

merely because some one would laugh at me if I did not, would be a motive of "human respect." But we must distinguish between human respect and a reluctance to give disedification to others by abstaining, which would be virtuous. To communicate automatically simply because all the others rise from their places to approach the rails would be "routine." A Communion, however, is not one of "routine" because constant practice makes it a habit requiring little effort—for that is a virtuous habit: nor because our emotions and pious feelings are not stirred by a religious act which we perform so continually, and hence get accustomed to' (*The Spouse of Christ*, p. 36). And here it may be well to explain that pious feelings are not everything in the spiritual life: they come and they go at God's good pleasure. If He gives them to make our path heavenwards easy and pleasant for the time, we should be grateful; if He withdraws them in order to harden our virtues with the freezing cold of temptation, difficulty, and discouragement, we can still, with His never-failing grace, do His will, and so remain pleasing in His sight.

The Storyteller

THE ASHTON EXCHANGE

Like a joyous young whirlwind, Rachel McCoy burst into the quiet home sitting-room. 'Mother McCoy!' she cried. 'I want you to listen, please!'

'I met Miss Chloe Deane down town,' Rachel began, 'and she asked me what I thought of taking the telephone exchange—running it here, you know, in this house. They decided two weeks ago to give it up, now that Mr. John's come back with money enough to take care of them. He says they mustn't bother with the thing any longer, and Miss Chloe and Miss Lydia are delighted. Right away they thought of me, and—'

'And I know what you thought of, right away,' said Mrs. McCoy, smiling.

'What I am always thinking of,' the girl replied, wistfully. 'It means a way for my music at last, if you and father are willing to let me accept. With a year or two of saving I could begin.'

Rachel had left her high school with one dear ambition—to study music, and in time to teach it. She had had small chance during school-days even to begin, although she had had a few lessons from the one instructor in town, Miss Lydia Deane, who soon had had to acknowledge that her pupil was overtaking her. So now Rachel's music was at a standstill. The family fortunes were too slender to do more for her dream than buy a shiny piano, on the instalment plan; and rack her brain as she would, there seemed no way to procure the means to the glorious end. Talent tingled in her finger-tips, but there, to all appearances, it was fated to remain.

'We'll talk it over with your father,' said Mrs. McCoy, secretly almost as excited as Rachel. 'I suppose old Mrs. Deane will have a holiday from now on.'

'Oh, old Mrs. Deane. She's not well, Miss Chloe says—takes no interest in their new plans, and won't eat. And that makes them all the gladder about giving up the exchange, especially as they're going on with their teaching and sewing just the same.'

'And, mother,' Rachel continued, 'I already understand how to manage the switchboard, from helping when they were sick over there, and Miss Chloe says that a week or two more of practice will put me in good trim. And after a while, I can begin to save and save.'

A family conference took place at supper, and finally the great question was settled in the affirmative. Mrs. McCoy would assist Rachel in the work, and fourteen-year-old Linda might prove a great help. Ashton was ten miles from the railroad, and although most of its citizens owned telephones, the exchange was not a large one, and the three McCoy's were confident that they could succeed with it. The future musician was on fire with happy expectation.

The next day, ensconced in the big front room at the Deane house, which for fifteen years had sheltered the local exchange, she began her training. While she sat that morning busily responding to calls, it seemed as if Ashton were suddenly all one tongue; and from the next room, old Mrs. Deane's monotonous arguing with her elder daughter flowed on like a vexing undercurrent. Into the girl's mind came a vision of the little old woman perched at this same window, bent crookedly before the board throughout the changing seasons. Then the picture faded, and her absorbing task went on, growing steadily easier and smoother, becoming more truly her own as she mastered it.

Miss Chloe thrust her head in at the door. 'Rachel,' she said, 'ma's pestering me with a dozen things to tell you. Don't let Mary Watkins talk to young Mrs. Green more than ten minutes; she'll hold the line all night if you don't cut her off. And when Jasper Wright's house calls up his store, ring long and hard, because his children are forever falling into wells and things, and he has to be sent for in a hurry. And the Benson number has changed lately; and—Mercy, ma, isn't that all? She says, charge those Graham children to hang up their receiver, else it'll dangle all night and leak electricity.' She drew her head back like a turtle.

'The idea,' remarked Miss Lydia, 'of her lying there fretting over the telephone, when she's freed for once from slaving over it!'

Miss Lydia was the younger of the Deane sisters, and had always resented the presence of the exchange in her home. While her sister surrendered it rather from a sense of duty, Miss Lydia felt that she was bidding glad good-bye to a loquacious intruder.

Miss Chloe came in the next day to help in case there should be any hitch. 'John's in yonder, trying to make mother laugh with his jokes,' she observed, as a bass voice boomed cheerily from the next room. 'The doctor looks puzzled; but the fact is, she's worn out with that switchboard. And we never could have got her away from it without John's help.'

'She used to seem so well, always,' Rachel ventured.

'Yes,' replied Miss Chloe, 'but this reaction simply shows that she wasn't.'

That second day, the work was troublesome. A thunderstorm had interfered with the current, and the wires seemed to twist and snarl with every call. In the afternoon Miss Chloe went down town, and the clamorous subscribers appeared to be taking advantage of her absence to confuse the young operator. Rachel was repeating 'Number?' in weary crescendo, when she heard the wheels of Mrs. Deane's rolling-chair. A moment later the invalid was beside her.

'Such goings on!' complained a querulous old voice that never had been very cross before. 'Child, you've put every call through crooked for the past half hour. It takes me to mend the lightning's mischief; it takes me.' She raised herself to her feet by Rachel's shoulder, and stood peering down at her. The sharp tones softened, wheedling.

'Honey, let me get there a minute; there's no reason why I shouldn't. Quick, before the girls come back!'

Not without misgivings, Rachel yielded. She helped the old lady gently into the chair, arranged cushions and brought a footstool. Mrs. Deane went swiftly to work. The pathetic droop left her figure; in the waning light, her face was as eager as a child's.

'That you, Allie Burns? Scott's drug store's busy now. How's little Benjie's arm? Too bad. Well, rub it well with the liniment I'm going to send down; now do as I tell you. Mrs. Wetherbridge, Charlie and Mac passed here, running uptown, ten minutes ago; heard 'em under my window. You can head 'em off at the court house. Listen, tell the Wares their black heifer has strayed off; I see her making for Denman's pasture. No. The doctor's gone down to Riverside, won't be back for an hour. My, my! Emily, put the baby in water as hot as she can stand; I'll ring up young Doctor Rice at the hotel. My, my!'

So she went on; her deft fingers worked quickly, and every moment her face lighted with a different