

'Of course, I know that justly, naturally, and professionally you have the right to kick, I mean object, but—Iris is an exception to all rules; she is in a class by herself. If you could only see her, once know her—as she is—you wouldn't blame me, you couldn't blame her—'

'Blame her, poor child, no no,' said the priest gently. 'But—but a mixed marriage is a sad business at best, Jack. Bless it as I may, and often must, I always feel that the devil is chuckling somewhere in the background. You may be able to keep his claws out of the bargain; but there's a big risk, my boy, a big risk.'

'There will be none here,' said Jack, and there was a glow of faith and hope and love in the young man's face that Father Hugh had not the heart to shadow with another doubting word.

II.

Beyond the dim room, lined with ponderous tomes, where the professor dwelt with his Greek gods and demi-gods, Parnassus lost its classic chill and ran into sweet riot of vine-wreathed porch, blooming rose-bower, and wide garden-bed, where all the dear old-time flowers held their own.

Here reigned supreme the fair daughter of the house.

'Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,
Queen lily and rose in one,'

Jack Devon's heart had sung when he met Iris Weatherby at the 'College Room' one year ago, and the yoke of her sweet sovereignty had been upon him ever since. And she was, indeed, as her lover had said, in a class by herself. In some subtle way the old professor's mind and thought seemed to have flowered in this one girl, for Iris was of that pure, perfect type of female beauty the Greek artists have immortalised—a beauty that could even bear the trying test of tears, for it was a hopeless Niobe that sat in the garden rose-bower on this June day—her lover, breathless with indignant surprise, at her side. He had just heard of the sudden impasse that blocked the happy course of their love—of the professor's ultimatum delivered this morning.

'I never dreamed he would object, Jack, especially as it was your uncle who would marry us. But, as dear mamma says, we must not expect to understand papa. He is so wise and so deep—so far beyond us—'

'Then, we'll leave him beyond,' said Jack, resolutely. 'The matter is very simple, darling. I'll just carry you off to Uncle Hugh's, and marry you in his parlor.'

'Oh, no, Jack, no! I couldn't. He—he would never forgive us.'

'Well, we could stand that, couldn't we, darling—together?' and Jack lifted the little hand he held to his lips.

'Yes, yes—I mean no—Jack! Oh, no. It would be so hard, so cruel to poor mamma! It would shut me out of her life, if papa were angry; it would break her heart, for I am all she has. And, of course, neither she nor papa can understand how you feel in the matter, why you cannot give way.' And as the sweet, tearful eyes were lifted to his, Jack felt—well, as if a faggot and stake were small trials of faith to this.

'Iris,' he said hoarsely, 'do you ask me to—'

'No, no!' she interrupted quickly. 'I understand, Jack, though they do not. It would be a sacrifice I would not dare to ask—dare to accept, Jack. It would be asking you to turn traitor to all that you hold true and holy. And I love your loyalty, your truth; for this very faith I know is a guiding star where I have been taught all is dark, cold, nothingness—'

'My darling!—and you will let such atrocious teaching influence you now,' said Jack, 'when your soul as well as your heart is crying out for Faith, Hope, Love—all that sweet soul craves? Be brave, dearest, and break away—'

'Oh, no, no,' she shook her head sadly, but resolutely, 'we must wait, Jack; we must wait. Perhaps when papa sees that—that my heart—is—breaking—'

'He won't see it,' interrupted her lover tempestuously. 'He is blind and hard as the old pagan gods with whom he lives. When these old Dryasdusts get a crank in their craniums, it's there for good and all, Iris. There's no hope for him, I tell you,' added the young man gloomily; 'no hope—'

'Oh, don't say that, Jack,' she faltered; 'I thought that for those like you, who can see stars in the darkness, that there is always hope and help. I don't know how, Jack,' she added, simply—'but can't you pray?'

'Pray?' echoed Jack, looking into the violet eyes uplifted with childlike truth to his.

'You believe there is a God who hears you,' she went on softly—'a Father, loving and tender and wise and powerful, Who guides and rules our hearts and lives. Surely He will help us in this trouble—if you ask Him, Jack. I have never been taught, but you know, Jack, you know how to pray. Try it, dear; and, though the faith had been a Devon heritage for generations, Jack felt he had never known how priceless was his birthright until he saw Iris turning from her darkness in sweet, trusting appeal to the God she did not know.'

But, despite all his Faith and Hope and Love, it was a very disconsolate young gentleman that broke into Uncle Hugh's study late that evening with his story of woe.

The story had to wait its turn, for there was a parish feud to be settled amicably between church sweeper and sexton, and the organist was there for full pontifical explanation of the new and old chant, and Mrs. Rafferty was lingering outside the door to say 'a word for Mickey,' who was 'in trouble wid the teacher,' while plans for the new schoolhouse strewed the big table in the study, and the shabby desk was loaded with pamphlets, papers, and letters—which would keep Father Hugh up to midnight at least. With all the cares, the sorrows, the burdens of a great parish upon him, perhaps Jack's troubles did not seem to Uncle Hugh the mighty things they were in the eyes of the young lover.

'Well, well,' he said, when at last his nephew found time and chance to burst out his indignant story; 'so the old pagan has gone back on us, eh, my boy? I was afraid you would not find it all plain sailing in such strange seas, Jack. And the pretty little pagan stands by her father. Most natural, I suppose, too.' There was perceptible relief in Father Hugh's tone. 'Never mind, my boy. It's a little hard, of course, at first, but it may be a bad business well ended for you, Jack. And there are plenty of other good girls in the world—'

'But there is only one—one wife in the world for me,' was the answer, and there was a thrill in the words that went to the good priest's heart.

And then, Jack related at length the story of that last interview, the kind heart softened more and more, until the clear eyes were dimmed with pitying tears for the white lamb that had never known Shepherd or fold.

'Poor child, poor child,' he said; 'she is an exception, as you say, Jack. This will be no mixed marriage, for she is one of us already in heart and soul.' And then suddenly a light flashed into his eyes, and he burst into a laugh. 'I believe I'll try it, Jack. I'll face old Zeus for you, myself.'

'You, uncle!' exclaimed the young man; 'why, you are the chief objection—it's the priest that is the difficulty! He swears he won't have one under his roof. He'll turn on you—'

'With all his thunderbolts, eh,' laughed Father Hugh, who, leaning back on his chair, was regarding his nephew with twinkling eyes. 'Well, it may be a fight, Jack, but I'm something of a Greek myself, and I'll risk it: for your sake I'll risk the "tug of war." We'll have it out, together, if I live, to-morrow.'

III.

Father Hugh was as good as his word. Though it was Sodality night and his promised talk on 'Vocations' would be greatly missed, though the architect was coming to discuss the lecture room of the new