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# She Walks in Beauty

*When a girl is passionately in love—and her lover dies—can she ever find happiness again?  
Alyce Graham did—in the most amazing way*

**A** FEW years ago I was the engineer in charge of a piece of railroad work in the swamps of Alabama.

By FREDERICK GRAHAM

*As told to Anatole Feldman*

forward to the meeting with me. He signed it unaffectedly, "Allen." It was a simple, straightforward letter, and it appealed to me immensely.

The project was about one hundred and forty miles from my home in Birmingham. Due to unexpected difficulties encountered in the work, we were far behind our schedule and I had determined to stay there on the job until completed, which would be some few days before Christmas. Then I planned a long vacation at home with my only daughter, who was rapidly blooming into lovely womanhood.

Pushing my men for all they were worth, I remained locked up in the interior for almost six months. During this time, with fair regularity I received letters from my daughter.

At first they were the usual run of school-girl chatter. She gave me the little personal details of her life, that meant so much to her and so little to anyone else except myself.

After a time a new note crept into her letters to me. She was in love. She had found her perfect man, her ideal. Of course she was ridiculously happy, and her happiness was mine. If Alyce had found the one man who interpreted life and love for her and who returned her love in kind, I was well satisfied. She had been motherless now for years and as my work often took me away from home, I could not devote to her the time and attention she deserved. I knew that she would find fulfillment in a happy, domestic life.

Towards the end of my stay in the swamps she wrote me of her engagement. They were only waiting for my return at Christmas time to celebrate the wedding. Enclosed with her letter to me was one from her fiancé. He told me of his great love for Alyce and of how he was looking

I was happy in their happiness. Then just a few days before the job was completed I received a telegram which destroyed every dream I had ever cherished. It must be understood here that I had no warning, no premonition, nothing to prepare me.

The wire was brutal in its stark reality:

*Come home at once. Alyce dying.*

I leaped into action, turned the remaining work over to my superintendent, commandeered an idle engine and lunched over the forty miles of track we had just laid, to the nearest railroad junction.

I care to say little about that trip home. Suffice it that I agonized over every one of those hundred and forty-odd miles. I aged more in that day than in the preceding ten years.

**W**HEN I arrived in Birmingham late that night, I raced to my home on the outskirts of the city as fast as a cab could take me. But they told me there that Alyce was in the Washington Hospital. For the second time that night I broke all traffic laws through the quiet city streets.

I was permitted to see her for only a few minutes. There on the bed—crushed, broken—lay my poor Alyce. A merciful state of coma relieved her of her agony. As I gazed at her pale, wan face, the first tears in many years furrowed my cheeks. If it had been humanly possible, I would have gladly taken her place on the bed, exchanging my worn, spent life for her young one still to be fulfilled. What father wouldn't be willing to make the sacrifice?

In her delirium she did not recognize me, but before

they took me out of that cold, white hospital room, it seemed to me that she relaxed and breathed more easily. I prayed that my presence at her bedside would help her.

As I walked the hollow, resounding corridors that night, they told me the story—what little there was to tell.

That morning Allen had called for Alyce in his car. They started for the city to do some belated Christmas shopping. That was all that was definitely known. A half hour later their wrecked machine was discovered on a sharp curve in the road. Allen was extricated in a dying condition and did not live to reach the hospital. And my girl—even now she was struggling with the dark forces of death! An examination of the demolished car indicated that a steering knuckle had broken, and instead of taking the curve, the machine had swerved straight ahead to crash against a giant oak—a shapeless wreck of twisted steel.

**M**ORNING came and the doctors told me that there was a slim hope that she would pull through. I prayed.

My time for the next week was divided between the hospital corridor, the restaurant on the corner and a room in the hotel across the street. Allen was buried. I did not, would not, go to the funeral. Unkind as the thought may have been, I held him responsible for my girl's condition. I was bitter and unforgiving.

Alyce lived. In a few weeks' time I brought her home. Though she was not out of danger by any means, I nourished the hope that with constant care and attention I would win her back to health again. She was very brave and never once did I hear her complain. Hers had been a double tragedy; for on the threshold of life, not only had she lost her lover, but it was very doubtful if she herself would ever live to know again the ecstasy of love.

I could not understand her fortitude. She shamed me by her patience and graciousness even throughout the periods of her greatest suffering. At times, I was surprised to see on her face a faint, indescribable smile. When she was unaware of my gaze, I would see her lips form the one word—Allen. It was pathetic, heart-breaking.

I questioned her one day.

"Alyce," I said, "why do you smile?"

"Did I, Father?" she replied.

"Yes, dear girl," I answered gently. "You were smiling and your lips formed a word—"

"It was 'Allen,' Father. *His* name I spoke. At times I feel him very close to me."

"You are not unhappy then, dear?" I asked.

"No, Father. Not unhappy when Allen is near. I know he will always be near me—that we are still to have our love together—that we are parted only for a little while."

I could not speak. I held her hand a bit closer in my own. To me the grave was the last resting-place—and beyond it, nothing.

She read my thoughts.

"Father, don't feel that way. I—I *know* that sometimes he comes to me. Though I can't see him, I feel his presence. I feel his hand in my hair, his fingers caress my cheek and if I close my eyes, the velvet of his lips touch mine. You do not believe, but I know—and some day you will know, too. And so I am happy—happy in waiting for the time when we shall be united again."

Before she was aware of the tears in my eyes, I disengaged my hand and retired.

No, I did not believe. At that time I never thought I would believe. But it would have taken a man with a heart of stone to have tried to argue her out of her delusions.

Months passed. Alyce's condition remained unchanged. Only her face became more delicately molded, refined and spiritual.

Spring came. One day I was pleased to note an expression of happy, excited expectancy on her face. She smiled at me over the breakfast table and her look gave me the

impression that she was nourishing in her own mind some delightful secret. The slight flush in her cheeks made me happy.

That night was warm. A full moon rose early in all its splendid glory. The nurse and I, with infinite care and many pillows, made Alyce comfortable in an immense armchair on the veranda. From where she sat, she looked down the broad, silvery path of the moon, across the spacious lawns to where the path lost itself in a group of shapely elms. She was smiling to herself and seemed lost in reverie; and so, not to disturb her day-dreams, I went round the corner of the porch to enjoy my after-dinner cigar.

It is possible I dozed. At all events, I was brought back to reality by a blistered finger caused by the burning cigar. An hour must have passed since I had first sat down there, for the moonlight was no longer a silvery path on the lawn but a dimming, diffused radiance. I reclined in my chair and was dimly aware of voices from around the corner of the porch. It was a full minute before it penetrated into my dull consciousness that someone was talking to Alyce. I heard a mellow baritone, and Alyce's light and eager voice answering softly.

Who could be talking to Alyce? I had heard no one arrive. A pause—then Alyce addressed the speaker as "Allen." Strange—a curious coincidence. Allen had been the name of her lover.

My God! The man was making love to her! Didn't he know, didn't he know—? I strained my ears to catch what they said. Snatches of conversation came to me.

"Allen, dear, I knew you would come. I've been waiting so long."

"And, dear heart, I've been watching over you, too, waiting—waiting—for a long time."

"You're handsome tonight, dear. Beau Ideal, gallant."

"And you, sweetheart, are lovelier than I have ever seen you."

My brain was in a whirl. I could not believe my ears. Who could this lover be? Alyce talking to her illusion? But no. For the illusion answered! My brain staggered in search of the explanation. Some old friend of hers, no doubt, going through a pretty bit of play-acting. That was it! Exquisitely done! Lovely! I relaxed again.

**O**NLY a moment did I lie back in ease, enjoying mentally the pretty idyll going on round the corner of the porch. The voice, the low melodious male voice, was talking.

"Come, let us walk—out into the moonlight."

A simple sentence but it brought me to my feet with a smothered exclamation. But something held me back. What was to follow? I distinctly heard the sound of a chair pushed back. And then—I could not believe my eyes. Was I dreaming? Had I suddenly lost all sanity? My cigar burnt deep into my fingers, and I knew that I was awake.

Down the broad, terraced stairs walked Alyce with the stranger! The moonlight shimmered on her hair like a bridal wreath. It seemed to me that never before had she looked so stately, so regal, as she walked into the night on the arm of her mysterious lover.

Their heads nodded closely together as lovers' heads always do on a languorous night in spring. In a moment they were lost to sight in the group of shadowy elms; and the paralyzing indecision that gripped me was over.

An instant later I had turned the corner of the porch. To my utter amazement there sat Alyce in her chair—still, aloof, like a woman chiseled in marble—with a divine smile upon her lips. And I knew—what a strange sensation of perfect peace—that Death, the Great Romanticist, had claimed her.

Wistfully, I gazed down at her fallen crutches, and saw they had formed in the liquid moonlight the symbol of peace beyond understanding—the Cross of God.