

But what need to lengthen my story with a minute account of that long, long fight with heart-break and death? Suffice it to say that the new year had run its first quarter, and the buds of springtime were swelling, when once again Leonie Desmond was strong enough to leave her bed, and, with the aid of the protecting arm that had never failed her for a single hour through all that time of sorrow, to come down stairs and try once more to take up the burden of every day existence.

She looked so white, so fragile, so like a flake of snow that might vanish with a breath, that Allan Kirke, standing and looking down upon her, remembering all she had suffered and was still suffering, felt tears of pity well up into his eyes, and, lest she should perceive his weakness, bent down and touched her hair, as reverently as he would have stroked the green sod above his mother's grave.

"Little girl," he said, "do you know of what you remind me?" She glanced at him with a faint, wistful, pathetic smile, and shook her head. "A bit of thistle-down," he said, "floating just beyond my reach, and ready, at a careless touch or a chill breath, to vanish into the blue nothingness of space."

A few days later, chancing to find her alone when he came in, he was both startled and glad when she, for the first time, spoke to him directly of her trouble.

"Doctor Kirke," she said, "can you spare me a moment of your time? There is a question I must ask you."

He came at once and sat down beside her. "I would cheerfully devote a month of my time to you if by so doing I can lift one iota of the burden from your poor little heart," he said, and then waited in silence until she could speak.

"Have you received any word from—from him—since he—went away?" she faltered.

"None whatever, neither directly nor indirectly," he replied.

"Have you written to him?" she queried, with her questioning eyes searching his face.

"I have not. I thought best not to act independently of your instructions. If I have your permission, I will write to him at once."

"If you will copy this and send it to him in your name, without adding a syllable to it, I will be deeply obliged."

He unfolded the bit of paper and read:

TO ARTHUR DESMOND,
Melbourne, Australia.

Sir:—Feeling that you may be resting under a very serious misapprehension, I take this means of informing you that your wife, Leonie Desmond, is alive and in fairly good health.

DR. ALLAN KIRKE,
Portland, Oregon.

He arose, without a word, to comply with her request; but she also arose, and laid her hand upon his arm detainingly.

"One moment, doctor," she said. "Will you give me your promise never to write a line to him without my knowledge and consent?"

"Certainly I will, most freely," he answered. "I have neither the right nor the wish to communicate with him, except at your command."

"I thank you," she murmured, and sank down again, weakened and trembling from the momentary excitement.

"My brave little woman," he said, in gentle approval, touching lightly the hand that had lain for a moment on his arm.

"If the scoundrel waits for cringing, pleading appeals from her, he will not come back very soon. She is clear grit, thank heaven," he mused, as he sat in his study and copied the few terse lines she had given him.

Later in the day, as he was preparing to go out, she gave him a letter to post. When he took it from his pocket, afterward, to drop it in the box, he would have been less or more than human had he not glanced at the superscription. It was, "Rev. Alfred C. Bell, Rector St. ——— Church, Fredericksburg, Canada West."

Three weeks later he brought to her, one evening, a letter post-marked "Fredericksburg, Canada West." She opened it in the presence of his sister and himself, and, handing it to him, said, in a voice that was eloquent with feeling—

"My dear friends, you have asked of me no credentials; you have opened to me your hearts and home in the face of a cloud that would have closed the door of many a Christian house against me; you have done for me everything, and asked of me nothing. Because I have been silent, I trust you have not thought me unappreciative. Heaven grant that I may, in time to come, be able to prove my gratitude. At the present, the most I can do is to give you proof of my innocence of any intentional wrong doing. That proof, so far as my connection with Arthur Desmond is concerned, you will find here. Please read it."

"I will do so because you wish it," he replied, with scarcely less emotion than she evinced, "but I require no such proof to refute anything derogatory to you. The impress of a stainless soul is stamped upon your face, and is visible in your every act."

At these words she bowed her head and gave way to the first tears he had known her to shed through all her trouble.

The letter was brief, but very much to the point. It said—