

BAB, OR LIVES THAT TOUCHED.

PART I.

THE golden sunlight was beginning to fade in the land of flowers. A minute before it had shone in all its splendor, making more intense the blue of the gulf waters in the distance, the green and gold of the orange groves on shore, and the white of the little cottage nestling among them. How calm and peaceful the scene, as sea and earth waited the eventide.

Presently a window was thrown open in the cottage, and a daring, restless sunbeam, like a frisking lamb loitering outside the fold, flashed in and rested for a moment on the pale, emaciated face on the pillow. A ghastly smile played over the sick man's features, as he essayed to touch the dancing ray with his nerveless fingers. "A good omen," he faintly whispered to the girl bending over him. "See!" One moment it rested carelessly on the head of the mute watcher, then, with a half-reluctant motion, disappeared, leaving naught but gray shadows behind.

"Evelyn, love,"—how faint and far the voice sounded to the ear bent to catch the words—"you will send the letter to your uncle as soon as I am gone, and remember all I have said?"

"Yes, dearest father, everything shall be as you wish; but are you feeling worse?"

"I am so tired, love, and dread so leaving you alone. If only Harold had—"

"There, don't worry, father, God will be my friend. He is ever the orphan's friend, you have told me."

"'When thy father and mother forsake thee, then the Lord will take thee up.' Even so; but I sometimes seem to forget. Now I think I will try and sleep, I am so weary."

"Dearest father," and the girl pressed a long, loving kiss on the cold forehead.

A moment later, the door opened softly and a dusky form crept in. The watcher motioned her to a seat. With a silent nod, the colored woman sank into it and covered her face with her apron. Noiselessly the two kept their vigil till the last faint gleam of daylight had fled, then, knowing the superstitious nature of her companion, Evelyn Fletcher rose and lighted a lamp, carefully shading it from the face of the sleeper. Going over to the black woman, she said, in a whisper, "You are tired, Mollie; lie down there on the couch."

"No, missus, you rest."

"Not now; after—" A moan from the invalid interrupted her, and in an instant she was by his side. One glance, and she knew the worst.

"Mollie!" Her tones were full of agony, and the servant knew that the supreme moment of her young mistress' sorrow was at hand.

"Yes, dearie."

There was no outcry, no struggle. Weaker and weaker throbbed the pulse, shorter and shorter came the breath, one sigh like that of a tired child yielding to sleep.

"Dar, honey, ye kin do no more; he's done gone home, bress de Lo'd."

With her own hands the girl closed the eyes that had looked their last so lovingly on her, and folded the thin hands across the pulseless breast.

"Shall I fetch Missie Bailey?" questioned Mollie, in an awed whisper.

"No—or, yes, if you wish."

There was no fear, no shrinking at thus being left alone with her precious dead; rather a satisfaction to kneel by the bedside and pour out her pent-up grief in prayer to Him who could hear, and loving, tender words to him who could not hear. It was not Evelyn Fletcher's first acquaintance with death. Again and again had she striven to hold some dear one back when his icy hand was upon them, but ever in vain.

It was evening of the same day upon which Evelyn found herself an orphan, alone in sunny Florida, that a sunbeam—and who knows but what it was the same one that kissed the face of the dying man there?—flitted boldly through the branches of a tree guarding the window in the second story of a rambling old house on one of Salt Lake City's broad and handsome streets, and rested on the face of another human being, whose feet were already lapped by the waves of the mystic river.

"Mother, mother, don't die. Don't go and leave me here alone. I can not, can not, live without you," cried the girl, scarcely more than a child, who lingered by the bedside.

"Hush, Bab, my precious baby, you know mother would stay if she could for her darling's sake; but God will take care of you, I am sure of it, for I have prayed so earnestly night and day since ever you came to my arms, that He would deliver you from the power of those who have wrecked my life."

"But I shall miss you so. Oh, mother, if you would only take me with you."

"Almost I can say that I wish I might; but you have promised me, Bab, that you will never become a polygamous wife."

"Yes, I have promised, and I will die rather than break it."

"The Lord help you. But hark! Don't I hear your father's voice? Yes, 'tis he; go bring him, quick."