

HIS BANNER OVER ME

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

MORE STATELY MANSIONS

THIS WAS TO BE a year of great change for the Snell family. First, Amy began attending the little College of Puget Sound, a deeply spiritual school in those days. New vistas were opened to me, both in the type of earnest young people who began coming to our home, and in the courses of study. I could scarcely wait to graduate from high school and begin those fascinating subjects.

It was in that same month of September that our parents decided we could proceed with the long projected plan of remodeling the house: enlarging the living room, making a hall and staircase and a whole wonderful upstairs with closets galore. It was the most exciting adventure which had ever befallen us. I pondered over the plans, wondering how they could put on an upstairs without taking off our present roof. Would we be wide open to the stars for a while? And suppose it rained! Since Father could not drive a nail straight, all the work was to be done by a carpenter neighbor.

To me there is deep and touching significance in the fact that when God came down to earth in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, He chose the trade of a carpenter. With His own hands He measured and sawed and nailed the timbers which went into the making of little homes. He was homeless while here, with no place to lay His head, yet made homes for His creatures. Houses built by the Son of God! And when He returned to His peaces He assured us, **“In My Father’s house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . .”** The divine Carpenter, still building homes!

What a proof this is that we shall know and love the dear ones who have departed, for since the beginning of time a home has not been a home if lived in alone!

That is why God would have the marriage bonds kept clean, so little Christian families for whom He is preparing homes, might not be sullied or broken up. The family around the hearth, around the family altar . . . how He loves this gift He has given to man! May God forgive our nation for holding it lightly.

I glimpsed a little of these truths when the men came to work on our home. There was real pain to me when the side wall of the living room was torn off. Most of the work involved adding on, not tearing off. So in the kitchen was left the old record of our heights, beginning so close to the floor and growing upwards.

Years later, after the place had been sold, my husband and I asked the owner if we might look through the house. She graciously consented. The measuring record had been painted over, but I knew it was still there. And under the wallpaper in the back bedroom I knew was written in my sprawling hand, a history and record of all our family. I smiled, thinking of the little secret.

It is impossible to believe that within the walls of a real home something is not retained of the events which transpired there. Surely the walls are sentient to some extent. As we walked through the rooms, they seemed to welcome me back. In this room Cathie was born, in that one my mother died, before this big window Amy was married; in this corner, my husband and myself. Upstairs—my heart began thudding as I climbed again the stairs which led to the room which had been a prison cell for me. Can the house forget? Obviously the longer the residence, the dearer the house becomes. Apartments can know little of this. I often think of the long, long time we shall live in those heavenly homes and how very dear they will become to us as the centuries roll by.

Mother marshaled her forces like a good general.

“Now girls, you know we planned to have this work done as economically as possible, and that means we must all help. There is nothing you girls can do while the carpentry work is going on, but you will be called upon to bear some inconveniences during that time. After the carpenters go home there will be the indoor finishing to do, which will take all of us.”

Little did Mother know how prophetically she spoke about bearing inconveniences. We were in the worst stage of confusion, with plaster dust and dirt filling the air and sifting into the kitchen, when Mother and I came down simultaneously with severe cases of quinsy. We ran high fever and it seemed as though the painful thing in my throat had been there years when it finally decided to break right into my mouth. I began to get better, but found that I had been much weakened.

We girls were nearly wild with joy on the day the stairs went up. They seemed so long and wide, as though they would reach almost to Heaven. From a two-bedroom cottage our home had been transformed into four-bedroom spaciousness, with clothes closets to spare. I felt as though there was more room for my soul to grow.

Miles and miles of woodwork. Every spare moment we spent sandpapering, going over and over the woodwork, smoothing it down until it satisfied Mother, who insisted that anything that was worth doing at all was worth doing well. I am afraid that she did more than her share. After this, a light stain was applied; and then two coats of varnish. Upstairs and downstairs—the new living room, the hall and the closets.

Opening off the dining room was a stair closet, with deep, wide shelves. The top shelf was devoted to Mother's medicine chest and various family remedies; the wider shelves below for magazines. In no time at all, however, this became a dumping ground for anything we wanted to discard in a hurry or for which we could find no other place.

When the shelves filled to overflowing, we held a general cleaning out, in the course of which we discovered many treasures thought to have been lost.

The only furniture in the hall was a hat rack, on which later were to hang more and more masculine headgear and overcoats as the three Snell girls began growing up.

Although we were well into the new century, Father had thought that electric lights were too “new fangled” to install. So much pressure was brought to bear upon him by his family and the Uncles, and even my boy friend who was studying to be an electrician, that Father gave the latter the contract to install electricity.

The wonderful day arrived when we finally moved upstairs. Amy and I had previously slept together in a three-quarters iron bed in the little crowded bedroom downstairs, Cathie occupying a single bed in the same bedroom. Cathie now had the rear bedroom upstairs, which was so large it took in the whole width of the house. Amy and I shared the new double iron bed in the front bedroom.

I little dreamed when we moved in, carefree and happy, that this room was to be a prison place to me for many years.

What joyous times we had! Whole troops of university students came, girls and boys. We moved some of the furniture back to the rooms before the woodwork was finished, so there would be nothing in the dining room except the dining table stretched to its fullest capacity.

Around it would gather some of the university students who were putting themselves through college on next to nothing, and how they did appreciate a good, home-cooked meal! On Sunday evenings after dinner the whole group would gather around the old organ and “raise the roof” singing the glory song, after which we would all attend young people’s meeting, remaining for church services.

After the final coat of paint was put on the outside of the house, we all took pride in it. It was my father’s habit when he started off to work morning and noon, always to turn three times and look back at the house, even taking a few steps backwards before he disappeared over the hill. I knew just how he felt, for somehow the conviction had come to me that not only our home was enlarged but my soul was building more stately mansions.

~ end of chapter 24 ~

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