

Chapter 1

THE NEED OF HEALTH AND MONEY

MRS. BRUN softly closed the door and followed the doctor into the hall. "Doctor, I must know what your verdict is. I cannot bear the suspense any longer. I fear that John is not so strong these last few days, although he does not complain."

The grave old family doctor looked at her in a sympathetic manner, and said kindly, though firmly: "As I have told you repeatedly, Mrs. Brun, John has studied too hard. He had a great ambition to gain a scholarship, and devoted every moment to attain his object; but he sacrificed his health, for he did not rest and exercise as he should. He must have a change of climate. Could you not send him away somewhere to escape our rigorous northern winter - say to Florida or to California?"

A shade of sorrow and of perplexity passed over the patient face of Mrs. Brun as she exclaimed: "Oh, sir, how can we? We must talk it over. Tell me truly, doctor, is he going down as Catherine did?"

"I greatly fear so; but talk the matter over with your family, and let me know your decision tomorrow. I wish to emphasize the fact that whatever is done for your son must be done soon."

The doctor's hand was upon the door, when he turned to the mother with a kindly smile, and said: "If you are worrying about Catherine's bill, you just forget that for the time. Is not this child worth more than all the money in the world?"

"Oh, to me he is far more precious than gold! No sacrifice would be too great, if I only knew what to do or how to manage. You have already done so much for us, I feel that your bill should be paid at once."

"Now give me a chance to help that much. Forget the bill, and plan speedily a change for John."

Mrs. Brun smiled her thanks after the departing doctor. Her heart was too full for words. She sat down on a sofa in the hall. No tears fell from her burning eyes. She clenched her hands tightly in her agony, and strove to control herself. She was dazed by the blunt announcement of the doctor. Could it be that John, her only boy, was stricken with the terrible "white plague," and would soon be buried beside his only sister, who had succumbed to the dread disease in the

spring? "I must be brave. I cannot give way to my grief now." And she prayed: "O Father, help me in my affliction. Open the way that my son may be restored to health and strength." Quieted and comforted by communion with the Source of all wisdom, she at last arose and entered the large, sunny living room.

Reclining in an easy-chair before the window was a tall, pale lad about sixteen years of age. He appeared decidedly handsome to his adoring mother's eyes as he turned languidly toward her. She asked in a solicitous tone, "Is the room too cool for you, son?"

"Not in the least, mother. Isn't this sunshine glorious? What do you say to my walking down to the dean's this morning and talking with him about entering college this fall?"

The sorrowing mother turned to the table and pretended to arrange the books. How could she let him see, by her face, that all his eager plannings were futile?

"Of course, I know very well that you and father cannot afford to send me, after the heavy expense of Catherine's long sickness; but you know that the dean spoke to me about helping him for my tuition. He said he needed someone as a sort of private secretary, and it need not interfere with my regular studies. Oh, if I had only won that scholarship! I feel confident that I would have done so if it had not been for dear sister's death. I could not apply myself to my studies after that."

His mother crossed quickly to his side, and throwing her arms about his frail shoulders, whispered: "Mother knows all about it, my son; and the dear Father knows, too. Let us not worry, but trust to His guidance. Yes," she added cheerfully, as she arose, "I believe it will be a fine plan to talk with the dean."

Mrs. Brun performed her usual duties that morning with her brain fairly afire with many plans for obeying the doctor's instructions, but none of them were feasible. After the evening work was finished, and John had retired, exhausted by the unusual exercise, Mr. Brun seemed very uneasy, and said dejectedly: "John is failing. What has the doctor to say about him?"

His wife steadied herself by the edge of the table, as though to support herself for the trial before her, and answered in a strained voice: "I want to talk with you about him. Let us go across to father's."

"But why go there?"

"It is necessary for us to take them into our confidence. Maybe they can help us, and surely we need help now."

He followed her silently, and then questioned, alarmed, "What is it?"

She hurried on, only motioning him to follow. As soon as they were seated in the cozy sitting room of her parents, she confided to them her conversation with the doctor, saying, in a choked voice: "What can we do to save our boy? Times have been so hard this summer, and we certainly have nothing left now to sell. The doctor's bill for Catherine's sickness is not paid yet, either, nor our team paid for. Without the team, we could not earn our daily bread. Dear old Doctor Rob-bins, though, gave me some courage, for he absolutely refuses to receive any money on his bill until we have done something for John. He realizes that what is done must be done very soon. What a comfort to have friends, real friends, in a time of trouble!"

After a prolonged discussion of ways and means, in which Mrs. Brim's father took no part, the old gentleman suddenly spoke: "Why not send him to his Uncle John for the winter? John invited us to go there last winter, but mother and I feel we are too old to go so far away from home."

His daughter gasped. "What! Away down in Mexico!" as though he had proposed sending the boy to the planet Mars.

Her father answered confidently: "Why not? John has often written of the fine climate, and there would be no danger of the tropical fevers in the high altitude of Mexico City. I know that John and Elsie and their girls would welcome and take good care of the boy."

"Yes; but," said practical Mr. Brun, "how could we raise the money for such a long and expensive journey? Doubtless John would help us if he knew of our predicament, but there is no time to wait for an interchange of letters now. The cold weather will soon be here."

Grandfather Turner raised his hand to command silence. Then he announced: "I have a little idea which I hope will materialize into something definite tomorrow."

His daughter interrupted him: "Oh, father, you are so -"

"Please don't thank me, nor ask me tonight what it is that I have in mind. Let us now read the restful and trust-inspiring twenty-third psalm and have a few words of prayer together."

Grandfather Turner earnestly pleaded with the Father to bestow His blessing upon them, and if it was His will that the boy be sent away, to open the right path to pursue.

As they arose from their knees, they stood silent a moment: then Mrs. Brun broke forth affectionately: "Oh, how thankful I am for my

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dear, good parents! We must go now, as Frank has to go to work so very early in the morning.”

“Yes, Rachel, added her father, “you had better make ready John’s clothes. I believe that the way will open soon.”

This was more than the already overwrought mother could hear, and with a hasty “Good night,” she slipped out into the night by her suffering but less demonstrative husband.