

# BELLEHOOD AND BONDAGE.

BY

MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

AUTHOR OF "THE OLD COUNTESS," "LORD HOPE'S CHOICE," "THE REIGNING BELLE,"  
"MARRIED IN HASTE," "MABEL'S MISTAKE," "RUBY GRAY'S STRATEGY,"  
"WIVES AND WIDOWS," "MARY DERWENT," "THE SOLDIER'S ORPHANS,"  
"THE REJECTED WIFE," "THE OLD HOMESTEAD," "A NOBLE WOMAN,"  
"FASHION AND FAMINE," "THE CURSE OF GOLD," "THE HEIRESS,"  
"THE GOLD BRICK," "SILENT STRUGGLES," "DOUBLY FALSE,"  
"PALACES AND PRISONS," "THE WIFE'S SECRET," ETC.

Oh, count not time by cycles,  
Since the day that she was born,—  
From the life time of a woman,  
Let all the hours be shorn—  
Not brimming o'er with happiness—  
Not glorified by love—  
Not speaking of her womanhood  
To the holy One above.

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TO

MY DEAR FRIEND,

MRS. GEORGE F. GILMAN,

OF NEW YORK,

THIS VOLUME

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

ANN S. STEPHENS.

ST. CLOUD HOTEL, NEW YORK, }  
Sept., 1873.

# CONTENTS.

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Chapter	PAGE
I.—THE OLD PEAR-TREE . . . . .	25
II.—THE INVITATION . . . . .	31
III.—COUSINLY GREETINGS . . . . .	37
IV.—THE TEA-PARTY . . . . .	43
V.—THE OLD OAK STUMP . . . . .	49
VI.—THE NEW MOON . . . . .	54
VII.—UNDER THE MILL-DAM . . . . .	58
VIII.—IS SHE ALIVE? . . . . .	64
IX.—ANOTHER PATIENT . . . . .	71
X.—LITTLE PATTY . . . . .	76
XI.—THE STOLEN VISIT . . . . .	82
XII.—CONFIDENCES ON THE BRIDGE) . . . . .	87
XIII.—AUNT EUNICE SPEAKS OUT . . . . .	94
XIV.—BY THE BROOK . . . . .	103
XV.—DISCONTENTED PATTY . . . . .	108
XVI.—CLARA TELLS HER SECRET . . . . .	114
XVII.—(ASKING CONSENT) . . . . .	121
XVIII.—A BREAKFAST IN THE CITY . . . . .	127
XIX.—BROTHER AND SISTER . . . . .	131

Chapter	PAGE
XX.—SARAH ANN . . . . .	138
XXI.—SUNSHINE AND STORMS . . . . .	144
XXII.—(JEALOUS QUESTIONS) . . . . .	150
XXIII.—OUT A FISHING . . . . .	155
XXIV.—GROWING DISCONTENT . . . . .	159
XXV.—A WILD RIDE . . . . .	166
XXVI.—WHERE WAS HE GOING? . . . . .	170
XXVII.—THE LITTLE ROUGH RIDER . . . . .	174
XXVIII.—WILD OATS . . . . .	179
XXIX.—(LOVE AND JEALOUSY) . . . . .	183
XXX.—(DID SHE LOVE HIM?) . . . . .	188
XXXI.—ASKING FOR APPLES . . . . .	192
XXXII.—UNDER THE CHESTNUT . . . . .	197
XXXIII.—A NEW ARRIVAL . . . . .	203
XXXIV.—CHILDISH CRAFT . . . . .	208
XXXV.—PATTY AT THE POST-OFFICE . . . . .	212
XXXVI.—THE GIRL FROM THE COUNTRY . . . . .	216
XXXVII.—THE AUNT AND NIECE . . . . .	221
XXXVIII.—EXPECTATION . . . . .	225
XXXIX.—THE RAINBOW SASH . . . . .	229
XL.—THE RETURNED REBEL . . . . .	234
XLI.—THE LADY AND HER MAID . . . . .	240
XLII.—TAKEN AT HER WORD . . . . .	244
XLIII.—MISS FOSTER'S DEFEAT . . . . .	248
XLIV.—OUT FOR A RIDE . . . . .	253
XLV.—AN UNEXPECTED CALL . . . . .	258
XLVI.—AN UNPLEASANT INTRODUCTION . . . . .	263

Chapter	PAGE
XLVII.—THE STRIFE OF LOVE . . . . .	268
XLVIII.—CALLED TO ACCOUNT . . . . .	274
XLIX.—WAS HE A TRAITOR? . . . . .	279
L.—A FIRM RESOLUTION . . . . .	283
LI.—THE PAINFUL CONFESSION . . . . .	288
LII.—LEAVING HOME . . . . .	292
LIII.—OFF AT LAST . . . . .	297
LIV.—ON THE WING . . . . .	302
LV.—IN SEARCH OF A PLACE . . . . .	308
LVI.—CROSS EXAMINATION . . . . .	313
LVII.—STOLEN KNOWLEDGE . . . . .	320
LVIII.—INCIPIENT STRIFE . . . . .	325
LIX.—THE MAID PLEADS WITH HER MISTRESS . . . . .	329
LX.—THE CRAFTY LETTER . . . . .	332
LXI.—THE LITTLE WIDOW . . . . .	337
LXII.—A GREAT TEMPTATION . . . . .	341
LXIII.—NEWS OF THE SOCIAL TREASON . . . . .	346
LXIV.—AN HOUR AFTER . . . . .	353
LXV.—SELF-ABNEGATION . . . . .	357
LXVI.—(WAITING AND WISHING) . . . . .	363
LXVII.—THE DAY BEFORE GERTRUDE'S WEDDING . . . . .	368
LXVIII.—HEARTS AND DIAMONDS . . . . .	372
LXIX.—COUNTRY HONESTY . . . . .	377
LXX.—THE OLD SISTERS . . . . .	381
LXXI.—AT SUPPER . . . . .	385
LXXII.—(A BITTER SECRET) . . . . .	391
LXXIII.—RUFUS FOSTER ESCAPES A SCENE . . . . .	399



Chapter	PAGE
LXXIV.—GERTRUDE'S WEDDING-DAY . . . . .	405
LXXV.—SELF-SACRIFICE . . . . .	410
LXXVI.—AFTER THE WEDDING . . . . .	416
LXXVII.—AWAKING TO NEW LIFE . . . . .	424
LXXVIII.—HEART-FISHING . . . . .	433
LXXIX.—WHAT IT CAME TO . . . . .	437
LXXX.—THE OLD PRISONER . . . . .	443
LXXXI.—TOGETHER AND PARTED . . . . .	450

## BELLEHOOD AND BONDAGE.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE OLD PEAR-TREE.

A LOVELY valley, formed by two hills, almost mountains: one high, broken and jagged with rocks, clothed richly with forest-trees, and a luxuriant undergrowth; the other long, rolling, and, in some places, cultivated to the very top, with patches of trees, and a ridge of thrifty evergreens, running along the summit, and choking up the furrows, which floods of rain sometimes tore deep in the soil. A mile or so of flat land lay between these pretty mountains, where rye and corn found a noble growth, and fruit orchards turned the place into a garden in the blossom season. The village was small, and mostly composed of old-fashioned houses, with long, sloping roofs behind, stone chimneys, and ghostly, tall poplars in front, two-thirds of them dead at the top.

A street ran through the heart of the valley, cut in two more than once by less pretentious cross-roads, and the brightest, most coquettish, and musical river you ever saw, came sweeping around the shoulder of the

eastern hill, ran half up the valley, curved itself into an ox-bow, and swept down the foot of the western hills, taking a brook or two in its progress, welcoming them with dimpling eddies, and bearing them forward triumphantly, as fond mothers toss their children up and down in the air, rejoicing to hear them laugh. Of course, there was an old-fashioned wooden bridge where this river crossed the highway, and just below that all its bright waters gathered deeply, and plunged over a dam that was half natural rock, and half timber. All the year round there was pleasant music beneath that old bridge—the dash and laughter of the waters, the soft, mellow grinding of the low-roofed mill, and the shiver of a group of weeping willows to which the spray of the dam gave a perpetual baptism.

Back of these willows, and just where the highway curved to meet the bridge, was a low-roofed, red farmhouse, raised from the level by a terrace wall of rough stone, and buried in front to the chamber windows with purple and white lilac bushes.

Along the terrace wall, which lifted an old-fashioned garden from the road, clumps of yellow lilies, clusters of blue flag and peonies, blazed out at intervals, and gorgeous drifts of nasturtions fell in masses down the stones. Back of this house was an apple-orchard, covering the sloping hill-side with its leafy greenness, and close to the well, over which a mossy old bucket swayed to and fro on a well-used pole, rose a couple of noble pear-trees, just at this writing heavy with fruit and musical with laughter.

The laughter came from a young girl, half buried in the thick leaves. She stood with one foot on the last rounds of a ladder, planted in a growth of horseradish

and burdocks, near the well; the other rested on a sturdy branch, which bent a little, but gave her safe foothold, as she plucked the golden fruit, and peering through the leaves, dropped it into the apron of a still younger girl who stood beneath.

You could only see a slender foot and ankle, a round, white arm, and a pair of bright, laughing eyes through the thick leaves overhead. But the girl below was a picture in herself, for the grace of childhood was in her form, and the brightness of spring in her uplifted face. No daffodil, drinking in its first dew, ever looked its freshness more completely than that girl. Just then the sunshine was in her hair, golden, surely, but it had been brown in the shadow. Such hair! long, thick, and silky as a handful of corn-tassels, and broken into lovely waves, that rippled into curls about the face and neck. Sweet as her face, and mellow as the fruit that fell into her apron, was the gleeful laughter with which she answered the subdued fun from the girl overhead, whenever a pear went astray, or broke the white apron from her hold.

"There! there! my apron is full; they are bruising each other; such beauties," she cried, gathering up her apron, and dodging to escape a great yellow pear that just grazed her shoulder; "besides, Aunt Eunice will be out to fill her teakettle, and catch us at it. Then won't you wish we had never seen a ladder."

"Is she coming? Do you hear anything? Run for your life, and hide them under the first big-leaved burdock you can find. I'll take care of the ladder," cried the girl in the branches. "That's right; I hear her."

Away went the young creature with her burden of

pears, and the other came with a leap half down the ladder, which she seized with energy, and fairly tossed among the plantain leaves, that grew all around the well.

Scarcely was this done when a middle-aged woman came through the back door of the house, with a teakettle in her hand, which she held straight before her, as if she intended to water the plantains on her way to the well.

"Ah, here you come, Aunt Eunice!" cried the girl. "I began to think it was about tea-time! Dear me, how the bucket does swing!"

True enough, the old bucket was swinging to and fro on its pole, and the girl had to leap like a deer, more than once, before she caught it. Even then, she gave herself a flying swing in the air, dragging it downward by her weight.

Aunt Eunice stood with the teakettle in her hand, looking on grimly, with just a gleam of contempt in her sharp, gray eyes.

"The bucket's easy enough to catch, if you don't set it a swinging," she said. "I never have to jump."

"You jump! Good gracious! who ever dreamed of it," cried the girl, brightening all over with the fun of the thought. "But here goes the bucket, down, down, down!"

Sure enough, the roughhewn beam, with a great stone swinging at the end, swayed slowly in the air, and the upright post which supported it began to creak. When the bucket dropped, with a far-off splash, into the well, the slender pole attached to it stood upright, and the stone swung high in the air, ready to help pull up the bucket by its weight. What a queenly,

graceful creature that was, even as she bent over the well-curb, with one hand lifted on the pole, and the other dropping downward? The position was full of grace; every curve of that superb figure fell into harmony, and the glimpse you got of her face was full of warm coloring and vivid life.

A splash!—a mellow gurgle of waters, as they flowed into the bucket, followed; then, hand over hand, the pail was lifted; the great stone settled down upon the turf with a thud, and the bucket, cool, mossy, and dripping, was poised on the well-curb, while its contents were poured into the teakettle, which Aunt Eunice held with austere precision under the sparkling flood, after gathering her calico dress back between her knees, to protect it from the overflow, and keeping the kettle rigidly at arm's-length while it was filled.

"Now, Aunt Eunice, you can't say that I haven't done my duty, so you must make us the nicest sort of a short-cake for tea."

Here the girl gave an inquiring look over her shoulder, and, seeing nothing very unpropitious in the old woman's face, went on.

"Short-cake! jelly-cake! Don't look so cross, aunt. Didn't I see you making a lovely one yesterday?"

"But that was for company," said Aunt Eunice, "not when there's nobody but ourselves at table."

"Oh, that makes no difference. Then there's peach preserves, strawberry preserves, and cream for the tea—real cream from the morning's milk. No humbug, aunty, we won't stand that. You might make one of your delicious pot-cheeses, too, it wouldn't hurt you a bit."

"Why, Gertrude Harrington, what do you mean?"

"Mean? Oh, those little round things, white as a snow-ball, that you make out of milk or something. I think they're excellent."

"Excellent! I should rather opine they are excellent. So is jelly-cake, so is preserves, so is short-cake; but who is a going to set out a table with such things, and no company to eat 'em?"

"Who, indeed, but the dearest and best aunt that ever lived, who hasn't got over being young herself—"

"There, there, Gertie, I'm not to be flattered and coaxed out of my senses, just yet."

"Calls herself old without a gray hair in her head; and cross, too, while in fact she has the sweetest disposition—"

Aunt Eunice gave her teakettle a swing, and went towards the house, leaving it doubtful how far this persuasion and petting had affected her, but Gertrude knew the old woman well, and gave herself no uneasiness.

"I say, have you brought her round?"

It was the voice of Clara Vane, who came cautiously out from behind the largest pear-tree, and walked on tiptoe towards the well, as if she feared Aunt Eunice might hear her footsteps in the grass.

"All right; she didn't say no—and that is a great deal; but are you certain?"

"Certain—look yonder!"

Gertrude did look up the road, and saw two young men riding towards the bridge.

"Here already, and we looking like this. I do believe my dress is torn off at the gathers," she cried, lifting both hands to her head—always the first movement of a girl in doubt of her toilet.

"Oh, Gertrude, you always look nice in anything; but how am I to get home without being seen. It really is awful," answered Clara, ready to cry. "If it were not for the bridge, now—"

"Jump into the canoe, cross below the mill-dam, and climb that bank by the water-wheel. You will be under shelter all the time, and have a chance to come down from your room, looking like an angel, in white and blue, remember."

---

## CHAPTER II.

### THE INVITATION.

CLARA VANE seized upon her friend's idea at once. With a light step she ran to the bank of the river, down a foot-path, which led to a little cove under the willows, and leaping into the tiny shallop that lay rocking there, shot it across the stream like an arrow.

Gertrude smoothed her hair again, which was like brushing down the plumage of a raven, and went towards the house, flushed like a damask rose; for two handsome young strangers, to be entertained and made much of, in that little village, was an event which had not happened many times in her life. The girl watched Clara until she saw her half way up the opposite bank, tearing a path through the dense foliage of vines, and then gave a peep into a pantry, which opened from the kitchen. There Aunt Eunice was hard at work, measuring off a big jelly-cake with the blade of her knife,

and cutting it into delicate spikes with a precision which scarcely jagged the snowy frosting. This was sufficient. Gertrude knew that a splendid treat was in preparation, and took courage.

"Aunty, dear," she said, approaching the kitchen-table, "I'm so glad you happened to speak of getting up something a little extra. Only think of it, Clara's cousin and another gentleman just rode by. You can hear their horses tramping across the bridge now, and I don't believe Mrs. Vane has got a thing to offer them. I declare it's enough to mortify poor Clara to death. Don't you think so?"

Aunt Eunice deliberately measured off two more wedges of the jelly-cake with the blade of her knife, this time turning that mathematical instrument three times, under a prompt impulse of hospitality. She knew a little of Mrs. Vane's method of housekeeping, and took compassion on poor Clara at once.

"Two young men did you say?"

"Yes, two. I think one is the Yale College student, that young fellow who made such a figure last commencement."

"How did you know about that?" inquired Aunt Eunice, dryly.

"Oh, somebody told me; he's coming up to see our school committee."

"Shouldn't wonder," observed Aunt Eunice; "them students, more than half of 'em, have to keep school a year or so before their debts are paid up. What's this young feller's name?"

"Compton—Guy Compton. Nice name, isn't it?"

"Never heard it before. Betsey—Betsey Taft!"

A stout, heavily-built girl, with quantities of coal

black hair, and eyes to match, came from the kitchen, with a roll of snow-white pot-cheese in her hand, which she was moulding between her palms.

"Betsey, gunpowder tea and the silver teapot—bring them here!"

Betsey retreated, finished moulding her cheese with deliberation, and after taking sufficient time to prove her independence, came back with a tin caddy in one hand and a funny little silver teapot in the other. Aunt Eunice laid her knife across the jelly-cake, and unscrewing the top from the caddy, filled it twice, levelling the surface with her finger, and making certain that every waste particle fell back into the caddy.

"There, you know how to draw it," she said; "just a spoonful of cold water, then fill up boiling hot—but don't set it on the coals."

"As if I didn't know enough for that," muttered Betsey, with a toss of the head that threatened to shake down the masses of her hair, which always seemed ready to give way.

"Put that short-cake down to the fire," commanded Aunt Eunice austere.

"It is down," answered the girl, with equal force.

"Well, then, put on your sun-bonnet, run across the bridge, and ask Mrs. Vane—"

"No, no, aunty. Only Clara!" interposed Gertrude, putting in a breathless protest.

"Ask Mrs. Vane, Miss Vane, and Mr. Vane, to bring their company and take tea with us this afternoon."

Gertrude dropped into a chair, and both hands fell downward in helpless dismay.

"Oh, Aunt Eunice!"

"Before you go bring out the china tea-set," con-

tinued Aunt Eunice, quite ignoring Gertrude's distress, "and roll up the paper blinds in the best room, where the young people can have a chance to enjoy themselves a little, while we old folks have the sitting-room to ourselves." Gertrude breathed again. This was half a reprieve.

Betsey tied on her sun-bonnet with a jerk, and while she was doing it, nodded her head once or twice to the young lady, who took another gleam of hope from these gestures.

Away went Betsey across the bridge, and into the brown house at the other end, which was crowded so close to the water that a narrow back porch fairly hung over it. A little gore of land, filled with beds of onions, beets, and cucumber vines, hedged in by thick rows of currant bushes, lay between one end of the house and the bridge. Over that a great straggling sycamore-tree spread its mottled limbs and ragged foliage, from which a growth of fuzzy balls dangled sparsely.

Betsey dragged open the wooden gate, which scraped the earth in a circle when it moved, and entered the dwelling, where she found Mrs. Vane making heroic efforts to twist up her hair, and get her best cap from a cupboard in the room, where two young men were seated, rather impatiently waiting for Clara to make her appearance.

When the good woman saw Betsey she dropped both arms from her head, and made a piteous appeal for help.

"Oh, Betsey Taft, what am I to do? Company in the out-room, Clara taking care of herself, and I without a cap to put on. Did you ever see anything

like it? What shall I do? More than that, I know them young fellers have come to tea, and not a morsel of pie or cake in the house; besides, that young one will be streaking in barefooted, and looking like sixty—I know she will."

"Where is your cap?" said Betsey, who was worth her weight in—well, it would be safe to say in—silver on an emergency like this.

"In the cupboard, and they setting right opposite. Oh! if they would only take a notion to see Vane at the mill, or something—but there they sit, and sit, and sit."

"Let 'em sit," answered Betsey, who was a girl of resources, "but just hurry up your hair, and tighten up your dress a little. I'll get the cap."

True enough, Betsey walked with cool deliberation into the next room, where the two young gentlemen sat, told them that Miss Clara would be down in a few minutes, and, turning her back squarely upon them, opened the cupboard-door, drew the cap, with all its pink ribbons, slyly forth and pinned it under her apron. Then she walked out, carrying a little china vase in her hands, looking innocent as a lamb.

Mrs. Vane was all delight and volubility. The cap, with its flutter of pink ribbons, was always a strong point in her toilet, and its possession proved to her what a sword is to a general. While she was fitting it to her head, Betsey exhibited her genius in another direction.

"Now, about the tea, Mrs. Vane. Our people saw the young gentlemen crossing the bridge, and sent me over to say that you must all come and take tea there; so I give the invite just as they sent it, not meaning to

say a word about the suddenness, or the jelly-cake not being large enough for so many, because Aunt Eunice never would forgive me. So you must be sure and come."

This hint about the cake was not quite enough to deter Mrs. Vane, who dearly loved a tea-party, and found her cap very becoming; but the next sentence unsettled her again.

"It'll be worth while for you to come now, I tell you, if it's only to see her at the head of the table, in that dove-colored silk dress—"

"What! Will she wear that, do you think, and I nothing but this alpaca?" she was about to say, but thought better of it, and added, with reference to some imaginary garment—"and I so little time to get out my best silk. Besides, Vane is so busy at the mill."

"Yes, I thought of that," answered Betsey.

"But then you could keep back tea a little. After all, I think we'll come. It isn't of any great account about getting out the silk dress; my alpaca is as good as new. There, now, I'm ready to go in."

But that moment Clara came gliding down the narrow staircase, and stood a moment in the entry, just one cloud of blue and white muslin, and with an azure ribbon floating from her hair, with all the simple grace of a Scottish snood. She saw Betsey, and her face brightened. The girl nodded her head confidentially.

"You are coming to tea," she said. "Our people will be all ready before you can get there."

"Thank you, Betsey! Aunt Eunice is the nicest creature that ever lived. I was so anxious about it. Tell Gertrude that she has made me as happy as a bird."

"I'll tell her," said Betsey. What more she might have said must go unrecorded, for Clara had the latch in her hand. The next instant she stood in that humble parlor, face to face with her visitors.

"My dear cousin," she heard Webster saying, as both young men arose. She received the cousinship with some confusion, and acknowledged it with blushes, for her experience in the world was very limited, and she was naturally a modest girl, rich in that exquisite sensibility which sends the blood up from the heart at every thrill of feeling.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### COUSINLY GREETINGS.

YOU might have wondered that Clara Vane was so agitated at the sight of Compton, had you seen her cousin—as fine a specimen of humanity as ever trod the earth. Tall, keen-eyed, and giving in every movement evidence of great power, both physical and mental, he towered above his companion completely, throwing him in shade to the ordinary observer.

At first there was a little awkwardness in the meeting, even with this cousin, who was considered the pride and glory of the Vane family. He had always been held in especial reverence by Clara, both for the position he had earned for himself at Yale, his commanding presence, and the kindness with which he had always regarded her own family, which had not been



recognized as a branch to be especially proud of by the Websters, who had married into it.

"How do you do, Cousin Hart, and how is Aunt Mary, and—and—?"

Here Clara broke off, just glanced at the stranger, and was blushing rosily, when Hart Webster came to her rescue, and introduced his companion.

Clara put out one foot, and attempted an elaborate salute, which would have delighted her dancing-master, but broke into natural, childlike grace, and ended by holding out her hand with a cordial welcome.

Then Hart Webster answered all her questions. His own health was excellent, that of his mother perfect, and everybody at home sent love—all this while Guy Compton sat gazing on the bright girl with kindling interest, which she felt in every nerve of her body.

But a noise arose outside the door, a soft patter of words, perpetual and monotonous as the flow of the mill-dam, and quite as difficult to check. In came Mrs. Vane, beaming with hospitality—words of welcome on her lips, pink ribbons casting rosy reflections on her face, and both plump hands held out with such cordial warmth, that Hart sprang up and seized them at once.

"Dear me, where did you drop from? Hadn't the least idea you would get here before dark. In fact, only just heard that you was to be expected. The letter only came this morning—not more than an hour since I heard of it. Vane always keeps letters in his pocket till they're half worn out. Clara, just run to the mill, and tell him that your cousin, and—and—"

"Mr. Compton," said Hart, without breaking the

thread of his aunt's discourse. "Mr. Guy Compton, a class-mate of mine."

"Your cousin and Mr. Compton, his class-mate, you know," chimed in the woman, running on with her accompaniment industriously as the young man spoke. "The young gentleman—glad to see you, sir. Friends of my nephew always welcome. The young gentleman we've heard so much about—that valedictory was so nice. Vane read it to us from the paper. Tell Par to come right in. You'll excuse the flour—he won't have time to change, I dare say, having no end of grists in to-day—team on team, and the water a little low for grinding. Why, Clara, haven't you gone yet?"

"Yes, mother, I—I only waited—"

"It's only because we've got company—the most obedient child in a general way." Mrs. Vane went on without a breath, or a break in her words. "Par doats on her. Well, Nephew Hart, how is Mary? I love her just as *well* as a sister of my own, Mr. Compton, though she is only Vane's sister, and a proper pretty cretur she was—small, and light, and springy, like Vane. Awful smart family, them Vanes. It's from them Hart got his smartness, though where he got his height from and his size, goodness only knows. Here comes Clara. Vane will be here in no time. Oh!—"

Nothing but a glance at herself in the looking-glass, which revealed her cap all awry, could have checked the good woman for a moment; but this discovery filled her mind with consternation for half a minute, and she paused to adjust the cap.

During that half minute Vane came in from the mill. He had made a little preparation for this interview, having stamped some of the flour-dust from his



boots, leaving it in lines along the creases, and he had shaken it from his hat, save where it clung tenaciously about the band. Still he had the general appearance of a man who had been running through a sifting snow-storm, and in breathless haste found refuge in his own parlor.

"Well, Hart, glad to see you here at last. Got through college first-rate they tell me. How are all the folks at home?"

"Quite well, Uncle Vane," answered the young man, pleased with this hearty welcome. "This gentleman is a friend of mine. We have come over to see if there is any chance of a school in your neighborhood."

"Glad to see you, sir. Just come in time about the school; committee meeting called for next week."

"And Par's one of the board," Mrs. Vane broke in, after subsiding for half a minute quite against her will.

"He'll go for you, of course, and make the rest too; for he has a sight of influence, and it isn't so easy to get a real first-class college chap into our school."

"I am sure you are very kind," said the young man cordially.

"Just the kindest creature that ever trod shoe leather," said Mrs. Vane, beaming proudly on her little help-mate, "and smart too; never saw a Vane that wasn't cute as a razor."

"There, there, old woman, that'll do; there's plenty of chickens about the mill to do our crowing," said the miller, blushing through a haze of flour-dust that whitened his face. "The young gentleman can make sure that I'll do my best."

There was something of rude dignity about the little miller as he made this disclosure; for, though

small of stature, there was a great deal of manliness in his five feet of measurement, which impressed young Compton with respect.

"I have got to go right back to the mill," continued the little man, "or the stones will be grinding each other; but you make yourself and your friend here at home, just as if I was by all the time. The old woman and Clara will see about getting something to eat, I reckon. Mebby you'll like to come out to the mill by and by; got three run of stones agoing, and a water-power worth looking at."

Vane lingered in the door long enough to say this, then disappeared; while his wife, who had kept pattering on as if no one else were talking, gathered up her forces and took a fresh start.

"You know Uncle Vane," she said; "shy as a girl, but no end of grit. Talk of me crowing! why there ain't a man in the neighborhood that don't sort of look up to him. Now, just as like as not, you think he ain't glad to see you; but I know he's tickled half to death about it. Talking about something to eat now: we've just got an invite out to tea over the bridge. Miss Harrington (Aunt Eunice, we call her,) has set her heart on it. So if you and Clara want to go a little early, I'll be along with you right away."

"Is it at the red house with all those bright flowers hanging down the wall?" inquired Hart Webster, cutting ruthlessly through the good woman's copious stream of talk; for he had visited his uncle before, in his school-days, and knew how useless waiting would be.

"Yes, that's the house. Aunt Eunice is an old maid, you know, but farms her own land and has ever-so-long, makes money too like smoke. Her niece and

our Clara are great friends, together half the time when they ought to be doing up the chores, but somehow we let them."

"Has Aunt Eunice, as you call her, got a niece yet?" inquired Hart, making another faint struggle against Mrs. Vane's torrent of volubility.

"Oh, yes," answered Clara, blushing at her own eagerness, "one of the brightest, loveliest girls that ever lived."

"That's just so," Mrs. Vane chimed in, "pretty as a picture and bright as a briar rose. There isn't a girl in the village can take the shine off from Gertie Harrington; but spoiled—you don't know how that old maid spoils her."

"Oh, mother!" cried Clara, putting in an eager protest, "nothing could spoil Gertrude. There never was such a bright, beautiful creature."

Mrs. Vane did not stop to contradict this loving assertion. She was looking through the window where a white napkin, streaming from a window of the red farmhouse, gave a signal that she understood on the instant.

"There, now, don't stop to talk about Gertrude. She's a nice girl enough, but not so very much smarter or handsomer than some others I could mention but won't, remembering what Vane said about crowing. But see, there the eager creature is at the window, shaking that white cloth like all possessed. You young folks had better be a going."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE TEA-PARTY.

GERTRUDE HARRINGTON had been a little impatient. Her chamber window looked directly into Mrs. Vane's little parlor, and there she had seen the strange young gentleman talking to Clara, who seemed to have forgotten her entirely—a degree of oblivion Gertrude was not in the habit of suffering with equanimity. After watching this tantalizing *tableau* for a time, she flung out her white signal which Clara was in the habit of obeying at all times, and this had the desired effect.

In a few minutes, Clara Vane was seen walking demurely across the old bridge, between two young gentlemen, with a flimsy handkerchief over her head, and the loose muslin dress floating around her like a summer cloud.

When the party mounted the stone steps of the terrace, and approached the front entrance, Gertrude had glided down stairs and stood in the parlor door, ready to receive her guests, while Betsey Taft answered the clang of the iron knocker, and invited them to walk in, with the air of one who owned the premises.

This was a day of introductions. Hart Webster had never seen Gertrude Harrington in his life, though Clara's letters had been full of her friend for half a year. Now, when he did see her, standing by him in

all her queenly grace, the effect was bewildering. He had expected beauty, but not of that character. Rustic timidity, a complexion clear, and varied by every emotion—something very sweet and dependent, he had imagined to himself, but the real girl took him by surprise. She was absolutely superb.

Into the out-room the little group went, speaking of the weather, the beautiful scenery, and such things as newly introduced people usually fall back upon, with breathless haste, as if there was much to say and no time to say it in.

The room was cool, from the shadows imprisoned there all the week, and fragrant with the breath of abundant flowers, which Gertrude had arranged in the old-fashioned china jars that stood upon the hearth. To these she added a background of asparagus-spray, over which a host of berries trembled like coral drops, quite illuminating the old Franklin stove with a brilliant contrast of green and scarlet.

Directly Mrs. Vane was seen crossing the bridge, with her pink ribbons in full bloom, and a shawl of gorgeous pattern folded over her bosom. Her step was rapid and her lips in motion. In fact, they never were at rest, for she was given to talking in her sleep, as the miller could testify, and, when quite alone, held perpetual conversation with herself. Nothing but the mill-dam, with its eternal flow, could equal the good woman in this respect. On she came, through the gate, and up the terrace-steps, smiling in the midst of her solitary talk, and nodding to the young people benignly as she passed the window.

"Enjoying yourselves? That's right. Young folks will be young. Par and I used to like it, just as well

as anybody. Of course, he'll be here by-and-by. Set out some bread and milk for the child. Nothing to keep him."

With this rather confusing information Mrs. Vane walked into the next room, where the tea-table was spread, and held a long conversation with the silver tea-set. She caressed and rearranged each article which she looked upon as a distinguished stranger, which never came out of the dark china-closet except on great occasions, and was to be treated with deference accordingly.

"China that is china. Brought from India. Can see your fingers through it when you touch one of the cups. That's the sort of thing to go with such silver," she said, nodding and smiling benignly at the tall sugar-bowl and milk-cup, into which she looked with curious interest.

"Loaf-sugar in lumps—brimming over with cream. The silver butter-dish, too"—here the lid of the butter-dish was softly lifted—"yellow as gold, and fresh from the well. Saw the pail it was in standing by the curb as I came in. Ice-cold, and dew breaking over the lid. That's what I call doing things up in the genteelest way. Honey, too! I shouldn't wonder if she's took up one of the hives under the big pear-tree—fed on white clover every bee of them. Pot-cheese! Well, this does beat all! Why it's a feast, instead of a tea; just to set here and see my own face a shining in the sugar-bowl, is a treat—but lonesome.

"Supposing I go into the other room, and help the young folks along?"

Having investigated the table, in all its points, Mrs. Vane was about to put this last idea in operation,

when Betsey Taft came in, with both hands full, followed by Aunt Eunice, who carried the silver teapot, which gave out a little cloud of steam, before her. Then the young people came through the entry, and gathered around the table, joyous and brilliant with hilarity.

The china cups had scarcely circulated once, when Vane came nimbly across the bridge. He caught a glimpse of a party through the window, crossed the street almost at a run, and flinging his hat down in the entry, begged everybody not to move for him, while he took a reserved seat by his wife. The good woman beamed on him lovingly from under her cap ribbons—said that she was glad as could be that he had come at last; then rushed on in an overflow of words, by which she was attempting to explain that a garden without currant bushes was just no garden at all.

After this, the business of the table went on splendidly. Aunt Eunice did the honors with stiff precision, lifting her antique silver, as a queen wielded her sceptre in olden times, and the girls were bright as birds when a warm, spring sunshine bursts upon them.

After tea the party broke up. Mrs. Vane took out her knitting work, and settled down in a Boston rocking chair by one of the open windows. Aunt Eunice brought hot water and washed the china, a duty she never allowed Betsey Taft to undertake, and Mr. Vane wandered off to the bridge, and took an exterior survey of his own mill, which was the whole world to him.

The young people went first into the garden. Then they found themselves in the orchard, where they broke into couples, and wandered off to the banks of the river. There they sat listening to the mellow flow of the wa-

ters, conversed together in low voices, and with downcast eyes, as if they were thinking of something deeper and sweeter than the uttered words that passed between them.

Then the sunset came on gorgeously. The waters around them turned into gold. All the leaves of the orchard were aglow with crimson light, and the dusky laurels on the river's bank took a rich coloring upon their glossy leaves, that trembled and whispered back to the waters, as if warning them to flow quietly, while these young souls learned to know each other.

Back among the laurels sat Clara Vane, with Guy Compton by her side. He was telling her of his college life, of his future hopes, of the struggle that lay before him. She listened with keen interest, sometimes lifting her eyes to his face with a glow of sympathy, but oftener sitting in dreamy silence, her lashes downcast, her cheeks burning, and the breath fluttering up from her bosom in sweet sighs, laden with sensations she had never known before.

He had come to the village with a purpose. For a time it was necessary that he should earn money; a school was vacant, and there was some hopes that he might be engaged as the principal. He had not cared so much about it at first, but from that afternoon it would be the great desire of his life. Would she regret it if he were successful?

Would she regret it? The very thought made her indignant. Would she repine if all that lovely village were turned into a paradise at once; if the flowers blazed out into jewels, and every spear of grass blossomed under her feet? Why did he ask a question like that? Could he not understand how her heart

was beating, how hot her cheek was from the very fear that he might be defeated. Why it had become almost a question of life and death with her, within the last hour, too.

Thus the soft purple of the coming night settled down upon these two; they never thought of moving until a voice called to them from across the river:

"Clara! Clara, I say! What are you about, catching your death of cold?"

It was Mrs. Vane, who had gone home when the dusk gathered, and saw the young couple sitting there, in the soft purple haze, on which they were floating into dream-land.

Clara started, and uttered a faint cry. That voice seemed to drag her out of heaven.

"It is almost dark," she said, like one aroused from sleep. "Have we been here so long?"

"It does not seem ten minutes," answered Compton, arising reluctantly to his feet. "Why did your mother call?"

"She was afraid that I—I might take cold. I must go now. Where is Gertrude?"

"Oh, she has found her way home, I dare say."

"Then I must go. Not round by the bridge—this is the shortest way. Were you ever in a canoe?"

Compton laughed and answered, "Never in my life."

"This is mine," said Clara. Taking up the oars. "The mill-boy has brought it over. Step carefully—we are close to the dam, and the water is deep."

Clara held the oars in her hands, one was planted against the bank, holding her little craft steady, while Compton stepped in. She stood upright, and balanced

herself like a water-nymph, laughing gayly as he hesitated to load the shallop with so much weight.

"Come in! come in! We will take a row down stream, just a little way. The moon is up—see how it shines upon the dam. One pull will bring us out of sight. Mother will think that we are coming round by the bridge. Now for it."

Compton leaped down from the bank, and struck the boat with considerable force, which made it rock like a cradle. In her fright, Clara pressed her oar against the bank, and instead of sending her craft down stream, gave it a strong impetus towards the dam. In an instant it upset, and hurled her forward under the great body of water that plunged over the dam.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE OLD OAK STUMP.

GERTRUDE HARRINGTON and Hart Webster had strolled away by themselves, when Clara and Compton disappeared among the laurels. Up through the apple-orchard, to the ridge of an inlaping hill, they walked slowly, conversing as they went.

I do not say that these young persons had fallen in love at first sight; but a feeling of strange and bewildering pleasure possessed them both. Gertrude's beauty was of a kind to fascinate the senses of a man possessed with keen feelings and vivid imagination, and her intellect, as yet but half developed, astonished him by a

sparkle of wit and naive humor, which kept his own faculties at their highest. There was not much of sentiment in their conversation, perhaps, until they reached the summit of the hill. Here some soft, feathery larch-trees stood against the crimson sky, forming a sort of temple around a huge fragment of rock that had been blasted for some purpose years before. It was now overgrown with seeded ferns and soft cushions of moss, while its crevices were choked up with wild columbines and trailing arbutus. All around this rock a carpet of gray, buck-horn moss crackled under foot; and, rising against it, like a Druid altar, was the stump of a huge oak, with lichen creeping over the brown bark, and cup-moss studding the top with coral drops.

On this side of the rock fragments had been torn away, leaving a hollow, curved like the seat and back of a sofa, which seemed to be cushioned with greener and richer velvet than the looms of France ever gave forth.

Up to this sylvan seat Gertrude led her guest, and stood smiling at the pleased wonder with which he regarded it.

"Why, it is the throne for a fairy," he said, drawing a deep breath; for a love of nature stirred his intellect like old wine. "Surely all this never came by chance!"

Gertrude laughed; his surprise pleased her.

"Not quite by chance. Clara and I only helped nature a trifle. This was our playhouse when we were little girls. We were always luxurious in our tastes, you see. When the rain and shadows did not give us moss enough, we brought it in fleeces from the woods; sometimes it died, and nearly broke our hearts; but

we soon learned to bring rich mould with it, which held the roots and seeds of pretty wild-flowers. See this hollow in the stump, arched like a church-door. Nature did that for us, and gave this dainty fashion to decay. We carpeted it with green, and planted this lawn of violets before it, that our dolls might have a fairy carpet to look upon. Here, in this hollow of the rock, was our kitchen, where we built a tiny fire of sticks, and broiled leaden fishes, stamped into tin frying-pans. Yonder is the great out-door oven; we built it ourselves, and used to bake green apples in it, which tasted delicious, though they did come out smoky and half-done. This puts me in mind of something."

Gertrude turned away, ran to the oak stump, and, thrusting her arm through the side opening drew forth a half-dozen golden and rosy-cheeked pears.

"Of course, we couldn't ask you up to our homestead without some sort of hospitality. These are from the ripest boughs of our choice old pear-tree. Clara and I took them on purpose for a feast up here. There should have been plenty more; but Aunt Eunice caught us at it, and we had to hide the rest under some burdock leaves. To-morrow we will hunt them up. Now don't say that I haven't entertained you like a princess."

Here Gertrude gathered up the pears in the overskirt of her dress, and brought them to her guest.

How lovely the girl looked, standing before him, with the richly-tinted fruit shining through her drape-ry, and the golden sunset falling all around her! Flowers might have been out of place in that picture; nothing but the warm, mellow color of ripe fruit could have harmonized with the rare beauty of Gertrude Harrington.

"There," she said, placing herself by his side on the rustic sofa, and giving him the finest pear, while she helped herself to another, "just say if you ever tasted anything more delightful."

Compton took a pear and began to eat it. Then Gertrude remembered that they were alone, and felt as if she were doing wrong.

"Clara ought to be ashamed to let us eat them all by ourselves. I do wonder where she has gone. It's abominable in her," she said.

"I dare say she has forgotten all about us," answered the young man, burying his teeth in the richest side of the pear. "But it is their loss. They don't deserve our compassion—delicious!"

"I thought you would like them," answered Gertrude, in a voice mellow as the pear she was eating. "You ought to, for I climbed up the tree for them myself."

"You?"

The girl laughed, blushed richly, and played with the fruit, while she cast a roguish, sidelong glance at the astonished young man from under her black eyelashes.

"Oh, yes! Clara and I have nobody else to steal for us; besides, we like climbing—on a ladder you know."

"Oh! with a ladder? That is not so—so dangerous."

"Dangerous! Why, the old pear-tree wouldn't know itself if we didn't climb it every day when the fruit grows yellow. Aunt Eunice makes believe that she don't know it, dear old soul. I've seen her dodge from the window rather than be found peeping. Oh! take

another; plenty of them—what, you refuse! I expected you to devour them ravenously. Well, I can't sit here holding them—holding them in my lap. To-morrow will do just as well. Of course you will be here to-morrow?"

"Oh, yes; for several days yet."

"That is splendid! Sure you won't take another?"

Webster shook his head.

"Then here they go back into the fruit cellar."

Gertrude carried her pears to the hollow stump, fell upon her knees, and rolled them in, one by one, upon the bed of moss. When she arose, it was with a little regretful sigh.

"After all, I think the apples tasted better—smoke, ashes and all," she said, smoothing down her overskirt; "but one can never go back to them. The poor old oven will be moss-grown like the rest."

There was a tone of regret in Gertrude's voice as she pointed out these mementoes of her childhood to the young man—a hint of tears, as if she felt that the innocent joys she spoke of were departing from her that moment for ever and ever. It seemed as if she had brought the young man there, that she might render up all these sweet memories to him, and after that enter upon a new life.



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE NEW MOON.

"SIT down," she said, waving her hand towards the moss-sofa, as she expressed this feeling with a low, nervous laugh. "Clara and I had arranged to walk up here after tea; but your friend has run away with her, and I must do the honors alone."

"It is like taking possession of a throne," said Webster, seating himself. "Ah! if I were a monarch, and you my queen—"

"No! no!" answered the girl laughing. "I like the thrones best which men build for themselves. You see Clara and I made this, and it is our exclusive possession. We helped plant even the little laurel grove."

"You must have been industrious little girls?"

"Indeed we were, and travellers, too. There is no describing the journeys we made through the woods out yonder. Livingstone never undertook more arduous explorations. Now it was for the first tuft of anemones. Then the young wintergreen began to sprout, and we roved half the day, filling our little painted baskets with the fragrant shoots. Then the birds took to building, and we had great fun in searching out their nests, watching the eggs, and reporting the young birds as they came out. Such ugly things they were, too:

all heads and open bills. How the old birds used to flutter and shriek, when they saw us by the nests. It was good fun then; but since, I have been sorry that we frightened them so. Children are sometimes cruelly thoughtless. Don't you think so?"

"Ignorance of results is always thoughtless, I suppose," said the young man gravely. "You are sorry for the birds, now. Hereafter, I shall be for the men and women you may live to pain."

"Why should I give pain to any one?" asked the girl.

"Because there will always be nests to disturb, and hearts to wound."

Gertrude did not answer; she was questioning her heart if it had been really cruel—if it ever could be brought to wound any one. That young heart, being ignorant of itself, answered, never! Then her eyes fell upon a narrow foot-path worn in the grass, which led to a spring in the hollow of the hill-side; and she remembered a cat-bird's nest built in one of the overhanging dogwood-trees, which she and Clara Vane had visited every day, pulling down the bough that their eyes might feast on the speckled eggs, and their cautious fingers touch them. At first the distressful screams of the old birds had filled her with tender sympathy, but, day by day, she had cared less for them, till one morning she bent down that dogwood limb, and found the eggs cold. Yes! she had been cruel then! It was like breaking up a poor family. Could she ever do that in real earnest, and with human beings?

The young man sat looking at Gertrude, to whose face a thoughtful sadness, born of these questions, came slowly; and this gave a new phase to her beauty.



"I have made you serious," he said with compunction.

"Because you spoke of possibilities that never entered my mind before. Why should you have thought of them?"

"Because I am sometimes wounding myself with painful conjectures, and wondering what may be; because I am an egotist, and philosophize from that stand-point, forgetting that others may not be bound up in self as I am."

"I will not believe that," answered Gertrude, brightening up, and ready to defend him against himself. "No one will ever make me believe that you are selfish."

"I, at any-rate, would rather believe you than myself—so let us think of something else," answered the young man.

"But how can we, after making each other so sad," said Gertrude, turning her dark eyes upon him with wistful questioning. "Besides, it is sunset now, and that always depresses me."

"I am glad of that, for, in one thing at least, there is sympathy between us. In my whole life I can never remember being joyous while the sun was going down."

Gertrude sighed. She was not unhappy, but, in youth, the soul seems to yearn for the romance of sadness. She liked this man all the better because he understood these feelings—and both remained silent awhile.

He was the first to speak, and he did it with an effort, as if throwing off a world of dreamy thoughts.

"There, the sun is down now, and the faintest rim

of a moon is out; just a curve, like the shadow cast from a silver sickle."

"A new moon? That is ominous or auspicious, as one sees it. Just tell me where it is, that I may find it first over my right shoulder," cried Gertrude, standing immovable, really disturbed with a faint superstition, which had followed her up from childhood.

Webster laughed.

"Turn a little to the left and look up."

Gertrude obeyed him, and lifted her face to the silver crescent with a glance of delight.

"I wouldn't have seen it over the left shoulder for anything," she said. "A bad omen to-night would break my heart."

"But you forget that the moon shines on me from the left," said Webster, smiling faintly; for, spite of himself, a gleam of superstition disturbed him.

Gertrude stood a moment in deep trouble; then her face brightened as she turned it upon him.

"You shall have half of my light," she said, with a faint laugh. "There will be enough for us both."

The young man started up.

"Fifty moons may shine askance upon me, so long as I am permitted to share anything with you. But remember, girl, you are pledged!"

Before Gertrude could answer, or really comprehend the full meaning of this almost passionate speech, her name was called in a long, wailing cry from the orchard.

"What is that?" she questioned, wildly.

"Gertrude! Gertrude! Oh! Gertrude Harrington!"

"It is some child," said Webster, listening.

"It is little Patty Vane," answered Gertrude. "She is climbing the orchard-fence. What can it mean?"

A tiny figure dropped down from the orchard-fence, which was half stone-wall, half rails, and came running toward them, still crying out, amid great wailing sobs,

"Gertrude! Oh, Gertrude! Come! Come!"

Both Webster and Gertrude walked hastily forward to meet the child.

"What is it, Patty? Oh! tell me—what is the matter?"

"Come home! Come home! Sister Clara is dead!"

"Dead! Clara! Oh, Patty! what does this mean?"

"She is dead! She is dead!" answered the child, in panting sobs. "Drowned in the mill-dam!"

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## CHAPTER VII.

### UNDER THE MILL-DAM.

**W**ILD with terror, Gertrude cast one look on her companion, and fled down the hill. She forgot the child and everything else in the mad agony of the moment. Webster was by her side in an instant; but she leaped the fence without heeding him, rushed through the orchard and the flower-beds in the garden, threw herself over the stone terrace, and in another minute stood, white and breathless, in the crowd gathered around Mrs. Vane's house.

"Where? Where? Oh! tell me!" she almost

shrieked, appealing from one to another of the terrified neighbors, who stood helplessly looking at each other like a drove of startled sheep.

"Under the dam," said one. "The canoe upset—both went down!"

Gertrude flung aside the summer-shawl which had kept her from the night-dew, darted through the house, into the balcony, which overhung the river, and clinging to the railing, cast a swift glance up and down the stream. On the opposite bank she saw young Webster, throwing off his coat, and, in the whirlpool of waters just below him, a human form struggling blindly.

Again she swept the stream with her wild glances, and there, in the deep water, on a range with the balcony, she saw the face of her friend, with a mass of hair weltering around it. Quick as lightning the girl sprang to the railing, threw out her arms, and plunged into the boiling stream. It was an act of desperation; for at the moment, no thought of her power to save prompted it. Still the girl could swim, and the stroke of her arms upon the water fell powerfully when she rose to the surface.

Clara Vane had disappeared; but as Gertrude lifted her head, she saw a mass of loose hair drifting downward some yards below, and struck out to grasp it. The next moment it was gone, and the brave swimmer sank with it.

A cry of despair rose from the crowd that had swarmed into the balcony and on the bridge. An old woman, who stood silent on the bank, with clasped hands, and lips pale as ashes, fell like a dead creature on the turf. Another woman, who had rushed down to a corner of the triangular garden, shrieked fearfully,

and flinging up her hands, implored help from the crowd in a wild rush of broken words. A little man, white as the flour that sprinkled his garments, fell upon his knees at the low window of the mill, and silently prayed, for he had no strength to move or speak.

A shout rang up from the bridge. Gertrude Harrington arose from the depths, girding one arm around Clara, and fighting the stream with the other. Her eyes were blinded by the wet tresses that swept across her face; but she kept with the stream, and with desperate force reached the shore.

A little higher up lay the form of an insensible man, with blood upon his temple, and an ashen whiteness on his face. Webster had plunged into a whirling vortex under the falls, dragged his friend up from the very grasp of death, laid him tenderly on the bank, and then left him to others, while he looked around for some sign of the girl who had gone down with him. He saw her face lifted upward, and that brave girl, on whom the last gleams of daylight streamed dimly, struggling with her toward the bank, which shelved down precipitously just there.

Gertrude saw this also, and was seized by a spasm of despair. Her strength was failing; the weight upon her arm bore her down. She seized a vine that trailed out into the water. It broke in her hand. One cry, one appealing look to the crowd that, to her vision, swarmed along the bank like ghosts, and her arm relaxed.

But Webster came reeling along the bank, plunged into the water, and, seizing Clara, bade Gertrude support herself with a hand on his shoulder, and so drifted down to the level shore, along which the crowd followed, ready to give help.

The giant strength of the young man availed him here. Securing a foothold in a network of roots, washed bare by the stream, he lifted the insensible form of Clara Vane to the crowding hands offered to receive her; then, taking Gertrude in his arms, climbed the bank, holding her close to his heart, and fell down upon the turf, without loosening his clasp.

The neighbors were busy enough now. Clara Vane was lifted in two stout pair of arms, and carried into the red farmhouse. Young Compton had got back enough life to walk there between two men. Several persons, who had nothing to do, came around Webster, and offered to take Gertrude from his arms; but, after taking a few moments for breath, he briefly desired them to take care of the others, declaring that he was strong enough to carry her home himself.

Then Hart was left alone, and she lay, conscious, but utterly exhausted in his arms. He looked down into her face, all white and wet; he listened to the sobbing breath that shook her bosom; his head drooped to hers, and kissing the quivering whiteness of her lips, he murmured,

"Oh, thank God! Thank God it was I who saved her!"

Then Gertrude began to struggle in his arms, and, in the dying light, he could see that a smile stole over the palor of her lips.

"Are you better? Are you getting strength, my beloved?"

This was no time for resentment, even if Gertrude had felt it, against these tender words. Had she not been at the gates of death with this man? Had not his strong arm dragged her away from that awful por-

tal, thus saving her friend and herself at once? Had he not a right to love the creature he had saved? Was not peril like theirs links of steel binding them together? She raised her arm, to which the dripping sleeve clung chilly, and, winding it around his neck, lifted herself to a sitting posture.

"Yes; I am better; I am strong now. The struggle wore me out; but I have not been insensible."

"Thank God for that!" said Webster, thinking of what he had done, and that these broken words were a forgiveness.

"But Clara! Where is she?"

"They have taken her to your house."

"Ah, poor Aunt Eunice! This will be hard on her."

"She will know that you are safe, and find cause only for gratitude."

"And your friend?"

Before Webster could answer, a shadow fell across the grass, at his feet, and a trembling voice questioned him,

"Is she dead?"

"No! no! Aunt Eunice; I am only wet, and out of breath; don't be frightened about me," answered Gertrude, reaching up her arms, and beginning to sob.

Aunt Eunice lifted both hands to her face, and Webster saw that she was shaking from head to foot; then she turned upon the young man.

"What on earth are you keeping the child here for, wet through and through, and her teeth a chattering in her head? If she can't walk, ain't you and I strong enough to help her along? Get up, Gertie, if you don't want to catch your death of cold."

Gertrude attempted to obey, but fell back upon the turf.

Webster arose to his feet, and almost lifted her from the earth. He had one arm around her waist, and was about to move forward, when Aunt Eunice came round on the other side, and put him away.

"We women can help each other best," she said.

"Just hold unto me, Gertie."

The girl was too much exhausted for resistance; but she whispered, "Oh, auntie! how can you—and he trembling so?"

"It is only yourself that trembles," said the old woman austere; for now that she was getting over her fright, a rigid sense of propriety came in full play; "and that is because you are shivering with cold."

"Yes; that is all. I can walk faster; but you shake so. Were you very much frightened?"

"Me frightened? Who told you so?"

"I thought, perhaps, you might be, for I was under water, and poor Clara clung to me so. Is she well? Has she spoken?"

"I don't know—how should I? Wasn't there trouble enough about you, not but that I am ready now."

"Oh, aunt! go forward and help. These people will never know what is best without some one to direct. Remember, a minute may be life and death to her."

Gertrude was frightened by her own words, and seized with sudden dread, attempted to walk more swiftly.

"Do not exert yourself; I will go," said Webster, moving forward. "Have no fear that all will not be done that is possible."

When he was gone, Gertrude leaned heavily on her aunt, and her voice was choked with tears.

"Oh! Aunt Eunice, how could you treat him so? But for him both Clara and I would have been dead now!"

The old woman said nothing; but her arm gave a quick, nervous jerk.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### IS SHE ALIVE?

WHEN Aunt Eunice and her shivering charge reached the terrace steps, they were thronged with men and women who eagerly questioned each other about what was going on within.

"Is she alive? Has she stirred yet? Will the doctor never come?" were questions that followed them into the house.

When Gertrude appeared, these questions changed to a clamor of thanksgiving. The women pressed forward and flung their arms around her; the children clung to her skirts, and clamored out their sympathetic joy. The whole crowd was in commotion. But Aunt Eunice hurried through it in grim haste. She was bitterly ashamed of her own fainting fit, and fearing that some one might remind her of it, made no answer to their congratulations.

When she came in sight of the open door, which was thronged like the steps, Gertrude grew strong with

anxiety, and regardless of her dripping garments, hurried forward to the room where her friend was lying, still white, cold, and insensible.

Aunt Eunice followed her. Webster had been in advance of them a few minutes, and already a huge armful of kindling-wood had been piled on the kitchen fire, and a feather-bed, with blankets, was being brought down stairs.

"Let the men folks all go out," said Aunt Eunice, once more firm and efficient in her own house. "Four or five of the neighbors are enough. Pile on more wood—dry hickory. Don't groan and sob so, Mrs. Vane, we'll bring her to. Betsey Taft, go to the blanket-chest, and tumble down an armful. That's right, Gertie; you've got more sense than the whole of them put together."

This encomium was hardly heeded by Gertrude, who was attempting to remove the dripping garments from that cold form, pausing now and then to smooth out the golden hair, and wipe the dank moisture from it, without much regard to the women who stood by, some talking, some in tears, and all helpless as a cage full of frightened birds.

"Do help me!" pleaded the trembling girl, as she strove to take off the wet and soiled dress that had been so crisp and blue only an hour before. "It clings dreadfully, and my fingers tremble so."

"Let me take it off," said the mother, kneeling down by her child. "Who ought to dress and undress her but me?"

The poor woman attempted to take that white arm from its dripping sleeve, which clung to the cold limb like moss to marble, and baffled those quivering hands,

until Aunt Eunice came up, tore the delicate fabric as if it had been a cobweb, and wrapped the lifeless form in the blanket she had made hot before the fire. But when she attempted to lift the young creature in her arms, Mrs. Vane fired up in her grief, and gathered that form, blanket and all, in a desperate embrace.

"No one on earth shall take the poor darling from me," she said. "Who has a right to care for her and tend her if her own mother is put aside? Aunt Eunice is good, as good as can be; but she has never been a mother."

Here Aunt Eunice stopped beating the feather bed, which lay upon the floor, drew herself upright, and cast a withering glance on the poor, weak mother, who had lost all discretion in her grief. After one long, stern, annihilating gaze, which Mrs. Vane could not see, tears were so thick in her eyes, the outraged spinster snatched up a pillow, pounded it unmercifully, and flung it on the hearth to get hot, much as if it had been a scape-goat for all the sins of that tender-hearted, garrulous little woman.

"Now the bed is ready, will you let us lift her in?"

The old maid's voice softened a little when she saw the great tears rolling down Mrs. Vane's face, and met the pitiful look uplifted to hers, and she added, almost persuasively, "Now you had better."

"No, no! I'm her mother. Do you think I haven't ever lifted her before? Come, Clara, my own little darling—mother will carry you to bed. Oh! put your arms up! Do, do put your arms up! See, Clara, mother is kissing you! Oh! oh! she cannot kiss me back! She never will! She never will!"

The poor woman, weak, garrulous, but full of motherly tenderness, rose to her feet, and half bore, half dragged that lifeless form to the bed. Kindly hands were ready to help her; but she put them aside with this piteous protest: "I am her mother, neighbors—her own, own mother! Let me do it!"

Love is strength to a woman. This simple-hearted mother laid her child tenderly on the feather bed and huddled blankets upon her; then fell down by her side, laughing, crying, and pleading for the young creature's life in ungovernable hysterics.

Now Aunt Eunice took the lead.

"Let her alone," she said. "Poor thing! she is in no danger; but this other—Gertrude, stop shivering, and go to work! This is no time for snivelling. Rub her limbs, her chest, her heart—hard—hard. Don't, any of you, be afraid of hurting her. Turn her face downward. Move her. Rock her in the hot blankets! That is something like. There can't be too many hands at work here. You musn't come in! Shut that door, I say! Oh! is it you, Mr. Vane? It may be wrong, but I haven't the heart to say no. Your wife says I have never been a mother—but I can feel. Come in and look at her. We think she is getting warmer. The blue has gone out of her lips. There may be life, if any of us could find whereabouts her heart is."

The little miller crept into the room like a ghost; lifting his eyes to Aunt Eunice, he whispered, "Thank you!" and kneeling down by his wife, murmured, pitiously,

"Mother! Mother! Don't take on so! I am here!"

Mrs. Vane reached up her arms and clung to the little man.

"Oh, Vane! Oh, father! father! It seems as if it was only yesterday you came to the bed, and bent down just so, to look at her, when she was a baby—our first baby, and now she's lying there."

Vane bent down, and kissed the woman, tenderly, again and again, "Don't, mother! Don't take on so! I'm here."

"But the doctor! Why don't he come?" cried Aunt Eunice. "Don't he know that time is life or death to us?"

"He's coming," answered Vane, weakly. "I tried to go after him; but, somehow, my legs gave out, and every step was a mile; but our Patty went by me, just stopping to call out, 'Don't try, Par; I'll get him. You go back to marm and tell her the doctor is coming sure.' There, now, isn't that the sound of hoofs on the bridge? Mother! mother! Don't you hear?"

Mrs. Vane started up, put aside her cap with one hand, while she listened breathlessly, holding back her sobs. The other women, for a moment, stopped their merciful work, and scarcely breathed.

That instant the door was flung open, and little Patty Vane rushed through, her cheeks white, her eyes full of fire, and her hair flying over her face.

"He is coming! he is coming! He's getting off from his horse now! Don't cry, mammy! the doctor is here. Oh, my! how white she looks! Clara! Clara! Oh, sister Clara!"

Down upon her knees the child dropped, and, flinging her plump arms over that marble neck, fell to kissing the face, the eyes, the forehead, the white lips of

Clara Vane, with the passionate fervor of a loving child.

"They move! they move! She kissed me back, I tell you, every one! She kissed me back!" cried the little creature, springing to her feet, and appealing to the crowd. "Oh, Gertie! She did!—she did!"

Gertrude received the little creature, with a cry of thanksgiving, as she leaped into her arms. Then they sunk down, clinging together, and she too felt a faint motion of life answer her awe-stricken kisses. It was hardly a breath; but that thrilled her with joy from head to foot.

Before the girl could speak the doctor came in. Little Patty had found him with a patient, more than a mile away; but he had come round by the road, while she, knowing every path in the neighborhood, had taken a short-cut across lots.

"Come here, doctor," said Aunt Eunice, "if you can tell whereabouts a woman's heart is, I want to know. I sha'n't be satisfied, by no manner of means, till I hear hers a-beating."

The doctor bent down, and was about to feel for this sign of life, when Aunt Eunice laid her hand on his arm.

"Tell me where to find her heart. That, I should say, would be more proper," she observed with cutting reproof.

The doctor glanced at Clara's face, to which a gleam of warmth was returning, and allowed the spinster to push him decorously back.

"My hand would be quite as satisfactory to the friends here," she observed. "I only wanted to know where to apply it."



The doctor laughed lightly, reached forth his hand, and was about to lay it just above the left side of that long, thin waist, when Aunt Eunice drew back with a chilling rebuke in her eyes.

This scene was interrupted by a joyous scream from little Patty, who, nestling herself into the blankets, and close to her sister's bosom, had rested one little hand, by pure accident, on her heart.

"It's a beating! it's a beating! I—I can feel it stir, like a little bit of a bird in the bottom of its nest. Give me your hand, Gertie, and then say if it don't."

Gertrude gave up her hand to the child. Then they both seemed to listen, with doubt and wonder, as infants hear the ticking of a watch. Slow smiles crept over their parted lips, and Gertrude spoke almost in a whisper, with her eyes lifted to the doctor, who stood earnestly regarding her.

"Yes; it beats!"

Here a great sob broke from that side of the bed where the little miller knelt by his wife, and the latter fell upon his neck.

"Oh, father! father! Is she alive? Do you believe it? Clara! Clara!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### ANOTHER PATIENT.

"MOTHER!"

That was Clara's first word when she came to life; and the strangely indistinct object that met her eyes, as they opened so feebly, was a face bathed in tears, a cap all awry, and a tangle of pink ribbons fluttering confusedly over it. All this brought the words mother once more to her white lips, almost with a smile.

Then Clara was conscious that a living heart had nestled close to hers, and was warming it into life. She felt the kisses of soft, young lips on her bosom, her neck, and her face. Sometimes both her hands were huddled under the child, who was striving to warm them, while now and then a sweet, cooing voice came out of the blankets, which said,

"Sister Clara! sister Clara! It is me! Your little Patsey! It's only me."

There had been great pain, as that young soul took back its life—a feeling of horror and distress, as if the spirit had been wandering in dark, gloomy places against its will; but now a sweet glow of comfort pervaded Clara's whole being; a flood of tender joy seemed to roll over her; warmth itself was an exquisite sensation. The sound of voices gave her a promise of safety. She could only speak faintly, and in syllables; but there



was pleasure in this dreamy state of listening. The soft patter of her mother's voice was like music to her, for, weak and futile as it might have seemed to others, every word was full of tender love to her—tender and holy, at one time, for the grateful woman, not knowing how to frame fitting words herself, had broken into the Lord's Prayer, and was repeating it meekly, and in pathetic thankfulness, like a little child. At the end, the miller whispered, "Amen!" in a voice so humble that no one heard it, save the child that he prayed for, and the wife whom he prayed with.

Meantime there was great cause of anxiety in another part of the old farmhouse. Young Compton had managed to reach the terrace, in a feeble state of exhaustion, when he fell insensible on the turf, and was carried into the best chamber, where he lay in a long, dead faint, from which it seemed impossible to arouse him. When the doctor saw that Clara had no need of him, owing to the great care and forethought of Aunt Eunice, he betook himself to this chamber, and found his patient threatened with congestion of the brain. In attempting to dive after the girl whose safety his rashness had imperilled, his head had struck the sharp point of some rock under water, which wounded his temple, and had so disturbed the brain that serious danger might be apprehended.

While Gertrude was busy with her friend, Webster devoted himself to Compton, who was, in fact, more seriously injured than his companion had been. Aunt Eunice, seeing another path of duty marked out for her, left the young girl to the care of her niece, and introduced herself as consulting physician in the sick chamber above stairs. Here some little dispute arose

between her and the doctor, who had an idea of his own about the best method of bringing the young gentleman out of his fainting fit, while Aunt Eunice insisted on binding his head with horseradish leaves, and bathing his chest with wormwood and vinegar, before anything else was attempted.

No country doctor that ever I heard of, has the courage to set the superior wisdom of his patients at defiance. So, finding no great harm in horseradish leaves, and deciding within himself that a hot bath of wormwood, after so much cold water, might give some comfort to his patient, our particular doctor fell into harmony with the old maid. While she was out in the garden, selecting the most succulent leaves and the bitterest wormwood, he brought the young man back to consciousness, after his own fashion, gave his directions clearly to Webster, who had tact enough to keep them to himself, and sat by patiently while Aunt Eunice applied her remedies. When she observed, in a self-satisfied way, that nursing was more important than doctoring, he agreed with her at once, and added, pleasantly, "especially such nursing as he was sure to find in that house," which brought the grimest of grim smiles into that hard face, and a glass of currant wine from the parlor cupboard, when the doctor took his leave.

Clara Vane was out of danger; but by no means strong enough to cross the bridge that night; so she was taken up to Gertrude's chamber, and buried in the snow-drift of her white bed, with plenty of fine, homemade blankets to keep her warm, and linen, white and glossy as satin, to soften the wool. The poor girl was in a languid, dreamy state even yet; her limbs ached a little, and had lost their elasticity.

When Aunt Eunice saw this, she ordered a halt in the proceedings, went hurriedly up to the garret, where a bright, brass warming-pan had been put aside for the season, and brought it down. Setting it on the hearth, with the handle resting on the seat of a chair, she threw back the lid, and put a generous shovelful of hickory coals into the pan. Over these she scattered a handful of brown sugar, and marched up stairs again, leaving a thin cloud of spicy smoke behind her.

"Now," she said, calling back from the stairs, "you may bring her right along. The bed will be warm as toast when you get to it; and if sugar-smoke don't take the stiffness out of her limbs, nothing will, depend on that."

Mrs. Vane and Gertrude half carried Clara up stairs, and put on her night-garments while Aunt Eunice moved the warming-pan gently to and fro between the linen sheets, leaving them full of comfortable heat and wholesome fragrance.

The poor girl, weak with exhaustion, sank into the luxurious warmth with a sigh of gentle satisfaction, and, resting down on the pillows, closed her eyes.

Then Mrs. Vane clasped her hands and watered her abundant gratitude with a soft rain of tears. The little miller stood on the stairs watching these proceedings from a distance; and when Clara was in the bed, crept up meekly and kissed her, whispering,

"Don't forget to say your prayers, daughter, for you have been very near to dying."

Clara opened her eyes and smiled. The miller took this for answer enough, and went away, calling out softly to his wife,

"Come, mother! you and I, and little Patty, will go

home. I never expected to cross that bridge with a light heart again."

Mr. Vane looked around for Patty, but she was not in the chamber, though she had come up with the rest. They found her, however, in the entry, sitting on the lowest stair; but when her parents came down, she did not move.

"Come, Patsey, dear," said the father, "we are going home."

But I am going to watch with sister Clara; she'll want me," answered the little girl, shaking the hair back from her eyes with a wilful motion. "We mustn't all leave her; she might die in her sleep."

The miller patted his little girl on the head—his heart was brimful of tenderness that night.

"Come, come, little Patty, you must go with us. Clara will want lots of sleep, and that we can't help her in. Early in the morning you shall come and see how bright she is."

Patty turned away her head, and lifted one shoulder naughtily.

"I want to watch with her my own self."

"But she will sleep with Gertie."

"That's it! Gertie will just go to sleep—then who knows?"

"Come, come! you must go! It's getting late."

The child left her seat, discontented and pouting; her steps dragged as they led her across the bridge; still she made no further protest, but crept up to her own little garret bedroom in silence. Country children in New England learn self-help early. Mrs. Vane never thought of undressing her little girl, and only kissed her good-night as she crept reluctantly up stairs.

The little miller had not enjoined prayers on his daughter without feeling the need of them himself. While he was upon his knees trembling with tender thanksgiving, a little figure came down stairs, glided through the passage, and softly lifting the latch, shut herself outside of the door. With the light swiftness of a bird, Patty flew across the bridge, and up the stone terrace of the red house. Many houses in New England are left unlocked, year in and year out. In this village keys were seldom turned. As she had left her father's house, little Patty let herself into that of Aunt Eunice's, and crept like a mouse up stairs. The bedroom was dimly lighted by a small lamp, but Patty could see Clara and Gertrude asleep in each other's arms. So, folding her feet under her, she settled down on the floor, and when the girls awoke in the morning, they found her waiting there.

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## CHAPTER X.

### LITTLE PATTY.

**L**ITTLE PATTY sprang to her feet, and shook out the thick masses of her hair before the glass, satisfied that no further toilet was necessary to a watcher who had been asleep all night with her dress on.

"There, now, you are both wide awake, and bright as new dollars. So I reckon I'll go home, and help marm get breakfast ready."

Clara, who was half awake, sat up in bed and

watched the quick, vigorous action of the child, as she swayed her hair to and fro, using her brush as if it had been a currycomb, and herself a restive colt.

"Why—why, Patty, dear, is that you. Over so early?"

"Yes, it's me, sure enough; but I came late, not early."

"Late—why, dear, it isn't quite daybreak yet."

"Well, I know that," answered the child, brushing away with renewed energy. "There it is again, all tangled up; these newfangled brushes are just awful. I came back right away last night."

"You came back, and alone?"

"Just so!"

"How could they let you?"

"Didn't ask 'em. Cut and run after they had gone to bed. Well, not to bed in earnest; for I heard Par praying about you like sixty, and Mar, just saying amen! amen! amen! as if she wanted to catch up with him, and couldn't. I knew they wouldn't be listening then, so put for the bridge—that's how I did it!"

"Oh, little Patty! how could you?" cried Clara, with so much tenderness in her voice that the little girl dropped her hair, and flung both arms around her sister's neck.

"It was, 'cause I couldn't help it, sister Clara."

"You precious, naughty darling!"

"I was afraid they would let you die in the night."

"Poor child!"

"Gertie, there, sleeps like a mole—and I knew it. How could I go to bed with that old mill-dam going on like a roaring lion, just as if it meant to drown you over again. I tried to be good and knelt down to say

my prayers, but the water seemed to kind of howl at me, and when I come to the little prayer, and said, 'now I lay me down to sleep,' I knew it was an awful fib, for I couldn't do it. Haven't slept a wink, and didn't mean to. That's all about it."

Clara had intended to reprove the affectionate little thing, but that was impossible; so she gave her half a dozen kisses instead, and whispered that she might wake Gertrude, who lay smiling in her dreams as if rocked on a bed of water-lilies.

Little Patty needed no second hint, but flung herself upon the sleeping girl in a burst of glee, patted her cheeks, pulled her hair, kissed the breath from her lips, and filled the room with laughter.

"Oh, you little wretch!" cried Gertrude, seizing upon her childish assailant, and rolling her over and over amongst the pillows. "How dare you kiss me so?"

"Because I dare," answered Patty, shouting with merriment, which softened into exquisite pathos; "because you sha'n't have anything but kisses all your life, for diving down after our Clara. I saw you do it; and I love you. Oh, how I do love you! I wish every kiss was a silver dollar, and I'd just fill this room with 'em."

"Hush! hush! or the sick gentleman will hear us!"

"So he will," answered the child, holding a finger to her lips; "for he's wide awake enough. I peeked into his room just as the day broke, and he was talking to himself like a house afire. The other gentleman was a trying to pacify him, but he couldn't. My, wasn't his cheeks red!"

The two girls looked at each other anxiously.

"He must be very ill," faltered Clara—and her own lips grew white.

"Yes!" answered Gertrude. "We did not think that pleasant day could end in all this. But Mr. Webster is with him."

Clara began to dress herself in nervous haste.

"Shall I run for the doctor?" said Patty, dividing her hair and braiding it with her nimble fingers.

"No!" said Gertrude. "We must not act at random, like that; but I will tell you what you may do; just run in and ask Mr. Webster to send us word how he is."

Patty started.

"Be careful, and make no noise."

"I'll creep like a mouse," answered the child.

"Don't speak loud!"

"I'll give him a little mite of a whisper, right in his ear."

"That's a good girl!"

Away went Patty, with one half of her hair braided, and the other hanging loose. She pushed the door of the spare chamber open so carefully, that Webster started, when he found her close to him.

"Please, gentleman, Clara and Gertie want to know just how he is getting along?"

Webster smiled, the naive earnestness of the little girl interested him. Her position was so piquant, as she pointed over her shoulder to the sick man, that he gazed upon her for a moment without answering.

"I mean him!" she whispered, nodding towards the bed. "They wan't to know!"

Webster took the tiny hand which was helping out her whisper with quick gesticulation.

"He is ill—very ill, I fear!" he said.

Patty's eyes grew wild and large.

"Is he going to die? Oh, gentleman! don't let him do that; he tried so hard to get our Clara out of the water."

"No, child, I hope it is not so bad as that; but we can tell better when the doctor comes."

"Shall I go after him?"

"No, not yet."

"But I can cut across lots, and it won't take me no time!"

"That is a brave girl; but I think the doctor will come early, of his own accord."

Patty drew a deep breath, and stood irresolutely, as if she wished to say more, but did not exactly know how.

"You can tell the young ladies."

"The who?"

"Miss Clara and Miss Gertrude."

"Oh, our girls, you mean! Well, I'll tell 'em."

"Say that he has slept a little."

Patty nodded, and answered.

"Just so."

"But he has some fever!"

"Is that why his cheeks are so red?"

"I fear so."

"And his lips so dry? Hark! he is asking for drink!"

A pitcher of water stood on the table. Patty lifted it with both hands, poured some of the cool liquid into a glass, and held it to the sick man's lips. He raised his head and drank eagerly. The child's eyes sparkled, and a bright smile came over her face.

"He likes it!" she said, in her pretty whisper. "Just as soon as I can get some one to draw it, he shall have some, cold as ice, from the bottom of the well. There now! just lie down on the pillow, and go to sleep, like a dear, good gentleman. It'll do you lots of good."

Patty smoothed the pillow, and touched the burning cheek with her little hand; then the lips she had moistened moved, and uttered a name.

"Clara!" cried the child, in great glee. "He thinks I am Clara. I'll go and tell her." Away the child flew, radiant with what she conceived to be good news.

"Oh, Clara, what do you think! The gentleman thought that I was you, and called me Clara, when he was almost asleep."

Clara was dressing herself before the glass; a red flush came over the face reflecting hers, till she was ashamed to look at it.

Gertrude saw the flush, and spoke for her friend.

"That's nothing, dear Patty! people always talk nonsense when they are feverish. But how is he this morning? That is what I want to know."

"Talking and fever!" answered the child promptly. "The gentleman said fever, and I heard him talk with my own ears. He wanted drink, too, and has got to have it, cold as a stone; that I gave him has been standing all night. Wonder where Betsey Taft is. She's got to sink that bucket now, I tell you."

Again the child flitted from the room, and in a few minutes Gertrude and Clara heard the old well-pole creaking like a rheumatic limb, as it descended into the depths of the coldest spring in all that neighborhood.

"I wonder!" said Gertrude, half selfishly, half in compassion for her friend, "I wonder if it would be very dreadful for us to go in and see if Mr. Compton is so very ill for ourselves."

Clara did not speak, but Gertrude saw a sudden flush of light pass over her face in the mirror.

"I don't think there would be any harm!" she continued.

Clara was very busy with her hair, but she answered in a low, hesitating way, "that there really could not be anything wrong in it, though Aunt Eunice might think so."

"She needn't know!" said Gertrude. "Anyhow, it is the right thing to do, and I'm going. Come!"

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## CHAPTER XI.

### THE STOLEN VISIT.

THE two girls stole into the hall, and knocked softly at the door of that spare chamber. It was opened by Aunt Eunice, carefully dressed, with her hair done up tight from her face, and with a rigid twist behind.

"Well, what do you want?" demanded the old maid, holding the door half open.

"Oh, nothing, aunty!" answered Gertrude. "Only as you are here, we thought there could be no harm if we come just to inquire about him."

"Well, he's sick enough, thanks to your harum-

scarum ways, and that canoe, which is about as safe as a bread-tray."

"Can't we just step in, aunty, dear?" said Gertrude, putting one foot over the threshold.

"What for? It is no proper place for young girls."

"But you are here, aunty!"

The demure innocence of this little speech brought the first quiver of a smile to the woman's mouth.

"Me! as if there wasn't a difference."

"But so little, aunty, dear!"

"Is he very ill?" Clara ventured to ask. "Can't we help a little?"

Clara's sweet, anxious face, lifted to hers, really touched the old maid more effectually than Gertrude's pleading and adroit flattery, which pleased the ancient female, though she had a grave sense of its unsoundness all the time.

"Well, if you want to so dreadfully, come in; but step light, and don't make any noise."

Gertrude passed in first. While Clara stood, pale and quiet, with noiseless tears dropping down her cheeks, as she gazed on the man who had nearly lost his own life in saving hers, her friend was exchanging broken whispers with Webster, who had forgotten to release the hand she had given with the first greeting, and in truth was holding it in a warm clasp.

"You are safe. You have no cold; no injury of any kind. Make me quite sure of that," said the young man.

"Oh, I was never better in my life!" she answered.

"But you?"

"Can't you see that I'm all right?"

"But you look pale!"

"That is from the gray light, and I am rather anxious about our friend there. It will be impossible for me to leave him, I fear."

Gertrude lifted her eyes an instant, and dropped them again; but not till he had seen the pleasure that brightened them.

"Of course you cannot leave him," she murmured. "It would be cruel."

That moment little Patty came through the open door, carrying a pitcher between her two hands, which bore her down with its weight.

"There," she said, lifting it to the little round table, and shaking the drops from her hands, "that is something worth while. It was enough to make one dry to hear it a trickling down the bucket."

Clara stooped down and kissed the child, leaving a stain of tears on her bright, young face.

"Dear little Patty," she murmured.

The child looked at her with earnest gravity.

"Sister Clara, never mind about going home just yet. I mean to help marm get breakfast ready, and wash up all the dishes. It's easy enough, when I stand on a chair. So you never mind. Only don't cry any more. I don't like it."

Shaking her demure little head, Patty went away, resolved to do such prodigies of work that no one should miss Clara at home; but she saw the doctor, when half-way down the terrace, and ran back.

"He's coming; the doctor is just here!" she proclaimed, in an excited whisper. "I'll tell him to come right up."

The next minute she met the doctor at the door, and after telling him that he was wanted dreadfully

up stairs, took to the bridge, and got home just time enough to meet her father at the gate, with the key of the mill in his hand.

"Where on earth have you been child?" questioned the miller astonished.

"Over to see about all the sick folks," answered the little girl. "Clara's first rate, but that young gentleman has got a hot fever. Red in his face with it."

"I'll go and see," said the little man alarmed, "and you scamper in before Mar misses you."

Patty did scamper in and Mr. Vane turned towards the bridge.

There was positive cause for apprehension in that sick-room. Guy Compton had received injuries on the chest and head, fever intervened, and delirium set in. For some days his state filled the whole village with anxiety; but good professional care, and such attention as few men ever received, soon brought him to a state of convalescence, and he was drawn back to life by some of the sweetest ties that ever entangled themselves around a sick-bed.

During three or four days, Webster and Gertrude were unremitting in their attendance in the sick-room; but there came a time when their presence seemed quite unnecessary; and Aunt Eunice began to remark, that when Clara Vane was seen crossing the bridge, Gertrude began to prepare for a walk, and Webster found confinement indoors oppressive. She also remarked that the invalid became wonderfully anxious that his friends should take the air about that time, and found the society of Clara Vane ample compensation for their absence.

When the old maid mentioned this to Mrs. Vane,



the good woman smiled, and smirked, and shook her cap ribbons with a knowing flutter.

"Young people would be young people," she said. "As for her part, she never could forget the time when she and Vane—Little Vane people used to call him—was just as anxious to get off alone, with nothing but apple-trees, and juniper-bushes, and birds, to hear what they said, which wasn't anything in particular, till the very last. Then Vane just asked her to marry him, out of hand, which she had been expecting, and rather wondered that he hadn't done it before. No harm had come of that; so she wasn't going to make or break matches. Miss Harrington could do as she pleased; but there wasn't many such young fellows in the State as Hart Webster. He was a connection of hers. If that was what troubled Miss Eunice, why of course she had but to say it, and—"

Aunt Eunice broke in here, and, for a moment, stopped this swift current of words, which threatened to go on forever.

"I spoke about it," she said, "because the neighbors will talk, and—"

"Of course they will talk. What can stop 'em? Why, it was just so about me and Vane. 'When are you a going to be married?' says one; 'I haven't had my invitation to the wedding,' says another, and all the time I didn't know more about it than they did. Only Vane kept a coming and coming; but it all came out right, you see."

"But these young people may have no idea of marrying," said the old maid, thrusting in her sentence by main force.

"Oh, yes, they have. Trust 'em for that. Why,

there wasn't a minute of all that time that I wasn't a thinking about it; and after we were married, Vane told me the same thing. He was hankering to speak out all the time; but didn't know how to bring it in naturally. Young people are always thinking about it. Human nature is human nature all over the world."

Notwithstanding all this amount of human wisdom, which came upon her in a deluge, Aunt Eunice was anxious about the state of affairs in her own house. Perhaps some remembrance of her own youth deepened these feelings, for she had been a fair girl in her time, and people hinted that a great many sad and tender memories had carried her, year after year, to the hill-side graveyard, where the tombstone of a young clergyman who had died in her father's house, was just beginning to have black moss upon it.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### CONFIDENCES ON THE BRIDGE.

THERE was no longer any excuse for Webster's stay at the farmhouse; for Compton was now able to sit at the window, and walk a little on the terrace; but the young man lingered yet, and the miller, proudly considering him as his guest, urged his longer stay with the most cordial hospitality. Aunt Eunice could find no excuse to interfere. One day, however, she happened to meet Vane on the old bridge, where he was taking a silent survey of his own mill,



which was really a picturesque building, and worthy of attention in an artistic point of view.

"Fair sort of a building; don't you think so?" he observed, as Aunt Eunice paused by his side, and folded her arms on the railing, preparatory to a reasonable talk.

"I think so, for it was the first thing I can remember. The farm wouldn't seem like home without that old mill."

"Yes," answered the little miller. "The sound of the water-wheel is pleasant. I wonder who will have it when I'm gone."

"I sometimes ask myself that about the farm," said Aunt Eunice, with a sigh. "It isn't many females that could carry it on, and I shouldn't like to have it sold out of the family."

"Oh!" answered the miller, "as like as not your girl will marry some smart young fellow, who will double its value; for, as you was saying, Aunt Eunice, farming comes hard on women-folks."

Aunt Eunice shook her head.

"I've about given up hoping for that," she said. "Gertrude don't take to work with a will; and she's—"

"She's a proper, purty girl, Aunt Eunice, and it ain't astonishing if she does look a notch above farming."

"You think she will?"

"Why not? I haven't seen a harnsomer girl than your Gertie for many a year. She might marry a lawyer or a judge. Who has a better right?"

The color came into Aunt Eunice's face. She had brought the conversation round to the desired point.

"Speaking of lawyers, didn't some one tell me that your nephew had studied law?"

"I don't remember speaking of it; but he has, and is making a smart beginning. His father was a lawyer before him, and just such a looking young fellow, when he married our Mary. Since then he's been made Supreme Judge of the State. I may as well own up to it. We were a good deal uplifted with that wedding. I only hope that your girl will turn out as well."

Aunt Eunice sighed, and answered thoughtfully,

"I hope she will; but who knows?"

"Well, I reckon it would'nt be hard to guess. Things look a good deal that way; don't you think so? Not that you can be much of a judge."

A faint color mounted slowly to the old maid's face, and, if Vane had been looking, he might have seen her lips quiver.

"You are thinking of your nephew?"

"Yes; who else? Now, I tell you, it looks like it. What keeps the young fellow here so long? You are busy about the house; but I have my eyes about me, and, while the mill grinds, I sometimes look out of the window. How many times, now, on an average, do you think I have seen that young couple sitting under the old willow, opposite to my mill? Why, every day, for a week; sometimes with their heads bent, and talking to each other so earnestly; sometimes looking at the water, without a word; in fact, I know the signs, Aunt Eunice, and they are all there."

"I have thought it myself," said Aunt Eunice, frankly. "Now tell me, old neighbor, is there anything I can learn of this man that should make me afraid to believe it?"

"What! Nephew Webster? I never heard a word against him in my life. A finer young fellow doesn't breathe. He may have had his wild scrapes at college, but that amounts to nothing."

"You *know* this?"

"Know it! Who should be acquainted with him if I am not? He is my own sister's child. Wouldn't it be strange now if you and I were to turn out relations? The girls have always loved each other, like sisters, and my running a mill won't hurt him."

"I think they love each other!" thought the old maid; but, for the world, she would not have framed these words into speech; for something in her own heart made her sensitively delicate when the affections of another woman were concerned.

"There! There they go now!" said Vane, suddenly, leaning over the side of the bridge. "I say, Aunt Eunice, do you see where her hand is—locked fast in his; and I'll be bound their two hearts moving together like double mill-stones. I don't think it's of much use asking questions after that. If they ain't beginning to understand each other, you and I needn't trouble ourselves to guess about it."

Those two young people, sitting under the clump of willows below the dam, had no idea that they were objects of attention. They were so deeply absorbed in each other, that it is doubtful if they would have regarded the figures on the bridge, even if they had looked that way. There had been silence between them for a long time—such sweet silence as is to the expression of love what perfume is to the flower. I think her hand was in his, though both seemed unconscious of it. Sometimes he would press that hand closely, as if nothing

in heaven or on earth could tear that clasp asunder. Then his fingers would relax, while his brow became serious, for thoughts of wisdom would creep into his love-dream, and trouble it.

Gertrude thought of nothing but the exquisite happiness of the moment. She had no need of worldly knowledge, or thought of future care. Such things had never yet found a place in her life.

"To-morrow I must go," said Webster, dreamily, as if speaking to himself.

The hand in his gave a quick flutter, like a bird frightened on its nest.

"To-morrow!" she said. "No! no! that is too soon."

"But I have been here more than a week."

"A week! But it seems so short a time."

Webster held her hand closer and murmured,

"Ah! who so keen-eyed, as remarks,  
The ebbing of the glass;  
When all its sands are diamond sparks,  
That glitter as they pass."

Gertrude looked up and smiled; then cast down her eyes and sighed. Would he really go home on the morrow?

"And shall we ever meet again?" she asked.

"This would be a bitter week in my life, if I thought not," he answered, almost passionately. "But you—"

She looked at him earnestly.

"Why, this one week *is* my life," she said.

He threw one arm around her waist, and held her close to his heart, which was beating so vehemently, that she struggled a little to free herself, while her own panted with something like terror.

"Not yet! Not till you say that you love me—that you know how wildly I love you!"

This was said with an outburst of feeling that revealed some wild struggle of his ardent nature.

"Speak to me! Speak to me!" he added, impatient with her silence. "Have I not said that I love you?"

"What shall I say? How can I answer? My lips do not frame such words easily," she murmured, creeping back to his heart.

"You have answered," he said, pressing his lips to hers. "What have words to do with a love like ours. That which I have felt, no human being could speak. Do you understand this, my darling?"

"It is not easy to understand so much that I never dreamed of before!" was her tremulous answer.

"Did you guess; did you know, that I lost my heart on the very day we met, my beautiful one?"

"I only know that I have been very happy since then; but now you talk of going away!"

"I must! You will understand that; men must toil, that those they love may be sure of a future. I never knew what ambition was till now. Believe me, dear one, you shall have no cause to blush for this hour, or the man you have made so happy. We may have a struggle at first, but even then, richer people shall be forced to look on us with envy."

"I haven't thought of that; why should we care whether men envy us or not? Is it so important to be rich?"

"People think so!"

Gertrude blushed and hesitated before she spoke again.

"Then we need not care, for Aunt Eunice has got the best farm in the village, and she means to give it to me!"

Webster laughed; her idea of wealth amused him.

"It is the same as mine now!" continued Gertrude, generously. "And aunt wants some one to take the care off her hands."

"I think we must let her endure it a little longer!" said the young man. "You and I were formed for the world, and must try our fortunes there. Aunt Eunice and her farm will be a capital retreat, when we get tired out with other things; but I am afraid, neither of us would be content with them for life."

"Perhaps!" said Gertrude, thoughtfully. "I know it is very dull to me, sometimes. Like a dream from which I shall wake to real life, by and by, it always seemed to me that some one would come and take me away."

"As I will come, after a year or two!"

A shadow fell upon Gertrude Harrington, as her lover spoke of coming back in two years. It seemed like eternity to her. Webster did not observe this, but went on.

"By that time, I shall have got a foothold in the profession, and a place in society, which you can share with honor. No, no, my girl! beauty and grace like yours were not made to fade away in a small country village. With love, youth, and resolution, what cannot be accomplished!"

Gertrude's cheek was burning. Out of his newly expressed love sprang an ambition which kindled her whole being. Yes, she would share this man's life; all that was strong and powerful in him should be matched

by her own exertions. If men looked up to him, women should envy her. She, too, would find a high place by his side, wherever he might be. While he was preparing for the battle of life, there was study for her—accomplishments to be mastered—experience to obtain. At the end of their engagement, he should find her prepared for any position which lay before him in the future. During some moments, ambition crowded love to the wall.

It was only for a few brief moments. While all her thoughts were in a tumult, he had dropped worldly calculations, and was asking her over and over again for some fresh assurance of love. In his eager longing for a certainty, which only time can give to any human being, he broke into entreaties and passionate exclamations which won her to more endearing confidence, and then, full of infinite contentment, they fell into silence; and so the soft purple of twilight gathered around the willow, and veiled in the heaven they had made for themselves.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

#### AUNT EUNICE SPEAKS OUT.

“GERTRUDE! Gertrude Harrington!”  
Up from the circling arm of her lover the young girl sprang with a little fluttering cry of dismay; for the voice was that of Aunt Eunice, and the tall figure of that ancient maiden loomed upon them from the soft mists on the river’s bank.

“Gertrude Harrington, if you don’t want to catch your death of cold, go right straight into the house, and tell Betsey to make you a hot cup of tea. Don’t be in a hurry, Mr. Webster, you’re not made of sugar or salt, to melt under the first drop of dew.”

Webster hesitated; but Aunt Eunice seated herself on an upheaving root of the willow, and folded a heavy plaid shawl about her, as if she at least was prepared to camp out for the night.

“Keep your seat! keep your seat!” she said, with a benign wave of the hand. “Gertie knows the way, and I want to have a little honest talk with you!”

Webster stood watching Gertrude, as she went up the path, with an eager longing to join her; but when she disappeared from the terrace, he resigned himself to fate, and sat down by the old maid, who folded both arms tightly in her shawl, and sitting upright with her back against the trunk of a willow, addressed him.

“Mr. Webster!”

“Madam.”

“If my girl had a brother or a father, it isn’t at all likely that I should have interfered; but being as it is, I feel necessitated to—”

“Do not hesitate, my dear Miss Harrington. There is nothing you can say that will give me pain or offence.”

“Both being far from my mind!”

“You find me extending a visit, which should have been a brief one, to a most unreasonable extent!”

These words struck Aunt Eunice in her most vulnerable point. Hospitality at the red farmhouse had been almost a religion, ever since she could remember.

The very idea that she could feel it a burden stung her with humiliation.

"No, Mr. Webster, it isn't that! I beg you wouldn't think it for a minute; but I ought to be a mother to that girl. What mother would let her stay out of doors with a stranger to this time of night, without feeling it her duty to ask the meaning of it?"

"I will spare you the embarrassment, Miss Harrington, for I feel sure it is not a pleasant duty you assume. Only a few minutes ago, I was asking your niece if she would one day become my wife!"

"You were asking her? Well, sir? Well, what did she say to that?"

"Little I think that you could object to; unless there is something which you desire for your niece more than I can give. Aunt Eunice, pray, congratulate me, and open your heart to a man who will do his very best to make that sweet girl both happy and prosperous."

Here the young man held out his hand with such frank cordiality, that Aunt Eunice let the shawl drop loose from her shoulders, and sat staring at him in blank amazement.

"So, then, you are engaged!"

"So far as we two are concerned; but nothing can be complete without your consent!"

"And the girl loves you?"

"She will scarcely deny it, if you ask her."

"You will not take her away from me?" cried the lone woman, with a sudden pang of anxiety.

"Not altogether; but a man worthy to be that girl's husband, must be in the world and ready to hold his part there."

The old maid dropped her arms, and great tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Oh, this is hard, awful hard!" she moaned.

"Yes!" said Webster. "It is hard that the happiness of one human being should be obtained at the expense of another; but that is the fate of too many."

"I have loved her all her life!" pleaded the woman. "And you, only just a week. I ought to have known that it would come sooner or later; but that does not make it the less hard to bear."

"But she will not love you less, Aunt Eunice!"

The old maid smiled through her tears, though Webster could not see it. To be called Aunt Eunice by this splendid young fellow, thrilled her to the heart, but the feeling melted away into deep sadness. There, in the soft purplish mist, with the willow branches rippling to the water, his voice sounded like another voice heard years and years before, on that very spot, while the soft, mellow sound of the mill-dam flowed on as it was flowing now; as the river of time had flowed when it carried that one soul into the ocean of eternity. The old woman's voice was entirely changed when he spoke again.

"You love this girl?"

The question was solemn and impressive. Webster answered it in the same spirit.

"With all the strength of my being!"

"And she loves you?"

"I think so."

"Hart Webster, you may kiss me!"

The young man leaned forward and touched those thin lips with his own. He did not know it, but since that evening under the willows, which had come back so

vividly into her life, the kiss of no man had met hers.

"Then I have your consent," said the young man beaming with happiness. The old maid did not answer at once, a look of trouble came into her face.

"Yes, young man you have mine, and I suppose that ought to be enough; but Gertrude has—yes, she has other relatives beside me."

"But none that will be likely to oppose us, I trust."

"I—I cannot tell— Why should they? the girl has made her own choice. Wait here a minute, I want a little time to think things over."

Aunt Eunice arose and marched off into the shelter of a clump of laurels which were growing dusky in the gathering twilight. There at the foot of a hemlock that sheltered the thicket she sat down, and with both hands locked under her shawl, began to ponder over what she had heard in her mind.

"I have been too fast, she thought, the girl isn't mine, kindness hasn't bought her, and after all I don't know as I have been specially kind to the sweet motherless creature; worse than motherless poor thing.—What shall I do! how can I explain to this proud young fellow without breaking her heart."

Some hard task evidently lay before the conscientious old maid, for she sat a long time pondering over it at the foot of the hemlock—so long that Webster became impatient, and began to walk about making a commotion among the laurels, which aroused her. She came forward, slowly and pale as death, for she felt like a criminal coming to judgment.

"Hart Webster," she said, "come and sit by me, I have something more to say."

"Nothing unpleasant, I hope," he answered, surprised by her pallor and the hesitation in her speech.

"Yes, it is unpleasant. It may force you to change your mind. It may break that poor child's heart."

"Not if my life can stand between her and any threatening evil."

"Hush! young man, do not speak so rashly. Remember, promises made in ignorance cannot be final. Nothing that you have said binds you as yet."

"That is for me to judge, I can imagine nothing that has the power to release me against my own wishes."

"I think you are an honest man," replied the old maid, eyeing him earnestly; "but again I say nothing binds you as yet. Sit down here."

As she spoke Aunt Eunice drew back into the shadow of the hemlock, where a purple mist was gathering heavily, and the grass seemed turning black under her feet.

Webster seated himself by her side, with his back against the hemlock. He was rather surprised by the solemn look of trouble that clouded the woman's face, but would not permit himself to think it anything which his energy might fail to conquer.

"Repeat it again, you love my niece."

"I do! I do!"

"Well enough to suffer pain for her?"

"Or I should not love her at all."

"Suspense—anxiety!"

"Those things fall to the lot of most men, they come in the common course of events."

"But men are called upon to make great sacrifices sometimes."

"Men meet the occasion. It is only cowards that hesitate."

"You are a proud man, Hart Webster!"

"Reasonably so."

"Proud of your intellect, of your family, of your integrity."

"Of the two latter, yes—I need not hesitate to say so much."

"Supposing—supposing—"

"Well!"

"Suppose those things so dear to every honest man should be brought into jeopardy by this engagement with my niece."

"I can suppose nothing of the kind. She is everything that a good woman can want or a proud one aspire to. The bare supposition does her a wrong."

"Yes, she is a good, pure, true-hearted girl."

"Then what do you mean, Miss Harrington? What are you hinting at?"

The young man's face was flushed now, and his eyes on fire. He could not understand this ambiguous language, and resented it.

"I was not speaking of Gertrude, but of that which may stand between you and her."

"Nothing can do that. Before hearing what you have to say, I can assure you of this!"

"Wait till you have heard."

"I will. Go on."

Aunt Eunice leaned forward, clasped her hands over her knees, and rested her face upon them, praying, perhaps, that the agony and shame of that moment might pass from her; but the weakness lasted only for a minute. When that had passed, she lifted her head and

spoke in a low, almost hoarse voice. That which she said seemed wrung with pain from the very depths of her soul. Webster grew still and white as he listened, but when the old maid's voice broke, and dry sobs heaved her bosom, he took her hand gently and kissed it.

"And is this all!" he said with a brave thrill of sympathy in his voice, "is this all!"

"It has almost killed me to say it," answered the old maid hoarsely. "I have done it once before in this very spot, but that was when a good man wanted to marry me."

"And this prevented it," said Webster indignantly.

"No, I prevented it. He was a minister of God's holy word. How could I, loving him so well, mate his holy calling with that?"

"I have heard something of this," said the young man.

"You have heard all that the world knows," replied Aunt Eunice sadly, "but not this."

"No, I heard that you were engaged and that he died."

"Yes, he died. The struggle killed him and hardened me. He was buried up yonder," said Aunt Eunice, pointing to the white stones of a graveyard in the distance, and the secret that parted us was buried here.

"There let it rest," said Hart Webster, taking the hand which the lone woman had pressed with pathetic significance to her bosom, in his. "It was right that you should tell me—right that my love for this fair girl should be put to some test. I am almost glad that it has been so, for I loved her proudly, passionately. Now my heart is broken up with tender sympathy. I did not know how deep and solemn the feeling was."



The old maid looked at the handsome face turned on her in all the inspiration of heroic love, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Is there two such men in the world?" she said in solemn wonder. "The world that has seemed so hard and barren to me."

"Do not say that; what place can be barren while she brightens it. I almost envy you the years that have made her so perfect."

The old maid's face was still anxious.

"She knows nothing—I have kept it here; you will not—"

Webster cut the hesitating request short. "She never must know. It shall be my duty to guard her from that and everything else which can bring pain. Now, Aunt Eunice, say to me that with all your heart I may have your niece."

A grand, beautiful smile lay on the old maid's face, as the first gleam of starlight fell upon it.

"It was a hard task, but God has rewarded me tenfold for the pain of it," she said. "If my niece Gertrude were an angel, Hart Webster, you would be worthy of her. Go in, go in, I must stay here alone. It seems as if I could really have a crying spell."

## CHAPTER XIV.

BY THE BROOK.

HART WEBSTER was gone. The first sweet dream of love that had ever dawned upon Gertrude, was broken by a farewell which left her in tears, and such vague sadness as haunts youth like positive grief until real sorrow comes. The first day she went off alone, and spent whole hours in her old playground on the hill, thinking over every word her lover had spoken there, and wondering if he was made unhappy by this brief separation, which seemed to her an eternity.

The girl lingered around the turf-seat on the rock, and wandered beneath the larch-trees, believing herself supremely miserable, but unconsciously falling into such vague dreams as haunt a brain which has never comprehended the realities of life. Gertrude was still scarcely more than a school-girl, wild, romantic, and with a world of latent ambition slumbering in her vivid nature. The first dawn of love brought this aspiring passion with it. Under the larch-trees Gertrude began to weave wild plans of an after-life to be spent with that one man, who was the glory and centre-figure of all her dreams. His powers of greatness she comprehended without admitting to herself the possibility of alloy. His brilliant intellect, his charm of manner, the energy with which he spoke of conquering

a career for himself, aroused all her enthusiasm and kindled her pride. What was there that talents like his could not achieve? What position was there in her native land that he might not aspire to? Proudly the young creature asked herself these questions and answered them triumphantly. As for herself, this brilliant being should be well mated. No one should have the power to say that he had chosen an ignorant or uninformed country girl to creep through life under the shadow of a husband's greatness. Henceforth she had duties to perform, an intellect to cultivate, a place to fill.

In all this one sweet, thrilling idea predominated with the girl—she loved and was beloved. If this first joy awoke proud aspirations, they sprang spontaneously out of a nature full of romance, but capable of real action, as it hardened in the world's fiery furnace.

But all these things were vague and dreamy now; rosy shadows were all around her. Every thought followed her lover. His last words lingered in her ear; the fire of his farewell kiss still burned on her hand. More than once she caught herself pressing that hand to her lips, because his had left a rosy stain there.

A brook ran down the little ravine that cleft the hill-side, some few yards from the larch-grove, and on its brink sat little Patty Vane, with one naked foot dropping down into the water, which rippled over and kissed it, as if a water-lily had been floating there. Close to the child was a tall cluster of ladies' ear-jewels, from which she had gathered a handful of the golden and ruby-spotted flowers, which lay glowing in her lap, to adorn the tattered doll which she was caressing.

Patty had managed to twist two of these jewels in her own ears, and was admiring her bright image in the brook, when a footstep startled her, and looking around she saw Gertrude moving about under the larch-trees.

"There she is, lonesome enough. Wonder how she likes it, just for once: don't you, dolly? You and I know. How long is it, dolly, since we haven't had a soul to speak to but marm, who don't let anybody talk but herself? 'Ever since those college chaps came,' I know you want to say that, dolly. But babies can't talk; and you are nothing but a baby yet."

Here Patty twisted a garland of jewels around her doll's head, and held her over the water, that she might admire her own image in the broken waves. Then she prattled on again.

"Sorry for her, are you? Of course you are. So am I. She's a great big girl, and hasn't a sign of a doll to comfort her; but you and I are company for each other. Shall we go up and see her? She'll have a chance to notice us, now that tall fellow has gone. Wasn't you half tickled to death, dolly, when you saw him riding over the bridge? I was, anyhow. There, now, isn't that lovely?"

While she was talking, Patty had not only crowned her doll with ladies' ear-jewels, but woven a garland around the bottom of her little muslin frock, and again the little thing was held over the brook; which reflected her in dancing fragments.

"There, how do you like this party dress? I mean to put on my new white apron with ruffles this very afternoon, just for myself and you. Between us, now, I'm tired out of being dressed up every day for

Cousin Hart Webster, and then made to wait till he and Mar and Clara have done eating; just as if I couldn't be hungry because I am a little girl. It's too bad—don't you think so, now?"

That moment a rabbit, that had been hiding in a thicket close by the child, trembling, and afraid to stir, gave a sudden leap across the brook, and Patty, fearfully startled, dropped her doll into the water. With a cry of real distress she plunged into the shallow water, snatched the doll which she fully believed to be sinking, and shook the drops from its frock, while her own plump legs were knee-deep in the little stream.

"Oh, my poor child! My own darling baby!" she cried. "It will be your death of cold! Wet through and through. Shouldn't wonder if it gives you a fit of teething, or scarlet fever, or something. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

The poor doll did look particularly forlorn. Its flaxen curls hung straight and limp and its muslin ball-dress fell in a wisp about its limbs. No wonder the child, with her keen sensibilities and splendid imagination, was possessed with an idea that the little thing really suffered. She began to cry in terrible earnest, and hugged the doll to her bosom.

"Don't be frightened," she said, "sister Clara was worse drowned than you are, and she come to; but then she hasn't been like herself since; all the time with that other college chap, who kept sick a purpose, I'm sure of it, just to have her a nursing him up. I do wish neither of 'em had ever come. Next thing I shall know he'll be going off, and sister Clara will look after him with her eyes full of tears, just as Gertie did this morning. Then she'll come up here and mope and

mope, just as she is doing now. Between you and me, dolly, sister Clara isn't the same girl that she used to be, always going over the bridge, and wanting to do something for that fellow. I don't think she's asked me to say my prayers these two weeks; not that I want to so very much, but it don't do for girls to have college fellows about when they ought to be attending to things."

While she talked, little Patty was diligently wiping the moisture from her doll's dress and hair, shaking back her own curls meantime, and half persuading herself that she had saved it from some terrible peril. At last she laid it softly on the turf, took off her apron, and made a mantle of it, with sweet, motherly ingenuity, which would have amused a philosopher had he witnessed her movements.

"Come," she said, "now that I've brought you round, suppose we try if Miss Gertie will take any notice of us, or just say, 'Ah, little Patty! is that you?' as she's got to doing lately. Come along!"

Thus muttering to her rescued doll, the little girl, whose isolation and discontent were more real than any one thought of, moved up the ravine, and made her quiet way towards the larch grove.

## CHAPTER XV.

### DISCONTENTED PATTY.

GERTRUDE sat alone, and half-disconsolate, weaving her changing hopes and fancies into a most intricate web, when little Patty crept to her side, with the wet doll in her arms.

Gertrude started, and held out her hand. She was glad to see the bright child, now that no dearer object was by.

"Why, Patty, where did you come from?"

"Down by the brook," answered the child, "and I've been in, too, after dolly, who almost drowned there, just as you pitched into the mill-dam after our Clara."

"Why, child, your clothes are dripping wet!"

"So was yours, but they dried, and everybody said you were so brave. I wonder what they'll say about me?"

"That you are as good a little girl as ever lived, little Patty."

Patty shook her head. She was not quite satisfied with herself.

"Well, I didn't go in quite so deep, because the brook isn't a mill-dam; but she went in head over heels, and I after her. When I got her out there was nobody to help bring her to; so I come up here," she said, hushing the demoralized doll in her arms.

(108)

### DISCONTENTED PATTY.

109

"Caught her death of cold, I'm afraid, and she's teething."

The gravity of the little girl, the quaint, motherly way with which she patted and hushed the doll in her arms, made Gertrude laugh.

"Don't, please!" said Patty, lifting her great, earnest eyes to the girl's face. "Don't! remember, Clara couldn't bear a noise."

"Yes, I know that!" answered Gertrude, smothering her merriment.

"But we haven't any fire and blankets up here. What are we to do about it?"

The child really seemed to think her mock baby a living thing, and in great danger, and was troubled by the amused unbelief in Gertrude's eyes.

"Do you think it will ever get over it," she questioned. "Just feel if it's got a pulse."

Here Patty held out the doll's arm, half cloth, half kid, stuffed roundly with saw-dust, and waited for Gertrude to search for a pulse, with as much apparent solicitude as any mother could feel for a sick child.

Gertrude laid her finger on the tiny wrist.

"Does it beat?" said Patty, and a mischievous smile began to twinkle over her plump mouth.

"I rather think so," answered Gertrude, demurely.

All at once little Patty flung back her head, and burst into a fit of childish laughter.

"Ain't I a little humbug?" she said. "Just a humbug, and nothing else?"

"You are just that," said Gertrude, seizing upon the child, and kissing her with warmth. "Now, what possessed you to bring that ugly thing here?"

"I was lonesome," answered Patty. "Since them

college chaps came, there hasn't been a soul to play with me, so dolly and I had to make up and be friends; didn't we dolly?"

"So you have been lonesome, Patty. I know what that means, now," said Gertrude, with a long sigh.

"Since he went away," answered the child. "That was what brought me up here. 'She'll know what it is to be wandering about with no one to care for her,' says I, 'and she'll have time to think of little Patty,' says I."

Here Patty carried her doll to the old oak stump, and laid it on the moss. Then she came back to Gertrude, and sat down at her feet.

"It seems a long time since you've been to see me," said Gertrude, burying her hand in the thick waves of Patty's hair.

The child began to sob.

"I've been hanging about all the time," she said, "but nobody cared."

"And we never thought of it. What a shame?" said Gertrude.

Patty lifted her eyes. They were full of tears.

"I suppose you couldn't help it," she said. "It was those college chaps that did it. I just wish they'd both go right home, and never come back again."

"Oh, Patsey, you musn't say that, of your own cousin, too," cried Gertrude, removing her hand from the little culprit's head.

"I hate great big tall cousins. What is the good of 'em? Only to keep little girls from the table, and make them afraid to speak out loud."

"But your cousin, Mr. Webster, I mean, was always good to you, I'm sure."

"I don't care, and I don't like him a bit—there!" cried Patty.

"You naughty girl!"

"If you want to talk about him, and you do,—there now, I'd rather have dolly; she don't bother about cousins."

Patty gave her head an angry shake, and dragged her doll out from its bed of moss.

"We're going home, and I hope you'll be just as lonesome—as lonesome as I am."

Away the child marched, with her eyes full of tears, and a swell of pain at her heart. It was only a childish trouble, futile and unreasoning; but not the less hard to bear for all that. Indeed, it seems to me, that unreasoning sorrows are the worst that can fall upon us; they have no limit in the mind, and their vagueness terrifies the imagination.

She was keenly jealous, too, little child as she was, and resented the anxious waiting and watching of the last few weeks, when she had been driven to the society of her doll, while the elder girls seemed to have forgotten her, and were enjoying themselves so much with their visitors.

Sometimes it really is a hard thing to be a young child, full of sensitive feeling, which all the world ignores. You are never too young for suffering, though you may be for reason.

"I'll go home, and tell Clara not to speak to that other college chap again. He's no business to be coming over to our house, now that our tall cousin is gone, sitting there in the out-room, as if it belonged to him, and looking at sister Clara as if he wanted to eat her. Why don't *he* go home, I should like to know?"

Patty walked fast, and felt a sort of pride in turning her back on Gertrude. There was something grand in resentment against a person so much older and larger than herself, which uplifted the child.

"I heard Mar telling Aunt Eunice that she'd better look out, or Gertie would be over head and ears in love with our big cousin—and so she is. Mad just 'cause I said I hated him, till her hand shook among my curls, as if she wanted to box my ears, which I know she did. I used to have such fun over there, and think so much of her; but it's all over now. She wants me to give up hating him, and I won't. Oh, my!"

Little Patty came to a sharp halt; for that moment she saw two persons through the apple-tree branches, and the sight fairly took away her breath.

It was Clara and young Compton who had been strolling through the orchard, stopping now and then in the cool shades. They were walking very slowly, for the young man was still feeble, and he was speaking to Clara with great earnestness.

"There they are," said Patty, "and I'll just go that way and see if either of 'em will take notice."

So Patty walked off, looking very resolute, and resolved to claim a little attention for herself. But that young couple were too deeply engrossed by each other to observe the child, who began to hesitate a little, and walk softly as she came near enough to look upon their faces. She comprehended that something very serious was going on, in which she was to hold no part, and which threatened to leave her quite alone. It was unsatisfactory to tell her troubles to a doll, that kept staring at her, and never spoke, after the free romps, and walks, and joyous companionship with which she had

spent the few years of her life with those two girls. An older and more patient girl than little Patty might have borne the cold corners in which she was thrust with as little patience.

The child did absolutely love her doll, and confide in it with a hollow sort of trust, that it could feel for her, and understand, in some degree, the ache at her heart, when the two girls who had petted her so were carried out of her world by their lovers; but, in the depths of her heart, she knew that there was make-believe in it all, and sometimes shook the poor thing in wrath that it was not real.

For some moments Clara and Compton had been standing, but now they sat down on a fragment of rock, and Patty could see that her sister was very much disturbed; a bright color came and went in her cheeks. She held a branch of golden-rod in her hand, from which she was stripping the soft, yellow down with a nervous movement.

"It's of no sort of use," muttered little Patty.

"They are going on just like the others, looking down and talking low, and not caring for anybody in the world but their two selves. By and by he'll go away, then Clara will just cry her eyes out, like Gertie there; and that will be all the good of it. Oh, my! how lonesome it is! I wish there wasn't a man in the world. Oh, yes! Par, I couldn't do without him no how."

Plenty of rocks were scattered along the hill-side, and on one of these the child perched herself, watching the young couple as they sat and conversed together. Compton was talking earnestly, and, at times, Clara ceased tearing at the golden-rod, and bent her head, as if listening to something very sweet that he was saying.

Patty watched them with wide-open, eager eyes. Her sense of loneliness was lost in curiosity. There was something thrilling and mysterious going on, which excited and troubled her. What was Compton saying? Why did Clara look so resolutely on the ground? She longed to ask these questions of some one, but had no faith that dolly could help her in this emergency. It was altogether a case beyond her silent sympathy.

Still, she watched these two young people, who seemed to be alone in the world, from any consciousness they exhibited of surrounding objects. Compton took the branch of golden-rod from Clara, and dropped it at her feet. Then Patty could see that he was holding both her hands in his, and kissing them over and over again.

"I just wonder she don't slap his face," cried the child, full of vivid indignation. "I'll tell Mar, just as sure as I live. He ought to be ashamed of himself; by and by he'll be wanting *me* to kiss him, but I won't. See if I do—there!"

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### CLARA TELLS HER SECRET.

UP little Patty started from the rock, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks hot with childish rage, and ran towards home. Mrs. Vane was in the triangular garden, pulling up some beets for dinner, when the child came tumbling over the wall, and ran to her.

"Mar! Mar! I wish you'd just go up through Aunt

Eunice's orchard, and tell Clara to come right home. She sitting there with that sick fellow, and Mar—"

Mrs. Vane brought a fine red beet up by the roots, and shook the soil away from it before she took notice of the child's excitement.

"What was it you were a saying, Patsey? The mill-dam makes such a noise."

The child had been seized with a thrill of compunction during this short pause. What right had she to tell tales about her sister Clara. The hot color died out of her face.

"Oh, nothing very particular, Mar! Only I'm so awful lonesome, with no one to talk with, and—and I just want to burst out a crying; that's all."

Here Patty sunk down on the beet-bed, and, with the great maroon-colored leaves drooping all around her, burst into a childish passion of tears.

"Why, Patsey, what is the matter?" cried Mrs. Vane, astonished for once into asking a direct question.

"Nothing, only dolly has been drowned in the brook, just as Clara was in the mill-dam, and—and I can't bring her to, and that Mr. Compton— Oh, Mar! do ask Aunt Eunice to send him home. He isn't of a mite of use here, and I hate him."

"Hate him! Dear me! what has come over the child," cried Mrs. Vane, now fairly set a going. "Talks about hating, and such like, as if she knew what it meant. Now, Patty, get right up from that beet-bed; the leaves are wet, and you'll catch your death of cold."

Patty jumped up, and ran into the mill. Poor thing! it seemed as if the whole world was against her.

Mrs. Vane followed, and was washing her vegetables in the back porch when Clara came in. Without lay-



ing aside her bonnet, she crept close up to her mother, and asked, in a trembling whisper, if there was anything she could do.

Mrs. Vane kept her eyes steadily on her work. She had caught, at one glance, the glow and tremor in that young face, and, out of her simple womanliness, pretended not to observe.

"No," she said, scraping a tuft of the root from the plump red beet in her hand with the sharp point of a kitchen-knife, "there isn't more than I can do."

Still the girl lingered in the porch.

"Mother!"

"Well, Clara. What is it?"

"Mr.—Mr. Compton and I have been out walking."

"Well, I knew that! Patty saw you in the orchard."

Clara started, and began to tremble like a guilty thing. A flush of innocent shame crimsoned her face, neck, and hands.

"He—he was talking to me, mother."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"About—about loving me!"

"Yes, daughter."

"Better—better than all the world beside, mother."

"Just what Vane said to me," muttered the housewife, and a soft, struggling sigh just stirred her bosom.

"Did you speak, mother?"

"Not exactly. So he—he rather likes you, does he?"

"Likes me! Oh, yes, mother!"

"And you like him, daughter?"

"Yes, mother, if—if you and father don't object!"

"Object! Why should we, if you love each other,

said the mother, dropping the vegetable she was scraping, and looking squarely into her daughter's face for the first time. "It isn't in me or your father to interfere, when the good God puts love into an honest heart."

"But Mr. Compton thinks that Pa, being owner of the mill property, might expect his daughter to marry some well-off man. Oh, mother! that was just what he said, and it frightened me a little."

"Some well-off man! Does he think your Par expects a young fellow to be well-off before he's had a chance to work for it?"

Clara's eyes shone like stars through the tears that sprung into them. At any rate that dear mother would be her friend.

"Besides, that," continued the good woman, now fairly set a going, "what sort of a start in life did your Par have, I should like to know? Just sixty dollars, that he had laid up out of his wages, and a two-year old colt. As for the setting out, I reckon we can do by our first girl just as well as your Grandpar did by me. There's a chest of homespun linen up stairs, that hasn't seen the daylight since it was bleached. As for blankets, there's plenty, and three patch-work quilts, ready for the frames, besides bird's-eye table-cloths and towels, and a roll of rag-carpeting, that I never would have touched, and, and—"

Here Mrs. Vane was interrupted by a pair of caressing white arms flung around her neck, and two lips, plump and sweet as ripe cherries, pressed to her mouth, while it was yet full of beneficent words.

"Oh, mother! how kind you are! How I love you! But it was always so. I never had a fear or a cloud,

that you didn't come in like a sunshiny day, and make everything bright."

"I wish I could! How I wish I could!" said the mother, with a soft, quivering smile. "It would be so easy for us old people to work and suffer for our children, and it seems natural, too, because we are used to it; but, somehow, we can't. God doesn't permit it. Every back must learn to bear its own burden, I suppose, and—"

Here Clara checked the soft flow of her mother's speech with grateful kisses.

"Come in and speak with him, mother; he is waiting for you."

Mrs. Vane shook the water from her hands, and wiped them vigorously on the roller-towel.

"Is my cap on straight, Clara?"

"Yes, mother."

Mrs. Vane untied her apron, and Clara saw that her hand shook a little.

"Why, Clara, it seems only yesterday that you were a baby in my lap; and a dreadful pretty baby you were. Your match couldn't be found in the whole neighborhood."

Clara smiled, and a soft glitter of tears came into her eyes, while Mrs. Vane smoothed down the skirt of her dress with both hands, in a hesitating way, as if she had some dread of the interview before her.

"I wish he had spoke to Par first," she said.

"My goodness! there he goes, right over to the mill, a looking as earnest as if he had got a whole harvest of wheat to grind. I declare it brings the heart right into my mouth!"

Clara did not answer. She was leaning over the

railing of the back porch, following Compton with half frightened eyes. What would her father say? Would she ever dare to look in his face again!

Mrs. Vane sat down on a wooden chair, folded both hands resolutely in her lap, and fixed her eyes on the arch of amber-tinted water that curved over the mill-dam. She, too, was restless and anxious. There might be difficulties in her husband's mind. Compton had no trade, and, so far as she knew, had not registered a profession in any church or congregation.

Clara still leaned over the railing; but her eyes were on the water now. She had watched Compton till he disappeared under the low, shelving roof of the mill; then a trembling seized upon her; the river seemed to heave and swell under her feet, and the back stoop quivered like the deck of a vessel.

The old, upright clock, with its brazen front and cherry-wood case, tolled out the hour so loudly, that Mrs. Vane started.

"Goodness, me! how much time they take!" she exclaimed, hurrying her vegetables from the tin-pan, where she had left them, into an iron pot, which was speedily swung over the kitchen fire. "One may as well be at work as waiting; for there's no calculating on Vane, if he once gets to quoting Scripture, and talking about that water turned into wine; but he needn't keep that poor child a shaking like a leaf another half-hour. If he does, I will out to the mill, and cut him short. It really is strange that some people don't know how to stop when they once get to talking. Why can't Vane take an example by me, and say what he wants to in just as few words as possible? Clara, dear."

"Yes, mother."

"Hadn't you better come in and sit down."

"I can't, mother: I—I'm so anxious."

"Well, just as you like. Only don't worry about his being gone so long. That don't amount to anything."

Clara's fears took form from her mother's words. Surely it need not take so long for her father to say "yes." That sweet word which was like the key of heaven to her. What could they be talking about so long? Was her father angry? Had the whole thing taken him by surprise? Would he refuse the consent her heart was craving?

As one sees figures moving in a dream, the girl saw her lover come out from the mill, and walk toward the house. He must not find her there, watching so anxiously. What would he think of her?

The blood rushed into her pale face with this thought, and she darted, breathlessly, into the kitchen, fell upon her knees, and buried her face in her mother's lap.

"Oh, mother, he is coming!"

Mrs. Vane smoothed the girl's hair with her plump, work-hardened hand.

"Don't be frightened! Don't take on so, daughter!"

The gate opened. A footstep was on the threshold-stone. Clara started up, and fled to her room.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### ASKING CONSENT.

HUGH COMPTON, like most earnest men, found it hard to wait, when a thing requiring courage was to be done. During the few moments in which he was left alone, the idea had struck him that his first duty lay at the mill; to this point he went at once, not without trepidation, for he was young, and had little to offer but love in exchange for love. He knew the miller to be a thrifty and cautious man, who was not likely to take his good looks and education at much above their value. Under these disadvantages, he was far from confident of a favorable answer: but having won the love of that sweet girl, and fallen to worshipping her with all the strength of his young manhood, he knew himself, in honor, bound to state the case clearly to her father, before the sun went down upon his happiness.

The mill was a large one, covering a great deal of ground, and spreading its low roof far out from the walls, thus forming a shelter for the teams which were ever coming and going with grain or flour. Wreaths and drifts of dusty flour clung to the broad entrance-door through which Compton passed into the atmosphere of a snow-storm without its coldness. The broad body of the mill was surrounded by wooden bins, running over with corn, wheat, and rye. Sacks of grain,

waiting their turn to be ground, were heaped against them, and piles of new barrels formed ramparts through which the young man passed towards the massive stones, that made the whole building tremble, as they ground their rough faces together, and sent flour like drifting snow in one direction, and worthless bran in another.

The noise of the great water-wheel and the low thunder of the stones in perpetual motion, disturbed the young man. How was his voice, tremulous with its delicate secret, to be heard amid all this tumult! Should he defer his interview till evening, when the miller was sure to be at home? No. The suspense of waiting was more than he had the courage to undertake. In that thick atmosphere, and amid the tumult of crashing stones, his destiny, and that of the fair girl, left in such tremulous uncertainty, must be decided.

Through the floating mist Compton saw the gray figure of a little man moving towards the hopper, with a well-filled bag on his shoulder. He drew a deep breath. That man held his destiny. It was bewilderingly strange. Only a few weeks before they had been strangers. Now a grand passion, which had transfigured his whole being—made him almost afraid to address the person who had seemed so insignificant then.

The young man approached the miller almost with timidity. His heart beat quickly; for his life he could not have drawn a deep breath.

"Mr. Vane!"

The miller did not hear him. He was relieving his shoulder of the bag he carried, which settled, with a mellow crash, to the floor. Then he began to untie the twisted strings that fastened it.

"Mr. Vane!"

The miller did not trouble himself to look up; but tugged away at a very hard knot like a terrier pulling at a root.

"Can't do it, neighbor. It's of no use asking me. Every man at his turn. No going up head without spelling in this grist-mill. Just set your grist down in that row nearest the door, and it will have a fair chance."

"But, Mr. Vane, I—I have no grist to grind."

"No grist to grind! Then what brings you here?"

Vane left the refractory strings at rest for a moment, and straightened himself up.

"What! ha! Is it you, Mr. Compton? Come to see about that school business, I reckon. Well, the committee had a meeting last night, and, it seems to me, your chances are from fair to middling. I set myself to work in earnest among them, and, considering that the majority are a little stiff-necked in a doctrinal point of view, I made out a good case with them. Shouldn't wonder if you get the school, Mr. Compton. Can't promise for a certainty; but I feel it in my bones that you'll be our choice."

"Thank you," said Compton. "Thank you very much, very much, indeed. I can't express myself—that is, Mr. Vane, I come here just now on another subject. I—I—what a confounded racket the stones make. He doesn't hear a word I say."

Sure enough, Vane, having delivered his opinion about the school, was pulling more gently at the strings again, and, with much patience, untied the knot. Then he looked up.

"You were a saying something, Mr. Compton, but

the buzz of the stones makes my hearing uncertain. Besides, I never hanker after thanks."

"I had something else, Mr. Vane, to speak with you about."

"Something else?"

"Will you step this way a little? I need not detain you long."

"Wait a minute."

Here Vane lifted the open bag in his arms, and poured its contents into the hopper.

"There's a good feed for them, so they can go ahead without help," he said, throwing down the empty bag. "This way."

An open window, curtained with cobwebs, lined and embossed with ridges of flour, looked upon the river, and splendid thickets of laurel and ivy that grew on the opposite hill-side. The wind came through it, pure and fresh, and the two men were stationed far enough from the grinding-stones to make themselves understood.

"Well," said Vane, wiping the white dust from his face, "I listen."

"Mr. Vane, I am almost a stranger to you; but those who know me best, will tell you that I am an honest and honorable man. I—I—the truth is, I love your daughter."

"My daughter! Why, I haven't got any daughter old enough for a young fellow to love."

"Still she is a young lady!"

"What! My Clara? She's only—only—"

"In her nineteenth year, I believe."

"Well—y-e-s. I shouldn't have thought it, without reckoning; but you might as well ask for little Patty. She's just as likely to be in love."

"Not with me, I fancy," said Compton, smiling. "I am not a favorite with little Patty."

"But, Clara! Our Clara?" questioned Vane, fixing his keen eyes on the young man.

"She knows that I love her dearly."

"And she loves you?"

There was a pathetic thrill in the little man's voice that disturbed Compton, who answered modestly.

"I hope—indeed, she has told me so."

Compton bent his appealing eyes on the miller's face. It began to quiver. Spite of the little man's effort to quiet his lips, they took a sorrowful curve; the lids drooped over his eyes, and down his dusty cheeks two great tears rolled, each leaving a faint furrow behind it.

"And you almost a stranger," he said, in a tone of mournful reproach.

"I know," said Compton, misunderstanding a grief which no man who has not been a parent can ever appreciate. "I have little to offer which can make you willing to part with her."

Vane interrupted him with a sharp cry.

"Offer! Young man! Do you think millions of money could make me willing to part with her! I wasn't thinking of that, but of the child, of—of—"

A sob finished the sentence. Vane turned from the window, and walked away. Directly he came back with the flour-dust wiped from around his eyes, which were still wet and flushed.

"You can't expect the father of a family to take in an idea like this all at once without wincing," he said. "I never could realize that my daughters would want to leave me, and it comes hard."

"I can understand that it would be a great sacrifice for any one to give up a young creature like that; but I do not ask it yet. Only let me feel sure that you will consent, when I am better able to support her. It may be years before I can claim her."

The miller's face brightened. Compton saw it, and went on.

"We love each other dearly. She is willing to wait, and I am able to work."

Vane's eyes began to kindle. Compton went on.

"You shall not lose a daughter. I only ask the promise that in time you will accept a son."

Compton held out his hand a little shyly. The miller took it with a heavy sigh.

"I hope God will reconcile me to it," he said; "but it seems to me like promising to go to a funeral."

This unexpected sadness troubled the young man; he could neither protest nor expostulate. The father's heart had been taken by surprise, and wounded with the first idea of a great loss. What argument could assuage the pain of taking a second place in the heart of his child? A bitter and jealous sense of wrong made him unjust to the young man, whose gentle and pleading manner rebuked the feeling.

"God will help me in time," he said, struggling to keep back the tears that burned close to his eyes. "I have nothing against you, young man; but it's hard."

Compton's eyes were turned upon the little man with genuine sympathy.

"I never realized before how hard it must be."

"And you can't yet. Nobody can who has not buried a daughter, or given one to be married. I shouldn't know which to choose."

Compton was about to speak, but Vane turned from him.

"Go in and talk with her mother," he said. "I shouldn't like to be the one to break it to her."

The young man smiled faintly. He had reason to think that Mrs. Vane had not been so blind as her husband. When he was gone, the miller did not return to his work, but crept into a corner, made by two bins, and falling upon his knees, covered his face with his hands, and for some minutes, sobbed like a child.

Then from one of the bins a bright little head appeared, and two naked feet were thrust up through the corn, in which they had been buried; then little Patty herself sprang from the bin, where she had been crying out her grief, and, scattering the golden corn right and left, flung her arms around her father's neck.

"Don't cry, Par; don't, now! Never you seem to mind. I'll love you dearly, and stay with you forever and ever. If any college feller asks me to leave you, I'll—I'll up and kill him. There!"

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A BREAKFAST IN THE CITY.

"WHAT a singular letter! Sealed with red wax, and I do believe stamped with the end of a thimble. Such a stiff, upright hand, too. Auntie Foster, it is for you."

The young lady who said this had found some let-

ters in the box, as she came down to breakfast, and was sorting them in her hand with true feminine curiosity as she entered the room, where an elderly lady sat behind a stately coffee-urn, with frosted silver sparkling around her, and delicate china set forth for the morning meal.

Mrs. Foster reached forth her hand for the letter. A slight flush came over her face as she broke the seal, which deepened into evident excitement when she had gathered the full meaning of its contents.

Miss Foster received no letters that morning, and had full leisure to speculate on the strange epistle that had come to her step-mother.

"Well, what is it, auntie? Your face is worth studying as you read. One would think you had got a love-letter from some old, country beau," she said, folding her hands in the quilted sleeves of a loose silk dressing-gown, and leaning them on the table.

"It is from my sister Eunice," answered the elderly lady, with an effort to speak naturally.

"Oh, that stiff-necked old maid! I would give the world to see her—do let me look at the letter. Can she really write?"

Miss Foster reached forth her hand as she spoke, but the elder lady drew the letter away, grasping it close, while a quick, startled look came into her eyes.

"You—you could not read it," she said hurriedly. "Eunice writes a crabbed, old-fashioned hand."

"I dare say; but that would be a treat. One gets so tired of this swift running hand, which everybody teaches, and which has no more individuality than leaves from the same tree. Now in the old times you

speak of, I dare say you could almost read a man's character by his writing."

"Yes, we might have done it, only some of us were so blind we would not make the effort."

"Well, if you won't let me read the letter, do tell me what it is about. I am dying to hear news of some kind; and so rare a thing as a letter from the old homestead must contain something worth hearing."

"You know that Eunice has an adopted child?"

"No?"

"A girl. Her—her niece."

"Why, how can that be when you are her only sister?"

Mrs. Foster attempted to answer, but for some moments the words seemed to strangle her.

"Ah! I understand! A white fib, intended to give some poor-house waif respectability. I understand! It is some one that passes for a niece."

"No, you do not understand. Gertrude Harrington never saw the poor-house—and she was no waif. As for respectability, no person in the State would want better proof of that than the roof that covers her, and the name she bears."

"The name, Gertrude Harrington, that, like her home, must have been a gift."

"The child has the right to the name she bears."

"How strange! And your sister was never married."

A look of distress came into Mrs. Foster's eyes; but she answered coldly enough,

"My sister was never married."

"And you never visit her?"

Mrs. Foster had taken one of the delicate china



cups from the table, and was attempting to fill it, but her hand shook so violently that she was obliged to set it down half full.

"Not often," she answered in a low voice.

"How members of a family do drift apart?" said the young lady, again folding her arms, ignorant or careless of the evident distress her questions were giving. "But you haven't told me what the letter is about?"

Mrs. Foster seemed to gather up her courage for a great effort. She took up the half-filled cup and drank the strong coffee in eager swallows. It nerved her like wine.

"Eunice wants me to invite Gertrude here."

"Here! A child in this house! The idea!"

"Gertrude is not a child. It is seventeen years since my sister adopted her."

"Why that makes her a young person."

"She is a young lady, undoubtedly."

"And coming here. Do you really mean it?"

"I hope you would not object. She is, as Eunice writes, a bright, pleasant girl."

"Object? Well, your New England girls are all so smart. If she isn't too knowing, and don't put on beauty airs, perhaps it might do."

Mrs. Foster's face, which had been locked and white as she was speaking, softened with a sense of relief.

"You are very kind to help me in this—so kind! I shall not forget it."

"Oh, nonsense! I never was really kind in my life; so don't try to make me out better than I am. This girl may liven up the establishment a little.

If she bothers too much, there is the old maid and the Connecticut farm to go back to, and no great harm done. When does she want to come?"

"Directly. She is nicely educated, but lacks some things which a year in town will give her."

"A year! Why it is a residence you propose, not a visit."

"Even that might not be unpleasant," suggested Mrs. Foster, in a low, deprecating voice, for her heart was so full of this idea that she unconsciously took the air of a suppliant with her step-daughter.

But Jane Foster had interested herself in the subject quite enough to weary of it, and only replied,

"Well, now that she is to come, would there be any objections to a little breakfast? Of course, Rufe will not be down this half hour."

With a look of infinite relief, Mrs. Foster went on with the duties she had been neglecting; but she tasted nothing herself, except another cup of strong coffee. She longed to get away and read her sister's letter, where no criticising eye was upon her. Its purport she had gathered in a hasty, nervous way; but it was like a broken dream to her as yet.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### BROTHER AND SISTER.

AFTER awhile the breakfast-room doors opened again, and an elderly appearing young man came

in, wrapped in a quilted dressing-gown of plum-colored silk, and with a pair of Oriental slippers on his feet. His blonde hair, getting thin on the top of his head, was daintily curled, and soft, silky whiskers, in which threads of silver gleamed to the close observer, fell on each side of his face with the lightness of thisle-down. His face was fair, and flushed easily; his eyes, soft, furtive, and blandly treacherous, sought shelter under their drooping lids whenever an earnest glance was turned upon them. In society a soft smile was usually beaming on his face; but here, in his own home, he came to his breakfast silent, and weakly sullen.

This man, who thought himself young in spite of more than forty years, seated himself at the table, and began to read the morning paper, which he had brought in his hand. He looked up long enough to accept his coffee, but not to give either of the ladies a morning salutation.

Miss Foster drew back as her brother seated himself, and gave a saucy shrug of the shoulders, which she had brought back as an accomplishment from Paris. She was not a handsome girl, and in her, this bit of audacity lost its graceful dash. Rufus Foster looked up for a moment, and threw a sneer into his usual smile.

"Don't," he said. "I have seen plenty of second-rate French nurses do it better; I would advise you to give it up."

"And you," answered the young lady, tartly, "have made yourself an excellent judge of that particular class."

Foster went on with his reading, but paused now and then to sip the strong, black coffee, which his step-mother had given him.

Miss Foster sat down again, and rested her elbow on the table; the apathy of her brother was exasperating.

"Perhaps," she said, "we may yet find something that will wake the Grand Mogul up. He does not know that we have a prodigy coming from the country."

Foster lifted his eyes.

"A rose-bud of rustic innocence; something rare in his life," laughed the sister.

The man frowned heavily, while pretending not to hear.

"Oh! I forgot to ask you, auntie—is the girl handsome?"

"I—I don't know," was the faint reply.

"Because if she is, I advise you not to bring her here."

The girl was perfectly conscious that she was annoying one person and torturing another with the reckless malice of her words. But chancing to turn her eyes upon Mrs. Foster, she was startled.

"Why, auntie, what makes you so pale?"

Mrs. Foster did not reply, but arose and left the table. The step-daughter laughed lightly.

"So I am left to wait on his high mightiness," she said, "like a good, dutiful sister. Well, I don't mind taking the role for once. Will it please his highness to accept an egg?"

Foster pushed the egg-cup she offered aside, without looking from his paper.

"Toast?" persisted the tantalizing girl, pushing the plate towards him.

Foster reached out his hand, broke off a morsel of the toast, and laid down the paper.

"Who is it you tell me is coming here?" he questioned.

"Ah! I thought you would have some curiosity. Auntie has got a sort of adopted niece somewhere in Connecticut—"

"Ah! I never heard of such a person," said Foster, quietly interrupting his sister.

"Nor I till lately. But there she is, and here she soon will be, unless you or I protest against it."

"I certainly shall not take the trouble," said Foster.

"Nor I," answered the girl. "Any change will be for the better in this dull house."

Foster arose and went out of the room, muttering,

"It will be a bore, I dare say; but, fortunately, females cannot follow one to the club."

Jane watched him with her dull eyes, in which mischief itself never kindled beyond a glow of malice.

"I only wish the creature may be handsome enough to snub him. It would be a treat to see Rufe put down for once," she muttered. "But I dare say she will be ready to fetch and carry for him like a poodle, and I shall hate her abominably."

It is doubtful if Miss Jane Foster could really hate or love any one in a deep and earnest degree. Her disposition certainly was not affectionate, and she was capable of more mischief than a stranger or more deliberately wicked person. No longer in her first youth, and never even tolerably handsome, her ambition, as far as it was womanly, had failed of any satisfactory result, and, of late, she had aspired to the character of a brilliant conversationalist and wit, which she was compelled to maintain by a good deal of bitter practice at home.

While she was lingering about the table, her brother returned, drew an easy chair up to the grate, and rested one foot on the sparkling steel of the fender, while the paper rustled down to his knee. A little Skye terrier, with hair of a delicate buff color, and soft as unspun silk, leaped into his lap, tinkling a tiny golden bell attached to his collar with a joyous movement. The white hand of this idle man rested on the little animal with caressing affection.

"Well, Floss," he said, looking in the dog's eyes with a frank, smiling glance, seldom bestowed on a human being, "where have you been hiding?"

"He has no business in the breakfast-room, and wouldn't dare to come in but for you," said Jane.

Foster arose with the dog in his arms, sat down by the table, and began to mince some broiled chicken on the plate he had just left.

"Hungry, ha, Floss!" he said, with a soft laugh which he knew would aggravate the young lady as much as the forbidden liberty he had taken. "Don't be so greedy, Floss, and scatter so much on the tablecloth. There now!"

Here, with provoking hatefulness, the man took a fine handkerchief from his pocket, shook out its folds, and pinned it around the dog's neck, with the exquisitely embroidered monogram dropping on its breast like a shield.

Jane stood near, eyeing this proceeding with contempt, which deepened the smile on her brother's face.

"Noble work for a man," she sneered; "but like clings to like. No wonder there is so much sympathy here."

"Fearfully hackneyed that," said the brother, pat-

ting his favorite on the head. "We have heard it ever since you were a puppy! Haven't we Floss? But when one wants to be witty, it is always safe to fall back on something that every one endorses."

"Wit?" said Jane, snatching at the plate which Floss had fallen to licking, quite heedless of this frothy dialogue. "I'm not likely to throw away anything of the kind here."

"Of course she won't?" murmured Foster, unpinning the handkerchief, and wiping the dog's mouth with dainty deliberation. "Wit isn't a thing that can be thrown to the dogs like chicken-bones, or wasted on refractory brothers, especially where it is so hard to get."

"If you intend your words for me," said Miss Foster, seating herself and resting her chin on one hand, "perhaps it would be as well to utter them direct."

"I—was saying to Flossy, here, that wit is the very highest and brightest emanation of a brilliant intellect and a good heart acting in harmony—and that is a rare combination. A little smartness and a good deal of ill-nature, is enough to make any female sarcastic; and it only requires audacity and ignorance to be flippant; but wit—don't attempt that, Jane—it isn't in your line; upon my word it isn't?"

As he spoke this biting truth, Foster sank, smiling, into the luxurious depths of his easy chair, and held his slippered foot against the net-work of silvered wire that protected the grate.

Miss Foster retorted on him sharply, and left the room, burning with futile anger; for the biting truths that sometimes came so calmly through the smiling lips of that brother, had power to sting her into re-

sentment without fastening themselves on her mind as a thing to be considered.

Meantime Mrs. Foster had gone to her room and locked herself in. There she took out Eunice Harrington's letter and read it carefully, over and over again. It was a stiff, formal epistle, and might have seemed cold to any person who was a stranger to the woman; but to Mrs. Foster every line was full of tender significance. She understood with what care and study it had been written, and could feel all the sacrifice which it proposed.

"Gertrude is engaged to be married," the letter said. "The young man she has accepted will be a disappointment in some things, for he is a lawyer, and will always feel above settling down on a farm, as I hoped Gertrude's husband would. Besides this, he does not take to the society in which you and I were brought up. Still, there is a good deal to say in his praise. A finer looking young man you never saw. His father has been a member of Congress, and is a judge of the Supreme Court of this State. His grandfather was a general in the Revolution, and he himself was one of the most forward scholars that ever graduated at Yale College.

"A man like this, dear sister, is not likely to settle down on my farm, though I should offer to deed it to him at once. He is looking upward and forward. Without a dollar in the world, he means to get rich, and speaks of supporting Gertrude like a lady. She, too, knowing nothing that might discourage her, has ideas of something much higher than the farm, and I sometimes think if queens were a possible thing in this country, she would expect this young man to

make her one by the force of his own talent. She is a smart girl, and reads a great deal; but this does not satisfy her. In order to fill the high place which she believes young Webster will work out for her, she is beginning to hanker after something more than any school about here can give. She wants the accomplishments of a city lady, and will give me no peace till she gets them. For more reasons than she knows of, this may be right, but my heart sinks when I think of it.

"She must come to you. I cannot trust her in the hands of strangers. She has had care, and kindness, and—and—"

"I could not go, on my eyes were so full of pain. It is not often that I give up, but so many thoughts come back to me. Yes, the girl shall have her way! I shall be lonesome, but—"

Here Mrs. Foster closed her sister's letter hastily.

There was a portion of it that she did not care to read again.

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## CHAPTER XX.

SARAH ANN.

AS Hart Webster rode home, after this long visit to his relatives at the mill, some thoughts, that had been kept far away from his mind during the first dawning of his love-dream, crowded up through his happiness, and made themselves felt. In spite of himself, a young face, bright, vivid, and passion lighted,

would force itself between him and the beautiful girl he had just left. True, he questioned, with a certain feeling of contempt, if that which he had felt for the young creature and would gladly have forgotten, partook, in any degree, of the manly passion that ennobled his life now. But the girl was in his thoughts, and they became troubled as he approached the place of her abode. The rash, boyish preference that had flamed up out of his first youth, seemed to the passion that filled his whole being now, like sparks among shavings compared to a bright steady fire; still it was a part of his life, something that he could not remember without a thrill of self-reproach.

The young man smiled to himself when he remembered that he had almost believed this feeling to be love. That contempt which manhood feels for the follies of the boy, had aided him to thrust the unpleasant subject out of sight while surrounded by no associating objects; but now, when that flimsily-built, unpainted house, surrounded by half-barren lands, hove in view, a feeling of humiliation came over him, and a dread of future annoyance, which cast a shade over his return home.

As Webster rode by this house, slowly, for he was too brave for any thought of evasion, a young lad, in a suit of worn, gray clothes, protected to the knees by high-topped boots, and with a rusty cloth cap set jauntily on one side of his head, came out to the rail-fence in front of the house, and hastily let down the bars.

"Hello! Is that you, Webster? Just in time for a shute. Plenty of wild ducks on the black pond. Just got news of it—what say now!"

Webster drew in his horse. He had joined in many

a day's shooting with young Ward, and was tempted to get down and try his luck again; but the sight of that face, bright, eager, and enticing, which watched him from the window, checked the thought.

"No, Ward," he said. "I must get home. It is nearly three weeks since I went away, so the ducks must wait."

Ward, who held a gun in his hand, dashed its butt to the ground, and called out,

"By Goram! Hart Webster, some confounded thing or another must have come over you. Not go a ducking when birds are plenty; I don't believe it! Why, there's old Price fidgeting to give up work and go along, but I got hold of the gun first, and he hasn't got a chance with old flint-lock. Oh, here comes Sara Ann! Won't you catch 'Hail Columbia!'"

Sure enough, the door flew open, and down the narrow plank which led to the bars came a young girl, dark-haired, black-eyed, and with the slender, lithe limbs of a gipsy. Two of the bars were still in their sockets; but she leaped over them with a bound, and came up to Webster's horse, which tossed his head rather angrily at her swift approach.

"There! there! None of that!" she exclaimed, striking her brown hand against the animal's neck with something more than a caress. "Just hush up your capers. You ought to know me. Horses aren't expected to forget folks like men. How do you do, Hart? Shying, too. Looks like it; but what for? Whose done anything? Where have you been these three weeks?"

Webster smiled, but not frankly.

"I have been over the river!"

"Over the river? That means anywhere!"

"Well, yes; it does leave a broad choice of places!" answered the young man, laughing. "And you, Sarah Ann, I never saw you looking better."

The girl tossed her head like a wild colt.

"Did you want me to look as if my heart was broke? I dare say. But I'm not of that kind. It'll take more than one fellow to bring me down to my knees. Now just tell where you've been, for I'm bound to know anyway."

"Indeed? Well, I've been on a visit to my uncle."

"Your uncle!"

The eager fire in the girl's eyes slackened its force. She began to pat the neck of the horse more gently.

"Your uncle? I didn't know you had one."

"Very likely; but what have you been doing about the farm? All well, I hope?"

"Oh, yes!" answered the girl, carelessly. "The old man Price complains of too much work, for Tim is awful lazy; and marm has been sick in bed, so I have had pretty much all the chores to do; but that wasn't much matter, as I'd nobody to go a fishing with but Tim—and there's no fun in that."

"Well," said Tim, breaking in here, "have you made up your mind to go or not. There is no use in waiting to hear her chatter."

"Don't let me keep you, then," said Webster. "There are two excellent reasons why I can't go. I am in haste to get home, and have no gun here, besides—"

"I'll run in and get Price's," said Sarah Ann. "It kicks a little, but that's nothing. He put a new flint in the lock this morning."

Tim Ward laughed, till the gun on which he leaned shook under him.

"Kick!" he said, choking with fun. "Why, a two-year old colt is nothing to it—and she knows it. Means to pay you off for something, old fellow. Take care!"

"Here it is," cried Sarah Ann, running down the plank with a long spooky-looking gun in her hand, "loaded and all. Both of you come back to supper. Stop, though! I'll kill a chicken before you take the gun."

"There's one just grown. Kill it now, while you have the gun," said Tim, with a wink at the young gentleman.

Sarah Ann looked at the gun, and from it to her brother, who was regarding her with a jeering laugh. He turned to Webster,

"She's afraid," said he. "Just as like as not the old kickster'll straighten her out. She knows that, but is afraid to try it on—nothing but a chicken, too."

"Who's afraid?" said Sarah Ann, lifting the gun to her shoulder. "Not I, for one."

A loud, blasting sound, a curl of smoke from the old flint-lock, a hit chicken, some ten yards off, and a prostrate girl, with the breath knocked from her body, lying near the bars, with her black hair scattered on the ground, and a pallid face upturned to the sky. That was what the old gun had accomplished in return for Tim's jeering challenge.

Tim made a dive for the chicken, which was taking fierce, tumbling death-leaps across the road. Webster sprang from his horse, cleared the bars, and lifted the girl in his arms. She did not breathe; a deathly white-

ness lay about her mouth—her little brown hands fell down limp and helpless.

"You have killed her," panted the young man, as Tim got over the bars, twisting the chicken's neck with a swift twirl of the hand as he cleared them.

"Not as you know on. I've seen the old soger kick before now. He don't do much killing, neither on one end nor t'other; but I reckon he's shook her up a trifle. I say, Sarah Ann, what's the time o'day; look up and tell a feller."

Sarah Ann neither moved nor heard. Her face was deathly under the shadow of that black hair. In her helplessness she was pure womanly, and her state filled the young man with terror.

"Go forward and open the door," he said, regarding Tim with stern wrath, as the lad stood, meek and conscience-stricken, gazing on that pallid face.

Tim flung the door open, and tossed the chicken through, sending a curse after it.

"Give hold here! It was I that did it, and if she's got to be carried into the house dead, I'll—I'll face it. I didn't think she'd got the pluck, knowing what the old soger was. Well, then, if you won't let me lift her, do it alone. I can't do anything. Poor girl! poor—poor—"

Here the young fellow leaned his face against the door-frame and burst into a stormy passion of tears.

"I didn't think the old soger would rear up like that," he sobbed. "But it was my fault. I ought to have known better than to stump her to anything, clear grit as she is."

"Come and get me some brandy, if there is any in



the house," said Webster, who regarded his distress with but little compassion.

"Is she coming to? Will she ever breathe agin?" questioned Tim, lifting his wet face in piteous earnestness.

"Get me some brandy!"

This was all the answer poor Tim got; but he started at once, and, after a moment, stood by the bed on which his sister lay, with a square glass bottle in his hand, which he held to those white lips, spilling the red fluid it contained over the pale neck and bosom.

Perhaps it was this outward bath that brought the rich blood once more astir in that young heart. At first a faint swell shook the chest, then a sob broke from the parted lips, to which the brandy was giving a ruddy color of its own. Then Sarah opened her great, wondering black eyes, and stared wildly at Webster, who began to tremble, and turned faint, when there was nothing more for him to do.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### SUNSHINE AND STORMS.

"IS this blood? Did some one shoot me?" questioned Sarah Ann, lifting one hand feebly to her throat, over which the brandy was still dripping. Her vision was evidently clouded, and the ruddy color on her fingers seemed like blood. The girl shuddered, and looked piteously at Webster.

"What have I done, that you should want to kill me?"

"That I should want to kill you? Why, Sarah, no one has harmed you. It was your own rash play with that blundering old gun!"

The girl closed her eyes, and seemed trying to remember. All at once she started up from the pillow, and throwing both arms around her knees, began to rock to and fro, laughing, peal after peal, till the whole house rang with her crazy merriment.

"Oh, oh! it is too good. I remember it all now. I wanted you to go a ducking with Tim, and didn't care much if the old gun did knock you a little—why should I? Three weeks gone, and no one to tell where: but I didn't think the old soger was half so spiteful."

Here Sarah clasped her knees in a fresh paroxysm, and laughed until tears flashed like diamonds down her cheek.

"Oh, my! It is delicious! Tim dared me. He is always doing it, and I never could stand that. The white chicken by the road! I wanted you both to come home to supper. That is the last thing I remember. Next came a blow and a crash, as if a blasted rock had struck me; and here I am took up for dead, and thinking myself murdered, when it was nothing but the old soger after all. I say! if somebody don't stop my laughing, there'll be a funeral on these premises!" she sobbed hysterically.

Webster joined in the girl's mirth—it was contagious. And now that all danger was over, his old liking for this strange young creature returned. He had never loved her—of that he felt certain; but her naive originality had its charm, and, against his

own wishes, he felt a sort of fascination in her wild joyousness.

"And you were frightened! You thought me dead! Don't pretend to deny it, I know. Look at Tim, there; he is white as a ghost. Serves him right, to dare me. But you—you, Hart Webster, did it frighten you? Did your heart stop? Did cold chills creep over you? Did you find out that if I had died on this bed my soul would have carried you with it wherever it went, and held you close forever and ever?"

As she said this, Sarah unlocked both hands from the clasp on her knee and wove them together as she stretched them towards the young man. Her eyes, so bright with laughter a moment before, were flooded with a tender and beseeching mist.

"Would you? Oh, would you have cared if I had never breathed again?"

Webster took those trembling hands in his, the deep pathos of her look and words subdued him into thoughtfulness, which deepened into self-reproach, his eyes fell under the wild ardor in hers; he hesitated for words that would be kind and yet save his honor from reproach.

"You will not speak," she said.

"Yes," he answered, "I was frightened; my heart did stand still, I could not see a—a neighbor and friend who, in some respects, has been like a sister, in such a plight, without feeling it very much, indeed."

"Neighbor! Friend! Sister!"

These words dropped like lead from those young lips; deep, dark trouble broke into the eyes turned so earnestly upon him.

Tim had gone out, and was tying Webster's horse

to the fence. Those two were alone. He now feared that the girl loved him, that in some way his own actions had led to this.

"They are sweet and honest words," he said earnestly, "and no one of them is misapplied when I give them to you, Sarah Ann."

The girl sunk slowly down to her pillow, and the whiteness came back to her lips, that closed and locked themselves together as if they never would speak again. But after awhile they parted suddenly, and a quick light came into her eyes.

"Hart Webster, you have seen some other girl. You have told some other girl that you loved her."

Webster made no immediate reply, but a hot flush of anger swept across his face. The girl's rudeness shocked him.

"You don't answer. You're afraid to tell me the truth."

"I do not admit that you have the right to an answer," said the young man gravely.

The girl rose to her elbow, and gazed at him in amazement; her lips, now hot and crimson, parted till the teeth gleamed through them, and her black eyes were wide open, and full of fire.

"You say that?"

"Yes, I say that. We have been good friends, Sarah, and have had many things in common that girls seldom join in; but because we can shoot birds and catch trout from the same thicket and brook is no reason that you should attempt to control my free actions in other matters."

"Hart! Hart Webster! then you own it?"

Sarah Ann sprang from the bed. Her languor was

gone; she seemed a creature of fire. Her eyes flashed, the words she spoke seethed with passion.

"I own nothing, I deny nothing, only this—your right to ask."

The young man arose and took the riding-gloves from his hat.

"You are not going? You do not mean to say such things, and leave me to think of them?" demanded the girl, in fierce wrath.

"Yes, I am going? You have taught me how dangerous this neighborhood is. I should have known this before."

The girl stamped her feet.

"You shall not go. It is three weeks since you have been here; three weeks, and you—"

All at once a stormy burst of tenderness broke up these reproaches into sobs. Tears flashed down her cheeks like shooting diamonds. Her features were convulsed.

"You shall not go!" she repeated, striving to take the glove from his hand. "I—I am sorry. Only wait a little. It was the hurt—I haven't got over it yet. How solemn you look, just as if you had never seen me get mad before. Please!"

She took the glove from his hand. Her childlike penitence disarmed him. Tears had quenched all the fire of her jealous rage. In her subdued state the creature was not only womanly but childlike. She took his hat from the table, and carrying it into another room, hid it in a closet, which she locked. Then feeling secure that he could not go, a little of her audacity returned, and she went back to the out-room more confident.

Webster was walking up and down the room. He was hardly pleased with himself, or with the girl, whose piquancy and quick wit had attracted him to the house so often during his college vacations and fishing excursions, which she had often joined with her brother Tim. Sometimes she had even shouldered a gun, and killed more than her share of birds, keeping up a sharp rivalry with the young men.

Of course, all this had its charm for a young student like Webster, who had found his way into the best society of New Haven during his Senior year at Yale, and had been a little spoiled by its over refinement. The dead level of high fashion was too devoid of all romance for a character like his; and there was an originality about Sarah Ann that kindled his imagination, and to some extent, blinded him to her coarseness. That coarseness which, after all, sprang out of ignorance and association rather than nature, struck him now with peculiar force.

In Gertrude Harrington the young man had found frank wit, genial impulse and refinement, blending the two extremes which had failed to secure his sympathy when so far apart. With his mind still rich with her memory, and lips consecrated by her farewell kiss, he was peculiarly sensitive to the rude assumption with which Sarah Ann Ward claimed a right to question him.

To speak of Gertrude to that wild gipsy, who had from her very childhood been his hunting companion, was, to his mind, sacrilegious. Still his old friendship for the girl remained. Perhaps before this he had guessed that she loved him, and amused himself with the thought. As he would have cared for a wild bird,

and troubled himself to tame it, he had found pleasure in what he deemed the childish passion of this young thing, and at times half fancied that it was returned. This delusion, if it was such, entirely vanished after he learned of what deep feelings his soul was capable. But with this self-knowledge came a consciousness of the misery that unrequited love might bring on its object; and when the form of this wild girl rose before him, as it would, spite of his efforts to keep it down, it was followed by a pang of self-reproach. He understood now the danger of playing with a human soul.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### JEALOUS QUESTIONS.

WEBSTER was troubled! Why had this girl upbraided him so? In what way had he sought her? Only as her brother's companion in woodcraft, never with a wish to interest her beyond the day's sport, or a pleasant hour in the evening, when he had been in the habit of strolling over through the maple woods to make engagements with Tim. His fishing-tackle was usually left at the half-finished house, which was growing old before its walls were plastered. And in some way it had been a second home to him.

This house stood directly on his road home, as he came over from beyond the river, where his Uncle Vane lived, and there was no reason why he should go by without calling. Down below he had seen old Mrs.

Ward gathering cranberries in a marsh by the wayside, where she had stood up, pushed back her sun-bonnet, and given him a greeting, with the information that Tim was at home. Had he wanted to evade the house after that, it would have been to wound the inmates; but he did not. No word of love, no unwary endearment, had ever passed between him and the girl.

For the first time in his life he began to feel that some explanation might be due her, now that he was engaged. But the wild claim that she put in for his confidence, subdued all that, and he shrunk from the idea of answering it in any form.

But the swift change from passion to penitence, which was one of the girl's great attractions, softened his resentment, and he allowed her to inveigle him into a longer stay, without a very urgent protest. She was very humble now, and the meekness of a little child settled down upon her. With a wish to conciliate, she had brought out his fishing tackle, to show him how nicely it had been kept; then, with shy pride, she sat down on the floor at his feet, and took some lovely artificial flies from a little paper box which she had made with her own hands, during his absence.

"To-morrow," she said, with timid entreaty in her eyes, "to-morrow we will try them. The deep hole is alive with trout, Tim and I have been keeping them till you come."

Webster smiled. The girl was beginning to be her own self again. "What could have possessed her to berate and question him so?"

"You haven't been a fishing with—with any lady over yonder?" she went on, looking meekly down at her flies.

"No, Sarah, but I have been very near being food for fishes myself."

The girl looked up wildly.

"How? What do you mean?"

"Nothing very terrible, child. Only I got into very deep water, and a friend who was with me was badly hurt."

"But you—you got out safe?"

"Or I shouldn't be here, Sarah."

"True enough," she answered, laughing softly. Then she added, with some hesitation, "How far is it to where your uncle lives?"

"Oh! about twenty-five miles."

"That is a long way. I never was so far in my life."

Webster laughed, and took out his watch.

"Why, child, it is nothing. I haven't been more than two hours and a half on the road."

A blank expression came into Sarah's face, and she said, with an effort as if something were choking her,

"Then you could go over any time?"

"Why, of course. What should prevent me?"

"Oh, nothing, I suppose! How far is it from the river?"

"The Housatonic?"

"Yes."

"Why, you can almost see it from the rocks beyond my uncle's mill."

"So his uncle runs a grist mill," thought the girl, almost hugging herself with pleasure, that she had learned so much. "If I could only find out his name now!"

Sarah had too much feminine cunning to ask the

name direct; but her heart was burning with jealousy, and she resolved to discover what he seemed careful not to tell her.

"Are you going away again soon?"

"Why, yes, it is likely, but not for long. I have got to study hard, and get business now. My play-days are about over, Sarah."

"No more fishing; no more squirrel and quail shooting," said the girl, with pathetic sadness in her voice, and gathering up her pretty artificial flies, she closed the box over them sharply.

"Oh, it won't be so bad as that," laughed the young man. "I dare say we will try the deep hole to-morrow."

The girl sprang to her feet.

"Will you! will you!"

"Well, let us make a bargain. Get my hat; let me go off quietly now, and, if Tim has nothing better to do, we will make a day of it to-morrow."

"I warrant the trout will suffer, if we do," cried Sarah, clasping her hands. "Tim; of course, our Tim is always on hand."

"Then it is a settled thing. So get my hat."

"You won't stay to supper," pleaded the girl more with her eyes than voice.

"Not now. After our sport to-morrow perhaps."

Sarah ran to the kitchen-door.

"Tim! Tim! hang the chicken in the spring house. It will be wanted for to-morrow," she called out.

"All right," answered Tim, from the garden where he stood knee-deep in weeds which he was lazily pulling up, in order to take himself out of the way.

"Here is your hat. Now be sure and come early,"

said the girl, full of brilliant vivacity once more. "We'll have everything ready."

Webster took his hat, drew on one glove, and looked for the other, but it was nowhere to be found.

"Surely I brought it in," he said, searching his pockets a second time, and, after that the floor.

Sarah did not speak; but pretended to aid in his search, stooping her head that he might not see the smile that quivered over her lips.

"Well, never mind. Perhaps you will find it," said Webster, at last, giving up the search with reluctance. "I would not care but—but—"

"But what?"

"Oh, nothing! Only one does not want to ride home with one hand bare. So, if you find it, Sarah, let me know."

Sarah was following Webster to the fence as he said this, and, as he untied his horse, her face clouded; but she said nothing, and allowed him to ride away without protest. The moment he was out of sight, she drew a glove from her bosom, and examined it with sharp scrutiny.

"Here it is! I knew there was something! That creature has been a mending it for him. Oh! I wonder who she is; but I will find out. He can't keep it from me. That girl and I are coming face to face, just as sure as we both live. Such small stitches, too, as if I couldn't beat that, if I only tried. How dare she mend his gloves? Oh! I could be the death of her. But, who is she? Who is she! I'll find out, if it kills me!"

Sarah thrust the glove fiercely into her bosom as she spoke, and ran into the house with teeth clenched, and her eyes blazing.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### OUT A FISHING.

"LOOK a here, Hart Webster! Hallo, Tim! Do come along here! Did you ever see such a sparkler?"

Hart Webster drew his line lazily from the water of a delightful little trout-stream, which he and his companions had followed into the hills, and came slowly up to where Sarah Ann was standing, or rather dancing, on the bank, with a magnificent trout leaping and floundering in the grass at her feet, scattering sunshine from its spotted side, and crystal drops from its quivering fins.

"Isn't it a beauty? I've been watching it this half hour, and now—"

"Watching it this half hour!" said Tim, whose face was clouded over with half-angry disappointment. "I should rather think so. Why, that fellow has been a floating round my hook more than that time. Once I a'most had him."

"Yes," answered the girl, laughing triumphantly. "But you jerked too soon, and scared him down stream, where my innocent bait lay floating so natural, that he bit at once. I didn't go to getting nervous, but lay low, till the hook was in his gills."

"Shouldn't wonder," muttered Tim. "Just like a gal to do that. Lying low, when anything is to be caught, is born in 'em!"

"Oh, you hush up! It was a fair catch. I didn't 'tice the fellow a bit; only kept still, and waited. Ask Mr. Webster if it isn't all fair."

That moment Hart Webster came up, twisting the line about his pole as he walked. He found Sarah Ann holding her breath, and striving anxiously to extricate her hook from the transparent jaw of the fish, for, with all her dashing ways, the girl was tender-hearted as a child.

"There," she said, having dexterously performed her task. "Isn't he a splendid old fellow? Don't he glisten? I'll broil him myself for your supper, Hart; nobody else shall so much as touch it!"

"It's all owing to your possoming that I didn't catch him," said Tim. "No fish ever gave a more greedy nibble."

"Oh, you get away, Tim!" cried the girl, giving the fish a defiant toss into the sunshine. "Mercy on me!"

This sudden outcry was accompanied by a splash in the brook, and a tiny shower of water-drops. The trout had been sent up too high. He just grazed the girl's outstretched hand as he came down, and the next minute was making a downward line of light across the brook, where he sought shelter under a huge cluster of ferns and trailing clematis vines that hung over the bank, and mirrored their whiteness in the water.

"There, now! You have gone and went and done it!" cried Tim, brightening into a laugh. "Serves you right, too. Just try to hook another feller's property again, and that's how you'll be paid!"

Sarah Ann took no heed of this taunt, but stood on the bank, looking wistfully at the ripples left behind by her escaped captive.

"It's too bad! I declare its just awful!" she said, turning to Webster, with great tears crowding into her magnificent eyes. "I had him almost on the gridiron for your supper, and now there he goes. It's enough to make a child strike her own grandmother! Isn't it now?"

"It is provoking," said the young man; "but never mind, Sarah Ann. There is as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it."

"Yes," answered the girl, trying to laugh through her tears; "but a great, big, magnificent shiner like that isn't likely to take to the hook again in a hurry; and—and he would have been so nice. Now we have nothing but the chicken, and I'm afraid it won't be over tender."

"Oh, yes! it will. So just wipe your eyes, my girl, and go with me up stream. I know of a pool among the rocks where we may find trout to match the one you have lost. Come, Tim!"

"Not as you knows on," answered Tim. "I don't mean to have Sarah Ann 'ticing fish from my bait. If she goes up stream, I goes down."

"But what if I stay here, Tim?" said Sarah Ann, taking her pole from the grass.

"Why, then, I shall have my choice, up or down, just as the notion takes me. It don't make no sort of difference to me."

"Just as you please," answered Sarah Ann, with a shy glance at Hart, who exhibited some little irresolution.

"Don't you think it just as well to go with us, Tim," said the young man, with a rather sensitive feeling that Gertrude Harrington might not think his



wanderings along that shaded trout-stream, with a remarkably handsome and bright creature of the feminine gender, the most satisfactory means of proving his loyalty to herself.

"No! I'm durned if I do!" was the prompt answer.

"Sarah Ann's red jacket is enough to scare every fish back among the brake-leaves! How that old fellow ever was fool enough to come her side of the brook is more than I can tell."

"I—I say, Tim," faltered Sarah Ann, with unusually sensitive tones in her voice, "hadn't you better go along?"

Tim made no verbal answer to this appeal, but wound up his line, and marched off down stream, whistling "Yankee Doodle" as he went.

"Come, then," said Webster, striking into a foot-path that led through the thick undergrowth and old forest-trees of the rocky upland. "I hope our luck will prove that Tim has made a bad choice."

The young man walked on hurriedly as he spoke, and kept ahead of Sarah Ann, who followed him with burning cheeks, over which a tear leaped, now and then, as if she were still grieving over the loss of her fish.

Thus, for some time, the two penetrated into the cool shadow of the woods. Now and then the red-cloth jacket, worn so jauntily by the girl, sent a rich gleam across the water, and the scarlet plume in her pretty felt hat shot in and out of the green foliage like a cardinal bird on the wing. More than once, when she saw her image thrown back by some sleeping pool, tears stole thickly into her eyes, and she moved on with a keen sense of disappointment. Both the jacket and the plume belonged to her Sabbath-day finery. She had

taken them, unknown to her mother, from the closet in her room, determined to look her very best that morning, and charm back the heart that, some intuition told her, was in danger of going astray.

She noticed, poor girl, that Webster never once looked back to see that no harm befell her along the rough foot-path, and he had not once seemed to observe the dashing change in her dress, to which Tim had alluded with such careless scorn. All these things filled her with a sharp sense of disappointment, which received its crowning pain when Webster so earnestly attempted to persuade Tim to bear them company up stream. In all his life he had never done this before. What was the matter? Was he afraid of sitting on the bank of that trout-stream alone with her? What had she done to deserve such treatment?

These were the thoughts that sent the tears down those hot cheeks, and at length quenched all the color out of those cheeks themselves, while the girl toiled up that steep path behind the man who was thinking of her with something like annoyance.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### GROWING DISCONTENT.

WEBSTER was dissatisfied with himself. The intercourse which had been so easy and pleasant with the girl and her family, struck him, for the first time, as indecorous, if not full of danger. Made keen-

sighted by his passionate love for Gertrude Harrington, he had reflected seriously on his position at the farmhouse, and its possible result. The flush on that young face, the tears that came all too large and thickly for any feeling that the loss of a pretty fish could occasion, were slowly and painfully enlightening him. The young man had noticed, with a sensation of something like displeasure, the jaunty little hat and brilliant jacket, which made the girl's wild beauty something marvelous to look upon, and was angry with himself for the thrill of admiration that had stirred his blood, when she first appeared before him that morning. If his vanity was unconsciously gratified by this change, the feeling soon gave way to one of honorable self-reproach; and this made him so reserved and cold, that the girl felt herself chilled to the heart.

They came to the deep pool, which was a natural basin, made by a circle of rocks, on which the moss grew thickly, while fern, wild columbines, and the delicate spray of maiden-hair choked up the crevices. High forest-trees overhung the water, and an undergrowth of mountain laurel rendered the rising ground dusky with its dark-green foliage.

Webster halted upon a large boulder that shot some feet over the pool, unwound his line, and seated himself. Another rock, lower down, supported his feet, and on that Sarah Ann took her place, as she had done many a time, in the careless intercourse of the past. But now her breath came quickly, and a timid hesitation possessed her. She did not lean against his knee, as had been her innocent custom, but sat a little apart, so near the verge of the rock, that almost her whole form was thrown back by the water, in which a red stain

from her garments seemed to welter. Now, and then she cast a furtive glance at her companion, who purposely turned his eyes from the wild beauty of the picture she made, lest there should be treason in his heart against the lady of his love.

Webster felt that the girl was looking at him, and resolutely turned away from those large, wistful eyes, wondering that he had never felt their power so thrilling before—wondering indeed, why they should trouble him so now.

"I am afraid that two lines so near each other will distract the fish," he said, at length, rising to his feet. "I will take that rock lower down. You had better come up to this seat, or your shadow in the water may frighten them away."

Sarah Ann started up! All her gentle sadness was gone. He wanted to get rid of her. Well, let him. He would not find her the girl to sit at his feet again.

"You might have thought of that before," she said flashing a proud look at him from under her moist eyelashes. "I was wondering when you would remember that I was sitting there, with no bait on my hook, and not a soul to speak to!"

"Have I been so thoughtless," said Webster, with a forced laugh. "No wonder you are getting cross. Here, give me your hook. Now I will take myself out of your way, or Tim will get ahead of us both."

Sarah Ann almost snatched her pole from the young man, and whipped the line into the water, with a sharpness that sent ripples over the whole pool. What had she done that he should avoid her so? Or what had he done? The vague jealousy that had taken root in that young heart the previous day, gave vigor and bitterness

to these thoughts. Something had happened! Her old friend and companion had changed. He either feared or hated her now. All this had come about since his absence. Where had he really been? Who had poisoned his mind against her? Who had dared to love him, and tempt him, and—and—

Here that wild, untutored heart sent up sobs so deep and bitter, that they almost reached the young man who sat moodily on the rock near by. The girl thought of this, and checked them in sudden terror; but the pole in her hand quivered, and the surface of the water was broken, as if the sudden passion of her grief had troubled their depths. Slowly the pole drooped downward, the current drew it from her hold, and all unconsciously, she allowed it to drift away.

As she sat gazing on the water, her eyes full of tears, her lips trembling with trouble so new that she could scarcely comprehend its nature, young Webster arose from the rock, on which he had sought safety himself, and came towards her. She saw the movement, and sprang to her feet.

"Look! look!" she said, clapping her hands, and laughing with glee. "That little wretch has stolen my hook, pole, and all. There he is boxing his own ears. Dear! dear! it is too funny!"

The laughter which rang out from those young lips was genuine.

Sarah Ann had not been ready to use her hands a moment before, but, with the quick transition of youth, she clapped them in sheer merriment now, and her eyes danced under their still moist lashes.

While the girl had lost herself in those jealous inquiries, a turtle seized upon her hook, and slowly drag-

ged the pole from her hand. Becoming conscious of its loss, she searched around, and saw the comical prize sitting upright on a fragment of rock that rose above the surface of the pool, with his brown and yellow head lifted high from the shell, and both fore-paws hard at work, boxing right and left, in vain efforts to knock the hook from his jaws.

Webster looked around for the cause of this sudden merriment, and saw the turtle, still vigorously beating his head right and left, with such ludicrous gravity, that he too burst into a peal of laughter that made the woods ring again.

This noise brought Tim Ward rushing up stream like a deer. He supposed that some one had shouted for him in extremity, and valiantly came to the rescue; but when his sister pointed out the distracted turtle in the midst of his grotesque pantomime, the lad sent a mellow roar of laughter into the general outburst of fun, and, throwing himself on the ground, rolled, and kicked, and made the turf fly in his uproarious glee.

After awhile Tim volunteered to wade into the pool after his sister's floating tackle, and, if possible, to set the poor snapper free, without quite killing him. After rolling his pantaloons into a heavy wisp above his knees, and throwing off his thick shoes, he waded to the rock, and, with more tenderness than might have been expected from him, drew the hook from the tortured mouth of the turtle, and brought back the pole to its owner.

Of course this little episode drove all deep feeling and serious thought from those young minds. Sarah Ann forgot her jealous troubles, and young Webster threw aside the coldness that had occasioned them.

They went back to the farmhouse cheerful, and so hungry that the fricasseed chicken, mealy potatoes, and stewed pears, that Mrs. Ward set before them, disappeared with a rapidity that frightened the good woman, who stole into the kitchen and soon came back with the string of trout Tim had brought home, nicely broiled, and filling the room with an appetizing odor as she placed it on the table.

A genial, hard-working, good-natured soul was the widow Ward. In a rough helter-skelter way she presided over a rickety, half-finished house, that seemed old from want of paint, and some fifty acres of land, more than she had any possible means of cultivating, for Tim performed the principal part of the out-door work, and, when help was hired, had an unthrifty habit of hurrying off to the woods in search of squirrels, or to the brooks where fishing was far pleasanter than cradling wheat or planting potatoes in the hot sun.

Of course, the widow considered herself as general superintendent of the place, and filled up the gaps which Tim left open, by a little out-door labor herself, such as pulling up onions, planting cucumbers, picking fruit from the straggling branches of her plum-trees, and housing quinces, when they grew golden on the gnarled boughs, that twisted and coiled over the stone-wall back of the garden. She did her own house-work, too, in which Sarah Ann gave her dashes of spasmodic help, sometimes working like a beaver days together, scouring, dusting, and striving her best to beautify the old place. At other times she would desert the whole affair for a tramp in the woods, or an afternoon by the brook, while the cows were lowing for her to help milk them, and her mother was toiling, scolding, and pre-

paring the meal which, in nine cases out of ten, was kept waiting till everything was cold on the table.

In short, Mrs. Ward was like a nice, motherly old hen, with two wild ducks in charge, whose erratic natures she could neither understand or control. She talked about this a great deal, and was very positive about her own will, so far as words went; but the time never came when that will superseded the smallest caprice of her son, or the wild wishes of the girl Sarah Ann.

There is one thing of which the most inert and barren feminine intellect is capable. The intricacies of a love affair come to such minds by intuition, and the match-making propensity which develops itself at mid-age is the result. Of this latent talent Mrs. Ward gave rather annoying proof that evening. Out of the multiplicity of words that dropped from her lips, during supper, more than one brought the blood to Webster's face, and the fire to Sarah Ann's eyes. Perhaps it was this which sent the young man home, directly after that meal was completed, in a state of perplexity and annoyance, that led to a very serious determination.

It was ten days before Sarah Ann saw the young lawyer again—ten weary days to her, for, in all that time, awake or in dreams, his image never left her heart or brain.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### A WILD RIDE.

SARAH ANN was sitting at her chamber-window, sadly impatient, and full of passionate trouble. Why had Webster kept away? What had she done that he should avoid her so cruelly? She knew that he was at home, for one afternoon when she had walked into the village, with the restless hope of learning something about him, her longing eyes had caught a glimpse of his figure, as he sat by a desk in his father's office, evidently absorbed in study. He did not look up. She paused a moment, hoping for that, but in vain.

That day the girl went home with a heavy heart. Now she sat by her window, looking out into the bright, beautiful autumn, wondering if that too would go by without bringing him to the farmhouse. The girl was not exactly crying, but a flush lay around her eyes, and a quiver as of coming tears now and then shook her lips. She had some sewing in her lap, but both hands lay idly upon it, and she had not as yet taken a dozen stitches.

All at once the sound of coming hoofs struck her ear, at first very faintly, but it checked the breath on her lips. She started up, and leaned out of the open window, casting a long, eager glance up the road.

In the distance she saw a horseman, riding at a

### A WILD RIDE.

167

long, even trot; a horseman that she knew, and for whose presence she had been longing with such passionate impatience.

Now the breath came through those red lips with a quick sob of delight, the hands clasped themselves, a glow of color diffused itself over her neck and face.

"At last! At last!" she said, flinging up her clasped hands, as if she longed to poise herself, and fly towards him. "Now I will ask him—now he *shall* tell me what I have done!"

As she spoke, the girl, with new-born shyness, retreated back from the window, where, herself in shadow, she could watch that horse and its handsome rider as they approached. It was the same young bay that Webster had ridden before—a spirited animal, that seemed a part of the rider as he comes swiftly onward.

Again the girl held her breath. He did not slacken that swift pace as he drew near the house. What did it mean? Surely—surely— The breath stopped on her white lips now. It seemed to have frozen there. He was close to the house, looking straight ahead. The horse never broke his long, even trot, or swerved an inch from the highway. The rider, for one moment, lifted his eyes to the window. She darted forward, ready to cry out, but drew herself up straight, and made no return to the bow which Webster gave, as the horse gave his head a toss, and bore him on.

"He's going across the river again," said the girl, clenching both hands, and stamping her foot on the floor. "I—I'll follow him! Yes, if I die for it, I will!"

Thus, with her spirited little foot set down hard on the floor, her hands clenched, and a black frown on her

face, she paused and reflected, while the sound of hoofs was beating more and more faintly in the distance. Then she started forward, and ran down to the back door, where Tim was splitting oven-wood.

"Tim! Tim, I say! Take the halter, quick, and bring up the horse!"

"What! Old Sorrel?" questioned Tim, dropping his axe.

"No! no! The colt!"

"But you can't ride that skittish critter, Sarah Ann."

"I can. Don't stop to talk, but bring him up."

"He ain't more'n half broke, I tell you."

"So much the better. I feel all over like breaking him in. Come, hurry!"

"But you'll break your neck, and then old woman in there'll blame me for it."

"No, she won't. I'll make it all right with her. Only go—go, I say!"

"But where are you off to?"

"For a long ride. Down to Uncle Rood's, mebbby. At any rate, I sha'n't be back to-night, nor to-morrow night, neither, as I know of. It's a good while since I've been down in that neighborhood a visiting. Now, do you ever mean to start?"

"Yes. I'll catch the critter, if you really want to go; and it's just as well you took the colt, if you mean to keep him like that; for old Sorrel has got to lead the oxen to-morrow. The wood-pile is purty well down, and marm is always cross as bricks when she comes to nothing but chips."

"Of course, you'll have to draw wood. That's why I want to ride the colt. He ain't broke to harness yet,

and won't be missed. Now up and go! I won't wait another second! Quick, now!"

Tim kicked his scattered oven-wood together in a heap, and walked away, taking a rope-halter from its peg on the back stoop as he went.

Sarah Ann went into the house, breathing quick, and looking wild as a hawk. She found her mother in the kitchen.

"Look a here, marm. I have just took a notion to go down and make a visit to Uncle Rood's folks. I suppose you won't want me for a while."

"Why should I, Sarah Ann?" replied the widow, discontentedly. "You might as well go a visiting all the time as not, for any help you are to me."

"But I'll be better. I'll work like smoke when I once come back."

"You have heard about promises and pie-crust, I reckon," said the old woman, tersely.

"If it's anything tantalizing, I'm sure to hear of it," answered the girl, with an impatient toss of the head. "At any rate, I'm going to Uncle Rood's now. Tim has gone after the colt, so I haven't time to take anything like a scolding before we start."

"I suppose you'll do as you please," answered the old woman. "How long do you mean to be gone?"

"Oh! a day or two. One can't tell exactly; but I'm sure to come back when I return! Good-bye, you precious old darling. I don't mean to be half as saucy as I am; but the truth is I—I—"

Here Sarah Ann broke down, and, flinging her arms round the old woman's neck, sobbed out.

"Oh, mother! I'm just so miserable, that I can't help but be hateful. You don't know—"

"Yes, yes, I do, Sarah Ann. Haven't I been young myself—tender-hearted as a chicken, too? There! there! Just get ready, and ride over to your uncle's. It will do you good."

"You don't mind, mother, if I was a little uppish!" sobbed the girl.

"I'd rather see you uppish, as all out doors, than clinging to me, a crying like this, Sarah Ann. There, now! Hush up, and get ready. Tim is a coming with the colt."

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### WHERE WAS HE GOING?

SARAH ANN kissed her mother, and went to her own room. From that she hurried into the chamber occupied by her brother, and came forth with some garments in her arms, which she crowded into an old bandbox. Over this she tied a huge silk handkerchief, which had been her father's. Then she proceeded to put on a black-silk dress, and added to that the jaunty red jacket, which made her look like a beautiful gipsy. She took the pretty felt hat, with its flame-colored feather, out of its place in the closet, and was fitting it to her head, when a thought seemed to strike her.

For one instant the girl was seized with a feeling of sharp regret. Then she shook all her thick, glossy hair loose, with an impetuous motion of the head, and,

seizing a pair of shears that lay in her work-basket, cut the rippling mass from her head.

With the clumsy shears in her hand, she stood a moment, looking down at the shining mass at her feet, and a flush, as of coming sobs, flamed over her face; but she choked the emotion back, and, dashing both hands into the shortened hair, ruffled it up into confused waves, saying to herself, defiantly,

"Who cares! It will grow again!"

Then she tied the little hat on, thrust her hand through a loop in the knotted handkerchief, and went down stairs with the bandbox on her arm.

Tim had put a man's saddle on the colt's back, and a curb in his mouth, which the spirited creature was champing furiously. No such thing as a side-saddle had ever been known in that house, and the girl was lithe and brave enough to ride anything. Just now it happened that she was particularly satisfied with the masculine form of her saddle; so she climbed up the fence, and leaped to it with a single bound.

"Good-by, mother! Good-by, Tim!"

Before the lad could answer, the bridle was jerked from his hold, and the colt sprang forward. The girl kept her seat bravely. She needed neither saddle-horn nor stirrup to keep her balance; but leaning gently forward, adapted herself to the swift speed of the half-tamed colt, while the bandbox scarcely swayed on her arm, and her little foot pressed his side with the clinging tenacity of an Indian hunter's.

The colt was running like a race-horse; but Sarah Ann did not permit him to check his speed until she came opposite an old barn, standing out alone near the highway. Here she pulled him up, sprang to the



ground, and, undoing the rope-halter, left under the bridle, tied him fast to a post in the fence.

All this was done in breathless haste. Then she crossed the barn-yard, and entered the old building. Here she opened her handbox, took out a suit of Tim's clothes, and exchanged them for her own, which she crowded into the box, before hiding it under a mass of hay heaped on the floor. She had torn the red plume from her hat, and left it without trimming of any kind. Thus, when she left the barn, a man working in a neighboring field saw what seemed to him a handsome boy mounting a restive colt, which he rode off at a break-neck speed, and disappeared.

"There goes some young scamp that has run away with his father's horse, and has a fair chance to break his neck," thought the man, as he bent to his work again.

But the girl was not likely to break her neck. She enjoyed the speed at which her colt went. It carried off some portion of her own excitement, and brought her every moment nearer to the man she was following.

But Webster also had a fast horse, and had nearly reached a toll-bridge that crossed the Housatonic, when the seeming boy came in sight of him. Then the colt was forced to check his speed; but he resented the change by fiercely champing his bit, and scattering foam, like snow, flakes, all along the road, while his rider, in nothing fatigued, kept the bay horse well in sight, without bringing herself into notice.

At last Webster began to quicken his pace.

"He is getting near the mill," thought the seeming boy. "We shall not have far to go now." Once more she let the colt have his way. The forward horseman

left the river at the toll-bridge, and struck across the country, which began to sink between two ranges of hills, and form one of the loveliest valleys the girl had ever seen. For a mile or two, the highway ran along the banks of a beautiful stream, bordered with forest-trees and young grape-vines, on which the fruit was hanging in purple clusters. This stream wound itself down one side of the valley, made a sudden curve, and turned back on its course, miles below, where it emptied its bright waters into the great river.

Looking down stream, Sarah Ann saw a wooden bridge, and, near the end, a red farmhouse, lifted up from the road by a stone terrace, on which gorgeous garden-flowers were burning out their lives. Behind the house were some fine old pear-trees, and up the hill-side an orchard, on which the apples were turning gold and crimson among the green leaves.

Webster halted at this house, sprang off his horse, and ran up the steps. Sarah Ann could not see the door, which was shaded by an overhanging stoop; but it must have opened instantly, for scarcely had she watched him mount the steps, when he disappeared altogether.

At first the disguised girl drew up her horse with a pang of torment that made her very breath a pain. After a moment, she allowed the restive creature to move forward; but at every step it seemed as if he were dragging her to a scaffold.

That was his destination. That dusky, red house, the pear-trees clustering behind it; that orchard, sending out a warm glow of ripening fruit, and flowers trailing down the stone wall. Oh, heavens! how that lovely spot compared with her own home. The contrast sickened her into hopelessness.

But who was in the house? Did it shelter some girl as much superior to her as that dwelling was to her own home? How could she find out? If a rival was there, she must see her. But how? She was in a strange place, some twenty miles from home, for the first time in her life. Where could she stay long enough to seek information, and of whom could she obtain it?

A large chestnut-tree, bristling over with burs, flung its shadow across the road; she drew up her horse once more, in order to resolve some new plan in her mind. The chestnut-tree was rooted in the bank of the river, and its great branches spread over her like a tent. Along the lower boughs a grape-vine had crept, and woven its purple clusters among the greenness of the burs. Sarah Ann saw nothing of the beautiful arch this mingled leafiness had flung over her; but took off her hat, and strove to cool the fever of her brain, in the fresh air that came up from the water. Holding her hat in one hand, she swept the moist hair back from her forehead with the other, thus making a futile effort to calm herself.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE LITTLE ROUGH RIDER.

AS Sarah Ann sat thus upon her saddle, a great cluster of grapes came rattling down through the leaves, and fell into her hat. With it sounded a sweet,

childish laugh, and the vines above her head shook as if a storm were sweeping through them.

All at once, a great bough swayed downward, almost to a level with herself, and astride it, riding on the extreme end, was a little girl, whose wild, bright face, full of gleeful fun, danced up and down before her as the bough yielded to the impetus of those sturdy little hands and limbs.

"Don't! Please, don't go!" said the child, holding on to her leafy steed with one hand, while she waved a welcome with the other. "My horse won't trot out of these shades, yours goes too swift for him. Try the grapes, they're awful good."

Sarah Ann was astonished, and a little startled, but at the first glance she fell into sympathy with the child, and began to laugh.

"Whoa! Whoa! Just behave yourself, can't you!" sung out the child, straining the chestnut-limb under her weight, and going up with a rebound, then furiously beating the long leaves till the fragments began to fly.

"Stand still, I say! Now, then, if this skittish critter will stand still a minute, tell me who you are, and what place you come from. I don't mean to have no more cousins and strangers come into these parts without knowing the reason why, now I tell you. Speak quick, for both our horses are skittish as get out, and want to be a going."

"I'm afraid yours will throw you," said Sarah Ann, drawing her own horse nearer the child, who was slipping dangerously towards the end of the chestnut-bough.

"Can't do it!" answered the girl, giving herself a hitch up the bough. "He knows me."

"But I don't. Who are you, my little butter-cup?"

"Who are you? I asked first," answered the child.

"Besides, I live here, that's more than some other people can say."

"I? Oh! my name is an old one my father had, and I'm going to—to a mill somewhere about here."

"A mill? That's Par's. But I don't see no grist."

"Grist? No, not this time; I only come to—to—"

"To see about it. I know," broke in the child, with a sagacious nod of the head.

"Yes, to see about it," replied Sarah Ann, grateful for this help out of her dilemma.

"Because," added the child, "since Cousin Webster and that other chap came to the mill without grist, I'm down on such things."

Sarah Ann caught her breath. For a moment she had forgotten the anguish of her jealousy. Now it came back with a sharp pang.

"Why?"

The question faltered on her lips; she dreaded the answer it might bring with shrinking cowardice.

"Why? Because they break up families, steal one's sisters, and leave a girl without anybody to play with."

"How so?"

"How so, indeed? Mebby you saw that feller that just rode by? He's my own cousin."

"Your cousin, little girl?"

"Yes, indeed! But I hate him!"

"Hate him? Why?"

"Never you mind! I do—and that's enough!"

"Is—is that your house at the end of the bridge?" asked Sarah Ann, turning her face from the sharp scru-

tiny of two bright eyes looking upon her through the leaves.

"That red house, with the 'sturctions' a streaming down the wall, and the well-pole a sticking out?"

"Yes; that is the house I mean."

"Well, no; that isn't our house by no manner of means. We live 'tother end of the bridge."

"But *he* stops there?"

"In course he does. I dare say she's been watching for him ever since morning."

"She! Who?"

"Why, Gertie. She used to be *our* Gertie; but I don't claim her any more, since she got Cousin Webster away from us, and set on that other feller to break Par's heart."

"Who is Gertie?" questioned Sarah Ann, in a voice so low and hoarse, that little Patty bent down to make sure it was the same person she had been talking with.

"Who is Gertie? My gracious! don't you know? Where did you come from? Why, she's Aunt Eunice's niece."

"Then it is a relative of yours that lives in the red house?"

"No it ain't. Only Aunt Eunice."

"She's your aunt, then?"

"Not a smitchen of it, more'n she's everybody's aunt."

"Oh! and her other name?"

"Name! Name! Oh! I believe that is—well, yes—Harrington; that's her Sunday-go-meeting name."

"And your cousin stops there, instead of going to your house?"

"Ain't it a shame? But everything has been topsy-turvy ever since he came the first time. Do you know something?"

"Me? I'm afraid not."

"And if I tell you, can you keep a close lip?"

"Try me."

"Well, then, it's my belief that he's making love to Gertie, and has been a doing it ever so long."

Sarah Ann did not speak—she could not; but little Patty saw that she grew very white, and clutched the felt hat in her hand as if something hurt her.

"That's what I hate him for," said the child, growing more and more confidential.

"But—but perhaps it isn't so."

"Isn't it. I guess if you'd seen 'em a sitting together on the rocks, and down by the river, you would know more about it. Oh, gracious! my horse is a rearing up with his fore feet till I can't but just hold on to him!"

This was said with a little frightened scream; and Sarah Ann saw that the child had slipped so low on the bough that it was impossible to recover herself.

"Spring!" she said, urging the colt a step forward. "Spring to his back behind me! Now!"

The child gave a flying leap, and settled on the colt's back. But the skittish animal had never been broken to such performances. Instantly his heels flew into the air.

"Cling to me, child!" cried Sarah Ann. "Hold tight, for he's bound to have a run for it."

Little Patty did hold tight, and shouted with glee, as the colt shot like an arrow from under the chestnut shade.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### WILD OATS.

ON went that colt with a wild dash that would have hurled any rider less lythe and bold to the earth. Little Patty clung close to the girl, with both arms wound tightly around her waist, her own hair flying out loose, and her voice ringing its exultant glee upon the air.

Along the river's bank, where the road ran close to the water, these two young creatures were hurried. The danger filled them with mad delight. The swift motion was wildly intoxicating.

Down the long sweep of the road they went, rushed around a curve near the bridge, and across that with a dash and clatter that brought Mrs. Vane into her front stoop, and held the miller motionless, with a bag of flour on his shoulder, which he had just lifted from a horse ridden by a boy who was not strong enough to unload his own grist.

"Oh, Par! Par! See how we are a going it!" shrieked little Patty, bending back, and shaking the loose hair from her eyes.

Before Vane could answer, or draw his breath, the colt had passed, bearing those two young creatures up the street like a whirlwind. A long hill uplifted itself at the lower end of the village, and towards this the animal bounded. As he began to mount the high

slope, his speed slackened, and his mouth was white with foam. Then that seeming boy gave free play to her whip, and urged him to his swiftest pace till he reached the top of the hill, reeking with sweat, ridged with foam, and champing his bit with impotent fury.

"There, how do you like it, little girl?" said Sarah Ann, turning her flushed face back on Patty. "Never had such a ride in your life before; now did you?"

"No, indeed! Make him go it again."

"Not just now, you little humbug. I reckon his fire is pretty much run out. So, ho! old fellow, supposing we turn now, and walk down hill, if you've come to your senses."

"Let him trot, anyway," pleaded Patty, whose wild spirits were not half exhausted. "It is five hundred times better than any old chestnut, that trots, trots, trots, all the time at one pace. I'll take the first real horse that comes to the mill, and go it all by myself—see if I don't."

Sarah Ann turned her now submissive horse towards the village, where an alarm had been given, and half the inhabitants were out, waiting for some dreadful catastrophe. The miller had rushed into the street, mad with apprehension, where Mrs. Vane followed him, wringing her hands, and pleading for help, with a flow of pathos that urged the honest hearts of her neighbors into doing impossible things to rescue her child.

In the midst of this tumult, during which the millstones were grinding fiercely against each other, without a handful of grain to soften their harshness, that strange colt came trotting gently down the street, and halted in the midst of the crowd, with what seemed a

handsome boy, and little Patty, flushed and smiling on his back.

The miller, whose white features began to quiver with thankfulness, ran forward, and lifted the child from her perilous seat, in spite of Patty's struggles to retain it.

"My child! my own little Patty! How came you on that wild horse," he cried, half crying, and trembling with afright.

"I just gave a jump to his back, and away he went," answered Patty, parting the hair from her face, and tossing it back with both hands. "Oh, wasn't it fun? Just ask him?"

"She isn't hurt a bit," said the boy, smiling, till his white teeth were visible; "but she might have been if the colt hadn't stood handy. Never saw such a creature for clinging. Are you her father?"

"Of course he is," interposed Mrs. Vane, giving Patty half a dozen warm, maternal kisses, and ending them off with a shake that made the child's teeth chatter. "And he deserves to give her a good whipping."

"No! no!" answered the miller, rescuing the child from its mother's fond wrath. "She didn't mean any harm."

"The little girl would have broken her neck, if it hadn't been for me and the colt, sir. Riding a chestnut limb, twenty feet from the ground, isn't a bit safer than a run along a clear, open road like this; but she's clear grit anyway."

"And who are you, if I may be so bold?" questioned the miller.

"Me? Oh, I'm nothing in particular!"

"Business in these parts, meebby," suggested one of the neighbors.

"No—no! I believe not!" answered the boy, blushing red.

"Up above, then?"

"Yes—yes! I have got a little business up above; but the colt is pretty well tired out. I shall have to stay somewhere all night. Is there any place?"

"Put your horse under the mill-shed; there is plenty of oats inside, and the old woman will make up a bed somewhere," said Vane, who comprehended, in a vague way, that the lad had saved his child from great peril.

"That's right, Par! that's right! He's just the nicest sort of a boy," said Patty, fairly dancing with delight. "I'll sit next to him at table. I—I—"

"This way," said the miller, walking off towards the low-roofed entrance to the mill. "Tie up your horse, and I'll bring out a measure of oats. Then you can look about till supper-time."

This was exactly what the seeming boy wanted. The fates were playing into his hands, though he did not reflect upon it in that light, never having heard much about the weird sisters. The colt was soon unsaddled, and gently rubbed down, with a wisp of clean straw, before the miller came out with a generous measure of oats in his hand.

"Now, my good boy, tell me all about it," he said, earnestly. "My little Patty, how came she on this skittish creature's back?"

"Easy enough, sir. She was tottering on a high limb, and would have slipped off, if I hadn't rode the colt right under it, and told her to jump, which she

did. You never saw anything like it. She jumped square behind me. The colt didn't like it, kicked up like fury, bolted, and you saw how we went it. The little girl hung on like a hero, and seemed to enjoy it as much as I did. The colt liked it, too; but the long hill tired him out, so that gave me a chance to bring that smart little creature back home. That's all there is about it, so far as I know."

The miller listened with very deep interest, as a loving father does when his child has been in danger. He did not speak at first, but the seeming lad saw traces of two large tears, which made a slow path down the flour-dust on his face.

"Wait a minute," said the little man, at last; and he went hastily into the mill, and brought out another measure of oats, which he poured out before the colt, thus offering that spirited animal a fair chance of foundering itself, out of his teeming gratitude.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### LOVE AND JEALOUSY.

"**N**OW just look about the mill, or go in and rest, if you hadn't rather do something else, till supper-time," said Vane to his strange visitor, with a burst of glowing hospitality. "I've got to tend the hopper, now, or I'd go about with you."

"Oh, never mind that," answered the boy, "I can find my way."

"Don't go too far off. If you shouldn't be back, we will blow the toot-horn, and you'll know by that when supper is ready. Speaking of supper puts me in mind. If you know how to shoot, just knock over one of them chickens there, and we'll have him broiled agin you come back."

Here Vane ran into the mill, and came out with an old flint-lock gun in his hand, which he offered to the boy.

"Just take hold here, and settle one of them fellers," he said. "My eyesight ain't so good as it was once. It's loaded—so blaze away!"

Fortunately for the disguised girl, she knew how to handle a gun, and the flint-lock had no terrors for her. In less than a minute, there was a fearful commotion among a group of chickens, which was lazily picking up grain about the mill. One white pullet was making desperate bounds into the air, while the rest fled away, shrieking out hoarse cries of terror.

"Now just carry that in to the old woman. Tell her it's for supper; and batter cakes, beside, wouldn't be too much for a shaver that has saved our little girl's life. You can give that as my opinion, and let her do as she's a mind to."

The boy scarcely stayed to hear these directions out, but seized upon the pullet, carried it to the house, and handed it to Mrs. Vane. She had been alternately kissing and scolding little Patty, who was forbidden to leave the house again that day, and sat gloomily in a corner, with rebellious tears streaming down her face.

"To be briled with batter-cakes, the old man says."

Mrs. Vane took the pullet, which was still enough now, and looked hard at her husband's messenger.

"Batter-cakes?" said she, with emphasis.

"That's exactly what the old fellow said. Ask him, if you don't believe me," was the prompt answer. "Nothing dreadful about that, I reckon. Batter-cakes is easy made, some milk, and plenty of eggs."

"Some milk and eggs! Boys about these times are nation bright. What does a whipper-snapper like you know about cooking?"

The seeming lad blushed crimson, and stammered out,

"No—nothing! Only boys have mothers sometimes, and mine knows how to cook anything, from a chippen-bird to a turkey-gobbler."

Mrs. Vane gave the chicken a toss into the back balcony, where it lay, with its white wings outspread, and its neck twisted awry, waiting for future action.

While the good woman's attention was drawn that way, Patty made a sign to the boy that he was to insist that she should go out with him. Her eager face was plea enough for the lad.

"I should just like to have that little girl go along, while I look about a little," he said. "She can show me the way."

"And I should just like to keep her where she is. Two children nigh about killed is enough for me in one summer."

"Oh, Mar, Mar! Do let me go," pleaded Patty.

Mrs. Vane turned a discouraging look on the petitioners, and proceeded to fill an iron pot with water, which she swung over the fire.

"May I, Mar?" pleaded Patty, in a piteous little voice.

"No. I want you to help pick the chicken," an-



swered Mrs. Vane. "You may go, boy. She'd better stay with me."

The strange boy gave little Patty a look of tender sympathy, and went away. Drawing his cap down low, and stooping a little in his walk, he crossed the bridge, sauntered along the garden wall, and, from its shelter, took a survey of the red farmhouse. No one was at the windows, or about the front door, but the bay horse stood by the gate still, and this sign of a protracted visit filled that young heart with angry pain.

"I can't stand it," the boy muttered. "If it's real, I want to lie down somewhere, and be buried out of sight."

A noise, as of a closing door, startled the young listener, who kept along the stone wall, until the terrace ended, then sprang over it. With a burning heart he wandered off across an orchard, where the yellow and crimson fruit lay in rare ripeness among the thick grass of a thrifty aftergrowth. Since morning the poor girl had taken no food; but excitement made her forget that, and kept away all idea of hunger. She scarcely heeded the tempting apples, but passed through them rapidly, feeling oppressed by the gloom of the trees, and a little faint from the rich fruity smell that loaded the air.

At last she left the orchard, mounted the rising ground still farther, and threw herself down on a broad rock, tufted with wild plants, and half-covered with moss, over which a clump of larch-trees cast their delicate shadows.

It was a bitter hour for this wayward young creature, filled as she was with loving tenderness, stung with jealousy, passionate by nature, ardent in all things.

She was drinking the first wormwood of her woman's life—drinking it with fierce struggles and infinite pain.

"I will know—I *will* know it all, and then die," she moaned, clasping her knees with both hands, and rocking to and fro in anguish that, to her ignorance, seemed immortal. "Nobody shall find me out, nobody but mother. She knows; she may pity me, and cry over me if she wants to. It won't be for long. A heart that aches so must break in the end. But who will care? Mother and Tim—not another soul."

The sound of soft, low voices, and of footsteps wading through the grass, made the girl start up and look about. She saw nothing, but dreading the approach of some one who might observe her distress, slipped down the rock and hid herself behind an old hollow tree that stood close by it. As she sat there, holding her breath, two persons came upon the rock and sat down on the very place she had occupied. A man and a woman; she was certain of that, from the shadows that fell upon the turf.

The girl knew in her heart that this man was the person she had followed, but the woman—who was she?

A sweet, rich voice answered the thought—a voice that made the heart of that listening girl thrill, like a handful of torn harp-strings.

"Have I wanted to see you, Webster? Have I been impatient? How can you ask me? Does not your own heart answer mine?"

"But I would rather have it from your own sweet lips."

The girl by the oak started, and a faint moan broke from her. She knew it all now. He loved some one else. He never had loved her.

Strange! very strange; but the pain at her heart relaxed; certainty had crowded back suspense, which is the most harassing anguish that can fetter a human soul. To know the worst is to be unchained.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### DID SHE LOVE HIM?

SARAH ANN leaned back against the hollow tree, wondering at herself. A sentence or two had been spoken on the rock, and lost to her. She was quite unconscious of listening. It seemed natural and right that she should learn all that related so nearly to her own life. Beyond that she had no power to reason. Indeed, those nice shades of honor, which are a part of the refinements of social life, were only known to that wild nature by intuition. Thus she listened without shame or compunction—listened to that which seemed to wreck her young life in the beginning.

"Thought of you every day and hour. Why, girl, you have filled my whole life."

"Am I indeed so dear to you?" answered the sweet voice, through which came a faint ring of triumph. "It seems strange to be loved so entirely."

"Strange? And were you never loved before?"

"How should I? Who ever comes to this place worth noticing?"

There was a thrill of scorn in that fresh, young voice, which aroused the girl that listened. Perhaps

it was also felt by Hart Webster, for his next sentence was uttered gravely.

"But how will it prove," he questioned, "when you are surrounded by men far superior to the one you have chosen?"

"I never expect to find any one half so good," was the answer.

"Do not think that. I should not care to be loved because of your inexperience. When once in the world you will find many persons infinitely my superior, especially in the power of giving you those luxuries and pleasures which youth craves, and beauty like yours should command."

"Are such things so very important then?"

"In the society you will adorn they are considered important. It will require great love to overbalance them."

Gertrude Harrington was silent. The young man's eyes were upon her, and she felt the scrutiny of their glance with a sort of irritation. Did he doubt her? Did she, in fact, doubt herself?

"You hesitate. You are not sure," he said, very gravely.

"I—I only would not speak, because you seemed to doubt me. What can I say that you will not think springs out of a young girl's inexperience. But time will satisfy you, for I am going into the world—your world."

"What do you mean, Gertrude?"

"Only this. I have a rich aunt in New York, who wants me to come and stay with her, until my education is complete."

"What? Going to school?"

"Not exactly. My aunt was the second wife of a gentleman who left a daughter to her care. I am to have a proper amount of society with this young lady, and masters at home. So, in the end, you may perhaps marry a very accomplished young person, who will have seen enough of life to make it certain that she chooses you out of something beside country ignorance."

"Indeed," said Hart, thoughtfully. "And is this really arranged?"

"Why, you hardly seem to like it."

"Still, I have no right to make objections. Were it possible you should at once go from this quiet and safe home to mine. But that is in the clouds as yet. It may be years before I can claim the right to have you all to myself."

"The more reason, then, why this aunt of mine should put me in the way of knowing something of life."

"Perhaps. But you are safer here."

"Safer! Who can wish to harm me?"

"You cannot understand," said the young man, impatiently. "Experience is sometimes dearly bought."

"But one must have it, sometime, you know," answered the girl, tossing a handful of broken fern-leaves from her lap. "Since you left us I have been thinking of nothing but the place you are to fill in the great world; of the need there is that I should be prepared to stand side by side with you in it. No one shall say that you have sacrificed anything to love for a mere country girl."

Gertrude spoke excitedly. Her color rose and her eyes kindled. If love had made her tenderly gentle, ambition rendered her brilliant. The young man

looked at her with a strange expression in his face.

"You forgot," he said, "that greatness, in any walk of life, seldom comes all at once. It is a thing to be worked for, waited for, as we watch fruit ripen on the bough. Like that it is oftenest full and perfect in the autumn of life; when it becomes a power rather than a passion."

"So long! so long!" murmured the girl.

"Ah! but in the mean time we have love, and the toil that wins success, which is, some men say, sweeter than success itself. That is what you and I can look forward to, let the rest come when it may."

"But we shall be old when it comes."

"True. What then? (With love such as ours, deepening every year, greatness, if it ever comes, will be but a secondary thing.)"

"Ah! but I should like—" Gertrude broke off this sentence, and blushed deeply. She was ashamed of the impulse that had grown up rankly with her love.

"Well, what would you like, my beautiful darling?"

"Oh! to have the whole world look up to you, and worship you as I worship."

The young man shook his head, smiling almost sadly.

"But the world is too clear-sighted for that. No matter, dear one, so long as we are all the world to each other."

Hart threw his arm about Gertrude's waist, as he spoke, strained her to his heart, and kissed her on the lips and forehead with passionate warmth.

"You love me! Notwithstanding these proud dreams, you love me as I am?" Say that over again,

for somehow the joy I felt in seeing you once more seems chilled."

("I do love you. Indeed, indeed I do!")

Gertrude made no effort to free herself from his embrace, but clung to him, and shyly returned his kisses.

The girl who sat in breathless stillness by the hollow tree, clutched at the grass on either side of her with both hands, and shut her eyes, till the quivering lashes knit together; but great tears came through them, broken up like crushed diamonds, and the rich bloom faded utterly out of her face.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### ASKING FOR APPLES.

"LET us go now!" said Gertrude, rising in some natural confusion. "Some one may be coming, and we shall be talked about fearfully."

"Well, what then? Are we not engaged?"

"That is just what they have been asking me these three weeks," answered Gertrude, laughing. "The moment it was settled about Clara and your friend, public curiosity turned towards us."

"Of course; so far as you are concerned, it could not have turned on a fairer subject. But you really are not going?"

"Yes, I am, or half the children in the village will be peeping at us from back of the orchard wall. You don't know what curious little creatures they are. It

was from them the first news about Clara got about."

"Very likely. But, tell me, has our friend got the school?"

"The school? Oh, yes; and Clara is one of his pupils. He is a great favorite with every one but little Patty. She, poor thing, is disconsolate, and grows more and more hostile to him every day."

"What a child it is. I rather think she dislikes me also."

"Of course she does. I expect to see her starting up from some hollow every instant, menacing you with her little fist. So we had better be gone."

Hart laughed, but protested against a cowardly retreat from the place made dear to him by the first associations of their love.

"But you haven't seen your aunt yet," argued Gertrude."

"No; but there is time enough."

"And your horse is standing before our gate. She will see it across the river, and so will every one that comes to the mill. This is the care you take of a delicate secret, is it? Come, now, we are safe here no longer."

Gertrude stepped down from the rock, as she made this playful reproach, and turned into a foot-path that led through the orchard. Hart followed her reluctantly, and in a few minutes they disappeared under the apple-trees.

Then Sarah Ann came out of her hiding-place, pale and trembling with passionate grief. She was given up to the first love-sorrow, which rends its way through the young heart like a wild beast. That moment was utter desolation to the poor girl. She was humbled to

the dust. Her inferiority to that girl, in her great beauty and natural grace, urged itself upon her with crushing force. No wonder Hart Webster loved a creature like that. How he must despise her! How could she ever think that he liked her!

Sarah Ann crushed the cap over her forehead, and walked towards the orchard. She had learned enough to break any girl's heart; but her tortured fancy clung to the subject. She longed to know what it was that lifted this young lady so much above her.

"I will see her close. I will see how she lives, and what it is that charms him," thought the girl, as she walked towards the road. "The thought of her is sure to kill me, when I get home; but I will carry her picture back with me. I tried to look at her, but the tears came so thick and strong I couldn't."

Yes; Sarah Ann had resolved to see and speak with her rival—but how? It was all easy enough. Despair had made her reckless, and she was naturally quick witted. Leaping over the wall into the terraced garden, she went boldly up to the front door, for Hart's bay horse had disappeared from the gate, and she had no fear of meeting him. Her knock was answered by a request to come in, and the next moment what seemed to be a bright young boy stood in the parlor, where Gertrude and Aunt Eunice had, ten minutes before, parted from Hart. Holding his cap in one hand, the lad asked, in a quick, nervous way, for permission to pick up a few apples from the orchard.

The cap in his hand seemed to tremble with fright; and his great, wild eyes looked piteously on Gertrude, as if the request had been one of life and death to him.

"Of course you may. Get just as many as you want to eat, and both pockets full to carry home," said Aunt Eunice. "You must be a stranger in these parts to have the decency to ask."

"Yes, marm; I am a stranger," answered the boy, in a low, trembling voice.

"Just so," said Aunt Eunice. "Such politeness wasn't born in this neighborhood, I reckon. But you look tired; won't you take a drink of milk or something."

"Thank you," answered the lad, sitting down on the edge of a chair. "I don't mind if I do."

Aunt Eunice went out to get the milk, and Gertrude was left alone with the boy. Expecting Hart that day, she had put on a soft, crimson cashmere dress, which gave depth and richness to her complexion, while its subtle folds fell in drapery around her person. A cluster of white asters, of which she was half ashamed—having gathered them for his especial admiration—contrasted with the raven blackness of her hair, and in her eyes there lay more tender shadows than the drooping lashes could throw, thick and inky as they were.

The seeming boy sat gazing on her, his great eyes full of enforced admiration, his heart burning with a bitter sense of bereavement.

Why was she so handsome? What good fortune had surrounded her with such beautiful things, while his own home was so bare even of necessary comfort? The carpet on that parlor-floor, though an ordinary one, in fact, seemed to him a sumptuous affair; and the windows, with red worsted curtains falling over them, gave the room wonderful splendor in his eyes. His

heart sank lower and lower, as he saw these things, and compared them with the bare floors and naked sashes at home.

Gertrude was not thinking of him, but took her position at the window, and was looking out. She had just caught a glimpse of her lover, who stood talking to Mrs. Vane under the old button-ball tree, and her face brightened so beautifully, that the boy felt the cause, and almost hated her.

Aunt Eunice came back from the kitchen with a tumbler of milk in one hand, and a plate of apple-pie in the other. These she placed on a little round stand, which she drew up to the boy, who lifted his eyes to her face with a quick, thankful look, as if he felt grateful that any one should notice him. But he could not eat; the pie, nice and flaky as it was, choked him. He drank a few mouthfuls of the milk, and got up from his chair.

"But you haven't eaten anything?" expostulated Aunt Eunice.

"I—I haven't much appetite," answered the boy, looking ruefully at the pie. "That is for anything but apples," he added, remembering his seeming greed for them.

"They do look tempting," said the old maid, greatly appeased; for the orchard was her pride and delight. "So just go out, and help yourself."

"Thank you, marm!"

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### UNDER THE CHESTNUT.

THE boy snatched his cap from the floor, where he had dropped it, and making an awkward bow went into the hall, and out of the back door.

How thrifty and green everything looked. The old well-pole, with moss on its bucket; the pear-trees, deeply green; the garden, all red and golden with fall flowers, sickened that young creature with their beauty. He went into the orchard in a wild and desperate condition of mind. The crimson apples in the grass tantalized him. He snatched one up, and dashed it against the rough trunk of an old tree, from which it fell back split in twain.

"I wouldn't touch one, if I was starving," he sobbed.

Another, and another ruddy-cheeked apple went whirling from that little hand. It was a relief to destroy something. When his hands tired, he began to kick the fruit with his foot, and stamp it down in the grass.

This appeased the restless spirit that tortured him, and he left the orchard weary with excitement. The afternoon shadows were lengthening when he reached the highway, and crossed the bridge. Hart was still lingering in the little triangular garden, where little Patty was gathering ear-jewels from the wall that kept back the

waters of the river. The young man was deep in his love-dreams, and observed nothing. So the lad crept by and turned into the mill-shed. Here he found the colt so rampant, from a double feed of oats, that he danced and curveted all the while his owner was putting on the saddle.

The boy did not mount, but led the colt towards the bridge, keeping close to the garden fence, after he passed Vane's cottage. This caution was unnecessary, for Hart did not even look that way; but Patty did, and made a rush for the fence, which she cleared like a fawn.

"Boy! boy!" she called out. "You ain't a going, and supper 'most ready?"

"Yes, little girl. I've got a good way to ride."

"But Par will be mad, and Mar too, for she's a stirring up the batter-cakes now."

"Little girl, you see I can't stay, and I don't want anything to eat. It don't seem to me as if I should ever eat again; but I'm just as much obliged to you as if I did. Any way," he added breaking into a hysterical laugh, "we had a good ride together—didn't we? A splendid ride?"

"Didn't we now?" shouted Patty, looking behind her to make sure that no one was calling her back. "I should just like to do it again."

The lad shook his head.

"You won't?" said Patty, disappointed.

"No, little girl. I don't think I shall ever have the heart for another run like that. The colt could master me easy as nothing now."

"No, he can't. Just get on, and help me up."

"Not this time. I must go home."

The lad spoke so mournfully, that little Patty grew sympathetic.

"Are you sick?" she inquired.

"Yes; I am afraid so."

"How cold your hand is!"

Here the child lifted the little hand to her cheek, as if she hoped to warm it against the rich bloom that burned there, like color on a peach.

"You are a good, sweet little girl," sobbed the lad.

"Yes; I am that, if folks would only let me alone," said Patty, still fondling the boy's hand. "But they won't, and then I'm awful!"

They had now come in sight of the chestnut-tree. Patty saw it, and began to leap forward.

"Come! come along! Mother don't know I'm out; so just take me up, and off I go. Won't she be sorry then for fastening me up. Oh, no! I reckon she won't! But then Par, poor dear old Par. No, indeed, I couldn't do it. He'd just burst his heart a crying for his little girl. So, good-by, boy. I should like to run off with you, but won't on that account."

By this time they were under the chestnut. The child lifted up her arms, and wound them around the boy's neck. She looked into his sorrowful eyes, and began to cry.

"Don't! don't!" she said. "It makes me feel awful; don't now."

The disguised boy snatched the little creature up, kissed her again and again, then sprang on the colt, and was gone.

Little Patty followed the colt with wondering eyes, till he dashed around a curve of the road. Then she



sat down, and began to cry, feeling very lonely, and afraid to go home.

"That's the way it is," she sobbed, in confidential conversation with herself. "They all come and rush about, then cut off just as hard as hosses can carry them. All but Clara's feller, and he won't go anyhow; but hangs about, and makes sister just good for nothing; besides, eating up all our chickens; for Clara will have 'em every time he comes. Then I have to wait till they've done, and eat drum-sticks. He'll never go. I wish he would. So does Par; only he won't speak out. As for Mar— Well, I suppose she'll give me Hail Columbia on both ears, when she gets back. Why couldn't that boy just have took me along? then she'd a been sorry enough! But he rode off, just as Cousin Hart did, and Gertie a sitting by the window, and crying just as I do now. He's come back. I wonder if that boy ever will? If he does, I'll have a new, red merino frock, like hers, and set all ready for him, in the best room, as she did this morning. No. Mar would hustle me out of there; but I could fix up and hang about the mill. Oh, goody! goody! He's coming back again. He *is*, sure!"

Here Patty sprang to her feet, clapped her hands, and was about to rush forward, when a new caprice seized upon her.

"Gertie don't let Cousin Hart see half how glad she is, and I won't. This is the way grown ladies act when their beaux come—make believe they don't care."

Here Patty folded her hands demurely, drooped her eyelids, and shot side glances at the colt and his rider, as they came swiftly towards the chestnut.

"Little girl?"

"Did you speak to me?" answered the child, meekly looking down at her hands.

"I want you to do something for me. What is your name? I haven't thought to ask."

"Patty."

"Patty what?"

"Patty Vane, please."

"Well, Patty, I hope you like me a little."

"Don't just know," answered the child, somewhat at a loss as to the way young ladies would answer a question like that.

"Now, that's tough. I thought you liked me ever so much, and I wanted you to do something against I come again."

"Then you *will* come again!" cried the child, springing up, and brightening out of her pretty affectations. "Just as Cousin Hart did for Gertie? Yes, I'll do it. Anything you want."

"Well, Patty, I want you to come here just a week from to-day."

"That's next Monday," said the child. "I'll come. Under this chestnut-tree, you mean—don't you?"

"Yes. I'll ride over, and get here before noon; but I don't want to see a soul but you."

"That's just like them others," thought Patty. "They never want to see anybody but their own girls, and like to do it out of doors, too."

"So you won't say a word about it," continued the boy, rather anxiously.

"Not a word!" said Patty, shutting her lips close.

"Well, I want you to find out something. You can?"

Patty nodded her head.

"Find out where that young lady—"

"Don't know any young lady," said Patty.

"Well, that girl in the house by the bridge—"

"Our Gertie?"

"Yes. Find out where she is going to in New York."

"I know now. It's to her 'tother aunt."

"Yes; but I want the name of her aunt—the street she lives in—"

"Why, Gertie hasn't got no aunt that lives in the street—nobody does that," cried Patty, interrupting her friend.

"Never mind that. Only you ask what her aunt's name is, and what number is on her door, and about the street, just as if folks did live there. That is just what I want you to do for me. Now will you?"

"Yes, I will. So, there!"

"And I'll bring you something. What shall I bring you, Patty?"

"Just your own self," said Patty drooping her eyelids, and taking to side glances again, for she had not observed Gertrude and Hart sitting under the larch-trees for nothing.

"Well, I'll be sure to come next Monday. Good-by, Patty."

"Good-by, boy. You'll find me either down here or up in the limbs. Good-by."

"Some one is coming. I hear a horse crossing the bridge."

The boy bent forward on his saddle, spoke to the colt, and dashed off on a swift run. Patty slid down the bank, and contented herself with throwing tufts of

grass into the water, until a horse and wagon passed by, then she crept slowly home, feeling that supper was waiting for her, and perhaps something else, not quite so pleasant on the maternal side.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### A NEW ARRIVAL.

A PLAIN carriage, with a footman standing by the door, was waiting for the train. As it came slowly into the depot, a fine old lady who had been sitting inside, got out hastily and went upon the platform, where she stood anxiously scrutinizing each female face as it passed her. At last, she gave a start, and, pressing forward into the crowd, spoke to a young lady who was walking slowly, and looking around in some bewilderment.

"Gertrude! Miss Harrington!"

The girl turned, and looked at the sweet and somewhat agitated face of the old lady, who had spoken her name.

"Is it—is it my aunt?" she said, brightening all over. "I am so relieved—so glad?"

The old lady held out her arms, and Gertrude felt them tremble as they were thrown around her.

"I was half-frightened," said the girl, returning her aunt's kiss. "Would you believe it, Aunt Foster, I have never been so far from home before?"

"You—you are safe enough now," was the kind

answer. "There, Thomas, take the young lady's satchel and books."

Gertrude resigned her satchel to the footman with shy hesitation. She could not all at once comprehend that this neatly-attired young man was a servant, and insisted on carrying the books herself.

When once in the carriage, the girl, with all her natural grace, would have sat bolt upright among the luxurious cushions; but Mrs. Foster drew her softly into a caressing embrace, and laid her own pale cheek against the bloom of that other youthful face with a murmur of love, not unmixed with something like tender pity.

"You must try and be happy with us, Gertrude; and, remember, you are not to get homesick, because things are a little cold and strange at first."

"Oh, I am not likely to be that, and you so kind," answered the girl, kissing the soft cheek resting so near her lips. "It seems to me like having Aunt Eunice with me again. Dear Aunt Eunice! she told me to kiss you for her."

"Did she? Dear sister! Is she much changed?"

"Not since I knew her. It seems to me that Aunt Eunice never can change."

"Not changel!" said Mrs. Foster, dreamily. "But her youth and her beauty was all before you were born. From that time, I think my sister became what she is now."

"And that is," said Gertrude, "the dearest, kindest, most unselfish creature that the sun ever shone upon."

"She was always that," said Mrs. Foster earnestly. "Always! Always!"

There was silence between the two for a time, and in that silence their hearts seemed to knit together and

understand each other. All the feeling of dread and uncertainty that had haunted Gertrude during her ride in the cars was gone. She knew there was one heart honest and kind as that she had left, which would always turn to hers in case of loneliness or need.

"Here we are," said Mrs. Foster, as the carriage stopped before a large house in one of the fashionable avenues.

"We will go directly to your room," said Aunt Foster, leading the way up a broad walnut staircase, whose shining wood was but half covered by a carpet, in which forest moss and roses seemed matted together.

"We gave you this room because it is nearest my own," said Mrs. Foster, untying the girl's bonnet, and smoothing back her thick hair with evident admiration. "You are very like your father, my dear—and he was the handsomest of us all."

Gertrude blushed, then grew slowly white.

"I scarcely know anything of my father," she said. "Aunt Eunice never will talk of him, and there was no one else to tell me anything."

"No, he never lived at the farm. That belonged to your grandfather, on our mother's side. It came to us after her death; or, rather, to your Aunt Eunice, for I refused all share in it."

"But my father—you know all about him?" inquired Gertrude, earnestly, for she had forgotten everything else in that one absorbing subject. "Do I indeed look like my father?"

"Yes," answered the aunt briefly. "I recognized you by the likeness."

"So you did. How else could you have known me?"

"But we must not stop to talk now," said Mrs. Foster, evading the subject without seeming to shrink from it. "Through this door is your dressing-room. You will find a bath ready."

Mrs. Foster opened the door as she spoke, and Gertrude followed her into a small inner chamber, in which a tall mirror reflected her figure from head to foot. Opposite this stood a bureau, on which lay a pair of delicately carved ivory brushes, and beyond them glistened the crystal and gold of some toilet bottles, whose contents filled the apartment with a scarcely perceptible perfume.

"Open the drawers, you will find almost everything you need," said Mrs. Foster, taking a key from a jewel-case of oxydized silver, which was a chief ornament of the bureau.

Gertrude obeyed her, and opened the first drawer. It was full of garments, enriched with delicate French embroidery, such as she had never seen in her lifetime.

"Oh, aunt!" she exclaimed, all in a tremor of grateful delight, "Are all these things for me?"

"For you, child. Yes; we must not let Mr. Foster's son or daughter think that such articles are a novelty to my niece."

"Are they here?" inquired Gertrude, dropping a lace handkerchief back into the drawer, and turning a half frightened face on her aunt. "What if they should take a dislike to me?"

"Would that frighten you?"

"I—I don't know. At first it might a little."

"I hope not, because it is my first wish that you should be happy while you stay with us."

"But will they prevent it?" inquired Gertrude,

aghast with the thought of meeting enemies in the house.

"I hope not. Of course, they cannot help liking you."

Gertrude sat down in a pretty easy chair, half covered with crochet work, and was for awhile silent with dismay. She started up at last with a glow in her face.

"Never mind, aunt, I'll make them like me."

"I hope so," said Mrs. Foster, doubtfully.

"But I will! So don't be anxious about it. I know you are, and it troubles you. Now it will make a coward of me if my coming brings you into difficulty. So I will act like an angel—see if I don't."

"I fear there will be need of it," said the aunt.

"Why, have they made up their minds to hate me already?"

"No, child, it is not that; but Mr. Foster and his sister seldom agree to like the same person."

"Oh, that is it! Well, aunt, which of them am I to please?"

"Both, if you can. As a beginning, get dressed as soon as possible, for it will soon be dinner-time."

"But my trunks—the express-man has them?"

"They are here; Thomas is bringing them up."

True enough; that moment the trunks were brought in, and Gertrude took the crimson cashmere dress from one of them. It was the best garment in her wardrobe, and she had been rather proud of it, but now drew it forth with some misgivings.

"Will this do, aunt?"

"Very well, child," answered the aunt, looking at the girl as she flung down her magnificent hair, for she

thought, a little proudly, that such beauty would sustain itself in any dress.

As the girl stood between the two mirrors, regarding the full effect of her own beauty, almost for the first time in her life, the door opened, and Miss Foster looked in.

Gertrude turned, dropped the hair she was braiding in waves and ripples, over her person, and in a wild, embarrassed way, saw that a strange woman was looking in upon her.

"Oh, aunt!" she exclaimed, shrinking back in dismay.

The young lady at the door was held motionless with surprise. She neither advanced nor receded, but stood a moment on the threshold, then closed the door without speaking.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### CHILDISH CRAFT.

"AUNT EUNICE!"

"Well, Patty—what is it?"

"Our horseradish is all dug up, and the tops planted down agin. So Mar wants to know if you'd just as lief as not let me dig some out of your garden? 'Cause we've got roasted beef for dinner, and nothing to smart it up with."

"Just as much as you like," answered Aunt Eunice. "Ask Betsey Taft to give you the little garden-hoe."

"I know where it is myself," answered Patty. "I stood it up agin the well-crotch last time we used it."

Out flew the child and found the hoe, with which she marched into the garden, and finding a patch of horseradish-leaves growing rank and green along the wall, dashed into them with vigor. Directly she returned with a couple of straggling roots dangling from the long leaves grasped in her hand.

"There," she said, sitting down on the back doorstep, with her feet buried in the thick plantain-leaves. "I'll just cut off the tops here, if Betsey'll give me a case-knife and set 'em back. Curious, isn't it, how the pieces will take to growing agin."

"Never mind about setting them out; there's plenty of it by the old wall," said Aunt Eunice. "And I sha'n't want so much of anything now—"

Aunt Eunice faltered here, and drew a long breath.

Patty nodded her head, and took up the old maid's broken speech.

"Yes, I know; since *she's* gone. Lonesome—isn't it? But then you know just where she is, and I don't—so that makes it dreadful. Seems as if she was gone for ever and ever."

"Well, New York is a good way off."

"New York," muttered Patty, registering the name in her memory. Then she said aloud:

"Isn't that a place cut up, like gingerbread, into long streets that have names to 'em?"

"Yes," answered Aunt Eunice, who was busy cutting up curd for a cheese on the back stoop, and rather enjoyed a little chat with the child.

"All cities have streets with names. You couldn't

tell how to find the houses without them, they are built so close together."

"You don't say so! But how can folks tell so many houses by one street?"

"How, Patty? Why they all have numbers on the doors."

"How funny! Has our Gertie's aunt got a number all to herself?"

"Of course she has."

"And the street?"

"Her Aunt Foster lives in an avenue."

"An avenue! What's that, Aunt Eunice?"

"A long, long-street, wider than the rest, and more genteel."

"More genteel! That's good for Gertie. But about the number?"

Patty got an answer she did not expect.

"Patty Vane, what on earth are you about all this time?"

Patty gave a jump, dropped the horseradish from her lap, and saw her mother standing in the back door, just beyond Aunt Eunice.

"I—I was cutting off the tops, Mar," answered the little girl, crestfallen at this termination of her diplomacy.

"Cutting off the tops, and dawdling about, just as if dinner wasn't on the table, and your Par waiting."

"Oh, my! is he? Then I'll cut home at once. Poor Par! I didn't mean to keep him waiting, and he so kind about my new red marener frock."

"Just wait a minute, Patty," said Aunt Eunice.

"I've got an errand for you, if your Mar is willing to let you run up the street."

"Of course I'm willing. The child has got nothing else to do," said Mrs. Vane. "It was the horseradish I wanted. There's no hurry about her."

Aunt Eunice went into the sitting-room, from which she came forth with a letter in her hand.

"If Patty will just run up street, after dinner, and put this in the post-office, it will save me the trouble. It is for Gertrude."

Patty sprang forward with a leap.

"For Gertrude! Of course I will. But is her name on the cover?"

"Of course it is," said Aunt Eunice; "plain as print."

"And that avenue?"

"Why, yes."

"And the number on the door?"

"There, now, just hush up your questions, and come along," interposed Mrs. Vane. "She shall take the letter right away, Aunt Eunice, I'll see to that."

"It don't want no seeing to; I'll tend to it my own self," cried Patty, holding the letter against her bosom with both hands, and darting off like a lapwing.

"Did you ever?" exclaimed Mrs. Vane, gathering up the horseradish.

"Spry as a squirrel," answered Aunt Eunice, smiling grimly.

"Spry! Just watch her bounding over the bridge!"

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### PATTY AT THE POST-OFFICE.

SURE enough, Patty was flying across the bridge with the letter in her hand, and never once checked her speed till she reached the post-office, which was located in a variety store in the centre of the village. She found the postmaster lying at half length on the counter. From this comfortable position he rolled lazily off and reached out his hand for the letter. But little Patty held on to it.

"Just you see that it's all right, Mr. Snow, before we put it in. Read it over careful, for Aunt Eunice is awful particular. Out loud, please."

The postmaster took hold of a corner of the letter and read aloud, "Miss Gertrude Harrington. Care of Rufus Foster, Esq., Union Club, New York."

While the man was reading, Patty repeated over his words, nodding her head vigorously at the end.

"That's all correct," she said, giving up the letter. "Now, Mr. Snow, if you'll just give me a couple of sugar-kisses for these, streaked ones, red and white, I'll cut for home."

Snow dropped the letter into a box on his desk, took a glass jar down from the shelves and gave the little girl two lumps of candy, for which she laid a couple of pennies on the counter, and darted out of the store.

### PATTY AT THE POST-OFFICE. 213

Mrs. Vane had hardly found time to grate her horse-radish for the table when Patty came in with her mouth full of candy, and flushed with running. She had been crushing the sweets between her teeth, and repeating over the address of that letter all the way from the post-office, until he had them both by heart.

After dinner the child followed her sister Clara into the little parlor, and sat down at her feet.

"Clara, if you'd just cut out my new frock now, I could sew up the over-and-over seams my own self, and that would help along."

"Why, you are in a great hurry about that dress, Patty," answered the girl, who was very busy over some of the pretty garments necessary to her wedding outfit.

"Yes," answered Patty, with unusual meekness. "I'd like to have it before Monday, sister Clara, if you've no objections."

"Well, dear, I will go right to work on it."

Patty sprang up from her stool, threw both arms about Clara's neck, and smothered her sister with kisses.

"Oh! but I've got something better than that," she cried, diving one little hand down into her pocket, and bringing out the last lump of candy. "Just open your mouth and shut up your eyes, and take a big bite. Isn't it luscious?"

"Very nice," said Clara, nibbling at the candy.

"Oh, that's no way!" cried Patty, crushing one side of the kiss between her own little teeth. "Take another, you don't bite worth a cent!"

Here the child gave a generous bite for herself, and crushed the rest between the smiling lips of her sister.



"Now you'll hurry up, won't you, darling Clara?" she exclaimed triumphantly.

"Yes, darling."

Patty forgot all about her over-and-over seams after this promise, and stole upon her mother unawares, as she was washing the noon dishes in the back porch.

"Mar," she said, meekly, "shall I wipe the plates for you?"

"Yes, if you won't break them."

"Oh, Mar! did I ever, now?"

"Well, well, here's the towel."

Patty went to work vigorously, resting the plates on her bent knee, as she rubbed the moisture from them. When she had piled half a dozen together, the child took breath and began to talk.

"Mar, is my white apron, with the ruffles, done up?"

"Of course it is, goosey."

"And, Mar—"

"Well, what do you want now?"

"I wish you'd just crimple up the ruffles along the edges, with a little knife; you know that makes 'em look scrumptious."

Mrs. Vane rested one moist hand on the kitchen-table, and looked down upon the little diplomat in comical astonishment.

"Why, what has come over you, Patty?"

"Nothing, Mar; only—. Have you got any more plates to wipe? I want to be good, and help you."

"That I may let you wear the white apron when you take a notion to. Is that it?"

"If you please, Mar; or mebbly I should outgrow

them; and you haven't any other little girl to wear things out."

"There is some sense in that," answered Mrs. Vane, laughing to herself. "They are getting small. Well, be a good girl, Patty, and we'll see."

A few minutes after this Patty was in the mill, diligently picking up corn from the floor, which she piled in a little heap ready for the chickens. The miller took time to smile upon her and pat her head affectionately with his hand.

Patty lifted her bright face to his, and put out her foot. The little morocco boot that covered it was worn out at the toes.

"Look there, Par; isn't it too bad?"

"Are those your best, Patty?"

"Yes, they are. All the other little girls have got nice new ones."

"Well, well, little girl, don't speak as if you were going to cry, and we'll see if they have got any up at the store that'll fit you."

Patty had her lap full of corn, but she sprang up, scattering it over the floor.

"Oh, Par! I do think you're just the primmest old darling that ever a little girl had. What should I do without you?"

The little miller was tender-hearted as a woman, and this heedless speech struck a cord that had vibrated painfully many times in his life, when he thought of his children. All at once tears came into his eyes, and his voice faltered,

"Ah, my baby! God would take care of you," he said.

The child looked at him wonderingly, then her own

eyes began to fill, and putting her hand in his, she faltered,

"Oh, Par; but I'd rather have you."

The next instant the miller had the little creature in his arms, and was kissing her with desperate fondness.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE GIRL FROM THE COUNTRY.

FOR a time Gertrude Harrington stood in that pretty dressing-room dismayed by the first glance she had obtained of the young lady it was so important that she should please. She had nothing of that artistic experience which might have taught her that no perfection of toilet would have rendered her so beautiful as she appeared in the simple grace of her own loveliness; and a keen sense of mortification seized upon her.

Mrs. Foster, too, was annoyed, not from the same reason, but the rude entrance and retreat of her step-daughter seemed almost like a premeditated insult. She said nothing, however; but Gertrude saw that her face was grave, and that increased her own troubles. After awhile she was prepared to go down, and took a nervous survey of herself in the glass.

If Mrs. Foster had endured any misgivings about her visitor's presentability, it vanished as she too glanced at the superb image reflected in the glass. There was no real want of grace in that simple dress, little as it was, prepared to meet the requirements of fashion; of a deep,

rich color, and exquisitely soft material, it fell in folds, that were absolutely classic, around her subtile and perfect figure. To this Mrs. Foster had added the delicate richness of some fine lace for the neck and sleeves.

Gertrude's own taste had arranged the splendid masses of her hair with more effect than adhesion to any prevailing style could have produced. Still there was wanting that all-pervading stamp of fashion which persons like Miss Foster deem all important; and both Gertrude and her aunt felt this with unpleasant misgivings.

Thus Mrs. Foster was unusually anxious, and Gertrude lost much of her color as they entered the small sitting-room in which the family assembled before dinner.

A gentleman was already there with his back to the door, holding a book which he was not reading. He arose languidly when the ladies came in, and laying down the book, asked if the dinner would ever be served.

"It is a little late to-day; the train comes in at an inconvenient hour," said Mrs. Foster, faltering a little in her explanation.

"The train! Ah, I remember! You expected some one—from the country, was it not? Disappointed, of course."

"No," said Mrs. Foster; "My niece is here. Allow me to present her."

The man turned almost abruptly. For a moment he lost his sublime self-possession, and a faint flush stole over his face.

"I beg pardon—"

He stopped, and absolutely stood for a moment staring at this girl from the country, who blushed

crimson, and began to tremble from head to foot, partly from self-distrust, partly with natural resentment.

"I beg pardon," he repeated, recovering himself, "but I had no idea that the train came in so early."

A servant opened the door and announced dinner. Mrs. Foster moved forward, and Foster, with that quiet suave grace, which could only forsake him for a moment at any time, offered his arm to Gertrude.

The country girl took his arm, and he could feel hers tremble. The whole scene was so new to this young creature that a shrinking dread of criticism deprived her of all self-possession. She longed to drop his arm, and run away where no one could see her.

Mr. Foster had at least the habits of a gentleman. This emotion pleased him; there was something fresh and real in it that aroused his curiosity, and flattered his self-love. Simulated modesty he was accustomed to, and he understood its hollowness—no man better; but a frank, truthful nature impressed him with a feeling of boyhood; and this had become a novel sensation.

This little attention, volunteered by her step-son, was a pleasant surprise to Mrs. Foster. The cheerful look came back to her face, and she thanked him graciously with her eyes. It was not often that this spoiled man of the world cared to disturb himself with anything going on in his own home; certainly he was not inclined to do its honors to any guest that his step-mother or sister might introduce there.

While the soup was on the table, there arose a little commotion in the next room, where Miss Foster was questioning the servants, evidently regarding their new guest, for Gertrude heard her say very distinctly,

"Well, what kind of a person is she, Thomas? One that you can condescend to wait upon?"

Gertrude lost the answer, for the servant, better bred than his mistress, spoke in a low voice; but the next sentence reached her broadly enough.

"Now, understand this, Thomas. You are not to be judge. I allow no one in this house to put on airs but myself."

Gertrude grew crimson as she heard this, and while her quick, native spirit rose almost fiercely, she turned her flashing eyes upon the door. The shy timidity which had oppressed her was all gone now. Unconsciously she erected her superb figure, and sat proudly upright in the chair she had taken with so much hesitation.

The door opened, and Miss Foster sailed through it in full toilet, as if she had been invited to dine with royalty. Her dress of blue silk swept and rustled half across the floor; rich lace, fastened with clustering pearls floated over her bosom, and softly shaded her arms. She even had roses in her hair, and carried a superb fan in her gloved hands, though the autumn was advanced and chilly.

The young lady made an abrupt pause, as if the presence of a stranger at the table took her by surprise.

Mrs. Foster, who had been turning red and white by turns, spoke in a voice that indignation made firmer than usual.

"My niece, Miss Harrington, Jane."

Miss Foster took a back step, and recovered herself with a magnificent lift of the head. Then she swept round to her seat, complained that the soup was cold, and sent it away, observing that everything in the

house seemed to be deranged that day for Mrs. Foster's accommodation.

Gertrude Harrington half arose from her chair; but her aunt cast a piteous look across the table and she sat down pale to the lips. Mr. Foster looked at his sister with a contemptuous half-smile, then turning to Mrs. Foster, he observed, with provoking quietness.

"Our young lady is in high feather to-day. We must not let her disturb us too much."

"Your niece has just come in from the country, I suppose," said Miss Foster, addressing the old lady, but surveying Gertrude with insolent scrutiny.

"And you seem to have prepared for the opera, only there does not happen to be one to-night," said Foster. "Will you take wine, Miss Harrington?"

Gertrude allowed her glass to be filled, but she did not taste the wine. The dialogue, in which some covert insult to herself was evidently lurking, deprived her of all appetite. She sat trembling in her chair. The novelty of her position was enough to distress any girl; but to this was added the sudden attack of an enemy, who seemed determined to drive her from the house. What had she done to this haughty person, that the first hour of her stay should be embittered with insult? True, Foster seemed as if he wished both to welcome and protect her; but even inexperienced Gertrude could see that this sprang as much from a desire to torment his sister as from any wish to please her.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE AUNT AND NIECE.

MRS. FOSTER was almost as much disturbed as her niece by this cruel reception. In a timid nervous way she attempted to draw the conversation into more peaceful channels; but Jane Foster had taken her stand. From the moment Gertrude's beauty struck her dumb, on the threshold of that little dressing-room, a spirit of bitter antagonism seized upon her. When she saw the impression it had made on her brother, this feeling took a double zest.

The same experience, in a less degree, influenced the brother, whose most vivid amusement lay in a sort of indolent antagonism to all his sister's foibles and desires. That which one approved the other was sure to hate. The evident admiration which Gertrude had aroused in this man, was an inspiration of malice to the woman.

Half the weary meal was over, and Gertrude had hardly joined in the conversation. Once or twice she had answered a question, addressed by her aunt; but it was in a voice that shook with a passionate desire to burst into tears and go away forever.

At last her aunt arose. The dinner had dragged through its dreary courses, and ended in strong, black coffee, which was bitter as that haughty girl's insults. In fact, everything was bitter to the poor girl then.

The thought of home, of all its freedom and honest hospitality, came upon her in overpowering contrast with the splendid meanness with which her coming had been greeted.

Mrs. Foster went with her up stairs, where all was elegant quiet. There she was certain of sweet, welcoming love; but her heart was full. To the very soul she was homesick.

"Here, Gertrude, is your home, in which no one shall intrude," she said, opening a door, which led from the dressing-room into a pretty parlor, the most beautiful room she had ever seen in her life.

"Oh, aunt! is it because others are so cruel that you do all this for me?"

"It is because you are my niece, and I want you to love me!"

"I do—I do love you dearly already, Aunt Foster," said Gertrude. "Only—only—"

"Only you are homesick. No wonder!"

"Just—just a little, aunt; but not when we are alone—not when you are with me."

"I shall be with you a great deal of the time. The house is large enough, and we can live almost by ourselves. The rest you will bear for my sake."

"I will bear anything to please you; but, aunt, let me say it once, I hate that insolent girl!"

A faint smile came over Mrs. Foster's face; but she answered with habitual gentleness.

"She was my husband's child, and he was very good to me. So good that I will not permit myself to see faults in the beings he loved so dearly. Jane was left to my care long after any influence I possessed could effect her character. Indeed, the position I held

in her father's house, before our marriage, was a perpetual bar to that."

"What position do you speak of, aunt," said Gertrude.

"Has Eunice never told you then that I was Mr. Foster's housekeeper before I became his wife?"

"No, aunt, she never did; but that's no reason—"

"Why a woman he chose to honor should not be honored by his children, you were going to say. Perhaps not. But other things caused them some dissatisfaction. When my husband died, he left Jane under my guardianship. I had not been long his wife, you know; and to them this authority seemed like an usurpation."

"But you seem— You are so kind, so forbearing."

"That may be; but we will not talk about it now. You and I must be a great deal to each other, and, for my sake, you will bear with her. She is not always so—so—"

"Insolent!" said Gertrude, recklessly. "Oh, aunt! you do not know how I longed to snatch up that glass of wine, and dash it into her face!"

Mrs. Foster looked horrified for a moment, then, broke into a quiet smile.

"I suppose you would have turned me out of doors, if I had," continued Gertrude, dropping into the arms of a convenient easy-chair, while a dash of mischievous glee broke up through the bitterness of her laughter.

"I think not. Only we must have come to open warfare then; and that I would rather avoid, for many reasons."

"One of which is, you are too good, while I am just

the other thing," said Gertrude. "You don't know, aunt, how much genuine fight there is in me, when it once gets uppermost. I am almost angry with myself, because all this overpowered me."

Here Gertrude glanced around the room that was to be hers. The thick carpet; the couch, covered with some rich crimson material, cushioned easy-chairs and curtains, through which the sunshine poured like a rain of red wine. All commonplace enough to her aunt, but gorgeous to her, and did, indeed, half scorn herself. It was a truth, all these appliances of wealth had helped to subdue her in the presence of those two strangers; and she could not bring herself yet to despise anything so beautiful. "I am more angry with myself than anyone else," she added; "because I was ashamed of my dress and of everything that I had thought much of at home."

"That is natural, and easily remedied," said her aunt. "But you must not let our experience of to-day make a false impression. My step-daughter's dress, like her manners, were put on for the occasion. We do not, as a general thing, dine in opera costume."

"Then it was put on to crush the poor country relation," said Gertrude, laughing now with genuine scorn! "Well, she succeeded. My poor cashmere did look poverty-stricken by the side of her magnificence. Aunt Eunice would have sold her best cow, rather than have had me so put down."

"Your Aunt Eunice would have felt, as I did, that there was no need of dress to make her proud of you. There, now; lie down on the couch, and rest awhile. By-and-by the servant shall bring you up some tea. A good night's sleep will cure you of homesickness. That

door leads to your bedroom; forget all that has been unpleasant, and remember this is your own little kingdom."

Mrs. Foster kissed the girl tenderly, as she said this, and left the room.

Gertrude, when once left alone, had no idea of resting. The excitement of her new position was too intense for that. She moved about the room, excitedly, like a bird in its gilded cage, touched the pretty upright piano, took the inlaid guitar from its corner, and started, like a guilty thing, when its strings vibrated loudly under her fingers. Then she went to the bookcase, and poured over the titles of volumes that she had heard of, but never read. All these things were for her. How happy she could be, if it were not for the people below stairs! What a change Hart Webster would find in her way of life! Would that girl dare to insult *him*?

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### EXPECTATION.

MONDAY came, the day which little Patty had been longing for with more impatience than she had ever wished for a doll, when coming out of her first babyhood. Her sister Clara was at school—a most attentive scholar Clara was in those days. Mrs. Vane had put on her very best cap, with the pink ribbons, and was on her way up the valley to a church sewing-

circle. Thus Patty was left alone, mistress of the little brown house and all it contained.

For at least half an hour she had been sitting on a footstool in the kitchen, with both hands in her lap, watching the old cherry-wood clock as it growled out the hour, and ticked hoarsely on its way towards a new departure. When the clock made a sharp stop, gave a whirr, as if a nest of partridges were taking flight from the old case, and boomed out twelve rusty hour guns, the little girl sprang up, clapped her hands, and disappeared in the narrow stairway that led to the loft, in which all her worldly goods were bestowed. On the little bed, covered with a home-made counterpane of blue and white yarn, woven in orange quarters, lay a tiny red dress, and down upon the rag carpet beneath sat a pair of new morocco boots.

Before you could have taken all these objects in, Patty had loosened her faded calico dress, which dropped away from her dimpled shoulders, and fell in rifts about her feet; while her head was buried for a moment in the red merino, and came out glowing with smiles, and radiant with reflected color. Then the little arms were thrown backward, and she began tugging at a hook and eye on the belt, with her teeth set, and her face turning red as the merino, for the hook would go astray, and the eye was hard to hold in place. At last she broke down, dropped her hands, and began to cry a little, then shook away her tears, and commenced again.

It was of no use, though. Her poor little arms were too short, and that hook the most obstinate bit of twisted wire that ever tormented a little girl. So she took breath, sat down flat on the carpet, and put on the

new boots, hurting her fingers awfully with the buttons. Then she made another attempt at the dress, and dropped her hands in despair.

"What shall I do? Oh, dear! what shall I do?"

Now, another child might have given up; but our little lady was seldom without resources. She had courage, too, or the resolve that came into her head that moment would never have been carried out.

"Yes, I'll do it," she said. "Par ain't handy; but then he ain't cross neither. I wonder where Clara's littlest shawl is?"

The child acted while she talked. Clara's shawl was found in the next room, and, with its gray folds thrown over her head, Patty ran to the mill, and flew across it like a cardinal bird lost in the dusk.

"Par! oh, Par! Just set down that bag of corn, and hook me up just this once. Mar and Clara have left me alone, and I can't make it meet, all I can do."

Here Patty threw off her shawl, and exhibited a little white rift of linen running down her back, which the miller understood at once, and, setting down the bag, began to dust the flour from his hands.

"Do be in a hurry, Par; please do!"

The miller made short work of the refractory hook and eye; besides jerking the buttons into place. True, he got the wrong button-hole every time, and never did understand why there was an odd corner to be tucked away at the neck. At any rate, his task was done, very much to his own satisfaction; and when it occurred to him to wonder for what occasion the child was putting on her new frock, the little creature was gone.

Gone! You would have thought so, had you seen Patty cutting across the bridge, with the ends of the



gray shawl trailing after her, now and then a flash of red breaking through its folds, and her new boots glistening in the sunshine.

The old chestnut was heavy with burs now, and its long, slender leaves shook in the wind with a pleasant rustle, as the child darted under it. No one was there! Noon is an indefinite term; still she was a little disappointed. Sister Clara never waited for her beau, and Hart Webster always got to the larch trees first. What had become of that boy? Had the colt thrown him?

The little girl sat down on the shelving bank, with her feet in the grass, and began to feel like crying.

"Mebby he's tried to cross some big river and got drowned," she said, looking at the water that crept along its course below her. "No, he hasn't. He's coming! I hear that colt!"

Up the child jumped, flung down the shawl, and the next minute was on the brink of the river, looking at herself in the water, smoothing down the ruffles of her white apron, and almost dancing as she saw the color of her red dress broken up in the ripples of the waves, and the shadow of her long curls playing duski-ly among them.

Patty heard the hoofs of the colt coming nearer and nearer. She looked up into the great boughs of the chestnut, with a longing desire to climb them, hide away in the leaves, and see how that handsome boy would look, when he came up and did not find her. But the new dress, the ruffles and glossy boots, were in the way of this coquettish proceeding; so she hid herself behind a great black alder bush, and waited.

The colt evidently slackened his pace as he drew near the village, and came under the tree at a walk.

Patty peeped out from her covert, and saw the boy look anxiously up the road, then ride forward a pace or two and turn back, looking disconsolate.

"That's him. He thinks I ain't a coming," she whispered, giggling. "I'll stir the bush, just as if it was a redbird. He'll hear it shake, and try to find out."

Here she gave the alders a fierce shake; but the lad was too far away, and did not regard the noise it made.

"He don't take notice worth a cent," she said, creeping out of her shelter, and allowing the sunshine to fall upon her.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE RAINBOW SASH.

THE boy saw Patty moving like a flame through the deep green foliage, and sprang to the ground. Tying his colt to a drooping branch of the chestnut, he darted down the bank, flung his arms around the child, and kissed her again and again.

"Oh, you little darling! You are here, after all!"

Patty's experience or observation had never reached this degree of impetuosity, so she struggled to get free, and, failing in that, boxed the boy's ears with one hand, and pulled his hair with the other.

"Just you set me down, now."

"Well, I will; but what's the matter?"

"Nothing. Only I—I won't bear it. Sister Clara wouldn't, and I won't."

"Oh!" said the boy, laughing till the tears flashed into his eyes. "That's right, little lady; but, goodness gracious, how fine we are!"

"No more fine than ever," answered the little coquette, seating herself upon the bank, and glancing from her boots to the boy's face.

"Still you are looking like a little duck, and that's just what you are!" said the boy.

Patty smoothed her dress, and plumed herself as if she accepted the compliment, and were making herself ready for the water.

"And I don't doubt that you mean to be real good, and tell me a lot of news."

"Patty brightened up at once, and nodded her head.

"Has she gone, Patty?"

The boy's voice faltered, as he asked the question, and this made the child quite serious in her answer.

"Yes, boy. She's gone, sure enough."

"Do you know where, Patty?"

"Yes, I know. Miss Gertrude Harrington, care of Rufus Foster, Esq., Union Club, New York.

"Is that where she has gone, Patty?"

Patty pursed up her lips, and nodded her head.

"How did you find out? Tell me all about it."

"Aunt Eunice sent a letter, and I got the postmaster to read what was on it, you see."

"You precious little darling."

"Then, again, I know something else. Cousin Webster is a going down to York to see her just as often as he can, besides he means to write ever so many letters.

"He is? He does?"

Patty started. The passionate anxiety in the lad's voice frightened her.

"What is the matter?" she said.

"Nothing! nothing! But are you sure?"

"Yes, I am, for he wrote that to sister Clara, his own self, and I heard her read it out loud."

The lad did not speak for a long time; but sat motionless, with his wild eyes gathering fire every instant. Patty, astonished by his silence, began to get restless.

"I suppose you thought I wasn't here," she said, demurely, "and I sha'n't be long, if you don't talk more."

The boy did not reply, but Patty saw that the fire in his eyes was smothered with tears.

"What are you a crying for?" she said, creeping toward him. "I didn't mean to say nothing wrong."

"I know you didn't. There never was a kinder little girl," said the lad absolutely sobbing.

"Then you shouldn't feel so bad."

"Oh, Patty! little Patty! I can't help it!"

"But you'll make me cry too," sobbed Patty, wiping her eyes with the white apron.

"I don't want to do that. Kiss me, Patty. I do so want some one to be sorry for me—just a little."

Patty threw her arms around the boy's neck and kissed him.

"There, now. Don't feel bad any more. I never will box your ears again, so long as I live."

"I don't mind that, little girl."

"Then what are you crying about?"

"I'm very, very miserable, Patty. There never was a poor creature so unhappy as I am."

A look of abject misery came over the child's faces.

"But I can't help it."

"No one loves me but one or two in the wide, wide world," sobbed the boy.

"Oh, that's an awful fib! I love you ever so much, I do."

The boy got up from the grass and looked despairingly around, as if his very soul were weary and had no resting-place.

"I will go now," he said, with an impatient gesture.

"Go now!" faltered poor little Patty, grievously disappointed in the interview that had cost her so much trouble.

"Yes, I must."

"And I shall never see you again," sobbed the child.

"Yes, we are both young, and life is so dreary long. Besides, I think you and I love each other a little."

"Yes, a good deal," faltered Patty. "And now you are going away, and I shall have nobody but Par—not a soul."

The boy did not seem to hear her; but moved slowly up the bank. Patty watched him with wide open eyes.

"Boy! Boy!"

There was real grief in Patty's voice. The lad turned and came back.

"I forgot something. See what I brought for you!"

"Oh, my! Isn't it scrumptious?" cried Patty, reaching out her hands and seizing on the broad pink

ribbon that the boy took from his pocket, and held towards her, fluttering in the wind."

"Is it mine—all for my own self?"

"All for your own self; and I never shall forget how nice and good you have been to me. Some of these days I mean to pay you back."

"But I don't want any pay; I won't take it."

Patty gave the ribbon a toss, and it went floating off towards the river, where it would certainly have been lost, but for the drooping bough of the chestnut, that caught it on a clump of burs, and held it there like a pennant.

"But it isn't pay. I brought it because I love you dearly."

"Oh, then—"

"(And I mean to love you always!)"

"Dear me! I wish I hadn't done it!" cried Patty, looking wistfully at the fluttering ribbon.

"And you'll always love me a little?" said the boy, in a broken voice. "You would, if you only knew how much I want somebody to love me."

"I'll just do it always! But I say, boy."

"Well, Patty?"

"Couldn't you just get it down for me?"

The boy made a vigorous leap upward, seized an end of the ribbon, and brought it to the child.

"Now good-by, Patty!"

"Good-by!" But you'll be sure to come back again?"

"Some day."

"And I'll wear this right round my waist, with a big bow behind," said Patty, so absorbed by her ribbon that she almost forgot that the lad was making ready to mount his colt.

"Now it is good-by in earnest," he said.

"Good-by!" answered the child, still delightfully preoccupied. But the clatter of hoofs aroused her. She sprang up just in time to see the colt dart out from beneath the chestnut boughs, and shoot like an arrow down the road.

"He's gone, sure enough!" she said. "But who cares, he's sure to come back again—they all do. Now I'll go right home, with this ribbon flying, and they'll think I've caught a rainbow."

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## CHAPTER XL.

### THE RETURNED REBEL.

WHILE the little girl was running one way, with her prize, the seeming boy rode homeward, sometimes urging his colt into break-neck speed, again curbing him into a restless walk, as despondency, or sharp flashes of angry pain seized upon him. The afternoon shadows were lengthening along the road when he rode into that solitary farm-yard, and after remaining a few moments in the old building, came out a very miserable and weary looking girl, with a bundle on her arm, whose scarlet jacket seemed far too splendid for her downcast countenance.

Poor Sarah Ann! all her dashing animation was gone! she even climbed the fence in order to mount her colt, and rode up to the farm-house like a culprit returning home from prison.

There was a great deal of generous womanhood in the widow Ward, plain and commonplace as she seemed. When Sarah Ann came in, with heavy eyes and weary footsteps that no fatigue alone could have produced, the good woman asked no questions, but went to the kitchen and made a strong cup of tea with which, and a plate of toast, and some preserves usually kept for company, she intended to comfort her daughter.

When the girl saw her mother thus kindly busy in her behalf, a flood of tender grief swept over her. She flung herself into a chair, threw her arms upon the table, and dropping her head upon them sobbed as if her heart would break.

When Mrs. Ward heard this great outburst of tears she came in from the kitchen and laid her hard hand gently on the dusty hair which fell over that troubled face.

Just then Tim came in, and stood a moment in the door, watching the scene.

"Hello! What's the row?" he said. "Anybody been a hurting your feelings, Sare Ann? If there has, just pint 'em out, that's all."

Mrs. Ward shook her head, and made a signal for her belligerent son to retreat. He would not understand it, but came close up to his sister.

"Look a here, Sare Ann—what's the matter? Have you and Hart Webster been fighting? Or what on arth are you so down in the mouth about? I want to know, and I mean to."

When Hart Webster's name was mentioned, Sarah Ann lifted her head, and dashed the tears from her eyes.

"I wish you'd just let Hart Webster alone. What has he got to do with my crying, I should like to know?"

Can't a girl be tired out without having other people dragged in? Oh, Tim! Tim! don't you begin to torment me! I can't stand it! I won't stand it! No, I won't, you dear old goose!"

Here the girl flung her arms around Tim's neck, and burst into another paroxysm of sobs.

Tim kissed her awkwardly on her cheek and neck, while he patted her head and shoulders with a kindly but rough hand.

"There, there! I didn't mean to hurt yer feelings, Sare Ann. Hope I may be shot if I did. Only I can't bear to see you growing so peaked and good-for-nothing. The fact is, visiting about don't seem to agree with your constitution, gal; so I think we'd better turn the colt out to grass, and go a fishing agin, as we used to."

"No, no! I shall never go a fishing any more, Tim! Never!" cried the poor girl, lifting her tear-stained face to his. "All that is over with."

"Why, what's come over you, Sare Ann? Not go a fishing?"

"I couldn't do it, Tim. It would break my heart."

Tim looked down into the piteous expression of that dark face, and was woefully puzzled.

"Now what is all this about?" he said, turning to his mother.

"She's nigh about tired to death," answered the kind woman. "Just give her a chance to drink her tea, and take a bite of toast, and she'll be all right in no time. The best thing you can do, Tim, is to go out and feed the colt."

"Well, I reckon you're about right there. I heard it a whinnering as I came in. Now, Sare Ann, chirk

up and eat your supper. If anybody has made you mad, or hurt your feelings, I'm on hand. Nobody shall impose on you, if I know it."

Tim put his cloth cap on one side of his head, knocked it flat, and left the room.

"Now Sare Ann, just take off your bonnet and lie down on the settee, while I fix you up a first-rate supper, tired a'most to death I know. The colt trots awful hard, and by his looks you must have run him fast. There now, let me put this chair cushion under your head, and shut your eyes while I set the table. By and by you'll chirk up and tell me about Uncle Rood's folks."

Sarah Ann shut her eyes and turned away her face, she could not speak just then, her throat was so convulsed with sobs which she was striving hard to suppress.

Mrs. Ward set her tea down to draw, and found a moment to comfort her child in.

"What is it all about, Sare dear? Have them Rood boys been a pestering you about Hart Webster again, and couldn't you give them as good as they sent? I'm sure you used to."

"I—I haven't been to Uncle Rood's, Mar."

"Not been to Uncle Rood's! Then where in the name of nature have you been?"

"Clear to the other side of the river. I've been there once before when you thought I had gone down to Uncle Rood's. There and back, I've rode nearly forty miles. And what good has it done? He's going to give us up! He's going to give us up!"

"Who is going to give us up, Sare Ann?"

"Hart Webster!"

"You don't say so!"

"He's as good as gone now, Mar. His old friends are nothing to him any more."

"There, there, Sare Ann, don't go on so! You'll go into hysterics if you do! Don't you believe nothing wrong about Hart Webster. We have known him ever since he was a boy; he's sure to come out right."

"Oh, mother, he never, never will, not for us; he's paying attentions to a girl across the river."

"Paying attention! What! Hart Webster?"

"Yes, Mar, our Hart," answered the girl breaking into a wild passion of tears. "That—that was what made him so offish about fishing. That is what kept him away from home so long. He's over there now, I saw him with my own eyes."

"Poor girl, poor dear Sare Ann, it is hard. There now just creep into mother's arms and tell her all about it. So you never went to Uncle Rood's at all?"

"No, mother, that was all make-believe," sobbed the girl with her hot, tear-stained face hidden on Mrs. Ward's bosom, as she clung to her with passionate yearning for sympathy.

"And you just followed after him?" questioned the good woman patting the thick mass of short hair that was just beginning to curl over the young creature's head.

"Yes, I did, for I had to know the truth, or just sink down and die," sobbed the girl, writhing with grief and shame in her mother's arms.

"But how? you did not let him see you?"

"No—no, not for the world. He hasn't the least idea of it. I—I—oh, mother, don't scold!"

"Of course I won't. Did your Mar ever scold wher there was real trouble?"

The girl clung closer to her mother, and kissed her neck with grateful fondness; but all at once she began to shake all over, and a burst of laughter broke through her sobs.

"I stole Tim's clothes, Mar, and put them on in the old barn. That is the reason I cut off my hair, which you got so mad about."

Why, Sarah Ann! How could you, cried the woman? with a glow of fun breaking over her cloudy countenance. "I wouldn't have thought it of you."

"I couldn't help it, not if I'd dropped dead from the colt, I really believe my heart was on fire. It is burning yet, all the tears in the world couldn't put it out."

"There, there, don't get so wild about it. So you followed him on the colt, dressed in Tim's go-to-meeting clothes."

"Yes, I did, but don't tell Tim. He musn't know a word about it. I couldn't stand that!"

"Never fear! Tim is genuine, but he don't understand a girl's nature, besides, if he thought that Webster had made you cry and take on so there's no knowing what he might do. The boy is true grit!"

Sarah Ann lifted her tear-stained face suddenly and listened, then drew herself from those kind motherly arms.

"Tim is coming! He musn't know—he musn't know," she said, hastily wiping her face and turning it to the wall.

Tim came in with a look of discontent on his honest face.

"You must have been riding the colt like sixty," he said, "seems as if he'd been swimming through

soap suds. No gal that I ever see yet is to be trusted with a hoss that has got anything in him. It's too bad, Sare Ann!"

"You hush up and let Sare Ann alone," said the mother, with a degree of force that astonished Tim. "She owns just as much of this place and the stock on it as you do, Tim Ward, so just make yourself scarce and let her drink her tea in peace. You'd a great deal better be rubbing down the colt than hanging about here. Come, Sare Ann, tea's ready."

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE LADY AND HER MAID.

MISS JANE FOSTER felt that her attempt to put down "that girl from the country," as she called Gertrude Harrington, was worse than a failure. The grave quiet of her step-mother had more than the effect of an open rebuke, and a smile lurked on her brother's mouth, all that evening, which was a continued aggravation. Instead of overpowering their inexperienced guest with the magnificence of her airs, she had brought nothing but quiet reprobation and cynical sneers upon herself. She felt herself defeated, and had no one to sympathize in her defeat. This brought all the strength of her spite upon the inoffensive girl that had brought it forth.

It seemed as if Rufus Foster stayed at home that evening to enjoy the humiliating figure she displayed,

trailing that volume of silk up and down the drawing-room carpet, and multiplying her magnificence in the tall looking-glasses which reflected a sullen and baffled face, which seemed to taunt her like an enemy.

"What has happened at the club, that you honor us with your company now, of all nights in the year?" she said at last.

"Oh, nothing! I fancy things are going on as usual; but I always stay where I find the best promise of amusement," answered Foster, as he turned in his easy-chair, and regarded his sister from head to foot with a most provoking smile. "Besides, I had an idea that the very beautiful young person up stairs might need better protection than Mrs. Foster can give her."

"Indeed! It is an outburst of innocent rural taste that keeps you at home then. I congratulate 'the beautiful young person.' Her powers of reformation must be wonderful."

"In that case you had better cultivate her, Jane, she may prove of the greatest benefit to you, for, so far as I can see, her manners are unpretending, and perfectly modest."

Here Miss Foster gave up the battle for a while, and flying to the piano, spread a cataract of silk over the stool, while her hands thundered at the keys with a vigor which she knew would drive the fastidious man half distracted.

Foster bore this new infliction heroically for a time; but at last took his hat, and went forth to the neighboring club-house, rather disappointed that his step-mother's guest had not appeared again.

The moment he was gone, Miss Foster gave both hands a final dash over the piano-keys, and half-trium-



phant that she had at least driven her exasperating brother from the house.

Meantime, Gertrude, weary with fatigue and excitement, was half-asleep upon the frilled pillows she was at first reluctant to rest her head against, but accepted at last with a delicious sense of comfort never dreamed of in her country home. The door was open into her pretty sitting-room, and the ruddy light of burning coals came through the glitter of a low steel grate, filling both rooms with a soft glimmer, delightfully dreamy and pleasant. All her resentment against the young lady, who had met her so rudely, was toned down by a feeling of exquisite sleepiness, which soon deepened into profound and sweet rest.

In the morning, Miss Foster arose earlier than usual, and rang for her maid, a bright French girl, who paid with compound interest in flattery for all the cast-off clothing and uncertain privileges bestowed upon her from time to time, when spasmodic fits of generosity seized upon her mistress.

Lois knocked lightly at Miss Foster's dressing-room door, in answer to the bell, and found that lady sitting in a low easy-chair, with her unclad feet buried in the white fur of the hearth-rug, and her hair streaming loosely over her shoulders.

"Come and do my hair," said the young lady, folding her arms in the loose sleeves of her cashmere wrapper. "I have been obliged to ring twice."

"Didn't hear the bell. Come the very first minute I had an idea that I was wanted," answered Lois, taking a large brush of carved ivory from the bureau, and beginning to smooth the not over abundant hair that Miss Foster submitted to her. "Everything in miser-

able confusion this morning. Mr. Foster ringing for his man an hour earlier than common. Mrs. Foster up and dressed, when her maid knocked, and the young lady—"

"Well, what of the young lady, Lois?"

"Nothing. Only Mademoiselle hasn't rung or opened her door yet."

"Rung, indeed! Who is she to ring for?"

"Mrs. Foster's own maid was ordered to attend on the young person."

"And will she do it? Why, the girl never had any one to help dress her. Don't know what a lady's maid is."

"That is what Susan said to me, mademoiselle," answered Lois, she says "we were hired here to wait on our own ladies, not to take in extra. I do not know what extra means, but suppose it may be the new visitor that madame has brought home."

"Exactly, Lois. I hope Susan will understand her own interest, and refuse to wait on that person. If she asks you to help her in one single thing, remember, I forbid it. The idea of a girl like that not being able to wait on herself!"

"Indeed, mademoiselle, I know what belongs to myself better than that."

"And I hope Susan does too," answered the young lady.

"Well, as to that, the old lady is generous munificent, as you call it, beyond anything, and, as one may say, no trouble. Susan has nothing but contentment and ease with her; so when she asks a thing, it's hard to refuse, because she gives a direction as if she asked it as a favor."

"But this is putting double duty on Susan."

"Ah, yes, but Susan thinks it won't be for long."

"Does she? Well, you can inform her that Miss Harrington means to stay here during the next twelve months at least."

"What! Twelve months, mademoiselle? Susan will be miserable when she learns that."

"I should think so. If you are her friend, Lois—"

"Susan and I are what you call friends. If she suffers, I suffer very much. She will not be content one full year."

"Or a single day. If Susan takes her stand she must do it this very morning."

"I will speak to her," said Lois, laying down her brush, and kneeling on the rug, while she put on the young lady's slippers.

"That will do, Lois; I can wait. You had better go at once."

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## CHAPTER XLII.

### TAKEN AT HER WORD.

LOIS left the room, and, in the upper hall, met Susan Webb, a stiff, hard-faced maiden, of long experience, and staid, if not sullen temper. There was a cloud on the woman's face, as if she did not quite like the task so gently put upon her.

"Has mademoiselle rung? Do you attend her,

Susan?" said Lois, nodding her head towards Gertrude's room.

"Yes, just while the young lady is here, you know."

"Just while she's here? Aye, yes, I comprehend, but that'll be till the fall comes around again."

"What is it you say, Lois?"

"Why, the strange mademoiselle is the own niece of madame. It is a year that she stays, and will expect you to serve. One year and no reward!"

Susan Webb paused, and ruminated, with her eyes on the floor. She was a cautious individual, and her place was an easy one; but another mistress, and that a young girl, threatened to change the aspect of things so materially, that all the alacrity of purpose with which she had come up stairs was considerably disturbed.

"Are you sure that she means to stay so long, Lois?"

"I am satisfied entirely. It was my own lady who informed me."

"But after all, she looks like a sweet young creature, and may make it worth my while."

"Make it worth your while, Susan. This person hasn't a *sous* of her own."

"Sure and is that true," said Susan. Then all things that the mistress has to give will just pass by after this, and go to her. The worst enemy we servants ever have is a poor relation,—that's the living truth, I shouldn't mind the work so much, but—"

"You never could give up your rights to that extent," broke in Lois.

"And I never will," answered Susan with decision. "No country relation shall rob me."

With these words, Susan Webb left Lois in the hall and marched down stairs, resolved to fight this matter out with her kind and sweet-tempered mistress.

Mrs. Foster was in the breakfast-room, daintily rearranging some of the silver and china which had been too carelessly put on the table. She looked up with some surprise when Susan came into the room.

"Is anything the matter—is my niece ill?" she asked, anxiously.

"Not having seen her, it is hard to tell," answered that respectable female, who had more rebellion in her heart than she found spirit to express. "I have thought better of it, Mrs. Foster."

"Thought better of what, Susan?"

"About waiting on the young lady. It wasn't in my bargain at all."

"If I remember, there was no especial bargain between us," said the lady, very quietly. "I hired your services for a certain sum of money, and desire that they shall be given to my niece."

"Which I decline to do," answered Susan, looking up to the ceiling, as if conversing with some invisible person up there.

"Very well, Susan."

"Being reasonable, I thought you would come down to the point of not asking me," answered Susan, preparing to depart with grave triumph in her heart.

"You misunderstand, Susan. I accept your refusal to do what I desire, and that terminates our engagement."

Susan stared at her mistress in blank amazement.

"You mean—that is. I—I am ready to do anything in reason."

"I mean," said the lady, ignoring the repentant suggestion, "that your month's wages will be ready directly after breakfast."

Mrs. Foster did not raise her voice, or exhibit the least excitement, but a storm of words could not have been more decisive. Susan Webb left the room crest-fallen and subdued. An hour or two after, she met Lois in the hall.

"Well, Susan, I hope you have had the great courage to speak your mind," she said, with an air of pert security.

"Yes," answered the spinster bitterly, "I have spoken my mind."

"Eh! well?"

"And have got my month's wages, that's all."

"A month's wages, and the madame so mild and sweet. I never can comprehend it, never. Mademoiselle protests so much more, but she makes sure to surrender."

"But Mrs. Foster don't fight, and she won't give in. There is the difference. I took your advice, Lois, and have lost the best place I ever had in my life."

Lois tossed her head like a haltered colt.

"As for that, there is good fish in the sea as ever come out of it, which is your saying. It is one little trouble, that is all."

Susan did not take her fate with such genial philosophy. In fact, third parties usually do endure their friends' misfortunes with more equanimity than the direct sufferers know how to assume. There was bitterness and regret in her bosom all the time she was packing up; and when Lois would have shaken hands with her in parting, the crusty thing—as the servants

generally called her—wrapped her arms defiantly in her shawl, and stalked out of the house, resolved in her innermost heart never to offer pitched battle to a gentle and dove-like woman again as long as she lived.

Lois watched her victim from the window with some natural compunction, and no little bitterness against her young mistress, who had in fact suggested the advice she had given, when she entered the dressing-room again with a quivering lip and sullen brow.

"I suppose you will be pleased, mademoiselle, for Madame Foster has sent that poor Susan on the great world again," she said, "and I, miserable that I am, have done it all."

"Never mind, Lo, there is a blue silk you may have, if that will console you," said the young lady, tossing the half-worn garment towards her maid.

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## CHAPTER XLIII.

### MISS FOSTER'S DEFEAT.

"MUSIC in the Park, for the last time this year."

Foster had found this announcement in the paper, and read it aloud at the breakfast-table, some ten days after Gertrude's arrival in New York. "Madam, what do you say to a drive? I do not think Miss Harrington has seen the Park in all its glory yet. There has been a touch of black frost, and the foliage is splendid."

Gertrude looked eagerly towards her aunt. She had seen nothing of New York, except such occasional glimpses of prominent public buildings as could be obtained in her shopping excursions, and the thirst of great curiosity was upon her.

"I had proposed to go out with Mrs. Foster this afternoon," said Miss Foster, always on the alert.

"Ah!" ejaculated the gentleman, as if that settled the question in his mind.

"But there is room enough, if you will accept a seat," observed Mrs. Foster, addressing her step-son, who answered with indifference.

"Thank you, I will go on horseback, if Jane chooses to honor you."

"On horseback!" exclaimed Gertrude, suddenly animated with the thought of a ride on that beautiful autumn day. "Do people ever venture to ride on horseback in a great city like this?"

"Do you ride, Miss Harrington?" inquired Foster, with sudden interest.

"Do I ride? Of course I do. Only, perhaps, I might not understand all that is expected of one here."

"If you would like it, I have a horse that will be proud to bear you, for city ladies certainly do ride in the Park."

"If you mean Dusty-foot, she has gone lame," said Miss Foster, sharply.

"Your horse was quite out of mind, Jane, I have a fancy that Miss Harrington can manage a better steed than that. I purchased a beautiful chestnut yesterday. Will you try it this afternoon, and let me have the honor of escorting you?"

The bland smile with which this invitation was given

was so winning, and her surprise so great, that Gertrude flushed scarlet. It was the first real attention that Foster had bestowed on her, except in rebuke and defiance of his sister. She cast a swift, anxious look on her aunt, who seemed just a little excited herself, but gave no sign of disapproval.

"I—I should be too happy, only I have no habit, nothing that would do," she said at last, almost with tears in her eyes.

"Oh, that must not cheat us of our ride. Of course, after the horse, one's next thought is about the habit. I have been intriguing with your dressmaker, and dare say the things have been sent home. In fact I guessed at your proficiency as a rider and have been plotting in its favor for days."

A bright flash broke through the mist in Gertrude's eyes, and, in spite of herself, she cast a glance of triumph on the sister, who turned white with suppressed rage.

"I suppose Miss Harrington will hardly care to go out with any gentleman alone, for the first time," said the young lady. As you seem to desire it, mamma, I will have Dusty-foot out, and go with them."

Before Mrs. Foster could speak, her step-son had an answer ready. "We should be delighted, Jane, but you have forgotten that Dusty-foot is disabled, poor thing."

A vivid and mischievous brightness flashed over Gertrude's face, and Mrs. Foster felt a smile trembling on her own serene lips; but a glance at Jane's baffled face, filled her with compunction, and she said, very kindly:

"You and I can go in the carriage, Jane; they will

join us from time to time, and thus all the proprieties will be kept up."

Miss Foster, defeated and baffled by her own selfish malice, had nothing to say, but left the room, pale with anger.

Gertrude also ran up stairs, wild with joyous anticipation. She met Jane in the hall, and, being too happy for resentment, stopped impulsively, holding out her hand.

"Oh, Miss Foster, do be friends with me for once. If you knew how I pine for exercise, how dearly I love riding, you would be glad for me."

The suddenness and ardor of this girlish appeal had its effect, for the moment at least. Before the angry girl knew it, that frankly-offered hand was clasped in hers.

"I wish it were possible for me to feel such happiness, if it were only for a single minute," she said, honestly. "All about a paltry horseback-ride. I cannot understand it."

"Oh, but you have had so much and I so little. It will take me years to look upon these pleasures as you do!" said Gertrude, who was in fact thrilled with happy expectations.

"If you were in love with Rufus, now, I could sympathize with you; but just a ride—"

In love with Rufus! The very thought flashed through Gertrude like a flame, leaving its crimson track over hands, neck, and face; but spite of her confusion she broke into a laugh.

"Now I comprehend why you dislike me so. In love with your brother Rufus! Rest content; I never shall be that, never, never. The thing is simply impossible."

"Why so? You will not be the first by many a silly moth. Have you not learned by this time that Rufe is a great catch?"

"A great catch, is he? Well, please inform me, what a great catch is."

"There, there, don't play the innocent with me; try it on him. These city girls do it bunglingly; but you bring fresh country air with you, and that is a novelty that will reach him, if anything can, which I doubt very much!"

"Reach him! Who wants to reach him? Not I, truly. You would never think it possible, if you had the least idea of—of—"

Here Gertrude broke off, blushing violently. She was thinking of Hart Webster, and on the verge of betraying herself.

Miss Foster laughed as she answered.

"Dear me, what a spirit I have aroused! Just hinting at the possibility of another victim at the slow chariot-wheels of my brother, isn't a terrible crime, is it? Why, you will have whole crowds of company. Haven't I said he has been the great catch in society ever so many years."

"But you have not told me what a great catch is," answered Gertrude, half provoked, half amused.

"Two or three millions, with any sort of a man at the back of it," answered Miss Foster, dryly.

"Then your brother is worth his millions, and, therefore, a great catch. I begin to understand."

"It will take a good while to understand him, I can tell you. One might as well attempt to fathom the Dead Sea."

Gertrude laughed.

"I can at any rate understand that you do not love each other to distraction!"

"Only to detraction, you would like to say," answered Miss Foster, laughing with genuine admiration of her own wit; for she was gradually drawing into a more amiable state of mind, having found a single-handed fight harassing, and rather lonely work. "No, there is no intense affection between us. What is that, Lois?"

"Only a package which I was to carry to the room of Mademoiselle," answered the girl, who was gliding cautiously by her mistress, with a large paper box in her arms.

Miss Foster frowned, and retreated into her own room.

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

### OUT FOR A RIDE.

GERTRUDE ran forward and entered her apartments, just in time to see a long skirt of the finest and deepest blue cloth thrown across the sofa, and a habit, brightened sumptuously with small buttons, held up for her inspection.

"For me, and so beautiful! How can I ever repay such kindness?" she exclaimed, radiant with satisfaction.

"Here is something," said Lois, taking a dainty whip from the box, mounted with gold, and rounded at the handle with a purple amethyst.

"Oh, the beauty!" cried Gertrude, dropping the habit, and seizing upon the whip.

"And gauntlet-gloves," continued Lois. "Such a little pair; besides, there is another package."

Here the girl darted from the room, and left Gertrude to examine her new outfit with such satisfaction as only a young creature like her can feel, when she finds herself supplied with the elegancies of a grand toilet for the first time in her life.

"They look like gold; but I suppose that isn't possible," she thought, examining the buttons with interest. "But I never saw the pattern before."

Here Lois came in with a round box in her arms. Opening the box, she held a pretty, low-crowned hat up for observation.

"Veil all complete, Mademoiselle; boots, too, the prettiest things you ever saw, with a spur on one heel."

"Why, Lois, do ladies wear such hats, boots, and things, in New York?" said Gertrude, a little terrified by the masculine features of her riding-dress.

"Wear them! Ah! this comes of living in the country. These things are very modest as Mademoiselle will be made to understand. Now, if she pleases, I will return to the young mistress, who is offended very much, but no matter. I go."

Inspired with something like defiance, she moved reluctantly towards her lady's room, treacherously disposed to lay the blame of her disobedience on some one else, but Miss Foster nipped that idea in the bud at once.

"Lois, you have been taking money from my brother," she said, with sharp austerity. "Nothing but that

would have given you the courage to disobey my orders."

"Oh, Mademoiselle, it was the price he offered! Twenty francs doesn't often come in the way of a poor girl; so you'll consider that as some excuse for carrying the things up, and—and—"

"Helping to put them on," I understand.

"Yes, if Mademoiselle will excuse that much."

Miss Foster had exhausted a great deal of ill-humor during the last few days, and really wanted to rest on her arms. An idea struck her, full of mischief, and promising great amusement.

"Well, Lois, I will excuse it on one consideration."

"What is it, Mademoiselle?"

"When you fasten her braids, do them loosely. You understand?"

Lois nodded her head, and uttered a low laugh.

"I don't know of anything more disenchanting, than a thing of that sort," muttered the young lady; "and I really am doing this girl a service. She don't know that such attentions from Rufus mean just the amusement of a week. To cut them short is to save her little country head from being turned completely. I should dearly like to see all that hair tumble down, and drop off in the Park, with some of Rufe's club fellows looking on. Lois will do it, for, next to money, the girl loves mischief."

A few hours after this delicate compact between the mistress and maid, Lois was busy as a bee about Gertrude's equestrian toilet. She smoothed the long skirt into soft, voluminous folds, buttoned the habit over that subtile and rounded form, and seemed proud of the



girl's beauty, as if it were her own. All the time she kept up a lively stream of talk.

"Buttons of pure gold! oh, this is magnifique! Every one has a monogram, G. H., twisted in like as snakes in a nest. Mr. Foster never would have put them on anything but the finest of gold, and so many of them too. *Voilà!*"

Gertrude examined the buttons a second time, and, after some trouble, disentangled her own initials out of the artistic complication which ornamented them.

"Why, this must have been done for me—entirely for me!" she exclaimed, thrilled with astonishment and delight by the delicate compliment.

"Certainly," answered Lois, with enthusiasm, monograms are a delicate attention only possible to persons very rich. *Voilà!* the habit is buttoned. *Mon Dieu!* what a figure! It is no wonder Monsieur Foster desires to cover it with monograms of gold. Now permit me one little arrangement of the hair."

Gertrude sat down patiently, and allowed the maid to arrange her hair; for she was self-distrustful, and gratefully anxious to honor the toilet so generously bestowed upon her.

When Lois had done her task, and surmounted Gertrude's rich hair with the piquant little hat, the girl cast a shy glance at her figure in the glass, and blushed with pleasure as the graceful reflection smiled back upon her. The long, sweeping skirt gave a style and queenliness of person that she had never dreamed of possessing. She was almost ashamed of her own exultant vanity, when she saw how admiringly the maid was regarding her.

Just then Mrs. Foster came into the room, and Gertrude turned to her.

"Oh, aunt! isn't the whole dress perfect?" she exclaimed, sweeping across the room and kissing the good lady, with enthusiasm. "Did you order it, or am I altogether indebted to Mr. Foster?"

"I did not order it," said the lady, with gentle gravity. "We must not permit Rufus to pay for it—that would hardly do. Still his taste gives us plenty of room for gratitude. It is a lovely dress."

"Oh, how good you are!" cried the girl. "How shall I ever learn to live without you again?"

The lady made no answer in words, but an affectionate desire that had been lying deep in her heart from the time she first saw her niece, made itself visible in her eyes, and said more plainly than words could have done.

"Oh, how I wish it were possible to keep you always with me!"

"Miss, the horses are at the door."

A footman said this, and vanished, while Gertrude was giving a farewell kiss to her aunt. Before he reaching the bottom of the stairs, the joyous young creature was following him. As she stood a moment on the upper step, more than one person turned to gaze admiringly upon the bright picture she made.

With a slight bound, that scarcely needed the touch of Foster's hand, Gertrude sprang into the saddle and was instantly mistress of the beautiful chestnut animal, whose coat shone like satin in the afternoon sunshine, and whose limbs possessed all the grace and spirit of a reindeer.

"Ah, the beautiful creature!" cried Gertrude, pat-

ting that silken neck with her hand. "It will seem like riding the wind."

Mrs. Foster stood by the window as the elegant gentleman and the spirited girl rode off, moving slowly, much against the will of their thorough-bred horses. As they passed out of sight, the lady heaved a deep sigh.

"If it could have been, my lonely life might have some brightness yet," she murmured. "But she has taken fate in her own hands. I think he fancies her. Never since I came into the family has he ever seemed to care so much for any one. But ought I to wish it for her?" Dare I even permit it. Heaven help us! how fatally one plague spot spreads.

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## CHAPTER XLV.

### AN UNEXPECTED CALL.

"A GENTLEMAN in the reception-room, Miss. He inquired for Miss Harrington, and was anxious to know where she was gone, and when she would be home again, so I asked him in."

"A gentleman for Miss Harrington," said Miss Foster, laying down her French novel with a yawn. "From the country, I suppose? Farmer-looking, Stephen?"

"No, Miss, quite the gentleman."

"Quite the gentleman, and inquiring for Miss Harrington. You must be mistaken, Stephen. Now, tell me what is your idea of a gentleman?"

"He is tall, Miss—very tall; has a great head, with plenty of bright hair on it, curling a trifle at the ends, with eyes that smile their way right through one. Then he moves like a race-horse, and speaks carelessly, like a king that knows he's got to be obeyed. That's my idea of this gentleman, any way."

Miss Foster flung down her book and went up to the broad mirror that reflected half the room she was in.

"What a description," she said, laughing, as she began to refresh her front hair with an ivory brush. "You quite arouse my curiosity. Say that I will be down in a few minutes. Where is Mrs. Foster?"

"Gone out. The gentleman inquired for her, when I told him that Miss Harrington was not at home," answered Stephen.

"Very well, I will come in a moment."

When the door was closed, the young lady caressed the frizzed hair on each side of her forehead with both hands for a moment, then drew a mysterious little box from a drawer in her dressing-table, and seemed to be in closely confidential communication with the image that looked on her from the mirror. Both herself and the reflection grew rosier and rosier, and when the young lady turned away, there was a permanent flush on her cheeks.

After shaking out her flounces, and smoothing the lace on her over-dress, she went down stairs, curious to see the strange person of whom the footman had given this graphic description. She found Hart Webster waiting quietly in the reception-room. He arose to receive her with the ease and grace of a finished courtier.

"You desired to see Miss Harrington," said the young lady, motioning that he should take a seat on

the sofa, which she at once more than half occupied with her draperies. "She has gone out with my brother. They have hardly reached the Park yet, I should fancy, from the slow pace at which they rode."

"Then Miss Harrington has gone out to ride?"

"Yes, in the Park. My brother has just purchased a horse, half Arabian, I believe, and they are trying it for the first time. It is a beautiful animal. Mine is nothing to it, though Dusty-foot was of his own selection; but men are not so particular, you can imagine, when it is only a sister that is to be pleased."

"I was not aware that Mrs. Foster had a son."

"Oh, I am not speaking of Mrs. Foster. She is only our step-mother. But you cannot be a close friend of Miss Harrington's family if she has not informed you about Rufus. Young ladies are not apt to overlook him, I assure you. As my father's representative, he counts for something."

"I have never heard of him," said Hart Webster; and the bitterness of a swift pang of jealousy broke into his voice.

Miss Foster laughed gently.

"I wonder what Rufus would say to that. An intimate friend of Miss Harrington and his existence unknown. I am tempted to tell him of it. Why, she must be a paragon of modesty and discretion. I thought all girls were proud of their conquests."

A momentary pallor came to Webster's face. He arose and examined a picture closely without seeing it. Miss Foster went on, pleasant as a June morning.

"You can imagine how popular Miss Harrington must be with us. Rufus is the head of the house, as I may say. My father gave him the lion's share of every-

thing, and if he chooses to monopolize our young friend no one can help it."

Webster turned from his blind survey of the picture. His eyes were on fire, and the silken beard which shaded his mouth trembled.

"The Park is not far from here, I should judge," he said. "I will walk that way."

An idea flashed through the young lady's brain, and she too arose.

"Let me suggest a better plan. You would never find our young couple alone, for the Park is large, and the paths intricate to a stranger. I will be your guide; of course you can manage a horse?"

Webster smiled, but there was sarcasm rather than sweetness in the expression of his mouth.

"Of course, we men from the country have a pretty fair knowledge of horses," he said.

"I thought so," answered Miss Foster, ringing for a servant. "Now, as these selfish lov—I beg pardon—creatures, have left us to become acquainted at home, suppose we send for horses and follow them?"

Before Webster could answer, a servant obeyed the bell.

"Stephen," said the young lady promptly, "have my brother's black saddle-horse and Dusty-foot brought out. Tell the men to be as quick as possible."

The man bowed and disappeared.

"We shall give them a surprise, I fancy," she said, rendered bright and almost handsome by the spirit of mischief within her. "They will not thank us perhaps for breaking up a well planned *tête-à-tête*; but you will see our friend in all the glory of her beauty, and Rufus for a companion. She is sure to make a sensa-

tion in the Park. Her face is new, and that counts for everything."

Webster made some answer, but to his dying day he never knew what it was. It seemed to please his companion, however.

"Now, with your permission, I will run up and get ready," she said airily. "They have cheated me out of my ride. It is only returning good for evil when I take Gertrude's friends where she can be seen to the best advantage."

Webster saw the young lady depart, feeling as if some harassing dream held him enslaved, but the moment he was alone, the storm within him broke forth. He strode up and down the room like a roused lion, his superb eyes were flooded with dusky light, his lips moved passionately, and he thrust one clenched hand into his bosom, as if to stay the throbbing of some wound.

While he was walking up and down in this passionate manner, two horses were brought to the door, and Miss Foster came down stairs in her habit. He joined her in the hall, ran ahead of her down the steps, waited fiercely till she reached the pavement, then lifted her with startling violence to her saddle, sprang on to the black horse, and the two rode away.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### AN UNPLEASANT INTRODUCTION.

A KEEN frost had done its fairy work in the Park, scattering rich gold and crimson and delicate mauve tints among the deep green of such trees as nothing but the sweet breath of spring could change. The rocks were all ablaze with creeping vines; and at sunset, each little ravine seemed to have a fire kindling in its depths. A soft, smoky mist floated in the air, and over the pretty lake, giving a touch of luxuriant sleepiness to the whole scene.

Foster was a man of exceptional culture, appreciative in art, and in all things sensuous to fastidiousness; but this was a scene with which his own refined taste could take no exception. He was proud of its purely American gorgeousness, and watched the fair face of his companion with keen interest, wondering if a young creature so simply bred would appreciate its beauty.

Appreciate it! Why the æsthetic taste, born with the girl, kindled into enthusiasm at the first glance. She checked her horse, and looked around with parted lips, and such intense admiration in her eyes, that the man of the world experienced a kindred feeling, while regarding her evident delight.

"Oh, how beautiful it is! Are we to ride here? Can we go where we please?"

"Undoubtedly. Only just now, let this direction please you," answered Foster.

"This, or any other," said Gertrude, allowing her horse to move forward a pace or two, then checking him again. "It is like heaven, this velvet turf, those glorious masses of color. I thought our woods were beautiful in the fall; and so they are, but nothing like this. Here everything starts out in pictures."

Gertrude was looking at the scenery, but Foster found enough beauty in her face to fascinate him.

"I am pleased that you like it. Henceforward I shall think this spot more beautiful than ever," he said, impressively.

Gertrude did not heed this implied compliment. She was completely absorbed by new bits of scenery that broke up to her view every moment, and had little regard for anything else.

"Shall we ride on?" said Foster, rather interested by her indifference to his gallantry, which piqued him a little.

"Not yet; I want to ride slowly, just at first. It seems like a sin to dash through a picture like this."

Foster curbed his horse. Some people in carriages and on foot were passing, and lingered to look back on the lovely picture his companion made, sitting there in her bright enthusiasm, with the soft sunshine glinting over her.

"It would be a sin," he said, smiling, "only we are becoming objects of attention, and that is never agreeable."

Gertrude blushed scarlet, and at once gave the rein to her horse. She rode splendidly, with a free, easy seat, and a harmonious yielding of her graceful person

to the movements of the animal that bore her forward with the lightness of a bird.

All at once she drew him up again, exclaiming,

"Oh, the water! That beautiful, beautiful lake! So bright, so bordered with shadows. Can we ride that way?"

"I fancy no one will attempt to prevent us," said Foster.

"The boats, how graceful they are; and those great white birds sailing up and down—what are they?"

"Swans. Have you never seen them before?"

"Seen them—the splendid creatures! How could I? A flock of geese, sailing about in the mill-dam, is the nearest approach to them that I have ever met."

Foster laughed low and pleasantly; the fresh honesty of the girl charmed him.

"Shall we ride nearer?" he said. "Neither the lake or the swans will disenchant you at a closer distance. As for the queenly birds, they always remind me of a pure and beautiful woman."

"I do not wonder. How white and stately they are. It seems as if the water that ripples around them must wash snow from their bosoms."

"Ah, how soon this bright enthusiasm will wear off," thought the man, with a feeling of regret. "In a month or two she will be like the rest. All this fresh innocence will wear away, and then—"

That moment a swift fall of hoofs came around a curve of the road. Gertrude looked that way, uttered a little cry of surprise, and wheeled her horse around to meet the new-comers; Foster turned also, and, with a thrill of anger, saw his sister, evidently in high spirits,

escorted by a fine-looking young stranger, mounted on his own black horse.

"In the name of the fiend, what does this mean?" he muttered, giving his flaxen mustache a twist. "She seems to know the fellow!"

Of course, Gertrude knew Hart Webster, for she had ridden close to his side. His hand had already clasped hers, and his eyes told the old story so plainly that Foster's angry doubts were all cleared away before he had time to express them.

The lovers rode forward, blushing like children detected in some crime.

Miss Foster followed, frowning, for she too had received an unpleasant enlightenment. She gave Dusty-Foot a vicious cut with her whip, while Gertrude introduced Hart to Foster.

"Mr. Webster, a friend of—of ours," she faltered, "Mr. Foster."

The two men bowed stiffly, Foster with a dark smile stealing over his lips—Hart with frank haughtiness. From that moment, the two men began to detest each other.

"I have taken possession of your friend, Miss Harrington, and have given him possession of your horse, brother; but don't let us disturb your ride. I see you are both getting impatient of too much company," said Miss Foster, airily. "We shall cross each other again, no doubt."

Hart looked at Gertrude. Foster lifted his hat with elaborate politeness, which, in that moment of approval, included his sister. Gertrude hesitated a moment, then drew her horse back with a firm and spirited movement.

"No. Let us ride on together," she said.

"The idea!" sneered Miss Foster. "Nothing can be more absurd than riding on horseback in a crowd."

"We do not forsake our friends so easily in the country," answered Gertrude, with a bright glance at her lover.

That moment a burst of music broke over the lake, which started the chestnut horse. It became restless, and began to plunge a little. In the confusion, Jane Foster lifted her whip and cut him sharply across the flank, unseen by her companions.

In a flash of rage, the irritated creature rose on his hind legs, plunged fiercely, and shot forward like an arrow. Hart thundered after him, wild with apprehensions. Foster put spurs to his horse, and sped forward pale as death, neck and neck with the black steed. Gertrude knew that they were following close, by the increased speed of the chestnut, and, turning her head, called out—

"Keep back! keep back! I can manage him!"

She was going like the wind; but danger made her brave. Not one female rider in ten thousand could have kept her seat after the first shock; but she sat her saddle firmly, and guided the swift speed of the fiery beast to some extent, without checking it. The excitement gave her strength, and lifted her above fear.

Fortunately few carriages were on the road; they had been drawn towards the music. She had a clear sweep before her, and distanced the two men every instant. The road now wound in and out like a huge serpent coiling in the grass. A carriage came full upon her, sweeping round a curve. The chestnut

leaped on one side, reared upright, plunged, and shook itself viciously. Gertrude reeled in her seat for the first time.

"She is off! she is gone!" cried Foster, pale as death. "Great Heaven!"

No, no! She keeps her seat. She has him in hand; she turns him towards the hill; she rides right up the steepest part; he begins to flag at last; she uses the whip now; fierce and sharp the blows fall. The chestnut horse has found its mistress. She gives him no breath till he stands bathed in sweat and trembling in every limb on the top of Prospect Hill. Then she eases the curb, and permits him to breathe.

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

### THE STRIFE OF LOVE.

WHEN the two men came up, which was a minute after, Gertrude was sitting like a goddess on the steed she had conquered, radiant with a sense of conquest. Her white teeth, but a moment before clenched with energy, were now unlocked by a brilliant smile. Her hair, which treacherous Lois had done up loosely, drifted down to her waist in a luxuriant shower. She had made the horse a slave, and was patting his reeking neck with her hand. She turned him as her friends came up, and they saw that his chest was flecked with foam, and the white froth at his mouth had red streaks in it.

Hart came up first, white and anxious; but with a glow of triumph in his eyes.

"Gertrude! Gertrude! Oh, my darling! are you hurt?"

Foster, who was half a minute behind, heard this, and ground his teeth under the fair silkiness of his beard. In years his indolent nature had not been so aroused.

"Hurt?" answered the girl, still patting the horse she had conquered. "No, indeed. I only hope, Mr. Foster, that your horse will not suffer."

"I only wish the brute would drop dead," answered Foster, looking not at the panting horse, but at Hart Webster, who had sprung to the ground, and, with one arm around Gertrude's waist, was lifting her from the saddle. She reeled as her feet touched the ground, and the whip dropped from her hand.

"Great Heavens! we have killed her!" cried the young man.

The girl had fallen upon his bosom, insensible.

"She has fainted! Give her to me!" cried Foster, startled out of his usual self-possession, into something approaching ferocity.

"No, sir! This is her place!" said Hart, firmly.

"Insolent! How dare you? She is our guest. She came out by my invitation!"

Hart put the man aside with one hand, while he held Gertrude with the disengaged arm.

"She shall decide this when she is out of danger. Now she needs help," he said, with firm courtesy. "If there is water near, tell me which way to go, or yourself find some means of getting it."

Foster stood for a moment white, angry, and irreso-



lute; but a glance at Gertrude's deathly face startled him into action. He ran down the hill, came to a little drinking fountain at the bottom of it, and, seizing the iron cup, was brought to a sudden stand by the chain that held it. The man's temper and strength were aroused now. He gathered the chain in his hands, pressed his foot against the iron post, and wrenched it from the staple. In a moment he had filled the dipper, and was carrying it up the hill, with the broken chain linked over one arm.

Jane Foster rode by her brother when he had but half mastered the ascent. She cast a scornful glance at the iron dipper, and urged her horse forward, curious to know what had happened, but too indignant for speech. Every one had left her behind, and her temper was at fever heat.

"What on earth has come over Rufus? He looks like death. Something must have happened, or he never would have trailed along with that thing. This girl is beginning to make him fetch and carry like a dog. I wonder if the creature threw her. It looks like it. I'll wait and ask him. I only hope he has just escaped killing her."

The young lady did draw up her horse, and addressed her brother, but he looked wildly in her face and passed on.

"Dead! Surely she can't be dead!" muttered the young lady. "Rufus! Rufus, I say!"

Foster turned upon her then, and spoke passionately.

"Get off your horse, if you have a spark of womanly feeling. If she is living you may be of some help, bad as you are."

The man spoke so fiercely in earnest, that his sister

obeyed, and urged her horse to the top of the hill. Then she leaped from his back, and went toward Gertrude, who lay on the grass, with her deathly face still resting on Hart's bosom. The young man did not look up. His head was bent, and he seemed to be searching eagerly for some signs of life.

Just as Jane left her horse, her brother came in sight. Hart's face drooped lower, and Foster saw this stranger's lips pressed wildly to the pallid mouth of the girl.

Foster rushed forward and seized Hart by the shoulder.

"How dare you!" he said, shaking till the water he carried dashed over the other hand. "Living or dead, this young lady is under my protection."

Hart took no notice of this rude speech, but dashing his hand into the iron cup, sprinkled water on the face and lips he had kissed. Seeing Jane Foster near, he turned pleadingly to her.

"Oh, Miss Foster! take her, unbutton her habit. Force some water through her lips. She does not breathe. I cannot make her breathe."

Jane Foster was not devoid of womanly feeling, perverse and arrogant as she was. The helplessness of that poor girl appealed to her. She took Gertrude gently from the young man's arms, unbuttoned her habit, and laying her hat on the grass, bathed her face, and forced some drops of water into her mouth. But this was no common fainting fit. The brave girl had completely exhausted her strength. Wild excitement had kept her up until the danger was over, then she dropped like a flower cut at the stem.

But youth is strong, and Gertrude was no dainty young lady. After awhile she stirred faintly, and a

scarcely perceptible glow stole through the pallor of her face. Hart saw this change first, and fell upon his knees, by her side.

"Gertrude! Gertrude! Oh, say that you are better! This deathly silence is terrible! Speak, darling! speak to me!"

The girl did not open her eyes; but the long curling lashes quivered on her cheek; and across her lips came a faint smile.

"You hear me, Gertrude! You hear me! and will live! Oh! let me know that of a certainty. I cannot be sure till you have looked into my eyes, or answered me."

Gertrude opened her eyes, and made a brave effort to smile.

"I am not hurt," she said. "Why do you all look so frightened? The ride tired me out; that was all."

"Thank God it is no worse!" exclaimed Hart, with a burst of passionate gratitude. "Oh, my beloved! for a time I thought that you were dead in my arms."

"Miss Harrington, if you are sufficiently recovered, perhaps we had better prepare to return."

Low and constrained as Foster's voice was, anger, fierce and bitter, vibrated through it. Gertrude felt this, and made an effort to sit up.

"I am so sorry. Oh, Miss Foster, what a trouble I have been to you!"

"No," answered Jane, with a quick, malicious glance at her brother. "I think others have been more troubled than I could be, or than I imagined possible."

Gertrude put her wet hair back from her temples, and attempted to gather it up; but the mass was too heavy for her trembling hands, and she looked appealingly to

Jane Foster, who twisted it into a great coil, and fastened the hat above it rather roughly; for she was beginning to weary of a scene in which she was not the principal figure.

"Now if you are well enough to stand, we had better break up this *tableau*. The music is over, and crowds will be driving this way," she said. "A newspaper account of our little adventure might be unpleasant for us all."

Gertrude started up in fresh terror, and began to button her habit at the throat.

"Oh, I am quite well, and ready to go at once."

"No wonder you are afraid to mount that vicious beast again. A pretty purchase my brother has made!" said Miss Jane, observing her tremble.

"No, no, it is not fear! If Mr. Web— If one of the gentlemen will help me to the saddle, I can manage him. He is gentle as a lamb now. It was that sudden burst of music that set him wild."

Obeying the half-turned glance of her eye, Hart started forward to help her mount; but Foster, with a swift but quiet movement, came between him and the horse, and stooped gracefully that she might place her foot in his palm. Gertrude hesitated a single moment, then gave herself to his care, while Hart turned and placed Miss Foster in her saddle.

They rode slowly down the hill, and took the nearest path home. Gertrude was silent, and somewhat absorbed. Her nerves had been shaken, and a feeling of mental restraint was upon her. The two gentlemen were in evident antagonism, and the only member of the party who seemed to enjoy the ride was Miss Foster. She chatted, and laughed, and pointed out the

beauties of the Park with wonderful eloquence. Dusty-Foot was also in a playful humor, and curveted gracefully at each stimulating touch of her owner's hand. But the young lady's smiles and eloquence were, for once, thrown away.

Webster listened without hearing, and smiled vaguely whenever she indulged in a low, sweet laugh; but his thoughts were pre-occupied, and his eyes were full of sullen fire.

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## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### CALLED TO ACCOUNT.

THE riding-party dismounted at Mrs. Foster's door, ascended the steps in a group, and had entered the hall, when Hart felt a light touch on his arm. He, looking around, saw the smooth blonde face of Rufus Foster bending close to his.

"This way a moment," he whispered. "This way."

Hart turned haughtily, and followed Foster into a little smoking-room, opening from the lower end of the hall. Several low, wide easy-chairs were in the room; elaborately-mounted segar-cases, and richly-clouded pipes, were scattered about with artistic effect; and some curious specimens of antique fire-arms hung on gilt brackets over the mantel-piece.

Foster invited his reluctant guest to a chair, with a slight wave of the hand. Then he seated himself, and,

taking a curiously-wrought paper-knife of platina and gold from the table, examined it a moment thoughtfully, and spoke in a low, suave voice, indescribably hateful to the man who listened, and who felt the atmosphere around him offensive.

"This afternoon, on the hill, sir, you insulted a young lady, who is under the protection of my step-mother. Have you any apology to offer, or reason to give for conduct so unbecoming a gentleman?"

"When the proper person asks," answered Hart, conquering his fiery spirit, and speaking calmly, "I may give a reason, certainly not an apology for that which was no insult, nor even an impropriety."

"The head of a family has a right to protect the delicacy of its inmates," said Foster, with a little more energy than he had as yet permitted to himself. "I saw you press an audacious kiss on the white lips of Miss Harrington, when she lay helpless and at your mercy."

Hart answered the charge with a smile, that stung his assailant like a viper.

"Denial is of no use, sir. I saw it with my own eyes."

"I really had no intention of denying it, and even waive all questions of your right to interfere with any act of mine."

"I demand that you shall write an apology to the lady in my presence, and never again intrude upon her."

Hart leaned quietly back in his chair; a smile trembled around his mouth, and the angry discontent in his eyes was lighted up by a gleam of amusement.

"Perhaps we had better consult the young lady be-

fore we proceed to a ceremony that she might think a little exceptional. Miss Harrington may not deem the offence so atrocious."

"Sir, the young lady was insensible; but after that, your audacity was repeated in words."

"Indeed! As how?"

"You spoke to her as no man dare—called her—"

"My beloved, or something like that, wasn't it?"

Foster's face turned livid with rage. His lips had refused to repeat the hateful words, as applied to Miss Harrington; but this man from the country, smiled as they passed his lips. He started up, flung down the platina knife, and, taking some paper from a portfolio, laid it on the table, with a menacing gesture.

"Will you write?" he said in a low voice, that fairly hissed under the restraint put upon it. "Will you write?"

"I am not exactly in the humor," answered Hart. "When I address a letter to Miss Harrington, it will not be under compulsion."

Foster snatched up a pen, and dipped it into a heavy inkstand, that was of a set with the paper-knife.

"Sir, I will have this apology!" he said in a voice that trembled with suppressed rage.

"But I refuse to give it!"

"You refuse!"

"Yes. A man is not compelled to answer to every stranger he meets, for language used when his promised wife lies to all appearance dead in his arms."

Foster dropped the pen from his hold, and stood for a second white and still as death, gazing on the young man. Then he said, in a low, hoarse voice.

"I do not believe this!"

"It is not at all important that you should," answered Hart rising. "My visit here was to Miss Harrington. If she is well enough to come down, I will wait for her. If not I will withdraw, and pay my respects at an early hour to-morrow."

While Hart was speaking, Miss Foster entered the room. She had taken off her habit, and came down rustling in silk.

"Surely you are not going, Mr. Webster," she questioned, observing that the young man still held his hat. "Miss Harrington will not be able to leave her room again, I fear; but we cannot excuse you from dining with us on that account."

Hart bent his head, and keenly disappointed, moved towards the door.

"It is impossible! I—I have an engagement. Pray tell your friend that I will call again in the morning."

By this time Foster had regained something of his self-possession. He did not repeat his sister's invitation but moved across the room, and, bowing, held the door for Hart to pass. It was a mechanical action, which sprang out of superfine high-breeding, which had no heart in it; but when his enforced guest was gone, he returned to the smoking-room, and fell into a chair, stunned. (He believed all that Hart had told him—believed and recognized how passionately he loved Gertrude Harrington himself.)

For once, Jane Foster acted in unison with her brother. It would have gone hard with her had she known the fact; but, in carrying out her own selfish impulse, she unconsciously aided him. The moment the door closed after Hart, she flew up stairs, and met

Gertrude, who was leaving the room, after a hasty change of toilet.

"You need not take the trouble. The young gentleman has gone!" she said.

Gertrude turned away in bitter disappointment—so bitter that she could not endure that her enemy might witness it.

The next morning found Gertrude awake, heavy-eyed from want of sleep, but more hopeful as the soft morning light broke in upon her. All night long she had been thinking over the scene in the Park. "What had she done to offend Hart? Why had he left the house without seeing her again? Surely something must have gone wrong, which she would have an opportunity to explain. He will call early this morning—I know he will," she said to herself, at day-break. "He did not know how to send a message that wouldn't seem cold. But his heart will tell him how anxious I am. Oh, yes, he is sure to come."

The girl had got over all agitation from her ride, and thought of nothing but the joy of meeting her lover again. She went down to breakfast heavy-eyed, and somewhat anxious, to find Jane unusually elated, Foster watchfully silent, and her aunt full of sympathetic anxiety about the danger she had escaped.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

WAS HE A TRAITOR.

WHEN the rather uncomfortable meal was over, she ran up stairs, locked the door of her room, and arrayed herself in the most becoming morning-dress that her wardrobe afforded. Then, flushed and expectant, she unfastened the door, and sat down to wait.

The bell rang. Her heart gave a great leap. Starting up, she ran into the hall, and crept back again blushing, and so ashamed of her own eagerness, that she dared not meet Stephen, who was coming slowly up the stairs. Shrinking out of sight, the poor girl counted every footstep, with a quick heart-beat, till the blood fairly stopped circulation in her veins.

He turned away—he was going to Miss Foster's room.

A few minutes after Gertrude caught a glimpse of that young lady in a soft mauve dress, with a great flutter of ribbons about it, moving towards the staircase. Then she turned away with passionate tears in her eyes. Just then Lois went by, and the unhappy young creature ventured to inquire, in a low voice, what visitor had come.

"Oh!" answered the girl, carelessly, "it's a gentleman for Miss Foster, and nobody else. She's just gone down."

Gertrude closed her chamber-door, and, flinging herself on the couch, buried her angry shame in its cushions. Now and then she lifted her burning face to listen, but in that great house no sound could reach her.

Half an hour passed, and then Miss Foster came up stairs singing snatches of an opera tune as she passed through the hall. Instead of turning into her own room, she pushed open the door of Gertrude's chamber, and swept in, bringing a cloud of delicate perfume with her.

"My dear child, how dark you have made it!" she exclaimed, flinging back one of the blinds, through which a glow of light fell broadly on the poor girl, revealing the burning color of her cheeks, and the tears that wetted them, as dew trembles on the leaves of a carnation. "Why, what is the matter? Crying like a baby. That lovely dress too. Did you expect any one?"

Gertrude arose from her cushions, and turned her head away, while she wiped the tears from her face.

"I—I have been so nervous since the horse ran away with me. Somehow, I constantly find myself crying. Strange, isn't it?"

"Very!" answered the young lady, dryly. "That was a dangerous ride for you; while mine was every way pleasant. Your cavalier is sullen as November, while I have had a delightful call from mine."

"A call from—from—"

"Mr. Webster! I didn't think a man bred in the country could be so thoroughly interesting. Why, he is splendid!"

Gertrude was a proud girl, and all the haughty

pride in her nature sprang up vividly from her wretched heart. She sat upright, and looked her tormentor steadily in the face.

"Has Mr. Webster been here, this morning?" she said, with a degree of calmness that astonished herself.

"Yes, of course. He could not do less, after our ride of yesterday. I was sorry you did not happen to be down."

"He did not inquire for me, then?" questioned Gertrude, with forced composure, which delighted but did not deceive her companion.

"Oh, yes! He inquired about your health, in a very gentlemanly way. In fact, I have never seen a country person so perfectly well-bred."

Gertrude made no answer. The heart was faint in her bosom; slowly the color faded from her face. She would have given the world to be alone with the anguish which had swooped down upon her in one instant, like a bird of prey.

Miss Foster arose, and began to trifle with the ribbons on her dress. A pretty affectation of confusion accompanied the action.

"From what I heard Mr. Webster say, I should suppose he will be compelled to make his own fortune in the world?" she said, at last.

"Mr. Webster is a poor man. All the fortune he has is a fine education and great genius," said Gertrude.

"Such men were not born to be drudges," answered the young lady, giving the ribbon she had been rolling up a sudden flit. "Think of that superb creature spending his life in a country lawyer's office. The woman he marries should have money enough to save him from that miserable fate."

"I do not think Mr. Webster will ever care to marry in that way," answered Gertrude.

"Oh, this idea comes out of your country education. I for one should not like to be the person to shut a man like that out of the highest sphere he is capable of filling."

Miss Foster knew that every word she uttered went to that young creature's heart; but the thought only urged her on to more ingenious modes of torment. A few days before all her energies were put forth to prevent the dawning admiration which she detected in her brother. Now a more selfish desire possessed her. She was ready to forward his views in any direction, so long as they left that handsome stranger free. The caprice of a moment was fast urging her into serious interest in a man, whose existence had been unknown to her two days before. She would gladly have prolonged the interview; but Gertrude pushed a magazine towards her, and took one up herself. The girl had been stung into desperation, and it seemed impossible that she could endure the covert taunts with which this cruel girl was tormenting her, for another moment.

Miss Foster threw down the magazine, arose, and left the room, well satisfied with her morning's work.

The moment she was gone, Gertrude flung herself down upon her knees, and gave way to a passionate storm of resentment, grief, and harrowing distrust.

Had Hart, indeed, gone without seeing her? Had Miss Foster's bold style and overpowering assurance succeeded in sweeping him from her so suddenly. She could not believe it. Even in her insensibility, his voice, full of pathetic love, had reached her faculties. His face, so luminous with joy when she opened her

eyes at his tender entreaty, was before her now. No, no! A thousand times no! She would not believe him the love-traitor this neglect made him seem.

Up from her couch the girl sprang and rang the bell. Stephen came to the door in answer to it. Gertrude bent over the table, and turned her face away, seeming to be busy among some shades of silk in her work-basket, as she questioned him.

"There was a gentleman called a while ago?"

"Yes, ma'am. Mr. Webster. His name was on the card I brought up."

"Who was the card for, Stephen?"

"Miss Foster. She went down to see the gentleman."

"That is all, Stephen."

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## CHAPTER L.

### A FIRM RESOLUTION.

SARAH ANN WARD had been wandering restlessly in the woods, for the torment of an unquiet heart was upon the girl continually. To appease this, she would sometimes walk miles together, along a dusty road scarcely knowing where she went or caring where she stopped. That day, she had resolved to work hard and thus cheat her soul of its pain, for even the company of her mother was an oppression. As the Spartan boy might have pined to hide himself, and the vulture that tore at him, in some wild seclusion; she car-



ried her secret into solitude and strove to hide it as if love had been a theft.

Taking a new cedar pail on her arm she went to the marsh, resolved to gather all the fruit her mother could use, and so completely tire herself out that sleep would come at night, with oblivion and rest.

Down the road she went a mile or more, then turned aside into a broad marsh, tufted with black alder bushes, ferns, clumps of whortleberries, and bordered with a tangle of shrubbery and wild vines. The surface of the marsh trembled beneath her feet as she walked and sometimes gave way altogether, for heavy thought made her footsteps heavier than usual, and she had no heart for the deer-like leaps, and laughing escapes from danger that had made the air ring with merriment in former days.

The cranberries were fully ripe now, and lay all around her, plump and red as coral, embroidering the swamp moss with a crimson glow of fruit, and a tracery of delicate green vines, that took the sun like fairy work.

Sarah Ann went to work in earnest, and with something like cheerfulness. The soft autumnal sunshine fell hazily upon her. The undergrowth was rich with vivid colors, and the woods, beyond, one blaze of contrasting maples, ruddy oak and deep-toned evergreens. In and out she wandered through this glory of luxurious colors, sometimes stooping to gather berries from the level, sometimes kneeling on a dry knoll and sweeping them from the vines with her hand.

Slowly the girl's pail filled and her limbs grew weary.

"At any rate," she thought, shaking down the fruit

in her pail. "I shall have done something for mother to-day. Poor old soul, how good she is never to scold, or say a word! She'll be pleased when I go home to-night, luggin' all these along. I haven't done much for her lately, but she'll see that I mean to. It isn't because I am shirking or hard-hearted, I think she knows that. Now, I really am tired. This stooping wears me out faster than anything."

Thinking these thoughts, and gathering cranberries as she went, the girl found herself on the edge of the woods. The pail was even full now, and rather heavy. She looked around, measuring the sun with her eyes.

"It isn't low enough yet, besides I want to rest a little. It is awful hard work stooping so," she said, lifting her burden of fruit, wearily, and bearing it forward into the woods which sloped down a hill-side to the cranberry swamp, scattering broken glimpses of sunshine among the cool shadows whenever a breath of wind swept its leaves. The girl was not strong now. All the bright elasticity of spirit that had made her very presence a joy, seemed to have banished from that subtle frame. She dragged the pail forward a few rods up the shadowy slope, and half burying it in a bed of seeded ferns, dropped down close by, resting on her elbow while the broken sunshine shimmered over her red jacket and weary young face.

The girl had been lying thus perhaps ten minutes, when a noise in the brushwood startled her. It was but for an instant. Cattle sometimes browsed in the woods, she knew, and so fell back to her old position, breathing quickly, for even the sound of a broken stick could make her nervous now. Instantly she started up to her elbow again, and listened. Then a little cry

broke from her, for there, not three yards distant, stood Hart Webster, with a gun in his hand, looking at her almost with a frown on his face. When he met her great wandering eyes, which filled at once with a quick rush of delight that shook her from head to foot, a dull crimson rose slowly to his forehead, he seemed to hesitate a moment, then, lifting his cap, he moved on without speaking a word.

This was the first time Sarah Ann had met him since her wild ride across the Housatonic.

He was gone. The girl could not believe it. Hart, so cruel to her! how could she believe it? She sprang to her feet, with both arms extended, and rushed forward a pace or two. Then, smitten with a panic of shame, she dropped to the ground, and clutching the fern leaves with both hands, broke into a whirlwind of grief that seemed as if it would sweep her from the very earth.

"What have I done? Oh, what *have* I done?" she cried out in an agony of distress. "What does he hate me so for? I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!"

The poor child writhed upon the earth, now clenching her teeth; now sobbing piteously; again, holding her breath, in a mad hope that she might hear his returning footsteps. For, even then, she could not believe that he meant to be so cruel as his conduct seemed.

A full half-hour she waited, trembling with expectation at each sound; but Webster did not return. With a quick tread, and a thrill of perhaps something more than self-reproach stirring his heart, he had left the woods, and was now walking swiftly along the highway, like a man fleeing from some great temptation, or from his bitterest enemy.

When the girl saw that there was no hope, and felt the purple night-shadows creeping around her, she arose, with a fixed and rigid expression of the face, which would have frightened her had she seen her features in a glass.

"He shall never slight me so again—never in this world—never in the next—if I can help it!" she said. "He may love her; but he shall not scorn me so much as that. Never again—never again! Does he wish to make me hate him? so that marrying her will be easier. Am I so far beneath that proud girl, that he will not speak to me?"

"Shall I kill her, as he has killed me with his silent scorn? or shall I show him that the girl he takes out fishing and shooting, like a pointer dog, but is shy of anywhere else, has the will and the strength to match his idol before the whole world."

Sarah Ann was strong enough now. She swung the pail of fruit on her arm, crossed the marsh with a step so swift that it scarcely sank into the wet moss, and walked with her cheeks on fire and her head erect up the long sweep of road, scarcely heeding her burden or the distance through which she bore it.

During that walk, the strong character of the girl asserted itself. That which had hitherto been a vague dream, became a fixed resolution. She went into the house, set the pail of cranberries down on the kitchen-table, and turning to her mother, who was for a moment resting in the Boston rocking-chair, fell upon her knees and told her of the great wish that lay upon her mind.

## CHAPTER LI.

### THE PAINFUL CONFESSION.

SARAH ANN WARD was still upon her knees pleading piteously with her mother.

"Oh, mother, let me go! I cannot stay here. It seemed once as if my heart would break, now it is growing hard," she said.

"Sare Ann, my dear child, don't, don't ask me to let you go away from your own home. What would Tim and I do? Think of that and give it up."

"Mother, I shall go crazy if you keep me here, can't you see how wild I am growing?" cried the girl, lifting her great suffering eyes with an agony of pleading in them. "See how thin and white my hands are getting. Did you ever see them look like that before?"

"No, dear, I never did, but then you see Tim and I haven't let you work so hard or go out to tan them up as you used to."

"No, Mar, you and Tim have been just as good as gold to me, but I want something else."

"But won't nothing short of New York do? If you must live out, why not nearer home, where we can have a chance to see you once in a while?"

Then Sarah Ann broke out with passionate force.

"Mother, don't ask me, can't you see how it is? The old home isn't the same place to me now, no one comes, no one ever will come again. It's the hardest

(288)

sort of a life sitting here by the open window watching the road hour after hour, and no one coming."

"My poor girl, it is hard. Tim and I know it, but we never so much as hint about anything particular. Now couldn't you stay on a little spell longer, just for our sakes, Tim's and mine. It's awful tough to give you up."

"Oh, mother, believe me, I've tried and tried, but it's of no use. You and Tim will get along somehow without me, but I shall just wilt down into the grave if you don't let me go."

"But what will you do, child?" said the poor mother, gathering the young creature tenderly to her bosom.

"Work, and—and—mother."

"Well, Sare Ann, I'm a listening just as well as I can when the sobs rise so thick in my throat."

"Poor Mar, poor dear Mar! it is cruel, but I can't help it, you'd rather let me go than bury me now, wouldn't you?"

"Don't—don't—I can't bear it; you know I would."

"Well, Mother, I mean to get books and study them."

"You, Sare Ann?"

"Yes, I feel as if I could study this pain out of my heart, if I tried hard enough."

"Maybe, I don't know!" said the mother, bewildered by this new idea.

"You don't know how hard I've tried to get rid of it. House-work won't do it, neither will gardening or anything that I used to like. Somehow, I begin to hanker after books. Since he—since everybody has given up bringing any for me to read, I am getting hungry for them."

"Hungry for books, Sare Ann. Who ever heard of such a thing."

"Oh, try to understand me! Mother, do you know what it is that makes the difference between girls like me and ladies. It's reading and learning how to talk with educated people. He told me so once and wanted to teach me."

"Well, why not now. We have not done anything to make him angry, have we?"

"Now, now! Oh mother! you do not know what you are talking about, I would not read a word with Hart Webster—no, not if he would go down on his knees to me."

"Why, Sare Ann!"

"What am I to him?" the girl went on impetuously. "What was I ever to him but a creature to fish and shoot and have fun with. Oh, mother, it is too late for any good, but I *will* be something better than that."

"But why can't you read and study and such things here at home?"

"Because it would kill me; because I should sink under it. Oh, mother! dear mother! let me go out into the world and work this great longing want out of my soul. I don't expect to be happy, but no one shall look down on me forever. Who knows, mother, but I may come back fit to keep school, and earn money for you and Tim, like a lady. I have got it in me to do more than that."

"I shouldn't wonder if you had," said Mrs. Ward, in whom a latent ambition was kindling. "But going away, that is what troubles me."

"But I must. Can't you see that I am good for nothing here?"

"But I don't see why not. No girl ever had a safer home. You shall have books and slates and everything you want here, only don't talk about going away, Sare Ann. I can't stand that."

Sarah Ann stood up, cold and white as a ghost. Her features were set. Her mouth grew hard as if cut from marble. There must have been great pride in that young soul to have produced a change so remarkable, and wonderful ~~to~~ <sup>ever</sup> to conquer the pride even so far as it was conquered.

as it was conquered.

"Mother, I will tell you why I must go away."

Mrs. Ward was frightened by the whiteness of that young face.

"Why, Sare Ann, how—how strange you do look! What is the matter?"

The girl did not heed this question, but went on.

"Mother, I love Hart Webster, and he is going to marry another girl!"

Mrs. Ward's two hands dropped helplessly into her lap; for a moment she regarded that passionate young creature in blank dismay. Then she arose with something like dignity, and laid her hand on the girl's shoulder, which seemed to shrink with sensitive shame even from that kind touch. At last, the woman spoke; but it was with difficulty.

"Yes, Sare Ann, you may go. I won't say another word to hinder it."

## CHAPTER LII.

### LEAVING HOME.

“GOOD-BY, mother. Don't take on now, and try not to miss me.”

“But I can't help it, Sare Ann, I have been trying my best to keep in, but it ain't of no sort of use. What will Tim and I do without you?” sobbed Mrs. Ward, holding fast to the brave girl who was about to leave her, and speaking through great bursts of tears.

“Don't, don't now,” pleaded the girl, wiping her mother's face with her largest and best pocket-handkerchief, and kissing it tenderly. “You won't miss me so very much after all, for I wasn't of any great account about the place.”

“Oh, Sare Ann, Sare Ann, how can you say so!” exclaimed the poor mother, who this moment solemnly believed that her child had been the most useful and industrious creature on earth. “I—I sha'n't know how to get along—nor Tim either, shall we Tim?”

Tim wiped his eyes with the cuff of his coat before he attempted to answer. Then he came up to his mother and sister, embracing them vigorously in one comprehensive hug—“Miss her, I guess I shall; more'en anything about the place. There'll be no more fun in fishing now. The ‘old soger’ will never kick you over agin, Sare. He'll be hung up to rust for all I care.”

A tearful laugh broke through Sarah Ann's sobs as  
(292)

### LEAVING HOME.

293

Tim mentioned the old gun; at which he looked at her reproachfully, as if she had committed some impropriety at a funeral.

“I—I couldn't help it,” said the girl, “anyway, the old gun won't miss me. I only wish you and mother wouldn't care more than ‘old flinty,’ but you won't after awhile, will you now?”

“Not a bit,” answered Tim, swallowing a great sob and conquering himself valiantly. “We only seem to feel it now, but that's nothing. By to-morrow mother'll be chirp as a cricket, and I—never mind about me, I'm sure to come out right side up with care; only you be sure of this, Sare Ann, if any of them York chaps, girls or boys, attempt to impose on you, send me word and, by jingo, ‘old flinty’ will come down from over the mantel-tree-shelf mighty quick, I tell you—and a fellow about my size will be seen marching along the stun walks of that particular city with the ‘old soger’ across his shoulder. Remember, Sare Ann, here or in York, you've got a brother that'll stand up for you like a monement, no mistake about that.”

“Tim, Tim, I know you're good as gold, and brave as fifty lions; but nobody is going to hurt me. There won't be anyone that will care enough about me for that,” said the girl, a pathetic foreshadowing of loneliness coming over her. “I am going down yonder like a wild bird let loose in the woods, that no one will want to shoot.”

“But what for,” said Tim, asking the question for the twentieth time. “Why can't you give it all up and stay along with us? You might now, Sare Ann. Ma and I'll be better than ever if you will. Come now! Won't we, mother?”

Mrs. Ward fixed a yearning look on her daughter's face; but seeing the troubled expression there, heaved a deep sigh and turned away, while Sarah Ann laid her hand on Tim's arm, with a pleading earnestness in her great eyes that answered him before she spoke.

"I can't stay, Tim, and what is worse, I can't tell you what it is that makes me so discontented, because I do not understand it myself."

"But I do," answered Tim, shaking her hand from his arm, "and I mean to be even with that feller yet."

"Even with him. Oh, brother, that is what we've been a trying the whole time. I begin to see it all. How could we expect that he, or any other gentleman, or lady either, would even themselves to us when we took no pains to be like them."

"We are just as good as they are, anyhow," grumbled Tim, "and you are a mighty sight better than Hart Webster—"

"Oh, Tim, Tim!"

"Well, let any fellow on this side the Housertonic find a harnsomer gurl, or a smarter, if he can, which I say isn't to be done. Then, as to edecation, I never did take to that much, but you can read, and write, and cipher too, with the best of 'em, to say nothing of spelling, in which you beat all. What has any one to say agin your edecation, Sare Ann?"

"Nobody does say any thing about it except me, Tim; but reading and writing isn't everything that a girl wants, I feel that. Oh Tim, you don't know how I feel it."

"Sare Anne," said Tim, thoughtfully, "you are a notch or two above mother and me. We can't learn you anything, that is why you don't want to stay."

I don't seem to know how you're a goin' to do it, but you'll even yourself with the best of 'em yet. Mebby it'll be with books, mebby it won't; only you're sartin, to do it. I begin to kinder understand you now."

"Do you—oh, do you, Tim!"

"Yes, I reckon. So go ahead. Only don't let any human critter intice you into feeling above your own born mother. Me—well it's no consequence about me; but if ever you feel like lookin' down on her, I don't believe it of you, though—all the edecation in the world will never take that heart out of your bosom. Will it now?"

Sarah Ann looked thoughtfully on the ground for half a minute, then she lifted her face with a frank, wistful smile beaming over it.

"I shall come back some day. Then you will see. Just now I must have something to work out, to think of, to struggle through; without that I should die."

"But who will take care of you if you are sick," asked the mother anxiously.

"I do not mean to be sick. Why should I?"

"But you may."

"Then I will come home to you and Tim, mother."

"Well," said Tim drearily, "if you are determined on it, I'll go and hitch up the team. The train will be coming along soon."

Tim went out and Sarah Ann realized with a sharp pang that she was in fact going out into the wide world alone. The idea struck her with a sort of panic. She sat down on her trunk, which had been brought down to the entry-way, and for a moment hesitated. To a young girl brought up at home, this going forth into a

great unknown world is a terrible thing, from which the most courageous may well shrink.

"Oh mother!" she said, reaching out her arms, "it is hard, it is hard!"

The mother sat down on her daughter's trunk and took the young creature in her arms.

"Don't, don't ask me to stay. My heart is breaking as it is!" Sarah pleaded, in dread of the cowardly shrinking that possessed her.

"Is it because you cannot bear to meet him?" whispered the mother, laying the pale face gently on her bosom.

"Yes, mother."

"But you will not stay long—you will come back home."

"When he is gone, mother."

"Poor girl! poor darling! I won't say another word."

"Mother, you are so good!"

"You—you will write home just as often as you can."

"I will. I will."

"And think of your old Mar."

"How could I help it? God would forsake me if I forgot her."

"I don't know about that, anyway I should not want him to."

"Oh, mother—mother, how good you are!" cried the girl, clinging to the kind woman with passionate affection. It seems as if I was the wretchedest girl on earth to leave you."

"There, there. That is all settled," answered the mother, softly forcing a folded paper into the girl's bosom.

"What is that, mother?"

"Nothing particular, dear, just a trifle more money; I was afraid you would be short, and sold off a lot of chickens. We sha'n't want so many now."

"I—I don't want it. How can you be so good to me! It is just breaking my heart," sobbed the girl.

"Don't be afraid to use it, Tim and I will send more," said the mother, searching her brain for some new means of kindness. "I put a cake of maple-sugar in the trunk. That is a thing they don't have down in York I reckon," she said. "Then there is some sweet-flag root and hackmatack gum, mebbly you won't want to chew it, but it'll put you in mind of us, won't it now?"

"Hark!" exclaimed Sarah Ann, starting from her mother's arms, "that is the wagon, Tim is coming."

Then she began to tremble, and look wildly about as if every object in sight had suddenly become dear to her.

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## CHAPTER LIII.

### OFF AT LAST.

"COME, hurry up!" cried Tim, leaping over the front fence and seizing a handle of the new trunk as if he had a spite against it. "There now, mother, no more crying. It's all nonsense. I—I, whar's her satchel, and—and—I—I. Durn me if I ain't a crying myself. There, don't hold onto her so. It's no—no sort



of use. Come, Sare Ann, foller after the trunk, or you'll never git away."

Sarah Ann forced herself from the clinging arms of her mother, and went towards the fence sobbing and wretched.

A one-horse wagon, with two splint bottomed-chairs in it, stood ready to receive her.

Tim lifted the trunk, then climbing over the wheels, drove off with his sorrowful and half-repentant companion.

Mrs. Ward stood on the threshold stone, watching the wagon as it jolted up the road, with sad, wistful longing. As it advanced, she was drawn slowly down to the fence, and, leaning over it, watched the rickety vehicle until she lost sight of it in a blinding rush of tears; for it seemed to that poor woman as if the very heart in her bosom were drifting away from her.

When she could no longer see even the dust left behind, or hear the faintest rattle of wheels, the poor woman went into the house and looked around for some hard work that might tire out her pain.

The brother and sister were too mournful for anything but broken attempts at conversation, as they drove towards the depot. To them this simple journey seemed a grand undertaking which must bring forth some important event. More than once Tim cautioned Sarah Ann about her money, and impressed the importance of that article upon her with great solemnity. He spoke of pickpockets as certain to be met with at every other seat in the best cars, and besought her to keep guard over her pocketbook if any stranger should attempt to share her seat.

Sarah Ann listened to all these admonitions in a

sad, dreamy way. She was thinking of the kind woman who had watched her with such anxious longing, and felt like a coward giving pain to others that she might escape it herself.

They were a little early at the station. Tim lifted the trunk from his wagon, carried it to the platform, and when his sister sat down upon it, placed himself drearily by her side. Thus with both locked hands dropping between his knees, he waited for the great iron monster that was to drag her away from him.

"Sare Ann," said he at length, in a slow, hesitating voice which startled her.

"Did you speak, Tim?" she questioned gently.

"Yes, Sare Ann, I only wanted to say if—if I have ever been over rough and hateful to you, especially about the fishing, I just want to say I'm sorry as can be, and make it up now."

"Oh, Tim, how can you? I've been cross as fire to you a hundred times where you have been hateful to me once," answered the girl, with a fresh burst of feeling; "but we neither of us meant it."

"Well, mebby I did, sometimes."

"So did I then! You never were half as bad as I was."

"Worse, five hundred times worse! I stand on that. You seem to forget about the 'old soger.'"

"No, I never can forget all that happened that day, Tim; but it was my fault. Nobody was to blame but me."

"I don't know about that," said Tim, "seems to me I was almost allus to blame, but anyhow we'll agree to settle accounts—forget and forgive."

"Yes, Tim," answered the girl, making a brave ef-

fort to keep back her tears, for several persons had come upon the platform and she shrunk from attracting their notice.

"With all your heart," whispered Tim.

"With all my heart and soul," answered the girl, stealing her hand into his. "Oh!"

Tim snatched her hand with a sudden grasp, for it was the shriek of an engine that had startled them both. Then, with his disengaged hand, he drew something from his pocket and thrust it into hers.

"It—it's the money for my muskrat skins last year," he whispered. "I hain't no use for it, and you—oh! Sare Ann, Sare Ann, I hate to have you go! There, now, what a donkey I am—of course I don't. Shall have the liveliest sort of a time without you. There, there, no crying. Hurra! the great snorting beast is coming on like thunder. Jump up, and let me pitch the trunk aboard when he stops prancing. Stand ready. Here's your satchel. Now for it!"

Sarah Ann grasped the hard hand held out to her. Wild with terror, trembling with tender emotion, she clung to it one moment, then almost with a cry of pain, leaped upon the car. The next instant she was hurled away, feeling like the wild bird to which she had likened herself.

Tim saw his sister snatched away as if by some gigantic force and followed the train with a wild startled look, until it swept out of sight. Then he got into his wagon and drove off, exasperated by the tears that would redden his eyes, and whipping his horses sharply, as if they had taken some share in the loss that had fallen upon his home. The rattle of the loose chair in the wagon annoyed him, and he held it fiercely down

with his foot as if that had also formed a combination with the horses to make him miserable. In fact, the rough but most affectionate nature of the lad broke forth in anger when he was ashamed to give his tears full scope.

Mrs. Ward, who was scrubbing the kitchen floor with all her might, crying bitterly as she worked, heard the wagon rattle by and rested a moment on her knees, listening. No, the possibility at which her heart had wildly caught, vanished. Tim had driven on to the barn without stopping. The poor woman drew a deep breath and fell to her work again. Sarah Ann had not repented at the last moment. She had gone, and the house seemed like a tomb. An hour wore away and Tim did not come to report himself as usual. Mrs. Ward feeling very lonely went in search of him. The barn door was open, the horses had found their own stalls, and on a pile of straw heaped on the floor, she discovered Tim sobbing as if his heart would break.

"Tim, Timothy, I say! Don't take on so," she said, bending over him.

"Oh, mother, I can't help it! What if something should happen to her."

The woman's face turned white, and she stood a moment in dumb silence. Then her countenance changed, and she said, quietly:

"Sare Ann is a good gurl, I'm not afraid."

"But I am, mother. What if she gets robbed of all her money on the cars?"

An anxious look crept over the mother's face. She had not been thinking of that; but to her honest inexperience, vague fears had come which the lad would not easily have comprehended, or the girl either for that matter.

## CHAPTER LIV.

### ON THE WING.

THE roar and rush of the engine that bore Sarah Ann away from her home, was an absolute relief to her. The excitement drew her mind from its regrets. She was so young, so ardent and utterly inexperienced, that the very sense of rapid movement had something exhilarating in it. With her new leather satchel in her lap and her veil drawn down, she sat by the window eagerly watching the landscape glide by, and feeling in all her thoughts like some enchanted person afloat on the wind. Tantalizing glimpses of the country bewildered her, like broken pictures. After a time she caught a glimpse of the Sound, which being stirred by the wind, sent a flash of diamonds leaping from each ripple and wave. As this broke upon her, she uttered a cry of delight, and forgot everything in what seemed to her the broadest and grandest view upon the earth.

Then came villages, summer palaces and picturesque little houses all along the shore, such as she had never seen or even dreamed of, through which the train rushed as if it were ploughing its way to paradise.

"Oh, isn't this beautiful?" she exclaimed, turning her fine eyes upon the man who sat next her. "I did not think the world had anything like that in it."

She was addressing a quiet elderly gentleman who received her enthusiasm suspiciously at first, but no

one could look in that frank face and doubt its honesty. After surveying her during a moment through his glasses, he allowed a smile to visit his lips and answered her as we receive the impulsive observations of children.

"You have not been much in the world, I fancy," he said, "or this strip of water would not astonish you so much."

"No," said Sarah Ann, "I never saw the sea before in my life. How bright and salt the air is! Oh, how I should like to be in one of those little boats with white wings!"

"Perhaps you might be sea-sick," said the gentleman, greatly amused.

"Oh, no, I shouldn't," answered Sarah, with all the self-sufficiency of ignorance. The water is so lively and beautiful. See how the boats fly across it. Were you ever on the water, sir?"

"Yes, I have crossed the Atlantic half a dozen times."

"The Atlantic?" repeated Sarah, with a puzzled look. "Ah, now I remember. That is an ocean; much larger than this, I reckon?"

"Yes, much larger," answered the man smiling.

Sarah caught the smile, blushed crimson and subsided into silence. She was beginning to feel the pain of her own ignorance keenly. But her ardent nature soon broke loose again.

"Oh, what is that?" she said, as a distant view of the city burst upon her, its spires pencilled clearly against the burning fires of a gorgeous sunset and its roofs bathed in drifting gold-dust.

"It is New York. Have you never seen it before?"

answered the gentleman, really interested ; for he could no longer doubt that her enthusiasm was genuine.

"I—I have dreamed of it, and been so disappointed when I woke up," she said, with a tremulous sigh. "I wonder if this will be like the dream."

"Have you friends in the city," asked her fellow-passenger, falling into frank sympathy with the strange girl.

"Friends," she answered, hesitating over the word as if she now fully realized the loneliness of being without them. "No, I have left all my friends behind, every one."

The girl's eyes filled with tears and her voice trembled. Unconsciously she drew near to the strange man and seemed to ask kindness of him. He observed the action and was touched by it.

"No friends, and so young. Are you not afraid?"

"Afraid, no—but lonesome—very, very lonesome! That grand, beautiful, blazing picture frightens me, now that this great roaring thing is dragging me into it. A poor bird flying through the gloom of our woods is nothing to it.

"But why did you come away from your friends?"

Sarah Ann looked wistfully out of the window, and answered with evident constraint.

"We thought it best. It was best."

By this time the train of cars had rushed towards the city with fiery speed, slackening its pace more and more until it drew up under what seemed to the girl an interminable roof, ribbed with great beams and rafters of wood so far as her gaze could reach.

"Can I help you," said the gentleman, gathering

up his parcels. "Is there any place in particular where you intend to stay?"

"No, I—I never heard of any place but the Union Club, and I wouldn't go there for the world."

"I should think not," answered the gentleman, almost laughing. But surely you have been directed to some place, a private family perhaps?"

"Sarah Ann shook her head."

The gentleman deliberated, with his eyes fixed upon the changing countenance lifted so imploringly to his.

"Where, where ought I to go?" she said with shrinking humility.

"Take up your things and come with me."

The girl took up her satchel, and kept close to her guide until they stood together on the crowded platform.

"This way."

The gentleman looked kindly around to make sure that he was followed, and directly summoned a carriage into which he almost lifted the bewildered young traveller.

"I shall take you to a quiet hotel near by," he said, "where you will be comfortable and quite safe. If you would tell me what brought you here?"

"I will, sir—there is no harm in it—only somehow I feel like keeping everything to myself; but if you can tell me how to look out for a place—"

"A place. Do you mean service?"

"Service! No indeed! Mother would never hear to that. I am willing to help, if I can earn money by it."

"Have you no home then?"

"Just as good a home and as kind people in it, as

ever a girl had—only I want to earn some money and spend it in learning.”

A look of surprise brightened the gentleman's face.

“Spend it in learning,” he repeated.

“Yes, I saw how much you wanted to laugh when I asked about the Atlantic Ocean. If people were to do that all my life I would rather give up and die now. Yes, sir, learning is what I came to York for, and what I mean to have. That is what brought me here. Indeed it is!”

“But what kind of a place can you fill, my poor child?”

“I don't just know, girls like me mustn't be too particular.”

The gentleman took a daily journal from his pocket, and began to search down a column of advertisements, with considerable interest.

“Let's see, here is an advertisement that may suit us,” he said. “A lady's maid, how would you like that?”

“A lady's maid. Well, I don't just know what it is; but if you think it would be nice, I'll try it right off.”

“I think it would be the best kind of a situation to help your plan along. In a first-class house, you may learn a good deal without hard study.”

“I don't mind the study. It will come a little tough at first—not being used to it; but hard work and hard study is what I am after.”

“Very well; to-morrow, after breakfast, put on your very nicest clothes and go to this house. It is an excellent location, Madison Avenue. I will cut out the address. Be careful not to lose it. Be frank with the

lady as you have been here. That is the best way to interest her.”

“Frank! by that you mean polite?”

“Yes, polite and honest.”

Sarah Ann's face was scarlet in an instant.

“Honest. I hope—”

“There, there. I mean sincere and truthful. Nothing worse.”

“Oh, I—I thought—”

“A great many fiery things, I dare say. But here is the hotel. Your trunk will be delivered presently. Wait, he continued, addressing the driver, I wish to be set down at the Union Club.”

Sarah Ann caught her breath.

“The—the Union Club. Do you live there?” she said, so eagerly, that he remembered that she had mentioned it already.

“Rather more than I ought, perhaps; but why do you ask?”

“Oh, nothing. Only—only you may know a young person—a young lady from our part of the country that lives there.”

“No,” answered the gentleman, laughing, “I think not. It isn't much of a resort for young ladies.”

“But she lives at the Union Club. It is where her letters are sent. Miss—Miss—”

“Miss— Well?”

“No matter, you wouldn't care about her name, of course, especially if you don't know her.”

“True. Besides that we have no more time to waste. Come this way.”

Sarah Ann obeyed, and waited in a little parlor that seemed like a palace to her, while the new friend

whose care she had fallen under, made arrangements for her accommodation until she should be provided with a home.

From her little room, high up in the hotel, she saw the gentleman drive away. Then, feeling as if every friend she had on earth was gone, the poor girl sat down and began to cry.

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## CHAPTER LV.

### IN SEARCH OF A PLACE.

“IF you please, I came about the advertisement.”

Stephen looked at the strange young girl who said this, with questioning interest, for there was a wild sort of beauty about her that won his admiration at once. Otherwise it is doubtful if he would not have dismissed her without much ceremony.

“I will speak to the lady,” he said, “though I don’t think it is of the least use. The person she discharged was more than twice your age, and quite the lady.”

The girl had drawn the glove from her brown hand which Stephen glanced at doubtfully.

“Go ask the lady if she will see me. That is all you can do, I reckon,” she said, roughing up the short hair about her temples with that objectionable hand.

The girl sat down on a hall chair as she spoke, and looked at the servant with a glance that said plainly,

“ascend at once, and don’t trouble me with any more opinions.”

Stephen went, so impressed by her off-handed style, that he could not help obeying it.

“Madam, here is a girl answering an advertisement about a lady’s maid. She wants the place badly, I think.”

Mrs. Foster was in her dressing-room, busy with some fancy needle-work. She lifted her eyes quietly, as the man spoke.

“You can send her up, Stephen.”

Stephen bowed, and withdrew. In a minute, a bright and most singular young person came through the door and paused on the threshold, holding her breath with awe and surprise, while she took a survey of the room. She had evidently been in the country of late, for her handsome face was tanned to the throat, which was exposed by her red cloth jacket, thrown open like a sailor’s. Her straw hat, with a black ribbon around it, had been turned a little on one side when she gave her hair an extra puff in the hall; and her whole appearance would have been just a little masculine, but for the earnest, pleading look of her eyes, and a certain feminine grace in her movements, which appealed eloquently to the good lady.

For a full minute the young stranger stood gazing about the room, which, to her, was beautiful as a glimpse of fairy land. Then her great eyes settled on the lady, and she drew near her with some show of awkward hesitation.

“I—I saw a notice in the newspaper that you wanted a competent person to wait on you, marm, and I’ve come to get the place.”

"Have you any experience?" asked the lady, gently.

The girl looked a little puzzled, but, after a moment, her face brightened.

"No, marm, I can't say that I've experienced yet, but I was almost under conviction last camp-meeting."

The lady smiled. "I was not thinking of that."

"Well, I'm glad of it," broke in the girl, drawing a deep breath, "for a whole religious experience is what I cannot pretend to, being stiff-necked in that particular, as the class-leaders say."

This time a smile twinkled all over Mrs. Foster's face. She had taken a liking to this frank, pretty girl, not the less powerful because she awoke memories of her own youth, when almost all the excitement known to her native village came out of religious revivals.

"I did not mean to ask about anything but your ability to fill the place of a lady's maid. Have you ever been in service?"

"Me? no, indeed! It's help I want to be, not a servant."

Again the lady smiled, for she recognized this sturdy New England spirit as another reminiscence of the old times.

"Then you know nothing about the duties of the place you want," she said.

"No, marm, but I can learn in less than no time."

"Can you dress hair?"

"Dress—dress—yes, marm, I can—only show me how."

"Can you take care of a lady's wardrobe?"

"Oh, yes, nothing easier. I can lock and unlock them; and bureaus, too, if you want to use them."

These answers amused the lady. She laid down her work and looked at the girl with kindly interest.

"Would you like to wait on me?"

"Wouldn't I, now?"

Here the girl walked on tiptoe across the thick carpet, drew a chair close up to Mrs. Foster, and attempted to sit down on the silken cushion, but she sprang up again, catching her breath.

"Oh, my, how it gives!" she exclaimed, examining the chair. "Might let one through, I reckon."

"No; sit down, while I talk with you," answered Mrs. Foster, laughing more heartily than she had done for years. "Let me know more about yourself? Where have you lived?"

The girl hesitated and began to play with the fringe on her red jacket.

"That is just what I don't want to tell," she answered, at last.

"Indeed!" said the lady, drawing a little back in her chair.

"Not that I've done anything wrong," answered the girl. "Because I haven't; but—but none of our folks ever lived out."

"And you don't like it to be known. That is very foolish, but natural, I suppose."

"But I've got another reason, which isn't of any sort of consequence to any one but my own Mar, who knows all about it, and let me come down here to get out of the way of trouble. It may be foolish, and I may break my heart in doing it; but—but that will be all the harm of it."

There was a soft, pathetic trembling in the girl's voice, as she spoke, which touched the gentle lady.



"You have a mother then?" she inquired.

"Yes. Just one of the kindest, hardest-working old souls you ever set eyes on."

"Is she unable to keep you at home?"

"Well, I reckon so, after I'd made up my mind to go; but the best of it was, she kinder took to the idea herself—for she thinks all the world of her girl, and always did."

"Was she compelled to let you go?"

"Compelled! I reckon not. No person in our parts would undertake that with my Mar."

"But she might be unable to support you?"

"Support me! Why, the old farm does that."

"Then you did not come here from necessity?"

"Necessity! How?"

"The necessity of—of earning money."

"No; it was not necessity, but since you've mentioned it— How much do they give for such things down in York, besides one's board?"

"That depends on the ability of the person."

"Just so. Well, I reckon the capacity won't be wanting, nor the willingness. Now, if ladies ever get sick, you know I'm a first-rate hand at nursing; can make beautiful herb-tea, and spread mustard plasters for your feet that will set them all aglow in ten minutes. How your eyes light up marm! Reckon you've heard of such things before."

"Yes," said Mrs Foster, with a sigh. "I have heard of them; but it is a long time ago."

## CHAPTER LVI.

### CROSS EXAMINATION.

MRS. FOSTER was interrupted by a knock at the door, and Miss Jane came in with a slip of canvas in her hand, on which she had been making some false stitches. These her step-mother was expected to rectify. The strange girl started, and a look of intense curiosity brightened her great eyes, as the young lady came in.

"What, again?" said Mrs. Foster, with motherly patience. "Let me find out the mistake for you."

"No matter. I see you are engaged," answered the young lady, sinking into a chair. "I can wait. In fact, I am getting tired of the whole thing, and mean to give it up to Lois, only she would dawdle over it a month. I wish you had not discharged Susan. She was of some use in the family."

"Well," answered Mrs. Foster, pleasantly, "I am about supplying her place. Here is a young person who is willing to take it."

Jane turned, with what would have been abrupt rudeness in another person, and coolly examined the girl from head to foot. But there was no flinching in that bright, young face; a look of self-reliance, and a flash of amusement, nothing more.

Miss Jane withdrew her eyes, and a faint sneer stirred her lips.

"Willing! I dare say she is; but what can she

do? Have you taken the trouble to inquire? I know you haven't, for there never was such an easy-going old soul."

Having made this very respectful observation, the young lady turned to Sarah Ann, prepared to question her like a police officer.

"Where have you lived? Have you a recommendation from the last place? What can you do?"

"I have lived with my mother. She will give me a good recommendation, if the lady wants it; and I can do anything I put my hand to, and that my heart is in," answered the girl, with an air almost as haughty as her questioner.

"To the point now. Can you do fine needle-work?"

"If you mean working figures on muslin, and darning, yes, I can do it?"

"Can you flute?"

"Flute? No; my brother blows a little on one now and then, but I never tried. Girls don't in our parts. I've tried the Jew's-harp, and can make it twang beautifully."

Miss Foster leaned back in her chair, raised both hands, and broke into a laugh which was almost good-natured. Then she turned to Mrs. Foster, who was laughing in a soft, pleasant way herself.

"I think you will find her very useful," she said. "But let us get at the whole list of her accomplishments."

"Can you do up laces?"

"Laces?" answered the girl, with a puzzled look.

"Like this, for instance," said the young lady, touching a filmy ruffle of Valenciennes that fell like a cobweb over her hand.

"Oh! muslins! Yes, I know how to do them."

"Oh, she will be invaluable!" exclaimed the young lady, with laughing irony. "Engage her by all means."

A rush of hot color came into the strange girl's face. She clenched her little, brown fist, and thrust it into the jacket of her sacque, where her proud temper held it a prisoner by force.

"I really think I *shall* try her," answered Mrs. Foster. "She seems willing, and I can have patience while she learns."

"Oh, Mar— Oh! madam! I—I'm so much obliged! Indeed, indeed, I will do my best!" cried the girl, eagerly.

"I am sure you will," said Mrs. Foster.

Miss Foster arose and flung her imperfect embroidery on the table.

"Well, of all the ridiculous things I ever heard of, this is the most absurd. You cannot be in earnest, Mrs. Foster."

"Very much in earnest," answered the lady. "Remember she is to be my personal attendant."

"Oh, I thought, perhaps, she was engaged for your niece, who has been so used to a retinue of servants, that exceptional fastidiousness might be expected in the choice," sneered the young lady.

"That reminds me. You will have to give attendance, now and then, on a young lady," said Mrs. Foster, turning to the girl.

"This young lady?" questioned the girl, flashing a glance at Miss Foster, which made the blood tingle in that young lady's fingers.

"No. She will not require it."

"I should rather think not," said Miss Foster. "It

is a person who can appreciate your various accomplishments far better."

With this lady-like fling, Miss Jane swept out of the room, leaving her work behind.

"We haven't spoken of wages," said Mrs. Foster, as soon as her step-daughter was gone. "How much do you expect?"

"Nothing, till I can earn it. Then just what you please to give. I haven't thought much about that, only I want to earn all I can."

"Really this is a strange and most interesting young creature," thought the lady, whose own early life came back to her with force, as she listened to the girl. "I haven't the heart to let her run loose in this great city. Gertrude will understand her."

"Please, marm, am I engaged?" said the girl, breaking in upon this little reverie.

"Yes. There will be no trouble about your wages. Only be respectful and attentive. The work is not hard."

"I don't care a chestnut how hard, if it is only for you!"

"But some of your duties will be about a young lady."

A swift, gloomy cloud swept that face, and disappeared.

"I will do my best for her too," she answered; but this time there was gloom in her eyes. "My very best, if she is a bit like you."

Another knock at the door. The girl looked towards it with a glance of sharp curiosity.

"Come in," said Mrs. Foster, brightening when she saw her niece on the threshold.

"Here is a young person you will be glad to meet. She is to replace Susan."

"Her! her! Am I to wait on her," broke from the girl's lips almost with a cry of rage; and she moved towards the door, tempted to escape from a presence that was torture in itself. "I did not know that she was here. If I had—if I had—a team of wild horses wouldn't made me come."

Though thrilling with passion, Sarah Ann's voice had been low, and a passing carriage in the street drowned it so completely that Mrs. Foster could only distinguish that she was speaking. When she turned to address her, the girl was standing pale and still, with her great burning eyes fixed on Gertrude, who came into the room with a faint, sad smile on her lips. The brilliant glow of color had gone from her face, and there was something in her eyes that made the girl's heart swell with quick sympathy, startled as she was.

Mrs. Foster continued to address her niece.

"She is from the country, and I rather like that. Of course she will want a great deal of teaching; but we have plenty of time, haven't we, Gertrude?"

"Quite enough to help her learn all you desire, aunt," said Gertrude, casting a kind glance on the girl. "At any rate, I will do my part. Just from the country, did you say? Of course she will be a little home-sick at first."

"As you were, my dear."

Gertrude smiled faintly, and a sudden mist clouded her eyes. The strange girl saw this, and the fire in her own eyes softened.

"I will do my best for you," she said; but her poor lips were white, and quivered as she spoke.

Something in the voice, or that earnest look, struck Gertrude as familiar. She had seen that face before. But where?

"What part of the country are you from?" she said, with kindly interest.

"New England," answered the girl.

Gertrude scarcely noticed the latitude of this reply, but seated herself wearily. Nothing seemed to interest her much of late.

Sarah Jane looked at her searchingly. "She's no more happy than I am," she muttered, relaxing from the independent attitude she had assumed when the door opened. "Yes, marm, I've made up my mind to wait on you faithfully, and the young lady too, if she won't be hard on me."

"Hard on you," said Gertrude, "far from that, I shall be glad to have any one near my own age, so bright and good, for I am sure you are good," said Gertrude.

"Good," repeated Sarah Ann, remorsefully, "no, I'm not good; hateful sometimes, and always headstrong, but I'll try—I will try with all my heart."

"I know you will," said Mrs. Foster, kindly, "and my niece is sure to be considerate." Here Mrs. Foster rang the bell. The housekeeper presented herself.

"Take this girl to her room and see that she is made comfortable," she said, with delicate kindness.

The woman bowed, and waited for that strange young creature to leave the room; but the girl hesitated, drew close to Mrs. Foster, and snatching her hand, kissed it. "My own, own mother, who loves me almost to death, couldn't be kinder to a poor girl, than you are," she said, with a sob of passionate grati-

tude in her voice. "I—I'll be just as good as gold to you. See if I ain't; and—and to her," she added, turning an earnest look on Gertrude.

"A strange creature," said Mrs. Foster, as the girl went out. "I couldn't help engaging her."

"I am glad she has come," answered Gertrude. "She brings a breath from the country with her. Strange, isn't it? but it seems as if she had just left my own home. Somehow her voice connects itself with the old farm-house. Yet I never remember a girl anything like her there."

"It is her simple manners that interest you," said the aunt. "They are, indeed, refreshingly natural."

Gertrude did not reply. Of late she had fallen into habits of abrupt silence. Mrs. Foster observed this preoccupation, and took up her work with a gentle sigh.

Meantime Lois met the housekeeper with the new servant in the hall. She had a letter in her hand, which the stranger seemed to regard with keen interest. It was impossible to read the name upon it; but the handwriting brought the heart into her mouth.

Lois saw the direction of her eyes, and quietly dropped the letter into her pocket.

When Sarah Ann reached the room, she shut the door, and sat down on the little white bed, drawing a deep, long breath.

"It was his writing. I can swear it was his writing. Oh, I wonder if he will come here," she exclaimed, in a passionate whisper. "If he does, what am I to do. I wish they had not been so kind. Why can't I hate her? Why was it that I came to this house out of the thousands and thousands in this great .

city. Sure as life, God sent me here; for nothing but God could have softened my heart so. Yes, God sent me here, and I will stay."

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## CHAPTER LVII.

### STOLEN KNOWLEDGE.

GERTRUDE HARRINGTON had entered upon her new life, with all the freshness of youth and the ardor of an aspiring nature. She studied earnestly, and to the superstructure of an excellent English education added accomplishments with wonderful rapidity. Naturally graceful and self-possessed, she soon became superbly elegant. All that nature had left undone, wealth and application accomplished. She no longer felt herself strange in that sumptuous home, but the brightest part of its fastidious household.

Even Jane Foster had relented towards her, in appearance at least; and devotion was never more perfect or unobtrusive than that which the brother bestowed upon her. Every wish, expressed or unexpressed, met with what seemed to her a magical fulfilment. From the wealthy aunt who doted on her, to the lowest menial of the house, she was almost worshipped. Thus pampered and uplifted, the girl flung off all discontenting thoughts, and plunged into her new life with such exquisite zest as a bird feels when it learns to fly.

Mrs. Foster was a quiet, grave woman, who loved the solitude of her own room, but was always ready to

give her presence in society when it was necessary to the proper appearance of her niece. She was averse to excitement, and found her home pleasanter since Gertrude had become its inmate—so much pleasanter, that she preferred it to all other places.

This lady was essentially a peaceful woman, almost weak where her affections were concerned. Like many another guardian or parent, she knew less of her step-son than the world at large. As the son of a man whom she had tenderly loved, she was disposed to think of him with affectionate charity, and if she observed the devotion with which he regarded her niece, found no cause for interference in it.

"It will amount to nothing," she said, "Rufus is taken with her freshness and her beauty, but their influence will wear off, and he will sink back into the old club life. Otherwise, it would be well that her heart was anchored before she came here."

Jane Foster had her calculations also, and, singular enough, for once, they drifted with the rest of the family. "Let Rufe have his drowsy flirtation out," she said to herself. "It will amount to nothing. I almost wish it would, for then—"

Whatever else Miss Jane Foster thought, was never given, even to the low voice in which the rest of her reverie was uttered; but she had seen Hart Webster, and with perverse selfishness resolved to win him from the girl she could not crush, and had always regarded with mingled envy and detestation. Notwithstanding this, instead of avoiding Gertrude, she became oppressively gracious, and sometimes even obtrusive in bestowing her society on the girl.

The fashionable season opened with unusual bril-

liancy that year, and, as both young ladies plunged into its vortex, but little time was left for domestic experiences. Thus, at home and abroad, Gertrude was constantly thrown into society with Rufus Foster, who was, in fact, the most desirable match of the season, as he had been for many a year before. To a young girl in the first flush of success, the social elevation to which his wealth and supreme indifference had lifted him, partook of the real greatness to which, at some future day, she had hoped to see Hart Webster exalted.

Thus, a perilous and most fascinating life opened to this ardent and most ambitious girl. Careless as a bird and bright as a flower. Matinees in the morning, calls at off-hours, drives in the afternoon, and parties, operas, or theatres at night, gave little time for thought and none for real feeling. She drifted gayly from her quiet old habits into the brilliant turmoil of a fashionable season.

There was one person in the Foster mansion who had met with changes of circumstances quite as important as those which had befallen Gertrude Harrington. This was the girl who had hired herself out as lady's maid to Mrs. Foster. Never was there a brighter, more obliging, or faithful little attendant than Sarah made. She was like a sunbeam in the house. She had perfected herself in the details of her work with marvellous readiness, and adapted herself with such wonderful tact to the manners of her employer, that, in less than three months, she had lost all the rough provincialism of language that came with her from the country, and much of the brusque manner which had made her an object of Jane Foster's irony.

The girl was not always cheerful. At times she came down from her room in the morning, heavy-eyed and languid, as if her sleep had been broken; but she made no complaint, and only turned the subject off with a smile, if her mistress asked if she was not well.

After a while there really was not so very much difference between this girl and the young lady she was expected to serve. Both were observant, both well taught in New England schools. If Gertrude entered heart and soul into an accomplishment, either in music or the languages, drawing, or deeper study, the spirit of imitation seized upon the girl Sarah. She listened with greedy ears, as the tutor gave his lessons, and murmured them over in soft whispers, as the young lady repeated them.

Sarah's duties were not heavy, and, without any particular arrangement, she would take her work into the little room which adjoined Gertrude's boudoir, and gather up scraps of knowledge while her fingers were busy. Gertrude observed this, and liked it. There was a sort of companionship in this mental theft that made her own studies pleasant. Now and then she called the girl in to recite with her, and afterward, when her time was so much taken up by the world, allowed Sarah to benefit by the tuition of which she could but partially avail herself, and take the lessons that would otherwise have been lost.

This young girl had both genius and industry. She performed all her duties well; yet allowed no scrap of knowledge to escape the keen grasp of her intellect. At night, after the young ladies had left the house for some gay assembly, the servants down stairs would hear



sweet sounds from Miss Harrington's room, and wonder if the house was music haunted.

The lady's maid was keen-eyed, too, with regard to what was going on in the house. In the morning she was often called upon to carry flowers, gathered from the conservatory by Mr. Foster's own hand, up to her young lady; and when Gertrude began to receive them with an eager smile, the maid would regard her with a strange, searching look; an expression of struggling regret and pleasure, would fill her splendid eyes for a moment, then die out in mournful sadness.

Did Gertrude think of Hart Webster in those days? Yes, at times his image came back to her vividly; but he had wounded her pride, and filled her life for weeks with bitter disappointment. Why had he gone away, without seeing her? and after that, when she had deigned to reproach him, why had he left her letter unanswered for days and days, nor once alluded to his fault when he did write? (She loved him) Yes, of course she did; but no man should trifle with her in that way. She should seem as indifferent as he really was.

But the person who can for any length of time seem to be indifferent, will end in being the thing they seem. Gertrude believed herself neglected, and this thought stung her in the midst of her brilliant success. While the whole world seemed at her feet, this man alone withheld the homage which she had begun to expect as her right. Thus the year wore on.

Jane Foster understood all this, and smiled. For the first time in her life, she wished success to her brother's desires. She saw clearly, long before the year was out, that the idea of making this girl his wife had

settled into a passionate desire. She knew him to be a quiet, cold-blooded, crafty man, incapable of generous affection; but none the less did she long to see his victim surely snared.

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## CHAPTER LVIII.

### INCIPIENT STRIFE.

ONE night, this was late in the winter, Sarah sat by the steel grate, in her young lady's room, with both feet on the fender, and her chin resting in the palm of her hand. She was very thoughtful and serious just then; and, while she gazed into the glowing masses of fire, a strange longing was in her heart to go away, and once more breathe the pure atmosphere of her old home.

All at once she started up, and looked at the tiny clock that chimed forth the hours on the white marble of the mantel-piece. It was nearly two. A carriage had driven swiftly up to the door, and, after a slight bustle in the hall, Gertrude Harrington came in, filling the little room with the beauty of her presence.

"Here, take this," she cried, throwing off the fleecy snow of her opera-cloak, and revealing her superb neck and shoulders, just shaded with a mist of lace, "and tell me if I am looking well to-night. Others say so, but I want an honest opinion for once—and you are honest, Sarah, I know that. Tell me, girl, and tell me truly, am I beautiful, really—truly beautiful?"

"Sarah bent her large eyes on that superb figure,



clad in a sweeping robe of the delicate color which gleams in the heart of a tea-rose, and lifted them, almost sadly, to the splendid beauty of that queenly neck and face, dwelling upon them until the haughty girl blushed crimson.

"Yes," she said, drawing a deep sigh. "You are wonderfully beautiful!"

Gertrude turned, and, flinging back the rich folds of her train, surveyed herself in the mirror which reflected her from head to foot.

She seemed pleased with the survey, for a proud smile flashed over her face.

"And yet!" she exclaimed, with a stamp of her foot on the carpet, "a person was there, I mean at the party to-night, who had a crowd at her feet: a little creature, with eyes like periwinkles, and the complexion of a baby. Everybody was raving over her because of her blonde hair—Mr. Foster and all."

"Blonde," said Sarah, thoughtfully. "I suppose that means something yellow and bright!"

"Why, of course, hair full of sunshine, and lips like ripe cherries."

Here Gertrude bit her own lips. "That is the way all the people talked of her. I was almost left alone more than once."

Tears absolutely broke into Gertrude's eyes, and she flung herself into the easy-chair that Sarah had occupied, with a reckless disregard of her dress, which sent its glowing billows of silk almost into the fire. During a whole season she had found herself the novelty and idol of every assembly; and this approach of another to her throne filled her with astonishment, almost with dismay.

"It could not have been her beauty," she said, shaking the tears from her curling eyelashes. "But her neck was just one blaze of diamonds, they fell in drops down her bosom and burned in her hair; wedding gifts from her husband, for whom she had just gone out of mourning. No girl, they tell me, can wear such jewels. Fortunate for me; isn't it, Sarah?" added the excited young creature. "Because I haven't a diamond in the world."

"They wouldn't be of much use, when you go back to the country," answered Sarah, with a suppressed sigh. "Why should you care for such things?"

"The country!" Here Gertrude gave another glance at herself in the glass, and broke into a sarcastic laugh. "Oh, yes! I look like that, don't I? Just imagine me sweeping Aunt Eunice's sitting-room in this dress!"

"But then, perhaps, you will be too happy for any thought of dresses," said Sarah, gently.

Gertrude's face clouded severely.

"I don't know. It seems to me that I shall never be really happy again; sometimes the very thought of the country makes me shiver. One changes so!"

"But the people and places we have loved do not change."

"What do you mean, Sarah?" questioned the girl, sharply.

"Our old homes—yours and mine; for I come from the country too."

"Well, what then?"

"And I was just longing to go back again."

Gertrude gave an involuntary shudder.

"And I loathe the thought of it."

"Then it is not true?"

"What is not true?"

"That one of the bravest, noblest, handsomest men that ever breathed the breath of life, is waiting for you there."

"Who told you this, Sarah?"

"I heard it in the country, and I heard it here."

"In the country? Where? You speak as if you knew the person."

"I have heard of him often; and I know that he loves you dearly."

"Indeed," answered Gertrude, rising, with a haughty smile. "He has a most original way of expressing his love. If I had time to think of him, it might break my heart."

"I think you intend to break his," answered Sarah. A quick angry fire leaped into her eyes as she spoke, and burned there duskily.

"Sarah, you forget yourself."

"No, it is you who forget, and turn your back on the most noble destiny that ever was offered to a woman. Oh, Miss Harrington! think of what you are throwing away! Think of the happiness, the honor of being that man's wife. Compare him, if you can, with the people who surround you now—silken creatures, wrapped up in selfishness, incapable of a grand or noble thought; inheritors of wealth, they never would have had the ability to gain; men who will bow low to your beauty now, and leave you to perish of neglect when it fades."

"Sarah, are you crazy? How dare you speak in this way?"

"Not crazy, but troubled with a great fear that Hart

Webster's life will be made miserable, and yours worthless."

"Girl! girl! what is Hart Webster to you?"

"Nothing."

This one word dropped from Sarah with an accent of plaintive despair. All the animation went out from her face, her hands fell downward, and she left the room, closing the door softly after her.

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## CHAPTER LIX.

### THE MAID PLEADS WITH HER MISTRESS.

GERTRUDE HARRINGTON looked after the girl, amazed.

"What can she mean? What has come over her?" she said, impatiently looking around the room, which was in confusion. Her opera-cloak lay in a white heap on the floor, where she had dropped it. A withered bouquet and a pair of crumpled gloves lay scorching on the hearth.

She had expected that Sarah would help her undress; and sat there in the shaded gaslight, a glistening picture of helplessness—yes, degrading helplessness. In those few months, this hardy young creature from the red farm-house, had become so enervated, and elegantly sensuous, that she found it a task to unclasp her bracelets without assistance.

"It serves me rightly. I had no business to encourage her. She was hired for my maid, and sets up as

a monitress. By-and-by she will refuse to put on my slippers, I dare say."

But these uneasy thoughts were soon driven out by the one predominating torment that had harassed Gertrude all the evening—the young lady with the blonde hair and lily complexion, to whom Rufus Foster had devoted himself with such quiet assiduity.

"Was it done to torment me, I wonder, or did he really mean it? They tell me these young widows always have the advantage over girls, because they possess all the experience and privileges of married women. Why, Miss Foster here, who has audacity enough for anything, and could outshine this woman in jewels, ten to one, if society permitted it, stands aside for this new widow from Paris, and seems to enjoy the way she sweeps everything before her. Jane has told me a hundred times that her brother was fickle as the wind; but what do I care? Am I not bound? Bound to what? A little white house, with green blinds, and a gilt plate on the door of a one-story wing, with Hart Webster, attorney at law, blazing on it. That is what I am bound to, while this pink-faced witch will light the rooms of some palace with her diamonds. His palace if she likes, for he is rich enough to build one."

Here the girl sprang up from her seat, and went sweeping round the room, like a leopard in its cage, biting her lips, and dashing back her train passionately, as she turned, or entangled her feet in its silken waves. At last she rang the bell violently.

Sarah answered it. Very still and pale, she came into the room, and, lifting the opera-cloak from the carpet, folded it neatly. Gertrude loosened some white roses from her hair, flung them on the dressing-table,

and began to untangle the heavy braids, pulling them furiously, now and then, as if the pain of this proceeding did her good.

"Shall I help you?" said the maid, approaching the table.

Gertrude dropped into her seat, and gave the braids a toss over her shoulder, but vouchsafed no other answer.

Sarah's hands trembled, as she loosened the shining strands, and dropped them in waves over those white shoulders. There was no trace of tears or of anger on her face, but rather a look of sublime exaltation. When she had performed her task, loosened the robe, and removed the last shadow of lace from neck and arms, the girl fell upon her knees before her mistress, and, while all her eloquent features quivered with emotion, pleaded with her.

"Oh, lady! Oh, Gertrude Harrington! For Heaven's sake! for his sake, be yourself again. Go home; flee from this new and most evil life, where honor perishes, and true love is strangled to death. Go home to your good aunt. Trample all these things under foot. Take back the beauty which won him, because of its innocence. In that way lies happiness, honor—the great end of a girl's ambition. All that you pant for now, his love will bestow a thousand-fold."

Gertrude drew back in her chair, gathering the silken robe up to her bosom, as if it could conceal all that was in the heart underneath. Then her voice broke forth.

"Retreat before this new woman? Give up the position that I have won, and sneak away, hooted back by the derision of his sister, and the pity of his world?"

Go and content myself with Aunt Eunice, 'until a country lawyer deigns to claim me? No! no! a thousand times no!"

"But Hart Webster?"

"If Hart Webster has one spark of pride, he will glory in the position I have won. In the homage of other men he will see a compliment to his choice. I do not resign him. Why should I leave all that is pleasant in life till he is ready and able to enter it himself?"

"But it may be—it must be years before he can do that?"

"Well, why should those years be dragged out in the country? Am I not welcome here?"

"As birds are welcome to the upas tree," answered the maid.

"At any rate, I am my own mistress; so leave me!"

Sarah bent her head, and left the room. A few minutes after, she had fallen upon her own bed, and was weeping passionately. "It is for his sake—for her sake I do it; but, oh, the pain, the pain!" she exclaimed.

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## CHAPTER LX.

### THE CRAFTY LETTER.

THAT night Miss Jane Foster was also sitting in full dress, before a waning fire, which Lois had allowed to burn down, while she fell asleep among the

cushions of a silken couch, with a rich India shawl thrown over her. Without disturbing the girl, this young lady dropped into a chair, and fell to tapping the steel fender with the tip of her satin shoe, smiling blandly to herself, as if all the events of the evening had given her infinite satisfaction.

"The creature has lost her head at last. Rufus has found a way to his wishes through her insatiable vanity, if not her heart. Jealous! I never saw anything like it. Fool! fool! not to see that Rufe is playing this woman off for a purpose. I only wish that splendid fellow from the country could have seen her tonight, pale and trembling, because that silky scamp revealed himself a little. And she does not love him—that is the very best of it. Talk about jealousy being the offspring of love. Why, it is the born child of vanity! Lois!"

Here Miss Foster dragged away the India shawl, and shook her sleeping maid up from her nest among the cushions.

"Lois, I say!"

The girl rubbed her eyes, and sat up dazed.

"Eh, *Mon Dieu!* I was but resting one little moment. Is it Mademoiselle?"

"Yes. Wake up, and try to remember if Steve has given you any letters."

"Oh, yes! this morning. I—I forgot it," answered the girl, fumbling sleepily in her jacket, and drawing forth a letter, directed to Miss Gertrude Harrington, which she gave to her mistress.

"That will do. Now go to bed. Your help would be worth nothing in this state."

Lois, who was still half asleep, muttered a drowsy

good-night, and left the room. Then Miss Foster broke open her friend's letter, and read it.

"Jealous, restless, suspicious, but still honorable and chivalric. Now is my time."

With these words the young lady drew a little desk towards her, and began to write. This was her letter:

"I write you, my dear Mr. Webster, from a high sense of duty, which impels me to save a sister woman from deception and pain, at a sacrifice of reserve and feminine delicacy, which, I trust, you will appreciate, rather than condemn. I truly hope that your attachment to my step-mother's niece is not so deeply seated that her unconscious treason to it will, in any material way, darken your future. But, even if that were the fact, I must write. Better that you should suffer keenly now than drag through life with an unloving woman, whose desires are all with another.

"Miss Harrington, when you first saw her, was a young, beautiful—at least some think so—and unsophisticated girl, unformed, wildly ambitious, and ready to assume any engagement that would lift her out of that old red farm-house, and into the great world she panted to enjoy. Her tastes were simple then, and her aspirations very humble, compared to the audacity of her ambition now." She is a creature of keen imagination and sensuous tastes by nature, and her residence in this house, the pet of a doating and luxurious old lady, whose wealth is lavished upon her without stint, has developed and intensified these dangerous qualities, till such selfish gratification as money can purchase has become necessary to her existence.

"At first, no doubt, she was, as far as such natures can be, honestly attached to you as the first really elegant young man who had found his way to her primitive home. The ambition that consumes her now, influenced her then; but I say it with painful reluctance, the object is changed. The girl loves my brother Rufus, who is hopelessly infatuated with her. His suave elegance and sumptuous surroundings have undermined the little good faith that had found its way into her engagement with you; and now the weak but proud girl is shackled with a tie that she has not the courage to break, and a love that has become a part of her luxurious existence.

"The idea of being a poor man's wife becomes every day more repugnant to Gertrude Harrington. I can see it in the clouding of her countenance, whenever the conversation is directed that way; in the shrinking dread with which she receives your letters. To answer those letters seems a task that she delays and almost loathes. Forgive the last words; but they can alone express the truth.

"I really believe that she has more than once left the house when informed of your presence in the city, and made engagements that she knew would keep her from the embarrassment of meeting you. Meantime, my brother has not lost his opportunities. This girl has been surrounded with everything that could charm her fancy or enervate her principles; not intentionally, but because these elegances are essential to my step-mother's own life, and seem naturally a part of hers. Rufus loves her as I never expected to see him care for any human being but himself. I beg pardon! This may sound unsisterly; but he has never known a want;

and, in perpetual prosperity, selfishness roots itself with a firm hold. He loves her, and I am sure that she loves him.

"Have I said enough? It is not for me to point out the course you should take. A proud, honorable man will decide that for himself. I may have done wrong, and exposed myself to misconception in writing this. In truth, I expect it, for the path of duty is full of thorns; and bitter condemnation would follow me were either my brother or the lady of his love to know that I had thus frankly appealed to you with the truth.

"Understand me. I write of feelings that should be sacred, not of acts. There I have nothing to say. The thousand little proofs of love which are conveyed by looks and gestures, would be intangible, and even indelicate in expression; still they convey the best proof in the world to one whom affection has placed on the watch.

"The pure and deep attachment that I feel for my only brother, far more than any sympathy for this young lady, has impelled me to give you this information. I cannot endure to witness the struggle these two lovers are making, and sit inactive, while the happiness of three lives is wrecked. You have the truth now, and can act upon it as your own sense of honor may direct. For myself, I have performed an unpleasant duty, which may cost me the esteem of a person whose good opinion I would gladly retain; but if this bitter return for a generous sacrifice of feeling is to be mine, I shall at least have the consolation of knowing that it is undeserved.

"Very truly yours,

"JANE FOSTER."

"HART WEBSTER, Esq."

When Hart Webster received this letter a slow and bitter distrust had been preying on him for months. His letters to Gertrude had been frequently unanswered, and a chilling coldness seemed to pervade such replies as reached him. More than once the girl had spoken of the sacrifice he was making in clinging to an engagement that threatened to be a drag on his ambition, and, without offering to release him, had seemed to leave the way open for a request of the kind.

Twice the young man had been to the city, resolved to set the doubts that tormented him at rest; but each time he was received by Miss Foster with embarrassed excuses for the absence of her friend. Now he was resolved to know the worst.

Within a few hours after the letter was received, the young man was on his way to New York.

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## CHAPTER LXI.

### THE LITTLE WIDOW.

THE house was illuminated from basement to roof. The front, with its mellow-tinted French brick and stone, glowed with the radiance of a thousand burners, and almost as many wax candles, whose light streamed through the windows, and the frosty moonlight that fell over them. Through curtains of floating lace and glowing satin a shadowy crowd could be seen, moving to and fro, as flowering thickets are swayed by winds; when luminous day lies between them and the

beholder. A crimson carpet fell down a broad flight of steps, contrasting richly with the creamy-hued stone, and spreading across the broad sidewalk to the curbstone. Over this was an awning of a richer tinge of red, with deep fringes, that swayed in the wind, and gave a look of pleasant commotion to the entrance of the dwelling.

Carriages were coming and going continually. The avenue was black and tumultuous with them. Every moment a gay group was set down on the crimson carpet, and flitted up the steps, chatting gayly.

Opposite the house a crowd of people had gathered, eager for a glimpse of the high life they could only hope to see in vague snatches from the sidewalk. To them the rich garments of the ladies, as they trailed from beneath snowy or gorgeously wrought mantles, were objects of perpetual wonder. Now and then a lady, radiant with beauty, or flaming with diamonds, trod the carpet, and a half-subdued murmur of admiration ran through the crowd, followed, perhaps, by a flash of sarcastic wit from some poor man, to whose toilsome life all this display seemed a bitter mockery.

Amid the crowd of carriages, two set down their inmates almost together. From the first a fair young creature, in white silk, gleaming with threads of gold, that shot through it like starlight, and with diamonds flashing from her arms, her neck, and through the soft fluff of her unnaturally golden hair, like the very stars themselves, sprang lightly to the sidewalk. She flung back her cloud-like outer garment, as if to indulge the lookers on with a full view of her splendor, and walked lightly up the steps, turning to speak to her companions as she went, evidently in acknowledg-

ment of the swelling murmur of admiration that followed her from the street.

This action was received by the crowd with something that amounted almost to a shout. Then she smiled, half bowed, and ran into the house.

Another carriage drove up, and from it came a gentleman, an elderly lady in black velvet, a young lady muffled in a scarlet and gold bournous, and, at last, a tall, graceful young creature, whose face and figure was a challenge to more intense admiration than had followed any of the revellers that night. There was scarcely a murmur now, for the crowd, that had become excited over the splendor of the young widow, was hushed by the queenly loveliness of this girl. She had seen that pretty butterfly flit up the steps, moving in the flash of her own diamonds, and the sight had kindled her face with a brilliancy that astonished the crowd into silent homage. Rufus Foster smiled softly as he remarked it.

Gertrude knew well enough that she was an object of intense interest; that the crowd was swaying towards the house in order to catch a nearer view of her loveliness; but she was far too proud for any recognition of this homage, and mounted the steps with the graceful indifference of a swan moving in the water.

It was a noble mansion, spacious and palatial. In the broad hall they trod over a mosaic of tinted marble, representing a chariot-race in old Rome, lighted up by flambeaux of gas held on high by bronze statues. The banisters of the grand staircase were so garlanded with blooming plants and creeping vines, that its richly-carved wood was turned into sumptuous lattice-work, on which leaves trembled and flowers glowed in gorgeous profusion.



Down this staircase, moving through this tangle of blossoms, came the young widow, glittering like a humming-bird, with a fire-spot on its throat, and dew on its wings. Directly after her came the Fosters, an aristocratic group, with Gertrude Harrington as the centre figure, and Rufus Foster, as usual, an object of feminine attraction, moving by her side.

Already the little widow had taken her post under the rainbow light of a cut-glass chandelier, which was flung heavily back by the golden meshes of her hair, and the jewels entangled therein. All smiles and childish graces, she assumed the position generally awarded her as queen of the evening. Now and then the sweet, ringing laugh of this young creature swelled out upon the perfumed air, as she entertained the crowd of adorers that swarmed around her, in lisping French and frivolous English.

When Gertrude entered the room, her rival was playfully warding off a dozen applicants, who were eager to lead her into the dancing-room. She could not remember; but, really, it seemed to her that she had half pledged the first dance to some one. In fact, she was quite sure of it now, for here came the gentleman to claim her.

Rufus Foster was by far too well-bred to open his sleepy eyes wide, or utter a word of surprise, when thus graciously informed of an engagement he had never dreamed of. On the contrary, he pressed through the group of less favored adorers, gave his arm to the little widow, and led her into the dancing-room, with a triumphant smile on his lips aggravating to more than one person in the room.

Gertrude watched this proceeding with a burning

heart. Still no one saw her emotion under the smile which lightened her eyes and lips, as she accepted the arm of a foreign diplomat, and whirled into the dance, slightly circled by his arm.

Those who observed closely, saw something more than mere amusement in the whirl and eddies of this dance. Miss Foster stood by and watched. She understood the scarlet on Gertrude's cheek, and the side-long glances with which Rufus regarded it, as he seemed to be absorbed by his blithe partner, whose course in the dance was marked by the tiny rainbows that broke around her.

I do not think that Gertrude really heard the music on which she flew that night; but she caught the murmurs of admiration that followed her rival, and felt like a monarch when the subjects he thinks faithful to death, fall away from him.

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## CHAPTER LXII.

### A GREAT TEMPTATION.

THE music which inspired that waltz stopped with a harmonious crash. Those who had joined in it sauntered off in couples. Gertrude's partner led her to Mrs. Foster, and went away to seek the lady engaged to him for the next dance. For some humiliating moments the girl found herself alone, or rather without a crowd rushing eagerly to secure her hand; while the little widow was holding court at the entrance

of the ball-room, pelting off persistent applicants with flowers torn from her bouquet.

Indignant, and a little faint from the heavy perfume of flowers that floated through all the rooms, like odor from an eastern jungle, Gertrude Harrington arose softly, and glided into a little side-room, filled with the moonlight of an alabaster lamp that swung from the ceiling. This tiny boudoir was literally draped with the blossoming snow of a sweet-scented clematis vine, woven in and out with the purple flowers and dark-green leaves of a profuse passion flower, but a soft flow of air swept through the flowers and carried off the sweet oppression of their fragrance.

"The room was not a conservatory; but the finest running plants of a noble green-house had been brought there to drape it. Thus it was turned into one of those shadowy nooks that your hostess, if she is a woman of the world, knows how to improvise for young persons who wander away from the music in couples, and are happy when they can escape the crowd.

Gertrude entered this room alone. She felt baffled and put down by the little widow, whose brief reign was secured by the novelty of her appearance. The girl had known enough of that fickle thing called society, for the practice of a little patience. But her own experience had been so brilliant and intoxicating, that she was amazed and indignant that another should attempt to crowd her from the first place in any assembly.

"He—he is the first to desert me," she thought, sinking into a seat, and wringing her hands, passionately. "He, my slave! who was ready to sink to my feet for a look, who, knowing me pledged to another, has seemed to wither under the thought. He it is that

has lifted this creature into notice, by a homage the crowd is sure to follow. She will triumph, too, for she is rich, while the whole world knows that I have nothing. Oh, if I had a million, how I would sweep her down!"

In her humiliation and futile anger, Gertrude covered her eyes with one hand, ashamed to own, even to herself, that she was weeping.

Then a man came softly into the room, with a smile of triumph on his lips, and treading like a cat.

"Gertrude!"

The girl started up in hot haste, dashed the tears from her eyes, and turned them upon Foster with a forced laugh.

"Ah, is it you, Mr. Foster? I do not remember putting your name on my tablet. Have I been so careless as to forget an engagement that you follow me here?"

"I really do not think we have made any engagement as yet, Gertrude," he answered, quietly.

"Then why are you here? When one comes to a place like this, it is for solitude."

"But why did you leave the drawing-rooms?"

"Because the air was oppressive."

"And I left, hoping that you came away in order to give me the last chance I shall ever seek for, Gertrude Harrington. Once, and forever, will you consider all that I have said to you, and decide now!"

"Decide!" answered Gertrude, fairly catching her breath. "Decide how?"

"Yes, girl, here! Say if you will return to that room my engaged bride, to control and reign over society, as my wife must and shall, till we both weary of

the honor. Or, am I to go back a free man, to choose as best pleases me, while you—"

"Well, sir? While I—"

"Return to the country, and bury yourself forever."

Gertrude turned white; but her eyes shone with quick resentment.

Foster saw it, and went on with more craft.

"You know how passionately I love you. How I have waited—how pleaded?"

"But I told you from the first that it was impossible," faltered the girl.

"Yes, in words; but encouraged me by your actions. I say to you, Gertrude Harrington, your honor is no more pledged to that other man than it is to me!"

"If I thought so. If I could but think so!"

"Else why did you remain under my step-mother's roof one hour after I told you of my love!"

"But I did not think. She urged me to stay—"

"And you did stay, knowing how much encouragement was in the act."

"I—I did not think of that, knowing myself bound in honor."

"Honor! I tell you, Gertrude, at this moment you are more deeply pledged to me than you ever were to Hart Webster."

"No, no!"

"And this moment your heart turns to me rather than to him!"

"My heart! Oh, Mr. Foster, I think you are driving me mad!"

She looked at him pleadingly; her hands were clasped, her eyes shone with tears.

"Is it madness to take the destiny I will give you;

the love, the power, the devotion, of a man that never offered his hand to woman until now?"

"I know, I know! But how can I break my word?"

"How can you keep it? Think of the alternative."

"I do. I have thought of nothing else."

The girl was relenting. Her eyes seemed to plead for some means of extrication from a tie that burdened her. Foster saw this sign of weakness, threw his arm softly around her, and drew her to a low couch that was shaded, and half hidden under the passion vines.

"Tell me, dear one, is it only this man Webster who stands between you and all that I offer?"

Gertrude dropped her head to Foster's shoulder, and began to sob. He drew her closer, and kissed her lips.

"Oh, answer me back! answer me back!" he cried, with a burst of passionate feeling.

Gertrude Harrington turned her lips for the kiss that she knew would seal her destiny forever.

It did. For that moment a tall man stood in the door-way, regarding those two social traitors with a stern glance. His face was pale as death; but he stood motionless, and spoke no word.

"I knew—I have known all along that you could not love that man well enough to give up everything for his sake."

Gertrude made no answer.

"He took advantage of your inexperience!"

"No, no!" she answered. "He loved me—I know that he loved me."

"But now! now! You have nothing to give him in return?"

"Nothing!" answered the girl.

That moment the man in the door glided away, and lost himself in the crowded drawing-rooms.

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## CHAPTER LXIII.

### NEWS OF THE SOCIAL TREASON.

MRS. VANE was fearfully busy. Both kitchen-ta les were loaded with flour-boxes, sugar-boxes, heaps of eggs, piles of raisins, paper-bags running over with black currants and citron. In fact, Mrs. Vane was in the pride and glory of her life, bustling, smiling, chatting, ordering; busy, hands, lips, and eyes, with her daughter Clara's wedding-cake.

Little Patty, too, was in a high state of enjoyment. The confusion delighted her. The idea of a wedding made her wild with hilarity. She sat just inside of the river-balcony, with an earthen bowl in her lap, beating the whites of ever so many eggs vigorously into a snowy froth, when Aunt Eunice came in from over the bridge, in a swift walk, and without knocking—a very unusual thing with her.

"How do you do, Aunt Eunice? Why, the sight of you on this end of the bridge is reviving. Set by, now. Never mind my being busy, seeing as the oven might cool down too much, and leave heavy streaks in the cake, if I took time to consider you company. There now, I'll just take a seat by you, and stir the cake while we talk."

Here Mrs. Vane took a huge yellow bowl into her

lap, and with an iron spoon, proceeded to make little whirlpools of the soft substances out of which she was compounding the wedding-cake. After arranging a little hollow in her lap for the bowl to settle in, and giving her spoon the proper rotary motion, she looked at her neighbor with a conscious smile, and observed in a patronizing way:

"Come over to see how it's done, agin' our Gertie and Hart want theirs? Only think, Clara and her beau stepping off first. Curious; isn't it?"

"Very!" answered Aunt Eunice, with bitter emphasis. "But there's no accounting for anything in these days. Mrs. Vane, you are an old friend, and I came to tell you first: Gertrude is going to be married right away."

Mrs. Vane dropped her spoon into the batter she was stirring.

"What! Right away? And Hart not tell his own uncle? I wouldn't a believed it of him."

Aunt Eunice was silent a moment. Her face grew hard and stern before she answered.

"It isn't to Hart Webster my niece is going to be married," she said at last, speaking very slowly, as if each word were irksome to her.

"Isn't to Hart! Not to our nephew! Aunt Eunice, what do you mean?"

"That is all I have to tell you, for it is all I know myself," said Aunt Eunice, holding out a square envelope with a silver monogram glittering on it. "Read for yourself."

"Clara! Clara! Clara Vane, I say!"

Clara came hastily into the kitchen, with an armful of white tulle, which she had been cutting, gathered up to her bosom.

"What is it, mother?"

"Read that thing and tell me what it is about. My hands are all flour, and Aunt Eunice don't seem to know."

Clara took the envelope which Aunt Eunice held out, and drew from it a half-written, half-engraved invitation to the wedding and reception of Rufus Foster and Gertrude Harrington.

"It—it is an invitation. Gertrude is going to be married, I think, and not to Cousin Hart," faltered the girl, blushing crimson, as if the treason had been hers.

Aunt Eunice set her lips close. Mrs. Vane clasped her hands so tightly that the flour arose in a little cloud around them.

"What does it mean?" she cried.

"That is for you, Clara. I have got another just like it at home," said Aunt Eunice, grimly.

"For her! and not married to Hart. I would just like to see her think of going, or any of us," exclaimed Mrs. Vane, seizing the iron spoon with all her might, and sending new maelstroms of batter whirling in the yellow bowl. "I should just like to see a single soul of the Vane family at her wedding! Rufus Foster indeed!"

"What is the date? When is it?" questioned Aunt Eunice. "I was too flurried to take notice. When is it?"

"Next Thursday," said Clara.

"And you going to be married to-morrow night," interrupted Mrs. Vane. "A pretty piece of business. Hart Webster invited, and she too. Think of it, Clara. I should just like to see her come, that's all!"

Why, Aunt Eunice, what have you got to say to these goings on?"

"Nothing," answered Aunt Eunice. "I don't understand them!"

"And a wedding reception, too. That is some new uppercrust idea, that they think we don't understand in the country, I suppose."

"No, mother, it is only that they will be married in the church or meeting-house, and have their company at home afterwards," answered Clara, who was half crying.

"Then you shall be married in the meeting-house, and have a tea-party afterwards. That girl isn't going to put the Vane family down one notch, if I know it."

"No, mother, please. I would rather have everything as we had arranged it."

"Miss Clara, am I your mother, or am I not?"

"You are the dearest, and best mother that ever lived," answered Clara, with her blue eyes full of tears, "and won't make me unhappy now, just as I am going away from home."

Here Clara stole an arm around her mother's neck, and kissed her softly.

"There, now, did you ever see such a creature? Putting one's cap askew, and crying for just nothing. Well, well, what do I care! Have your own way. Only I don't know how to face Hart, poor fellow! Now, Aunt Eunice, are you a going to see her married to that other fellow?"

"I must. I am going to New York right away."

"Not till after Clara's wedding."

"No; but the next morning. That is one thing I came about. I can't leave the farm alone. Now, as

Guy Compton can't break up his school, and go a travelling like most folks, what if he and Clara here, just make a start in the old house, while I'm gone. Betsey Taft won't stay by herself on any account; but she's ready to wait on them all day long."

"What do you say to that, Clara?" inquired Mrs. Vane, pursing up her little mouth.

"It would be so near home, mother," answered Clara.

"So it would; and we haven't found a house to suit yet. Besides, why not? Aunt Eunice hasn't done anything against us. As for Gertrude—"

Here a faint moisture came into the old maid's eyes, and the muscles about her mouth began to tremble. Mrs. Vane saw it, and her kind heart smote her. "As for Gertrude— Well, we won't say anything about her, till we know more. Yes, Aunt Eunice, the young folks will keep house for you, and—and— Well, I'm just as sorry as can be that you have to go. If it had been to bring Gertie home, now."

"Home! She will never come home again," said the old woman, in a low dreary voice. "God has punished me for my pride. I have lost my child for ever and ever."

Here little Patty set the bowl of eggs down, and climbing into the old maid's lap, wound two plump little arms around her neck.

"Don't cry, Aunt Eunice—don't cry! 'Cause this ere little girl is a going to—to be awful good, and love you like sixty! Ask Mar if I can't. If my beau was to ask me ever so much I wouldn't go off and leave you. Chirk up, and don't mind a bit what Mar says. She don't mean nothing bad, and I'm going to York with you."

Mrs. Vane laughed.

"You, indeed!"

"Yes, Mar, we've got to see about our Gertie."

Aunt Eunice held the child close a minute, then turned to Mrs. Vane.

"Let her go. I shall not feel so strange, if she is with me!"

"Yes, Mar. She'd feel awfully," said the child, shaking her pretty head.

"But what would Par say?"

"I'll go and see," cried the little girl, leaping to the floor, and darting off towards the mill.

"You will let her go. It seems so lonesome for me to start off by myself," said Aunt Eunice, rising. "And say nothing about this—this other wedding till I come back."

"It'll get out; it is sure to get out," answered Mrs. Vane, shaking her head, and seizing her spoon again. "But I will not say a word—not a word."

"Thank you," said Aunt Eunice, "I cannot think my girl means to do wrong."

With these brief words, the old maid tied her sun-bonnet, and went away. Mrs. Vane set down the cake-bowl, and watched her neighbor as she crossed the bridge, in a slow, hesitating way, as if heavy thoughts weighed down her footsteps. Mrs. Vane shook her head, which was not burdened at any time with too much thought.

"Poor soul!" she said. "That girl has nigh upon broken her heart, and then there is Webster. I do wonder how he takes it."

She was disturbed by little Patty, who came rushing into the kitchen, wild with excitement.

"I'm a going! I'm a going!" she shouted, beginning to untie her apron, as if instant preparation was important. "Par says he don't care, if you don't, and my new frock is all ready, with that pink sash; and I've got a segar-box for dolly's clothes, and we're a going in the railroad, where a great iron horse snorts fire, and drinks water, and—and, I'm just a going. No mistake about that, anyhow."

Mrs. Vane turned from the window, and held up her chubby finger at the child.

"You'll just tie that apron on again, and beat up them eggs, or I'll know the reason why."

"But the eggs are beat, till they ain't nothing but froth, Mar."

"Well, then, pick over the currants, and see that you don't eat more than you pick."

"But, oh, Mar! I've got so many things to pack," pleaded the child, tying her apron, under protest.

"Sit down there, Patty Vane, and just show how good you can be, if you want to go anywhere. Here, take these, and do them well. Remember, it's for sister's wedding."

Patty seated herself, with a heavy sigh, and, thrusting her little fist into the paper-bag, which had been left in her lap, began to pour the tiny fruit from one hand to the other, while she pursed up her mouth into a red rosebud, and blew the dust away, trembling with impatience all the time. At last she spoke pleadingly.

"Now, Mar, ain't I a going?"

"Yes. Now hurry up, or the oven will get cold."

## CHAPTER LXIV.

### AN HOUR AFTER.

SHE had come home from that party in a state of remorseful excitement. Had she met Hart Webster then the whole drift of her life might have been changed; but, instead of that, she was told that he had been at the house, inquired for Miss Foster, and, learning where she was, had followed her.

When Gertrude knew that her lover had absolutely been under the same roof with her, while the scene she shrunk from remembering was burning itself into her life, the shock struck her dumb. The atmosphere of the place she had left seemed to float around her still, and sicken her. The perfume of a particular plant in that window seemed to have filled her soul with subtle poison, and never afterward, in her whole life, did that odor reach her, though softened and buried in a dozen other perfumes, that she did not turn faint, and loathe the falsehood of that hour, and the life it had led to—the barren, miserable life, where a soul was buried and stifled under luxuries heaped upon her, with a profusion that sickened the senses they could alone hope to reach.

Miss Foster had seen Hart Webster, and mentioned that fact triumphantly, as she and the others were riding home.

"He followed me from the house," she said, "and we had a delightful waltz, before he inquired for you."



What a superb dancer he is ! Then my partner took me away, and I reminded him that you had gone towards the little boudoir with Rufus, and he followed you there ! ”

Here Gertrude gave a guilty start, and a cry of alarm almost broke from her lips ; but Foster softly clasped his hands, and rubbed the palms gently together in the darkness, drawing a deep, long breath of delight.

“ Followed her there, after he had danced with you,” he said, addressing his sister, after a moment’s pause, resolved to impress the neglect of the man he hated upon the woman he loved !

“ Indeed he did. What could you have been about that he did not go in ? I saw him near the door ever so long. Perhaps he did not care to interrupt a lover’s *tête-à-tête*.

“ That was considerate,” answered Foster, with a light laugh ; “ but I suppose you consoled him with another dance.”

“ No, I didn’t. He passed me like a storm, and went away before I could get rid of my partner. Something must have happened, for he did not even wait to bid me good-by, but rushed past me, white as a ghost, and with the most scornful smile I ever saw on his lips.”

“ Oh, we shall see him at the house. Never fear. These country gentlemen have a keen scent for gold.”

Jane Foster laughed.

“ And country ladies as well. Don’t you think so, Miss Harrington ? ”

There was no answer. For once Gertrude’s pride was all broken down. She did not even comprehend this last taunt ; but sat white and faint in her corner

of the carriage, filled with self-loathing and bitter humiliation.

Rufus Foster was mistaken. Hart Webster did not present himself at the Foster mansion that night ; but had left the city by a late train, before the family reached home.

When Miss Foster entered, she inquired eagerly if any person had called, or if no message had been left. Gertrude held her breath as the answer was given, and a moan of absolute pain died on her lips. He would not even deign to reproach her.

Miss Foster was greatly annoyed. She, too, had possessed herself in hope, and, after all her trouble, felt a keen sensation of defeat ; but she concealed it bravely, and ran up stairs, humming a tune as she went, while Gertrude followed after, without appearing to see the hand of Foster held out to her.

Miss Foster found Lois waiting, as she came into the room, singing a defiant little air.

“ Well, Lois, what has happened ? ” she questioned, airily, flinging off her cloak. “ Of course a gentleman called. I know that ; but what was said to him ? Who did he inquire for ? ”

“ Mademoiselle Harrington, as he always does. This time he wouldn’t take ‘ aut ’ for an answer, though it was the truth for once ; but he demanded with an air where she was, and who was with her. When we told him, he said he knew the gentleman who gave the party, and would call there. We tried one effort to make him believe we didn’t know the number ; but off he went, with a wave of his hand, so—as much as to say that he knew, and didn’t care whether we did or not.”

"But are you sure he did not come back again?"

"Sure! oh yes! Wasn't I listening?"

"And did he not once ask for me?"

"No more than if you had been a common person, instead of the distin—"

"There, there, Lois! Never mind. I am not tired of any of my dresses yet. Is Mrs. Foster's maid waiting for her young lady?"

"Oh, no! That is something I forgot to say. She's given out at last. When the gentleman called, she happened to be in the hall, and, though he didn't see her, it seemed as if the sound of his voice quite withered her. She ran up stairs, like a cat, and shut herself into her own apartment, which she hasn't left since, and won't for all my knocking; only answers through the keyhole that she's sick, with a fearful pain of the head, and gone to retire herself!"

"Gone to bed! Now that is fortunate. Go into Miss Harrington's room, with my compliments, and say that I sent you to help her undress. The rest you will understand."

"No, Mademoiselle, I don't understand anything, only that you haven't got tired of any dress yet; and I wasn't hired to serve the other young lady."

Miss Foster laughed, went to her wardrobe, and, taking down a dress of mauve cashmere, tossed it towards the girl.

"Go! You have the lesson by heart, I suppose," she said, rather pleased than otherwise with her maid's sharpness.

"Oh, this is generous!" said Lois, gathering the dress up in her arms. "Of course I go to oblige Mademoiselle!"

## CHAPTER LXV.

### SELF-ABNEGATION.

SARAH, Mrs. Foster's maid, was not in the rooms, as usual, to meet the young girl, and help her undress. Gertrude saw this with a sense of relief, and casting a dreary, half-wild look around, she flung herself on the couch, and lay there, with her rich garments sweeping to the floor, cold and white, with all her features locked, as if the stillness of death were creeping over her.

While she lay thus, lost to everything but her own sense of degradation, Lois entered the room.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle. It is not my wish to intrude, but my mistress, in her great bounty, was anxious. Madame's domestic has a *grande mal*—what you call head-ache, and has retired herself. If Mademoiselle will accept my service?"

Gertrude opened her eyes, and sat up, listening to this speech in dreamy unconsciousness of its meaning.

"What is it? Where did you come from?"

"*Mon Dieu!* how weary she is. Will it please Mademoiselle that I brush her hair and put on her garments for the night?"

"But you said something of Sarah. Where is she? If I need help she can give it."

"Sarah is ill—what you call worn out very much. She was much disturbed when the gentleman from

the country came. Ah, he was disappointed when we told him Mademoiselle Foster was departed to the assembly; my heart was full of pity for the poor gentleman."

"What gentleman are you speaking of?" questioned Gertrude with nervous sharpness.

"Monsieur—Monsieur Webster. The person who calls so many times when my mistress is alone—but will Mademoiselle permit me? Her toilet is being deranged."

Gertrude arose, fell into the low chair before her dressing-table, and submitted her head, aching with dull pain, to the girl.

"What beautiful hair, *magnifique*, superb. At first we thought it was Mademoiselle that the gentleman sought; that was natural, with so much beauty. But my young mistress is so rich, who could resist her?"

"I do not believe it! There cannot be two such traitors in the world. I—I—"

Here Gertrude broke down in her passion, and held her quivering lips close, that the sob which panted for a passage should not break through.

Lois felt the poor girl shiver from head to foot, as she gathered up the loose masses of her hair, and began to brush them vigorously, apparently unconscious of the pain she had given.

"*Voilà!* the hair is arranged," said Lois, dropping the massy braids to Gertrude's shoulders. "Now permit me to unlace the boots and lay out the night-robe. Then good-night. I must go to my lady again, she is so happy, singing like one bird—no wonder; the gentleman is very distinguished. Good-night, sleep well."

When the girl was gone, Gertrude arose from her chair, covered her face with both hands, and fell upon the couch again.

Then the door opened and Sarah Ann Ward came into the room, pale, quiet, but deadly white, and with dusky shadows under her eyes, as if she had put down some great pain hard to conquer and sad to bear.

"Are you asleep? Do you want me?" was her gentle inquiry.

Gertrude writhed upon her couch, and buried her shame-stricken face among its silken cushions.

"No, no, I want nothing on earth only to die where I am."

"You—you wish to die. Has love no greater happiness than this?" said Sarah in a tone of mournful reproach.

Gertrude started up almost fiercely. "Love! do you call a feeling that stings so, love? No, no, Sarah, we will for once be honest, I am leaving all hopes of love far, far behind me."

Sarah flung herself on her knees by the couch, and seizing Gertrude by the shoulders, turned her face forcibly to the light.

"Gertrude Harrington, you have seen Hart Webster. In your haughty pride you have quarrelled with him, but—but this is nothing. He will forgive, he loves you so—he loves you so."

The last words were spoken with a wail of suffering that must have startled Gertrude, but for the intense excitement she was under.

"Forgive it? Love me? Girl—girl you are wild to talk so! He knows how false I am. He saw that other

man by my side, his arm around my waist, coiled there like a serpent, his lips pressing kisses upon mine. He saw all this and still you talk of love."

Sarah stood motionless, struck with unutterable amazement. All at once a great rush of color swept her face. She began to tremble.

"Is this thing true?"

"No wonder you refuse to believe it," answered Gertrude, covering her burning face with both hands.

"But you love him still. It was a madness. The sin of a moment. You love him still, and he loves you!"

There was a mighty struggle going on in that loyal girl's heart, a struggle that sent the breath panting from her throat and filled her eyes with fiery tears. One great rush of joy had overwhelmed her. She felt like a prisoner from whose limbs heavy chains had fallen. This joy was but for a moment. Knowing as she did how thoroughly Hart Webster loved the girl who lay there grovelling in the shame of her infidelity, she had no right to rejoice.

"It was the rash act of a moment—you love him still," she said, kneeling down by the couch.

"But he does not love me; if he had this thing could not have happened," said Gertrude, stung into self-vindication by a sense of wrong.

"Oh, Gertrude, Gertrude Harrington! He does love you."

"If I thought so—if I could only think so."

"Would you thrust this silken viper aside then?"

"Yes, Sarah, I—I think I would."

"Think you would? Has it come to this, that you can stop to think between two such men?" said Sarah

with superb scorn; has vanity come so near overmastering love in any woman's soul?"

Gertrude started up and shrank back against the wall. Her lips trembled, her eyes drooped with treacherous cowardice.

"He has gone without asking an explanation, without waiting to upbraid me. He means to crush me with his silent scorn. God knows the blame is not all mine. To-morrow! to-morrow this other man will claim me. Have I promised? Ah me! I am tired, so tired of thinking."

"No," said Sarah, "Hart Webster is incapable of that. Be frank with him, before the next mail goes out, tell him everything."

"What can I say—what can I say? With what language can I exonerate myself?"

"Tell him the truth, that some unknown power has sown distrust between you. Tell him that his coldness, his silence, and his seeming preference of another, have driven you into great peril. Confess all. Say all. In the delirious vanity of a moment, you have given him cause to condemn you. It will be hard to forgive; but he loves you, and it will not be impossible—nothing is impossible to perfect love."

"I will write the letter," Gertrude promised.

"Before to-morrow's mail goes out?" said Sarah.

"The moment I awake—if I sleep at all," Gertrude answered, "the letter shall be written. If there is one spark of love left for me in his heart I will not marry this other man."

"Now I will go," said Sarah faintly, for the room began to reel around her and a slow sickness crept through her heart that had exhausted all its strength.

"I will go now, for it is very late and I have not been well."

Out from the room and up to the topmost story, the brave but most suffering girl glided, holding on to the banisters as she went. It seemed miles and hours before she reached her bed, on which she fell face downward and perfectly senseless.

With her own brave hands she had removed all impediments to Hart Webster's happiness, but it seemed as if the effort had killed her.

Gertrude did not sleep, or leave the silken rest of that couch all night long. The morning found her pale still, and mournfully heavy-eyed; but with a look of resolution in her face.

Still but half undressed,—for she had refused the French girl's offer to disrobe her entirely,—and with the crushed and silken robe of the evening before hanging in wrinkled masses around her, she wrote a frank, honest letter, full of passionate self-upbraiding blended with reproaches of Webster also; for this new feeling of self-abnegation did not possess the girl so entirely that she could not see wrong and neglect in him. But she wrote generously, offering to return home, and give up everything for his sake.

When the letter was written, she sealed it in rash haste, scarcely daring to trust herself even then.

"I will wait three days for the answer," Gertrude said to herself, before she gave up the letter. "If it comes, I give up all this, and go back to the old life." Here she cast a longing, regretful look around her pretty room, and a sigh stirred her bosom. "If not," she added, slowly, "if not, then all this is mine."

When Gertrude rang the bell, Lois answered it. A

moment she hesitated, then handed her letter to the girl.

"See that it is mailed at once."

"Yes, Mademoiselle, I will take care."

She did take care; for, three minutes after, Gertrude's letter was in the hands of Jane Foster, burning brightly in the gas flame, and falling in filmy fragments over her shaking hand, and the snowy marble of a table underneath.

"So much for that," whispered the young lady, a few minutes after, as she shook the black ashes of Gertrude's letter from her hand. "She can afford to wait for the answer."

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## CHAPTER LXVI.

### WAITING AND WISHING.

FOR three days Gertrude Harrington kept her room, sometimes wandering restlessly into the apartments of her aunt; but never going down stairs. Nor did she in any way permit herself to meet the anxious inquiries of Foster, who, again and again, entreated to see her. During this time the only cheerful person in the house was Miss Foster. She had reason to judge of the result of all this disturbance, which no other person dreamed of; and seeing events drift towards a marriage, which left Hart Webster free to her own hopes, grew unusually animated.

On the third day Gertrude was seized with a degree

of nervous restlessness which she had never in her young life felt before. Every sound of the bell, or even a foot-step in the hall, brought her to the door of her room, listening breathlessly for the letter which was to decide her fate.

Another person in that house was equally anxious and more hopelessly wretched. Sarah had resolutely made the greatest sacrifice that one female can give to a sister woman. Notwithstanding the difference in station, these two girls had progressed in culture and refinement with more than equal success; for, thrown into a whirl of society, given up to amusements as the business of life, Gertrude had lost much time which Sarah harvested industriously. It was impossible for a girl so bright and impressive to associate, in any capacity, with a lady like Mrs. Foster, without catching both grace and graciousness of manner. As water finds its level, so will human capacity. Though a servant in name, Sarah was in part the friend and companion of the two persons who made her duties so light that she scarcely felt them.

So, restless as Gertrude herself, and suffering far more than that pampered beauty ever could, Sarah waited the result of her own earnest work. At every ring of the bell she would start like a guilty thing, and listen for the expected letter until her very heart stood still with an agony of suspense.

Did she wish the letter to come? I cannot tell. One thing is certain—the last hope of her life hung upon it. If she waited with vague hope, it was also with fear and trembling.

Miss Foster, also, had her anxieties. Time to her was precious. Her little fabric of deceit might, at any

moment, be thrown into ruins by the treachery of her maid, or the chance delivery of a letter that had escaped her observation.

An intrigue, begun in wanton malice, had become of real importance to her. While attempting to break up the happiness of another person, she had involved her own. So far as a thoroughly selfish woman could feel, she had recklessly given her love to Webster, all the more because of his engagement with the girl she had so thoroughly disliked.

Like many of her class, Jane Foster had believed that the power of great wealth, and the charm of a fashionable position, would command the homage of any man whom she might choose to honor with her preference. She was, therefore, much astonished at the calm indifference with which her very positive advances had been received, by a man with whom she at first only intended to amuse herself, while annoying the person she disliked. This indifference, more than anything else, served to enlist her feeling, and strengthen what had been at first a caprice into a settled purpose.

Still, of the three persons thus suffering from suspense, Miss Foster was the most tranquil. Her brother once married, and her course would be easy enough. With Gertrude out of the way, she felt secure of her victim; either to reject with airy scorn, or accept with condescension—as might suit her best. So, warily, and with a degree of craft that was feline in its quietness, she allowed the days to glide by, regardless of everything but her own object.

Up to this time, her part in the estrangement of the betrothed couple had been unsuspected. She had counted adroitly on the chivalrous honor of Hart Webster

not to mention the letters he had written; and thus, like many another mean character, had used the grandest traits of humanity for the security of her own fraud. She could therefore afford to wait the turn of events, with something like patience.

Not so Gertrude Harrington. For three days the excitement of constant expectation had kept her up; but when the third night passed, and brought no word from Webster, all the pride and perversity of her nature rose, and hardened against him. She kept aloof from the family; and if Sarah even hinted at the subject which preyed upon her mind, she haughtily silenced her, or withdrew into her own room to brood alone.

"You have led me to degrade myself," she said to the girl one day, turning upon her in pale anger, "and I thank you for it. But for that, I might have repented and thought myself to blame. Now he will not dare to reproach me."

"Only have patience," Sarah replied. "If Hart Webster is alive, he will reply to your letter."

Gertrude only answered with a proud, ironical smile. It was a bitter thought, that she had humbled herself to a man who did not deign to acknowledge that he had even rejected her repentance—terribly bitter.

On the morning of the fourth day Gertrude went down to the library, with a look of haughty resolve on her handsome face.

Foster was sitting in his easy chair, gloomy, and almost sullen. She laid her hand lightly on his shoulder.

"Mr. Foster!"

Her voice was sweet, and full of encouragement. The glow of scarlet on her cheeks, and the restless fire

in her eyes, gave a resplendence to her beauty, that fairly dazzled him.

"At last!" he said. "At last you have taken pity on me. Gertrude, Gertrude, why have you kept aloof so long?"

"I was ill—stupid. I wanted time for thought."

"And now you come to me of your own free-will?"

"Of my own free-will!" she answered, placing both her white hands in those he held out.

He drew her towards him, not with the quick impetuosity of honest passion, but slowly, as Sybarites taste their wine.

"My beautiful! My queen!"

Gertrude smiled. She mistook this man's sensuous calculation for delicacy, and it pleased her.

"Do you really love me so much—so very much?" she whispered.

"Love you, my queen? Are you not beautiful?"

"But that will not last forever," said the girl, thoughtfully.

Foster smiled, and this was his thought, though he only expressed it unconsciously in the silent curve of his lips.

"Beauty never dies. When it fades on one face it beams in another."

If the girl could only have read his heart then!

"My lovely one! My wife!" he whispered, kissing her lips for the second time.

Was it the word or the kiss that sent a shudder through her frame?

"When shall it be? At once; without a week's delay, if my will prevails."

"Let it be in a week," she answered.



## CHAPTER LXVII.

### THE DAY BEFORE GERTRUDE'S WEDDING.

IT was true; invitations to Gertrude Harrington's and Rufus Foster's wedding were thick as drifting leaves, in what our dainty Willis called the upper ten thousand. The whole thing had been arranged so suddenly that it fairly took away the girl's breath.

The wedding preparations were both rapid and superb; the trousseau something to marvel at, even in this extravagant age. Mrs. Foster was liberal beyond the generosity of most parents, and her step-son munificent in the gifts he lavished upon this girl from the country, whom he hardly thought worthy of a bow when they first met.

Of course, society was in a delightful ferment. The "great catch" of many seasons had been lured from its midst by a young creature, scarcely known in select circles a few months before. Of course, she was criticised, admired, traduced, and worshipped after the usual fashion of success. People wondered, sneered, and invented little romances about the girl, which kept up the excitement, and gave piquancy to the occasion.

All this time Gertrude was in a whirl of excitement, reckless, defiant of her fate, growing hard and selfish every hour of her life. Nothing was too elegant or expensive for her choice. Feeling in every nerve and fibre of her person that she had been bought with

### THE DAY BEFORE THE WEDDING. 369

a price, she determined to have the full value of her bargain; but her extravagance was recklessness—her happiness the delirium of insatiable vanity.

During the first days of this brilliant turmoil, Sarah, the bright girl, who had been, in some sense, a check upon Gertrude, was seriously ill. On the day before the wedding, she came down from her room, pale, large-eyed, and evidently nervous from confinement, or some deeper cause.

When she entered that pretty bower-room Gertrude was alone, seated drearily by the window, looking out upon the sunset, which she was never to see again as an honorable and self-respecting woman. She knew what others did not, that to-morrow's ceremony would give her to a man whom she had never loved, and never could love. She, too, began to feel that the very abundance and rich prodigality with which her treason was rewarded, had destroyed its own importance. By forestalling every want, this rich family had robbed the girl of her very desires.

The room which Sarah entered was transformed and littered with such costly things as might have befitted an Eastern princess. On the bed lay a glittering mass of satin, broken up with clouds and waves of frost-like lace, through which the lustrous fabric gleamed like crusted snow under a shimmer of moonlight. The couch and each chair was laden down with superb dresses, ready for packing; shawls, that seemed woven out of our richest autumnal tints; fans, worth thrice their weight in gold, and shoes of every color and form; handkerchiefs worth the old-fashioned New England "setting out" of a young married couple, and laces, you could easily have gathered up in your hands, that

would have sold for more than the old red farm-house, taking in pear-trees and orchard.

All this lay around the girl, mellowed softly by the gathering twilight, when Sarah came in, with a strange light in her eyes, and a quiver of pain about her mouth.

Gertrude started up, surprised. She had not seen the girl since her second engagement, nor even thought of her, save now and then with a sense of relief that she was out of the way with those great, searching eyes, that had stung her so often with their silent reproaches.

"Sarah!"

"Yes," answered the girl. "I have come at last. Too late, I fear, to do much good!"

"Oh, do not mind that. One cannot help being ill; but your hands are cold as death. You shiver so," said Gertrude, in a hurried, breathless way—for Sarah had drawn close to her, and was holding out both hands, which the young lady was constrained to take in spite of herself.

"Yes, I have been very ill; so ill that no one told me anything. I only heard it now, and come here out of my bed."

"But that was quite unnecessary. We are getting along very well. Go back to your room, Sarah. I will not let you run risks for me!"

"But I came on purpose. I could not rest after they told me."

"Ah!" answered Gertrude, laughing nervously; "but why should anything disturb you so?"

Sarah sank into a chair, unconsciously crushing a rich garment that had been thrown over it.

"Is it true?" she said, casting an excited look around the room. "Are these wedding-dresses?"

"Of course it is true," answered Gertrude, with a little nervous laugh. "One must be married sometime, you know!"

"And to that man, Rufus Foster?"

"There, there!" broke forth the bride, putting out her hand, impatiently. "We must not begin this subject again. These are my wedding-dresses. To-morrow I shall be married."

"To that man?"

"Yes, to that man!" was the defiant answer.

"And he, Hart Webster?"

"Hart Webster? Well, what of him? To-morrow will set him free to marry Miss Foster. She has got all that I lack—plenty of gold."

"Miss Foster?" answered the girl, and her pale face was one blaze of indignation. "Miss Foster! Can Hart Webster be 'bought with a woman's gold?'"

"I fancy so," answered Gertrude, with a scoff on her beautiful lip. "Such things have been."

"Not with men like him, Gertrude Harrington. If you have walked towards this precipice believing that Hart Webster ever thought of any other girl for a wife, you have done a weak and wicked thing."

## CHAPTER LXVIII.

### HEARTS AND DIAMONDS.

A SUDDEN gleam of enlightenment flashed across Gertrude's brain. She stood for a moment looking at Sarah in silent wonder.

"Who are you, girl? Why is it that you shake and tremble so when Hart Webster is named? Why do you plead for him as he has never yet cared to plead for himself? Speak once for all. What is this man to you?"

"Nothing, yet everything. Gertrude Harrington, I love the man you are casting from you—have loved him, I think, ever since I can remember."

"You! you Sarah? And he?"

"Loved you—loves you yet. I am nothing to him."

"And you know—you believe that he loves me?"

"I know it. You say I tremble when his name is mentioned; can I help it, knowing that he loves you."

"Yet? Even now?"

"Even now."

"And you can plead his cause with me?"

"Yes, because I love him better than all the world—better than myself; love him so dearly, so desperately, that I can have nothing but misery if he is not happy."

"Sarah, you are a strange girl."

"Ah, yes," sighed the poor girl, wearily. "Very

(372)

### HEARTS AND DIAMONDS.

373

strange, and very, very wretched, because I know how to pity him."

"Sarah, tell me what brought you here? I begin to see it was no want of money, or thirst for knowledge, that tempted you from home."

"Sometimes the unhappy have no reason for their movements beyond the restlessness of suffering. I left home to escape the thoughts that were killing me. Sorrow is the root of many great efforts. Out of mine sprung a resolution to drive regrets from my mind with knowledge. It may be that lore is with a woman deprived of love, what the husks are without corn; but you know that I have tried hard to content myself."

"But why did you come here?"

"It seemed an accident, but I think that God sent me to save you from a great sin. Even now it is not too late."

"Hush, Sarah, I cannot listen to this, I do not understand it. It is a phase of love too grand for me."

"Heaven forbid that you ever should understand it."

"But how could you stay here of all places in the world, believing as you did?"

"I do not know. It seemed to me that staying here I could cure myself, or break my heart. I—I thought that the sight of him and you engaged, loving each other, and with such a right to be happy, would rouse up the pride that ought to be in every girl's heart, and drive this feeling out of mine."

"But you have not seen him here so often after all," said Gertrude, with a low, bitter laugh.

"Whose fault is that, Miss Harrington?"

"His, of course."

"I do not believe it. He has been here many times," said Sarah.

"Yes, and contented himself with such interviews as Miss Foster awarded."

"She forced them upon him. I am certain of it!"

"Did she force him to almost cease writing?"

"I believe he did write."

"And to dip his pen in ice when he wrote?" continued Gertrude, growing more and more bitter.

Sarah arose, pale, a little faint, but resolute.

"I know that he is not to blame," she said. "Put off the iniquity of this wedding one day, I only ask that."

"Put it off! Why, girl, the invitations are all out!"

"Still, put it off! I charge you, or all the sin will be yours."

For one moment the girl hesitated; but that instant Lois came in, with a parcel in her hand.

"Something else from Ball and Black's, Mademoiselle, which the man said I was to be careful of."

Gertrude reached out her hand eagerly. She was grateful for the interruption, eager to examine this new gift. She tore away the tissue paper that covered it, and revealed a purple leather case, clasped with gold.

"Let me assist you," said Lois, touching the spring.

"Oh, how beautiful! they are enough to blind one."

It was true; the gaslight fell like living fire on a mass of great diamonds, coiled on the satin cushion; such diamonds as a queen might wear at her coronation.

Gertrude's face had been pale a moment before; but

it flamed up with roses now, and the last struggle of honor and of love was burned out of her heart by the fire in those jewels.

"Did *he* send them?" she demanded of Lois.

"Indeed he did."

Gertrude swept out of the room, carrying the jewels in her hand, without even noticing Sarah. She found Foster in the drawing-room, walking up and down in pleasant excitement. He was fancying how she would receive his princely gift; if all the fire of his diamonds would bring a glow of love-light to her beautiful eyes. She came in with the jewels, her face radiant, her hands fairly shaking with delight.

"Oh, they are so beautiful!" she said, placing them on the table, directly under the gaslight, and feasting her eyes afresh on them. "How can I ever repay you?"

"There is a way," answered the man, softly stooping towards her.

She understood him, hesitated one instant, then flung both arms around his neck, and almost passionately answered the kisses he pressed upon her lips.

That moment, Sarah, who had been left up stairs, took a quick resolve. She looked at the tiny clock on the mantel-piece, made a rapid calculation of the hours, and hurried up stairs, panting for breath, and muttering to herself.

"It is possible. There will not be a minute to spare; but it is possible."

Before ten minutes had elapsed, the girl came into the lower hall, with her bonnet on, and carrying a satchel in her hand.

As she turned the latch to go out, an old woman had her hand on the bell-knob, and a little girl was

standing half-way down the steps, gazing eagerly up at the windows.

"Does Mrs. Foster live here?" asked Aunt Eunice, timidly, for the stir and noises in the great city terrified her, while they delighted the child.

"Yes," answered Sarah, in a low voice. "Ring, the man will come."

Sarah knew the old lady, and being nervous from her illness, feared a recognition; but in turning her face from Aunt Eunice, she brought it fairly upon the child, and, what was worse, received the full light of a street-lamp upon it.

Little Patty sprang forward, with a cry of joy, and seized upon Sarah's garments, as she was hurrying down the steps.

"I say, boy! boy! Oh, my! it isn't him; but a girl that has stole his big eyes."

With all her anxiety Sarah could not prevent the little half-frightened laugh that broke from her, as Patty released her dress, and drew back, in puzzled consternation; but, without saying a word, she darted down the steps, and disappeared.

It was now dark, and the girl walked so rapidly, that she more than once stopped for breath before she reached the depot. She was just in time for the train, and in less than twenty minutes, was whirled away from New York, while her pale head rested on the cushions of her seat, and her eyes were closed with exhaustion.

## CHAPTER LXIX.

### COUNTRY HONESTY.

"AUNT EUNICE!"

Gertrude's voice faltered, and her eyelids drooped, as that grim New England woman held her back at arm's length, and examined her from head to foot, with a cool, dissatisfied look.

"Are you my niece?" she said, at last, receiving Gertrude's ready kiss on her withered cheek without returning it.

"Just as sure as this is darling little Patty," answered the girl, with an affectation of joyous warmth, as she lifted Patty Vane from the marble floor, and kissed her rapturously. "Come up stairs, aunt, and take off your things. This way."

"Wait a minute. Who is that man in there?" said Aunt Eunice. "I want to know."

"It—it is Mr. Foster, aunt."

"Mr. Foster? But how came his name on your wedding-card, instead of Hart Webster? That is what I have come down to York to hear about."

"Dear aunt, come up stairs, and I will tell you all. Indeed I will."

"That is about what I want. Come along, Patty."

"Come into my room, first; then I will tell Aunt Foster that you have come. We didn't quite expect—

that is, we were afraid you mightn't like to leave the farm."

Aunt Eunice followed her niece into the room, so richly crowded with the wedding paraphernalia, and looked around her in grim amazement.

"There is no place to sit down in here," she said. "Where is my sister's room? I'd rather take my chances for a talk with her. It's nigh on to twenty years since I've seen her; but she can't be altered as much as you are. It wasn't in her."

Gertrude went up to the old woman, in her old caressing fashion.

"Oh, aunt, you are angry with me."

"Yes, I am."

"You think I have done wrong?"

"I know you have. So wrong that I don't mean to stand it. My word was given to that young man, as well as yours; and I'm going to find out who has been a trifling with it."

"Oh, aunt, stay a minute. He did it himself; he neglected me, you can't think how much. Sometimes he would be weeks together without writing."

"Hum! Don't believe it was his fault."

"More than once he has come to the city without seeing me at all."

"Hum!"

"Only last week—"

Here Gertrude broke down. She remembered the scene in that little retiring-room, and the words she would have uttered died in her throat.

"Well, what did he do last week, Gertrude?"

"Nothing, only he came and went away, without speaking a word to me."

"Why?" questioned Aunt Eunice.

"I—I— How can I tell?"

"Do you mean to say, Gertrude Harrington, that Hart Webster has given you up?"

"Yes, aunt, I do—for it was as good as that."

"And you have made up your mind to marry this man?"

"You know I have, aunt. He loves me so devotedly, and he is so—so—"

"Rich. I understand; but, my child, my own dear brother's child, there is no need that you should sell yourself, body and soul, for property. I have never said it before, not wishing to set you up too much; but the farm will be all yours and everything on it. There is money, too, in the bank. Seven thousand dollars and more, which I will make over to you and Hart Webster the day you are married."

Tears came into Gertrude's eyes. The kind simplicity of this offer touched her sensibly. Still a smile broke through it all. Seven thousand dollars! Why, the centre pendant in that necklace had cost twice the sum.

"Dear Aunt Eunice, do not urge me. All is broken off between Hart Webster and myself. You ask me to cruelly insult those who have made me all that I am."

"All that you are, Gertrude Harrington, said the old woman, with slow, stern sarcasm in her face and voice. "Yes, they have made you all that you are."

After awhile Aunt Eunice spoke again.

"I will tell my sister just what I think of all this, and go home again. I'll not stay to this wicked wedding."

Little Patty began telling all the news from home as soon as Aunt Eunice had gone.

"Oh, yes, Clara is married, sure enough. She and Guy are keeping house for Aunt Eunice, while we are away, and, oh, goodness! don't they love one another. You should see him a holding of her hand when they sit together by the window. Happy? I should think so."

Gertrude drew a deep breath, and shrunk away from the child.

"Let us talk of something else," she said, sharply. "How would you like to be a bridesmaid?"

"Bridesmaid? What's that?"

"To be dressed up in a lovely white dress."

"With my pink sash?" interrupted Patty, breathless with expectation.

"No. With a new white sash, and a wreath of roses on your head."

"Oh, that would be lovely."

"And then walk behind me into church with another little girl," added Gertrude, drawing a deep heavy sigh. "It might please Aunt Eunice. Would you like it, Patty?"

"Wouldn't I?" shouted Patty, throwing herself into Gertrude's lap, and covering her face with a transport of kisses. "Wouldn't I?"

## CHAPTER LXX.

### THE OLD SISTERS.

MRS. FOSTER sat alone in her room. She was generally a placid woman; but shades of trouble lay upon her sweet old face, and she seemed burdened with a load of responsibility that weighed down her spirits. Perhaps it was the sudden surprise of the wedding that had overwhelmed her. Certain it was, that no one had ever seen her face so clouded for years.

The door opened, and a tall, gaunt old woman stalked into the room, with an umbrella in one hand and an old-fashioned carpet-bag in the other.

Mrs. Foster had not heard the door open, and for a full minute Aunt Eunice stood on the threshold, regarding her sister with a strange, wistful trembling of the features more pathetic than tears.

It was a lovely picture of dainty old-age that she gazed upon—a drooping, sweet-faced woman, crowned with soft white hair, over which a barb of filmy lace floated like a mist; garments of some delicate, gray fabric fell around her; and two little white hands had fallen supinely on her lap, where a half-finished bit of lace-work was lying.

"Sister."

Mrs. Foster looked up, saw the woman standing there leaning heavily upon her umbrella, and for one instant was lost in astonishment. Then she slowly



rose, her eyes seemed fascinated, her mouth began to quiver, her hands, with no seeming volition of hers, were held out.

"Eunice! Is it my sister Eunice?"

The stern old woman held out her arms; they shook like dry boughs in winter; they clasped themselves around the dainty old lady, who crept lovingly into their shelter; and then Aunt Eunice broke down, almost for the first time in her life,—broke down, and cried like a child.

"At last you have come, and I welcome you only with tears," said Mrs. Foster, lifting her sweet face all wet with tears to her sister. "I was thinking of you, Eunice, with a longing wish that you would come."

"I know, I know, child, you have need of me just now."

It seemed strange to hear an old woman with the snow of so many years on her head called child, but the relations of those two sisters seemed to justify it even then; the one was so sensitive and delicate, the other strong as a weather-beaten tree.

"I was almost afraid to have you come, all this has been so sudden," said Mrs. Foster trying to smile.

"No wonder that you feel timid, I was sure you would. This girl is bringing great trouble on us."

"Do you think so?" faltered the more gentle sister.

"Think? there is no doubt of it. What woman ever gained happiness by breaking faith with an honest man."

"I know, I know; but the blame seems to rest with him. Indeed it does."

"With him? I don't believe it. A truer-hearted young fellow never lived. But the girl; I have seen

her and she can't look me square in the face. Something wrong about it—but not with him."

"I do not know; he has been here often, still, somehow I have not had much chance to see him—but it is all over now; Rufus will make her a kind husband, I hope and trust."

"Sister!"

Mrs. Foster started. No wonder. The old woman's voice had changed into such hard and stern tones.

"What—what is it, Eunice?"

"Have you told this man Foster, your step-son?"

"Told him? Oh, Eunice! I dare not, you will not ask it?"

"No, child, I will do it myself."

"No, no, Sister Eunice, you must not do that," pleaded the little lady, white with terror.

Eunice looked steadily into that frightened face; her own grew stern and severe.

"There is nothing to be frightened about," she said, gravely. "Why do you tremble so?"

"It always makes me tremble. I cannot think that way without dread," was the hesitating reply. "I have not had courage to speak of it. Above all, oh, Eunice! Eunice! keep it from my step-son. You do not know how haughty he is, how proud of his position."

"Proud of his position is he?—feels lowered, I'll be bound, when he takes our niece for a wife. Let him know the truth, and give her up. She may yet have the chance she wants to fling away of marrying an honest man. He rose above it all without a word or a look. Let us see how this silky chap takes it."

"Eunice! Sister Eunice! I beg, I entreat. Do

you wish to kill your only sister the first time we have met for years?"

The distress of the little lady was piteous. She clung to Eunice like a child, as if her feeble strength could hold her back.

"Be it so then," said the old maid at last, stooping down and kissing that troubled face. "I come here to save discord, not make it." But *she* must know it. Then let her conscience say what is to be done with our secret.

"Must this be?"

"It must be, or evil will come of it. Had she been faithful and honest with Hart Webster, all this needn't have happened. He was too grand, too noble, for one look backward or one hint to her. But this man, I only wish he may be mean enough to give her up. It will be the saving of her, body and soul."

"And death to me," pleaded Mrs. Foster, desperately.

"Oh, sister, Rufus is not like his father!"

"I dare say, if his father was good for anything."

"He was good," cried the little lady, kindling up with a sudden thrill of pride, "but his children never really loved me. They found it hard to overlook my position and my poverty. After they know this— Oh, sister, for my sake, keep our secret. Why should they ever be made to hate me?"

Eunice attempted to smooth the soft white hair that rested on her bosom, but her hard hand got entangled in the lace, and she gave up the caress. She was of a nature to resist argument and sift reason, but pathetic pleading like that softened her almost to tears.

"Still I must tell Gertrude. If the man loves her, this will be nothing to him. She can persuade him to keep the whole thing to himself. Why, an ox team and horses could not have dragged it out of Hart Webster. It would come hard and tough from an old woman like you. I can understand that, but with her, and just now. Well, well, sister, we will leave it there. It isn't straightforward as I meant to do it, but maybe you know best."

Mrs. Foster gave a great sigh of relief.

"Oh, Eunice, you are just as good as ever, no one ever had to ask anything of you twice. I shall breathe freely again now, only try to break it kindly to Gertrude, she is so sensitive, so proud."

"I know all about it. This is her first cross, do you think I mean to crush her with it? You can depend on me, now let us talk of something else."

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## CHAPTER LXXI.

### AT SUPPER.

WHEN Aunt Eunice entered Gertrude's room again she found that young lady sitting at a little mosaic table, on which a dainty cloth of damask linen had been thrown, pacifying the keen hunger of little Patty with cakes and fruit, while some more substantial viands were in course of preparation down stairs. Patty nodded eagerly, when the old woman appeared, and would have spoken, but her mouth was

so full of candied cherries that an effort might have strangled her.

"I thought you would like to take your supper up here," said Gertrude. "Besides I want you all to myself now. Let me take off your bonnet; dear me the strings are in a hard knot. Patty, jump down and ring the bell. Sarah will be here in a minute and set you all right, aunt."

Patty jumped down from her chair, and looked eagerly around.

"Where is the bell-rope, Gertie? I don't see none."

Gertrude laughed, and going up to the bell knob, turned it.

"What, that little chunk of silver stuck in the wall, you don't call that a bell? There ain't a mite of ring to it. Don't even tinkle. Does it now?" said the child, with wondering disdain.

"Did you ring, Mademoiselle," said Lois, opening the door.

"Yes, where is Sarah?"

"Gone."

"Gone! how? When?"

"Are you speaking of a young girl with great black eyes like a scared rabbit, and a face that keeps you thinking about it, whether you want to or not," said Aunt Eunice, surveying Lois from head to foot.

"It is true, Madame has seen her on the steps. I was in the hall when she went by like a bird that takes flight."

"She will come back, Sarah cannot have gone for good," said Gertrude with a sinking heart, for she was seized with a vague dread that the girl might in

some way interfere with the destiny she was now determined on.

"Can I be of service to Madame, your aunt," said Lois. "It will give me much pleasure."

Lois came forward and was about to take the umbrella from Aunt Eunice, but the old maid held it firmly.

"No, thank you, Miss, I can take care of my own things. What I do want is to be left alone with my niece here."

"Ah, as Madame pleases," answered Lois, with a pert little shrug of the shoulders, which Patty admired exceedingly and imitated at once.

"Yes, you can go, Lois, only when Sarah returns send her here."

"Who is that, and what is she?" questioned Aunt Eunice, taking off her bonnet and shaking the dust from it. "How them cars do take up dust. Now just show me where I can wash my hands."

"This way, aunt."

Gertrude opened a door and the old maid looked at herself from head to foot in the tall mirror of a dressing-table, on which brushes of carved ivory, perfume bottles of crystal, mounted with gold, and a cushion of white satin sprinkled with pearls, bewildered her with their richness.

What a grim, dusty figure she looked among all this luxury.

"Here is water and towels," said Gertrude, shrinking from the rugged scorn in her aunt's face as she turned a silver faucet and sent a stream of sparkling water into a marble basin.

Aunt Eunice set down her umbrella, and took off

her cotton gloves. The cool dash of the water had softened her scorn of the costly objects that surrounded her. Plunging both hands into the basin, she deluged her face, with a soothing sense of enjoyment; let down her hair, and absolutely seized upon one of the carved ivory brushes, with which she dashed away right and left, till the whole mass floated like a gray banner over her shoulders.

"There, that's something like! A good wash is better than a night's sleep. Wait till I give my hair a twist, and get a clean collar from my carpet-bag, then I'm ready for supper. Now, what are you about, Patty?"

"Reckon I want to dress up too," answered the little girl, dragging a gilded chair up to the marble basin. "It's enough to do one good to hear the water run. Puts me in mind of the mill-dam. Oh! ain't it nice?"

"Let me help you, Aunt Eunice," said Gertrude, in her sweet, caressing way, which had taken a softer fascination from the refinements of the last year. "It—It'll seem like old times, and I do remember them!"

"Do you really?" said Aunt Eunice, resigning the brush, and seating herself before the glass. "Oh, Gertie, Gertie, I wish you had never come away from home!"

There was a thrill of tears in the old woman's voice that made the brush tremble in Gertrude's hand; and, for the moment, her heart echoed that wish with yearning fondness. But she had made up her mind; and put such feelings aside, with firmness worthy of a better cause.

"There, Aunt Eunice, look at yourself," she said,

standing back that the old maid might see her whole image in the glass.

Aunt Eunice did not even cast a glance that way; for her eyes were full of tears—and she was ashamed of them.

Little Patty made short work of her toilet; for the supper had been brought into the next room, and she was in her seat by the table, ready to preside over the glittering silver and crystal, when the aunt and niece came out of the dressing-room.

"Oh, Aunt Eunice, do hurry and set down, I'm so awfully hungry!" said the little girl.

Aunt Eunice hesitated, and looked severely at the man-servant who stood ready to remove the covers.

"By-and-by, child." Then whispering to Gertrude, she added, "I'd rather not have any strange gentleman to dinner, especially if it's *him*. Time enough when I can't help it."

Gertrude blushed, cast a quick glance at the servant to be sure that he had not heard the whisper, and quietly told him that he might withdraw.

"Now," she said, making a great effort at cheerfulness, we have everything to ourselves. Sit down, aunt, and let me wait on you."

"Well, this is something like," said the old maid, drawing a chair to the table, while Gertrude removed the silver covers. Snug, and what I call comfortable! especially when one hasn't eat anything since early morning."

"I hope they have sent up something that you will like," said Gertrude, taking refuge in her hospitable duties from a feeling of awkwardness and vague apprehension, which had oppressed her ever since her aunt

came into the house. "Ah, here is something that you are fond of, I know."

"Yes—chicken's liver," said Aunt Eunice, taking the plate offered to her, and turning its contents over with her fork. "Yes; there is nothing that I like as I do chicken's liver; but your people must kill an awful lot of poultry to have so many at once."

Gertrude winced a little at this observation, and was thankful that the man-servant had been sent out. But she had learned to control herself, and give no sign of the apprehensions with which these primitive observations filled her.

Before the meal was half over, little Patty had fallen asleep, with her arms folded on the table and a bunch of forced grapes in her hand.

Aunt Eunice arose and took the child in her arms.

"The poor little thing is sound asleep," she said. "Supposing we put her to bed. Where shall I carry her?"

Here Patty began to struggle and called out sleepily:

"Oh, Aunt Eunice, let me alone—I want to sleep with Gertie, and she wants me to, awfully. Don't you, now, Gertie?"

"Indeed, I do—and I promised it while you were in the other room, Aunt; bring her in here." Gertrude opened the door of her bed-room, and, after the sleepy child was disrobed, Aunt Eunice laid her down among the embroidery and lace that frosted the pillows of that luxurious bed.

"There, let her sleep," said the old woman, insensibly impressed by the splendor that had so wrought

upon the more sensuous nature of her niece. "It won't do her any harm for one night, I reckon. Now Gertrude, I must have some talk with you."

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## CHAPTER LXXII.

### A BITTER SECRET.

"COME here, Gertrude."

Aunt Eunice drew a low chair close to the couch on which she placed herself, and motioned with her hand that the girl should sit upon it.

Gertrude saw that the old woman's face was pale, and that her eyes were heavy with troubled thoughts. A faint shiver came over her as she took the seat, and for a full minute there was dead silence between the two.

"Gertrude!"

"Yes, aunt."

"I have got something to say to you that makes my heart ache in my bosom."

"Oh, aunt, if it is about him— If you wish me to draw back at this the eleventh hour, it is impossible. So spare me and yourself. My future is settled, I cannot change it without double dishonor. I would not if it were possible. Aunt, do not condemn me too much; but I am totally unfit for a poor man's wife. All the ease and luxury of this existence, the homage, the triumphs, have unfitted me for simple happiness. I must be supreme or nothing. It is wrong, it is

selfish—mean, you will think; but I cannot help it. I am what the last year has made me.”

The old woman waited patiently till this burst of worldly eloquence broke down. Then she said, with a gravity which had a kind of mournfulness in it:

“As to that, you have taken your own way, and must follow it to the end; I shall not speak another word to hinder it. But there is something that you ought to know and that I must tell you about.”

“What is it, aunt?” questioned the girl in a low frightened voice, “I am ready to listen.”

“Gertrude—”

Here the old woman stopped. The words she wanted, seemed to choke her.

“Gertrude, you have no remembrance of your father?”

“No,” answered the girl.

“You have never heard me or your Aunt Foster speak of him.”

“I cannot remember that you ever did.”

“Nor of your mother. Didn’t you ever think it strange?”

“No, I—I cannot remember thinking much about it in any way. You have always seemed like a mother to me.”

“Still, you had a mother as handsome and nearly as young as you are.”

“I know you once told me how handsome she was, and that she died young.”

“Yes, she died young.”

“And my father—”

“Your father is alive now.”

“My father alive now. How! Where!”

The old woman’s lips were white as snow, and the next words that passed through seemed to freeze them.

“He was insane—or a dreadfully wronged man.”

“Alive! Insane! Oh, no—no—no!”

“It is the truth; a bitter, bitter truth, that we—the poor woman in yonder and I—have kept faithfully, wickedly, I begin to think, all these years, ever since you learned to walk, Gertrude.”

“You kept this secret—you—and no one ever suspected it. Oh! aunt! aunt! why did you tell me of it at all? Take it back, take it back, if you would not kill me. How can I bear it? How can I bear it?”

“I have borne it almost since you were born,” said Aunt Eunice, “only two persons beside your Aunt Foster and myself ever heard of your connection with it.”

“Two persons! Oh, heavens! then it is known!” cried Gertrude, covering her face with both hands, and shuddering from head to foot. “How could you—how could you! Who are these persons? Tell me, that I may shun them.”

“One was Hart Webster. The other a man who loved me once.”

“Hart Webster! and you told him! When?”

“When he asked my consent that you should marry him.

“And he never mentioned it—never gave me the vaguest hint.”

“Because he loved you; because he was so grand and good that this awful story only made him love you more than ever, and pity you with a great pity that was softer and deeper than love. If, in his soul, he made a sacrifice, you would never have heard of it to your dying day. This is the man that you have given up.”

Gertrude tried to protest, and say that this was not true; that Webster had given her up; but in the depths of her soul she felt the falsehood which her voice refused to utter. A sense of her own unfaithfulness, which had come upon her heart as a flower sickens and fades in its own perfume, filled her with self-loathing. She knew, in her soul, that something she had shrunk from examining, had been cast between her and this man. That she had half wished him to prove the ingrate she knew herself to be. Even, when love had seemed to conquer, and she had expressed herself willing to give up everything for his sake, she was conscious of such hesitation and doubt as forbade perfect joy, if he had proved himself in every way loyal to the love he had spoken.

"This is the man that you have given up," said Aunt Eunice, growing impatient of Gertrude's long silence. "We shall soon find out if this other fellow is worthy to untie his shoes; I for my part don't believe he is."

"You speak of Rufus Foster," said Gertrude, hoarsely, and with only a confused sense of her aunt's meaning.

"Yes, I speak of Rufus Foster, the rich Foster, who is ready to buy you away from the man you love. Who has bought you, body and soul, Gertrude Harrington."

"Aunt, aunt, I will not hear this even from you. Mr. Foster has never attempted to buy me. He has been kind, very kind—attentive when others neglected me. Think how dearly he must love me when so many of the first ladies of the land would go down upon their knees to take my place to-morrow. If

Hart Webster had loved me like that, would he sit quietly in his office and make no effort to wrest me from the fate that must separate us forever—no matter what I had done."

Here Gertrude broke down and began to cry bitterly.

"Do you want him to come?"

"No, no. Even now he may be calculating the chances of disgrace that might fall upon him. Such men are capable of cool after-thoughts. No wonder he has kept aloof."

"Gertrude Harrington, you are slandering a good man," cried the old woman, pushing the girl away from her, "a man so good, that you, poor, frivolous, selfish child, can't understand him."

"At any rate all is over between us. Let the subject drop. I cannot bear it," said Gertrude dashing away her tears. "Now tell me once for all about—about the person you speak of."

"Your father?"

"Yes, my father," answered the girl with an effort.

"I did not mean to tell you now or ever," answered the old maid. "It was my duty to let the man you promised to marry know everything; that was enough. But you have forced me to speak and to make your heart heavy as mine has been with this hard secret."

"They have told me, or I read somewhere, that 'insanity is inherited,'" whispered Gertrude with a shiver, thinking of herself rather than of the poor man who had been shut out from the world all her life. Was that why you kept it so close? Was that why you felt it a duty to tell Hart Webster?"

"It was a hard, hard duty," answered Eunice with



slow hesitation, "but twice I have performed it. Now it is your turn."

"My turn? What do you mean, Aunt Eunice?"

"Before to-morrow morning, Gertrude, you must tell this—and God help you! more, too, than this—to the man down stairs."

"To—to Mr. Foster?"

"Yes, to Mr. Foster."

"Oh, aunt, you cannot ask this of me!" pleaded the poor girl, breathless with the swift panic that came upon her.

"If you tremble and shiver at this, how will you find courage to tell the rest," said the old woman, in a voice so low and hoarse that the poor girl could scarcely catch its meaning.

"The rest, the rest—oh, aunt, is there anything more."

The old woman's voice grew more and more husky.

"Your father was insane at the time, Gertrude. Remember that always. Wholly, thoroughly insane, —or wholly innocent; but he was convicted of killing your mother."

"Killed my mother? Oh, aunt, aunt, have mercy on me!" shrieked the poor girl, falling upon her knees, and clutching her aunt's dress as if the inheritance of madness had seized upon her that moment.

"He was tried for it, and would have been ex—"

"No, no! Do not say that, unless you wish to see me die here at your feet."

"He was my half-brother, yet I heard the whole of it. Three days I sat by him on the criminal's bench. The jury brought him in guilty—he was condemned—"

"To death? My father? I will not believe it."

"Still it is true. We appealed to the governor—we got an examination before commissioners—and the sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life."

"Imprisonment for life? Where, where is he now?"

"In the State Prison."

"Oh!"

It was neither a word, a groan, or a sigh that broke from those white lips—but something more heart-rending than language can express. If she had intended to speak, the strength was taken from her, and Gertrude fell forward with her face upon the old maid's lap.

Then all that was harsh went out of that kind old heart. Aunt Eunice took the fainting girl up into her arms, laid the deathly face on her bosom, and strove to kiss it into warmth and life again.

"Poor child! poor, dear child! her heart is broken at last. Oh, why did she make me do it? Why did she? Gertie, little Gertie, wake up—wake up. Aunt Eunice suffers more than you do, but oh, how glad she would be to hear it all alone again! Gertie, I say, are you dead?"

In her sudden agony of fright, Aunt Eunice lifted the girl from her bosom and shook her with both trembling hands.

"Gertrude! Gertrude!"

The girl opened her eyes, struggled from those shivering hands, and staggered back against the wall. At last she spoke.

"Have you told me everything now?"

"Yes, everything—only that your other aunt and I have done our best to make him comfortable, and keep you out of the miserable secret."

"Oh, could you not have let me die? Surely there must have been some disease that might have carried a miserable child like that out of the world."

"Oh, Gertrude, we loved you so!"

"Yes, as people love pet birds, to poison them at last. Oh, what am I to do? What am I to do?"

Aunt Eunice took the shivering little hands that covered that convulsed face, and held them close. You must be still and strong, Gertrude. Never attempt to carry the weight of a secret like this as I have. It makes a hermit of one in her own house. To us that know the truth, there is no real shame in this. Only great and most pitiful sorrow. It was so Hart Webster took it. If this man is worth the name, he will only love you with more tenderness and we shall all be happier."

Gertrude did not speak, but stood immovable with her eyes fixed on the floor.

"Go," said Aunt Eunice, "go now, let him have a night to think it over. Tell him that you have not taken time to reflect since you knew of this, but brought it straight to him."

But it may all come out. He has enemies that envy him, that would glory in pulling him down."

"It has been kept a secret between two women all these years," resumed Aunt Eunice.

"But the name—mine will be in every paper after to-morrow. That alone must betray us."

"My mother was married twice; the name of her eldest son was not Harrington," said Aunt Eunice.

"Oh, thank God for that!" exclaimed Gertrude flinging up her hands. "So you gave the wretched child your name as well as everything else?"

"We gave her all we could; but you must look to God alone for courage now."

"Courage— Ah, I understand, but why should I be the bearer of my own disgrace. If this miserable secret was safe with you, cannot I keep it also?"

"No, because it would be cowardly. Because it would be a wall of separation between you and your husband forever. Where a secret is between man and wife, love must fade and dwindle as flowers die when weeds overmaster them."

Aunt Eunice did not see it, but when she mentioned the word "love" a faint ironical smile quivered over the girl's lips.

"Aunt, give me a little time to think, go to bed now, you are tired, and I—"

"You will go now; brave people face the thing they have cause to dread."

"Aunt I—I will be brave. Good-night."

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## CHAPTER LXXIII.

### RUFUS FOSTER ESCAPES A SCENE.

AUNT EUNICE went out of the room, leaving Gertrude alone. For the next half-hour the struggle in that young heart was terrible. Naturally truthful and brave, she would a year before have gone down at once, and, hard as the task was to a creature so ambitious and proud, have told her affianced husband the whole truth. But now she reasoned, hesi-

tated, and tampered with her own conscience. What if at the very last he should reject her. In the depths of her soul she had no faith in the man. No absolute belief that love for her, or even pride in her beauty, would overmatch this one chance of disgrace that she must bring to him on her wedding day.

With the words of Aunt Eunice ringing in her ear, she dared not listen to this selfish reasoning altogether, for to evade the hard task imposed on her seemed impossible. She knew the old woman well enough, to fear that she would herself seek the interview with Foster, rather than allow the marriage to take place with that horrible secret untold. What could she do?

Wretched, irresolute, and shrinking with sensitive fears, she opened the door and went down stairs. Fate was urging her on, she would take its chances.

Aunt Eunice, who was on her knees in the chamber allotted to her, heard Gertrude's footsteps on the stairs, and clasping her hands, thanked God with a great burst of gratitude. The steps were slow and hesitating, but the old woman had faith in the bravery of human nature, and so thanked God.

Rufus Foster arose from the easy-chair in which he was lounging, and tossed his half-burned cigar out of the window, when Gertrude came softly, almost timidly, into the bachelor's nest he was rather regretfully enjoying for the last time.

"Oh, my angel, you have taken compassion on me! I did not expect this special grace; but how pale, how anxious you look—surely the thoughts of to-morrow are not so terrible, that your beauty should wither under them, like this."

Gertrude looked at him wistfully.

"Ah, I fear you think more of my poor beauty than of the heart under it," she said, with a soft quiver in her voice.

"We do not always know how to separate a lily from its perfume," he answered, drawing her towards him with a gentle caressing movement. "I am content to take both together. But you tremble; you sigh too heavily for happiness—What have I done or omitted to do, that my bride can desire?"

"Do? oh, it is not that. Only I had something to say, something—"

"Too serious for this late hour, if it is not to complain, as I do, that the minutes refuse to fly until you are all mine."

"But—but even now something might arise—"

"Indeed, I should say not, sweet one. Our world is all in a tumult of expectation, and I for one have no thought of disappointing it by a single moment."

"But what if I had something to say that might shock you—wound your pride before this world that you worship so?"

Foster broke into a soft mellow laugh and sank into his chair, drawing her down to a seat upon its arm.

"Ah, ha! I understand now," he said, pressing her hand to his lips. "The old lady has rather astonished you. I caught a glimpse of her, and that tremendous umbrella, in the hall, and haven't stopped laughing since. Never mind, darling, I love you well enough to put up with her, at any-rate till the wedding is over. After that, you will of course cut the whole concern."

"Oh Foster, remember you are speaking of my aunt—of all the mother I have ever known," said Gertrude, with a quick flush that died out in as sudden

pallor, for she thought of her real mother with a pang so sharp that it took away her breath.

"And a comical old mother it is, just the sort of person to be loved furiously at a distance. But no one that Mrs. Rufus Foster can parade before the world I am inclined to think at least, nor for more than a single day," but I had settled all that in my mind before you came in. Rig her out in something respectable and have her at the show by all means; I will even call her aunt if it will make you happy. Can human love go beyond that?"

"Oh, Foster! how can you speak so of the very best woman that ever lived!"

"Well, I am ready to yield in everything just now. Call her what you like and I will believe you. Only I make a stand on the umbrella; she must not carry that in the procession!"

"If you are so sensitive to ridicule, what would you feel if I brought shame also?" said Gertrude, dropping her eyes under his laughing gaze.

"I think you a strange, over sensitive, and foolish girl, to talk of such impossible things," was the rather serious answer.

"But if it were so, if—"

"If I should find a worm in the heart of my rose—well, well, perfect flowers are very uncommon, but I am not afraid that the leaves will fall from mine, though they do seem to fade a little."

Gertrude turned her head away. She was heart-sick with cowardice. The first great shock of her life had left her no strength for reaction.

"You will not let me talk seriously," she said with a petulant movement.

"Not if I can help it. The truth is, Gertrude, I do not wish to discuss anything that will disturb the exquisite enjoyment of the hour. So if you have anything lying heavily on your tender little conscience, throw it to the winds. You haven't the least idea how many confessions I should have to make if we once began."

Gertrude drew a deep breath. A cowardly sense of relief expanded her chest. She had done her utmost, and he would not listen. Surely no one could blame her after that.

"Remember, I wanted to have a thorough understanding. That is what brought me down," she said. "Hereafter you must not blame me if—"

"Blame you, my bird of Paradise! Am I such a monster that you think that possible? Ah! by the way, I was at Ball and Black's this morning, searching for something a little more worthy of my bride. Will these do?"

Here Foster opened a drawer of his table and drew forth a case which he unclasped under the gaslight. Upon the satin cushion was coiled a rope of great white pearls.

"You will wear them to-morrow," he said, lifting the gems from the cushion, "and now go to rest, my angel, we must have fresh roses for the morning."

Gertrude hesitated. Her heart was terribly burdened with its secret. She stood with the rope of pearls in her hand, distressed and pale.

"Still, I must speak," she said, lifting her eyes with a gleam of courage to the face of her betrothed, which was beginning to cloud over; for he was annoyed

at the indifference with which his princely gift was received.

"Not to-night, sweet one. You are wan and tired; more like a penitential nun than the bright girl I left an hour or two ago. Good-night—good-night!"

"Good-night," said Gertrude, receiving the kiss he offered, with chill unconsciousness, and mounting the stairs again with a leaden heart in her bosom, and the string of pearls in her hand.

"He would not listen. I had no power to force it upon him," she said drearily, "surely no one can blame me after this."

Meantime Foster had lighted another cigar, and was dreamily smoking it, while his thoughts took wing.

"Beautiful little goose. How conscience smites her for that old flirtation. As if I did not understand every word of it. Of course, she jilted him abominably—has broken up his life and all that. Tender-hearted darling; how pale she looked. I am not sure that she isn't handsomer so. The old woman has been expostulating, and I have escaped a scene. Hark! that is her step again."

Foster arose softly, turned off the gas, bolted the door, and sat down again, smoking in the dark. Directly a light knock sounded outside. He took no notice. It was repeated more gently, and then Gertrude went back to her room. In her solitude she had gained courage to tell him all, but it was now impossible. With a feeling of dreary relief, that she was in the hands of fate, she went to her room. Little Patty was sound asleep, and all that night Gertrude lay clasped in the soft, warm arms of that happy child, shedding silent, bitter tears, which wrung her heart without refreshing it.

## CHAPTER LXXIV.

### GERTRUDE'S WEDDING-DAY.

THE day came—the day and the hour. The bridegroom was waiting. The bride stood before her mirror, looking white and cold under the frost-work of her veil.

Aunt Eunice had found it impossible to get one word in private with her niece; but now—when arrayed in a brown silk dress which had been hurriedly made by the village dressmaker for the occasion, to which Mrs. Foster had added some rich old lace and a dainty head-dress of her own—the old woman came into the chamber resolved to claim a few sentences with her niece. Gertrude grew cold and white as the snow of her dress when the rustle of that brown silk approached her, but she turned with a forced smile to meet the questions that she knew were coming.

"Gertrude, have you done your duty?"

The girl sought an evasion, and found it.

"Yes, I have done my best."

"And it makes no difference with him."

"You see that it does not; is not this my wedding-dress?"

The old woman's gray eyes lighted up. She took the bride in her arms, and kissed her with hearty warmth.

"You are a brave, good girl, niece, and he is a great

deal better than I took him for. I'm glad I let sister Foster rig me out with her lace and things, for we ought to do our best for such occasions, and she knows better than I do what the best is. If it wasn't for Hart—"

"Oh, aunt, aunt, don't mention him. I—I cannot bear anything more. Indeed, indeed I have suffered."

"Poor thing," said Aunt Eunice. "It was hard."

"Don't, don't make her cry, Aunt Eunice. She's been a sobbing all night," interposed little Patty, who stood by devouring the beautiful creature with her eyes one moment, and admiring the mingled lace and India muslin of her own snow-white dress the next.

"When I'm married, nobody shall scold me, now I tell you."

With this Patty danced out into the hall, and came back with a telegram in her hand just as Aunt Eunice left the room.

"Be quick, and read it, for the gentleman has got his white gloves on, and they are all waiting."

Gertrude snatched the telegram from the child and flung it into a jewel stand that stood on her dressing table.

"I will not read it till after," she said, pale to the lips, still she stood gazing on the buff paper with a sort of weird fascination.

Patty grew impatient of this strange silence, and pulled her dress. "They are waiting, Gertie," she said.

"Yes, yes! I know."

"Come along, Gertie. Oh, do come. There's two great topsy-headed horses before the house, awful im-

patient, and Mr. Foster says if I don't bring you right down, he'll— Well, I don't know what he will do."

Gertude did not answer, but stood, cold and white, unable to withdraw her eyes from the telegram she dare not touch.

As she stood thus hesitating on the shores of a new life, Mrs. Foster came into the room all in a flutter of gentle excitement, and with her a group of bridesmaids, eager to bear a part in the great ceremony of which she was the lovely centre figure.

The outer door was flung open—a crimson carpet was laid on the steps, and over it, the bridal train passed down to their carriages. A great crowd was gathered in front of Grace Church that day. The gorgeous building had been slowly filling up for hours, until the people spread down the sidewalks and partially blocked up the street. Within the building, the splendor of the crowded guests was deepened to gorgeousness by a soft glory of light that fell through those tall windows of richly tinted glass. The altar was one mass of flowers, the atmosphere heavy with their fragrance. Ropes of snow-white blossoms were stretched across the principal aisle, beyond which the relatives of the bride and groom alone could go. Now and then soft bursts of preliminary music rolled from the great organ, died away and swelled out again in broken harmonies.

At last those who had a right beyond the rope of flowers began to arrive. Among them were two old ladies;—one was delicate and gentle, almost to an appearance of weakness, and created a general rustle of attention, as she moved up the aisle. A cluster of snow-white roses lay among the soft, white puffs of her hair. Her

robe of lustrous gray satin swept far out upon the floor. Beneath the lace on her bosom diamonds gleamed and twinkled. She might have been a born duchess, from the gentle grace of her movements, and the exquisite fitness of her raiment. By her side walked another woman, taller and more upright, squarely built, angular, and stiffly imposing. Her brown silk dress, without flounces or trimming, was voluminous and of rich material, and the lace upon it was of that exquisite old point which cannot be bought for gold. Her iron-gray hair was elaborately braided, and mingled richly with the filmy old lace. In truth, Aunt Eunice held her part well in that splendid throng. As these two women took their seats, a whisper ran through the crowd and people said to each other:

"It is another aunt from the country. How unlike they seem; still there is something strong and noble in the country woman. The bride need not be ashamed of her relatives."

All this whispering was hushed suddenly; for two great folding-doors were flung open, a glorious burst of music filled the church, and into that gorgeous atmosphere swept a train of white-robed figures that moved up the aisle in a slow procession headed by the bride, and ending with two lovely children, who moved forward hand in hand, looking demure as twin cherubs over an altar. One, a dark-haired little maiden, seemed half-frightened when she came in, and gave a quick, startled look at the crowd; as if half-tempted to turn and run away. But that went off in an instant, and little Patty Vane behaved decorously, and made quite a picture in the ceremony as she stood by the altar at which Gertrude Harrington was given away.

When the wedding party drove home from the church the bride found a moment in which she went to her room. The bride-maids would have followed her, but she evaded them like a hunted hare, and, while they prepared joyously for the reception, locked herself in with that unsealed telegram, that lay like a coiled serpent in her jewel-stand. It was some moments before she could find courage to touch it, even with her gloved fingers, but at last she tore it open and read:

"That iniquitous ceremony must not take place. We have been deceived. I shall start by the next train to discover how. Wait for me, and trust me."

"HART WEBSTER."

For a whole minute Gertrude held the paper in her hand, looking at it with wild startled eyes. Her brain was in a whirl. Her hands grew cold.

"What does it mean? What can it mean?" she thought. "Who has deceived us? No matter—no matter—it is over now."

Gertrude tore off her glove, and set one trembling hand free. Then she opened her desk, and, leaning over it, wrote, standing—

"It is too late. I am married."

"GERTRUDE FOSTER."



## CHAPTER LXXV.

### SELF-SACRIFICE.

ON the morning of that wedding-day, a young girl, pale, weary, and covered with dust, climbed over the rail fence, in front of Mrs. Ward's house, and, dragging herself up the path, knocked feebly at the door. It was not opened at once, and she sat down on the threshold, with the carpet-bag at her feet, resting her forehead on one hand. After awhile she lifted her head and listened. There was a stir in the house. The door opened, and Mrs. Ward looked out. The girl arose then, and held out her arms.

"Mother!"

"What, what! Goodness gracious! My own girl! I don't believe it. I can't believe it. I have you right here in my arms. Sarah Ann—"

The poor weary girl had literally fallen into those outspread arms, and was sobbing there. At last she looked up.

"Mother! mother! Where is Tim? I am worn out. I cannot go another step. Where is brother Tim?"

"Tim! Timothy Ward! Come here this minute. It is our Sarah Ann."

Tim came rushing down stairs, in his shirt sleeves, and with his hair half-combed, calling out:

"Where is the creature? Where is the dear old

(410)

### SELF-SACRIFICE.

411

girl? Why, Sarah Ann! Sarah Ann! what is the matter? Your eyes look like glass, and your face—She's sick, mother. Poor girl! Just look at her."

"Yes, Tim, I am real sick. My head aches and see how my hands burn; but I have something that must be done before I give up. Go over to the village directly, and tell Hart Webster that I wish to see him the minute he can get here. Go quickly, brother. Take the colt. I am so—so anxious."

Tim only paused to give his sister a kiss of welcome, before he leaped on the bare back of the colt, and ran him to the village.

"My poor girl, my poor dear child, what is the matter? what have these York people done to you?" sobbed Mrs. Ward taking Sarah Ann in her arms. The girl made a feeble struggle to free herself.

"Don't, don't make me cry, mother, tears burn me so."

"Well, I won't. See, I'm not crying myself, not a bit of it," answered the kind woman, with a pitiful attempt at cheerfulness. "Just let Mar undress you, and go to your own bed, that's a good girl."

"Not yet, not yet. Wait till he comes," pleaded Sarah Ann, and staggering towards the window, she fell down into a chair that stood by it.

The poor girl sat patiently by the open sash, with her bonnet on, and her heavy eyes fixed on the road.

"Oh, God keep me in my right mind until they come," she muttered wearily. "They must not be separated by a fraud. What would he do after that? Ah, me! my poor head, my poor head!"

The sick girl's head fell sideways upon her arm, but her eyes still wandered up the road. At last she

saw two horsemen advancing at a swift trot, like figures moving through a dream. They were her brother and Hart Webster.

Mary Ann strove to arouse herself. She saw Hart's tall figure coming up the walk, looming higher and higher till his face seemed to go out of sight. She heard him open the door. She knew that he had taken a chair close by her side, and was holding her hand in his own firm but cool clasp.

He was speaking, she was aware of that, but the kind voice seemed to come from a great distance. She was conscious of a hoarse effort to scream back, but after all her voice died off in a whisper.

"What is it? Don't hurry yourself, my poor girl, but when you can, tell me if there is anything that I may do."

"My—my head aches so," the girl answered, passing one hot hand over her forehead, "or I would have gone to you myself, for we have no time—not a minute. The cars were so long in coming, whistle—whistle—whistle, but dragging all the while."

"But you came at last, and I am here. Try and remember if you wanted me for anything important."

"Important! Is marriage important? Is fraud important? Is it important that you are about to lose Gertrude Harrington for ever and ever?"

"I have lost her. Gertrude is nothing to me now," said Webster, flushing red, "do not mention her name to me."

"But I must, I must," cried the sick girl. There has been treachery between you and Gertrude Harrington. If you have written her often, some one else has got the letters. If you inquired for her, she never knew

it. She believed you liked another, and, thinking you unfaithful, is—is going to be married."

"Married! When? To whom? But I need not ask."

"To Rufus Foster. This day, at one o'clock."

"To-day, at one? What time is it now?"

The old skeleton clock in the hall twanged out eleven.

"Eleven, and the train passed at seven-thirty. There is not another before evening," exclaimed Webster, starting up, and walking the room. Sarah Ann beckoned him with her hand.

"The telegraph—that will reach her," she whispered.

"True, true! I will go at once. I don't know how you found this out, Sarah Ann; but I shall never forget your goodness."

In his gratitude he took her hand, and kissed it. Then her heavy eyes opened wide, a beautiful smile passed over the flushed face, and a thrill of exquisite pleasure shot through all the pain that racked her.

"If there has been fraud, it is but right that she should have an opportunity to defend herself," exclaimed the young man. "Still there were circumstances that seem impossible to justify," he said, partly to himself, partly to the sick girl. "I wish it were not cruel to ask a clearer account of it all." The young man hesitated to go with the broken knowledge he had obtained, but forbore to press the girl further.

"Oh, do not wait," pleaded the girl, lifting her weary head, almost with a cry of pain, "I came all that long, long road, with engines shrieking after me like mad, only to make up between you and Gertrude. You loved her so—you loved her so, and I knew it."

"I will telegraph at once," said Webster; after that you shall tell me more."

Sarah Ann leaned on her elbow, and listened till the hoofs of Hart Webster's horse sent back no sound from the hard road; then she held out both trembling hands to her mother, who entered the room.

"He has gone, mother. She will believe in him again. He has gone to her. Now let me die."

Hart Webster waited hour after hour for an answer to his telegram, it came at last.

He angrily crushed the filmy morsel of paper in his hand. "Let her go. She has been bought at a rich price," he exclaimed, in scornful wrath. "Thank God I can live without her!"

With the telegram still crushed in his hand, the young man mounted his horse and rode over to Mrs. Ward's, thinking very tenderly of the poor girl who had suffered so much and so mysteriously in a vain attempt to secure his happiness. Sarah Ann was completely delirious when he reached the house. But good, unconventional Mrs. Ward was glad to have him sit by her child, while she went into the garden for herbs, and prepared hot drinks in the kitchen. He did sit by the girl, suffering himself as only a proud man endures wrong, but touched with gentle sympathy for this fair young creature, who lay beautifully transformed before him. She was pleased with his presence, and talked incessantly of him, of Gertrude, and the strange life she had spent in that city mansion.

By slow degrees—for the young man came every day to inquire after the invalid—he learned all the little romance of those months, during which she had disappeared from her home. To him it was a beautiful

confession of a woman's generous self-abnegation, a lesson that saved him from entire skepticism at a time when he was fast losing all trust in womanhood.

She was talking to him one day in her childlike delirium. Unconscious of the secret her answers might betray, he led her on to speak of her life at Mrs. Foster's more fully than she had yet done.

"But why did you go there?" he questioned, with gentle curiosity. "What took you away from home?"

"Oh, I was so wretched, when he did not come any more; and I thought it would cure me if I could get away altogether—knowing how much he loved her, and how little he cared for me, I could not help but go; but it was of no use. I tried to love her for his sake; but I couldn't—I couldn't. Because he loved her, I tried to be like her, and studied so hard—so hard. But she was beautiful, and, try ever so much, I couldn't be that. All the rest was easy—very, very easy; but I couldn't be beautiful, you know."

Was Hart Webster startled by this revelation, or had he been somewhat prepared to receive it? Was that a thrill of surprise or pleasure that passed through his frame, as the sweet, childlike voice betrayed the woman's heart? Had he even loved this girl in her wild estate; and was the old passion awakening in his nature now?

## CHAPTER LXXVI.

### AFTER THE WEDDING.

THE wedding festivities were over, and the Foster mansion seemed almost deserted. Aunt Eunice had been persuaded to spend a few days with her sister, having received a letter from the bride, who had charge of her home, that everything was going on prosperously at the red house. There certainly was not much excitement in the lives of those two old women, but Aunt Eunice was occasionally conscience-stricken by what she considered her rollicking life in the city. This consisted in rides through the Park behind a pair of sleek bay carriage horses that never were known to break the rules as to speed, and in exciting promenades up and down Stewart's spacious rooms, with now and then a perilous sea trip on some Staten Island ferry, which expanded the old maid's ideas of travel to an extent that almost frightened her.

One day the two women arose early in the morning ready for a mysterious visit up the North River, looking grave and anxious, as if the shadow of some great trouble were upon them.

Little Patty knew that orders had been given for a carriage, and she saw a heavy willow basket brought into the lower hall, from which a rich fruity odor stole that set her quite wild with curiosity and desire. She did not venture to touch the basket, but ran up stairs

and told her apprehensions, that something very wrong and mysterious was going on, to Miss Jane Foster, who was a little curious about these movements herself.

Miss Foster had, in one of her supreme caprices, taken a fancy to this little girl, which no one could understand.

This may be accounted for, perhaps, by the fact that our Patty, while chatting with the French maid Lois, had spoken of Hart Webster as her own—own cousin, who would feel just awful, when he knew that Gertie Harrington had married Mr. Foster, and gone off with him as if there was nobody else in the world.

After this piece of information had been conveyed to Miss Foster, little Patty became the pet and light of that grand old house. She spent half her time in the young lady's room. Dolls, that shut their blue eyes when she laid them down ever so tenderly, or that made her homesick when they called out papa, were bestowed upon her. Boxes of candy tempted her restless little hands whenever she entered Miss Foster's boudoir.

One day the young lady had taken her to Stewart's, a demure little creature in red merino, with a straw bonnet on her head. But she came out a black-eyed fairy thing, all silk and lace and fluttering white feathers, with a dainty pink parasol that put you in mind of a feather-edged puppy, and tiny kid gloves on her hands, which she kept eyeing with distrustful admiration, wondering if she might dare to bend her fingers without a disaster.

While those two sad old ladies were preparing to start on their secret excursion, Patty felt unusually anxious and restless. No indication had been given

that she was going with them, and she went to Miss Foster's room in a state of half-tearful resentment.

"They're all shut up by themselves and won't let me in no how, and this the very last day," she said, piteously.

Miss Foster took the little martyr in her lap, and strove to console her.

"Are you sure that the old lady means to go home to-morrow?" she questioned, soothingly.

"Yes," answered Patty, with tears in his eyes, "and they mean to leave me at home now, I know they do. It's just mean to be riding themselves and leave me out. I'll tell my Mar on 'em, see if I don't!"

"Never mind, let them go. This afternoon, you shall drive out with me in the pony carriage."

"And drive my ownself?" asked Patty, brightening all over.

"Perhaps, we shall see."

"Oh, won't that be fun?" cried the child, clapping her hands.

"Besides, I am going to give you something pretty, that you will keep to remember me by all your life."

"Oh, what is it?"

"See, what do you think of this?"

"A watch—a real watch?"

"A real watch!"

"That ticks?"

"Listen!"

Here the young lady lifted one of those dainty little timepieces, marvels of Geneva workmanship, which hung to her chain, and held it to the child's ear.

"Oh, my, don't it tick! But is it mine for true?"

"Yes, it is your own for true," answered the lady,

removing the chain from her neck and throwing it over the child's head."

"My own, own to keep?"

"Yes, your own to keep. Mercy, child, don't quite smother me with kisses," cried the lady, dropping the watch into Patty's bosom.

"But I can't help it," exclaimed the child, throwing her arms once more around the lady's neck. "I could just hug you to death, I could."

"There, there! Now, little lady, would you do something for me if I desired it?"

"Yes, I would."

"Would you take something that I shall give you to Cousin Hart Webster, and tell nobody about it?"

"Wouldn't I?"

"Just put it in his hands and see how he looks when he opens it?"

Patty nodded her head mysteriously.

"And tell him what nice times you have had up here with me?"

"I mean to tell everybody."

"But not about this," said the young lady, taking a small box from her pocket and placing it in the child's hands. "Remember, no one must see it but Hart Webster himself."

"Not a creature," said Patty, thrusting the box deep down in the pocket of her dress.

"Remember, I have trusted you with a great secret."

"I know," exclaimed the child, leaping to her feet, and rushing into the upper hall, for a carriage had just driven to the door. After nearly throwing herself over the banister a minute, she half ran, half tumbled down

stairs, and knocked the cover aside which concealed all the delicious things that I have spoken of as appearing so mysteriously and which afterward came back with those two old ladies, empty as a last year's bird's nest.

"Oh, goody, just look here," she cried, forgetting her watch, in childish greed, and catching hold of the French maid's dress as that damsel came gliding down the stairs in a lofty fit of sulks, "mightn't I have some now?"

"Of course you may. Let the little Mees help herself," answered the girl, rather hoping to entice Patty into a scrape, from pure malice; for she was insanely jealous of the favor she had won, and mortally offended by it.

Patty did help herself to a banana, a bunch of grapes, and a great red-cheeked peach, which she huddled together in her arms and carried up stairs, generously resolved to share her feast with the lady.

When Lois went up a few minutes after and found the child sitting at Miss Jane's feet, revelling in her stolen fruit, of which the young lady partook generously, the accumulated spite of many days grew too bitter for concealment. She cast a vicious glance at the child.

"It is Madame's fruit she has stolen," she said, "but no wonder, so long as she is made to think that the house is all for her."

"I didn't steal, and I don't know who Madame is. She told me to, her own self, anyhow," cried Patty, appealing to Miss Foster, but looking at the fruit in her lap with doubtful longing, "There, now, I'll put 'em back, I will."

"Never mind—never mind; no one will miss it,"

laughed Jane Foster, patting the child's head, as she moved towards the window which commanded a view of the carriage into which the two old ladies were stepping. "Besides, the basket is gone—Lois, you must stop annoying the child or we may part company sooner than you expect."

Lois gave her head a toss, and went out muttering angrily.

Patty was a tender-hearted little soul, and felt that she was in some way to blame for the sharp words that had been spoken. She had lost all appetite for her fruit, and stole out after the girl.

"Lois, Lois, don't mind, I didn't mean to make her scold you so. Here is this big sweet thing, all for yourself."

Here Patty held out the banana she had craved more than anything, but Lois would not take it. Patty could not bear her displeasure, and made a fresh effort.

"Don't be so cross, Lois, and you shall look at my new watch; don't it shine. Only you mustn't open it on no account."

"Ha!" ejaculated Lois. "Let me see, little Mees, let me see how pretty it is."

Patty lifted the watch so far as her chain would permit.

"Enamelled gold and diamonds! Ah! ha! my lady is munificent. Her caprice now is for this little child, to whom she gives her own watch, which I had not dared to ask for. It is for some reason. We shall see. We shall see!"

"What makes you talk to my watch so?" questioned Patty; for the girl spoke in French.

"Oh nothing, I only said *très jol*—how pretty it

was. There now, let me put it quite safe in your pocket, little Mees— Oh, here is something. *Mon Dieu!* how rich she is."

With a deft motion of the fingers, Lois drew the little jewel-box from the child's pocket and was about to open it. But Patty darted at her like a hawk, and snatched the box from her hand.

"You do that! You dare?" cried the child, stamping her foot furiously.

"Do what? little Mees, I have done nothing."

"You opened my box."

"No, no, little Mees; it was the rattle of the chain."

"Well, I thought you tried to open it. Anyhow, no one but Cousin Hart Webster must do that, 'cause I've promised! But I'll let you look at my watch just as much as you've a mind to; so now take this and make up. What's the use of keeping mad?"

Lois condescended to take the banana, and Patty went back to Miss Foster's room, ready to eat her stolen fruit in contentment.

That night Patty went to bed early, tired out by a morning of incessant excitement, and a drive in the Park after dinner. Mrs. Foster and her sister had not yet returned from their mysterious excursion. Thus Lois had access to the chamber occupied by Aunt Eunice and the child. As Patty lay in her first sweet sleep, breathing softly under the delicate lace that draped her bed, Lois stole into the room, noiseless as a kitten, and sank on her knees by a chair on which the child had left her garments. In the tiny pocket she found the jewel-box which had so excited her curiosity and stealing up to the shaded light, unfolded the outer covering of tissue paper, softly opened the box,

and discovered a large enamelled locket, on which a great diamond blazed like a star. The girl was adroit and experienced. She knew that some important secret was usually concealed under such costly workmanship. She touched a spring. The locket flew open, and Miss Jane Foster's face exquisitely painted on ivory smiled upon her.

This was not all; on the golden bed opposite she found engraven, not a name but an inscription which sorely puzzled the girl, for she was not deeply read in the Scriptures, and, French as she was, would not have thought of looking there for a love sentiment. So she closed the locket, put it back into the child's dress, and glided out of the room.

A Bible usually lay on Mrs. Foster's dressing-table. Lois sought it, and after some trouble found the passage indicated by the locket. Then a smile full of malicious craft crept over her lips, and she muttered in French—

"I, too, will send my little souvenir."

Just as Patty was leaving the house in the morning, Lois drew her into the breakfast-room, and shut the door.

"Here, little Mees," she said confidently, "that pretty box was not all. My lady says you must give this package too, and say no word to any one; you know how to be secret."

"Don't I now?" said Patty, putting what seemed a package of letters into a little satchel Miss Foster had given her. "Don't I?"



## CHAPTER LXXVII.

### AWAKING TO NEW LIFE.

IT was weeks before Sarah Ann awoke from the haunting delirium that possessed her, and recognized her mother.

"Has he got an answer, mother? Has he gone?"

"What are you asking about, Sare Ann?"

"What time is it?"

"Eight o'clock."

"Then he has gone. Oh, mother, I am so weak!"

The girl lay down, closed her eyes, and great tears came stealing through the tremulous lashes. Indeed she had scarcely the strength of a child. By-and-by she started on her pillow.

"What is that? Who is that, mother?"

"Who? Only Hart Webster. He has been riding over here every day since you got home. Come in, come in! We are all right now."

The door opened, and Hart Webster entered, animated by the good news, and with the old bright smile on his face. Mrs. Ward passed him on the threshold, for she was wanted in the kitchen, and had a womanly intuition that she was not wanted there.

Webster saw the tears trembling on the sick girl's cheek. Drawing softly towards the couch, he knelt down, and kissed them away.

It was a sudden and generous impulse, but when

Sarah Ann felt the touch of his lips on her face, she shrunk from it a little, believing that the caress sprung out of his pity for her weakness. Though the young man inquired after her tenderly, and spoke of his thankfulness that she was better, no hint was given of the heart-secret she had betrayed in her delirium. Had the girl guessed that, she would have died of very shame. For Gertrude Harrington, in all her beauty and overweening self-sufficiency, was not half so proud of soul as this poor suffering young creature.

Hart Webster understood this, and went away, leaving her to rest.

Time wore on. Sarah Ann slowly gained freshness and strength. Her old energies were returning, softened and refined, but still active enough to give brilliancy to her character, with spirit and grace to her actions. This spirit had worked great changes in the house and grounds, for Tim fairly adored his sister now, and obeyed her like a house-dog. The door-yard had been turfed over, a neat board fence, with a swinging gate, opened into it from the road. White muslin curtains, looped with knots of ribbon, softened what had been the grim stiffness of the out-room. Now the sun was sometimes permitted to look in upon the striped home-made carpet, and an old armed-chair or two, brightened up with new chintz. The settee was disguised by the same material into a respectable couch, with a prettily ruffled pillow at each end. In a rustic way, Sarah Ann had made a neat bower chamber of the old room.

These tasteful changes made the house very pleasant to Hart Webster, when he began to drop into the old habit of coming there. But day by day the girl was growing shy of him, and he could see that dark

shadows had settled about her eyes, which returning health had not removed.

In all this time there had been no return of the old, rollicking intimacy; no fishing parties; no hap-hazard game suppers, which the young people enjoyed, while the mother did the cooking. Everybody treated Sarah Ann with more respect now. Tim always saddled the colt for her when it was wanted, and Mrs. Ward utterly refused to let her daughter roughen her hands again with dish-washing.

It may seem strange, but the name of Gertrude Foster was never mentioned between these two persons. One way or another, Webster had learned the truth about Sarah Ann's residence at the Foster mansion, and was well assured that the real secret of Gertrude's unfaithfulness sprung out of the selfish ambition of her own heart.

For this reason he did not care to learn the particulars of a deception that might have proved an excuse, but was not the reason of her falsehood. If he ever thought of Miss Foster at all, it was with a kindly feeling that she had attempted to soften the blow which she saw impending, before it fell.

Thus time wore on, and Sarah Ann grew stronger, very slowly it is true, but with her convalescence came a soft and gentle grace that made her wonderfully interesting to the young man who had gathered a sweet secret from her own wandering brain.

While the girl was yet very feeble, a note of invitation came to Hart from his cousin Clara. Compton had obtained a permanent position as principal of the academy, and Mrs. Vane had purchased a pretty white cottage in the neighborhood in which the young people

were going to live. This note was an invitation to the house-warming which Mrs. Vane had insisted upon, and about which she had been busy for more than a week.

Hart Webster accepted the invitation and once more Sarah Ann saw him driving by, this time in a buggy and at a graver pace than she remembered him to have used of old. When he saw her at the window the young man leaned forward, bowed, and kissed his hand, quite unconscious that the girl had been watching for him hours and hours, and felt her eyes blinded with tears as he drove by without stopping.

When Hart Webster crossed the Housatonic and came in sight of the old mill, the red farm-house, and rushing dam, his heart swelled with feelings of mingled rage and regret that he could ever have deluded himself into such happiness as he had felt when Gertrude was there to receive him; but directly, all the great pride of his manhood rose in force and he drove over the old bridge with a feeling almost of emancipation.

"Not here, you mustn't stop here only just long enough to shake hands, and say, 'How do you do?'" cried Mrs. Vane, rushing out to the gate, settling her best cap as she went. "Clara and Compton are expecting you to tea, and I promised to send you right along. First white house with green blinds, the other side of the academy. You can't miss it."

"Miss it! I guess not!" cried little Patty, coming out of the house in breathless haste, tying her sun bonnet as she ran. "Just reach down your hand, Cousin Hart, I'm going to show you the way."

Hart reached down his hand, the child climbed over the wheel, and settled herself demurely by his side.

"Now, Mar, just hand me my silk frock and things that Miss Foster gave me, for I mean to cut an awful dash at sister Clara's house-warming. See, I've got my new boots on all ready."

Here the child thrust out a plump little foot encased in a blue kid boot, and held out her arms for the great paper bundle which Mrs. Vane brought from the house.

"There now, gee up, I'm ready," she cried, settling herself behind the precious parcel.

A few minutes brought the buggy in front of Compton's gate, to which the young couple hastened in great delight. Patty was lifted down, and the happy group went into the cottage joyous and gay as birds. Indeed, as Clara observed confidentially to her husband, "One would not think he really took that affair very much to heart after all."

During that evening there was great hilarity in that little white cottage, lights gleamed goldenly through every one of the green blinds, there was a sound of music even in the street. A crowd of little children gathered about the gate, and looked longingly after their elder brothers and sisters as they went into the house, which to them was an enchanted palace. Sometimes when the floor vibrated to dancing feet, and the music sounded most hilarious, little Patty would slyly throw open the blinds and invite her little playmates outside to swarm up into the porch, where they could look in upon the revel to which she was admitted. When the supper was served, the child stole into the pantry where Mrs. Vane was busy as a queen bee, and came away with the skirt of her pink silk dress bulging out like a balloon, and her bright face smiling all over with a glow of hospitable patronage.

On to a chair, through the open window, into the midst of her village playmates, the child leaped, and got up a wild little dance of her own, as she tossed cakes, and fruit and tarts, about until the juvenile house-warmers became more riotous than the invited guests dancing and feasting in-doors. Here Patty, in all her New York finery and powers of hospitality, was absolute queen of the fete, and the out-door sport ended in a play of blind-man's buff among the lilac and currant bushes, which gave the little girl unbounded popularity, as ineffaceable as the fruit stains that clouded her dainty dress. A number of persons had come to the house-warming from a distance, and of course the young couple had far more female guests than they could accommodate. So Hart Webster went home with the Vanes, leading Patty by the hand, very sleepy, very tired, and demure as a kitten.

Webster's room overlooked the river, and that laurel bank on which he had first talked of love to Gertrude Harrington. The late moon was up, and silvering the pear-trees and orchard back of the red farm-house with a soft, fairy-like beauty. The slow dash of water over the mill-dam blended harmoniously with the quiet scene, so harmoniously that Hart Webster sat down by the window; not to enjoy it—that was hardly possible, with his memories—but to think over the past more seriously and calmly than he had yet done.

When the sweet insanity of a sudden passion goes off, it cannot leave memories that are altogether pleasant; something of self-contempt which reaches the object of our delusions is sure to follow, and, like the perfume from a withered bouquet, sicken upon the memory.

Hart Webster was going through this mental pro-

cess, when his door opened, and a little figure glided across the room, bearing something in her hands.

"Cousin Hart!"

The young man was startled out of his reverie, and turned his back upon the scene that had inspired it.

"What, little Patsey, not in bed yet?"

No, Cousin Hart, I've got an errand to do, and I can't sleep a wink till it is done. Here's something that Miss Foster told me to put right into your own hand, when no one could see me a doing of it. Then here's something else that she sent after by Lois—I don't like Lois, she's too mousey, but I promised, and here the other thing is."

Patty was standing in the moonlight as she delivered her conscience of the commission which had troubled it so anxiously that she gave it up with a sigh of relief.

"Now I'll go right off to bed," she murmured, sleepily, for I reckon there is no more use in setting up. Is there now, Cousin Hart?"

"Certainly not, Patty, I suppose you have done all that the lady desired of you?"

"No, not just all, only I'm so sleepy! I promised to say how nice and good she was, and how dearly I loved her, and all the grand nice things she bought for me—and I want to do it, but can't, 'cause my eyes won't keep open long enough. The 'sand man' is going around awful to-night." Here Patty rubbed one little fist into her eyes and went out of the room really half asleep.

Webster arose from the window and took the package she had given him to a little table near his bed, where a candle was burning. With some natural cu-

riosity he opened the box, and the light brought out the sudden blaze of diamonds that encrusted the locket which Lois had so craftily examined. Hart took the trinket, sought for the spring, and discovered the concealed portrait with a start of absolute astonishment. Up to this moment he had never suspected the preference which its presentation in that form revealed to him.

Some words were closely engraved inside the locket, which he held down to the light, and read with absolute dismay. Yet the words were simple enough. They only pointed out a passage of Scripture, which he remembered at once: "Ruth, first chapter, sixteenth and seventeenth verses." That was the inscription which swept away Hart Webster's breath.

After awhile he took up the other package and unfolded it. A quantity of letters dropped out, all with postage stamps on the envelopes, some canceled, others not. Part were in his own handwriting, directed to Gertrude Harrington, the rest were in her writing, directed to himself.

With them was a small note signed "Lois Cosno," which the young man read more than once, and his face hardened as its meaning became clear to him:

"MONSIEUR WEBSTER:

"I send the billet—that is, little letter—that you may be made sure of the perfidy of my mistress, Mademoiselle Foster, who was the ingrate to intercept your letters to Mademoiselle Harrington, some of which she burned and some she kept in her escritoire until I find them and send them to you with my compliments very sincere.

"I would ask you to make it a secret that I send back these papers and put Mademoiselle into your hands for punishment; but that is no matter, because I have made up my ideas to leave her at once, without the compliment of a warning, and do not fear that she should know everything. These letters which you sent never reached Mademoiselle Harrington, and so thinking you perfidious, she makes a marriage with Monsieur Foster, and is now Madame.

"These letters, better than my pen, will tell you how so much mischief was made, and how treacherous, like a cat, Mademoiselle can be when she stretches out her hand to snatch the man she loves from some other person.

"Read, read, Monsieur, and say for yourself if perfidy can be more complete."

Hart Webster did read his own letters which seemed strange to him, now that his mind was cool and his heart beating evenly. He also read the answers of the girl he had loved, and, under the light of her late actions, judged her more fairly than he had yet done. All through these letters he detected the strife that was going on between the girl's love and her ambition, and in that struggle learned to pity her, while he almost congratulated himself that a heart so divided had been swept out of his life.

As for Miss Jane Foster, he folded the package of letters in with the locket, sealed them carefully, and the next mail carried them to Madison Avenue.

## CHAPTER LXXVIII.

### HEART-FISHING.

SARAH ANN had a lonely life on the farm. Though surrounded by as loyal and loving hearts as a girl ever possessed, she had associated but little with the neighbors, and now found herself quite separated from all she had ever known.

She had to a certain extent isolated herself by superior refinement, and found solitude best in her sad moments—for unreturned love leaves many such to a woman. One day she was seized with a desire to go off into the woods. Opening the closet, she found the scarlet jacket, and the long abandoned hat with its little flame of a feather, which brought back old memories keenly, as she put them on. Then she took down her brother's fishing-rod from the porch, and wandered away through the woods, up to the tiny cataract of the trout-stream. Here she sat down, dropped her line, and fell into thought so deep and dreamy, that a trout had swallowed the fly on her hook, and she knew nothing about it. The fact was, Sarah Ann's eyes were so full of tears that a great mist seemed floating over the water.

A sportsman coming down the stream, saw the red jacket through the overhanging branches, and his heart gave a leap at the sight. He flung down his rod, stepped softly over the mossy turf, and drew so close

to the girl that he saw the tears in her eyes, and felt them as a reproach.

"Sarah Ann!"

The girl uttered a little shriek, and turned her face away that Hart Webster might not see her wet eyes.

"Why, Sarah, are you afraid of me? What have I done that you should cry out when I come near you?"

"What? Oh, nothing! Did I? I—I suppose that fever has left me a little nervous."

The girl was very nervous, certainly, for she drew up her line sharply, and there was a fine trout at the end, which had found a treacherous hook under the fly on which he had been gormandizing.

Hart Webster took the pole from the girl's shaking hands, and landed the fish; then he cast both pole and trout on the earth, and threw himself by her side.

For a moment he looked earnestly into her face, with a smiling attempt to read the downcast eyes.

"Sarah, has it never occurred to you, during all these months, that I might be desperately in love with—with—"

The girl sprang to her feet in one of her wild impulses, ran a step or two, then turned upon him.

"Mr. Webster, this is cruel. It is—"

"The living truth, Sarah Ann. You never will be so loved again, have patience with me."

"Patience! Patience! I—"

The young man knew well enough that she loved him, and held out his arms. She did not finish her sentence, but came, like a charmed bird, nearer and nearer, till he held her in a close embrace.

"Yes, Sarah Ann. Yes, my life, my darling. I almost believe that I have loved you from the very first. At any rate, I worship you now, with all my heart and soul."

The girl drew back her head and looked at him. She could not believe that one little moment had lifted her from the depths of despondency into this glorious heaven.

"Hart—Hart Webster, are you—are you—but you could not have the heart to say this, if you didn't mean it. I know that I am only a poor girl—"

"You are a bright little angel—no—something fifty times better than that—I shouldn't know how to manage a woman with wings, besides her harp might be in the way, but I do know that a brighter, sweeter girl never lived than you are; and that no fellow on earth ever loved a girl more than I love you. Now just kiss me back, for once, my pretty red-bird, or I shall think you hate me."

"Hate you! Oh, Hart! No girl that ever lived could do that! and I—oh, I cannot believe it. Everything seems so real—yet this must be one of my dreams."

"Well, darling, if it is, I am dreaming too, and mean to keep it up till one of us drops into the grave."

"And you mean—you think—"

"I mean to make you my wife just as soon as the house my good father has purchased for us is ready."

"The house—your father— There now do not tease a poor girl. Remember I am not so very strong yet, and joking tires me. I never could stand much of it, you know."

"But I am in earnest—solemn earnest, you unbelieving child."

Sarah Ann shook her head.

"Not about your father," she said wistfully.

"Yes, about my father. He knows that I love you dearly, and am sure to tell you so. He thinks, too, that Mrs. Ward will rather like it, and so we have bought the house on a venture.

"And you mean to live there with—with—"

"With the brightest, sweetest—oh, there, I am answered now!"

And so he was. Her arms were around his neck; her lips answered his as cherries drink in sunshine. Then she laid her head upon his bosom and began to cry.

"It isn't real, of course—it cannot be real—but let me think so a little while," she murmured.

"Think so all your life, girl. I, for one, have got through with dreaming."

"But I—I could dream on so forever."

Hart Webster kissed her lips, her hair, her eyes, with passionate violence.

"Awake then; let this, and this, and this, prove how dearly I love you."

The girl struggled a little, then fell to weeping like a child.

"Is this the fever again? Shall I wake up to feel all alone once more?" she said, clinging to him as if she dreaded to awake, "or is it real? I cannot remember all that you have said, but it frightens me. Coming to, is painful. Oh, Hart! I have been so lonely."

"So have I; but it is all over now."

"But Gertrude Harrington—you loved her so."

"Hush, darling, we will not speak of her."

"But you did love her?" cried the girl, and her glorious eyes broke through their mist of tears, as she lifted them to his face in a long wistful gaze. "You did—"

"I love you," he said, girding her to his heart, "and you alone."

The girl drew a long, tremulous breath, and fainted away on his bosom.

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## CHAPTER LXXIX.

### WHAT IT CAME TO.

THE thing which Gertrude Harrington had half longed for and half scorned, came to pass, but she had no share in it.

A pretty white cottage, draped to the roof with a profuse wisterea, and tangled about the porch with honeysuckles and climbing roses, was inhabited that year by as happy a pair of young people as ever went to house-keeping. There was a wing to the building, in which was a pretty room, crowded with law books. On the outer door of that room a brass plate blazed through the overhanging vines, and on that plate was engraved "Hart Webster, Attorney at Law."

It was a fair beginning. Love brightened the present, and Hope led on to a still more prosperous future, which gradually and naturally worked itself out.

It was not long before that little country town be-



came far too small for the growing ambition of this young man. His powerful capacity required a broader field, and more arduous action. The chain of circumstances that hard-working talent is sure to weave for itself, when a firm will goes with it, drew him into companionship with the great intellects of the land; a companionship in which the bright and beautiful woman he had married held a place, brilliant as his own, yet so purely womanly that hers always seemed a reflected light. This young creature, self-made, and educated out of her own great and silent love, won for herself, unconsciously, the position which Gertrude had dreamed of under the larch-trees—dreamed of, but found no power in her own nature to accomplish. \* \* \*

What was the destiny of Gertrude Harrington after that brilliant wedding-day?

What is the destiny of any woman who marries one man with love for another, turning the most solemn vows she can utter, into perjury? Do men or women ever gather grapes from thistles, or wrest jewels from the dragon's teeth they have sown?

In one thing the young bride was wise; having sold herself, she resolved to claim the full price of her heartless bargain. The rush and whirl of life into which she plunged, was like a wild insanity. This, for a time, was shared by her husband, who gloried in her beauty, and wasted all the sentiment of his honeymoon before it was half over. After all, he was only a dreamy, sensuous man, who had lived his life out before the first gray hair appeared on his temples. The freshness and beauty of that fair country girl had offered him a sensation. The doubt and difficulty of obtaining her had aroused his admiration to an eager desire; and that

was the nearest approach to love, Rufus Foster was capable of feeling. Still, without the power of loving, this man claimed the most unbounded affection. He wished to sit calmly down and be adored by the woman whose fondness would have filled him with unutterable scorn, could she have forced herself to pretend it. Still, he was discontented. That she did not worship him was an insult to his vanity which he made her feel in many a silky sneer, and softly spoken gibe.

Still the woman had her distractions. With unbounded wealth at command, wonderful beauty, and a hundred dazzling accomplishments, she was still a goddess in society, a creature to be quoted, copied and envied, wherever she went. Her house was scarcely less than a palace; her horses the most superb animals that money could purchase; jewels crowned her like stars, when she chose to startle crowds with their brilliancy; and if pride could feed the hunger of a woman's soul, Gertrude would, for a time, have been happy.

But even these husks, for which she had sold her woman's birthright, were taken from her. In her extravagance, her chase after pleasure, her restless excitement, Foster read the hateful truth that it was his wealth, not himself, that had won her. He was not an illiberal man. Born to millions, he gave money no undue value, and saw it lavished on his wife with pride at first, then with supine indifference. But as her selfishness became more and more confirmed, he saw in this wealth a means of curbing her arrogance and avenging his own abased pride. In less than a year, Gertrude found her lavish expenditures curtailed steadily, and the gorgeousness of her entertainments quietly suppressed. At first she expostulated, and

made passionate attempts to command the extravagances that were already palling upon her. But she might as well have attempted to stop the balmy south wind from blowing.

She met with nothing but suave indifference or such smooth irony that a looker-on would have pronounced her husband the most urbane gentleman that ever carried his honeymoon into actual life; yet no iron-hearted tyrant ever had power to make a woman feel more keenly than this soft-voiced exquisite. With quiet, masterly inactivity he made his wife a slave.

Then she began to comprehend that her audacious ambition had overreached itself. She had tasted all the happiness that wealth can give, only to have it withdrawn from her when everything grander had faded out of her life. She learned also that even in her great world, novelty is more enticing than beauty, and that the reign of a belle, married or single, is scarcely longer than the blossom season of a rose.

All this bitter experience had come to the woman in less than three years after her marriage.

About this time Gertrude Foster fell ill, and for a time, her rich beauty faded from her like a dream. A few years would have done this permanently, and she might have borne it better; but she had married a sensuous, hollow-hearted man, who knew in his soul that she did not love him. This did not pain him much. Society had its distractions, and the little widow still remained unmarried.

Bereft of everything but the semblance of grandeur that she had begun to loathe, Gertrude grew irritable, and bitterly disconsolate. Sometimes she met her husband's silky politeness with an intensity of scorn that

stung him into momentary animation. Though he had never commanded her love, he still had a power of torment over her.

It was seldom that the animosity existing between these two persons broke into harsh words; but Gertrude had become sensitive under her great losses, and sometimes was driven into fierce wrath by her husband's quiet but unspoken scorn of her waning loveliness.

One day her temper broke suddenly forth and she hurled all the bitterness of a wounded and tortured heart upon him in a burst of overwhelming eloquence. She taunted him with neglect, indifference, scorn of her former condition. He admitted it all, and after his cynical, sarcastic fashion, asked what she intended to do about it.

"You no longer love me!" she said, in passionate wrath.

"Have I made the pretence, since it ceased to be a fact?" he replied. "In that I have not the patience to follow the example you gave me in the beginning."

"You never did love me."

"Oh, yes, I did; but love, like loveliness, will fade. In that, at least, there is sympathy between us."

For a moment, Gertrude stood before her husband, struck dumb by his bland audacity. Then she turned upon him, white with passion, and so hoarse that her voice scarcely rose above a whisper.

"I demand a separation."

"With all my heart! But let it be after the approved fashion. Will you take up a residence in Europe, or shall I? My sister, who is living in single independence in Rome, will, no doubt, be glad to re-

ceive you. The sweetest harmony always existed between you and her; or, if you prefer that I should go, there is my step-mother, who will welcome you back to the old Foster mansion. No one can make you a pleasanter home. There never was a more perfect house-keeper. She began in that capacity for my father, you know."

While Gertrude grew pale to the lips under this taunt, Foster regarded her with a smile that she had begun to reject with loathing scorn.

As she stood regarding him with haughty disdain, a servant came to the door.

"Madam, a messenger is here from Mrs. Foster. Miss Harrington has just arrived from the country. They desire that you will come over at once."

Gertrude sprung to her feet.

"I will go," she said, scarcely waiting for the servant to disappear. "I will appeal to them. Thank Heaven, I have some true friends left."

Foster arose from his seat, with his usual provoking indolence.

"If it is to be a family court-martial, perhaps you will accept me for an escort. I only hope the dear Aunt Eunice has brought her umbrella, if there is to be much of a storm. Shall I order the carriage, or do you prefer to take a *tête-à-tête* walk? Perhaps it will be best to take my arm. It looks conjugal, and people must not think we have quarrelled."

Gertrude did not speak.

Foster rang the bell, and stood, gracefully leaning against the door, while the servant brought his hat.

They went out together very quietly, but hating each other.

"What a pity it is," said Foster, as they walked together, "what a pity that young lawyer fellow got married with such indecorous haste after we jilted him."

Gertrude caught her breath with a gasp, and the pallor of her face grew deadly.

"If he had waited now, like a reasonable fellow, he might join your party in Europe. But I suppose the pretty gipsy he married would be in the way of an arrangement like that.

If fire in a woman's eyes could have struck a human being dead, Foster must have fallen to the pavement, blasted. Still Gertrude moved on, silently gnawing her white lips beneath the veil that but half concealed the passion of her wrath.

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## CHAPTER LXXX.

### THE OLD PRISONER.

**A**MONG a gang of prisoners in one of the workshops at Sing Sing, an old man was seated at a shoemaker's bench with a last strapped to his knee, and a hammer in his hand with which he was pounding the inner leather of a shoe into shape. On the tray of his bench the well-worn tools of his craft were neatly arrayed, and he toiled on with that patient perseverance that springs from habit long after every object for exertion is lost.

It was a noble head that bent over that teathered

last. Spite of the closely cut hair, white as falling snow, spite of the mournful expression so full of pathetic patience, there was a classical grandeur in that face which would have ennobled the purest marble that our Rogers ever glorified with his genius.

By the door, looking over the bowed heads of the prisoners, stood a young man who seemed disturbed by some unusual emotion, as his eyes fell upon the old prisoner who had been pointed out to him by the superintendent. "She has his features," thought Hart Webster, while a dim expression of tenderness came into his eyes. "His own proud look, broken down and subdued, but the ruin is there. Heavens! Who could have coupled that countenance with crime. Thank God that I have had the power to lift this awful weight from the old man's life!"

"Frothingham."

It was the superintendent who broke the dead silence of the room.

The old man gave a start that rattled the hammer against his last, and then looked across the room with terror in his eyes.

"Frothingham, you are wanted."

The old man slipped the strap from his knee, laid down the last, and came slowly forward, regarding the superintendent with a firm, eager glance.

"Has she come?" he questioned, not daring to address the superintendent, but, so nervously wrought upon, that he could not help speaking. Still his eyes were cast down as he stood before the two men who had summoned him from the dull monotony of his work.

"Mr. Frothingham!"

The voice, deep, tremulous, and sympathetic, star-

led the old man more than the title of respect that once belonged to his name had done. What could this strange man want of him?

With the thought came a sharp pang of terror.

"Is she dead? Is either of them dead, that they send a stranger?" he asked.

"No, no, Mr. Frothingham; there is no death—no calamity that you need dread. I have only come to you with a little news."

"News—and no death. Ah, well, I shall hear in time."

"Come this way," said the superintendent, "Mr. Webster has something to tell you."

"Webster—Webster— Ah, I remember the name. She told me—"

"That I was a friend of the family—and so I am. Had I known the facts of your case under other circumstances, some years of suffering might have been spared you."

"Ah! I do not understand."

By this time Webster had reached the superintendent's room, and was alone with the prisoner, who sat with his eyes fixed on the floor, from long habit, as if he were dead to everything; but his knees shook under the two hands placed nervously upon them.

"I wish you to understand that all your sufferings are over. There! there! do not allow me to startle you."

"But—but—how?"

"I have just had your pardon registered."

A gleam of thrilling light swept the old man's face. Then a darker cloud came over it.

"Pardon? for a crime I never committed. There can be redress for innocence, but no pardon."

"But you are free!"

"What is freedom to a man branded with crimes from which there is no exculpation?"

"The pardon is but a legal form. It was given, however, only when the proofs of your innocence were made clear to the Governor," said Hart Webster, with the kindness of infinite sympathy in his voice and manner.

"Ha!"

The breath which broke out in this sound seemed to die with it.

"The declaration of innocence is embodied in the pardon. You go forth from this place of martyrdom with an untainted name. Ha!"

The young man sprung to his feet, and caught the prisoner as he was falling, face foremost, to the floor.

"Have I killed him? Oh, God help me! have I killed him?"

It seemed so, for marble was never of a harder or more deathly white than that face which lay on his bosom heavily as stone itself. With a hand that trembled more violently than those of the old prisoner had done, Webster drew a travelling flask from his pocket, and poured some brandy between those pale half-open lips. He made no outcry, but clasped the limp hands and waited anxiously for the life that seemed smitten from the old man's frame.

After a little the gray eyebrows began to tremble, the thin lashes quivered, and a pair of dark eyes looked through, misty with dawning consciousness. Then the lips moved feebly.

"Was it you that mocked me so?"

"I have told you of your pardon, of your innocence proven before the whole world."

All at once the old man flung out his arms, sank down upon the floor—half kneeling, half prostrate—and burst into a flood of tears, in which the fortitude of almost a quarter of a century gave way.

"Oh, my God! my God!"

"Be calm. Do try for more composure."

"Composure? Ah! you don't know. I—I had a little child."

"Yes, I know!"

"Shall I—shall I see her?"

"Be strong, and there is no one you have loved whom you shall not see."

"Are they here?—Eunice?"

"No, not here. She has gone to prepare your other sister, and—"

"My child? my child?"

"Yes, your daughter. All will be ready to welcome you."

"Let me go—let me go. What are we staying here for?"

"There, there, be patient; you cannot leave in this dress."

The old man looked down upon his gray prison-dress, with a sort of regretful tenderness. Habit had made it dear to him.

"Poor old friend," he said, smoothing his hand down the sleeve! "They will give you to some forlorn wretch who will loathe your touch as I did at first; but if it is a life-sentence, he will learn, at last, how sweet companionship is with anything."

A touch of pathetic joy was on the old man's face

now. He had ceased to tremble, and his eyes shone with expectation.

"You will find more suitable garments there," said Webster, pointing to a portmanteau in a corner of the room. "Shall I send some one to help you?"

The old man laughed for the first time in twenty years. It was a weird, hoarse croak, that seemed to frighten him, for he looked around as if for some other person who had uttered it.

Meantime Webster had left the room, and stood talking with the superintendent, whose interest had been unusually aroused.

"Proven innocent after so many years," he said. "That is strange! A case of poisoning too; his own wife, wasn't it?"

"Yes," answered Webster. "It was a sudden death from causes little understood twenty years ago; but science has made rapid progress since then, and a thorough investigation has convinced all who entered upon it, inclusive of the Governor, that this wronged man was the victim of medical ignorance and scientific quackery. There was no evidence that would have convicted a man in any enlightened court of the present day."

"I am glad of that, for no quieter inmate ever left the prison," said the superintendent. "His patience has been something wonderful. Strange, isn't it, that his sister—the tall one I mean—never got him out. She was always trying. I don't think there has been a Governor inaugurated in twenty years that she has not been before. For her sake, if nothing else, I am glad the old gentleman is free."

"Yes, for her sake, if nothing else. She is a grand

old woman, but did not know how to act in a case like this. Without help and counsel she could do nothing, but the time came at last. This will be a happy night for more than one person—but I think he must be ready."

When Webster entered the superintendent's office, the old gentleman, neatly dressed in black, was walking up and down the room in wild haste, as if every step he took brought him nearer to something he loved.

"I am ready," he said, with breathless eagerness, "quite ready," and he hurried out like a bird eager to leave its cage.

He was in the prison-yard now, and looked around that grim, dreary space, with a touch of mournfulness.

"It seems strange," he said, with a piteous smile, as he remarked Webster's surprise at this, "but suffering sometimes links us closer to inanimate things than happiness, or even love. I long to go, and yet—and yet—"

The old man sighed heavily, and looked back on the prison walls with sad, dreamy eyes, holding the hat in his hand.

"They will be waiting for us," said Webster, kindly.

"Ah, yes."

The old man walked on and passed the gate bareheaded. He had been for years without the need of a covering for his head, and hardly knew how to use the hat he carried.

Webster took it gently from his grasp and placed it on his head, which the old man shook a little uneasily, as if he felt even that slight weight burdensome.

A carriage stood near the outer gate, which the old man entered timidly and with hesitation, for he had

almost forgotten the uses of a vehicle like that. The softness of the cushions seemed to trouble him, and when the horses started he clung to the arm strap in absolute trepidation.

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## CHAPTER LXXXI.

### TOGETHER AND PARTED.

TWO anxious women sat together in the old Foster mansion waiting in silence for the sound of carriage wheels stopping at the door, both were pale, and one had a look of apprehension in her meek eyes as if she feared the very sound she hoped for.

"You have not told her?" said Aunt Eunice hoarsely. "They have not been kept in suspense like us?"

"No, I have not said a word."

"Hark! isn't that a carriage?"

The two women held their breath, and looked keenly at each other.

It was a carriage. Would it pass?

No! no! Surely it stopped—there was a faint crash as if steps were let down.

Both women crept towards the door. Aunt Eunice stood upright, but Mrs. Foster leaned against the wood-work, growing paler and paler each moment.

The bell rang. The steps of the servant in the hall sounded slow and leaden. It seemed an eternity to those two women before the door opened.

"The steps there is—there is more than one," whispered Mrs. Foster.

Aunt Eunice did not speak. Her lips attempted to move, but only quivered.

"Oh, yes, I hear another step, slower, stumbling. They are coming up."

Aunt Eunice flung the door open and stood in the cross lights. Mrs. Foster still supported herself by the frame-work, and clung to her sister.

Webster looked up, and saw those two pale faces peering in fearful suspense down the staircase.

"Do not be anxious," he called out, cheerily. He is with me."

Then Aunt Eunice reached out her arms with a cry, gathered the weaker woman to her bosom, told her not to sob so or make such a child of herself, and went forward to the stairs.

An old man was toiling up the steps with his head bowed, for the thick carpeting seemed strange to his feet. Down, between Webster and the banister, Aunt Eunice glided, took the old man tenderly by the arm and led him into her sister's room.

"Eunice—and you, my dear," said the old man touching them both as if to make sure that they were living beings. Tell me, is this your home? It—it frightens me."

Then Mrs. Foster sank on her knees, and kissed the slender hand yet stained with the prison wax.

"Yes, my home, and yours if you will stay with me, brother, for I am all alone now."

"Ah!" he said, "strange, strange."

Then he looked around wistfully, as if something were missing.



"What is it?" Ah! Mr. Webster? Why, sister, he has gone," cried Aunt Eunice, going to the door.

"He heard my message; he knew that they would be here, and whispered that Gertrude must never know that we could not have done it without his help. I promised," said Mrs. Foster.

"But—but I would have liked to thank him again," said Aunt Eunice, regretfully.

During this brief conversation the two women had drawn towards the window, apart from their brother. He looked after them wistfully, attempted to rise, and fell back in his chair, as if seized by some unaccountable dread.

"Why don't she come? Is anything the matter? Why don't she come? My child, my little girl."

Before either of the women could answer, the outer door opened, and some one came flying up the stairs.

"Aunt Eunice, dear Aunt Eunice."

"It is Gertrude," said Mrs. Foster, in a whisper.

The old man stood up leaning against his chair.

"My child! Oh, my God, it is a woman! I should not have known her."

A whirlwind of anger had swept Gertrude into the room, but the sight of that face stilled the tempest. For a moment she stood irresolute. Then some holy intuition possessed her, and she went up to him, reached out her arms, and laid her head on his bosom.

"Father."

The old man sank to a chair, almost dragging her with him. Then lifting his tear-stained face to hers, he said again with piteous incredulity.

"But it is a woman."

"Still your child," said Gertrude, with a touch of

pathetic humor in her smile. "I couldn't help growing, any more than I can help loving you dearly."

Then the old man leaned forward, and kissed her on the forehead, sighing heavily. In that sigh he bade an eternal farewell to the child that had haunted his prison like an angel.

Then Gertrude was seized with a noble inspiration. She remembered her husband who was waiting down stairs, and whom she had left in such bitter hate, while God was preparing this great blessing for her. She went into the little room that had formerly been his, and found him there, smoking. When she entered he he tossed the cigar away. He could taunt her cruelly in his speech, torture her with cold persistence; but to smoke in her presence would be an ungentlemanly act, of which he was quite incapable.

"Rufus," she said, resting a hand on his chair, not for support, for excitement had made her strong. "To-day, and many a time before, you have taunted me with my low origin, I have borne it without reply, because in one thing, and in that only, I have been a coward. There was nothing in my life or parentage, as you understood them, to call a taunt from your lips. I have learned this much while sharing your life. A man who toils for his daily bread upon the soil he has earned, is more likely to remain, in all things, the honest and noble being God intended his creatures should be, than the man who sells merchandise, barter gold, or preys upon his neighbor. But you had a right to condemn me, because I kept a secret from you—a secret withheld from me, up to the very time of our marriage—that very hour I came to you with the truth, but you refused to listen. Since then I have had no faith in

your magnanimity, and would not put my relatives at your mercy. Rufus Foster, my father is alive, and in this house."

For once, Foster was taken by surprise, and spoke quickly.

"Your father! and this the first time I ever heard of him."

"Because he was dead to the world—the innocent victim of a fearful mistake, for which he has during my whole life suffered martyrdom in State Prison."

"State Prison? My wife's father?"

"But he is free now, his innocence is proven—his good name restored. Even the charge against him is forgotten. The story is only known to my two aunts and one other person."

"And who is this favored individual?" said Foster, from whose eyes a vicious gleam shot stealthily.

"Hart Webster."

"Indeed!"

"When he asked my aunt's consent to our marriage she told him everything."

"And he was willing to take you?"

"Yes. Nothing could be more noble than his conduct. I did not know it at the time, nor until—until—"

"It was too late," said Foster, finishing the sentence for her. "What a pity! for really I am afraid that two such exalted characters could not have been found. I suppose it was this consideration that closed your lips until this precious old felon was under my father's roof, and you discovered that there was no chance of hiding him longer."

"Rufus Foster!"

Foster arose, and took his hat from the table.

"Is the whole thing explained now?"

"No. You are cold and cruel, but I deserve this. With my father's kiss on my forehead almost for the first time in my life, I came to you for pardon and conciliation."

"Indeed, and how do you propose to set the trifling matter right?"

"By striving to please you, by taking up my duties more faithfully. Let me see my poor father now and then. Keep his secret."

"Do you think I am likely to brand myself as a felon's son-in-law?"

The man spoke with intense bitterness now. All his languid cynicism was gone. His tongue was keen as a serpent's. It was only for a moment. The old tone and manner came back presently.

"Oh, Foster, see him; one look on that face, so worn, so patient, so grand, and you never could speak of him cruelly again."

"Excuse me if I decline."

"For my father's sake, I implore."

"For that nice old gentleman's sake I would of course make herculean sacrifices, but having made up my mind to take the first steamer to Europe, I have not time for that amount of heroism."

One moment Gertrude hesitated, then the slow crimson of a firm resolve settled on her face.

"Then you repudiate the old man who has been so wronged, and now comes here to ask for his child?"

Foster looked coolly into that impassioned face. All its beauty had come back, and added to it was a grandeur of sentiment that astonished him. Two years ago this superb beauty would have won him to any-

thing, but now it failed to awake more than momentary wonder.

"You answer me only with that smile," she said, "you are willing to give me up—be it so. Hereafter the old man up yonder shall never be separated from his child. Farewell, I shall return to your home no more."

"As a gentleman, I suppose it is unnecessary to say that I dispute no claim that you have upon me. There need be no quarrel about money," said Foster.

Gertrude turned away impatiently; she would not answer. Did not the man know that his wealth had become loathsome to her? After a moment she turned, and held out her hand.

"When we part to-night, it is forever," she said very quietly. This is an eternal farewell!"

The woman held out her hand. Foster took it in his and bowed over it with easy politeness. Thus the husband and wife parted.

Two days after the parting we have described, a carriage, which seemed heavily loaded, came along the river road, passed under the great chestnut, whose branches swept the dust from its top, and drew up at the red farm-house. Betsey Taft hurried to the front door, and held it open while Aunt Eunice came out of the carriage followed by two ladies, and an old gentleman, who cast a pleased look upon the garden and orchard as he went up the steps. Directly the door closed and shut out everything but the carriage from the eager glance of little Patty Vane, who was fishing for shiners with a pin hook, from the wall of her father's garden.

"It's them, I know it's them!" she cried, flinging

down her crooked stick that answered for a fishing-pole, and clambering up the end of the hedge. "Anyway, I'll just run and see." Away she went across the loose planks, over the street and around to the back door, which was sure to be open.

Half an hour after she came running home again, with her hair flying, and her apron full of toys and candies.

"Oh, Mar, Mar," she cried, rushing into the kitchen. "Aunt Eunice has come in a great big carriage with our Gertie and Mrs. Foster, and such a dear, nice old gentleman. Now, guess who he is."

"How can I, not knowing?" said the mother.

"Of course, how can you? He's our Gertie's own father, and Aunt Eunice's brother!"

"Gertrude's father—Aunt Eunice's brother!"

"Just so. That's it; been away ever since she was a baby, in foreign parts, I reckon; but isn't he just nice. Got hair soft as snow, but short as short; said people wore it so where he'd been. He's dressed up in Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, and is going to stay on the farm all his life—'cause he was brought up on a farm and knows all about it, so he can save Aunt Eunice ever so much trouble; don't you see, Mar?"

"Yes, but about Gertie?"

"Oh, she's going to stay at the farm too, with her own Par. Mr. Foster's gone off ever so far over the water, and we shall have Gertie all to herself. No fellow will dare to come after her now. More than that—Mrs. Foster is a going to stay with Aunt Eunice all summer—every summer, only staying winters in York, 'cause she loves her brother so—and Mar—"

"Well?"

Gertie is going to have forty pianos come from York, and she's going to learn me—no, teach me how to play on them."

"What, all at once?"

"Well now, I reckon, and Mrs. Foster is going to kind of adopt me in winter, and there now, Mar, isn't that a whole lot of news?"

"I should think so. You must have talked them to death."

"No, I didn't. All I told them about was Clara's baby, and what a dear, darling little fellow he is, and about Cousin Hart's wife coming here to visit us, and he so awful fond of her. There wasn't anything else to tell, you know, Mar. But just look here, cookies and ox-eyes and kisses and lump candy. Take all you want, Mar!"

THE END.

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