

"I'm anxious to find him for old friendships sake. If I get track of him I'll let you know."

"Thank you. Be sure to do so." Mrs. Delorme closed the door again and her visitor started away.

John returned to his dingy boarding house room. Its cheap furniture, its carpetless floor, its little wavy mirror that gave back as unstable a reflection as a pool lately disturbed by a pebble, its "figgered" wall paper torn off in spots revealing plastering so thin that the lath showed through like a starved horse's ribs; above all, the little, glimmering kerosene lamp with its half-inch wick, its bulged out chimney and its globe about the size of a tea cup standing on a glass stem about three inches high, contrasted greatly with the luxurious appointments and brilliant illumination of the room he had quitted but a half hour ago. He went to sleep wondering what Mrs. Delorme knew of Marsh Mason, but he could make no conjecture that would bear examination.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## DAUGHTERS OF JOANNA.

"Joanna, the wife of Chuza Herod's steward."  
—LUKE 8:3.

We have faith in the future that's near;  
We have faith in the Age's long dream;  
Through the storms of to-day we see clear  
The bright gates of the new Eden gleam.  
—GIBSON LAINE.

Lena Graham, Mrs. Delorme's niece, was a young woman of some 19 years. To anyone at all schooled in reading character from the physiognomy, a single glance at Lena's face, and especially at her eyes, sufficed to indicate three strongly-marked characteristics—broad intelligence, strong sympathies equally broad, and, above all and leading all, absolute and unshrinking candor and sincerity which could permit no dissimulation nor shadow of turning. Looking at that face one would say: "If that young woman says a thing she means it; and if her feelings should be aroused, she would give them frank utterance despite all the pleadings of cold prudence and let conventional society take what harsh measures it might to protect its barriers of caste."

Nevertheless, Lena Graham was no solemn-visaged prophetess. Far from it. She liked to laugh, especially when her laughter disconcerted the "dudes" she despised; and as there were in her set no specimens of man but "dudes," she laughed a great deal. At Sunday school she was wont to put troublesome questions and then "poke fun" at the embarrassed teacher's somewhat awkwardly-constructed answers. Of a young preacher calling at her father's house with malice aforethought matrimonial intentions she had asked:

"Why don't you preachers try to look more like healthy men? I like to see a great big, hearty-looking man, like some of the workmen I sometimes see on the street cars. If heaven is going to be such a wonderfully happy place as you preachers say it is, why don't you get used to looking as if you were satisfied with it, instead of waiting for Gabriel, after he gathers up your ashes, to shake out your faces till they get up a smile?"

And the young preacher never called again; and by him and his class Lena was considered a frivolous girl and virtually past praying for. But this frivolous girl had been known to pick up a lost child on the street, send word to the police station where to find the wanderer if inquired for, and then take the little tot home with her and stay with it and take care of it and amuse it for hours, while replacing its shabby garments with such substitutes as she could hurriedly throw together from bits of her own wardrobe, trusting that the little one's mother would make over the improvised garments with more skill after awhile. She had been known to leave a young man looking silly on a public corner while she stepped aside to give a kind word and some money to a beggar over whose appearance her discomfited escort had made merry. On one occasion of late, two blocks from the main street, she had met an honest-looking workman who was in a state of partial intoxication, and with her honest, sympathetic look and kindly voice had actually persuaded him to go home and keep out of the clutches of the law. He was a total stranger, but the frivolous girl felt sorry for the family that, per-

haps, needed the man's earnings worse than did the city, which, by the way of a fine, would rob the drunkard's family of bread in the name of Christian philanthropy.

On the afternoon of the Tuesday when John Cotterell was to lecture, Lena came unheralded to visit her aunt for a few days, and her advent just at that time caused Mrs. Delorme some embarrassment; for the club which was to meet that night consisted exclusively of married women, and its meetings were as secret as were those of the early Christians in the Catacombs. In her recent conversation with John, Mrs. Delorme, after stating that the club met afternoons, thus explained the secret character and the nature of the meetings themselves:

"The Major never gets home before eleven at night, and on these occasions the lady at whose house the meeting is to be held always lets her help, unless she happens to have a girl we can trust, have an afternoon out. Some of our domestics meet with us, and they are intelligent, too, and very much interested in our work. That is one of the pleasures of our meetings. We all treat each other, like the first-century Christians, as equals—as sisters, and we all feel so much comfort in it."

Mrs. Delorme having told her in confidence of the meeting and the anticipated lecture that night, and also something about the lecturer, Lena declared she would join the club and be present if she had to hunt up some thoughtless youth and marry him yet that afternoon in order to become eligible, and it was contrary to the club's strict regulations to even permit a stranger to remain beneath the roof during its meetings. But finally, Mrs. Delorme be thought her that, as Lena had come unexpectedly, this regulation could scarcely be insisted upon in this instance, and that as she did not live in Graham and such action could not under the peculiar circumstances be urged as a precedent, the club might, as a matter of prudence, admit her to membership so as to pledge her to everlasting secrecy. This was agreed to by the club when it met that night and Lena was admitted and given the right hand of fellowship.

"The Daughters of Joanna" had assembled in Mrs. Delorme's capacious parlors as early as half past seven. Every lady present was tastefully dressed, but there was a noticeable absence of expensive fabrics, jewelry and all ostentation. There were three or four domestics in the room who were members, but neither by their dress nor by any difference of conduct or of treatment could a stranger have told which ladies were the servants. The entire company were, as Mrs. Delorme had stated to John Cotterell, simply sisters—an assembly of first century Christians, where the hard lines of caste were, for the time at least, obliterated, and, not only disregarded in conduct, but, as far as practicable, forgotten.

"Aunt Hallie," said Lena to Mrs. Delorme before the club had opened its proceedings, "if your wonderful socialist isn't big and handsome like you say he is, I'll fall in love with him for spite. Don't trifle with my affections, I beg of you. If he's only a 'dude'—only an amateur workman—I'll tell all your awful secrets on the housetops. Honest, now, Aunt Hallie, is he as?"

The bell rang, and Mrs. Delorme went to answer it. She showed John into a room across the hall, while Lena, holding the parlor door a half inch ajar, tried to catch a glimpse of the lecturer. Mrs. Delorme soon returned to take the president, Mrs. Offrick, to introduce her to John. Mrs. Offrick was a fat, determined-looking, but good-natured woman of sixty on whose shapely head had plentifully fallen "the snows that never melt"—except under the influence of a hair restorer or a wig. She greeted John warmly, in her motherly but dignified way, and after a brief conversation with him, returned to call the club to order, leaving Mrs. Delorme and John alone.

"Have you learned anything yet of your friend, the strange preacher?" asked Mrs. Delorme as soon as Mrs. Offrick had retired, but in a manner intended to be merely as a matter of course—as when one speaks of the weather.

"Not a thing," said John.

After a few common-place remarks, she escorted the lecturer to the parlors

and he was shown to a seat by the president's side. It was a trying ordeal to pass before the eyes of so many ladies, he being the only man in the room, and he was glad when he reached his seat. Mrs. Offrick almost immediately arose and introduced him thus:

"Ladies, we have tried to learn from books. To-night we are to be instructed by the living voice. We boast in these days of the power of the press; but it remains true that the most potent instrumentality of human progress is the speech of inspired men. The gospel had its first and most remarkable promulgation by evangelists. It was the earnest, palpitating eloquence of the visible Savonarola which conquered the frivolous women and more frivolous men of Florence; and the platform labors of Wendell Phillips, the gifted orator of the anti-slavery cause, did most to break the fetters of the blacks of this land.

"I have the pleasure of presenting to you this evening a genuine working man, who this very day has performed his hard day's work as a blacksmith in the railway shops, and comes to us, no doubt, weary in body, if vigorous in mind and soul. He *knows*—knows by bitter experience—the social wrongs which we are organized to discuss and combat; and if I am correctly informed"—bowing to Mrs. Delorme—"he is a living illustration of that wickedness which dooms the gifted to drudgery while mediocrity lives in ease amid the untasted intellectual pleasures which better men in cramped environment yearn in vain to enjoy. The gentleman will, by special request, discuss the relation of the new party's doctrines to socialism. Ladies, I have the pleasure"—taking John by the hand as he rose—"of introducing Mr. Cotterell, who will now address you."

The lecturer was greeted with a well-bred clapping of hands, Lena, who sat near the opposite wall, meantime stretching her neck a trifle in order to get a good view of the orator. It must be confessed that John did not feel fully at ease. What man would have felt at ease in such a presence? I once dined at a female college, and I sympathize with John. He would have felt more comfortable if his hands could have been induced to keep out of his way; but they insisted on being taken care of whether the speech ever got started or not. Even experienced orators never get entirely over this tribulation, and to address a club of ladies *only* in a drawing room will disturb any man's nerves at first. But his awkwardness and painful self-consciousness wore off as he proceeded and soon disappeared and were forgotten.

"Ladies and" (he had almost said "gentlemen") he began, bowing stiffly, "I don't think it will be necessary for me to tell you I'm not much of a ladies' man."

"All the better," interrupted the president. "We are glad to hear it. Ladies' men are more than abundant. It will be a treat to hear words from a man's man for once."

This was greeted with applause. John smiled slightly and proceeded. He had been trying to gain courage to pull from his pocket the elaborate notes he had carefully prepared, but the president's remark gave him a good cue for an exordium and he soon forgot all about the notes.

"Ladies, the president states it right. I am a man's man. I am a slave."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Lena.

"Yes, I am a slave. Not a slave of any one man, but of a class of men—the employing class."

"I assure the gentleman I had no intention of wounding his feelings," said the president, much worried. "I did not mean what I said in that sense."

"I hope you'll not think I took it that way at all," said John turning to the president. "I knew you didn't mean it that way. I was only saying your words hit a real truth."

"Pardon my interruption, Mr. Cotterell. I was obtuse not to have discerned your meaning. Please proceed," said the president.

"I was saying that, as a working-man, I am a slave to the employing class. Let me illustrate. I am working for the railroad company. The company is bound to support the republican party in this state, just like they're bound to support the democratic party in the southern states.

They know the democrats have no show here, and if the republicans don't win, men who'll legislate against railroads will. So, of course, the company has no use for a man that fights the railroad party. Now, the other night I made a socialist speech over here at a big republican rally, and all of us in the shops expect I'll get my time for that; and as General Manager Graham is in town to-day, I may get my walking papers to-morrow."

Lena was about to utter an exclamation at this, but instead sat as if suddenly petrified in the act of speaking. Many eyes forgot their breeding and looked her way, although, of course, John did not know why.

"Now, suppose I do," continued John, "then what? I have no money but what little wages are coming to me, and it won't take long to live that up. My boarding-house keeper will know I've lost my job and she will get anxious. One morning, pretty soon, I wake up without a cent. What am I to do then? If I try to sleep out of doors the police will run me in for a vagrant. If I ask anybody for something to eat the police will run me in for a beggar. If I steal they will send me over the road. I can't set up a shop of my own, for I have no money and no credit; and if I could, I'd starve to death before I could get work enough to pay board. A man that's hungry to-day can't wait for his first meal till he can compete with others and work up a trade for a new shop. So here I am in this rich city, without property, without money, without credit. What am I to do? Why, I've only one thing left me to do. I must hunt a job. And what does that mean? I can't set up an auction block, and auctioneer myself off before a lot of bidders—white slaves can't get bidders to come, but I must peddle myself around begging somebody to buy me. Of course I don't sell myself for life to one man, but all my life I must keep myself sold to some men or I'll starve. They say we sell our labor, but I take notice workmen don't understand it that way, nor employers either. If I hadn't sold *myself*, not merely my labor, do you suppose anybody would think of my being discharged for making a speech out of working hours? And, look at it! I sell my labor for as many hours each day as my body can stand it to labor, for only enough to give me strength to work again next day as long and as hard, and so on all my life through, and I'm so worn out when night comes that I'm not fit to have a mind. Besides, I've got to turn in right after dark, for I've got to be up before daylight, and if I don't sleep I'm not in shape to work as the boss thinks I ought to. And, mind, this is for life. And if it aint myself I sell—not my labor only—I don't see just where my labor comes in. There's a lady over there with a bright little boy in her lap. Now, just suppose that was a workman's boy—what would be his condition? *Sentenced to hard labor for life*, just like he had been born a convict!"

"How dreadful!" came from several ladies, and the mother referred to instinctively clasped her little boy to her bosom as if shielding him from some demon's clutch. Lena exclaimed, almost in a whisper, she was so agitated, "Awful!"

"I'm getting to be nearly 28, but I've never dared think of marrying. I mustn't let myself know I've got a heart like other folks; for think of a man out of work and his wife whom he loves starving at home—if he's got a home for her to starve in, if she hasn't been thrown into the street, as I've seen them in a storm in winter even, because being out of work he can't pay the rent in advance. Political economists say poor folks have no business to marry. It's taught in your colleges that way. Tell me we don't sell anything but our labor, when we even sell our right to fall in love and to marry—sell our hearts, you may say!"

"Shocking!" exclaimed Lena, this time very audibly.

(To be continued.)

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