, leaving Mildred, reluctantly enough, too, but there were medicines to be given at regular intervals during the night, and she was quite resolved to assist in the nursing; while he could not stay, other patients claiming his attention; he left her therefore, promising to return for her at an early hour next morning.

Mildred followed him to the door.

“My darling, I can hardly bear to go without you,” he said, taking her hand in his and bending his head to press a parting kiss upon her sweet lips, his eyes full of wistful tenderness. “’Tis a lonely spot,” he added, with an uneasy glance around upon the woods that enclosed the little clearing on every side; “no man about and not another house within half a mile; none on this side of the river within two miles.”

“No, my dear husband,” she answered, looking up into his face with a sweet, trustful smile, “but you leave me in safe keeping nevertheless. ‘Man is distant, but God is near.’”

“That is true,” he said; “and the path of duty is the safest; you do seem to be needed here. So good-

by for a few hours, my precious little wife. 'The Lord bless thee and keep thee, and cause His face to shine upon thee.'"

"And may He keep my husband also, and bring him safely back to me," she whispered, putting her arms about his neck, her lips to his.

She watched him till a turn of the road hid him from sight, then went in, and with a serene, cheerful face entered upon her gentle ministrations about the sick-bed, while Mrs. Selby was busied with her children and household cares.

At length all these duties had been carefully attended to, doors and window-shutters bolted and barred, the children put to bed, where they were presently soundly sleeping.

The invalid too had fallen into a heavy slumber under the influence of an opiate, and the two ladies sat down together for a little chat, in the neat outer room, which served as kitchen, sitting-room, and parlor.

The evening was chilly, but a bright wood fire burned and crackled in the large open fireplace. They drew their chairs near to it and to each other and conversed in low tones, for the door into the inner apartment where the sleepers were stood open, and while they talked their ears were intent to catch the slightest sound from the sick-bed.

"It was so kind in you to stay with me to-night, and in the doctor to leave you," Mrs. Selby said, with a grateful pressure of Mildred's hand.

"I am sure you would have done the same for me in like circumstances," returned Mildred, "and who that loves the Master could do otherwise, remembering His words, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me'?"

"I am sure He sent you and the doctor here to-day in answer to prayer," Mrs. Selby went on, her eyes filling with grateful tears. "I think mother would have died before morning without better help than I could give her."

"We will give Him all the praise," Mildred said with emotion. "He sent us, and I feel it very sweet to be sent on His errands." Her eyes shone as she spoke.

"Yes," was the reply, "I have found it so when He has sent me, as I am sure He sometimes has, to minister to the troubled in heart, the sick and dying. I often feel thankful, Mrs. Landreth, that money isn't always the only thing we can serve Him with; because that would shut me off almost entirely."

"No, it is not always even the best or most acceptable," Mildred said, with her sweet cheery smile.

"Yet there are times when it is more welcome than almost anything else, it being unfortunately so very necessary in this world of ours. Ah! Mrs. Landreth, even at the risk of seeming to talk a great deal about myself, I must tell you what happened to me last fall. I was walking into town one cold day in November, feeling so sad at heart thinking over our many

necessities and how impossible it seemed to supply them; mother needed flannel badly and my little boys had no shoes. I was praying silently for help all the way and trying to stay myself upon God and those precious verses in the sixth chapter of Matthew about the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field, and the sweet words, 'Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.' They did comfort me a good deal, but my faith wasn't strong enough to quite lift the burden off me—the need was so very pressing and no sign of help at hand."

"They would trust me at the stores, I knew, but to buy on credit, or borrow money when you can see no way of paying it back, is, I think, no better than stealing, so I couldn't do that. Just as that thought was in my mind I looked up and saw that I was in front of the post-office. I hadn't thought of going there, because I had no reason to expect anything by mail, but I stepped in and asked if there was a letter for me; and you can't think how surprised I was when they handed me one, and I tore it open and found a ten-dollar bill in it. Nothing else, not a word of writing to say where it came from. But I knew my heavenly Father had sent it, and I cried for very joy and thankfulness—behind my veil—as I walked along the street."

Mildred's heart and eyes were full as she listened. Ah, how sweet it was to have been made the blessed Master's almoner to one of His dear children! But her face was half averted lest it should betray her secret,

and Mrs. Selby's own emotion assisted in the desired concealment.

"I thought I should never again doubt the love and care of my heavenly Father," the latter went on after a moment's pause in which Mildred's hand sought hers and pressed it in loving sympathy. "I went to Chetwood & Mocker's and bought the flannel and the shoes. (Mr. Chetwood waited on me himself, and I felt sure he put the goods down to me, probably at cost.) And such a rejoicing as there was when I got home! I really believe, Mrs. Landreth, that those who have but little of this world's goods enjoy them all the more; and so things are more evenly divided among us all than most people think."

The clock struck nine, and Mildred begged Mrs. Selby to lie down and try to sleep. "You know," she said with an arch smile, "the doctor's orders were that we should take turns in watching and sleeping, so that each should have half a night's rest."

"Yes; and you mean to obey, like a good little wife," returned her friend with playful look and tone. "But won't you take the first turn at sleeping?"

"No, no; I feel quite fresh, and you are looking sadly tired."

Mrs. Selby yielded, stretched herself upon a lounge, saying, "Please be sure to call me at twelve, or sooner if you feel like lying down," and fell asleep almost before Mildred had finished covering her carefully with a heavy blanket shawl.

Mildred sat musing by the fire for a little, then seeing it was the hour for giving the medicine, administered it—the invalid just rousing sufficiently to take it, and falling off into a heavy sleep again immediately—then returning to the outer room, found a book, seated herself near the light, and began to read.

She paused presently, and sat for a moment noting the death-like quiet that reigned within and without the dwelling, broken only by a faint sound of breathing from the next room and the ticking of the little wooden clock on the mantel.

But the fire needed replenishing. She attended to it with as little noise as possible, and returned to her book.

CHAPTER IV.

Table of Contents

**“And now in moodiness,
Being full of supper and distempering
draughts,
Upon malicious bravery dost thou come
To start my quiet.”
—Shaks.: Othello.**

**Suddenly there came a sound as of a heavy
body falling or being thrown against the
outer door; then a hand fumbled at the lock,
and a man’s voice said thickly, “Open hyar
and let a fellar in, can’t ye?”**

**Mildred started to her feet, her heart beating fast
and loud, while at the same instant Mrs. Selby,
waked by the noise of the fall, raised herself to a
sitting posture and glanced round at her friend with
a look of alarm.**

**“Blast ye! let me in hyar,” repeated the voice, its
owner accompanying the words with an oath and
another effort to turn the handle of the door.**

The two women drew nearer together.

“Who is it?” asked Mildred in a tremulous whisper.

**“I don’t know; but don’t be frightened, he’s
evidently too drunk to break in on us, for the door
and window shutters are stout and strongly barred.”**

**For several minutes the man continued to fumble
at the door, pushing against it and muttering curses**

and demands for entrance, the women standing together, clasping each other's hands and listening with bated breath.

Then he staggered to the window and tried that, but with no better success.

"If ye don't le'me in," he growled at length, "I'll climb the roof and git down the chimbly."

"Could he?" asked Mildred, taking a tighter grip of her companion's hand.

"A sober man could easily get on the roof from the back shed," Mrs. Selby answered, "but I hope he will fail. He seems very drunk for such an exploit."

"But can't he reach an upstairs window from the shed roof?"

"No, there is none on that side; it's a story and a half house and with upstairs windows in the gable ends only. They're without shutters, but he can't possibly reach them."

"And the chimney?"

"I don't know whether it is large enough for him to get down it or not," Mrs. Selby said, with an anxious glance toward it, her ear at the same time, as well as Mildred's, still intent upon the sounds without, "or what will be the consequence if he should. There's a pretty hot fire. I hope the heat will deter him from attempting the descent, even if he should gain the roof and the chimney-top."

"But if he should succeed in getting down?" Mildred said with a shudder and looking about for some weapon of defence.

“We must catch up the lamp, rush into the other room, and barricade the door. There! he is on the shed roof! Don’t you hear?”

“Yes; let us kneel down and ask our heavenly Father to protect us.”

They did so, continuing their silent supplications for many minutes, all the more importunately as the sounds from overhead told them that the drunken wretch had gained the upper roof and was at the top of the chimney.

Another moment and the rattling fall of a quantity of plaster gave notice that he was actually attempting the descent.

They rose hastily, Mrs. Selby caught up the lamp burning on the table, and they withdrew on tiptoe, but with great celerity, to the shelter of the inner room.

The lamp was set down in a corner where its light would not disturb the sleepers; then the two stood close to the door, intently listening and looking—the fire giving them light enough to see the invader should he succeed in forcing an entrance—and Mrs. Selby with her hand upon the lock, ready to close the door instantly upon his appearance.

Mutterings and curses came faintly to their ears; these were followed by half-suppressed cries and groans and another fall of plaster; but the sounds seemed stationary; they came no nearer.

“He has stuck fast, surely!” Mrs. Selby exclaimed in an excited whisper.

“And we can do nothing to help him!” Mildred said half breathlessly.

“No, nothing.”

Their conjecture soon grew to a certainty, as the groans and cries continued. Gradually their fright abated; they stole softly back to the fireside, and pitying the sufferings of the poor wretch, hastened to open the door, throw out the burning brands and extinguish them with water. It was all they could do for his relief.

He asked for water, and they tried to give it to him, but without success. He sang drunken songs, muttered indistinctly, asking, they thought, for help to get out—help they could not give; then followed groans, cries, and ineffectual struggles to get free. These gradually grew fainter, and at length were succeeded by a death-like silence and stillness.

“He is dead?” Mildred said half inquiringly in an awe-struck whisper.

Mrs. Selby nodded assent, tears springing to her eyes. “I am afraid so, though I had not thought it would come to that,” she whispered. “Oh, how horrible it is! But I’m thankful that mother and the children have slept through it all. We’ll not speak of it to mother if she wakes. There, I hear her stirring, and it’s time for the medicine again.”

“I’ll hold the light for you,” Mildred said, taking it up and following. She could not bear to stay alone in that room at that moment.