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Stairs of Sand

By Anna M. Regan

(Continued from Last Week)
CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Sara Leavitt arrived in Boston one August day as the whistles were blowing for noon. The rain had been driving at the car windows all the morning, making it impossible to catch a glimpse of the landscape that the train passed through.

She had two hours before her train left for Cape Cod, so she checked her suitcase, took her umbrella and started out through the rain drenched streets to find a place to eat. On the next street she saw a clean-looking restaurant, evidently kosher, for the name under the word restaurant was the name "Kirshbaumer, proprietor."

Sara determined, before she left Glenville, to follow every trail that promised adventure. Here was a chance to peep into the ways and customs of a people whose manner of living was totally unknown to her.

"Better I help you," she said. "That special chicken soup is so good, and the broiled chicken livers is special today. You don't got to be afraid of them chicken livers."

The chickens they come out of was killed this morning, for sure."

After the soup course, Sara was served a pink liquid in a small two-handled cup. In it there floated slivers of a red vegetable, presumably beets, and both vegetable and soup had no flavor that any normal palate could detect.

On the wall near Sara's table, hung a glazed sign reading:

"Patrons of this Restaurant Will Kindly Refrain from Smoking on Friday Night and Saturday." Sara recalled the fact that Saturday was the Jewish Sabbath. Perhaps that was the reason for the sign.

"For heaven's sake, Morganson," one of the men said to the other, "get a vacuum cleaner or something. Where was you raised, anyhow?"

The man addressed stopped using the bread method and had recourse to his knife, whereat Morganson was again called.

"Morganson, is that the way to behave—biting your gravy with a knife," the other can cried. "I'm asking you!"

"Well, what should I do with it?" Morganson protested. "Leave it lay?"

Sara smiled into her napkin. Ringing along the wall from Sara's table ran a counter heavily loaded with food, cans of pickles and sausages, tastefully decorated with strips of colored paper.

Sara finished a very satisfactory luncheon and was surprised that the cost was only fifty cents. She informed Mrs. Kirshbaumer that she had enjoyed the meal and might be back again in the near future.

The walls of the restaurant also claimed a good share of Sara's admiration. Ornate they were—with lavish use of stained glass, combined with scenes of Jewish life painted on satin-wood and mahogany.

She wished she had time to outline some of the scenes worked out on the panels. She tried to convert some of them to memory to be made into sketches later.

Sara felt very well pleased with herself for coming into the restaurant to dine. She felt that she would remember for some time her first adventure along her new, free road of life.

When Sara left the restaurant the rain was still falling heavily but she determined to continue her walk down the street and around the square to the depot. She felt that she couldn't stand it to sit alone so cramped and choked there. She would think constantly and brood over her rebellion of family cares, and the self pity which she had allowed to drug her in those days back home, when the family was together and when she could have filled them all with contentment and happiness.

At the end of the street, Sara saw a broad thoroughfare lined with shops of all kinds. She turned into it, intending to window shop and look closer at some pretty dresses in one of the windows. One of the models, a blue silk frock, took her eye at once. How becoming it would be to Lois' blond prettiness. Lois had been so helpful to everyone of late, too. Thus determined, she hurried into the shop to purchase the dress if the size was right.

It was so comforting to be able to purchase a pretty gift and not feel guilty about it.

The time for her train's departure was rapidly approaching, so she hurried back to the depot. A bridal party was passing through the depot as she entered. Loud, merry, and shrilly-spoken they were. Evidently above the middle-class they appeared. She had a glimpse of the pretty white-faced little bride. A large overdressed woman, probably her mother, crowded up closely beside her, talking fast, evidently arguing with her all the time. The groom, dark, boldly handsome, unmistakably foreign, flashing white teeth constantly, laid a hand on his bride's arm.

The story of this marriage was plainly written, Sara decided. For money or position, a young girl had been forced to marry a man she did not love. What would the future hold for a couple brought together in this way? It seemed easy to prophesy.

Sara thought of Hadda's glorified face as she came from the altar supported by her husband's arm.

She was glad to hear her train called and settled down on the last lap of her journey, surrounded with reading matter that would help her pass the long gray afternoon. She drew from her handbag a letter she had received from Hadda the day before she left home. She had read it over several times already, but but she decided to read it again in order to feel the deep love and intense interest it breathed into her soul. The letter read:

Just received your oh, so very welcome letter telling so vividly of the uprooting of our family from their old hearthstone and the reestablishing of them in a new home where the environment will not be hard for Grandmother to become used to.

I received your check for my part of rent of hunting preserve. Quite an idea for the movies in all that. It's complete the story, the man you rescued in the Den should have fallen for you. Perhaps you'll find the right one there beside the Atlantic. As I write this I can see the blue Pacific breaking on our shore. Neil and I spent the past week at Athol Springs, a resort built by a man that Neil knew in New York. He was on a park planning board there for years. I'll inclose what Neil has written about the place. He is going to send it to a newspaper man he knew very well in Boston. This man's name is James Davis.

Neil says he would like to have you meet Davis, he's such a fine fellow.

Write soon, won't you, dear sister, and give me your first impression of Cape Cod.

Athol Springs, California, August 1st.

This oasis in the desert threatens to become another Miami for winter tourists. God made the desert a healing place for many of man's ills. Man might as well

mensity, silence and creeping splendor in comfort.

Athol Springs is on the western rim of the Mohave desert—and is sheltered from the hot winds by the snow-capped San Jacinto. It is four hundred and fifty feet above sea level and "the season" is from October to June. Eastern crowds are flocking here and liking it.

The climate is dry, invigorating; the average temperature at noon is 85 degrees, but at night drops to 50. There is little humidity and fogs are unknown. The highways from Los Angeles, paved the entire way, is an easy six-hour drive.

There are oranges and grape-fruit in abundance and date farms are most productive. The unquestioned charm of the desert is its remoteness and air of mystery. Especially is this true at night when it literally whis-pers in monotonous undertones, and in wordless rhymes.

Just now the desert is an inferno and can be endured only a few hours by an outsider. The heat is blistering and there is the odor of dead flowers in the air. They tell, however, that when winter comes it blooms into a flame of strange flowers and wild plants.

On the desert at dusk, little streaks of fire often leap out and dance across the barren wastes as though a world was bursting with heat. The moon hangs sullen like a blood-red tangerine. Night winds are soft, but intoxicating.

The greatest lovers of the desert are the city bred. The native professes to hate it but never leaves it.

Dawn like night, also casts its magic spell. There is the scent of wild sage musk, the brilliance of the newly risen sun and the whis-pers!

Desert vegetation is picturesquely named and there is real romance in the naming of native wild flowers—so very fascinating in their mixed coloring and exotic perfumes.

"I do hope, Sara, that it will be your good fortune to meet James Davis. Now, be sure and write me your very first impressions of the Cape Cod country, of Aunt Anne and the neighbors. I have read a lot about the quaint characters of that part of the country.

Neil and I send warmest love to you—to Aunt Anne and to everyone at home.

Your loving sister, Hedda.

"South Dunham!" the brakeman opening the car door, yelled his loudest, so as to be heard above the rattle of the train and the shriek of the wind; "South Dunham!"

The brakeman's cap was soaked through, his hair was plastered on his forehead, his nose glistened as if varnished. Over his shoulders ropes of rain whipped and lashed across the space between the cars. The car windows streamed as each succeeding gust lunged its freshet against them.

Sara pulled back from a contemplation of golden California to the gloom and approaching darkness in a passenger coach that rattled and bumped over an uneven road bed; looked about for the first time at the other passengers in the car. There were but four of them and they did not seem greatly interested in the brakeman's announcement.

In a seat in the rear a red-faced man slept soundly. Two elderly men sitting together in the left-hand aisle dined on their apparently endless talk concerning the low price of cranberries, the scarcity of scallops on the flats and other topics pertaining to their daily life.

A man, two seats ahead of her, stirred uneasily on the lumpy cushion, looked at his watch and then at the time table in his hand, noted that the train was an hour late and audibly cursed the railway company, the whole shore from South Boston to Provincetown and the fates that had brought him to the place.

Across from her set a black-haired young man, who with his suitcase on his knees was writing busily in a large note book. Their glances met and held for a minute. Brown eyes looked deeply into deep-set gray eyes. There was a lean, dark face, tanned to swarthy tones, eyes startlingly grey in their framing of dark brows and sunburnt skin—a square jaw and a dogged mouth with the sensitive, upward curve at its corners. The mouth closed in a straight line that seemed to contradict the inherent sweetness of those upturned corners.

She spent some time studying the very prepossessing young man across the aisle. She decided she would like to know him. She had met very few men of his type. He bent to the writing before him and seemingly paid no further attention to her or the other passengers.

The train slowed down and crept on till the car in which Sara was seated was abreast the lighted windows of a small station, where it stopped. Peering through the water-streaked pane at the end of her seat, she saw dim silhouettes of uncertain outlines moving about. They moved with provoking slowness.

Then behind the door, which the brakeman, after announcing the station, had closed again, sounded a booming laugh. The heartiness of it warmed Sara's lonely heart.

The laugh was repeated, as a man entered the car. He was a big man, broad-shouldered, inclined to stoutness, wearing a cloth cap and a heavy ulster, the collar of which was turned up. Above the collar bristled a short grayish beard.

The face was sunburned, with little wrinkles about the eyes and curving lines from the nostrils to the corners of the mouth. The upper lip was shaved, and the eyebrows were heavy and black. Cap, face and ulster were dripping with water.

The big man paused an instant in the doorway, evidently to finish a conversation previously begun. He then closed the door, and smiling broadly, swung down the aisle.

The pair of calamity prophets broke off and greeted him almost jovially.

"Hello Cy!" cried one. "What's the south shore doin' over here?"

"Broke loose from your moor-in's, have you?" demanded the other. "Did you ever see such a storm?"

The man in the ulster shook hands with each of his questioners, removing first a pair of wet, heavy leather gloves.

"Don't know's I ever did, Bill," he answered. "I come over this morning to attend to some business at the court house. Then I stepped over to see Hank Fletcher. You remember him; he lived at Rush Junction some years ago. Stayed at his house all the afternoon, and then he offered to drive me. Here to the station. Hank's nearsighted, and he drove a new horse and I couldn't use my glasses 'cause of the rain. Sometimes we was in ruts and sometimes we was in the bushes.

"Well, you caught the train anyhow," observed Bill. "Yup. Easy at that."

The big man nodded at Sara and came down to her seat.

"Evenin' young lady," he smiled, "you must be the girl Mrs. Shattick's expectin' on this train from Boston. I told her I'd keep my weather eye cocked for you and take you up from the depot when we get there, if we ever make it. Our town ain't it none too well, yet."

"It's so kind of you, indeed," Sara smiled as contagious. "I thought maybe there'd be a bus to take."

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