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The Middle Ground

By Marion Robinson.

THE FAMILY QUARREL Chapter 18

A climax of a sort, came on a Sunday.

Luther had been getting well fast enough now to go on long drives and fairly long walks. His hollow cheeks had filled out and his huge eyes did not stare so out of his face. He had even gotten into laughing tussle with his small sister, and had come off much the best and not even winded by the struggles of that vigorous young lady.

"You'll be going to church this morning, I expect," Mrs. Talbot said gently at the breakfast-table. Claire's mouth at once went agape at Luther. The whole family were assembled about the table, but they were not eating. Jordan sat stonily in his chair, waiting the arrival of Donald who, as usual, was late getting in from his swim.

Mrs. Talbot looked anxiously at the muffins, which would be no good if they were cold. Jane sat looking very much bored by everything. Claire was cross because she hated getting up early, and Amy hated Sunday on general principles.

"I don't think Loo is well enough—it was the old excuse she always made.

"Oh, we might try it," Luther said hurriedly.

Claire frankly pouted.

"I hate church," she burst out. "It makes me nervous."

"Does it make you nervous to worship your Creator?" Jordan asked scathingly.

"Jane of course, you're going?" Mrs. Talbot was so upset by the row she had innocently started that she was ready to weep.

"Well, no, I don't think I shall," Jane said. "It doesn't make me nervous as it does Claire, it just doesn't interest me. I never went to college. Going through a set ceremony of words isn't religion to me—I can't find my Creator in that."

"And where can you find Him?" Jordan would have annihilated his family with his eyes, could eyes alone have killed.

"In my laboratory at college," Jane said cheerfully. "In the wonderful combinations of chemicals and the marvelous intricate machinery of the human system, in the healing power of herbs and drugs, Jane was quite evidently trying to put her ideas into language as simple and untechnical as possible. But her hearers, at least her parents, grasped nothing of this.

Jane would someday be a marvellous physician. She had a real scientist's devotion to her profession. She felt that the mystery of life and death lay in her hands when she was dissecting, and that if she could only know a little more about this complex system of nerves and impulses, she could really gain an insight into the causes and the results of things.

But how could these old people and how especially could little Mrs. Talbot know that the girl's devotion to the task of improving and soothing and prolonging life had in it any elements of religion? Once she had peeped inside a medical book of Jane's—to find a map of the nervous system which looked to her like nothing on earth but a tangle of black lines, whose outline was the human figure without any clothes on.

A hot argument followed with Jordan. To stop it, Mrs. Talbot remarked, watching with relief Donald's figure appearing—

"Oh, here he comes, I'll just pour the coffee. I'm sure he's going to church."

"Donald!" Jane laughed. "Dear me, not he. He's an atheist. It's more effect than this remark, in the way of creating sensation."

Jordan rose, towering above the table.

"He's a guest under my roof, so I can't order him out. And if I did, you women!" this with extra sarcasm "would contradict me. But I shall not sit at table with an unbeliever, and—"

He left. Donald entered, eyes sparkling and skin glowing from his exercise.

"You'd better all come, don't you think—just to please him?" Mrs. Talbot began timidly. Jane explained to Donald, who laughed.

"Why tread on the toes of prejudice?" the young doctor asked. "Jane, don't you realize that he can't take in these new ideas? You old, the arteries begin to harden in the forties, those leading to the brain atrophy. You really can't expect anything dead to function. Of course I'll go."

"It's all because we have breakfast together," said young Amy. "Why do families insist on eating with each other first thing in the morning? No wonder we fight!"

This explanation, which she did not understand, angered and hurt Mrs. Talbot.

"This from Amy! The young lady within a day of 18, was getting on much too fast for her mother. Mrs. Talbot also rose in anger.

DONALD LEAVES Chapter 19

Everything seemed to be wrong. Poor Amy Talbot went about her work with brows drawn together into a worried frown—a frown more worried than usual, that is.

Her children approved of nothing. Claire smiled in superior fashion at the new furniture in the place, shiny with varnish and beeswax polish and brave with curlines, and looked shocked when she was told of the "old things" that had been sold some years ago. The only thing in the house she cared for, it appeared, was the mahogany table that stood in her room as a washstand—a piece more than 100 years old and only put there because the newer washstand had a weak leg!

New furniture was old-fashioned, old-fashioned furniture was fashionable, it seemed! That was a paradox which Mrs. Talbot made no attempt to understand; she merely knew that she was criticized for having let a garretful of old things go.

That was a detail though. "I can be a good Christian and not go to church," Claire had said, and Jane had agreed with her.

How could that be? Not to go to church was to be wicked—at least to be a heathen, which was wicked. The Talbots belonged to one denomination, as did all the village since there was no other church within miles. The minister was an old man who gaged goodness by church attendance, a man who once had large congregations but who had asked for a small church in the country because of ill health.

Luther, it appeared, had leanings toward another denomination!

"They have a broader point of view," he explained to his mother. This, too, was disturbing. Amy Talbot unconsciously believed that the only right way to think was the way her particular church taught. Of course, some benighted people were actually brought up in other religions, which was a misfortune—but how could anyone trained in her church ever turn from it for another variety of worship?

Nothing she did, poor woman, was right.

Her ways of working were wrong. Jane changed back the kitchen to her own efficient plan after her mother interfered, and Amy dared not displace an object after that. The girls told her new ways to work—actually changing about baking and sweeping days to save labor, and sliding over jobs and actually reducing the tasks, or eliminating them.

It was less work, of course, but somehow Mrs. Talbot could not feel that the house was clean if it had not a daily scrupulous going over.

Then the talk! Jane stopped at nothing. The most delicate subjects were picked up and discussed by her in the most casual way. She did not mind what she mentioned in Donald's presence—the talk went on in the village was discussed at length, and his hereditary gone into, and various pathological details introduced that made the mother fidget in agony. People just shouldn't talk about such things! There was nothing about life, birth, love, death, sex—down to mere commonplaces that these two were not ready to talk about. Of course both being doctors, they went into medical discussions which the poor lady, sitting by doing her mending, could not understand but which were all the more shocking to her for that.

So says Mrs. MacPherson of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound

Brantford, Ont.—"I was always tired and the least exertion would set me out for a day or two. I had a pressing pain on the top of my head, pain in the nape of my neck, and when I stooped over I could not get up without help, because of pain in my back. I did not sleep well and was nervous at the least noise. I kept house, but I was such a wreck that I could not sweep the floor nor wash the dishes without lying down afterwards. A friend living near me told me what Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound had done for her so I began to take it. With the first bottle, I felt brighter and got so I could wash dishes and sweep without having to lie down. Later I became regular again in my monthly terms. I have taken ten bottles all told and am now all better. I can truly say that your wonderful medicine cannot be beaten for putting health and vim into a woman."

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Ask your druggist for genuine "California Fig Syrup" which has full directions for infants in arms, and children of all ages, plainly printed on bottle. Mother! You must say "California" or you may get an imitation fig syrup.

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Lizzie Forbes who, to use the village term, "got into trouble." Lizzie was 18, stupid, rather pretty. She was being kept, working for her board, in the house of a woman universally praised for her charity.

Mrs. Talbot passed Lizzie on the road without speaking to her. Amy had been taught to do the same thing—"though I feel ashamed of myself," she protested. Jane, with her usual energy, went into this matter. She dragged in Donald, who pulled the girl through a painful birth when he was summoned hurriedly, as the nearest doctor. Donald probably saved her life.

Neither Donald nor Jane condemned, nor did they seem to think that Lizzie had lost the right to associate with her fellow mortals. Claire was furious with "the man in the case" and wanted the law on him, demanded that he be made to support her. The man was a church member, which drew from Donald a sweeping condemnation of "Christians" and from Luther of "hypocrites." Young Amy, hearing and approving, gathered a huge armful of roses and carried them around to Lizzie's home.

Finally when Donald announced he was leaving, Mrs. Talbot sighted with relief. One cause of disturbance was going!

A HEATED TALK Chapter 20

The evening before Donald left, he sat with Jane out under the trees talking until so late that Mrs. Talbot feared the girl would be ill from lack of sleep. She herself slept uneasily, and once she awoke and lay staring into the dark, conscious of the low murmur of voices on the lawn below.

It was easy to hear, because Jane had insisted that the family sleep with all the windows open top and bottom, in the summer.

Mr. Talbot permitted himself half a windowful of fresh air, and in the winter, none at all at night.

Amy Talbot dared not say that this innovation was Jane's—that would arouse opposition at once. She merely remarked that the nights seemed "stuffy" and opened the windows as Jane told her to do.

It was cooler, of course, but then there was the danger of catching cold!

She lay fretting about this, fearing to enjoy the fragrant summer night breeze that blew through the room. She wondered how long she had slept, and what Jane and Donald could find to talk about so many hours.

"It's queer," she once confessed to Amy. "If they're in love, why don't they get engaged? It ain't right."

To which Amy said nothing. But Donald left the next morning. Luther drove him to the train, and Jane said goodbye from the porch, waving her hand cheerfully as the wagon went down the road.

She scarcely ate any lunch. "She's pining for her departed lover," Claire said romantically. Claire had been reading Tennyson that morning.

"Not at all, I have a perfectly good appetite," Jane protested. "I am somewhat depressed and the gastric juices do not act so readily under such adverse conditions, therefore digestion is retarded."

"This practical and unsentimental" Jane brought a general laugh from all but Mrs. Talbot. And strange to say, such as she hated Jane being in love with Donald, she hated still more the denial of sentiment.

She made some remark about her pale face "losing the roses in her cheeks," to which Jane replied by a few statements as to the effect of nervous depression on the circulation of the blood!

But even Jane, bravely scientific, could or would give no explanation of tear-stained eyes later in the day. She had moved back into her room, which had been given up to Donald, in the hurry of packing, Donald had left a blue tie which Jane, putting away her things, had come across. The mother found her crying, with the tie in her hand.

She sat down, after closing the door, herself ready to weep with sympathy.

"My poor little duckling," she said soothingly, wiping her own eyes, and wishing desperately that Jane were tall enough to pick up in her arms, as she used to be.

"I'm not a poor d-duckling," Jane answered, trying to dry her eyes and assume a practical voice again.

"He's wicked," Mrs. Talbot cried, all her feelings turning into anger against the man. "To make my girl fall in love with him, and then be too selfish to—"

"Don't be old-fashioned, mother," was Jane's reply to this. Her mother's tearful sympathy was exactly the thing she needed. It roused all her opposition, and therefore brought back her self-control. Had someone come in and argued in a common sense manner to her as she would have argued with someone else, for instance—she would have wept hysterically.

But as it was, she wiped her eyes, and calmly began tying Donald's blue tie over her tawdry white blouse.

"I may be old-fashioned, but I'm right and wrong's wrong," Mrs. Talbot said.

"It isn't always," Jane contradicted. "Mother, life is so simple for you. You only see two ways—one right, the other wrong, just as you say—"

"Well!" triumphantly from the older woman.

"Whereas life is really made up, not of black and white, or wrong and right, but of all sorts of shades in between, and combinations of these two."

This was clearly beyond the mother.

If right was right, which it was,



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ly? and where was there ever any thing right or good in what was evil and wrong? The poor lady was incapable of even the simplest abstract thought! Jane began to explain:

"Donald begins his practise this fall. There's a wealthy woman who is going to help him—"

"Oh, a woman!"—this seemed the explanation of it all, at last.

COMPLICATIONS Chapter 21

"You don't understand," Jane went on, evidently trying to be patient with her mother. "You see, a doctor beginning his practise must make a good showing, a prosperous showing, before the world. Otherwise, no one will come to him.

Naturally, no one wants to call in a physician who is shabby and down at the heels and who lives in a poor neighborhood. It makes him appear to be no good. People can't be expected to know that every doctor must make his way.

"Donald has to have an office in a good neighborhood, with a well furnished waiting-room for patients—they've nothing to do but sit there and wait their turns and criticize everything in the place, you see. And they'll be extra critical because they won't be feeling well."

"Then he has to have a car to make his calls. People like a doctor driving up in a machine. It looks poverty stricken to come on a trolley."

"I don't see—"

"Well, wait a minute." Jane was taking great care adjusting the blue tie while she went on with her explanation. "People don't go to doctor's because they're handy. They are recommended through friends. Besides, a very young man isn't trusted. They say he's immature, just as they say an old doctor is old-fashioned or not progressive, unless he's become a specialist and charges huge prices."

Mrs. Talbot tried to apply these theories to the fat, amiable gentleman who trotted about in a run-down huggy with a shabby black bag full of pills—who had been her doctor for more years than she could count.

The theories didn't apply. So she didn't believe them.

"But the woman—"

"She's a wealthy lady who has a big apartment in a good part of the city. She's giving Donald two rooms in her apartment that has a separate entrance, for his office. That saves rent—and she's recommending him to her friends, and she's already helped him out with money. She's buying a car for him too, simply because she is interested in him and believes he'll be a good doctor. He'll pay her back sometime. Meanwhile, he lives in a tiny little room way over on the East Side—"

(Continued on page 5)



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