SHORT STORIES BY LUCY M MONTGOMERY

Freeditorial

A Patent Medicine Testimonial

"You might as well try to move the rock of Gibraltar as attempt to change Uncle Abimelech's mind when it is once made up," said Murray gloomily.

Murray is like dear old Dad; he gets discouraged rather easily. Now, I'm not like that; I'm more like Mother's folks. As Uncle Abimelech has never failed to tell me when I have annoyed him, I'm "all Foster." Uncle Abimelech doesn't like the Fosters. But I'm glad I take after them. If I had folded my hands and sat down meekly when Uncle Abimelech made known his good will and pleasure regarding Murray and me after Father's death, Murray would never have got to college—nor I either, for that matter. Only I wouldn't have minded that very much. I just wanted to go to college because Murray did. I couldn't be separated from him. We were twins and had always been together.

As for Uncle Abimelech's mind, I knew that he never had been known to change it. But, as he himself was fond of saying, there has to be a first time for everything, and I had determined that this was to be the first time for him. I hadn't any idea how I was going to bring it about; but it just had to be done, and I'm not "all Foster" for nothing.

I knew I would have to depend on my own thinkers. Murray is clever at books and dissecting dead things, but he couldn't help me out in this, even if he hadn't settled beforehand that there was no use in opposing Uncle Abimelech.

"I'm going up to the garret to think this out, Murray," I said solemnly. "Don't let anybody disturb me, and if Uncle Abimelech comes over don't tell him where I am. If I don't come down in time to get tea, get it yourself. I shall not leave the garret until I have thought of some way to change Uncle Abimelech's mind."

"Then you'll be a prisoner there for the term of your natural life, dear sis," said Murray sceptically. "You're a clever girl, Prue—and you've got enough decision for two—but you'll never get the better of Uncle Abimelech."

"We'll see," I said resolutely, and up to the garret I went. I shut the door and bolted it good and fast to make sure. Then I piled some old cushions in the window seat—for one might as well be comfortable when one is thinking as not—and went over the whole ground from the beginning.

Outside the wind was thrashing the broad, leafy top of the maple whose tallest twigs reached to the funny grey eaves of our old house. One roly-poly little sparrow blew or flew to the sill and sat there for a minute, looking at me with knowing eyes. Down below I could see Murray in a corner of the yard, pottering over a sick duck. He had set its broken leg and was nursing it back to health. Anyone except Uncle Abimelech could see that Murray was simply born to be a doctor and that it was flying in the face of Providence to think of making him anything else.

From the garret windows I could see all over the farm, for the house is on the hill end of it. I could see all the dear old fields and the spring meadow and the beech woods in the southwest corner. And beyond the orchard were the two grey barns and down below at the right-hand corner was the garden with all my sweet peas fluttering over the fences

and trellises like a horde of butterflies. It was a dear old place and both Murray and I loved every stick and stone on it, but there was no reason why we should go on living there when Murray didn't like farming. And it wasn't our own, anyhow. It all belonged to Uncle Abimelech.

Father and Murray and I had always lived here together. Father's health broke down during his college course. That was one reason why Uncle Abimelech was set against Murray going to college, although Murray is as chubby and sturdy a fellow as you could wish to see. Anybody with Foster in him would be that.

To go back to Father. The doctors told him that his only chance of recovering his strength was an open-air life, so Father rented one of Uncle Abimelech's farms and there he lived for the rest of his days. He did not get strong again until it was too late for college, and he was a square peg in a round hole all his life, as he used to tell us. Mother died before we could remember, so Murray and Dad and I were everything to each other. We were very happy too, although we were bossed by Uncle Abimelech more or less. But he meant it well and Father didn't mind.

Then Father died—oh, that was a dreadful time! I hurried over it in my thinking-out. Of course when Murray and I came to look our position squarely in the face we found that we were dependent on Uncle Abimelech for everything, even the roof over our heads. We were literally as poor as church mice and even poorer, for at least they get churches rent-free.

Murray's heart was set on going to college and studying medicine. He asked Uncle Abimelech to lend him enough money to get a start with and then he could work his own way along and pay back the loan in due time. Uncle Abimelech is rich, and Murray and I are his nearest relatives. But he simply wouldn't listen to Murray's plan.

"I put my foot firmly down on such nonsense," he said. "And you know that when I put my foot down something squashes."

It was not that Uncle Abimelech was miserly or that he grudged us assistance. Not at all. He was ready to deal generously by us, but it must be in his own way. His way was this. Murray and I were to stay on the farm, and when Murray was twenty-one Uncle Abimelech said he would deed the farm to him—make him a present of it out and out.

"It's a good farm, Murray," he said. "Your father never made more than a bare living out of it because he wasn't strong enough to work it properly—that's what *he* got out of a college course, by the way. But you are strong enough and ambitious enough to do well."

But Murray couldn't be a farmer, that was all there was to it. I told Uncle Abimelech so, firmly, and I talked to him for days about it, but Uncle Abimelech never wavered. He sat and listened to me with a quizzical smile on that handsome, clean-shaven, ruddy old face of his, with its cut-granite features. And in the end he said,

"You ought to be the one to go to college if either of you did, Prue. You would make a capital lawyer, if I believed in the higher education of women, but I don't. Murray can take or leave the farm as he chooses. If he prefers the latter alternative, well and good. But he gets no help from me. You're a foolish little girl, Prue, to back him up in this nonsense of his."

It makes me angry to be called a little girl when I put up my hair a year ago, and Uncle Abimelech knows it. I gave up arguing with him. I knew it was no use anyway.

I thought it all over in the garret. But no way out of the dilemma could I see. I had eaten up all the apples I had brought with me and I felt flabby and disconsolate. The sight of Uncle Abimelech stalking up the lane, as erect and lordly as usual, served to deepen my gloom.

I picked up the paper my apples had been wrapped in and looked it over gloomily. Then I saw something, and Uncle Abimelech was delivered into my hand.

The whole plan of campaign unrolled itself before me, and I fairly laughed in glee, looking out of the garret window right down on the little bald spot on the top of Uncle Abimelech's head, as he stood laying down the law to Murray about something.

When Uncle Abimelech had gone I went down to Murray.

"Buddy," I said, "I've thought of a plan. I'm not going to tell you what it is, but you are to consent to it without knowing. I think it will quench Uncle Abimelech, but you must have perfect confidence in me. You must back me up no matter what I do and let me have my own way in it all."

"All right, sis," said Murray.

"That isn't solemn enough," I protested. "I'm serious. Promise solemnly."

"I promise solemnly, 'cross my heart,'" said Murray, looking like an owl.

"Very well. Remember that your role is to lie low and say nothing, like Brer Rabbit. Alloway's Anodyne Liniment is pretty good stuff, isn't it, Murray? It cured your sprain after you had tried everything else, didn't it?"

"Yes. But I don't see the connection."

"It isn't necessary that you should. Well, what with your sprain and my rheumatics I think I can manage it."

"Look here, Prue. Are you sure that long brooding over our troubles up in the garret hasn't turned your brain?"

"My brain is all right. Now leave me, minion. There is that which I would do."

Murray grinned and went. I wrote a letter, took it down to the office, and mailed it. For a week there was nothing more to do.

There is just one trait of Uncle Abimelech's disposition more marked than his fondness for having his own way and that one thing is family pride. The Melvilles are a very old family. The name dates back to the Norman conquest when a certain Roger de Melville, who was an ancestor of ours, went over to England with William the Conqueror. I don't think the Melvilles ever did anything worth recording in history since. To be sure, as far back as we can trace, none of them has ever done anything bad either. They have been honest, respectable folks and I think that is something worth being proud of.

But Uncle Abimelech pinned his family pride to Roger de Melville. He had the Melville coat of arms and our family tree, made out by an eminent genealogist, framed and hung up in his library, and he would not have done anything that would not have chimed in with that coat of arms and a conquering ancestor for the world.

At the end of a week I got an answer to my letter. It was what I wanted. I wrote again and sent a parcel. In three weeks' time the storm burst.

One day I saw Uncle Abimelech striding up the lane. He had a big newspaper clutched in his hand. I turned to Murray, who was poring over a book of anatomy in the corner.

"Murray, Uncle Abimelech is coming. There is going to be a battle royal between us. Allow me to remind you of your promise."

"To lie low and say nothing? That's the cue, isn't it, sis?"

"Unless Uncle Abimelech appeals to you. In that case you are to back me up."

Then Uncle Abimelech stalked in. He was purple with rage. Old Roger de Melville himself never could have looked fiercer. I *did* feel a quake or two, but I faced Uncle Abimelech undauntedly. No use in having your name on the roll of Battle Abbey if you can't stand your ground.

"Prudence, what does this mean?" thundered Uncle Abimelech, as he flung the newspaper down on the table. Murray got up and peered over. Then he whistled. He started to say something but remembered just in time and stopped. But he did give me a black look. Murray has a sneaking pride of name too, although he won't own up to it and laughs at Uncle Abimelech.

I looked at the paper and began to laugh. We did look so funny, Murray and I, in that advertisement. It took up the whole page. At the top were our photos, half life-size, and underneath our names and addresses printed out in full. Below was the letter I had written to the Alloway Anodyne Liniment folks. It was a florid testimonial to the virtues of their liniment. I said that it had cured Murray's sprain after all other remedies had failed and that, when I had been left a partial wreck from a very bad attack of rheumatic fever, the only thing that restored my joints and muscles to working order was Alloway's Anodyne Liniment, and so on.

It was all true enough, although I dare say old Aunt Sarah-from-the-Hollow's rubbing had as much to do with the cures as the liniment. But that is neither here nor there.

"What does this mean, Prudence?" said Uncle Abimelech again. He was quivering with wrath, but I was as cool as a cucumber, and Murray stood like a graven image.

"Why, that, Uncle Abimelech," I said calmly, "well, it just means one of my ways of making money. That liniment company pays for those testimonials and photos, you know. They gave me fifty dollars for the privilege of publishing them. Fifty dollars will pay for books and tuition for Murray and me at Kentville Academy next winter, and Mrs. Tredgold is kind enough to say she will board me for what help I can give her around the house, and wait for Murray's until he can earn it by teaching."

I rattled all this off glibly before Uncle Abimelech could get in a word.

"It's disgraceful!" he stormed. "Disgraceful! Think of Sir Roger de Melville—and a patent medicine advertisement! Murray Melville, what were you about, sir, to let your sister disgrace herself and her family name by such an outrageous transaction?"

I quaked a bit. If Murray should fail me! But Murray was true-blue.

"I gave Prue a free hand, sir. It's an honest business transaction enough—and the family name alone won't send us to college, you know, sir."

Uncle Abimelech glared at us.

"This must be put an end to," he said. "This advertisement must not appear again. I won't have it!"

"But I've signed a contract that it is to run for six months," I said sturdily. "And I've others in view. You remember the Herb Cure you recommended one spring and that it did me so much good! I'm negotiating with the makers of that and—"

"The girl's mad!" said Uncle Abimelech. "Stark, staring mad!"

"Oh, no, I'm not, Uncle Abimelech. I'm merely a pretty good businesswoman. You won't help Murray to go to college, so I must. This is the only way I have, and I'm going to see it through."

After Uncle Abimelech had gone, still in a towering rage, Murray remonstrated. But I reminded him of his promise and he had to succumb.

Next day Uncle Abimelech returned—a subdued and chastened Uncle Abimelech.

"See here, Prue," he said sternly. "This thing must be stopped. I say it *must*. I am not going to have the name of Melville dragged all over the country in a patent medicine advertisement. You've played your game and won it—take what comfort you can out of the confession: If you will agree to cancel this notorious contract of yours I'll settle it with the company—and I'll put Murray through college—and you too if you want to go! Something will have to be done with you, that's certain. Is this satisfactory?"

"Perfectly," I said promptly. "If you will add thereto your promise that you will forget and forgive, Uncle Abimelech. There are to be no hard feelings."

Uncle Abimelech shrugged his shoulders.

"In for a penny, in for a pound," he said. "Very well, Prue. We wipe off all scores and begin afresh. But there must be no more such doings. You've worked your little scheme through—trust a Foster for that! But in future you've got to remember that in law you're a Melville whatever you are in fact."

I nodded dutifully. "I'll remember, Uncle Abimelech," I promised.

After everything had been arranged and Uncle Abimelech had gone I looked at Murray. "Well?" I said.

Murray twinkled. "You've accomplished the impossible, sis. But, as Uncle Abimelech intimated—don't you try it again."

A Sandshore Wooing

Fir Cottage, Plover Sands.
July Sixth.

We arrived here late last night, and all day Aunt Martha has kept her room to rest. So I had to keep mine also, although I felt as fresh as a morning lark, and just in the mood for enjoyment.

My name is Marguerite Forrester—an absurdly long name for so small a girl. Aunt Martha always calls me Marguer*ite*, with an accent of strong disapproval. She does not like my name, but she gives me the full benefit of it. Connie Shelmardine used to call me Rita. Connie was my roommate last year at the Seminary. We correspond occasionally, but Aunt Martha frowns on it.

I have always lived with Aunt Martha—my parents died when I was a baby. Aunt Martha says I am to be her heiress if I please her—which means—but, oh, you do not know what "pleasing" Aunt Martha means.

Aunt is a determined and inveterate man-hater. She has no particular love for women, indeed, and trusts nobody but Mrs. Saxby, her maid. I rather like Mrs. Saxby. She is not quite so far gone in petrifaction as Aunt, although she gets a little stonier every year. I expect the process will soon begin on me, but it hasn't yet. My flesh and blood are still unreasonably warm and pulsing and rebellious.

Aunt Martha would be in danger of taking a fit if she ever saw me talking to a man. She watches me jealously, firmly determined to guard me from any possible attack of a roaring and ravening lion in the disguise of nineteenth-century masculine attire. So I have to walk demurely and assume a virtue, if I have it not, while I pine after the untested flesh-pots of Egypt in secret.

We have come down to spend a few weeks at Fir Cottage. Our good landlady is a capacious, kindly-souled creature, and I think she has rather a liking for me. I have been chattering to her all day, for there are times when I absolutely must talk to someone or go mad.

July Tenth.

This sort of life is decidedly dull. The program of every day is the same. I go to the sandshore with Aunt Martha and Mrs. Saxby in the morning, read to Aunt in the afternoons, and mope around by my disconsolate self in the evenings. Mrs. Blake has lent me, for shore use, a very fine spyglass which she owns. She says her "man" brought it home from "furrin' parts" before he died. While Aunt and Mrs. Saxby meander up and down the shore, leaving me free to a certain extent, I amuse myself by examining distant seas and coasts through it, thus getting a few peeps into a forbidden world. We see few people, although there is a large summer hotel about a mile up the beach. Our shore haunts do not seem to be popular with its guests. They prefer the rocks. This suits Aunt Martha admirably. I may also add that it doesn't suit her niece—but that is a matter of small importance.

The first morning I noticed a white object on the rocks, about half a mile away, and turned my glass on it. There—apparently within a stone's throw of me—was a young man. He was lounging on a rock, looking dreamily out to sea. There was something about his face that reminded me of someone I know, but I cannot remember whom.

Every morning he has reappeared on the same spot. He seems to be a solitary individual, given to prowling by himself. I wonder what Aunt would say if she knew what I am so earnestly watching through my glass at times.

July Eleventh.

I shall have to cease looking at the Unknown, I am afraid.

This morning I turned my glass, as usual, on his pet haunt. I nearly fell over in my astonishment, for he was also looking through a spyglass straight at me, too, it seemed. How foolish I felt! And yet my curiosity was so strong that a few minutes afterward I peeped back again, just to see what he was doing. Then he coolly laid down his glass, rose, lifted his cap and bowed politely to me—or, at least, in my direction. I dropped my glass and smiled in a mixture of dismay and amusement. Then I remembered that he was probably watching me again, and might imagine my smile was meant for him. I banished it immediately, shut my glass up and did not touch it again. Soon after we came home.

July Twelfth.

Something has happened at last. Today I went to the shore as usual, fully resolved not even to glance in the forbidden direction. But in the end I had to take a peep, and saw him on the rocks with his glass levelled at me. When he saw that I was looking he laid down the glass, held up his hands, and began to spell out something in the deaf-mute alphabet. Now, I know that same alphabet. Connie taught it to me last year, so that we might hold communication across the schoolroom. I gave one frantic glance at Aunt Martha's rigid back, and then watched him while he deftly spelled: "I am Francis Shelmardine. Are you not Miss Forrester, my sister's friend?"

Francis Shelmardine! Now I knew whom he resembled. And have I not heard endless dissertations from Connie on this wonderful brother of hers, Francis the clever, the handsome, the charming, until he has become the only hero of dreams I have ever had? It was too wonderful. I could only stare dazedly back through my glass.

"May we know each other?" he went on. "May I come over and introduce myself? Right hand, yes; left, no."

I gasped! Suppose he were to come? *What* would happen? I waved my left hand sorrowfully. He looked quite crestfallen and disappointed as he spelled out: "Why not? Would your friends disapprove?"

I signalled: "Yes."

"Are you displeased at my boldness?" was his next question.

Where had all Aunt Martha's precepts flown to then? I blush to record that I lifted my left hand shyly and had just time to catch his pleased expression when Aunt Martha came up and said it was time to go home. So I picked myself meekly up, shook the sand from my dress, and followed my good aunt dutifully home.

July Thirteenth.

When we went to the shore this morning I had to wait in spasms of remorse and anxiety until Aunt got tired of reading and set off along the shore with Mrs. Saxby. Then I reached for my glass.

Mr. Shelmardine and I had quite a conversation. Under the circumstances there could be no useless circumlocution in our exchange of ideas. It was religiously "boiled down," and ran something like this:

"You are not displeased with me?"

"No—but I should be."

"Why?"

"It is wrong to deceive Aunt."

"I am quite respectable."

"That is not the question."

"Cannot her prejudices be overcome?"

"Absolutely no."

"Mrs. Allardyce, who is staying at the hotel, knows her well. Shall I bring her over to vouch for my character?"

"It would not do a bit of good."

"Then it is hopeless."

"Yes."

"Would you object to knowing me on your own account?"

"No."

"Do you ever come to the shore alone?"

"No. Aunt would not permit me."

"Must she know?"

"Yes. I would not come without her permission."

"You will not refuse to chat with me thus now and then?"

"I don't know. Perhaps not."

I had to go home then. As we went Mrs. Saxby complimented me on my good colour. Aunt Martha looked her disapproval. If I were really ill Aunt would spend her last cent in my behalf, but she would be just as well pleased to see me properly pale and subdued at all times, and not looking as if I were too well contented in this vale of tears.

July Seventeenth.

I have "talked" a good deal with Mr. Shelmardine these past four days. He is to be at the beach for some weeks longer. This morning he signalled across from the rocks: "I mean to see you at last. Tomorrow I will walk over and pass you."

"You must not. Aunt will suspect."

"No danger. Don't be alarmed. I will do nothing rash."

I suppose he will. He seems to be very determined. Of course, I cannot prevent him from promenading on our beach all day if he chooses. But then if he did, Aunt would speedily leave him in sole possession of it.

I wonder what I had better wear tomorrow.

July Nineteenth.

Yesterday morning Aunt Martha was serene and unsuspicious. It is dreadful of me to be deceiving her and I do feel guilty. I sat down on the sand and pretended to read the "Memoirs of a Missionary"—Aunt likes cheerful books like that—in an agony of anticipation. Presently Aunt said, majestically: "Marguer*ite*, there is a man coming this way. We will move further down."

And we moved. Poor Aunt!

Mr. Shelmardine came bravely on. I felt my heart beating to my very finger tips. He halted by the fragment of an old stranded boat. Aunt had turned her back on him.

I ventured on a look. He lifted his hat with a twinkle in his eye. Just then Aunt said, icily: "We will go home, Marguer*ite*. That creature evidently intends to persist in his intrusion."

Home we came accordingly.

This morning he signalled across: "Letter from Connie. Message for you. I mean to deliver it personally. Do you ever go to church?"

Now, I *do* go regularly to church at home. But Aunt Martha and Mrs. Saxby are both such rigid church people that they would not darken the doors of the Methodist church at Plover Sands for any consideration. Needless to say, I am not allowed to go either. But it was impossible to make this long explanation, so I merely replied: "Not here."

"Will you not go tomorrow morning?"

"Aunt will not let me."

"Coax her."

"Coaxing never has any effect on her."

"Would she relent if Mrs. Allardyce were to call for you?"

Now, I have been cautiously sounding Aunt about Mrs. Allardyce, and I have discovered that she disapproves of her. So I said: "It would be useless. I will ask Aunt if I may go, but I feel almost sure that she will not consent."

This evening, when Aunt was in an unusually genial mood, I plucked up heart of grace and asked her.

"Marguer*ite*," she said impressively, "you know that I do not attend church here."

"But, Aunt," I persisted, quakingly, "couldn't I go alone? It is not very far—and I will be very careful."

Aunt merely gave me a look that said about forty distinct and separate things, and I was turning away in despair when Mrs. Saxby—bless her heart—said: "I really think it would be no harm to let the child go."

As Aunt attaches great importance to Mrs. Saxby's opinion, she looked at me relentingly and said: "Well, I will think it over and let you know in the morning, Marguer*ite*."

Now, everything depends on the sort of humour Aunt is in in the morning.

July Twentieth.

This morning was perfect, and after breakfast Aunt said, condescendingly: "I think you may attend church if you wish, Marguer*ite*. Remember that I expect you to conduct yourself with becoming prudence and modesty."

I flew upstairs and pulled my prettiest dress out of my trunk. It is a delicate, shimmering grey stuff with pearly tints about it. Every time I get anything new, Aunt Martha and I have a battle royal over it. I verily believe that Aunt would like me to dress in the fashions in vogue in her youth. There is always a certain flavour of old-fashionedness about my gowns and hats. Connie used to say that it was delicious and gave me a piquant uniqueness—a certain unlikeness to other people that possessed a positive charm. That is only Connie's view of it, however.

But I had had my own way about this dress and it is really very becoming. I wore a little silvery-grey chip hat, trimmed with pale pink flowers, and I pinned at my belt the sweetest cluster of old-fashioned blush rosebuds from the garden. Then I borrowed a hymn book from Mrs. Blake and ran down to undergo Aunt Martha's scrutiny.

"Dear me, child," she said discontentedly, "you have gotten yourself up very frivolously, it seems to me."

"Why, Aunty," I protested, "I'm all in grey—every bit."

Aunt Martha sniffed. You don't know how much Aunt can express in a sniff. But I tripped to church like a bird.

The first person I saw there was Mr. Shelmardine. He was sitting right across from me and a smile glimmered in his eyes. I did not look at him again. Through the service I was subdued enough to have satisfied even Aunt Martha.

When church came out, he waited for me at the entrance to his pew. I pretended not to see him until he said "Good morning," in a voice vibrating and deep, which sounded as though it might become infinitely tender if its owner chose. When we went down the steps he took my hymnal, and we walked up the long, bowery country road.

"Thank you so much for coming today," he said—as if I went to oblige him.

"I had a hard time to get Aunt Martha's consent," I declared frankly. "I wouldn't have succeeded if Mrs. Saxby hadn't taken my part."

"Heaven bless Mrs. Saxby," he remarked fervently. "But is there any known way of overcoming your aunt's scruples? If so, I am ready to risk it."

"There is none. Aunt Martha is very good and kind to me, but she will never stop trying to bring me up. The process will be going on when I am fifty. And she hates men! I don't know what she would do if she saw me now."

Mr. Shelmardine frowned and switched the unoffending daisies viciously with his cane.

"Then there is no hope of my seeing you openly and above-board?"

"Not at present," I said faintly.

After a brief silence we began to talk of other things. He told me how he happened to see me first.

"I was curious to know who the people were who were always in the same place at the same time, so one day I took my telescope. I could see you plainly. You were reading and had your hat off. When I went back to the hotel I asked Mrs. Allardyce if she knew who the boarders at Fir Cottage were and she told me. I had heard Connie speak of you, and I determined to make your acquaintance."

When we reached the lane I held out my hand for the hymnal.

"You mustn't come any further, Mr. Shelmardine," I said hurriedly. "Aunt—Aunt might see you."

He took my hand and held it, looking at me seriously.

"Suppose I were to walk up to the cottage tomorrow and ask for you?"

I gasped. He looked so capable of doing anything he took it into his head to do.

"Oh, you wouldn't," I said piteously. "Aunt Martha would—you are not in earnest."

"I suppose not," he said regretfully. "Of course I would not do anything that would cause you unpleasantness. But this must not—shall not be our last meeting."

"Aunt will not let me come to church again," I said.

"Does she ever take a nap in the afternoon?" he queried.

I wriggled my parasol about in the dust uneasily.

"Sometimes."

"I shall be at the old boat tomorrow afternoon at two-thirty," he said.

I pulled my hand away.

"I couldn't—you know I couldn't," I cried—and then I blushed to my ears.

"Are you sure you couldn't?" bending a little nearer.

"Quite sure," I murmured.

He surrendered my hymnal at last.

"Will you give me a rose?"

I unpinned the whole cluster and handed it to him. He lifted it until it touched his lips. As for me, I scuttled up the lane in the most undignified fashion. At the turn I looked back. He was still standing there with his hat off.

July Twenty-fourth.

On Monday afternoon I slipped away to the shore while Aunt Martha and Mrs. Saxby were taking their regular nap and I was supposed to be reading sermons in my room.

Mr. Shelmardine was leaning against the old boat, but he came swiftly across the sand to meet me.

"This is very kind of you," he said.

"I ought not to have come," I said repentantly. "But it is so lonely there—and one can't be interested in sermons and memoirs *all* the time."

Mr. Shelmardine laughed.

"Mr. and Mrs. Allardyce are on the other side of the boat. Will you come and meet them?"

How nice of him to bring them! I knew I should like Mrs. Allardyce, just because Aunt Martha didn't. We had a delightful stroll. I never thought of the time until Mr. Shelmardine said it was four o'clock.

"Oh, is it so late as that?" I cried. "I must go at once."

"I'm sorry we have kept you so long," remarked Mr. Shelmardine in a tone of concern. "If she should be awake, what will the consequences be?"

"Too terrible to think of," I answered seriously. "I'm sorry, Mr. Shelmardine, but you mustn't come any further."

"*We* will be here tomorrow afternoon," he said.

"Mr. Shelmardine!" I protested. "I wish you wouldn't put such ideas into my head. They won't come out—no, not if I read a whole volume of sermons right through."

We looked at each other for a second. Then he began to smile, and we both went off into a peal of laughter.

"At least let me know if Miss Fiske rampages," he called after me as I fled.

But Aunt Martha was not awake—and I have been to the shore three afternoons since then. I was there today, and I'm going tomorrow for a boat sail with Mr. Shelmardine and the Allardyces. But I am afraid the former will do something rash soon. This afternoon he said: "I don't think I can stand this much longer."

"Stand what?" I asked.

"You know very well," he answered recklessly. "Meeting you in this clandestine manner, and thereby causing that poor little conscience of yours such misery. If your aunt were not so—unreasonable, I should never have stooped to it."

"It is all my fault," I said contritely.

"Well, I hardly meant that," he said grimly. "But hadn't I better go frankly to your aunt and lay the whole case before her?"

"You would never see me again if you did that," I said hastily—and then wished I hadn't.

"That is the worst threat you could make," he said.

July Twenty-fifth.

It is all over, and I am the most miserable girl in the world. Of course this means that Aunt Martha has discovered everything and the deserved punishment of my sins has overtaken me.

I slipped away again this afternoon and went for that boat sail. We had a lovely time but were rather late getting in, and I hurried home with many misgivings. Aunt Martha met me at the door.

My dress was draggled, my hat had slipped back, and the kinks and curls of my obstreperous hair were something awful. I know I looked very disreputable and also, no doubt, very guilty and conscience-stricken. Aunt gave me an unutterable look and then followed me up to my room in grim silence.

"Marguer*ite*, what does this mean?"

I have lots of faults, but untruthfulness isn't one of them. I confessed everything—at least, almost everything. I didn't tell about the telescopes and deaf-mute alphabet, and Aunt was too horror-stricken to think of asking how I first made Mr. Shelmardine's acquaintance. She listened in stony silence. I had expected a terrible scolding, but I suppose my crimes simply seemed to her too enormous for words.

When I had sobbed out my last word she rose, swept me one glance of withering contempt, and left the room. Presently Mrs. Saxby came up, looking concerned.

"My dear child, what have you been doing? Your aunt says that we are to go home on the afternoon train tomorrow. She is terribly upset."

I just curled up on the bed and cried, while Mrs. Saxby packed my trunk. I will have no chance to explain matters to Mr. Shelmardine. And I will never see him again, for Aunt is quite capable of whisking me off to Africa. He will just think me a feather-brained flirt. Oh, I am so unhappy!

July Twenty-sixth.

I am the happiest girl in the world! That is quite a different strain from yesterday. We leave Fir Cottage in an hour, but that doesn't matter now.

I did not sleep a wink last night and crawled miserably down to breakfast. Aunt took not the slightest notice of me, but to my surprise she told Mrs. Saxby that she intended taking a farewell walk to the shore. I knew I would be taken, too, to be kept out of mischief, and my heart gave a great bound of hope. Perhaps I would have a chance to send word to Francis, since Aunt did not know of the part my spyglass had played in my bad behaviour.

I meekly followed my grim guardians to the shore and sat dejectedly on my rug while they paced the sand. Francis was on the rocks. As soon as Aunt Martha and Mrs. Saxby were at a safe distance, I began my message: "All discovered. Aunt is very angry. We go home today."

Then I snatched my glass. His face expressed the direst consternation and dismay. He signalled: "I must see you before you go."

"Impossible. Aunt will never forgive me. Good-bye."

I saw a look of desperate determination cross his face. If forty Aunt Marthas had swooped down upon me, I could not have torn my eyes from that glass.

"I love you. You know it. Do you care for me? I must have my answer now."

What a situation! No time or chance for any maidenly hesitation or softening aureole of words. Aunt and Mrs. Saxby had almost reached the point where they invariably turned. I had barely time to spell out a plain, blunt "yes" and read his answer.

"I shall go home at once, get Mother and Connie, follow you, and demand possession of my property. I shall win the day. Have no fear. Till then, good-bye, my darling."

"Marguerite," said Mrs. Saxby at my elbow, "it is time to go."

I got up obediently. Aunt Martha was as grim and uncompromising as ever, and Mrs. Saxby looked like a chief mourner, but do you suppose I cared? I dropped behind them just once before we left the shore. I knew he was watching me and I waved my hand.

I suppose I am really engaged to Francis Shelmardine. But was there ever such a funny wooing? And *what* will Aunt Martha say?

After Many Days

The square, bare front room of the Baxter Station Hotel—so called because there was no other house in the place to dispute the title—was filled with men. Some of them were putting up at the hotel while they worked at the new branch line, and some of them had dropped in to exchange news and banter while waiting for the mail train.

Gabe Foley, the proprietor, was playing at checkers with one of the railroad men, but was not too deeply absorbed in the game to take in all that was said around him. The air was dim with tobacco smoke, and the brilliant, scarlet geraniums which Mrs. Foley kept in the bay window looked oddly out of place. Gabe knew all those present except one man—a stranger who had landed at Baxter Station from the afternoon freight. Foley's hotel did not boast of a register, and the stranger did not volunteer any information regarding his name or business. He had put in the afternoon and early evening strolling about the village and talking to the men on the branch line. Now he had come in and ensconced himself in the corner behind the stove, where he preserved a complete silence.

He had a rather rough face and was flashily dressed. Altogether, Gabe hardly liked his looks, put as long as a man paid his bill and did not stir up a row Gabe Foley did not interfere with him.

Three or four farmers from "out Greenvale way" were drawn up by the stove, discussing the cheese factory sales and various Greenvale happenings. The stranger appeared to be listening to them intently, although he took no part in their conversation.

Presently he brought his tilted chair down with a sharp thud. Gabe Foley had paused in his manipulation of a king to hurl a question at the Greenvale men.

"Is it true that old man Strong is to be turned out next week?"

"True enough," answered William Jeffers. "Joe Moore is going to foreclose. Stephen Strong has got three years behind with the interest and Moore is out of patience. It seems hard on old Stephen, but Moore ain't the man to hesitate for that. He'll have his own out of it."

"What will the Strongs do?" asked Gabe.

"That's the question everyone in Greenvale is asking. Lizzie Strong has always been a delicate little girl, but maybe she'll manage to scare up a living. Old Stephen is to be the most pitied. I don't see anything for him but the poorhouse."

"How did Stephen Strong come to get into such a tight place?" the stranger asked suddenly. "When I was in these parts a good many years ago he was considered a well-to-do man."

"Well, so he was," replied William Jeffers. "But he began to get in debt when his wife took sick. He spent no end of money on doctors and medicines for her. And then he seemed to have a streak of bad luck besides—crops failed and cows died and all that sort of thing. He's been going behind ever since. He kind of lost heart when his wife died. And now Moore is going to foreclose. It's my opinion poor old Stephen won't live any time if he's turned out of his home."

"Do you know what the mortgage comes to?"

"Near three thousand, counting overdue interest."

"Well, I'm sorry for old Stephen," said Gabe, returning to his game. "If anybody deserves a peaceful old age he does. He's helped more people than you could count, and he was the best Christian in Greenvale, or out of it."

"He was too good," said a Greenvale man crustily. "He just let himself be imposed upon all his life. There's dozens of people owes him and he's never asked for a cent from them. And he's always had some shiftless critter or other hanging round and devouring his substance."

"D'ye mind that Ben Butler who used to be in Greenvale twenty years ago?" asked a third man. "If ever there was an imp of Satan 'twas him—old Ezra Butler's son from the valley. Old Stephen kept him for three or four years and was as good to him as if he'd been his own son."

"Most people out our way do mind Ben Butler," returned William Jeffers grimly, "even if he ain't been heard tell of for twenty years. He wasn't the kind you could forget in a hurry. Where'd he go? Out to the Kootenay, wasn't it?"

"Somewhere there. He was a reg'lar young villain—up to every kind of mischief. Old Stephen caught him stealing his oats one time and 'stead of giving him a taste of jail for it, as he ought to have done, he just took him right into his family and kept him there for three years. I used to tell him he'd be sorry for it, but he always persisted that Ben wasn't bad at heart and would come out all right some day. No matter what the young varmint did old Stephen would make excuses for him—'his ma was dead,' or he 'hadn't had no bringing-up.' I was thankful when he did finally clear out without doing some penitentiary work."

"If poor old Stephen hadn't been so open-handed to every unfortunate critter he came across," said Gabe, "he'd have had more for himself today."

The whistle of the mail train cut short the discussion of Stephen Strong's case. In a minute the room was vacant, except for the stranger. When left to himself he also rose and walked out. Turning away from the station, he struck briskly into the Greenvale road.

About three miles from the station he halted before a house built close to the road. It was old-fashioned, but large and comfortable-looking, with big barns in the rear and an orchard on the left slope. The house itself was in the shadow of the firs, but the yard lay out in the moonlight and the strange visitor did not elect to cross it. Instead, he turned aside into the shadow of the trees around the garden and, leaning against the old rail fence, gave himself up to contemplation of some kind.

There was a light in the kitchen. The window-blind was not down and he had a fairly good view of the room. The only visible occupant was a grey-haired old man sitting by the table, reading from a large open volume before him. The stranger whistled softly.

"That's old Stephen—reading the Bible same as ever, by all that's holy! He hasn't changed much except that he's got mighty grey. He must be close on to seventy. It's a shame to turn an old man like him out of house and home. But Joe Moore always was a genuine skinflint."

He drew himself softly up and sat on the fence. He saw old Stephen Strong close his book, place his spectacles on it, and kneel down by his chair. The old man remained on his knees for some time and then, taking up his candle, left the kitchen. The man on the fence still sat there. Truth to tell, he was chuckling to himself as he recalled all the mischief he had done in the old days—the doubtful jokes, tricks, and escapades he had gone through with.

He could not help remembering at the same time how patient old Stephen Strong had always been with him. He recalled the time he had been caught stealing the oats. How frightened and sullen he had been! And how gently the old man had talked to him and pointed out the sin of which he had been guilty!

He had never stolen again, but in other respects he had not mended his ways much. Behind old Stephen's back he laughed at him and his "preaching." But Stephen Strong had never lost faith in him. He had always asserted mildly that "Ben would come out all right by and by." Ben Butler remembered this too, as he sat on the fence.

He had "always liked old Stephen," he told himself. He was sorry he had fallen on such evil times.

"Preaching and praying don't seem to have brought him out clear after all," he said with a chuckle that quickly died away. Somehow, even in his worst days, Ben Butler had never felt easy when he mocked old Stephen. "Three thousand dollars! I could do it but I reckon I'd be a blamed fool. I ain't a-going to do it. Three thousand ain't picked up every day, even in the Kootenay—'specially by chaps like me."

He patted his pocket knowingly. Fifteen years previously he had gone to the Kootenay district with visions of making a fortune that were quickly dispelled by reality. He had squandered his wages as soon as paid, and it was only of late years that he had "pulled up a bit," as he expressed it, and saved his three thousand dollars.

He had brought the money home with him, having some vague notion of buying a farm and "settling down to do the respectable." But he had already given up the idea. This country was too blamed quiet for him, he said. He would go back to the Kootenay, and he knew what he would do with his money. Jake Perkins and Wade Brown, two "pals" of his, were running a flourishing grocery and saloon combined. They would be glad of another partner with some cash. It would suit him to a T.

"I'll clear out tomorrow," he mused as he walked back. "As long as I stay here old Stephen will haunt me, sure as fate. Wonder what he was praying for tonight. He always used to say the Lord would provide, but He don't appear to have done it. Well, I ain't His deputy."

The next afternoon Ben Butler went over to Greenvale and called at Stephen Strong's. He found only the old man at home. Old Stephen did not recognize him at first, but made him heartily welcome when he did.

"Ben, I do declare! Ben Butler! How are you? How are you? Sit down, Ben—here, take this chair. Where on earth did you come from?"

"Baxter just now—Kootenay on the large scale," answered Ben. "Thought I'd come over and see you again. Didn't expect you'd remember me at all."

"Remember you! Why, of course I do. I haven't ever forgot you, Ben. Many's the time I've wondered where you was and how you was getting on. And you tell me you've been in the Kootenay! Well, well, you have seen a good bit more of the world than I ever have. You've changed a lot, Ben. You ain't a boy no longer. D'ye mind all the pranks you used to play?"

Ben laughed sheepishly.

"I reckon I do. But it ain't myself I come here to talk about—not much to say if I did. It's just been up and down with me. How are you yourself, sir? They were telling me over at Baxter that you were kind of in trouble."

The old man's face clouded over; all the sparkle went out of his kind blue eyes.

"Yes, Ben, yes," he said, with a heavy sigh. "I've kind of gone downhill, that's a fact. The old farm has to go, Ben—I'm sorry for that—I'd have liked to have ended my days here, but it's not to be. I don't want to complain. The Lord does all things well. I haven't a doubt but that it all fits into His wise purposes—not a doubt, Ben, although it may be kind of hard to see it."

Ben was always skittish of "pious talk." He veered around adroitly.

"I dunno as the Lord has had much to do with this, sir. Seems to me as if 'twas the other one as was running it, with Joe Moore for deputy. The main thing, as I look at it, is to get a cinch on him. How much does the mortgage amount to, sir?"

"About three thousand dollars, interest and all."

Old Stephen's voice trembled. The future looked very dark to him in his old age.

Ben put his hand inside his coat and brought out a brand-new, plump pocketbook. He opened it, laid it on his knee, and counted out a number of crisp notes.

"Here, sir," he said, pushing them along the table. "I reckon that'll keep you out of Joe Moore's clutches. There's three thousand there if I ain't made a mistake. That'll set you clear, won't it?"

"Ben!" Old Stephen's voice trembled with amazement. "Ben, I can't take it. It wouldn't be fair—or right. I could never pay you back."

Ben slipped the rubber band around his wallet and replaced it airily.

"I don't want it paid back, sir. It's a little gift, so to speak, just to let you know I ain't ungrateful for all you did for me. If it hadn't been for you I might have been in the penitentiary by now. As for the money, it may seem a pile to you, but we don't think anything more of a thousand or so in the Kootenay than you Greenvale folks do of a fiver—not a bit more. We do things on a big scale out there."

"But, Ben, are you sure you can afford it—that you won't miss it?"

"Pop sure. Don't you worry, I'm all right."

"Bless you—bless you!" The tears were running down old Stephen's face as he gathered up the money with a shaking hand. "I always knew you would do well, Ben—

always said it. I knew you'd a good heart. I just can't realize this yet—it seems too good to be true. The old place saved—I can die in peace. Of course, I'll pay you back some of it anyhow if I'm spared a while longer. Bless you, Ben."

Ben would not stay long after that. He said he had to leave on the 4:30 train. He was relieved when he got away from the old man's thanks and questions. Ben did not find it easy to answer some of the latter. When he was out of sight of the house he sat on a fence and counted up his remaining funds.

"Just enough to take me back to the Kootenay—and then begin over again, I s'pose. But 'twas worth the money to see the old fellow's face. He'd thank the Lord and me, he said. How Jake and Wade'd roar to hear them two names in partnership! But I'm going to pull up a bit after this, see if I don't, just to justify the old man's faith in me. 'Twould be too bad to disappoint him if he's believed for so long that I was going to turn out all right yet."

When the 4:30 train went out Ben Butler stood on the rear platform. Gabe Foley watched him abstractedly as he receded.

"Blamed if I know who that fellow was," he remarked to a crony. "He never told his name, but seems to me I've seen him before. He has a kind of hang-dog look, I think. But he paid up square and it is none of my business."

An Unconventional Confidence

The Girl in Black-and-Yellow ran frantically down the grey road under the pines. There was nobody to see her, but she would have run if all Halifax had been looking on. For had she not on the loveliest new hat—a "creation" in yellow chiffon with big black *choux*—and a dress to match? And was there not a shower coming straight from the hills across the harbour?

Down at the end of the long resinous avenue the Girl saw the shore road, with the pavilion shutting out the view of the harbour's mouth. Below the pavilion, clean-shaven George's Island guarded the town like a sturdy bulldog, and beyond it were the wooded hills, already lost in a mist of rain.

"Oh, I shall be too late," moaned the Girl. But she held her hat steady with one hand and ran on. If she could only reach the pavilion in time! It was a neck-and-neck race between the rain and the Girl, but the Girl won. Just as she flew out upon the shore road, a tall Young Man came pelting down the latter, and they both dashed up the steps of the pavilion together as the rain swooped down upon them and blotted George's Island and the smoky town and the purple banks of the Eastern Passage from view.

The pavilion was small at the best of times, and just now the rain was beating into it on two sides, leaving only one dry corner. Into this the Girl moved. She was flushed and triumphant. The Young Man thought that in all his life he had never seen anyone so pretty.

"I'm so glad I didn't get my hat wet," said the Girl breathlessly, as she straightened it with a careful hand and wondered if she looked very blown and blowsy.

"It would have been a pity," admitted the Young Man. "It is a very pretty hat."

"Pretty!" The Girl looked the scorn her voice expressed. "Anyone can have a *pretty* hat. Our cook has one. This is a *creation*."

"Of course," said the Young Man humbly. "I ought to have known. But I am very stupid."

"Well, I suppose a mere man couldn't be expected to understand exactly," said the Girl graciously.

She smiled at him in a friendly fashion, and he smiled back. The Girl thought that she had never seen such lovely brown eyes before. He could not be a Haligonian. She was sure she knew all the nice young men with brown eyes in Halifax.

"Please sit down," she said plaintively. "I'm tired."

The Young Man smiled again at the idea of his sitting down because the Girl was tired. But he sat down, and so did she, on the only dry seat to be found.

"Goodness knows how long this rain will last," said the Girl, making herself comfortable and picturesque, "but I shall stay here until it clears up, if it rains for a week. I will *not* have my hat spoiled. I suppose I shouldn't have put it on. Beatrix said it was going to rain. Beatrix is such a horribly good prophet. I detest people who are good prophets, don't you?"

"I think that they are responsible for all the evils that they predict," said the Young Man solemnly.

"That is just what I told Beatrix. And I was determined to put on this hat and come out to the park today. I simply *had* to be alone, and I knew I'd be alone out here. Everybody else would be at the football game. By the way, why aren't you there?"

"I wasn't even aware that there was a football game on hand," said the Young Man, as if he knew he ought to be ashamed of his ignorance, and was.

"Dear me," said the Girl pityingly. "Where can you have been not to have heard of it? It's between the Dalhousie team and the Wanderers. Almost everybody here is on the Wanderers' side, because they are Haligonians, but I am not. I like the college boys best. Beatrix says that it is just because of my innate contrariness. Last year I simply screamed myself hoarse with enthusiasm. The Dalhousie team won the trophy."

"If you are so interested in the game, it is a wonder you didn't go to see it yourself," said the Young Man boldly.

"Well, I just couldn't," said the Girl with a sigh. "If anybody had ever told me that there would be a football game in Halifax, and that I would elect to prowl about by myself in the park instead of going to it, I'd have laughed them to scorn. Even Beatrix would never have dared to prophesy *that*. But you see it has happened. I was too crumpled up in my mind to care about football today. I had to come here and have it out with myself. That is why I put on my hat. I thought, perhaps, I might get through with

my mental gymnastics in time to go to the game afterwards. But I didn't. It is just maddening, too. I got this hat and dress on purpose to wear to it. They're black and yellow, you see—the Dalhousie colours. It was my own idea. I was sure it would make a sensation. But I couldn't go to the game and take any interest in it, feeling as I do, could I, now?"

The Young Man said, of course, she couldn't. It was utterly out of the question.

The Girl smiled. Without a smile, she was charming. With a smile, she was adorable.

"I like to have my opinions bolstered up. Do you know, I want to tell you something? May I?"

"You may. I'll never tell anyone as long as I live," said the Young Man solemnly.

"I don't know you and you don't know me. That is why I want to tell you about it. I *must* tell somebody, and if I told anybody I knew, they'd tell it all over Halifax. It is dreadful to be talking to you like this. Beatrix would have three fits, one after the other, if she saw me. But Beatrix is a slave to conventionality. I glory in discarding it at times. You don't mind, do you?"

"Not at all," said the Young Man sincerely.

The Girl sighed.

"I have reached that point where I must have a confidant, or go crazy. Once I could tell things to Beatrix. That was before she got engaged. Now she tells everything to *him*. There is no earthly way of preventing her. I've tried them all. So, nowadays, when I get into trouble, I tell it out loud to myself in the glass. It's a relief, you know. But that is no good now. I want to tell it to somebody who can say things back. Will you promise to say things back?"

The Young Man assured her that he would when the proper time came.

"Very well. But please don't look at me while I'm telling you. I'll be sure to blush in places. When Beatrix wants to be particularly aggravating she says I have lost the art of blushing. But that is only her way of putting it, you know. Sometimes I blush dreadfully."

The Young Man dragged his eyes from the face under the black-and-yellow hat, and fastened them on a crooked pine tree that hung out over the bank.

"Well," began the Girl, "the root of the whole trouble is simply this. There is a young man in England. I always think of him as the Creature. He is the son of a man who was Father's especial crony in boyhood, before Father emigrated to Canada. Worse than that, he comes of a family which has contracted a vile habit of marrying into our family. It has come down through the ages so long that it has become chronic. Father left most of his musty traditions in England, but he brought this pet one with him. He and this friend agreed that the latter's son should marry one of Father's daughters. It ought to have been Beatrix—she is the oldest. But Beatrix had a pug nose. So Father settled on me. From my earliest recollection I have been given to understand that just as soon as I grew up there would be a ready-made husband imported from England for me. I was doomed to it from my cradle. Now," said the Girl, with a tragic gesture, "I ask you, could *anything* be more hopelessly, appallingly stupid and devoid of romance than that?"

The Young Man shook his head, but did not look at her.

"It's pretty bad," he admitted.

"You see," said the Girl pathetically, "the shadow of it has been over my whole life. Of course, when I was a very little girl I didn't mind it so much. It was such a long way off and lots of things might happen. The Creature might run away with some other girl—or I might have the smallpox—or Beatrix's nose might be straight when she grew up. And if Beatrix's nose were straight she'd be a great deal prettier than I am. But nothing did happen—and her nose is puggier than ever. Then when I grew up things were horrid. I never could have a single little bit of fun. And Beatrix had such a good time! She had scores of lovers in spite of her nose. To be sure, she's engaged now—and he's a horrid, faddy little creature. But he is her own choice. She wasn't told that there was a man in England whom she must marry by and by, when he got sufficiently reconciled to the idea to come and ask her. Oh, it makes me furious!"

"Is—is there—anyone else?" asked the Young Man hesitatingly.

"Oh, dear, no. How could there be? Why, you know, I couldn't have the tiniest flirtation with another man when I was as good as engaged to the Creature. That is one of my grievances. Just think how much fun I've missed! I used to rage to Beatrix about it, but she would tell me that I ought to be thankful to have the chance of making such a good match—the Creature is rich, you know, and clever. As if I cared how clever or rich he is! Beatrix made me so cross that I gave up saying anything and sulked by myself. So they think I'm quite reconciled to it, but I'm not."

"He might be very nice after all," suggested the Young Man.

"*Nice*! That isn't the point. Oh, don't you see? But no, you're a man—you *can't* understand. You must just take my word for it. The whole thing makes me furious. But I haven't told you the worst. The Creature is on his way out to Canada now. He may arrive here at any minute. And they are all so aggravatingly delighted over it."

"What do you suppose *he* feels like?" asked the Young Man reflectively.

"Well," said the Girl frankly, "I've been too much taken up with my own feelings to worry about his. But I daresay they are pretty much like mine. He must loathe and detest the very thought of me."

"Oh, I don't think he does," said the Young Man gravely.

"Don't you? Well, what do you suppose he *does* think of it all? You ought to understand the man's part of it better than I can."

"There's as much difference in men as in women," said the Young Man in an impersonal tone. "I may be right or wrong, you see, but I imagine he would feel something like this: From boyhood he has understood that away out in Canada there is a little girl growing up who is some day to be his wife. She becomes his boyish ideal of all that is good and true. He pictures her as beautiful and winsome and sweet. She is his heart's lady, and the thought of her abides with him as a safeguard and an inspiration. For her sake he resolves to make the most of himself, and live a clean, loyal life. When she comes to him she must find his heart fit to receive her. There is never a time in all his life when the dream of her does not gleam before him as of a star to which he may aspire with all reverence and love."

The Young Man stopped abruptly, and looked at the Girl. She bent forward with shining eyes, and touched his hand.

"You are splendid," she said softly. "If he thought so—but no—I am sure he doesn't. He's just coming out here like a martyr going to the stake. He knows he will be expected

to propose to me when he gets here. And he knows that I know it too. And *he* knows and *I* know that I will be expected to say my very prettiest 'yes.'"

"But are you going to say it?" asked the Young Man anxiously.

The Girl leaned forward. "No. That is my secret. I am going to say a most emphatic 'no.'"

"But won't your family make an awful row?"

"Of course. But I rather enjoy a row now and then. It stirs up one's grey matter so nicely. I came out here this afternoon and thought the whole affair over from beginning to end. And I have determined to say 'no.'"

"Oh, I wouldn't make it so irreconcilable as that," said the Young Man lightly. "I'd leave a loophole of escape. You see, if you were to like him a little better than you expect, it would be awkward to have committed yourself by a rash vow to saying 'no,' wouldn't it?"

"I suppose it would," said the Girl thoughtfully, "but then, you know, I won't change my mind."

"It's just as well to be on the safe side," said the Young Man.

The Girl got up. The rain was over and the sun was coming out through the mists.

"Perhaps you are right," she said. "So I'll just resolve that I will say 'no' if I don't want to say 'yes.' That really amounts to the same thing, you know. Thank you so much for letting me tell you all about it. It must have bored you terribly, but it has done me so much good. I feel quite calm and rational now, and can go home and behave myself. Goodbye."

"Goodbye," said the Young Man gravely. He stood on the pavilion and watched the Girl out of sight beyond the pines.

When the Girl got home she was told that the Dalhousie team had won the game, eight to four. The Girl dragged her hat off and waved it joyously.

"What a shame I wasn't there! They'd have gone mad over my dress."

But the next item of information crushed her. The Creature had arrived. He had called that afternoon, and was coming to dinner that night.

"How fortunate," said the Girl, as she went to her room, "that I relieved my mind to that Young Man out in the park today. If I had come back with all that pent-up feeling seething within me and heard this news right on top of it all, I might have flown into a thousand pieces. What lovely brown eyes he had! I do dote on brown eyes. The Creature will be sure to have fishy blue ones."

When the Girl went down to meet the Creature she found herself confronted by the Young Man. For the first, last, and only time in her life, the Girl had not a word to say. But her family thought her confusion very natural and pretty. They really had not expected her to behave so well. As for the Young Man, his manner was flawless.

Toward the end of the dinner, when the Girl was beginning to recover herself, he turned to her.

"You know I promised never to tell," he said.

"Be sure you don't, then," said the Girl meekly.

"But aren't you glad you left the loophole?" he persisted.

The Girl smiled down into her lap.

"Perhaps," she said.

Aunt Cyrilla's Christmas Basket

When Lucy Rose met Aunt Cyrilla coming downstairs, somewhat flushed and breathless from her ascent to the garret, with a big, flat-covered basket hanging over her plump arm, she gave a little sigh of despair. Lucy Rose had done her brave best for some years—in fact, ever since she had put up her hair and lengthened her skirts—to break Aunt Cyrilla of the habit of carrying that basket with her every time she went to Pembroke; but Aunt Cyrilla still insisted on taking it, and only laughed at what she called Lucy Rose's "finicky notions." Lucy Rose had a horrible, haunting idea that it was extremely provincial for her aunt always to take the big basket, packed full of country good things, whenever she went to visit Edward and Geraldine. Geraldine was so stylish, and might think it queer; and then Aunt Cyrilla always would carry it on her arm and give cookies and apples and molasses taffy out of it to every child she encountered and, just as often as not, to older folks too. Lucy Rose, when she went to town with Aunt Cyrilla, felt chagrined over this—all of which goes to prove that Lucy was as yet very young and had a great deal to learn in this world.

That troublesome worry over what Geraldine would think nerved her to make a protest in this instance.

"Now, Aunt C'rilla," she pleaded, "you're surely not going to take that funny old basket to Pembroke this time—Christmas Day and all."

"'Deed and 'deed I am," returned Aunt Cyrilla briskly, as she put it on the table and proceeded to dust it out. "I never went to see Edward and Geraldine since they were married that I didn't take a basket of good things along with me for them, and I'm not going to stop now. As for it's being Christmas, all the more reason. Edward is always real glad to get some of the old farmhouse goodies. He says they beat city cooking all hollow, and so they do."

"But it's so countrified," moaned Lucy Rose.

"Well, I am countrified," said Aunt Cyrilla firmly, "and so are you. And what's more, I don't see that it's anything to be ashamed of. You've got some real silly pride about you, Lucy Rose. You'll grow out of it in time, but just now it is giving you a lot of trouble."

"The basket is a lot of trouble," said Lucy Rose crossly. "You're always mislaying it or afraid you will. And it does look so funny to be walking through the streets with that big, bulgy basket hanging on your arm."

"I'm not a mite worried about its looks," returned Aunt Cyrilla calmly. "As for its being a trouble, why, maybe it is, but I have that, and other people have the pleasure of it. Edward and Geraldine don't need it—I know that—but there may be those that will. And if it hurts your feelings to walk 'longside of a countrified old lady with a countrified basket, why, you can just fall behind, as it were."

Aunt Cyrilla nodded and smiled good-humouredly, and Lucy Rose, though she privately held to her own opinion, had to smile too.

"Now, let me see," said Aunt Cyrilla reflectively, tapping the snowy kitchen table with the point of her plump, dimpled forefinger, "what shall I take? That big fruit cake for one thing—Edward does like my fruit cake; and that cold boiled tongue for another. Those three mince pies too, they'd spoil before we got back or your uncle'd make himself sick eating them—mince pie is his besetting sin. And that little stone bottle full of cream—Geraldine may carry any amount of style, but I've yet to see her look down on real good country cream, Lucy Rose; and another bottle of my raspberry vinegar. That plate of jelly cookies and doughnuts will please the children and fill up the chinks, and you can bring me that box of ice-cream candy out of the pantry, and that bag of striped candy sticks your uncle brought home from the corner last night. And apples, of course—three or four dozen of those good eaters—and a little pot of my greengage preserves—Edward'll like that. And some sandwiches and pound cake for a snack for ourselves. Now, I guess that will do for eatables. The presents for the children can go in on top. There's a doll for Daisy and the little boat your uncle made for Ray and a tatted lace handkerchief apiece for the twins, and the crochet hood for the baby. Now, is that all?"

"There's a cold roast chicken in the pantry," said Lucy Rose wickedly, "and the pig Uncle Leo killed is hanging up in the porch. Couldn't you put them in too?"

Aunt Cyrilla smiled broadly. "Well, I guess we'll leave the pig alone; but since you have reminded me of it, the chicken may as well go in. I can make room."

Lucy Rose, in spite of her prejudices, helped with the packing and, not having been trained under Aunt Cyrilla's eye for nothing, did it very well too, with much clever economy of space. But when Aunt Cyrilla had put in as a finishing touch a big bouquet of pink and white everlastings, and tied the bulging covers down with a firm hand, Lucy Rose stood over the basket and whispered vindictively:

"Some day I'm going to burn this basket—when I get courage enough. Then there'll be an end of lugging it everywhere we go like a—like an old market-woman."

Uncle Leopold came in just then, shaking his head dubiously. He was not going to spend Christmas with Edward and Geraldine, and perhaps the prospect of having to cook and eat his Christmas dinner all alone made him pessimistic.

"I mistrust you folks won't get to Pembroke tomorrow," he said sagely. "It's going to storm."

Aunt Cyrilla did not worry over this. She believed matters of this kind were fore-ordained, and she slept calmly. But Lucy Rose got up three times in the night to see if it were storming, and when she did sleep had horrible nightmares of struggling through blinding snowstorms dragging Aunt Cyrilla's Christmas basket along with her.

It was not snowing in the early morning, and Uncle Leopold drove Aunt Cyrilla and Lucy Rose and the basket to the station, four miles off. When they reached there the air was thick with flying flakes. The stationmaster sold them their tickets with a grim face.

"If there's any more snow comes, the trains might as well keep Christmas too," he said. "There's been so much snow already that traffic is blocked half the time, and now there ain't no place to shovel the snow off onto."

Aunt Cyrilla said that if the train were to get to Pembroke in time for Christmas, it would get there; and she opened her basket and gave the stationmaster and three small boys an apple apiece.

"That's the beginning," groaned Lucy Rose to herself.

When their train came along Aunt Cyrilla established herself in one seat and her basket in another, and looked beamingly around her at her fellow travellers.

These were few in number—a delicate little woman at the end of the car, with a baby and four other children, a young girl across the aisle with a pale, pretty face, a sunburned lad three seats ahead in a khaki uniform, a very handsome, imposing old lady in a sealskin coat ahead of him, and a thin young man with spectacles opposite.

"A minister," reflected Aunt Cyrilla, beginning to classify, "who takes better care of other folks' souls than of his own body; and that woman in the sealskin is discontented and cross at something—got up too early to catch the train, maybe; and that young chap must be one of the boys not long out of the hospital. That woman's children look as if they hadn't enjoyed a square meal since they were born; and if that girl across from me has a mother, I'd like to know what the woman means, letting her daughter go from home in this weather in clothes like that."

Lucy Rose merely wondered uncomfortably what the others thought of Aunt Cyrilla's basket.

They expected to reach Pembroke that night, but as the day wore on the storm grew worse. Twice the train had to stop while the train hands dug it out. The third time it could not go on. It was dusk when the conductor came through the train, replying brusquely to the questions of the anxious passengers.

"A nice lookout for Christmas—no, impossible to go on or back—track blocked for miles—what's that, madam?—no, no station near—woods for miles. We're here for the night. These storms of late have played the mischief with everything."

"Oh, dear," groaned Lucy Rose.

Aunt Cyrilla looked at her basket complacently. "At any rate, we won't starve," she said.

The pale, pretty girl seemed indifferent. The sealskin lady looked crosser than ever. The khaki boy said, "Just my luck," and two of the children began to cry. Aunt Cyrilla took some apples and striped candy sticks from her basket and carried them to them. She lifted the oldest into her ample lap and soon had them all around her, laughing and contented.

The rest of the travellers straggled over to the corner and drifted into conversation. The khaki boy said it was hard lines not to get home for Christmas, after all.

"I was invalided from South Africa three months ago, and I've been in the hospital at Netley ever since. Reached Halifax three days ago and telegraphed the old folks I'd eat my Christmas dinner with them, and to have an extra-big turkey because I didn't have any last year. They'll be badly disappointed."

He looked disappointed too. One khaki sleeve hung empty by his side. Aunt Cyrilla passed him an apple.

"We were all going down to Grandpa's for Christmas," said the little mother's oldest boy dolefully. "We've never been there before, and it's just too bad."

He looked as if he wanted to cry but thought better of it and bit off a mouthful of candy.

"Will there be any Santa Claus on the train?" demanded his small sister tearfully. "Jack says there won't."

"I guess he'll find you out," said Aunt Cyrilla reassuringly.

The pale, pretty girl came up and took the baby from the tired mother. "What a dear little fellow," she said softly.

"Are you going home for Christmas too?" asked Aunt Cyrilla.

The girl shook her head. "I haven't any home. I'm just a shop girl out of work at present, and I'm going to Pembroke to look for some."

Aunt Cyrilla went to her basket and took out her box of cream candy. "I guess we might as well enjoy ourselves. Let's eat it all up and have a good time. Maybe we'll get down to Pembroke in the morning."

The little group grew cheerful as they nibbled, and even the pale girl brightened up. The little mother told Aunt Cyrilla her story aside. She had been long estranged from her family, who had disapproved of her marriage. Her husband had died the previous summer, leaving her in poor circumstances.

"Father wrote to me last week and asked me to let bygones be bygones and come home for Christmas. I was so glad. And the children's hearts were set on it. It seems too bad that we are not to get there. I have to be back at work the morning after Christmas."

The khaki boy came up again and shared the candy. He told amusing stories of campaigning in South Africa. The minister came too, and listened, and even the sealskin lady turned her head over her shoulder.

By and by the children fell asleep, one on Aunt Cyrilla's lap and one on Lucy Rose's, and two on the seat. Aunt Cyrilla and the pale girl helped the mother make up beds for them. The minister gave his overcoat and the sealskin lady came forward with a shawl.

"This will do for the baby," she said.

"We must get up some Santa Claus for these youngsters," said the khaki boy. "Let's hang their stockings on the wall and fill 'em up as best we can. I've nothing about me but some hard cash and a jack-knife. I'll give each of 'em a quarter and the boy can have the knife."

"I've nothing but money either," said the sealskin lady regretfully.

Aunt Cyrilla glanced at the little mother. She had fallen asleep with her head against the seat-back.

"I've got a basket over there," said Aunt Cyrilla firmly, "and I've some presents in it that I was taking to my nephew's children. I'm going to give 'em to these. As for the money, I think the mother is the one for it to go to. She's been telling me her story, and a pitiful one it is. Let's make up a little purse among us for a Christmas present."

The idea met with favour. The khaki boy passed his cap and everybody contributed. The sealskin lady put in a crumpled note. When Aunt Cyrilla straightened it out she saw that it was for twenty dollars.

Meanwhile, Lucy Rose had brought the basket. She smiled at Aunt Cyrilla as she lugged it down the aisle and Aunt Cyrilla smiled back. Lucy Rose had never touched that basket of her own accord before.

Ray's boat went to Jacky, and Daisy's doll to his oldest sister, the twins' lace handkerchiefs to the two smaller girls and the hood to the baby. Then the stockings were filled up with doughnuts and jelly cookies and the money was put in an envelope and pinned to the little mother's jacket.

"That baby is such a dear little fellow," said the sealskin lady gently. "He looks something like my little son. He died eighteen Christmases ago."

Aunt Cyrilla put her hand over the lady's kid glove. "So did mine," she said. Then the two women smiled tenderly at each other. Afterwards they rested from their labours and all had what Aunt Cyrilla called a "snack" of sandwiches and pound cake. The khaki boy said he hadn't tasted anything half so good since he left home.

"They didn't give us pound cake in South Africa," he said.

When morning came the storm was still raging. The children wakened and went wild with delight over their stockings. The little mother found her envelope and tried to utter thanks and broke down; and nobody knew what to say or do, when the conductor fortunately came in and made a diversion by telling them they might as well resign themselves to spending Christmas on the train.

"This is serious," said the khaki boy, "when you consider that we've no provisions. Don't mind for myself, used to half rations or no rations at all. But these kiddies will have tremendous appetites."

Then Aunt Cyrilla rose to the occasion.

"I've got some emergency rations here," she announced. "There's plenty for all and we'll have our Christmas dinner, although a cold one. Breakfast first thing. There's a sandwich apiece left and we must fill up on what is left of the cookies and doughnuts and save the rest for a real good spread at dinner time. The only thing is, I haven't any bread."

"I've a box of soda crackers," said the little mother eagerly.

Nobody in that car will ever forget that Christmas. To begin with, after breakfast they had a concert. The khaki boy gave two recitations, sang three songs, and gave a whistling solo. Lucy Rose gave three recitations and the minister a comic reading. The pale shop girl sang two songs. It was agreed that the khaki boy's whistling solo was the best number, and Aunt Cyrilla gave him the bouquet of everlastings as a reward of merit.

Then the conductor came in with the cheerful news that the storm was almost over and he thought the track would be cleared in a few hours.

"If we can get to the next station we'll be all right," he said. "The branch joins the main line there and the tracks will be clear."

At noon they had dinner. The train hands were invited in to share it. The minister carved the chicken with the brakeman's jack-knife and the khaki boy cut up the tongue and the mince pies, while the sealskin lady mixed the raspberry vinegar with its due proportion of water. Bits of paper served as plates. The train furnished a couple of glasses, a tin pint cup was discovered and given to the children, Aunt Cyrilla and Lucy Rose and the sealskin lady drank, turn about, from the latter's graduated medicine glass, the shop girl and the little mother shared one of the empty bottles, and the khaki boy, the minister, and the train men drank out of the other bottle.

Everybody declared they had never enjoyed a meal more in their lives. Certainly it was a merry one, and Aunt Cyrilla's cooking was never more appreciated; indeed, the bones of the chicken and the pot of preserves were all that was left. They could not eat the preserves because they had no spoons, so Aunt Cyrilla gave them to the little mother.

When all was over, a hearty vote of thanks was passed to Aunt Cyrilla and her basket. The sealskin lady wanted to know how she made her pound cake, and the khaki boy asked for her receipt for jelly cookies. And when two hours later the conductor came in and said the snowploughs had got along and they'd soon be starting, they all wondered if it could really be less than twenty-four hours since they met.

"I feel as if I'd been campaigning with you all my life," said the khaki boy.

At the next station they all parted. The little mother and the children had to take the next train back home. The minister stayed there, and the khaki boy and the sealskin lady changed trains. The sealskin lady shook Aunt Cyrilla's hand. She no longer looked discontented or cross.

"This has been the pleasantest Christmas I have ever spent," she said heartily. "I shall never forget that wonderful basket of yours. The little shop girl is going home with me. I've promised her a place in my husband's store."

When Aunt Cyrilla and Lucy Rose reached Pembroke there was nobody to meet them because everyone had given up expecting them. It was not far from the station to Edward's house and Aunt Cyrilla elected to walk.

"I'll carry the basket," said Lucy Rose.

Aunt Cyrilla relinquished it with a smile. Lucy Rose smiled too.

"It's a blessed old basket," said the latter, "and I love it. Please forget all the silly things I ever said about it, Aunt C'rilla."

Davenport's Story

It was a rainy afternoon, and we had been passing the time by telling ghost stories. That is a very good sort of thing for a rainy afternoon, and it is a much better time than after night. If you tell ghost stories after dark they are apt to make you nervous, whether you own up to it or not, and you sneak home and dodge upstairs in mortal terror, and undress with your back to the wall, so that you can't fancy there is anything behind you.

We had each told a story, and had had the usual assortment of mysterious noises and death warnings and sheeted spectres and so on, down through the whole catalogue of horrors—enough to satisfy any reasonable ghost-taster. But Jack, as usual, was dissatisfied. He said our stories were all second-hand stuff. There wasn't a man in the crowd who had ever seen or heard a ghost; all our so-called authentic stories had been told us by persons who had the story from other persons who saw the ghosts.

"One doesn't get any information from that," said Jack. "I never expect to get so far along as to see a real ghost myself, but I would like to see and talk to one who had."

Some persons appear to have the knack of getting their wishes granted. Jack is one of that ilk. Just as he made the remark, Davenport sauntered in and, finding out what was going on, volunteered to tell a ghost story himself—something that had happened to his grandmother, or maybe it was his great-aunt; I forget which. It was a very good ghost story as ghost stories go, and Davenport told it well. Even Jack admitted that, but he said:

"It's only second-hand too. Did you ever have a ghostly experience yourself, old man?"

Davenport put his finger tips critically together.

"Would you believe me if I said I had?" he asked.

"No," said Jack unblushingly.

"Then there would be no use in my saying it."

"But you don't mean that you ever really had, of course?"

"I don't know. Something queer happened once. I've never been able to explain it—from a practical point of view, that is. Want to hear about it?"

Of course we did. This was exciting. Nobody would ever have suspected Davenport of seeing ghosts.

"It's conventional enough," he began. "Ghosts don't seem to have much originality. But it's firsthand, Jack, if that's what you want. I don't suppose any of you have ever heard me speak of my brother, Charles. He was my senior by two years, and was a quiet, reserved sort of fellow—not at all demonstrative, but with very strong and deep affections.

"When he left college he became engaged to Dorothy Chester. She was very beautiful, and my brother idolized her. She died a short time before the date set for their marriage, and Charles never recovered from the blow.

"I married Dorothy's sister, Virginia. Virginia did not in the least resemble her sister, but our eldest daughter was strikingly like her dead aunt. We called her Dorothy, and Charles was devoted to her. Dolly, as we called her, was always 'Uncle Charley's girl.'

"When Dolly was twelve years old Charles went to New Orleans on business, and while there took yellow fever and died. He was buried there, and Dolly half broke her childish heart over his death.

"One day, five years later, when Dolly was seventeen, I was writing letters in my library. That very morning my wife and Dolly had gone to New York en route for Europe. Dolly was going to school in Paris for a year. Business prevented my accompanying them even as far as New York, but Gilbert Chester, my wife's brother, was going with them. They were to sail on the *Aragon* the next morning.

"I had written steadily for about an hour. At last, growing tired, I threw down my pen and, leaning back in my chair, was on the point of lighting a cigar when an unaccountable impulse made me turn round. I dropped my cigar and sprang to my feet in amazement. There was only one door in the room and I had all along been facing it. I could have sworn nobody had entered, yet there, standing between me and the bookcase, was a man—and that man was my brother Charles!

"There was no mistaking him; I saw him as plainly as I see you. He was a tall, rather stout man, with curly hair and a fair, close-clipped beard. He wore the same light-grey suit which he had worn when bidding us good-bye on the morning of his departure for New Orleans. He had no hat on, but wore spectacles, and was standing in his old favourite attitude, with his hands behind him.

"I want you to understand that at this precise moment, although I was surprised beyond measure, I was not in the least frightened, because I did not for a moment suppose that what I saw was—well, a ghost or apparition of any sort. The thought that flashed across my bewildered brain was simply that there had been some absurd mistake somewhere, and that my brother had never died at all, but was here, alive and well. I took a hasty step towards him.

"'Good heavens, old fellow!' I exclaimed. 'Where on earth have you come from? Why, we all thought you were dead!'

"I was quite close to him when I stopped abruptly. Somehow I couldn't move another step. He made no motion, but his eyes looked straight into mine.

"'Do not let Dolly sail on the *Aragon* tomorrow,' he said in slow, clear tones that I heard distinctly.

"And then he was gone—yes, Jack, I know it is a very conventional way of ending up a ghost story,| but I have to tell you just what occurred, or at least what I thought occurred. One moment he was there and the next moment he wasn't. He did not pass me or go out of the door.

"For a few moments I felt dazed. I was wide awake and in my right and proper senses so far as I could judge, and yet the whole thing seemed incredible. Scared? No, I wasn't conscious of being scared. I was simply bewildered.

"In my mental confusion one thought stood out sharply—Dolly was in danger of some kind, and if the warning was really from a supernatural source, it must not be disregarded. I rushed to the station and, having first wired to my wife not to sail on the *Aragon*, I found that I could connect with the five-fifteen train for New York. I took it

with the comfortable consciousness that my friends would certainly think I had gone out of my mind.

"I arrived in New York at eight o'clock the next morning and at once drove to the hotel where my wife, daughter and brother-in-law were staying. I found them greatly mystified by my telegram. I suppose my explanation was a very lame one. I know I felt decidedly like a fool. Gilbert laughed at me and said I had dreamed the whole thing. Virginia was perplexed, but Dolly accepted the warning unhesitatingly.

"'Of course it was Uncle Charley,' she said confidently. 'We will not sail on the *Aragon* now.'

"Gilbert had to give in to this decision with a very bad grace, and the *Aragon* sailed that day minus three of her intended passengers.

"Well, you've all heard of the historic collision between the *Aragon* and the *Astarte* in a fog, and the fearful loss of life it involved. Gilbert didn't laugh when the news came, I assure you. Virginia and Dolly sailed a month later on the *Marseilles*, and reached the other side in safety. That's all the story, boys—the only experience of the kind I ever had," concluded Davenport.

We had many questions to ask and several theories to advance. Jack said Davenport had dreamed it and that the collision of the *Aragon* and the *Astarte* was simply a striking coincidence. But Davenport merely smiled at all our suggestions and, as it cleared up just about three, we told no more ghost stories.

Emily's Husband

Emily Fair got out of Hiram Jameson's waggon at the gate. She took her satchel and parasol and, in her clear, musical tones, thanked him for bringing her home. Emily had a very distinctive voice. It was very sweet always and very cold generally; sometimes it softened to tenderness with those she loved, but in it there was always an undertone of inflexibility and reserve. Nobody had ever heard Emily Fair's voice tremble.

"You are more than welcome, Mrs. Fair," said Hiram Jameson, with a glance of bold admiration. Emily met it with an unflinching indifference. She disliked Hiram Jameson. She had been furious under all her external composure because he had been at the station when she left the train.

Jameson perceived her scorn, but chose to disregard it.

"Proud as Lucifer," he thought as he drove away. "Well, she's none the worse of that. I don't like your weak women—they're always sly. If Stephen Fair don't get better she'll be free and then—"

He did not round out the thought, but he gloated over the memory of Emily, standing by the gate in the harsh, crude light of the autumn sunset, with her tawny, brown hair curling about her pale, oval face and the scornful glint in her large, dark-grey eyes.

Emily stood at the gate for some time after Jameson's waggon had disappeared. When the brief burst of sunset splendour had faded out she turned and went into the garden where late asters and chrysanthemums still bloomed. She gathered some of the more perfect ones here and there. She loved flowers, but to-night the asters seemed to hurt her, for she presently dropped those she had gathered and deliberately set her foot on them.

A sudden gust of wind came over the brown, sodden fields and the ragged maples around the garden writhed and wailed. The air was raw and chill. The rain that had threatened all day was very near. Emily shivered and went into the house.

Amelia Phillips was bending over the fire. She came forward and took Emily's parcels and wraps with a certain gentleness that sat oddly on her grim personality.

"Are you tired? I'm glad you're back. Did you walk from the station?"

"No. Hiram Jameson was there and offered to drive me home. I'd rather have walked. It's going to be a storm, I think. Where is John?"

"He went to the village after supper," answered Amelia, lighting a lamp. "We needed some things from the store."

The light flared up as she spoke and brought out her strong, almost harsh features and deep-set black eyes. Amelia Phillips looked like an overdone sketch in charcoal.

"Has anything happened in Woodford while I've been away?" asked Emily indifferently. Plainly she did not expect an affirmative answer. Woodford life was not eventful.

Amelia glanced at her sharply. So she had not heard! Amelia had expected that Hiram Jameson would have told her. She wished that he had, for she never felt sure of Emily. The older sister knew that beneath that surface reserve was a passionate nature, brooking no restraint when once it overleaped the bounds of her Puritan self-control. Amelia Phillips, with all her naturally keen insight and her acquired knowledge of Emily's character, had never been able to fathom the latter's attitude of mind towards her husband. From the time that Emily had come back to her girlhood's home, five years before, Stephen Fair's name had never crossed her lips.

"I suppose you haven't heard that Stephen is very ill," said Amelia slowly.

Not a feature of Emily's face changed. Only in her voice when she spoke was a curious jarring, as if a false note had been struck in a silver melody.

"What is the matter with him?"

"Typhoid," answered Amelia briefly. She felt relieved that Emily had taken it so calmly. Amelia hated Stephen Fair with all the intensity of her nature because she believed that he had treated Emily ill, but she had always been distrustful that Emily in her heart of hearts loved her husband still. That, in Amelia Phillips' opinion, would have betrayed a weakness not to be tolerated.

Emily looked at the lamp unwinkingly.

"That wick needs trimming," she said. Then, with a sudden recurrence of the untuneful note:

"Is he dangerously ill?"

"We haven't heard for three days. The doctors were not anxious about him Monday, though they said it was a pretty severe case."

A faint, wraith-like change of expression drifted over Emily's beautiful face and was gone in a moment. What was it—relief? Regret? It would have been impossible to say. When she next spoke her vibrant voice was as perfectly melodious as usual.

"I think I will go to bed, Amelia. John will not be back until late I suppose, and I am very tired. There comes the rain. I suppose it will spoil all the flowers. They will be beaten to pieces."

In the dark hall Emily paused for a moment and opened the front door to be cut in the face with a whip-like dash of rain. She peered out into the thickly gathering gloom. Beyond, in the garden, she saw the asters tossed about, phantom-like. The wind around the many-cornered old farmhouse was full of wails and sobs.

The clock in the sitting-room struck eight. Emily shivered and shut the door. She remembered that she had been married at eight o'clock that very morning seven years ago. She thought she could see herself coming down the stairs in her white dress with her bouquet of asters. For a moment she was glad that those mocking flowers in the garden would be all beaten to death before morning by the lash of wind and rain.

Then she recovered her mental poise and put the hateful memories away from her as she went steadily up the narrow stairs and along the hall with its curious slant as the house had settled, to her own room under the north-western eaves.

When she had put out her light and gone to bed she found that she could not sleep. She pretended to believe that it was the noise of the storm that kept her awake. Not even to herself would Emily confess that she was waiting and listening nervously for John's return home. That would have been to admit a weakness, and Emily Fair, like Amelia, despised weakness.

Every few minutes a gust of wind smote the house, with a roar as of a wild beast, and bombarded Emily's window with a volley of rattling drops. In the silences that came between the gusts she heard the soft, steady pouring of the rain on the garden paths below, mingled with a faint murmur that came up from the creek beyond the barns where the pine boughs were thrashing in the storm. Emily suddenly thought of a weird story she had once read years before and long forgotten—a story of a soul that went out in a night of storm and blackness and lost its way between earth and heaven. She shuddered and drew the counterpane over her face.

"Of all things I hate a fall storm most," she muttered. "It frightens me."

Somewhat to her surprise—for even her thoughts were generally well under the control of her unbending will—she could not help thinking of Stephen—thinking of him not tenderly or remorsefully, but impersonally, as of a man who counted for nothing in her life. It was so strange to think of Stephen being ill. She had never known him to have a day's sickness in his life before. She looked back over her life much as if she were glancing with a chill interest at a series of pictures which in no way concerned her. Scene after scene, face after face, flashed out on the background of the darkness.

Emily's mother had died at her birth, but Amelia Phillips, twenty years older than the baby sister, had filled the vacant place so well and with such intuitive tenderness that Emily had never been conscious of missing a mother. John Phillips, too, the grave,

silent, elder brother, loved and petted the child. Woodford people were fond of saying that John and Amelia spoiled Emily shamefully.

Emily Phillips had never been like the other Woodford girls and had no friends of her own age among them. Her uncommon beauty won her many lovers, but she had never cared for any of them until Stephen Fair, fifteen years her senior, had come a-wooing to the old, gray, willow-girdled Phillips homestead.

Amelia and John Phillips never liked him. There was an ancient feud between the families that had died out among the younger generation, but was still potent with the older.

From the first Emily had loved Stephen. Indeed, deep down in her strange, wayward heart, she had cared for him long before the memorable day when he had first looked at her with seeing eyes and realized that the quiet, unthought-of child who had been growing up at the old Phillips place had blossomed out into a woman of strange, seraph-like beauty and deep grey eyes whose expression was nevermore to go out of Stephen Fair's remembrance from then till the day of his death.

John and Amelia Phillips put their own unjustifiable dislike of Stephen aside when they found that Emily's heart was set on him. The two were married after a brief courtship and Emily went out from her girlhood's home to the Fair homestead, two miles away.

Stephen's mother lived with them. Janet Fair had never liked Emily. She had not been willing for Stephen to marry her. But, apart from this, the woman had a natural, ineradicable love of making mischief and took a keen pleasure in it. She loved her son and she had loved her husband, but nevertheless, when Thomas Fair had been alive she had fomented continual strife and discontent between him and Stephen. Now it became her pleasure to make what trouble she could between Stephen and his wife.

She had the advantage of Emily in that she was always sweet-spoken and, on the surface, sweet-tempered. Emily, hurt and galled in a score of petty ways, so subtle that they were beyond a man's courser comprehension, astonished her husband by her fierce outbursts of anger that seemed to him for the most part without reason or excuse. He tried his best to preserve the peace between his wife and mother; and when he failed, not understanding all that Emily really endured at the elder woman's merciless hands, he grew to think her capricious and easily irritated—a spoiled child whose whims must not be taken too seriously.

To a certain extent he was right. Emily had been spoiled. The unbroken indulgence which her brother and sister had always accorded her had fitted her but poorly to cope with the trials of her new life. True, Mrs. Fair was an unpleasant woman to live with, but if Emily had chosen to be more patient under petty insults, and less resentful of her husband's well-meant though clumsy efforts for harmony, the older woman could have effected real little mischief. But this Emily refused to be, and the breach between husband and wife widened insidiously.

The final rupture came two years after their marriage. Emily, in rebellious anger, told her husband that she would no longer live in the same house with his mother.

"You must choose between us," she said, her splendid voice vibrating with all the unleashed emotion of her being, yet with no faltering in it. "If she stays I go."

Stephen Fair, harassed and bewildered, was angry with the relentless anger of a patient man roused at last.

"Go, then," he said sternly, "I'll never turn my mother from my door for any woman's whim."

The stormy red went out of Emily's face, leaving it like a marble wash.

"You mean that!" she said calmly. "Think well. If I go I'll never return."

"I do mean it," said Stephen. "Leave my house if you will—if you hold your marriage vow so lightly. When your senses return you are welcome to come back to me. I will never ask you to."

Without another word Emily turned away. That night she went back to John and Amelia. They, on their part, welcomed her back gladly, believing her to be a wronged and ill-used woman. They hated Stephen Fair with a new and personal rancour. The one thing they could hardly have forgiven Emily would have been the fact of her relenting towards him.

But she did not relent. In her soul she knew that, with all her just grievances, she had been in the wrong, and for that she could not forgive him!

Two years after she had left Stephen Mrs. Fair died, and his widowed sister-in-law went to keep house for him. If he thought of Emily he made no sign. Stephen Fair never broke a word once passed.

Since their separation no greeting or look had ever passed between husband and wife. When they met, as they occasionally did, neither impassive face changed. Emily Fair had buried her love deeply. In her pride and anger she would not let herself remember even where she had dug its grave.

And now Stephen was ill. The strange woman felt a certain pride in her own inflexibility because the fact did not affect her. She told herself that she could not have felt more unconcerned had he been the merest stranger. Nevertheless she waited and watched for John Phillips' homecoming.

At ten o'clock she heard his voice in the kitchen. She leaned out of the bed and pulled open her door. She heard voices below, but could not distinguish the words, so she rose and went noiselessly out into the hall, knelt down by the stair railing and listened. The door of the kitchen was open below her and a narrow shaft of light struck on her white, intent face. She looked like a woman waiting for the decree of doom.

At first John and Amelia talked of trivial matters. Then the latter said abruptly:

"Did you hear how Stephen Fair was?"

"He's dying," was the brief response.

Emily heard Amelia's startled exclamation. She gripped the square rails with her hands until the sharp edges dinted deep into her fingers. John's voice came up to her again, harsh and expressionless:

"He took a bad turn the day before yesterday and has been getting worse ever since. The doctors don't expect him to live till morning."

Amelia began to talk rapidly in low tones. Emily heard nothing further. She got up and went blindly back into her room with such agony tearing at her heartstrings that she dully wondered why she could not shriek aloud.

Stephen—her husband—dying! In the burning anguish of that moment her own soul was as an open book before her. The love she had buried rose from the deeps of her being in an awful, accusing resurrection.

Out of her stupor and pain a purpose formed itself clearly. She must go to Stephen—she must beg and win his forgiveness before it was too late. She dared not go down to John and ask him to take her to her husband. He might refuse. The Phillipses had been known to do even harder things than that. At the best there would be a storm of protest and objection on her brother's and sister's part, and Emily felt that she could not encounter that in her present mood. It would drive her mad.

She lit a lamp and dressed herself noiselessly, but with feverish haste. Then she listened. The house was very still. Amelia and John had gone to bed. She wrapped herself in a heavy woollen shawl hanging in the hall and crept downstairs. With numbed fingers she fumbled at the key of the hall door, turned it and slipped out into the night.

The storm seemed to reach out and clutch her and swallow her up. She went through the garden, where the flowers already were crushed to earth; she crossed the long field beyond, where the rain cut her face like a whip and the wind almost twisted her in its grasp like a broken reed. Somehow or other, more by blind instinct than anything else, she found the path that led through commons and woods and waste valleys to her lost home.

In after years that frenzied walk through the storm and blackness seemed as an unbroken nightmare to Emily Fair's recollection. Often she fell. Once as she did so a jagged, dead limb of fir struck her forehead and cut in it a gash that marked her for life. As she struggled to her feet and found her way again the blood trickled down over her face.

"Oh God, don't let him die before I get to him—don't—don't—don't!" she prayed desperately with more of defiance than entreaty in her voice. Then, realizing this, she cried out in horror. Surely some fearsome punishment would come upon her for her wickedness—she would find her husband lying dead.

When Emily opened the kitchen door of the Fair homestead Almira Sentner cried out in her alarm, who or what was this creature with the white face and wild eyes, with her torn and dripping garments and dishevelled, wind-writhen hair and the big drops of blood slowly trickling from her brow?

The next moment she recognized Emily and her face hardened. This woman, Stephen's sister-in-law, had always hated Emily Fair.

"What do you want here?" she said harshly.

"Where is my husband?" asked Emily.

"You can't see him," said Mrs. Sentner defiantly. "The doctors won't allow anyone in the room but those he's used to. Strangers excite him."

The insolence and cruelty of her speech fell on unheeding ears. Emily, understanding only that her husband yet lived, turned to the hall door.

"Stand back!" she said in a voice that was little more than a thrilling whisper, but which yet had in it something that cowed Almira Sentner's malice. Sullenly she stood aside and Emily went unhindered up the stairs to the room where the sick man lay.

The two doctors in attendance were there, together with the trained nurse from the city. Emily pushed them aside and fell on her knees by the bed. One of the doctors made a hasty motion as if to draw her back, but the other checked him.

"It doesn't matter now," he said significantly.

Stephen Fair turned his languid, unshorn head on the pillow. His dull, fevered eyes met Emily's. He had not recognized anyone all day, but he knew his wife.

"Emily!" he whispered.

Emily drew his head close to her face and kissed his lips passionately.

"Stephen, I've come back to you. Forgive me—forgive me—say that you forgive me."

"It's all right, my girl," he said feebly.

She buried her face in the pillow beside his with a sob.

In the wan, grey light of the autumn dawn the old doctor came to the bedside and lifted Emily to her feet. She had not stirred the whole night. Now she raised her white face with dumb pleading in her eyes. The doctor glanced at the sleeping form on the bed.

"Your husband will live, Mrs. Fair," he said gently. "I think your coming saved him. His joy turned the ebbing tide in favour of life."

"Thank God!" said Emily.

And for the first time in her life her beautiful voice trembled.

Min

The morning sun hung, a red, lustreless ball, in the dull grey sky. A light snow had fallen in the night and the landscape, crossed by spider-like trails of fences, was as white and lifeless as if wrapped in a shroud.

A young man was driving down the road to Rykman's Corner; the youthful face visible above the greatcoat was thoughtful and refined, the eyes deep blue and peculiarly beautiful, the mouth firm yet sensitive. It was not a handsome face, but there was a strangely subtle charm about it.

The chill breathlessness of the air seemed prophetic of more snow. The Reverend Allan Telford looked across the bare wastes and cold white hills and shivered, as if the

icy lifelessness about him were slowly and relentlessly creeping into his own heart and life.

He felt utterly discouraged. In his soul he was asking bitterly what good had come of all his prayerful labours among the people of this pinched, narrow world, as rugged and unbeautiful in form and life as the barren hills that shut them in.

He had been two years among them and he counted it two years of failure. He had been too outspoken for them; they resented sullenly his direct and incisive tirades against their pet sins. They viewed his small innovations on their traditional ways of worship with disfavour and distrust and shut him out of their lives with an ever-increasing coldness. He had meant well and worked hard and he felt his failure keenly.

His thoughts reverted to a letter received the preceding day from a former classmate, stating that the pastorate of a certain desirable town church had become vacant and hinting that a call was to be moderated for him unless he signified his unwillingness to accept.

Two years before, Allan Telford, fresh from college and full of vigorous enthusiasm and high ideas, would have said:

"No, that is not for me. My work must lie among the poor and lowly of earth as did my Master's. Shall I shrink from it because, to worldly eyes, the way looks dreary and uninviting?"

Now, looking back on his two years' ministry, he said wearily:

"I can remain here no longer. If I do, I fear I shall sink down into something almost as pitiful as one of these canting, gossiping people myself. I can do them no good—they do not like or trust me. I will accept this call and go back to my own world."

Perhaps the keynote of his failure was sounded in his last words, "my own world." He had never felt, or tried to feel, that this narrow sphere was his own world. It was some lower level to which he had come with good tidings and honest intentions but, unconsciously, he had held himself above it, and his people felt and resented this. They expressed it by saying he was "stuck-up."

Rykman's Corner came into view as he drove over the brow of a long hill. He hated the place, knowing it well for what it was—a festering hotbed of gossip and malice, the habitat of all the slanderous rumours and innuendoes that permeated the social tissue of the community. The newest scandal, the worst-flavoured joke, the latest details of the most recent quarrel, were always to be had at Rykman's store.

As the minister drove down the hill, a man came out of a small house at the foot and waited on the road. Had it been possible Telford would have pretended not to see him, but it was not possible, for Isaac Galletly meant to be seen and hailed the minister cheerfully.

"Good mornin', Mr. Telford. Ye won't mind giving me a lift down to the Corner, I dessay?"

Telford checked his horse reluctantly and Galletly crawled into the cutter. He was that most despicable of created beings, a male gossip, and he spent most of his time travelling from house to house in the village, smoking his pipe in neighbourly kitchens and fanning into an active blaze all the smouldering feuds of the place. He had been nicknamed "The Morning Chronicle" by a sarcastic schoolteacher who had sojourned a winter at the Corner. The name was an apt one and clung. Telford had heard it.

I suppose he is starting out on his rounds now, he thought.

Galletly plunged undauntedly into the conversational gap.

"Quite a fall of snow last night. Reckon we'll have more 'fore long. That was a grand sermon ye gave us last Sunday, Mr. Telford. Reckon it went home to some folks, judgin' from all I've heard. It was needed and that's a fact. 'Live peaceably with all men'—that's what I lay out to do. There ain't a house in the district but what I can drop into and welcome. 'Tain't everybody in Rykman's Corner can say the same."

Galletly squinted out of the corner of his eye to see if the minister would open on the trail of this hint. Telford's passive face was discouraging but Galletly was not to be baffled.

"I s'pose ye haven't heard about the row down at Palmers' last night?"

"No."

The monosyllable was curt. Telford was vainly seeking to nip Galletly's gossip in the bud. The name of Palmer conveyed no especial meaning to his ear. He knew where the Palmer homestead was, and that the plaintive-faced, fair-haired woman, whose name was Mrs. Fuller and who came to church occasionally, lived there. His knowledge went no further. He had called three times and found nobody at home—at least, to all appearances. Now he was fated to have the whole budget of some vulgar quarrel forced on him by Galletly.

"No? Everyone's talkin' of it. The long and short of it is that Min Palmer has had a regular up-and-down row with Rose Fuller and turned her and her little gal out of doors. I believe the two women had an awful time. Min's a Tartar when her temper's up—and that's pretty often. Nobody knows how Rose managed to put up with her so long. But she has had to go at last. Goodness knows what the poor critter'll do. She hasn't a cent nor a relation—she was just an orphan girl that Palmer brought up. She is at Rawlingses now. Maybe when Min cools off, she'll let her go back but it's doubtful. Min hates her like p'isen."

To Telford this was all very unintelligible. But he understood that Mrs. Fuller was in trouble of some kind and that it was his duty to help her if possible, although he had an odd and unaccountable aversion to the woman, for which he had often reproached himself.

"Who is this woman you call Min Palmer?" he said coldly. "What are the family circumstances? I ought to know, perhaps, if I am to be of any service—but I have no wish to hear idle gossip."

His concluding sentence was quite unheeded by Galletly.

"Min Palmer's the worst woman in Rykman's Corner—or out of it. She always was an odd one. I mind her when she was a girl—a saucy, black-eyed baggage she was! Handsome, some folks called her. I never c'd see it. Her people were a queer crowd and Min was never brung up right—jest let run wild all her life. Well, Rod Palmer took to dancin' attendance on her. Rod was a worthless scamp. Old Palmer was well off and Rod was his only child, but this Rose lived there and kept house for them after Mis' Palmer died. She was a quiet, well-behaved little creetur. Folks said the old man wanted Rod to marry her—dunno if 'twas so or not. In the end, howsomever, he had to marry Min. Her brother got after him with a horse-whip, ye understand. Old Palmer was furious but he had to give in and Rod brought her home. She was a bit sobered down by

her trouble and lived quiet and sullen-like at first. Her and Rod fought like cat and dog. Rose married Osh Fuller, a worthless, drunken fellow. He died in a year or so and left Rose and her baby without a roof over their heads. Then old Palmer went and brought her home. He set great store by Rose and he c'dn't bear Min. Min had to be civil to Rose as long as old Palmer lived. Fin'lly Rod up and died and 'twasn't long before his father went too. Then the queer part came in. Everyone expected that he'd purvide well for Rose and Min'd come in second best. But no will was to be found. I don't say but what it was all right, mind you. I may have my own secret opinion, of course. Old Palmer had a regular mania, as ye might say, for makin' wills. He'd have a lawyer out from town every year and have a new will made and the old one burnt. Lawyer Bell was there and made one 'bout eight months 'fore he died. It was s'posed he'd destroyed it and then died 'fore he'd time to make another. He went off awful sudden. Anyway, everything went to Min's child—to Min as ye might say. She's been boss. Rose still stayed on there and Min let her, which was more than folks expected of her. But she's turned her out at last. Min's in one of her tantrums now and 'tain't safe to cross her path."

"What is Mrs. Fuller to do?" asked Telford anxiously.

"That's the question. She's sickly—can't work much—and then she has her leetle gal. Min was always jealous of that child. It's a real purty, smart leetle creetur and old Palmer made a lot of it. Min's own is an awful-looking thing—a cripple from the time 'twas born. There's no doubt 'twas a jedgement on her. As for Rose, no doubt the god of the widow and fatherless will purvide for her."

In spite of his disgust, Telford could not repress a smile at the tone, half-whine, half-snuffle, with which Galletly ended up.

"I think I had better call and see this Mrs. Palmer," he said slowly.

'"Twould be no airthly use, Mr. Telford. Min'd slam the door in your face if she did nothing worse. She hates ministers and everything that's good. She hasn't darkened a church door for years. She never had any religious tendency to begin with, and when there was such a scandal about her, old Mr. Dinwoodie, our pastor then—a godly man, Mr. Telford—he didn't hold no truck with evildoers—he went right to her to reprove and rebuke her for her sins. Min, she flew at him. She vowed then she'd never go to church again, and she never has. People hereabouts has talked to her and tried to do her good, but it ain't no use. Why, I've heard that woman say there was no God. It's a fact, Mr. Telford—I have. Some of our ministers has tried to visit her. They didn't try it more than once. The last one—he was about your heft—he got a scare, I tell you. Min just caught him by the shoulder and shook him like a rat! Didn't see it myself but Mrs. Rawlings did. Ye ought to hear her describin' of it."

Galletly chuckled over the recollection, his wicked little eyes glistening with delight. Telford was thankful when they reached the store. He felt that he could not endure this man's society any longer.

Nevertheless, he felt strangely interested. This Min Palmer must at least be different from the rest of the Cornerites, if only in the greater force of her wickedness. He almost felt as if her sins on the grand scale were less blameworthy than the petty vices of her censorious neighbours.

Galletly eagerly joined the group of loungers on the dirty wet platform, and Telford passed into the store. A couple of slatternly women were talking to Mrs. Rykman about "the Palmer row." Telford made his small purchases hastily. As he turned from the counter, he came face to face with a woman who had paused in the doorway to survey

the scene with an air of sullen scorn. By some subtle intuition Telford knew that this was Min Palmer.

The young man's first feeling was one of admiration for the woman before him, who, in spite of her grotesque attire and defiant, unwomanly air, was strikingly beautiful. She was tall, and not even the man's ragged overcoat which she wore could conceal the grace of her figure. Her abundant black hair was twisted into a sagging knot at her neck, and from beneath the old fur cap looked out a pair of large and brilliant black eyes, heavily lashed, and full of a smouldering fire. Her skin was tanned and coarsened, but the warm crimson blood glowed in her cheeks with a dusky richness, and her face was a perfect oval, with features chiselled in almost classic regularity of outline.

Telford had a curious experience at that moment. He seemed to see, looking out from behind this external mask of degraded beauty, the semblance of what this woman might have been under more favouring circumstance of birth and environment, wherein her rich, passionate nature, potent for either good or evil, might have been trained and swayed aright until it had developed grandly out into the glorious womanhood the Creator must have planned for her. He knew, as if by revelation, that this woman had nothing in common with the narrow, self-righteous souls of Rykman's Corner. Warped and perverted though her nature might be, she was yet far nobler than those who sat in judgement upon her.

Min made some scanty purchases and left the store quickly, brushing unheedingly past the minister as she did so. He saw her step on a rough wood-sleigh and drive down the river road. The platform loungers had been silent during her call, but now the talk bubbled forth anew. Telford was sick at heart as he drove swiftly away. He felt for Min Palmer a pity he could not understand or analyze. The attempt to measure the gulf between what she was and what she might have been hurt him like the stab of a knife.

He made several calls at various houses along the river during the forenoon. After dinner he suddenly turned his horse towards the Palmer place. Isaac Galletly, comfortably curled up in a neighbour's chimney corner, saw him drive past.

"Ef the minister ain't goin' to Palmers' after all!" he chuckled. "He's a set one when he does take a notion. Well, I warned him what to expect. If Min claws his eyes out, he'll only have himself to blame."

Telford was not without his own misgivings as he drove into the Palmer yard. He tied his horse to the fence and looked doubtfully about him. Untrodden snowdrifts were heaped about the front door, so he turned towards the kitchen and walked slowly past the bare lilac trees along the fence. There was no sign of life about the place. It was beginning to snow again, softly and thickly, and the hills and river were hidden behind a misty white veil.

He lifted his hand to knock, but before he could do so, the door was flung open and Min herself confronted him on the threshold.

She did not now have on the man's overcoat which she had worn at the store, and her neat, close-fitting home-spun dress revealed to perfection the full, magnificent curves of her figure. Her splendid hair was braided about her head in a glossy coronet, and her dark eyes were ablaze with ill-suppressed anger. Again Telford was overcome by a sense of her wonderful loveliness. Not all the years of bondage to ill-temper and misguided will had been able to blot out the beauty of that proud, dark face.

She lifted one large but shapely brown hand and pointed to the gate.

"Go!" she said threateningly.

"Mrs. Palmer," began Telford, but she silenced him with an imperious gesture.

"I don't want any of your kind here. I hate all you ministers. Did you come here to lecture me? I suppose some of the Corner saints set you on me. You'll never cross my threshold."

Telford returned her defiant gaze unflinchingly. His dark-blue eyes, magnetic in their power and sweetness, looked gravely, questioningly, into Min's stormy orbs. Slowly the fire and anger faded out of her face and her head drooped.

"I ain't fit for you to talk to anyway," she said with a sort of sullen humility. "Maybe you mean well but you can't do me any good. I'm past that now. The Corner saints say I'm possessed of the devil. Perhaps I am—if there is one."

"I do mean well," said Telford slowly. "I did not come here to reprove you. I came to help you if I could—if you needed help, Mrs. Palmer—"

"Don't call me that," she interrupted passionately. She flung out her hands as if pushing some loathly, invisible thing from her. "I hate the name—as I hated all who ever bore it. I never had anything but wrong and dog-usage from them all. Call me Min—that's the only name that belongs to me now. Go—why don't you go? Don't stand there looking at me like that. I'm not going to change my mind. I don't want any praying and whining round me. I've been well sickened of that. Go!"

Telford threw back his head and looked once more into her eyes. A long look passed between them. Then he silently lifted his cap and, with no word of farewell, he turned and went down to the gate. A bitter sense of defeat and disappointment filled his heart as he drove away.

Min stood in the doorway and watched the sleigh out of sight down the river road. Then she gave a long, shivering sigh that was almost a moan.

"If I had met that man long ago," she said slowly, as if groping vaguely in some hitherto unsounded depth of consciousness, "I would never have become what I am. I felt that as I looked at him—it all came over me with an awful sickening feeling—just as if we were standing alone somewhere out of the world where there was no need of words to say things. He doesn't despise me—he wouldn't sneer at me, bad as I am, like those creatures up there. He could have helped me if we had met in time, but it's too late now."

She locked her hands over her eyes and groaned, swaying her body to and fro as one in mortal agony. Presently she looked out again with hard, dry eyes.

"What a fool I am!" she said bitterly. "How the Corner saints would stare if they saw me! I suppose some of them do—" with a glance at the windows of a neighbouring house. "Yes, there's Mrs. Rawlings staring out and Rose peeking over her shoulder."

Her face hardened. The old sway of evil passion reasserted itself.

"She shall never come back here—never. Oh, she was a sweet-spoken cat of a thing—but she had claws. I've been blamed for all the trouble. But if ever I had a chance, I'd tell that minister how she used to twit and taunt me in that sugary way of hers—how she schemed and plotted against me as long as she could. More fool I to care what he thinks either! I wish I were dead. If 'twasn't for the child, I'd go and drown myself at that black spring-hole down there—I'd be well out of the way."

It was a dull grey afternoon a week afterwards when Allan Telford again walked up the river road to the Palmer place. The wind was bitter and he walked with bent head to avoid its fury. His face was pale and worn and he looked years older.

He paused at the rough gate and leaned over it while he scanned the house and its surroundings eagerly. As he looked, the kitchen door opened and Min, clad in the old overcoat, came out and walked swiftly across the yard.

Telford's eyes followed her with pitiful absorption. He saw her lead a horse from the stable and harness it into a wood-sleigh loaded with bags of grain. Once she paused to fling her arms about the animal's neck, laying her face against it with a caressing motion.

The pale minister groaned aloud. He longed to snatch her forever from that hard, unwomanly toil and fold her safely away from jeers and scorn in the shelter of his love. He knew it was madness—he had told himself so every hour in which Min's dark, rebellious face had haunted him—yet none the less was he under its control.

Min led the horse across the yard and left it standing before the kitchen door; she had not seen the bowed figure at the gate. When she reappeared, he saw her dark eyes and the rose-red lustre of her face gleam out from under the old crimson shawl wrapped about her head.

As she caught the horse by the bridle, the kitchen door swung heavily to with a sharp, sudden bang. The horse, a great, powerful, nervous brute, started wildly and then reared in terror.

The ice underfoot was glib and treacherous. Min lost her foothold and fell directly under the horse's hoofs as they came heavily down. The animal, freed from her detaining hand, sprang forward, dragging the laden sleigh over the prostrate woman.

It had all passed in a moment. The moveless figure lay where it had fallen, one outstretched hand still grasping the whip. Telford sprang over the gate and rushed up the slope like a madman. He flung himself on his knees beside her.

"Min! Min!" he called wildly.

There was no answer. He lifted her in his arms and staggered into the house with his burden, his heart stilling with a horrible fear as he laid her gently down on the old lounge in one corner of the kitchen.

The room was a large one and everything was neat and clean. The fire burned brightly, and a few green plants were in blossom by the south window. Beside them sat a child of about seven years who turned a startled face at Telford's reckless entrance.

The boy had Min's dark eyes and perfectly chiselled features, refined by suffering into cameo-like delicacy, and the silken hair fell in soft, waving masses about the spiritual little face. By his side nestled a tiny dog, with satin ears and paws fringed as with ravelled silk.

Telford paid heed to nothing, not even the frightened child. He was as one distraught.

"Min," he wailed again, striving tremblingly to feel her pulse while cold drops came out on his forehead.

Min's face was as pallid as marble, save for one heavy bruise across the cheek and a cruel cut at the edge of the dark hair, from which the blood trickled down on the pillow.

She opened her eyes wonderingly at his call, looking up with a dazed, appealing expression of pain and dread. A low moan broke from her white lips. Telford sprang to his feet in a tumult of quivering joy.

"Min, dear," he said gently, "you have been hurt—not seriously, I hope. I must leave you for a minute while I run for help—I will not be long."

"Come back," said Min in a low but distinct tone.

He paused impatiently.

"It is of no use to get help," Min went on calmly. "I'm dying—I know it. Oh, my God!"

She pressed her hand to her side and writhed. Telford turned desperately to the door. Min raised her arm.

"Come here," she said resolutely.

He obeyed mutely. She looked up at him with bright, unquailing eyes.

"Don't you go one step—don't leave me here to die alone. I'm past help—and I've something to say to you. I must say it and I haven't much time."

Telford hardly heeded her in his misery.

"Min, let me go for help—let me do something," he implored. "You must not die—you must not!"

Min had fallen back, gasping, on the blood-stained pillow.

He knelt beside her and put his arm about the poor, crushed body.

"I must hurry," she said faintly. "I can't die with it on my mind. Rose—it's all hers—all. There was a will—he made it—old Gran'ther Palmer. He always hated me. I found it before he died—and read it. He left everything to her—not a cent to me nor his son's child—we were to starve—beg. I was like a madwoman. When he died—I hid the will. I meant—to burn it—but I never could. It's tortured me—night and day—I've had no peace. You'll find it in a box—in my room. Tell her—tell Rose—how wicked I've been. And my boy—what will become of him? Rose hates him—she'll turn him out—or ill-treat him—"

Telford lifted his white, drawn face.

"I will take your child, Min. He shall be to me as my own son."

An expression of unspeakable relief came into the dying woman's face.

"It is good—of you. I can die—in peace—now. I'm glad to die—to get clear of it all. I'm tired—of living so. Perhaps—I'll have a chance—somewhere else. I've never—had any—here."

The dark eyes drooped—closed. Telford moaned shudderingly.

Once again Min opened her eyes and looked straight into his.

"If I had met you—long ago—you would have—loved me—and I would have been—a good woman. It is well for us—for you—that I am—dying. Your path will be clear—you will be good and successful—but you will always—remember me."

Telford bent and pressed his lips to Min's pain-blanched mouth.

"Do you think—we will—ever meet again?" she said faintly. "Out there—it's so dark—God can never—forgive me—I've been so—wicked."

"Min, the all-loving Father is more merciful than man. He will forgive you, if you ask Him, and you will wait for me till I come. I will stay here and do my duty—I will try hard—"

His voice broke. Min's great black eyes beamed out on him with passionate tenderness. The strong, deep, erring nature yielded at last. An exceeding bitter cry rose to her lips.

"Oh, God—forgive me—forgive me!"

And with the cry, the soul of poor suffering, sinning, sinned-against Min Palmer fled—who shall say whither? Who shall say that her remorseful cry was not heard, even at that late hour, by a Judge more merciful than her fellow creatures?

Telford still knelt on the bare floor, holding in his arms the dead form of the woman he loved—his, all his, in death, as she could never have been in life. Death had bridged the gulf between them.

The room was very silent. To Min's face had returned something of its girlhood's innocence. The hard, unlovely lines were all smoothed out. The little cripple crept timidly up to Telford, with the silky head of the dog pressed against his cheek. Telford gathered the distorted little body to his side and looked earnestly into the small face—Min's face, purified and spiritualized. He would have it near him always. He bent and reverently kissed the cold face, the closed eyelids and the blood-stained brow of the dead woman. Then he stood up.

"Come with me, dear," he said gently to the child.

The day after the funeral, Allan Telford sat in the study of his little manse among the encircling wintry hills. Close to the window sat Min's child, his small, beautiful face pressed against the panes, and the bright-eyed dog beside him.

Telford was writing in his journal.

"I shall stay here—close to her grave. I shall see it every time I look from my study window—every time I stand in my pulpit—every time I go in and out among my people. I begin to see wherein I have failed. I shall begin again patiently and humbly. I wrote today to decline the C—— church call. My heart and my work are here."

He closed the book and bowed his head on it. Outside the snow fell softly; he knew that it was wrapping that new-made grave on the cold, fir-sentinelled hillside with a stainless shroud of infinite purity and peace.

Miss Cordelia's Accommodation

"Poor little creatures!" said Miss Cordelia compassionately.

She meant the factory children. In her car ride from the school where she taught to the bridge that spanned the river between Pottstown, the sooty little manufacturing village on one side, and Point Pleasant, which was merely a hamlet, on the other, she had seen dozens of them, playing and quarrelling on the streets or peering wistfully out of dingy tenement windows.

"Tomorrow is Saturday," she reflected, "and they've no better place to play in than the back streets and yards. It's a shame. There's work for our philanthropists here, but they don't seem to see it. Well, I'm so sorry for them it hurts me to look at them, but I can't do anything."

Miss Cordelia sighed and then brightened up, because she realized that she was turning her back upon Pottstown for two blissful days and going to Point Pleasant, which had just one straggling, elm-shaded street hedging on old-fashioned gardens and cosy little houses and trailing off into the real country in a half-hour's walk.

Miss Cordelia lived alone in a tiny house at Point Pleasant. It was so tiny that you would have wondered how anyone could live in it.

"But it's plenty big for a little old maid like me," Miss Cordelia would have told you. "And it's my own—I'm queen there. There's solid comfort in having one spot for your own self. To be sure, if I had less land and more house it would be better."

Miss Cordelia always laughed here. It was one of her jokes. There was a four-acre field behind the house. Both had been left to her by an uncle. The field was of no use to Miss Cordelia; she didn't keep a cow and she hadn't time to make a garden. But she liked her field; when people asked her why she didn't sell it she said:

"I'm fond of it. I like to walk around in it when the grass grows long. And it may come in handy some time. Mother used to say if you kept anything seven years it would come to use. I've had my field a good bit longer than that, but maybe the time will come yet. Meanwhile I rejoice in the fact that I am a landed proprietor to the extent of four acres."

Miss Cordelia had thought of converting her field into a playground for the factory children and asking detachments of them over on Saturday afternoon. But she knew that her Point Pleasant neighbours would object to this, so that project was dropped.

When Miss Cordelia pushed open her little gate, hung crookedly in a very compact and prim spruce hedge, she stopped in amazement and said, "Well, for pity's sake!"

Cynthia Ann Flemming, who lived on the other side of the spruce hedge, now came hurrying over.

"Good evening, Cordelia. I have a letter that was left with me for you."

"But—that—horse," said Miss Cordelia, with a long breath between every word. "Where did he come from? Tied at my front door—and he's eaten the tops off every one of my geraniums! Where's his owner or rider or something?"

The horse in question was a mild-eyed, rather good-looking quadruped, tied by a halter to the elm at Miss Cordelia's door and contentedly munching a mouthful of geranium stalks. Cynthia Ann came through the hedge with the letter.

"Maybe this will explain," she said. "Same boy brought it as brought the horse—a little freckly chap mostly all grin and shirtsleeves. Said he was told to take the letter and horse to Miss Cordelia Herry, Elm Street, Point Pleasant, and he couldn't wait. So he tied the creature in there and left the letter with me. He came half an hour ago. Well, he has played havoc with your geraniums and no mistake."

Miss Cordelia opened and read her letter. When she finished it she looked at the curious Cynthia Ann solemnly.

"Well, if that isn't John Drew all over! I suspected he was at the bottom of it as soon as I laid my eyes on that animal. John Drew is a cousin of mine. He's been living out at Poplar Valley and he writes me that he has gone out west, and wants me to take 'old Nap.' I suppose that is the horse. He says that Nap is getting old and not much use for work and he couldn't bear the thought of shooting him or selling him to someone who might ill-treat him, so he wants me to take him and be kind to him for old times' sake. John and I were just like brother and sister when we were children. If this isn't like him nothing ever was. He was always doing odd things and thinking they were all right. And now he's off west and here is the horse. If it were a cat or a dog—but a horse!"

"Your four-acre field will come in handy now," said Cynthia Ann jestingly.

"So it will." Miss Cordelia spoke absently. "The very thing! Yes, I'll put him in there."

"But you don't really mean that you're going to keep the horse, are you?" protested Cynthia Ann. "Why, he is no good to you—and think of the expense of feeding him!"

"I'll keep him for a while," said Miss Cordelia briskly. "As you say, there is the four-acre field. It will keep him in eating for a while. I always knew that field had a mission. Poor John Drew! I'd like to oblige him for old times' sake, as he says, although this is as crazy as anything he ever did. But I have a plan. Meanwhile, I can't feed Nap on geraniums."

Miss Cordelia always adapted herself quickly and calmly to new circumstances. "It is never any use to get in a stew about things," she was wont to say. So now she untied Nap gingerly, with many rueful glances at her geraniums, and led him away to the field behind the house, where she tied him safely to a post with such an abundance of knots that there was small fear of his getting away.

When the mystified Cynthia Ann had returned home Miss Cordelia set about getting her tea and thinking over the plan that had come to her concerning her white elephant.

"I can keep him for the summer," she said. "I'll have to dispose of him in the fall for I've no place to keep him in, and anyway I couldn't afford to feed him. I'll see if I can borrow Mr. Griggs's express wagon for Saturday afternoons, and if I can those poor

factory children in my grade shall have a weekly treat or my name is not Cordelia Herry. I'm not so sure but that John Drew has done a good thing after all. Poor John! He always did take things so for granted."

All the point pleasant people soon knew about Miss Cordelia's questionable windfall, and she was overwhelmed with advice and suggestions. She listened to all tranquilly and then placidly followed her own way. Mr. Griggs was very obliging in regard to his old express wagon, and the next Saturday Point Pleasant was treated to a mild sensation—nothing less than Miss Cordelia rattling through the village, enthroned on the high seat of Mr. Griggs's yellow express wagon, drawn by old Nap who, after a week of browsing idleness in the four-acre field, was quite frisky and went at a decided amble down Elm Street and across the bridge. The long wagon had been filled up with board seats, and when Miss Cordelia came back over the bridge the boards were crowded with factory children—pale-faced little creatures whose eyes were aglow with pleasure at this unexpected outing.

Miss Cordelia drove straight out to the big pine-clad hills of Deepdale, six miles from Pottstown. Then she tied Nap in a convenient lane and turned the children loose to revel in the woods and fields. How they did enjoy themselves! And how Miss Cordelia enjoyed seeing them enjoy themselves!

When dinner time came she gathered them all around her and went to the wagon. In it she had a basket of bread and butter.

"I can't afford anything more," she told Cynthia Ann, "but they must have something to stay their little stomachs. And I can get some water at a farmhouse."

Miss Cordelia had had her eye on a certain farmhouse all the morning. She did not know anything about the people who lived there, but she liked the looks of the place. It was a big, white, green-shuttered house, throned in wide-spreading orchards, with a green sweep of velvety lawn in front.

To this Miss Cordelia took her way, surrounded by her small passengers, and they all trooped into the great farmhouse yard just as a big man stepped out of a nearby barn. As he approached, Miss Cordelia thought she had never seen anybody so much like an incarnate smile before. Smiles of all kinds seemed literally to riot over his ruddy face and in and out of his eyes and around the corners of his mouth.

"Well, well, well!" he said, when he came near enough to be heard. "Is this a runaway school, ma'am?"

"I'm the runaway schoolma'am," responded Miss Cordelia with a twinkle. "And these are a lot of factory children I've brought out for a Saturday treat. I thought I might get some water from your well, and maybe you will lend us a tin dipper or two?"

"Water? Tut, tut!" said the big man, with three distinct smiles on his face. "Milk's the thing, ma'am—milk. I'll tell my housekeeper to bring some out. And all of you come over to the lawn and make yourselves at home. Bless you, ma'am, I'm fond of children. My name is Smiles, ma'am—Abraham Smiles."

"It suits you," said Miss Cordelia emphatically, before she thought, and then blushed rosy-red over her bluntness.

Mr. Smiles laughed. "Yes, I guess I always have an everlasting grin on. Had to live up to my name, you see, in spite of my naturally cantankerous disposition; But come this way, ma'am, I can see the hunger sticking out of those youngsters' eyes. We'll have a sort of impromptu picnic here and now, I'll tell my housekeeper to send out some jam too."

While the children devoured their lunch Miss Cordelia found herself telling Mr. Smiles all about old Nap and her little project.

"I'm going to bring out a load every fine Saturday all summer," she said. "It's all I can do. They enjoy it so, the little creatures. It's terrible to think how cramped their lives are. They just exist in soot. Some of them here never saw green fields before today."

Mr. Smiles listened and beamed and twinkled until Miss Cordelia felt almost as dazzled as if she were looking at the sun.

"Look here, ma'am, I like this plan of yours and I want to have a hand in helping it along. Bring your loads of children out here every Saturday, right here to Beechwood Farm, and turn them loose in my beech woods and upland pastures. I'll put up some swings for them and have some games, and I'll provide the refreshments also. Trouble, ma'am? No, trouble and I ain't on speaking terms. It'll be a pleasure, ma'am. I'm fond of children even if I am a grumpy cross-grained old bachelor. If you can give up your own holiday to give them a good time, surely I can do something too."

When Miss Cordelia and her brood of tired, happy little lads and lasses ambled back to town in the golden dusk she felt that the expedition had been an emphatic success. Even old Nap seemed to jog along eye-deep in satisfaction. Probably he was ruminating on the glorious afternoon he had spent in Mr. Smiles's clover pasture.

Every fine Saturday that summer Miss Cordelia took some of the factory children to the country. The Point Pleasant people nicknamed her equipage "Miss Cordelia's accommodation," and it became a mild standing joke.

As for Mr. Smiles, he proved a valuable assistant. Like Miss Cordelia, he gave his Saturdays over to the children, and high weekly revel was held at Beechwood Farm.

But when the big bronze and golden leaves began to fall in the beech woods, Miss Cordelia sorrowfully realized that the summer was over and that the weekly outings which she had enjoyed as much as the children must soon be discontinued.

"I feel so sorry," she told Mr. Smiles, "but it can't be helped. It will soon be too cold for our jaunts and of course I can't keep Nap through the winter. I hate to part with him, I've grown so fond of him, but I must."

She looked regretfully at Nap, who was nibbling Mr. Smiles's clover aftermath. He was sleek and glossy. It had been the golden summer of Nap's life.

Mr. Smiles coughed in an embarrassed fashion. Miss Cordelia looked at him and was amazed to see that not a smile was on or about his face. He looked absurdly serious.

"I want to buy Nap," he said in a sepulchral tone, "but that is not the only thing I want. I want you too, ma'am. I'm tired of being a cross old bachelor. I think I'd like to be a cross old husband, for a change. Do you think you could put up with me in that capacity, Miss Cordelia, my dear?"

Miss Cordelia gave a half gasp and then she had to laugh. "Oh, Mr. Smiles, I'll agree to anything if you'll only smile again. It seems unnatural to see you look so solemn."

The smiles at once broke loose and revelled over her wooer's face.

"Then you will come?" he said eagerly.

Half an hour later they had their plans made. At New Year's Miss Cordelia was to leave her school and sooty Pottstown and come to be mistress of Beechwood Farm.

"And look here," said Mr. Smiles. "Every fine Saturday you shall have a big, roomy sleigh and Nap, and drive into town for some children and bring them out here for their weekly treat as usual. The house is large enough to hold them, goodness knows, and if it isn't there are the barns for the overflow. This is going to be our particular pet charity all our lives, ma'am—I mean Cordelia, my dear."

"Blessings on old Nap," said Miss Cordelia with a happy light in her eyes.

"He shall live in clover for the rest of his days," added Mr. Smiles smilingly.

Ned's Stroke of Business

"Jump in, Ned; I can give you a lift if you're going my way." Mr. Rogers reined up his prancing grey horse, and Ned Allen sprang lightly into the comfortable cutter. The next minute they were flying down the long, glistening road, rosy-white in the sunset splendour. The first snow of the season had come, and the sleighing was, as Ned said, "dandy."

"Going over to Windsor, I suppose," said Mr. Rogers, with a glance at the skates that were hanging over Ned's shoulder.

"Yes, sir; all the Carleton boys are going over tonight. The moon is out, and the ice is good. We have to go in a body, or the Windsor fellows won't leave us alone. There's safety in numbers."

"Pretty hard lines when boys have to go six miles for a skate," commented Mr. Rogers.

"Well, it's that or nothing," laughed Ned. "There isn't a saucerful of ice any nearer, except that small pond in Old Dutcher's field, behind his barn. And you know Old Dutcher won't allow a boy to set foot there. He says they would knock down his fences climbing over them, and like as not set fire to his barn."

"Old Dutcher was always a crank," said Mr. Rogers, "and doubtless will be to the end. By the way, I heard a rumour to the effect that you are soon going to take a course at the business college in Trenton. I hope it's true."

Ned's frank face clouded over. "I'm afraid not, sir. The truth is, I guess Mother can't afford it. Of course, Aunt Ella has very kindly offered to board me free for the term, but fees, books, and so on would require at least fifty dollars. I don't expect to go."

"That's a pity. Can't you earn the necessary money yourself?"

Ned shook his head. "Not much chance for that in Carleton, Mr. Rogers. I've cudgelled my brains for the past month trying to think of some way, but in vain. Well, here is the crossroad, so I must get off. Thank you for the drive, sir."

"Keep on thinking, Ned," advised Mr. Rogers, as the lad jumped out. "Perhaps you'll hit on some plan yet to earn that money, and if you do—well, it will prove that you have good stuff in you."

"I think it would," laughed Ned to himself, as he trudged away. "A quiet little farming village in winter isn't exactly a promising field for financial operations."

At Winterby Corners Ned found a crowd of boys waiting for him, and soon paired off with his chum, Jim Slocum. Jim, as usual, was grumbling because they had to go all the way to Windsor to skate.

"Like as not we'll get into a free fight with the Windsorites when we get there, and be chevied off the ice," he complained.

The rivalry which existed between the Carleton and the Windsor boys was bitter and of long standing.

"We ought to be able to hold our own tonight," said Ned. "There'll be thirty of us there."

"If we could only get Old Dutcher to let us skate on his pond!" said Jim. "It wouldn't hurt his old pond! And the ice is always splendid on it. I'd give a lot if we could only go there."

Ned was silent. A sudden idea had come to him. He wondered if it were feasible. "Anyhow, I'll try it," he said to himself. "I'll interview Old Dutcher tomorrow."

The skating that night was not particularly successful. The small pond at Windsor was crowded, the Windsor boys being out in force and, although no positive disturbance arose, they contrived to make matters unpleasant for the Carletonites, who tramped moodily homeward in no very good humour, most of them declaring that, skating or no skating, they would not go to Windsor again.

The next day Ned Allen went down to see Mr. Dutcher, or Old Dutcher, as he was universally called in Carleton. Ned did not exactly look forward to the interview with pleasure. Old Dutcher was a crank—there was no getting around that fact. He had "good days" occasionally when, for him, he was fairly affable, but they were few and far between, and Ned had no reason to hope that this would be one. Old Dutcher was unmarried, and his widowed sister kept house for him. This poor lady had a decidedly lonely life of it, for Old Dutcher studiously discouraged visitors. His passion for solitude was surpassed only by his eagerness to make and save money. Although he was well-to-do, he would wrangle over a cent, and was the terror of all who had ever had dealings with him.

Fortunately for Ned and his project, this did turn out to be one of Old Dutcher's good days. He had just concluded an advantageous bargain with a Windsor cattle-dealer, and hence he received Ned with what, for Old Dutcher, might be called absolute cordiality. Besides, although Old Dutcher disliked all boys on principle, he disliked Ned less than the rest because the boy had always treated him respectfully and had never played any tricks on him on Hallowe'en or April Fool's Day.

"I've come down to see you on a little matter of business, Mr. Dutcher," said Ned, boldly and promptly. It never did to beat about the bush with Old Dutcher; you had to come straight to the point. "I want to know if you will rent your pond behind the barn to me for a skating-rink."

Old Dutcher's aspect was certainly not encouraging. "No, I won't. You ought to know that. I never allow anyone to skate there. I ain't going to have a parcel of whooping, yelling youngsters tearing over my fences, disturbing my sleep at nights, and like as not setting fire to my barns. No, sir! I ain't going to rent that pond for no skating-rink."

Ned smothered a smile. "Just wait a moment, Mr. Dutcher," he said respectfully. "I want you to hear my proposition before you refuse definitely. First, I'll give you ten dollars for the rent of the pond; then I'll see that there will be no running over your fields and climbing your fences, no lighting of fire or matches about it, and no 'whooping and yelling' at nights. My rink will be open only from two to six in the afternoon and from seven to ten in the evening. During that time I shall always be at the pond to keep everything in order. The skaters will come and go by the lane leading from the barn to the road. I think that if you agree to my proposition, Mr. Dutcher, you will not regret it."

"What's to prevent my running such a rink myself?" asked Old Dutcher gruffly.

"It wouldn't pay you, Mr. Dutcher," answered Ned promptly. "The Carleton boys wouldn't patronize a rink run by you."

Old Dutcher's eyes twinkled. It did not displease him to know that the Carleton boys hated him. In fact, it seemed as if he rather liked it.

"Besides," went on Ned, "you couldn't afford the time. You couldn't be on the pond for eight hours a day and until ten o'clock at night. I can, as I've nothing else to do just now. If I had, I wouldn't have to be trying to make money by a skating-rink."

Old Dutcher scowled. Ten dollars was ten dollars and, as Ned had said, he knew very well that he could not run a rink by himself. "Well," he said, half reluctantly, "I suppose I'll let you go ahead. Only remember I'll hold you responsible if anything happens."

Ned went home in high spirits. By the next day he had placards out in conspicuous places—on the schoolhouse, at the forge, at Mr. Rogers's store, and at Winterby Corners—announcing that he had rented Mr. Dutcher's pond for a skating-rink, and that tickets for the same at twenty-five cents a week for each skater could be had upon application to him.

Ned was not long left in doubt as to the success of his enterprise. It was popular from the start. There were about fifty boys in Carleton and Winterby, and they all patronized the rink freely. At first Ned had some trouble with two or three rowdies, who tried to evade his rules. He was backed up, however, by Old Dutcher's reputation and by the public opinion of the other boys, as well as by his own undoubted muscle, and soon had everything going smoothly. The rink flourished amain, and everybody, even Old Dutcher, was highly pleased.

At the end of the season Ned paid Old Dutcher his ten dollars, and had plenty left to pay for books and tuition at the business college in Trenton. On the eve of his departure Mr. Rogers, who had kept a keen eye on Ned's enterprise, again picked him up on the road.

"So you found a way after all, Ned," he said genially. "I had an idea you would. My bookkeeper will be leaving me about the time you will be through at the college. I will be wanting in his place a young man with a good nose for business, and I rather think that you will be that young man. What do you say?"

"Thank you, sir," stammered Ned, scarcely believing his ears. A position in Mr. Rogers's store meant good salary and promotion. He had never dared to hope for such good fortune. "If you—think I can give satisfaction—"

"You manipulated Old Dutcher, and you've earned enough in a very slow-going place to put you through your business-college term, so I am sure you are the man I'm looking for. I believe in helping those who have 'gumption' enough to help themselves, so we'll call it a bargain, Ned."

Our Runaway Kite

Of course there was nobody for us to play with on the Big Half Moon, but then, as Claude says, you can't have everything. We just had to make the most of each other, and we did.

The Big Half Moon is miles from anywhere, except the Little Half Moon. But nobody lives there, so that doesn't count.

We live on the Big Half Moon. "We" are Father and Claude and I and Aunt Esther and Mimi and Dick. It used to be only Father and Claude and I. It is all on account of the kite that there are more of us. This is what I want to tell you about.

Father is the keeper of the Big Half Moon lighthouse. He has always been the keeper ever since I can remember, although that isn't very long. I am only eleven years old. Claude is twelve.

In winter, when the harbour is frozen over, there isn't any need of a light on the Big Half Moon, and we all move over to the mainland, and Claude and Mimi and Dick and I go to school. But as soon as spring comes, back we sail to our own dear island, so glad that we don't know what to do with ourselves.

The funny part used to be that people always pitied us when the time came for us to return. They said we must be so lonesome over there, with no other children near us, and not even a woman to look after us.

Why, Claude and I were never lonesome. There was always so much to do, and Claude is splendid at making believe. He makes the very best pirate chief I ever saw. Dick is pretty good, but he can never roar out his orders in the bloodcurdling tones that Claude can.

Of course Claude and I would have liked to have someone to play with us, because it is hard to run pirate caves and things like that with only two. But we used to quarrel a good deal with the mainland children in winter, so perhaps it was just as well that there were none of them on the Big Half Moon. Claude and I never quarrelled. We used to argue sometimes and get excited, but that was as far as it ever went. When I saw Claude getting too excited I gave in to him. He is a boy, you know, and they have to be humoured; they are not like girls.

As for having a woman to look after us, I thought that just too silly, and so did Claude. What did we need with a woman when we had Father? He could cook all we wanted to eat and make molasses taffy that was just like a dream. He kept our clothes all mended, and everything about the lighthouse was neat as wax. Of course I helped him lots. I like pottering round.

He used to hear our lessons and tell us splendid stories and saw that we always said our prayers. Claude and I wouldn't have done anything to make him feel bad for the world. Father is just lovely.

To be sure, he didn't seem to have any relations except us. This used to puzzle Claude and me. Everybody on the mainland had relations; why hadn't we? Was it because we lived on an island? We thought it would be so jolly to have an uncle and aunt and some cousins. Once we asked Father about it, but he looked so sorrowful all of a sudden that we wished we hadn't. He said it was all his fault. I didn't see how that could be, but I never said anything more about it to Father. Still, I did wish we had some relations.

It is always lovely out here on the Big Half Moon in summer. When it is fine the harbour is blue and calm, with little winds and ripples purring over it, and the mainland shores look like long blue lands where fairies dwell. Away out over the bar, where the big ships go, it is always hazy and pearl-tinted, like the inside of the mussel shells. Claude says he is going to sail out there when he grows up. I would like to too, but Claude says I can't because I'm a girl. It is dreadfully inconvenient to be a girl at times.

When it storms it is grand to see the great waves come crashing up against the Big Half Moon as if they meant to swallow it right down. You can't see the Little Half Moon at all then; it is hidden by the mist and spume.

We had our pirate cave away up among the rocks, where we kept an old pistol with the lock broken, a rusty cutlass, a pair of knee boots, and Claude's jute beard and wig. Down on the shore, around one of the horns of the Half Moon, was the Mermaid's Pool, where we sailed our toy boats and watched for sea kelpies. We never saw any. Dick says there is no such thing as a kelpy. But then Dick has no imagination. It is no argument against a thing that you've never seen it. I have never seen the pyramids, either, but I know that there are pyramids.

Every summer we had some hobby. The last summer before Dick and Mimi came we were crazy about kites. A winter boy on the mainland showed Claude how to make them, and when we went back to the Big Half Moon we made kites galore. Even pirating wasn't such good fun. Claude would go around to the other side of the Big Half Moon and we would play shipwrecked mariners signalling to each other with kites. Oh, it was very exciting.

We had one kite that was a dandy. It was as big as we could make it and covered with lovely red paper; we had pasted gold tinsel stars all over it and written our names out in full on it—Claude Martin Leete and Philippa Brewster Leete, Big Half Moon Lighthouse. That kite had the most magnificent tail, too.

It used to scare the gulls nearly to death when we sent up our kites. They didn't know what to make of them. And the Big Half Moon is such a place for gulls—there are hundreds of them here.

One day there was a grand wind for kite-flying, and Claude and I were having a splendid time. We used our smaller kites for signalling, and when we got tired of that Claude sent me to the house for the big one. I'm sure I don't know how it happened, but when I was coming back over the rocks I tripped and fell, and my elbow went clear through that lovely kite. You would never have believed that one small elbow could make such a big hole. Claude said it was just like a girl to fall and stick her elbow through a kite, but I don't see why it should be any more like a girl than a boy. Do you?

We had to hurry to fix the kite if we wanted to send it up before the wind fell, so we rushed into the lighthouse to get some paper. We knew there was no more red paper, and the looks of the kite were spoiled, anyhow, so we just took the first thing that came handy—an old letter that was lying on the bookcase in the sitting-room. I suppose we shouldn't have taken it, although, as matters turned out, it was the best thing we could have done; but Father was away to the mainland to buy things, and we never thought it could make any difference about an old yellow letter. It was one Father had taken from a drawer in the bookcase which he had cleaned out the night before. We patched the kite up with the letter, a sheet on each side, and dried it by the fire. Then we started out, and up went the kite like a bird. The wind was glorious, and it soared and strained like something alive. All at once—snap! And there was Claude, standing with a bit of cord in his hand, looking as foolish as a flatfish, and our kite sailing along at a fearful rate of speed over to the mainland.

I might have said to Claude, So like a boy! but I didn't. Instead, I sympathized with him, and pointed out that it really didn't matter because I had spoiled it by jabbing my elbow through it. By this time the kite was out of sight, and we never expected to see or hear of it again.

A month later a letter came to the Big Half Moon for Father. Jake Wiggins brought it over in his sloop. Father went off by himself to read it, and such a queer-looking face as he had when he came back! His eyes looked as if he had been crying, but that couldn't be, I suppose, because Claude says men never cry. Anyhow, his face was all glad and soft and smiley.

"Do you two young pirates and freebooters want to know what has become of your kite?" he said.

Then he sat down beside us on the rocks at the Mermaid's Pool and told us the whole story, and read his letter to us. It was the most amazing thing.

It seems Father had had relations after all—a brother and a sister in particular. But when he was a young man he quarrelled with his brother, who didn't treat him very well—but he's been dead for years, so I won't say a word against him—and had gone away from home. He never went back, and he never even let them know he was living.

Father says that this was very wrong of him, and I suppose it was, since he says so; but I don't see how Father could do anything wrong.

Anyway, he had a sister Esther whom he loved very much; but he felt bitter against her too, because he thought she took his brother's part too much. So, though a letter of hers, asking him to go back, did reach him, he never answered it, and he never heard anything more. Years afterward he felt sorry and went back, but his brother was dead and his sister had gone away, and he couldn't find out a single thing about her.

So much for that; and now about the kite. The letter Father had just received was from his sister, our Aunt Esther and the mother of Dick and Mimi. She was living at a place hundreds of miles inland. Her husband was dead and, as we found out later, although she did not say a word about it in the letter, she was very poor. One day when Dick and Mimi were out in the woods looking for botany specimens they saw something funny in the top of a tree. Dick climbed up and got it. It was a big red kite with a patch on each side and names written on it. They carried it home to their mother. Dick has since told us that she turned as pale as the dead when she saw our names on it. You see, Philippa was her mother's name and Claude was her father's. And when she read the letter that was pasted over the hole in the kite she knew who we must be, for it was the very letter she had written to her brother so long ago. So she sat right down and wrote again, and this was the letter Jake Wiggins brought to the Big Half Moon. It was a beautiful letter. I loved Aunt Esther before I ever saw her, just from that letter.

Next day Father got Jake to take his place for a few days, and he left Claude and me over on the mainland while he went to see Aunt Esther. When he came back he brought Aunt Esther and Dick and Mimi with him, and they have been here ever since.

You don't know how splendid it is! Aunt Esther is such a dear, and Dick and Mimi are too jolly for words. They love the Big Half Moon as well as Claude and I do, and Dick makes a perfectly elegant shipwrecked mariner.

But the best of it all is that we have relations now!

The Bride Roses

Miss Corona awoke that June morning with a sigh, the cause of which she was at first too sleepy to understand. Then it all came over her with a little sickening rush; she had fallen asleep with tear-wet lashes the night before on account of it.

This was Juliet Gordon's wedding day, and she, Miss Corona, could not go to the wedding and was not even invited, all because of the Quarrel, a generation old, and so chronic and bitter and terrible that it always presented itself to Miss Corona's mental vision as spelled with a capital. Well might Miss Corona hate it. It had shut her up into a lonely life for long years. Juliet Gordon and Juliet's father, Meredith Gordon, were the only relations Miss Corona had in the world, and the old family feud divided them by a gulf which now seemed impassable.

Miss Corona turned over on her pillows, lifted one corner of the white window-blind and peeped out. Below her a river of early sunshine was flowing through the garden, and the far-away slopes were translucent green in their splendour of young day, with gauzy, uncertain mists lingering, spiritlike, in their intervales. A bird, his sleek plumage iridescent in the sunlight, was perched on the big chestnut bough that ran squarely across the window, singing as if his heart would burst with melody and the joy of his tiny life. No bride could have wished anything fairer for her day of days, and Miss Corona dropped back on her pillows with another gentle sigh.

"I'm so glad that the dear child has a fine day to be married," she said.

Juliet Gordon was always "dear child" to Miss Corona, although the two had never spoken to each other in their lives.

Miss Corona was a brisk and early riser as a rule, with a genuine horror of lazy people who lay late abed or took over-long to get their eyes well opened, but this morning she made no hurry about rising, even though scurrying footsteps, banging doors, and over-loud tinkling of dishes in the room below betokened that Charlotta was already up and about. And Charlotta, as poor Miss Corona knew only too well, was fatally sure to do something unfortunate if she were not under some careful, overseeing eye. To be sure, Charlotta's intentions were always good.

But Miss Corona was not thinking about Charlotta this morning, and she felt so strong a distaste for her lonely, purposeless life that she was in no haste to go forth to meet another day of it.

Miss Corona felt just the least little bit tired of living, although she feared it was very wicked of her to feel so. She lay there listlessly for half an hour longer, looking through a mist of tears at the portrait of her stern old father hanging on the wall at the foot of the bed, and thinking over the Quarrel.

It had happened thirty years ago, when Miss Corona had been a girl of twenty, living alone with her father at the old Gordon homestead on the hill, with the big black spruce grove behind it on the north and far-reaching slopes of green fields before it on the south. Down in the little northern valley below the spruce grove lived her uncle, Alexis Gordon. His son, Meredith, had seemed to Corona as her own brother. The mothers of both were dead; neither had any other brother or sister. The two children had grown up together, playmates and devoted friends. There had never been any sentiment or lovemaking between them to mar a perfect comradeship. They were only the best of friends, whatever plans the fathers might have cherished for the union of their estates and children, putting the property consideration first, as the Gordons were always prone to do.

But, if Roderick and Alexis Gordon had any such plans, all went by the board when they quarreled. Corona shivered yet over the bitterness of that time. The Gordons never did anything half-heartedly. The strife between the two brothers was determined and irreconcilable.

Corona's father forbade her to speak to her uncle and cousin or to hold any communication with them. Corona wept and obeyed him. She had always obeyed her father; it had never entered into her mind to do anything else. Meredith had resented her attitude hotly, and from that day they had never spoken or met, while the years came and went, each making a little wider and more hopeless the gulf of coldness and anger and distrust.

Ten years later Roderick Gordon died, and in five months Alexis Gordon followed him to the grave. The two brothers who had hated each other so unyieldingly in life slept very peaceably side by side in the old Gordon plot of the country graveyard, but their rancour still served to embitter the lives of their descendants.

Corona, with a half-guilty sense of disloyalty to her father, hoped that she and Meredith might now be friends again. He was married, and had one little daughter. In her new and intolerable loneliness Corona's heart yearned after her own people. But she was too timid to make any advances, and Meredith never made any. Corona believed that he hated her, and let slip her last fluttering hope that the old breach would ever be healed.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" she sobbed softly into her pillows. It seemed a terrible thing to her that one of her race and kin was to be married and she could not be present at the ceremony, she who had never seen a Gordon bride.

When Miss Corona went downstairs at last, she found Charlotta sobbing in the kitchen porch. The small handmaiden was doubled up on the floor, with her face muffled in her gingham apron and her long braids of red hair hanging with limp straightness down her back. When Charlotta was in good spirits, they always hung perkily over each shoulder, tied up with enormous bows of sky-blue ribbon.

"What have you done this time?" asked Miss Corona, without the slightest intention of being humorous or sarcastic.

"I've—I've bruk your green and yaller bowl," sniffed Charlotta. "Didn't mean to, Miss C'rona. It jest slipped out so fashion 'fore I c'd grab holt on it. And it's bruk into forty millyun pieces. Ain't I the onluckiest girl?"

"You certainly are," sighed Miss Corona. At any other time she would have been filled with dismay over the untoward fate of her green and yellow bowl, which had belonged to her great-grandmother and had stood on the hall table to hold flowers as long as she could remember. But just now her heart was so sore over the Quarrel that there was no room for other regrets. "Well, well, crying won't mend it. I suppose it is a judgment on me for staying abed so late. Go and sweep up the pieces, and do try and be a little more careful, Charlotte."

"Yes'm," said Charlotta meekly. She dared not resent being called Charlotte just then. "And I'll tell you what I'll do, ma'am, to make up, I'll go and weed the garden. Yes'm, I'll do it beautiful."

"And pull up more flowers than weeds," Miss Corona reflected mournfully. But it did not matter; nothing mattered. She saw Charlotta sally forth into the garden with a determined, do-or-die expression surmounting her freckles, without feeling interest enough to go and make sure that she did not root out all the late asters in her tardy and wilfully postponed warfare on weeds.

This mood lasted until the afternoon. Then Miss Corona, whose heart and thoughts were still down in the festive house in the valley, roused herself enough to go out and

see what Charlotta was doing. After finding out, she wandered idly about the rambling, old-fashioned place, which was full of nooks and surprises. At every turn you might stumble on some clump or tangle of sweetness, showering elusive fragrance on the air, that you would never have suspected. Nothing in the garden was planted quite where it should be, yet withal it was the most delightful spot imaginable.

Miss Corona pushed her way into the cherry-tree copse, and followed a tiny, overgrown path to a sunshiny corner beyond. She had not been there since last summer; the little path was getting almost impassable. When she emerged from the cherry trees, somewhat rumpled and pulled about in hair and attire, but attended, as if by a benediction, by the aromatic breath of the mint she had trodden on, she gave a little cry and stood quite still, gazing at the rosebush that grew in the corner. It was so large and woody that it seemed more like a tree than a bush, and it was snowed over with a splendour of large, pure white roses.

"Dear life," whispered Miss Corona tremulously, as she tiptoed towards it. "The bride roses have bloomed again! How very strange! Why, there has not been a rose on that tree for twenty years."

The rosebush had been planted there by Corona's great-grandmother, the lady of the green and yellow bowl. It was a new variety, brought out from Scotland by Mary Gordon, and it bore large white roses which three generations of Gordon brides had worn on their wedding day. It had come to be a family tradition among the Gordons that no luck would attend the bride who did not carry a white rose from Mary Gordon's rose-tree.

Long years ago the tree had given up blooming, nor could all the pruning and care given it coax a single blossom from it. Miss Corona, tinctured with the superstition apt to wait on a lonely womanhood, believed in her heart that the rosebush had a secret sympathy with the fortunes of the Gordon women. She, the last of them on the old homestead, would never need the bride roses. Wherefore, then, should the old tree bloom? And now, after all these years, it had flung all its long-hoarded sweetness into blossom again. Miss Corona thrilled at the thought. The rosebush had bloomed again for a Gordon bride, but Miss Corona was sure there was another meaning in it too; she believed it foretokened some change in her own life, some rejuvenescence of love and beauty like to that of the ancient rose-tree. She bent over its foam of loveliness almost reverently.

"They have bloomed for Juliet's wedding," she murmured. "A Gordon bride must wear the bride roses, indeed she must. And this—why, it is almost a miracle."

She ran, light-footedly as a girl, to the house for scissors and a basket. She would send Juliet Gordon the bride roses. Her cheeks were pink from excitement as she snipped them off. How lovely they were! How very large and fragrant! It was as if all the grace and perfume and beauty and glory of those twenty lost summers were found here at once in them. When Miss Corona had them ready, she went to the door and called, "Charlotte! Charlotte!"

Now Charlotta, having atoned to her conscience for the destruction of the green and yellow bowl by faithfully weeding the garden, a task which she hated above all else, was singing a hymn among the sweet peas, and her red braids were over her shoulders. This ought to have warned Miss Corona, but Miss Corona was thinking of other things, and kept on calling patiently, while Charlotta weeded away for dear life, and seemed smitten with treble deafness.

After a time Miss Corona remembered and sighed. She did hate to call the child that foolish name with its foreign sound. Just as if plain "Charlotte" were not good enough for her, and much more suitable to "Smith" too! Ordinarily Miss Corona would not have given in. But the case was urgent; she could not stand upon her dignity just now.

"Charlotta!" she called entreatingly.

Instantly Charlotta flew to the garden gate and raced up to the door.

"Yes'm," she said meekly. "You want me, Miss C'rona?"

"Take this box down to Miss Juliet Gordon, and ask that it be given to her at once," said Miss Corona, "Don't loiter, Charlotta. Don't stop to pick gum in the grove, or eat sours in the dike, or poke sticks through the bridge, or—"

But Charlotta had gone.

Down in the valley, the other Gordon house was in a hum of excitement. Upstairs Juliet had gone to her invalid mother's room to show herself in her wedding dress to the pale little lady lying on the sofa. She was a tall, stately young girl with the dark grey Gordon eyes and the pure creaminess of colouring, flawless as a lily petal. Her face was a very sweet one, and the simple white dress she wore became her dainty, flowerlike beauty as nothing elaborate could have done.

"I'm not going to put on my veil until the last moment," she said laughingly. "I would feel married right away if I did. And oh, Mother dear, isn't it too bad? My roses haven't come. Father is back from the station, and they were not there. I am so disappointed. Romney ordered pure white roses because I said a Gordon bride must carry nothing else. Come in"—as a knock sounded at the door.

Laura Burton, Juliet's cousin and bridesmaid, entered with a box.

"Juliet dear, the funniest little red-headed girl with the most enormous freckles has just brought this for you. I haven't an idea where she came from; she looked like a messenger from pixy-land."

Juliet opened the box and gave a cry.

"Oh, Mother, look—look! What perfect roses! Who could have sent them? Oh, here's a note from—from—why, Mother, it's from Cousin Corona."

"My dear child," ran the letter in Miss Corona's fine, old-fashioned script. "I am sending you the Gordon bride roses. The rose-tree has bloomed for the first time in twenty years, my dear, and it must surely be in honour of your wedding day. I hope you will wear them for, although I have never known you, I love you very much. I was once a dear friend of your father's. Tell him to let you wear the roses I send for old times' sake. I wish you every happiness, my dear.

"Your affectionate cousin,
"Corona Gordon."

"Oh, how sweet and lovely of her!" said Juliet gently, as she laid the letter down. "And to think she was not even invited! I wanted to send her an invitation, but Father

said it would be better not to—she was so hard and bitter against us that she would probably regard it as an insult."

"He must have been mistaken about her attitude," said Mrs. Gordon. "It certainly is a great pity she was not invited, but it is too late now. An invitation sent two hours before the ceremony would be an insult indeed."

"Not if the bride herself took it!" exclaimed Juliet impulsively. "I'll go myself to Cousin Corona, and ask her to come to my wedding."

"Go yourself! Child, you can't do such a thing! In that dress...."

"Go I must, Momsie. Why, it's only a three minutes' walk. I'll go up the hill by the old field-path, and no one will see me. Oh, don't say a word—there, I'm gone!"

"That child!" sighed the mother protestingly, as she heard Juliet's flying feet on the stairs. "What a thing for a bride to do!"

Juliet, with her white silken skirts caught up above grasses and dust, ran light-footedly through the green lowland fields and up the hill, treading for the first time the faint old field-path between the two homes, so long disused that it was now barely visible in its fringing grasses and star-dust of buttercups. Where it ran into the spruce grove was a tiny gate which Miss Corona had always kept in good repair, albeit it was never used. Juliet pushed up the rusty hasp and ran through.

Miss Corona was sitting alone in her shadowy parlour, hanging over a few of the bride roses with falling tears, when something tall and beautiful and white, came in like a blessing and knelt by her chair.

"Cousin Corona," said a somewhat breathless bride, "I have come to thank you for your roses and ask you to forgive us all for the old quarrel."

"Dear child," said Miss Corona out of her amazement, "there is nothing to forgive. I've loved you all and longed for you. Dear child, you have brought me great happiness."

"And you must come to my wedding," cried Juliet. "Oh, you must—or I shall think you have not really forgiven us. You would never refuse the request of a bride, Cousin Corona. We are queens on our wedding day, you know."

"Oh, it's not that, dear child—but I'm not dressed—I—"

"I'll help you dress. And I won't go back without you. The guests and the minister must wait if necessary—yes, even Romney must wait. Oh, I want you to meet Romney. Come, dear."

And Miss Corona went. Charlotta and the bride got her into her grey silk and did her hair, and in a very short time she and Juliet were hurrying down the old field-path. In the hollow Meredith Gordon met them.

"Cousin Meredith," said Miss Corona tremulously.

"Dear Corona."

He took both her hands in his, and kissed her heartily. "Forgive me for misunderstanding you so long. I thought you hated us all."

Turning to Juliet, he said with a fatherly smile,

"What a terrible girl it is for having its own way! Who ever heard of a Gordon bride doing such an unconventional thing? There, scamper off to the house before your guests come. Laura has made your roses up into what she calls 'a dream of a bouquet,' I'll take Cousin Corona up more leisurely."

"Oh, I knew that something beautiful was going to happen when the old rose-tree bloomed," murmured Miss Corona happily.

The Josephs' Christmas

The month before Christmas was always the most exciting and mysterious time in the Joseph household. Such scheming and planning, such putting of curly heads together in corners, such counting of small hoards, such hiding and smuggling of things out of sight, as went on among the little Josephs!

There were a good many of them, and very few of the pennies; hence the reason for so much contriving and consulting. From fourteen-year-old Mollie down to four-year-old Lennie there were eight small Josephs in all in the little log house on the prairie; so that when each little Joseph wanted to give a Christmas box to each of the other little Josephs, and something to Father and Mother Joseph besides, it is no wonder that they had to cudgel their small brains for ways and means thereof.

Father and Mother were always discreetly blind and silent through December. No questions were asked no matter what queer things were done. Many secret trips to the little store at the railway station two miles away were ignored, and no little Joseph was called to account because he or she looked terribly guilty when somebody suddenly came into the room. The air was simply charged with secrets.

Sister Mollie was the grand repository of these; all the little Josephs came to her for advice and assistance. It was Mollie who for troubled small brothers and sisters did such sums in division as this: How can I get a ten-cent present for Emmy and a fifteen-cent one for Jimmy out of eighteen cents? Or, how can seven sticks of candy be divided among eight people so that each shall have one? It was Mollie who advised regarding the purchase of ribbon and crepe paper. It was Mollie who put the finishing touches to most of the little gifts. In short, all through December Mollie was weighed down under an avalanche of responsibility. It speaks volumes for her sagacity and skill that she never got things mixed up or made any such terrible mistake as letting one little Joseph find out what another was going to give him. "Dead" secrecy was the keystone of all plans and confidences.

During this particular December the planning and contriving had been more difficult and the results less satisfactory than usual. The Josephs were poor at any time, but this

winter they were poorer than ever. The crops had failed in the summer, and as a consequence the family were, as Jimmy said, "on short commons." But they made the brave best of their small resources, and on Christmas Eve every little Joseph went to bed with a clear conscience, for was there not on the corner table in the kitchen a small mountain of tiny—sometimes very tiny—gifts labelled with the names of recipients and givers, and worth their weight in gold if love and good wishes count for anything?

It was beginning to snow when the small small Josephs went to bed, and when the big small Josephs climbed the stairs it was snowing thickly. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph sat before the fire and listened to the wind howling about the house.

"I'm glad I'm not driving over the prairie tonight," said Mr. Joseph. "It's quite a storm. I hope it will be fine tomorrow, for the children's sake. They've set their hearts on having a sleigh ride, and it will be too bad if they can't have it when it's about all the Christmas they'll have this year. Mary, this is the first Christmas since we came west that we couldn't afford some little extras for them, even if 'twas only a box of nuts and candy."

Mrs. Joseph sighed over Jimmy's worn jacket which she was mending. Then she smiled.

"Never mind, John. Things will be better next Christmas, we'll hope. The children will not mind, bless their hearts. Look at all the little knick-knacks they've made for each other. Last week when I was over at Taunton, Mr. Fisher had his store all gayified up,' as Jim says, with Christmas presents. I did feel that I'd ask nothing better than to go in and buy all the lovely things I wanted, just for once, and give them to the children tomorrow morning. They've never had anything really nice for Christmas. But there! We've all got each other and good health and spirits, and a Christmas wouldn't be much without those if we had all the presents in the world."

Mr. Joseph nodded.

"That's so. I don't want to grumble; but I tell you I did want to get Maggie a 'real live doll,' as she calls it. She never has had anything but homemade dolls, and that small heart of hers is set on a real one. There was one at Fisher's store today—a big beauty with real hair, and eyes that opened and shut. Just fancy Maggie's face if she saw such a Christmas box as that tomorrow morning."

"Don't let's fancy it," laughed Mrs. Joseph, "it is only aggravating. Talking of candy reminds me that I made a big plateful of taffy for the children today. It's all the 'Christmassy' I could give them. I'll get it out and put it on the table along with the children's presents. That can't be someone at the door!"

"It is, though," said Mr. Joseph as he strode to the door and flung it open.

Two snowed-up figures were standing on the porch. As they stepped in, the Josephs recognized one of them as Mr. Ralston, a wealthy merchant in a small town fifteen miles away.

"Late hour for callers, isn't it?" said Mr. Ralston. "The fact is, our horse has about given out, and the storm is so bad that we can't proceed. This is my wife, and we are on our way to spend Christmas with my brother's family at Lindsay. Can you take us in for the night, Mr. Joseph?"

"Certainly, and welcome!" exclaimed Mr. Joseph heartily, "if you don't mind a shakedown by the kitchen fire for the night. My, Mrs. Ralston," as his wife helped her

off with her things, "but you are snowed up! I'll see to putting your horse away, Mr. Ralston. This way, if you please."

When the two men came stamping into the house again Mrs. Ralston and Mrs. Joseph were sitting at the fire, the former with a steaming hot cup of tea in her hand. Mr. Ralston put the big basket he was carrying down on a bench in the corner.

"Thought I'd better bring our Christmas flummery in," he said. "You see, Mrs. Joseph, my brother has a big family, so we are taking them a lot of Santa Claus stuff. Mrs. Ralston packed this basket, and goodness knows what she put in it, but she half cleaned out my store. The eyes of the Lindsay youngsters will dance tomorrow—that is, if we ever get there."

Mrs. Joseph gave a little sigh in spite of herself, and looked wistfully at the heap of gifts on the corner table. How meagre and small they did look, to be sure, beside that bulgy basket with its cover suggestively tied down.

Mrs. Ralston looked too.

"Santa Claus seems to have visited you already," she said with a smile.

The Josephs laughed.

"Our Santa Claus is somewhat out of pocket this year," said Mr. Joseph frankly. "Those are the little things the small folks here have made for each other. They've been a month at it, and I'm always kind of relieved when Christmas is over and there are no more mysterious doings. We're in such cramped quarters here that you can't move without stepping on somebody's secret."

A shakedown was spread in the kitchen for the unexpected guests, and presently the Ralstons found themselves alone. Mrs. Ralston went over to the Christmas table and looked at the little gifts half tenderly and half pityingly.

"They're not much like the contents of our basket, are they?" she said, as she touched the calendar Jimmie had made for Mollie out of cardboard and autumn leaves and grasses.

"Just what I was thinking," returned her husband, "and I was thinking of something else, too. I've a notion that I'd like to see some of the things in our basket right here on this table."

"I'd like to see them all," said Mrs. Ralston promptly. "Let's just leave them here, Edward. Roger's family will have plenty of presents without them, and for that matter we can send them ours when we go back home."

"Just as you say," agreed Mr. Ralston. "I like the idea of giving the small folk of this household a rousing good Christmas for once. They're poor I know, and I dare say pretty well pinched this year like most of the farmers hereabout after the crop failure."

Mrs. Ralston untied the cover of the big basket. Then the two of them, moving as stealthily as if engaged in a burglary, transferred the contents to the table. Mr. Ralston got out a small pencil and a note book, and by dint of comparing the names attached to the gifts on the table they managed to divide theirs up pretty evenly among the little Josephs.

When all was done Mrs. Ralston said, "Now, I'm going to spread that tablecloth carelessly over the table. We will be going before daylight, probably, and in the hurry of

getting off I hope that Mr. and Mrs. Joseph will not notice the difference till we're gone."

It fell out as Mrs. Ralston had planned. The dawn broke fine and clear over a vast white world. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph were early astir; breakfast for the storm-stayed travellers was cooked and eaten by lamplight; then the horse and sleigh were brought to the door and Mr. Ralston carried out his empty basket.

"I expect the trail will be heavy," he said, "but I guess we'd get to Lindsay in time for dinner, anyway. Much obliged for your kindness, Mr. Joseph. When you and Mrs. Joseph come to town we shall hope to have a chance to return it. Good-bye and a merry Christmas to you all."

When Mrs. Joseph went back to the kitchen her eyes fell on the heaped-up table in the corner.

"Why-y!" she said, and snatched off the cover.

One look she gave, and then this funny little mother began to cry; but they were happy tears. Mr. Joseph came too, and looked and whistled.

There really seemed to be everything on that table that the hearts of children could desire—three pairs of skates, a fur cap and collar, a dainty workbasket, half a dozen gleaming new books, a writing desk, a roll of stuff that looked like a new dress, a pair of fur-topped kid gloves just Mollie's size, and a china cup and saucer. All these were to be seen at the first glance; and in one corner of the table was a big box filled with candies and nuts and raisins, and in the other a doll with curling golden hair and brown eyes, dressed in "real" clothes and with all her wardrobe in a trunk beside her. Pinned to her dress was a leaf from Mr. Ralston's notebook with Maggie's name written on it.

"Well, this is Christmas with a vengeance," said Mr. Joseph.

"The children will go wild with delight," said his wife happily.

They pretty nearly did when they all came scrambling down the stairs a little later. Such a Christmas had never been known in the Joseph household before. Maggie clasped her doll with shining eyes, Mollie looked at the workbasket that her housewifely little heart had always longed for, studious Jimmy beamed over the books, and Ted and Hal whooped with delight over the skates. And as for the big box of good things, why, everybody appreciated that. That Christmas was one to date from in that family.

I'm glad to be able to say, too, that even in the heyday of their delight and surprise over their wonderful presents, the little Josephs did not forget to appreciate the gifts they had prepared for each other. Mollie thought her calendar just too pretty for anything, and Jimmy was sure the new red mittens which Maggie had knitted for him with her own chubby wee fingers, were the very nicest, gayest mittens a boy had ever worn.

Mrs. Joseph's taffy was eaten too. Not a scrap of it was left. As Ted said loyally, "It was just as good as the candy in the box and had more 'chew' to it besides."

The Magical Bond of the Sea

A late September wind from the northwest was sweeping over the waters of Racicot Harbour. It blew in, strong with the tang of the salt seas, past the grim lighthouse rock on the one hand and the sandbars on the other, up the long, narrow funnel of darkly blue water, until it whistled among the masts of the boats at anchor and among the stovepipe chimneys of the fishing village. It was a wind that sang and piped and keened of many things—but what it sang to each listener was only what was in that listener's heart. And Nora Shelley, standing at the door of her father's bleached cottage on the grey sands, heard a new strain in it. The wind had sung often to her of the outer world she longed for, but there had never been the note of fulfilment in it before.

There's a new life beyond, Nora, whistled the wind. A good life—and it's yours for the taking. You have but to put out your hand and all you've wished for will be in your grasp.

Nora leaned out from the door to meet the wind. She loved that northwest gale; it was a staunch old friend of hers. Very slim and straight was Nora, with a skin as white as the foam flakes crisping over the sands, and eyes of the tremulous, haunting blue that deepens on the water after a fair sunset. But her hair was as black as midnight, and her lips blossomed out with a ripe redness against the uncoloured purity of her face. She was far and away the most beautiful of the harbour girls, but hardly the most popular. Men and women alike thought her proud. Even her friends felt themselves called upon to make excuses for her unlikeness to themselves.

Nora had dosed the door behind her to shut in the voices. She wanted to be alone with the wind while she made her decision. Before her the sandy shingle, made firm by a straggling growth of some pale sea-ivy, sloped down to the sapphire cup of the harbour. Around her were the small, uncouth houses of the village—no smaller or more uncouth than the one which was her home—with children playing noisily on the paths between them. The mackerel boats curtsied and nodded outside; beyond them the sharp tip of Sandy Point was curdled white with seagulls. Down at the curve of the cove a group of men were laughing and talking loudly in front of French Joe's fish-house. This was the life that she had always known.

Across the harbour, on a fir-fringed headland, stood Dalveigh. John Cameron, childless millionaire, had built a summer cottage on that point two years ago, and given it the name of the old ancestral estate in Scotland. To the Racicot fishing folk the house and grounds were as a dream of enchantment made real. Few of them had ever seen anything like it.

Nora Shelley knew Dalveigh well. She had been the Camerons' guest many times that summer, finding in the luxury and beauty of their surroundings something that entered with a strange aptness into her own nature. It was as if it were hers by right of fitness. And this was the life that might be hers, did she so choose.

In reality, her choice was already made, and she knew it. But it pleased her to pretend for a little time that it was not, and to dally tenderly with-the old loves and emotions that tugged at her heart and clamoured to be remembered.

Within, in the low-ceilinged living room, with its worn, uneven floor and its blackened walls hung with fish nets and oilskins, four people were sitting. John Cameron and his wife were given the seats of honour in the middle of the room. Mrs. Cameron was a handsome, well-dressed woman, with an expression that was discontented and, at times, petulant. Yet her face had a good deal of plain common sense in it, and not even the most critical of the Racicot folks could say that she "put on airs." Her husband was a small, white-haired man, with a fresh, young-looking face. He was popular in Racicot, for he mingled freely with the sailors and fishermen. Moreover, Dalveigh was an excellent market for fresh mackerel.

Nathan Shelley, in his favourite corner behind the stove, sat lurching forward with his hands on his knees. He had laid aside his pipe out of deference to Mrs. Cameron, and it was hard for him to think without it. He wished his wife would go to work; it seemed uncanny to see her idle. She had sat idle only once that he remembered—the day they had brought Ned Shelley in, dank and dripping, after the August storm ten years before. Mrs. Shelley sat by the crooked, small-paned window and looked out down the harbour. The coat she had been patching for her husband when the Camerons came still lay in her lap, and she had folded her hands upon it. She was a big woman, slow of speech and manner, with a placid, handsome face—a face that had not visibly stirred even when she had heard the Camerons' proposition.

They wanted Nora—these rich people who had so much in life wanted the blossom of girlhood that had never bloomed for them. John Cameron pleaded his cause well.

"We will look on her as our own," he said at last. "We have grown to love her this summer. She is beautiful and clever—she has a right to more than Racicot can give her. You have other children—we are childless. And we do not take her from you utterly. You will see her every summer when we come to Dalveigh."

"It won't be the same thing quite," said Nathan Shelley drily. "She'll belong to your life then—not ours. And no matter how many young ones folks has, they don't want to lose none of 'em. But I dunno as we ought to let our feelings stand in Nora's light. She's clever, and she's been hankering for more'n we can ever give her. I was the same way once. Lord, how I raged at Racicot! I broke away finally—went to a city and got work. But it wasn't no use. I'd left it too long. The sea had got into my blood. I toughed it out for two years, and then I had to come back. I didn't want to, mark you, but I had to come. Been here ever since. But maybe 'twill be different with the girl. She's younger than I was; if the hankering for the sea and the life of the shore hasn't got into her too deep, maybe she'll be able to cut loose for good. But you don't know how the sea calls to one of its own."

Cameron smiled. He thought that this dry old salt was a bit of a poet in his own way. Very likely Nora got her ability and originality from him. There did not seem to be a great deal in the phlegmatic, good-looking mother.

"What say, wife?" asked Shelley at last.

His wife had said in her slow way, "Leave it to Nora," and to Nora it was left.

When she came in at last, her face stung to radiant beauty by the northwest wind, she found it hard to tell them after all. She looked at her mother appealingly.

"Is it go or stay, girl," demanded her father brusquely.

"I think I'll go," said Nora slowly. Then, catching sight of her mother's face, she ran to her and flung her arms about her. "But I'll never forget you, Mother," she cried. "I'll love you always—you and Father."

Her mother loosened the clinging arms and pushed her gently towards the Camerons.

"Go to them," she said calmly. "You belong to them now."

The news spread quickly over Racicot. Before night everyone on the harbour shore knew that the Camerons were going to adopt Nora Shelley and take her away with them. There was much surprise and more envy. The shore women tossed their heads.

"Reckon Nora is in great feather," they said. "She always did think herself better than anyone else. Nate Shelley and his wife spoiled her ridiculous. Wonder what Rob Fletcher thinks of it?"

Nora asked her brother to tell the news to Rob Fletcher himself, but Merran Andrews was before him. She was at Rob before he had fairly landed, when the fishing boats came in at sunset.

"Have you heard the news, Rob? Nora's going away to be a fine lady. The Camerons have been daft about her all summer, and now they are going to adopt her."

Merran wanted Rob herself. He was a big, handsome fellow, and well-off—the pick of the harbour men in every way. He had slighted her for Nora, and it pleased her to stab him now, though she meant to be nice to him later on.

He turned white under his tan, but he did not choose to make a book of his heart for Merran's bold black eyes to read. "It's a great thing for her," he answered calmly. "She was meant for better things than can be found at Racicot."

"She was always too good for common folks, if that is what you mean," said Merran spitefully.

Nora and Rob did not meet until the next evening, when she rowed herself home from Dalveigh. He was at the shore to tie up her boat and help her out. They walked up the sands together in the heart of the autumn sunset, with the northwest wind whistling in their ears and the great star of the lighthouse gleaming wanly out against the golden sky. Nora felt uncomfortable, and resented it. Rob Fletcher was nothing to her; he never had been anything but the good friend to whom she told her strange thoughts and longings. Why should her heart ache over him? She wished he would talk, but he strode along in silence, with his fine head drooping a little.

"I suppose you have heard that I am going away, Rob?" she said at last.

He nodded. "Yes, I've heard it from a hundred mouths, more or less," he answered, not looking at her.

"It's a splendid thing for me, isn't it?" dared Nora.

"Well, I don't know," he said slowly. "Looking at it from the outside, it seems so. But from the inside it mayn't look the same. Do you think you'll be able to cut twenty years of a life out of your heart without any pain?"

"Oh, I'll be homesick, if that is what you mean," said Nora petulantly. "Of course I'll be that at first. I expect it—but people get over that. And it is not as if I were going away for good. I'll be back next summer—every summer."

"It'll be different," said Rob stubbornly, thinking as old Nathan Shelley had thought. "You'll be a fine lady—oh, all the better for that perhaps—but you'll not be the same. No, no, the new life will change you; not all at once, maybe, but in the end. You'll be one of them, not one of us. But will you be happy? That's the question I'm asking."

In anyone else Nora would have resented this. But she never felt angry with Rob.

"I think I shall be," she said thoughtfully. "And, anyway, I must go. It doesn't seem as if I could help myself if I wanted to. Something—out beyond there—is calling me, always has been calling me ever since I was a tiny girl and found out there was a big world far away from Racicot. And it always seemed to me that I would find a way to it some day. That was why I kept going to school long after the other girls stopped. Mother thought I'd better stop home; she said too much book learning would make me discontented and too different from the people I had to live along. But Father let me go; he understood; he said I was like him when he was young. I learned everything and read everything I could. It seems to me as if I had been walking along a narrow pathway all my life. And now it seems as if a gate were opened before me and I can pass through into a wider world. It isn't the luxury and the pleasure or the fine house and dresses that tempt me, though the people here think so—even Mother thinks so. But it is not. It's just that something seems to be in my grasp that I've always longed for, and I must go—Rob, I must go."

"Yes, if you feel like that you must go," he answered, looking down at her troubled face gently. "And it's best for you to go, Nora. I believe that, and I'm not so selfish as not to be able to hope that you'll find all you long for. But it will change you all the more if it is so. Nora! Nora! Whatever am I going to do without you!"

The sudden passion bursting out in his tone frightened her.

"Don't, Rob, don't! And you won't miss me long. There's many another."

"No, there isn't. Don't fling me that dry bone of comfort. There's no other, and never has been any other—none but you, Nora, and well you know it."

"I'm sorry," she said faintly.

"You needn't be," said Rob grimly. "After all, I'd rather love you than not, hurt as it will. I never had much hope of getting you to listen to me, so there's no great disappointment there. You're too good for me—I've always known that. A girl that is fit to mate with the Camerons is far above Rob Fletcher, fisherman."

"I never had such a thought," protested Nora.

"I know it," he said, casing himself up in his quietness again. "But it's so—and now I've got to lose you. But there'll never be any other for me, Nora."

He left her at her father's door. She watched his stalwart figure out of sight around the point, and raged to find tears in her eyes and a bitter yearning in her heart. For a moment she repented—she would stay—she could not go. Then over the harbour flashed out the lights of Dalveigh. The life behind them glittered, allured, beckoned. Nay, she must go on—she had made her choice. There was no turning back now.

Nora Shelley went away with the Camerons, and Dalveigh was deserted. Winter came down on Racicot Harbour, and the colony of fisher folk at its head gave themselves over to the idleness of the season—a time for lounging and gossipping and long hours of lazy contentment smoking in the neighbours' chimney corners, when tales were told of the sea and the fishing. The Harbour laid itself out to be sociable in winter. There was no time for that in summer. People had to work eighteen hours out of the twenty-four then. In the winter there was spare time to laugh and quarrel, woo and wed and—were a man so minded—dream, as did Rob Fletcher in his loneliness.

In a Racicot winter much was made of small things. The arrival of Nora Shelley's weekly letter to her father and mother was an event in the village. The post-mistress in the Cove store spread the news that it had come, and that night the Shelley kitchen would be crowded. Isobel Shelley, Nora's younger sister, read the letter aloud by virtue of having gone to school long enough to be able to pronounce the words and tell where the places named were situated.

The Camerons had spent the autumn in New York and had then gone south for the winter. Nora wrote freely of her new life. In the beginning she admitted great homesickness, but after the first few letters she made no further mention of that. She wrote little of herself, but she described fully the places she had visited, the people she had met, the wonderful things she had seen. She sent affectionate messages to all her old friends and asked after all her old interests. But the letters came to be more and more like those of a stranger and one apart from the Racicot life, and the father and mother felt it.

"She's changing," muttered old Nathan. "It had to be so—it's well for her that it is so—but it hurts. She ain't ours any more. We've lost the girl, wife, lost her forever."

Rob Fletcher always came and listened to the letters in silence while the others buzzed and commented. Rob, so the Harbour folk said, was much changed. He had grown unsociable and preferred to stay home and read books rather than go a-visiting as did others. The Harbour folk shook their heads over this. There was something wrong with a man who read books when there was a plenty of other amusements. Jacob Radnor had read books all one winter and had drowned himself in the spring—jumped overboard from his dory at the herring nets. And that was what came of books, mark you.

The Camerons came later to Dalveigh the next summer, on account of John Cameron's health, which was not good. It was the first of August before a host of servants came to put Dalveigh in habitable order, and a week later the family came. They brought a houseful of guests with them.

At sunset on the day of her arrival Nora Shelley looked out cross the harbour to the fishing village. She was tired after her journey, and she had not meant to go over until the morning, but now she knew she must go at once. Her mother was over there; the old life called to her; the northwest wind swept up the channel and whistled alluringly to her at the window of her luxurious room. It brought to her the tang of the salt wastes and filled her heart with a great, bitter-sweet yearning.

She was more beautiful than ever. In the year that had passed she had blossomed out to a gracious fulfilment of womanhood. Even the Camerons had wondered at her swift adaptation to her new surroundings. She seemed to have put Racicot behind her as one puts by an old garment. In everything she had held her own royally. Her adopted parents were proud of her beauty and her nameless, untamed charm. They had lavished every

indulgence upon her. In those few short months she had lived more keenly and fully than in all her life before. The Nora Shelley who went away was not, so it would seem, the Nora Shelley who came back.

But when she looked from her window to the waves and saw the star of the lighthouse and the blaze of the sunset in the window of the fishing-houses and heard the summons of the wind, something broke loose in her soul and overwhelmed her, like a wave of the sea. She must go at once—at once—at once. Not a moment could she wait.

She was dressed for dinner, but with tingling fingers she threw off her costly gown and put on her dark travelling suit again. She left her hair as it was and knotted a crimson scarf about her head. She would slip away quietly to the boathouse, get Davy to launch the little sailboat for her—and then for a fleet skim over the harbour before that glorious wind! She hoped not to be seen, but Mrs. Cameron met her in the hall.

"Nora!" she said in astonishment.

"Oh, I must go, Aunty! I must go!" the girl cried feverishly. She was afraid Mrs. Cameron would try to prevent her going, and all at once she knew that she could not bear that.

"Must go? Where? Dinner is almost ready, and—"

"Oh, I don't want any dinner. I'm going home—I will sail over."

"My dear child, don't be foolish. It's too late to go over the harbour tonight. They won't be expecting you. Wait until the morning."

"No—oh, you don't understand. I must go—I must! My mother is over there."

Something in the girl's last sentence or the tone in which it was uttered brought a look of pain to Mrs. Cameron's face. But she made no further attempt to dissuade her.

"Well, if you must. But you cannot go alone—no, Nora, I cannot allow it. The wind is too high and it is too late for you to go over by yourself. Clark Bryant will take you."

Nora would have protested but she knew it would be in vain. She submitted somewhat sullenly and walked down to the shore in silence. Clark Bryant strode beside her, humouring her mood. He was a tall, stout man, with an ugly, clever, sarcastic face. He was as clever as he looked, and was one of the younger millionaires whom John Cameron drew around him in the development of his huge financial schemes. Bryant was in love with Nora. This was why the Camerons had asked him to join their August house party at Dalveigh, and why he had accepted. It had occurred to Nora that this was the case, but as yet she had never troubled to think the situation over seriously.

She liked Clark Bryant well enough, but just at the moment he was in the way. She did not want to take him over to Racicot—just why she could not have explained. There was in her no snobbish shame of her humble home. But he did not belong there; he was an alien, and she wished to go back to it for the first time alone.

At the boathouse Davy launched the small sailboat and Nora took the tiller. She knew every inch of the harbour. As the sail filled before the wind and the boat sprang across the upcurling waves, her brief sullenness fell away from her. She no longer resented Clark Bryant's presence—she forgot it. He was no more to her than the mast by which he stood. The spell of the sea and the wind surged into her heart and filled it with wild happiness and measureless content. Over yonder, where the lights gleamed on the darkening shore under the high-sprung arch of pale golden sky, was home. How the wind whistled to welcome her back! The lash of it against her face—the flick of salt

spray on her lips—the swing of the boat as it cut through the racing crests—how glorious it all was!

Clark Bryant watched her, understanding all at once that he was nothing to her, that he had no part or lot in her heart. He was as one forgotten and left behind. And how lovely, how desirable she was! He had never seen her look so beautiful. The shawl had slipped down to her shoulders and her head rose out of it like some magnificent flower out of a crimson calyx. The masses of her black hair lifted from her face in the rush of the wind and swayed back again like rich shadows. Her lips were stung scarlet with the sea's sharp caresses, and her eyes, large and splendid, looked past him unseeing to the harbour lights of Racicot.

When they swung in by the wharf Nora sprang from the boat before Bryant had time to moor it. Pausing for an instant, she called down to him, carelessly, "Don't wait for me. I shall not go back tonight."

Then she caught her shawl around her head and almost ran up the wharf and along the shore. No one was abroad, for it was supper hour in Racicot. In the Shelley kitchen the family was gathered around the table, when the door was flung open and Nora stood on the threshold. For a moment they gazed at her as at an apparition. They had not known the precise day of her coming and were not aware of the Camerons' arrival at Dalveigh.

"It's the girl herself. It's Nora," said old Nathan, rising from his bench.

"Mother!" cried Nora. She ran across the room and buried her face in her mother's breast, sobbing.

When the news spread, the Racicot people crowded in to see Nora until the house was full. They spent a noisy, merry, whole-hearted evening of the old sort. The men smoked and most of the women knitted while they talked. They were pleased to find that Nora did not put on any airs. Old Jonas Myers bluntly told her that he didn't see as her year among rich folks had done her much good, after all.

"You're just the same as when you went away," he said. "They haven't made a fine lady of you. Folks here thought you'd be something wonderful."

Nora laughed. She was glad that they did not find her changed. Old Nathan chuckled in his dry way. There was a difference in the girl, and he saw it, though the neighbours did not, but it was not the difference he had feared. His daughter was not utterly taken from him yet.

Nora sat by her mother and was happy. But as the evening wore away she grew very quiet, and watched the door with something piteous in her eyes. Old Nathan noticed it and thought she was tired. He gave the curious neighbours a good-natured hint, and they presently withdrew. When they had all gone Nora went out to the door alone.

The wind had died down and the shore, gemmed with its twinkling lights, was very still, for it was too late an hour for Racicot folk to be abroad in the mackerel season. The moon was rising and the harbour was a tossing expanse of silver waves. The mellow light fell on a tall figure lurking at the angle of the road that led past the Shelley cottage. Nora saw and recognized it. She flew down the sandy slope with outstretched hands.

"Rob—Rob!"

"Nora!" he said huskily, holding out his hand. But she flung herself on his breast and clung to him, half laughing, half crying.

"Oh, Rob! I've been looking for you all the evening. Every time there was a step I said to myself, 'That is Rob, now.' And when the door opened to let in another, my heart died within me. I dared not even ask after you for fear of what they might tell me. Why didn't you come?"

"I didn't know that I'd be welcome," he whispered, holding her closer to him. "I've been hanging about thinking to get a glimpse of you unbeknown. I thought maybe you wouldn't want to see me tonight."

"Not want to see you! Oh, Rob, this evening at Dalveigh, when I looked across to Racicot, it was you I thought of before all—even before Mother."

She drew back and looked at him with her soul in her eyes.

"What a splendid fellow you are—how handsome you are, Rob!" she cried. All the reserve of womanhood fell away from her in the inrush of emotions. For the moment she was a child again, telling out her thoughts with all a child's frankness. "I've been in a dream this past year—a lovely dream—a fair dream, but only a dream, after all. And now I've wakened. And you are part of the wakening—the best part! Oh, to think I never knew before!"

"Knew what, my girl?"

He had her close against his heart now; the breath of her lips mingled with his, but he would not kiss her yet.

"That I loved you," she whispered back. "Oh, Rob, you are all the world to me. I belong to you and the sea. But I never knew it until I crossed the harbour tonight. Then I knew—it came to me all at once, like a flood of understanding. I knew I could never go away again—that I must stay here forever where I could hear that call of wind and waves. The new life was good—good—but it could not go deep enough. And when you did not come I knew what was in my heart for you as well."

That night Nora lay beside her sisters in the tiny room that looked out on the harbour. The younger girls slept soundly, but Nora kept awake to listen to the laughter of the wind outside, and con over what she and Rob had said to each other. There was no blot on her happiness save a sorry wonder what the Camerons would say when they knew.

"They will think me ungrateful and fickle," she sighed. "They don't know that I can't help it even if I would. They will never understand."

Nor did they. When Nora told them that she was going back to Racicot, they laughed at her kindly at first, treating it as the passing whim of a homesick girl. Later, when they came to understand that she meant it, they were grieved and angry. There were scenes of pleading and tears and reproaches. Nora cried bitterly in Mrs. Cameron's arms, but stood rock-firm. She could never go back to them—never.

They appealed to Nathan Shelley finally, but he refused to say anything.

"It can't be altered," he told them. "The sea has called her and she'll listen to naught else. I'm sorry enough for the girl's own sake. It would have been better for her if she

could have cut loose from it all and lived your life, I dare say. But you've made a fair trial and it's of no use. I know what's in her heart—it was in mine once—and I'll say no word of rebuke to her. She's free to go or stay as she chooses—just as free as she was last year."

Mrs. Cameron made one more appeal to Nora. She told the girl bitterly that she was ungrateful.

"I'm not that," said Nora with quivering lips. "I love you, and I'm grateful to you. But your life isn't for me, after all. I thought it was—I longed so for it. And I loved it, too—I love it yet. But there's something stronger in me that holds me here."

"I don't think you realize what you are doing, Nora. You have been a little homesick and you are glad to be back. But after we have gone and you must settle into the old Racicot life again, you will not be contented. You will find that your life with us will have unfitted you for this. There will be no real place for you here—nothing for you to do. You will be as a stranger here."

"Oh, no. I am going to marry Rob Fletcher," said Nora proudly.

"Marry Rob Fletcher! And you might have married Clark Bryant, Nora!"

Nora shook her head. "That could never have been. I thought it might once—but I know better now. You see, I love Rob."

There did not seem to be anything more to say after that. Mrs. Cameron did not try to say anything. She went away in sorrow.

Nora cried bitterly after she had gone. But there were no tears in her eyes that night when she walked on the shore with Rob Fletcher. The wind whistled around them, and the stars came out in the great ebony dome of the sky over the harbour. Laughter and song of the fishing folk were behind them, and the deep, solemn call of the sea before. Over the harbour gleamed the score of lights at Dalveigh. Rob looked from them to Nora.

"Do you think you'll ever regret yon life, my girl?"

"Never, Rob. It seems to me now like a beautiful garment put on for a holiday and worn easily and pleasantly for a time. But I've put it off now, and put on workaday clothes again. It is only a week since I left Dalveigh, but it seems long ago. Listen to the wind, Rob! It is singing of the good days to be for you and me."

He bent over and kissed her.

"My own dear lass!" he said softly.

The Martyrdom of Estella

Estella was waiting under the poplars at the gate for Spencer Morgan. She was engaged to him, and he always came to see her on Saturday and Wednesday evenings. It was after sunset, and the air was mellow and warm-hued. The willow trees along the walk and the tall birches in the background stood out darkly distinct against the lemon-tinted sky. The breath of mint floated out from the garden, and the dew was falling heavily.

Estella leaned against the gate, listening for the sound of wheels and dreamily watching the light shining out from the window of Vivienne LeMar's room. The blind was up and she could see Miss LeMar writing at her table. Her profile was clear and distinct against the lamplight.

Estella reflected without the least envy that Miss LeMar was very beautiful. She had never seen anyone who was really beautiful before—beautiful with the loveliness of the heroines in the novels she sometimes read or the pictures she had seen.

Estella Bowes was not pretty. She was a nice-looking girl, with clear eyes, rosy cheeks, and a pervading air of the content and happiness her life had always known. She was an orphan and lived with her uncle and aunt. In the summer they sometimes took a boarder for a month or two, and this summer Miss LeMar had come. She had been with them about a week. She was an actress from the city and had around her all the glamour of a strange, unknown life. Nothing was known about her. The Boweses liked her well enough as a boarder. Estella admired and held her in awe. She wondered what Spencer would think of this beautiful woman. He had not yet seen her.

It was quite dark when he came. Estella opened the gate for him, but he got out of his buggy and walked up the lane beside her with his arm about her. Miss LeMar's light had removed to the parlour where she was singing, accompanying herself on the cottage organ. Estella felt annoyed. The parlour was considered her private domain on Wednesday and Saturday night, but Miss LeMar did not know that.

"Who is singing?" asked Spencer. "What a voice she has!"

"That's our new boarder, Miss LeMar," answered Estella. "She's an actress and sings and does everything. She is awfully pretty, Spencer."

"Yes?" said the young man indifferently.

He was not in the least interested in the Boweses' new boarder. Indeed, he considered her advent a nuisance. He pressed Estella closer to him, and when they reached the garden gate he kissed her. Estella always remembered that moment afterwards. She was so supremely happy.

Spencer went off to put up his horse, and Estella waited for him on the porch steps, wondering if any other girl in the world could be quite so happy as she was, or love anyone as much as she loved Spencer. She did not see how it could be possible, because there was only one Spencer.

When Spencer came back she took him into the parlour, half shyly, half proudly. He was a handsome fellow, with a magnificent physique. Miss LeMar stopped singing and turned around on the organ stool as they entered. The little room was flooded with a mellow light from the pink-globed lamp on the table, and in the soft, shadowy radiance she was as beautiful as a dream. She wore a dress of crepe, cut low in the neck. Estella had never seen anyone dressed so before. To her it seemed immodest.

She introduced Spencer. He bowed awkwardly and sat stiffly down by the window with his eyes riveted on Miss LeMar's face. Estella, catching a glimpse of herself in the old-fashioned mirror above the mantel, suddenly felt a cold chill of dissatisfaction. Her figure had never seemed to her so stout and stiff, her brown hair so dull and prim, her complexion so muddy, her features so commonplace. She wished Miss LeMar would go out of the room.

Vivienne LeMar watched the two faces before her; a hard gleam, half mockery, half malice, flashed into her eyes and a smile crept about her lips. She looked straight in Spencer Morgan's honest blue eyes and read there the young man's dazzled admiration. There was contempt in the look she turned on Estella.

"You were singing when we came in," said Spencer. "Won't you go on, please? I am very fond of music."

Miss LeMar turned again to the organ. The gleaming curves of her neck and shoulders rose out of their filmy sheathings of lace. Spencer, sitting where he could see her face with its rose-leaf bloom and the ringlets of golden hair clustering about it, gazed at her, unheeding of aught else. Estella saw his look. She suddenly began to hate the black-eyed witch at the organ—and to fear her as well. Why did Spencer look at her like that? She wished she had not brought him in at all. She felt commonplace and angry, and wanted to cry.

Vivienne LeMar went on singing, drifting from one sweet love song into another. Once she looked up at Spencer Morgan. He rose quickly and went to her side, looking down at her with a strange fire in his eyes.

Estella got up abruptly and left the room. She was angry and jealous, but she thought Spencer would follow her. When he did not, she could not believe it. She waited on the porch for him, not knowing whether she were more angry or miserable. She would not go back into the room. Vivienne LeMar had stopped singing. She could hear a low murmur of voices. When she had waited there an hour, she went in and upstairs to her room with ostentatious footsteps. She was too angry to cry or to realize what had happened, and still kept hoping all sorts of impossible things as she sat by her window.

It was ten o'clock when Spencer went away and Vivienne LeMar passed up the hall to her room. Estella clenched her hands in an access of helpless rage. She was very angry, but under her fury was a horrible ache of pain. It could not be only three hours since she had been so happy! It must be more than that! What had happened? Had she made a fool of herself? Ought she to have behaved in any other way? Perhaps Spencer had come out to look for her after she had gone upstairs and, not finding her, had gone back to Miss LeMar to show her he was angry. This poor hope was a small comfort. She wished she had not acted as she had. It looked spiteful and jealous, and Spencer did not like people who were spiteful and jealous. She would show him she was sorry when he came back, and it would be all right.

She lay awake most of the night, thinking out plausible reasons and excuses for Spencer's behaviour, and trying to convince herself that she had exaggerated everything absurdly. Towards morning she fell asleep and awoke hardly remembering what had happened. Then it rolled back upon her crushingly.

But she rose and dressed in better spirits. It had been hardest to lie there and do nothing. Now the day was before her and something pleasant might happen. Spencer might come back in the evening. She would be doubly nice to him to make up.

Mrs. Bowes looked sharply at her niece's dull eyes and pale cheeks at the breakfast table. She had her own thoughts of things. She was a large, handsome woman with a rather harsh face.

"Did you go upstairs last night and leave Spencer Morgan with Miss LeMar?" she asked bluntly.

"Yes," muttered Estella.

"Did you have a quarrel with him?"

"No."

"What made you act so queer?"

"I couldn't help it," faltered the girl.

The food she was eating seemed to choke her. She wished she were a hundred miles away from everyone she ever knew.

Mrs. Bowes gave a grunt of dissatisfaction.

"Well, I think it is a pretty queer piece of business. But if you are satisfied, it isn't anyone else's concern, I suppose. He stayed with her till ten o'clock and when he left she did everything but kiss him—and she asked him to come back too. I heard."

"Aunt!" protested the girl.

She felt as if her aunt were striking her blow after blow on a sensitive, quivering spot. It was bad enough to know it all, but to hear it put into such cold, brutal words was more than she could endure. It seemed to make everything so horribly sure.

"I guess I had a right to listen, hadn't I, with such goings on in my own house? You're a little fool, Estella Bowes! I don't believe that LeMar girl is a bit better than she ought to be. I wish I'd never taken her to board, and if you say so, I'll send her packing right off and not give her a chance to make mischief atween folks."

Estella's suffering found vent in a burst of anger.

"You needn't do anything of the sort!" she cried.

"It's all nonsense about Spencer—it was my fault—and anyhow, if he is so easily led away as that, I am sure I don't want him! I wish to goodness, Aunt, you'd leave me alone!"

"Oh, very well!" returned Mrs. Bowes in an offended tone. "It was for your own good I spoke. You know best, I suppose. If you don't care, I don't know that anyone else need."

Estella went about her work like one in a dream. A great hatred had sprung up in her heart against Vivienne LeMar. The simple-hearted country girl felt almost murderous. The whole day seemed like a nightmare to her. When night came she dressed herself with feverish care, for she could not quell the hope that Spencer would surely come again. But he did not; and when she went up to bed, it did not seem as if she could live through the night. She lay staring wide-eyed through the darkness until dawn. She wished that she might cry, but no tears came to her relief.

Next day she went to work with furious energy. When her usual tasks were done, she ransacked the house for other employment. She was afraid if she stopped work for a moment she would go mad. Mrs. Bowes watched her with a grim pity.

At night she walked to prayer meeting in the schoolhouse a mile away. She always went, and Spencer was generally on hand to see her home. He was not there tonight. She wished she had not come. It was dreadful to have to sit still and think. She did not hear a word the minister said.

She had to walk home with a crowd of girls and nerve herself to answer their merry sallies that no one might suspect. She was tortured by the fear that everyone knew her shame and humiliation and was pitying her. She got hysterically gay, but underneath all she was constantly trying to assign a satisfactory reason for Spencer's nonappearance. He was often kept away, and of course he was a little cross at her yet, as was natural. If he had come before her then, she could have gone down in the very dust at his feet and implored his forgiveness.

When she reached home she went into the garden and sat down. The calm of the night soothed her. She felt happier and more hopeful. She thought over all that had passed between her and Spencer and all his loving assurances, and the recollection comforted her. She was almost happy when she went in.

Tomorrow is Sunday, she thought when she wakened in the morning. Her step was lighter and her face brighter. Mrs. Bowes seemed to be in a bad humour. Presently she said bluntly:

"Do you know that Spencer Morgan was here last night?"

Estella felt the cold tighten round her heart. Yet underneath it sprang up a wild, sweet hope.

"Spencer here! I suppose he forgot it was prayer meeting night. What did he say? Why didn't you tell him where I was?"

"I don't know that he forgot it was prayer meeting night," returned Mrs. Bowes with measured emphasis. '"Tisn't likely his memory has failed so all at once. He didn't ask where you was. He took good care to go before you got home too. Miss LeMar entertained him. I guess she was quite capable of it."

Estella bent over her dishes in silence. Her face was deadly white.

"I'll send her away," said Mrs. Bowes pityingly. "When she's gone, Spencer will soon come back to you."

"No, you won't!" said Estella fiercely. "If you do, she'll only go over to Barstows', and it would be worse than ever. I don't care—I'll show them both I don't care! As for Spencer coming back to me, do you think I want her leavings? He's welcome to go."

"He's only just fooled by her pretty face," persisted Mrs. Bowes in a clumsy effort at consolation. "She's just turning his head, the hussy, and he isn't really in his proper senses. You'll see, he'll be ashamed of himself when he comes to them again. He knows very well in his heart that you're worth ten girls like her."

Estella faced around.

"Aunt," she said desperately, "you mean well, I know, but you're killing me! I can't stand it. For pity's sake, don't say another word to me about this, no matter what happens. And don't keep looking at me as if I were a martyr! She watches us and it would please her to think I cared. I don't—and I mean she shall see I don't. I guess I'm well rid of a fellow as fickle as he is, and I've sense enough to know it."

She went upstairs then, tearing off her turquoise engagement ring as she climbed the steps. All sorts of wild ideas flashed through her head. She would go down and confront Vivienne LeMar—she would rush off and find Spencer and throw his ring at him, no matter where he was—she would go away where no one would ever see her again. Why couldn't she die? Was it possible people could suffer like this and yet go on living?

"I don't care—I don't care!" she moaned, telling the lie aloud to herself, as if she hoped that by this means she would come to believe it.

When twilight came she went out to the front steps and leaned her aching head against the honeysuckle trellis. The sun had just set and the whole world swam in dusky golden light. The wonderful beauty frightened her. She felt like a blot on it.

While she stood there, a buggy came driving up the lane and wheeled about at the steps. In it was Spencer Morgan.

Estella saw him and, in spite of the maddening throb of hope that seemed suddenly to transfigure the world for her, her pride rose in arms. Had Spencer come the night before, he would have found her loving and humble. Even now, had she but been sure that he had come to see her, she would have unbent. But was it the other? The torturing doubt stung her to the quick.

She waited, stubbornly resolved that she would not speak first. It was not in her place. Spencer Morgan flicked his horse sharply with his whip. He dared not look at Estella, but he felt her uncompromising attitude. He was miserably ashamed of himself, and he felt angry at Estella for his shame.

"Do you care to come for a drive?" he asked awkwardly, with a covert glance at the parlour windows.

Estella caught the glance and her jealous perception instantly divined its true significance. Her heart died within her. She did not care what she said.

"Oh," she cried with a toss of her head, "it's not me you want—it's Miss LeMar, isn't it? She's away at the shore. You'll find her there, I dare say."

Still, in spite of all, she perversely hoped. If he would only make any sign, the least in the world, that he was sorry—that he still loved her—she could forgive him everything. When he drove away without another word, she could not believe it again. Surely he would not go—surely he knew she did not mean it—he would turn back before he got to the gate.

But he did not. She saw him disappear around the turn of the road. She could not see if he took the shore lane further on, but she was sure he would. She was furious at herself for acting as she had done. It was all her fault again! Oh, if he would only give her another chance!

She was in her room when she heard the buggy drive up again. She knew it was Spencer and that he had brought Vivienne LeMar home. Acting on a sudden wild impulse, the girl stepped out on the landing and confronted her rival as she came up the stairs.

The latter paused at sight of the white face and anguished eyes. There was a little mocking smile on her lovely face.

"Miss LeMar," said Estella in a quivering voice, "what do you mean by all this? You know I'm engaged to Spencer Morgan!"

Miss LeMar laughed softly.

"Really? If you are engaged to the young man, my dear Miss Bowes, I would advise you to look after him more sharply. He seems very willing to flirt, I should say."

She passed on to her room with a malicious smile. Estella shrank back against the wall, humiliated and baffled. When she found herself alone, she crawled back to her room and threw herself face downward on the bed, praying that she might die.

But she had to live through the horrible month that followed—a month so full of agony that she seemed to draw every breath in pain. Spencer never sought her again; he went everywhere with Miss LeMar. His infatuation was the talk of the settlement. Estella knew that her story was in everyone's mouth, and her pride smarted; but she carried a brave front outwardly. No one should say she cared.

She believed that the actress was merely deluding Spencer for her own amusement and would never dream of marrying him. But one day the idea occurred to her that she might. Estella had always told herself that even if Spencer wanted to come back to her she would never take him back, but now, by the half-sick horror that came over her, she knew how strong the hope had really been and despised herself more than ever.

One evening she was alone in the parlour. She had lit the lamp and was listlessly arranging the little room. She looked old and worn. Her colour was gone and her eyes were dull. As she worked, the door opened and Vivienne LeMar walked or, rather, reeled into the room.

Estella dropped the book she held and gazed at her as one in a dream. The actress's face was flushed and her hair was wildly disordered. Her eyes glittered with an unearthly light. She was talking incoherently. The air was heavy with the fumes of brandy.

Estella laughed hysterically. Vivienne LeMar was grossly intoxicated. This woman whom Spencer Morgan worshipped, for whom he had forsaken her, was reeling about the room, laughing idiotically, talking wildly in a thick voice. If he could but see her now!

Estella turned white with the passion of the wild idea that had come to her. Spencer Morgan should see this woman in her true colours.

She lost no time. Swiftly she left the room and locked the door behind her on the maudlin, babbling creature inside. Then she flung a shawl over her head and ran from the house. It was not far to the Morgan homestead. She ran all the way, hardly knowing what she was doing. Mrs. Morgan answered her knock. She gazed in bewilderment at Estella's wild face.

"I want Spencer," said the girl through her white lips.

The elder woman stepped back in dumb amazement. She knew and rued her son's folly. What could Estella want with him?

The young man appeared in the doorway. Estella caught him by the arm and pulled him outside.

"Miss LeMar wants you at once," she said hoarsely. "At once—you are to come at once!"

"Has anything happened to her?" cried Spencer savagely. "Is she ill—is she—what is the matter?"

"No, she is not ill. But she wants you. Come at once."

He started off bareheaded. Estella followed him up the road breathlessly. Surely it was the strangest walk ever a girl had, she told herself with mirthless laughter. She pushed the key into his hand at the porch.

"She's in the parlour," she said wildly. "Go in and look at her, Spencer."

Spencer snatched the key and fitted it into the door. He was full of fear. Had Estella gone out of her mind? Had she done anything to Vivienne? Had she—

As he entered, the actress reeled to her feet and came to meet him. He stood and gazed at her stupidly. This could not be Vivienne, this creature reeking with brandy, uttering such foolish words! What fiend was this in her likeness?

He grew sick at heart and brain; she had her arms about him. He tried to push her away, but she clung closer, and her senseless laughter echoed through the room. He flung her from him with an effort and rushed out through the hall and down the road like a madman. Estella, watching him, felt that she was avenged. She was glad with a joy more pitiful than grief.

Vivienne LeMar left the cottage the next day. Mrs. Bowes, suspecting some mystery, questioned Estella sharply, but could find out nothing. The girl kept her own counsel stubbornly. The interest and curiosity of the village centred around Spencer Morgan, and his case was well discussed. Gossip said that the actress had jilted him and that he was breaking his heart about it. Then came the rumour that he was going West.

Estella heard it apathetically. Life seemed ended for her. There was nothing to look forward to. She could not even look back. All the past was embittered. She had never met Spencer since the night she went after him. She sometimes wondered what he must think of her for what she had done. Did he think her unwomanly and revengeful? She did not care. It was rather a relief to hear that he was going away. She would not be tortured by the fear of meeting him then. She was sure he would never come back to her. If he did, she would never forgive him.

One evening in early harvest Estella was lingering by the lane gate at twilight. She had worked slavishly all day and was very tired, but she was loath to go into the house, where her trouble always seemed to weigh on her more heavily. The dusk, sweet night seemed to soothe her as it always did.

She leaned her head against the poplar by the gate. How long Spencer Morgan had been standing by her she did not know, but when she looked up he was there. In the dim light she could see how haggard and hollow-eyed he had grown. He had changed almost as much as herself.

The girl's first proud impulse was to turn coldly away and leave him. But some strange tumult in her heart kept her still. What had he come to say?

There was a moment's fateful silence. Then Spencer spoke in a muffled voice.

"I couldn't go away without seeing you once more, Estella, to say good-bye. Perhaps you won't speak to me. You must hate me. I deserve it."

He paused, but she said no word. She could not. After a space, he went wistfully on.

"I know you can never forgive me—no girl could. I've behaved like a fool. There isn't any excuse to be made for me. I don't think I could have been in my right senses, Estella. It all seems like some bad dream now. When I saw her that night, I came to my

right mind, and I've been the most miserable man alive ever since. Not for her—but because I'd lost you. I can't bear to live here any longer, so I am going away. Will you say good-bye, Estella?"

Still she did not speak. There were a hundred things she wanted to say but she could not say them. Did he mean that he loved her still? If she were sure of that, she could forgive him anything, but her doubt rendered her mute.

The young man turned away despairingly from her rigid attitude. So be it—he had brought his fate on himself.

He had gone but a few steps when Estella suddenly found her voice with a gasp.

"Spencer!" He came swiftly back. "Oh, Spencer—do—you—do you love me still?"

He caught her hands in his.

"Love you—oh, Estella, yes, yes! I always have. That other wasn't love—it was just madness. When it passed I hated life because I'd lost you. I know you can't forgive me, but, oh—"

He broke down. Estella flung her arms around his neck and put her face up to his. She felt as if her heart must break with its great happiness. He understood her mute pardon. In their kiss the past was put aside. Estella's martyrdom was ended.

The Old Chest at Wyther Grange

When I was a child I always thought a visit to Wyther Grange was a great treat. It was a big, quiet, old-fashioned house where Grandmother Laurance and Mrs. DeLisle, my Aunt Winnifred, lived. I was a favourite with them, yet I could never overcome a certain awe of them both. Grandmother was a tall, dignified old lady with keen black eyes that seemed veritably to bore through one. She always wore stiffly-rustling gowns of rich silk made in the fashion of her youth. I suppose she must have changed her dress occasionally, but the impression on my mind was always the same, as she went trailing about the house with a big bunch of keys at her belt—keys that opened a score of wonderful old chests and boxes and drawers. It was one of my dearest delights to attend Grandmother in her peregrinations and watch the unfolding and examining of all those old treasures and heirlooms of bygone Laurances.

Of Aunt Winnifred I was less in awe, possibly because she dressed in a modern way and so looked to my small eyes more human and natural. As Winnifred Laurance she had been the beauty of the family and was a handsome woman still, with brilliant dark eyes and cameo-like features. She always looked very sad, spoke in a low sweet voice, and was my childish ideal of all that was high-bred and graceful.

I had many beloved haunts at the Grange, but I liked the garret best. It was a roomy old place, big enough to have comfortably housed a family in itself, and was filled with cast-off furniture and old trunks and boxes of discarded finery. I was never tired of playing there, dressing up in the old-fashioned gowns and hats and practising old-time dance steps before the high, cracked mirror that hung at one end. That old garret was a veritable fairyland to me.

There was one old chest which I could not explore and, like all forbidden things, it possessed a great attraction for me. It stood away back in a dusty, cobwebbed corner, a strong, high wooden box, painted blue. From some words which I had heard Grandmother let fall I was sure it had a history; it was the one thing she never explored in her periodical overhaulings. When I grew tired of playing I liked to creep up on it and sit there, picturing out my own fancies concerning it—of which my favourite one was that some day I should solve the riddle and open the chest to find it full of gold and jewels with which I might restore the fortune of the Laurances and all the traditionary splendours of the old Grange.

I was sitting there one day when Aunt Winnifred and Grandmother Laurance came up the narrow dark staircase, the latter jingling her keys and peering into the dusty corners as she came along the room. When they came to the old chest, Grandmother rapped the top smartly with her keys.

"I wonder what is in this old chest," she said. "I believe it really should be opened. The moths may have got into it through that crack in the lid."

"Why don't you open it, Mother?" said Mrs. DeLisle. "I am sure that key of Robert's would fit the lock."

"No," said Grandmother in the tone that nobody, not even Aunt Winnifred, ever dreamed of disputing. "I will not open that chest without Eliza's permission. She confided it to my care when she went away, and I promised that it should never be opened until she came for it."

"Poor Eliza," said Mrs. DeLisle thoughtfully. "I wonder what she is like now. Very much changed, like all the rest of us, I suppose. It is almost thirty years since she was here. How pretty she was!"

"I never approved of her," said Grandmother brusquely. "She was a sentimental, fanciful creature. She might have married well but she preferred to waste her life pining over the memory of a man who was not worthy to untie the shoelace of a Laurance."

Mrs. DeLisle sighed softly and made no reply. People said that she had had her own romance in her youth and that her mother had sternly repressed it. I had heard that her marriage with Mr. DeLisle was loveless on her part and proved very unhappy. But he had been dead many years, and Aunt Winnifred never spoke of him.

"I have made up my mind what to do," said Grandmother decidedly. "I will write to Eliza and ask her if I may open the chest to see if the moths have got into it. If she refuses, well and good. I have no doubt that she *will* refuse. She will cling to her old sentimental ideas as long as the breath is in her body."

I rather avoided the old chest after this. It took on a new significance in my eyes and seemed to me like the tomb of something—possibly some dead and buried romance of the past.

Later on a letter came to Grandmother; she passed it over the table to Mrs. DeLisle.

"That is from Eliza," she said. "I would know her writing anywhere—none of your modern sprawly, untidy hands, but a fine lady-like script, as regular as copperplate. Read the letter, Winnifred; I haven't my glasses and I dare say Eliza's rhapsodies would tire me very much. You need not read them aloud—I can imagine them all. Let me know what she says about the chest."

Aunt Winnifred opened and read the letter and laid it down with a brief sigh.

"This is all she says about the chest. 'If it were not for one thing that is in it, I would ask you to open the chest and burn all its contents. But I cannot bear that anyone but myself should see or touch that one thing. So please leave the chest as it is, dear Aunt. It is no matter if the moths do get in.' That is all," continued Mrs. DeLisle, "and I must confess that I am disappointed. I have always had an almost childish curiosity about that old chest, but I seem fated not to have it gratified. That 'one thing' must be her wedding dress. I have always thought that she locked it away there."

"Her answer is just what I expected of her," said Grandmother impatiently. "Evidently the years have not made her more sensible. Well, I wash my hands of her belongings, moths or no moths."

It was not until ten years afterwards that I heard anything more of the old chest. Grandmother Laurance had died, but Aunt Winnifred still lived at the Grange. She was very lonely, and the winter after Grandmother's death she sent me an invitation to make her a long visit.

When I revisited the garret and saw the old blue chest in the same dusty corner, my childish curiosity revived and I begged Aunt Winnifred to tell me its history.

"I am glad you have reminded me of it," said Mrs. DeLisle. "I have intended to open the chest ever since Mother's death but I kept putting it off. You know, Amy, poor Eliza Laurance died five years ago, but even then Mother would not have the chest opened. There is no reason why it should not be examined now. If you like, we will go and open it at once and afterwards I will tell you the story."

We went eagerly up the garret stairs. Aunt knelt down before the old chest and selected a key from the bunch at her belt.

"Would it not be too provoking, Amy, if this key should not fit after all? Well, I do not believe you would be any more disappointed than I."

She turned the key and lifted the heavy lid. I bent forward eagerly. A layer of tissue paper revealed itself, with a fine tracing of sifted dust in its crinkles.

"Lift it up, child," said my aunt gently. "There are no ghosts for you, at least, in this old chest."

I lifted the paper up and saw that the chest was divided into two compartments. Lying on the top of one was a small, square, inlaid box. This Mrs. DeLisle took up and carried to the window. Lifting up the cover she laid it in my lap.

"There, Amy, look through it and let us see what old treasures have lain hidden there these forty years."

The first thing I took out was a small square case covered with dark purple velvet. The tiny clasp was almost rusted away and yielded easily. I gave a little cry of admiration. Aunt Winnifred bent over my shoulder.

"That is Eliza's portrait at the age of twenty, and that is Willis Starr's. Was she not lovely, Amy?"

Lovely indeed was the face looking out at me from its border of tarnished gilt. It was the face of a young girl, in shape a perfect oval, with delicate features and large dark-blue eyes. Her hair, caught high on the crown and falling on her neck in the long curls of a bygone fashion, was a warm auburn, and the curves of her bare neck and shoulders were exquisite.

"The other picture is that of the man to whom she was betrothed. Tell me, Amy, do you think him handsome?"

I looked at the other portrait critically. It was that of a young man of about twenty-five; he was undeniably handsome, but there was something I did not like in his face and I said so.

Aunt Winnifred made no reply—she was taking out the remaining contents of the box. There was a white silk fan with delicately carved ivory sticks, a packet of old letters and a folded paper containing some dried and crumpled flowers. Aunt laid the box aside and unpacked the chest in silence. First came a ball dress of pale-yellow satin brocade, made with the trained skirt, "baby" waist and full puffed sleeves of a former generation. Beneath it was a case containing a necklace of small but perfect pearls and a pair of tiny satin slippers. The rest of the compartment was filled with household linen, fine and costly but yellowed with age—damask table linen and webs of the uncut fabric.

In the second compartment lay a dress. Aunt Winnifred lifted it out reverently. It was a gown of rich silk that had once been white, but now, like the linen, it was yellow with age. It was simply made and trimmed with cobwebby old lace. Wrapped around it was a long white bridal veil, redolent with some strange, old-time perfume that had kept its sweetness all through the years.

"Well, Amy, this is all," said Aunt Winnifred with a quiver in her voice. "And now for the story. Where shall I begin?"

"At the very beginning, Aunty. You see I know nothing at all except her name. Tell me who she was and why she put her wedding dress away here."

"Poor Eliza!" said Aunt dreamily. "It is a sorrowful story, Amy, and it seems so long ago now. I must be an old woman. Forty years ago—and I was only twenty then. Eliza Laurance was my cousin, the only daughter of Uncle Henry Laurance. My father—your grandfather, Amy, you don't remember him—had two brothers, each of whom had an only daughter. Both these girls were called Eliza after your great-grandmother. I never saw Uncle George's Eliza but once. He was a rich man and his daughter was much sought after, but she was no beauty, I promise you that, and proud and vain to the last degree. Her home was in a distant city and she never came to Wyther Grange.

"The other Eliza Laurance was a poor man's daughter. She and I were of the same age and did not look unlike each other, although I was not so pretty by half. You can see by the portrait how beautiful she was, and it does her scant justice, for half her charm lay in her arch expression and her vivacious ways. She had her little faults, of course, and was rather over much given to romance and sentiment. This did not seem much of a defect to me then, Amy, for I was young and romantic too. Mother never cared much for Eliza, I think, but everyone else liked her. One winter Eliza came to Wyther Grange for a long visit. The Grange was a very lively place then, Amy. Eliza kept the old house ringing with merriment. We went out a great deal and she was always the belle of any festivity

we attended. Yet she wore her honours easily; all the flattery and homage she received did not turn her head.

"That winter we first met Willis Starr. He was a newcomer, and nobody knew much about him, but one or two of the best families took him up, and his own fascinations did the rest. He became what you would call the rage. He was considered very handsome, his manners were polished and easy, and people said he was rich.

"I don't think, Amy, that I ever trusted Willis Starr. But like all the rest, I was blinded by his charm. Mother was almost the only one who did not worship at his shrine, and very often she dropped hints about penniless adventurers that made Eliza very indignant.

"From the first he had paid Eliza marked attention and seemed utterly bewitched by her. Well, his was an easy winning. Eliza loved him with her whole impulsive, girlish heart and made no attempt to hide it.

"I shall never forget the night they were first engaged. It was Eliza's birthday, and we were invited to a ball that evening. This yellow gown is the very one she wore. I suppose that is why she put it away here—the gown she wore on the happiest night of her life. I had never seen her look more beautiful—her neck and arms were bare, and she wore this string of pearls and carried a bouquet of her favourite white roses.

"When we reached home after the dance, Eliza had her happy secret to tell us. She was engaged to Willis Starr, and they were to be married in early spring.

"Willis Starr certainly seemed to be an ideal lover, and Eliza was so perfectly happy that she seemed to grow more beautiful and radiant every day.

"Well, Amy, the wedding day was set. Eliza was to be married from the Grange, as her own mother was dead, and I was to be bridesmaid. We made her wedding dress together, she and I. Girls were not above making their own gowns then, and not a stitch was set in Eliza's save those put there by loving fingers and blessed by loving wishes. It was I who draped the veil over her sunny curls—see how yellow and creased it is now, but it was as white as snow that day.

"A week before the wedding, Willis Starr was spending the evening at the Grange. We were all chattering gaily about the coming event, and in speaking of the invited guests Eliza said something about the other Eliza Laurance, the great heiress, looking archly at Willis over her shoulder as she spoke. It was some merry badinage about the cousin whose namesake she was but whom she so little resembled.

"We all laughed, but I shall never forget the look that came over Willis Starr's face. It passed quickly, but the chill fear that it gave me remained. A few minutes later I left the room on some trifling errand, and as I returned through the dim hall I was met by Willis Starr. He laid his hand on my arm and bent his evil face—for it *was* evil then, Amy—close to mine.

"'Tell me,' he said in a low but rude tone, 'is there another Eliza Laurance who is an heiress?'

"'Certainly there is,' I said sharply. 'She is our cousin and the daughter of our Uncle George. Our Eliza is not an heiress. You surely did not suppose she was!'

"Willis stepped aside with a mocking smile.

'"I did—what wonder? I had heard much about the great heiress, Eliza Laurance, and the great beauty, Eliza Laurance. I supposed they were one and the same. You have all been careful not to undeceive me.'

'"You forget yourself, Mr. Starr, when you speak so to me,' I retorted coldly. 'You have deceived yourself. We have never dreamed of allowing anyone to think that Eliza was an heiress. She is sweet and lovely enough to be loved for her own sake.'

'I went back to the parlour full of dismay. Willis Starr remained gloomy and taciturn all the rest of the evening, but nobody seemed to notice it but myself.

'The next day we were all so busy that I almost forgot the incident of the previous evening. We girls were up in the sewing room putting the last touches to the wedding gown. Eliza tried it and her veil on and was standing so, in all her silken splendour, when a letter was brought in. I guessed by her blush who was the writer. I laughed and ran downstairs, leaving her to read it.

'When I returned she was still standing just where I had left her in the middle of the room, holding the letter in her hand. Her face was as white as her veil, and her wide-open eyes had a dazed, agonized look as of someone who had been stricken a mortal blow. All the soft happiness and sweetness had gone out of them. They were the eyes of an old woman, Amy.

'"Eliza, what is the matter?' I said. 'Has anything happened to Willis?'

'She made no answer, but walked to the fireplace, dropped the letter in a bed of writhing blue flame and watched it burn to white ashes. Then she turned to me.

'"Help me take off this gown, Winnie,' she said dully. 'I shall never wear it again. There will be no wedding. Willis is gone.'

'"Gone!' I echoed stupidly.

'"Yes. I am not the heiress, Winnie. It was the fortune, not the girl, he loved. He says he is too poor for us to dream of marrying when I have nothing. Oh, such a cruel, heartless letter! Why did he not kill me? It would have been so much more merciful! I loved him so—I trusted him so! Oh, Winnie, Winnie, what am I to do!'

'There was something terrible in the contrast between her passionate words and her calm face and lifeless voice. I wanted to call Mother, but she would not let me. She went away to her own room, trailing along the dark hall in her dress and veil, and locked herself in.

'Well, I told it all to the others in some fashion. You can imagine their anger and dismay. Your father, Amy—he was a hot-blooded, impetuous, young fellow then—went at once to seek Willis Starr. But he was gone, no one knew where, and the whole country rang with the gossip and scandal of the affair. Eliza knew nothing of this, for she was ill and unconscious for many a day. In a novel or story she would have died, I suppose, and that would have been the end of it. But this was in real life, and Eliza did not die, although many times we thought she would.

'When she did recover, how frightfully changed she was! It almost broke my heart to see her. Her very nature seemed to have changed too—all her joyousness and light-heartedness were dead. From that time she was a faded, dispirited creature, no more like the Eliza we had known than the merest stranger. And then after a while came other news—Willis Starr was married to the other Eliza Laurance, the true heiress. He had made no second mistake. We tried to keep it from Eliza but she found it out at last. That

was the day she came up here alone and packed this old chest. Nobody ever knew just what she put into it. But you and I see now, Amy—her ball dress, her wedding gown, her love letters and, more than all else, her youth and happiness—this old chest was the tomb of it all. Eliza Laurance was really buried here.

"She went home soon after. Before she went she exacted a promise from Mother that the old chest should be left at the Grange unopened until she came for it herself. But she never came back, and I do not think she ever intended to, and I never saw her again.

"That is the story of the old chest. It was all over so long ago—the heartbreak and the misery—but it all seems to come back to me now. Poor Eliza!"

My own eyes were full of tears as Aunt Winnifred went down the stairs, leaving me sitting dreamily there in the sunset light, with the old yellowed bridal veil across my lap and the portrait of Eliza Laurance in my hand. Around me were the relics of her pitiful story—the old, oft-repeated story of a faithless love and a woman's broken heart—the gown she had worn, the slippers in which she had danced light-heartedly at her betrothal ball, her fan, her pearls, her gloves—and it somehow seemed to me as if I were living in those old years myself, as if the love and happiness, the betrayal and pain were part of my own life. Presently Aunt Winnifred came back through the twilight shadows.

"Let us put all these things back in their grave, Amy," she said. "They are of no use to anyone now. The linen might be bleached and used, I dare say—but it would seem like a sacrilege. It was Mother's wedding present to Eliza. And the pearls—would you care to have them, Amy?"

"Oh, no, no," I said with a little shiver. "I would never wear them, Aunt Winnifred. I should feel like a ghost if I did. Put everything back just as we found it—only her portrait. I would like to keep that."

Reverently we put gowns and letters and trinkets back into the old blue chest. Aunt Winnifred closed the lid and turned the key softly. She bowed her head over it for a minute and then we went together in silence down the shadowy garret stairs of Wyther Grange.

The Osbornes' Christmas

Cousin Myra had come to spend Christmas at "The Firs," and all the junior Osbornes were ready to stand on their heads with delight. Darby—whose real name was Charles—did it, because he was only eight, and at eight you have no dignity to keep up. The others, being older, couldn't.

But the fact of Christmas itself awoke no great enthusiasm in the hearts of the junior Osbornes. Frank voiced their opinion of it the day after Cousin Myra had arrived. He was sitting on the table with his hands in his pockets and a cynical sneer on his face. At least, Frank flattered himself that it was cynical. He knew that Uncle Edgar was said to wear a cynical sneer, and Frank admired Uncle Edgar very much and imitated him in every possible way. But to you and me it would have looked just as it did to Cousin Myra—a very discontented and unbecoming scowl.

"I'm awfully glad to see you, Cousin Myra," explained Frank carefully, "and your being here may make some things worth while. But Christmas is just a bore—a regular bore."

That was what Uncle Edgar called things that didn't interest him, so that Frank felt pretty sure of his word. Nevertheless, he wondered uncomfortably what made Cousin Myra smile so queerly.

"Why, how dreadful!" she said brightly. "I thought all boys and girls looked upon Christmas as the very best time in the year."

"We don't," said Frank gloomily. "It's just the same old thing year in and year out. We know just exactly what is going to happen. We even know pretty well what presents we are going to get. And Christmas Day itself is always the same. We'll get up in the morning, and our stockings will be full of things, and half of them we don't want. Then there's dinner. It's always so poky. And all the uncles and aunts come to dinner—just the same old crowd, every year, and they say just the same things. Aunt Desda always says, 'Why, Frankie, how you have grown!' She knows I hate to be called Frankie. And after dinner they'll sit round and talk the rest of the day, and that's all. Yes, I call Christmas a nuisance."

"There isn't a single bit of fun in it," said Ida discontentedly.

"Not a bit!" said the twins, both together, as they always said things.

"There's lots of candy," said Darby stoutly. He rather liked Christmas, although he was ashamed to say so before Frank.

Cousin Myra smothered another of those queer smiles.

"You've had too much Christmas, you Osbornes," she said seriously. "It has palled on your taste, as all good things will if you overdo them. Did you ever try giving Christmas to somebody else?"

The Osbornes looked at Cousin Myra doubtfully. They didn't understand.

"We always send presents to all our cousins," said Frank hesitatingly. "That's a bore, too. They've all got so many things already it's no end of bother to think of something new."

"That isn't what I mean," said Cousin Myra. "How much Christmas do you suppose those little Rolands down there in the hollow have? Or Sammy Abbott with his lame back? Or French Joe's family over the hill? If you have too much Christmas, why don't you give some to them?"

The Osbornes looked at each other. This was a new idea.

"How could we do it?" asked Ida.

Whereupon they had a consultation. Cousin Myra explained her plan, and the Osbornes grew enthusiastic over it. Even Frank forgot that he was supposed to be wearing a cynical sneer.

"I move we do it, Osbornes," said he.

"If Father and Mother are willing," said Ida.

"Won't it be jolly!" exclaimed the twins.

"Well, rather," said Darby scornfully. He did not mean to be scornful. He had heard Frank saying the same words in the same tone, and thought it signified approval.

Cousin Myra had a talk with Father and Mother Osborne that night, and found them heartily in sympathy with her plans.

For the next week the Osbornes were agog with excitement and interest. At first Cousin Myra made the suggestions, but their enthusiasm soon outstripped her, and they thought out things for themselves. Never did a week pass so quickly. And the Osbornes had never had such fun, either.

Christmas morning there was not a single present given or received at "The Firs" except those which Cousin Myra and Mr. and Mrs. Osborne gave to each other. The junior Osbornes had asked that the money which their parents had planned to spend in presents for them be given to them the previous week; and given it was, without a word.

The uncles and aunts arrived in due time, but not with them was the junior Osbornes' concern. They were the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Osborne. The junior Osbornes were having a Christmas dinner party of their own. In the small dining room a table was spread and loaded with good things. Ida and the twins cooked that dinner all by themselves. To be sure, Cousin Myra had helped some, and Frank and Darby had stoned all the raisins and helped pull the home-made candy; and all together they had decorated the small dining room royally with Christmas greens.

Then their guests came. First, all the little Rolands from the Hollow arrived—seven in all, with very red, shining faces and not a word to say for themselves, so shy were they. Then came a troop from French Joe's—four black-eyed lads, who never knew what shyness meant. Frank drove down to the village in the cutter and brought lame Sammy back with him, and soon after the last guest arrived—little Tillie Mather, who was Miss Rankin's "orphan 'sylum girl" from over the road. Everybody knew that Miss Rankin never kept Christmas. She did not believe in it, she said, but she did not prevent Tillie from going to the Osbornes' dinner party.

Just at first the guests were a little stiff and unsocial; but they soon got acquainted, and so jolly was Cousin Myra—who had her dinner with the children in preference to the grown-ups—and so friendly the junior Osbornes, that all stiffness vanished. What a merry dinner it was! What peals of laughter went up, reaching to the big dining room across the hall, where the grown-ups sat in rather solemn state. And how those guests did eat and frankly enjoy the good things before them! How nicely they all behaved, even to the French Joes! Myra had secretly been a little dubious about those four mischievous-looking lads, but their manners were quite flawless. Mrs. French Joe had been drilling them for three days—ever since they had been invited to "de Chrismus dinner at de beeg house."

After the merry dinner was over, the junior Osbornes brought in a Christmas tree, loaded with presents. They had bought them with the money that Mr. and Mrs. Osborne

had meant for their own presents, and a splendid assortment they were. All the French-Joe boys got a pair of skates apiece, and Sammy a set of beautiful books, and Tillie was made supremely happy with a big wax doll. Every little Roland got just what his or her small heart had been longing for. Besides, there were nuts and candies galore.

Then Frank hitched up his pony again, but this time into a great pung sleigh, and the junior Osbornes took their guests for a sleigh-drive, chaperoned by Cousin Myra. It was just dusk when they got back, having driven the Rolands and the French Joes and Sammy and Tillie to their respective homes.

"This has been the jolliest Christmas I ever spent," said Frank, emphatically.

"I thought we were just going to give the others a good time, but it was they who gave it to us," said Ida.

"Weren't the French Joes jolly?" giggled the twins. "Such cute speeches as they would make!"

"Me and Teddy Roland are going to be chums after this," announced Darby. "He's an inch taller than me, but I'm wider."

That night Frank and Ida and Cousin Myra had a little talk after the smaller Osbornes had been haled off to bed.

"We're not going to stop with Christmas, Cousin Myra," said Frank, at the end of it. "We're just going to keep on through the year. We've never had such a delightful old Christmas before."

"You've learned the secret of happiness," said Cousin Myra gently.

And the Osbornes understood what she meant.

The Romance of Aunt Beatrice

Margaret always maintains that it was a direct inspiration of Providence that took her across the street to see Aunt Beatrice that night. And Aunt Beatrice believes that it was too. But the truth of the matter is that Margaret was feeling very unhappy, and went over to talk to Aunt Beatrice as the only alternative to a fit of crying. Margaret's unhappiness has nothing further to do with this story, so it may be dismissed with the remark that it did not amount to much, in spite of Margaret's tragical attitude, and was dissipated at once and forever by the arrival of a certain missent letter the next day.

Aunt Beatrice was alone. Her brother and his wife had gone to the "at home" which Mrs. Cunningham was giving that night in honour of the Honourable John Reynolds, M.P. The children were upstairs in bed, and Aunt Beatrice was darning their stockings,

a big basketful of which loomed up aggressively on the table beside her. Or, to speak more correctly, she had been darning them. Just when Margaret was sliding across the icy street Aunt Beatrice was bent forward in her chair, her hands over her face, while soft, shrinking little sobs shook her from head to foot.

When Margaret's imperative knock came at the front door, Aunt Beatrice started guiltily and wished earnestly that she had waited until she went to bed before crying, if cry she must. She knew Margaret's knock, and she did not want her gay young niece, of all people in the world, to suspect the fact or the cause of her tears.

"I hope she won't notice my eyes," she thought, as she hastily plumped a big ugly dark-green shade, with an almond-eyed oriental leering from it, over the lamp, before going out to let Margaret in.

Margaret did not notice at first. She was too deeply absorbed in her own troubles to think that anyone else in the world could be miserable too. She curled up in the deep easy-chair by the fire, and clasped her hands behind her curly head with a sigh of physical comfort and mental unhappiness, while Aunt Beatrice, warily sitting with her back to the light, took up her work again.

"You didn't go to Mrs. Cunningham's 'at home,' Auntie," said Margaret lazily, feeling that she must make some conversation to justify her appearance. "You were invited, weren't you?"

Aunt Beatrice nodded. The hole she was darning in the knee of Willie Hayden's stocking must be done very carefully. Mrs. George Hayden was particular about such matters. Perhaps this was why Aunt Beatrice did not speak.

"Why didn't you go?" asked Margaret absently, wondering why there had been no letter for her that morning—and this was the third day too! Could Gilbert be ill? Or was he flirting with some other girl and forgetting her? Margaret swallowed a big lump in her throat, and resolved that she would go home next week—no, she wouldn't, either—if he was as hateful and fickle as that—what was Aunt Beatrice saying?

"Well, I'm—I'm not used to going to parties now, my dear. And the truth is I have no dress fit to wear. At least Bella said so, because the party was to be a very fashionable affair. She said my old grey silk wouldn't do at all. Of course she knows. She had to have a new dress for it, and, we couldn't both have that. George couldn't afford it these hard times. And, as Bella said, it would be very foolish of me to get an expensive dress that would be no use to me afterward. But it doesn't matter. And, of course, somebody had to stay with the children."

"Of course," assented Margaret dreamily. Mrs. Cunningham's "at home" was of no particular interest. The guests were all middle-aged people whom the M.P. had known in his boyhood and Margaret, in her presumptuous youth, thought it would be a very prosy affair, although it had made quite a sensation in quiet little Murraybridge, where people still called an "at home" a party plain and simple.

"I saw Mr. Reynolds in church Sunday afternoon," she went on. "He is very fine-looking, I think. Did you ever meet him?"

"I used to know him very well long ago," answered Aunt Beatrice, bowing still lower over her work. "He used to live down in Wentworth, you know, and he visited his married sister here very often. He was only a boy at that time. Then—he went out to British Columbia and—and—we never heard much more about him."

"He's very rich and owns dozens of mines and railroads and things like that," said Margaret, "and he's a member of the Dominion Parliament, too. They say he's one of the foremost men in the House and came very near getting a portfolio in the new cabinet. I like men like that. They are so interesting. Wouldn't it be awfully nice and complimentary to have one of them in love with you? Is he married?"

"I—I don't know," said Aunt Beatrice faintly. "I have never heard that he was."

"There, you've run the needle into your finger," said Margaret sympathetically.

"It's of no consequence," said Aunt Beatrice hastily.

She wiped away the drop of blood and went on with her work. Margaret watched her dreamily. What lovely hair Aunt Beatrice had! It was so thick and glossy, with warm bronze tones where the lamp-light fell on it under that hideous weird old shade. But Aunt Beatrice wore it in such an unbecoming way. Margaret idly wondered if she would comb her hair straight back and prim when she was thirty-five. She thought it very probable if that letter did not come tomorrow.

From Aunt Beatrice's hair Margaret's eyes fell to Aunt Beatrice's face. She gave a little jump. Had Aunt Beatrice been crying? Margaret sat bolt upright.

"Aunt Beatrice, did you want to go to that party?" she demanded explosively. "Now tell me the truth."

"I did," said Aunt Beatrice weakly. Margaret's sudden attack fairly startled the truth out of her. "It is very silly of me, I know, but I did want to go. I didn't care about a new dress. I'd have been quite willing to wear my grey silk, and I could have fixed the sleeves. What difference would it have made? Nobody would ever have noticed me, but Bella thought it wouldn't do."

She paused long enough to give a little sob which she could not repress. Margaret made use of the opportunity to exclaim violently, "It's a shame!"

"I suppose you don't understand why I wanted to go to this particular party so much," went on Aunt Beatrice shyly. "I'll tell you why—if you won't laugh at me. I wanted to see John Reynolds—not to talk to him—oh, I dare say he wouldn't remember me—but just to see him. Long ago—fifteen years ago—we were engaged. And—and—I loved him so much then, Margaret."

"You poor dear!" said Margaret sympathetically. She reached over and patted her aunt's hand. She thought that this little bit of romance, long hidden and unsuspected, blossoming out under her eyes, was charming. In her interest she quite forgot her own pet grievance.

"Yes—and then we quarrelled. It was a dreadful quarrel and it was about such a trifle. We parted in anger and he went away. He never came back. It was all my fault. Well, it is all over long ago and everybody has forgotten. I—I don't mind it now. But I just wanted to see him once more and then come quietly away."

"Aunt Beatrice, you are going to that party yet," said Margaret decisively.

"Oh, it is impossible, my dear."

"No, it isn't. Nothing is impossible when I make up my mind. You must go. I'll drag you there by main force if it comes to that. Oh, I have such a jolly plan, Auntie. You know my black and yellow dinner dress—no, you don't either, for I've never worn it here. The folks at home all said it was too severe for me—and so it is. Nothing suits me

but the fluffy, chuffy things with a tilt to them. Gil—er—I mean—well, yes, Gilbert always declared that dress made me look like a cross between an unwilling nun and a ballet girl, so I took a dislike to it. But it's as lovely as a dream. Oh, when you see it your eyes will stick out. You must wear it tonight. It's just your style, and I'm sure it will fit you, for our figures are so much alike."

"But it is too late."

'"Tisn't. It's not more than half an hour since Uncle George and Aunt Bella went. I'll have you ready in a twinkling."

"But the fire—and the children!"

"I'll stay here and look after both. I won't burn the house down, and if the twins wake up I'll give them—what is it you give them—soothing syrup? So go at once and get you ready, while I fly over for the dress. I'll fix your hair up when I get back."

Margaret was gone before Aunt Beatrice could speak again. Her niece's excitement seized hold of her too. She flung the stockings into the basket and the basket into the closet.

"I will go—and I won't do another bit of darning tonight. I hate it—I hate it—I hate it! Oh, how much good it does me to say it!"

When Margaret came flying up the stairs Aunt Beatrice was ready save for hair and dress. Margaret cast the gown on the bed, revealing all its beauty of jetted lace and soft yellow silk with a dextrous sweep of her arm. Aunt Beatrice gave a little cry of admiration.

"Isn't it lovely?" demanded Margaret. "And I've brought you my opera cape and my fascinator and my black satin slippers with the cunningest gold buckles, and some sweet pale yellow roses that Uncle Ned gave me yesterday. Oh, Aunt Beatrice! What magnificent arms and shoulders you have! They're like marble. Mine are so scrawny I'm just ashamed to have people know they belong to me."

Margaret's nimble fingers were keeping time with her tongue. Aunt Beatrice's hair went up as if by magic into soft puffs and waves and twists, and a golden rose was dropped among the bronze masses. Then the lovely dress was put on and pinned and looped and pulled until it fell into its simple, classical lines around the tall, curving figure. Margaret stepped back and clapped her hands admiringly.

"Oh, Auntie, you're beautiful! Now I'll pop down for the cloak and fascinator. I left them hanging by the fire."

When Margaret had gone Aunt Beatrice caught up the lamp and tiptoed shamefacedly across the hall to the icy-cold spare room. In the long mirror she saw herself reflected from top to toe—or was it herself! Could it be—that gracious woman with the sweet eyes and flushed cheeks, with rounded arms gleaming through their black laces and the cluster of roses nestling against the warm white flesh of the shoulder?

"I do look nice," she said aloud, with a little curtsey to the radiant reflection. "It is all the dress, I know. I feel like a queen in it—no, like a girl again—and that's better."

Margaret went to Mrs. Cunningham's door with her.

"How I wish I could go in and see the sensation you'll make, Aunt Beatrice," she whispered.

"You dear, silly child! It's just the purple and fine linen," laughed Aunt Beatrice. But she did not altogether think so, and she rang the doorbell unquailingly. In the hall Mrs. Cunningham herself came beamingly to greet her.

"My dear Beatrice! I'm so glad. Bella said you could not come because you had a headache."

"My headache got quite better after they left, and so I thought I would get ready and come, even if it were rather late," said Beatrice glibly, wondering if Sapphira had ever worn a black-and-yellow dress, and if so, might not her historic falsehood be traced to its influence?

When they came downstairs together, Beatrice, statuesque and erect in her trailing draperies, and Mrs. Cunningham secretly wondering where on earth Beatrice Hayden had got such a magnificent dress and what she had done to herself to make her look as she did—a man came through the hall. At the foot of the stairs they met. He put out his hand.

"Beatrice! It must be Beatrice! How little you have changed!"

Mrs. Cunningham was not particularly noted in Murraybridge for her tact, but she had a sudden visitation of the saving grace at that moment, and left the two alone.

Beatrice put her hand into the M.P.'s.

"I am glad to see you," she said simply, looking up at him.

She could not say that he had not changed, for there was little in this tall, broad-shouldered man of the world, with grey glints in his hair, to suggest the slim, boyish young lover whose image she had carried in her heart all the long years.

But the voice, though deeper and mellower, was the same, and the thin, clever mouth that went up at one corner and down at the other in a humorous twist; and one little curl of reddish hair fell over his forehead away from its orderly fellows, just as it used to when she had loved to poke her fingers through it; and, more than all, the deep-set grey eyes looking down into her blue ones were unchanged. Beatrice felt her heart beating to her fingertips.

"I thought you were not coming," he said. "I expected to meet you here and I was horribly disappointed. I thought the bitterness of that foolish old quarrel must be strong enough to sway you yet."

"Didn't Bella tell you I had a headache?" faltered Beatrice.

"Bella? Oh, your brother's wife! I wasn't talking to her. I've been sulking in corners ever since I concluded you were not coming. How beautiful you are, Beatrice! You'll let an old friend say that much, won't you?"

Beatrice laughed softly. She had forgotten for years that she was beautiful, but the sweet old knowledge had come back to her again. She could not help knowing that he spoke the simple truth, but she said mirthfully,

"You've learned to flatter since the old days, haven't you? Don't you remember you used to tell me I was too thin to be pretty? But I suppose a bit of blarney is a necessary ingredient in the composition of an M.P."

He was still holding her hand. With a glance of dissatisfaction at the open parlour door, he drew her away to the little room at the end of the hall, which Mrs. Cunningham, for reasons known only to herself, called her library.

"Come in here with me," he said masterfully. "I want to have a long talk with you before the other people get hold of you."

When Beatrice got home from the party ten minutes before her brother and his wife, Margaret was sitting Turk fashion in the big armchair, with her eyes very wide open and owlish.

"You dear girlie, were you asleep?" asked Aunt Beatrice indulgently.

Margaret nodded. "Yes, and I've let the fire go out. I hope you're not cold. I must run before Aunt Bella gets here, or she'll scold. Had a nice time?"

"Delightful. You were a dear to lend me this dress. It was so funny to see Bella staring at it."

When Margaret had put on her hat and jacket she went as far as the street door, and then tiptoed back to the sitting-room. Aunt Beatrice was leaning back in the armchair, with a drooping rose held softly against her lips, gazing dreamily into the dull red embers.

"Auntie," said Margaret contritely, "I can't go home without confessing, although I know it is a heinous offence to interrupt the kind of musing that goes with dying embers and faded roses in the small hours. But it would weigh on my conscience all night if I didn't. I was asleep, but I wakened up just before you came in and went to the window. I didn't mean to spy upon anyone—but that street was bright as day! And if you will let an M.P. kiss you on the doorstep in glaring moonlight, you must expect to be seen."

"I wouldn't have cared if there had been a dozen onlookers," said Aunt Beatrice frankly, "and I don't believe he would either."

Margaret threw up her hands. "Well, my conscience is clear, at least. And remember, Aunt Beatrice, I'm to be bridesmaid—I insist upon that. And, oh, won't you ask me to visit you when you go down to Ottawa next winter? I'm told it's such a jolly place when the House is in session. And you'll need somebody to help you entertain, you know. The wife of a cabinet minister has to do lots of that. But I forgot—he isn't a cabinet minister yet. But he will be, of course. Promise that you'll have me, Aunt Beatrice, promise quick. I hear Uncle George and Aunt Bella coming."

Aunt Beatrice promised. Margaret flew to the door.

"You'd better keep that dress," she called back softly, as she opened it.

The Running Away of Chester

Chester did the chores with unusual vim that night. His lips were set and there was an air of resolution as plainly visible on his small, freckled face as if it had been stamped there. Mrs. Elwell saw him flying around, and her grim features took on a still grimmer expression.

"Ches is mighty lively tonight," she muttered. "I s'pose he's in a gog to be off on some foolishness with Henry Wilson. Well, he won't, and he needn't think it."

Lige Barton, the hired man, also thought this was Chester's purpose, but he took a more lenient view of it than did Mrs. Elwell.

"The little chap is going through things with a rush this evening," he reflected. "Guess he's laying out for a bit of fun with the Wilson boy."

But Chester was not planning anything connected with Henry Wilson, who lived on the other side of the pond and was the only chum he possessed. After the chores were done, he lingered a little while around the barns, getting his courage keyed up to the necessary pitch.

Chester Stephens was an orphan without kith or kin in the world, unless his father's stepsister, Mrs. Harriet Elwell, could be called so. His parents had died in his babyhood, and Mrs. Elwell had taken him to bring up. She was a harsh woman, with a violent temper, and she had scolded and worried the boy all his short life. Upton people said it was a shame, but nobody felt called upon to interfere. Mrs. Elwell was not a person one would care to make an enemy of.

She eyed Chester sourly when he went in, expecting some request to be allowed to go with Henry, and prepared to refuse it sharply.

"Aunt Harriet," said Chester suddenly, "can I go to school this year? It begins tomorrow."

"No," said Mrs. Elwell, when she had recovered from her surprise at this unexpected question. "You've had schoolin' in plenty—more'n I ever had, and all you're goin' to get!"

"But, Aunt Harriet," persisted Chester, his face flushed with earnestness, "I'm nearly thirteen, and I can barely read and write a little. The other boys are ever so far ahead of me. I don't know anything."

"You know enough to be disrespectful!" exclaimed Mrs. Elwell. "I suppose you want to go to school to idle away your time, as you do at home—lazy good-for-nothing that you are!" Chester thought of the drudgery that had been his portion all his life. He resented being called lazy when he was willing enough to work, but he made one more appeal.

"If you'll let me go to school this year, I'll work twice as hard out of school to make up for it—indeed, I will. Do let me go, Aunt Harriet. I haven't been to school a day for over a year."

"Let's hear no more of this nonsense," said Mrs. Elwell, taking a bottle from the shelf above her with the air of one who closes a discussion. "Here, run down to the Bridge and get me this bottle full of vinegar at Jacob's store. Be smart, too, d'ye hear! I ain't going to have you idling around the Bridge neither. If you ain't back in twenty minutes, it won't be well for you."

Chester did his errand at the Bridge with a heart full of bitter disappointment and anger.

"I won't stand it any longer!" he muttered. "I'll run away—I don't care where, so long as it's away from her. I wish I could get out West on the harvest excursions."

On his return home, as he crossed the yard in the dusk, he stumbled over a stick of wood and fell. The bottle of vinegar slipped from his hand and was broken on the doorstep. Mrs. Elwell saw the accident from the window. She rushed out and jerked the unlucky lad to his feet.

"Take that, you sulky little cub!" she exclaimed, cuffing his ears soundly. "I'll teach you to break and spill things you're sent for! You did it on purpose. Get off to bed with you this instant."

Chester crept off to his garret chamber with a very sullen face. He was too used to being sent to bed without any supper to care much for that, although he was hungry. But his whole being was in a tumult of rebellion over the injustice that was meted out to him.

"I won't stand it!" he muttered over and over again. "I'll run away. I won't stay here."

To talk of running away was one thing. To do it without a cent in your pocket or a place to run to was another. But Chester had a great deal of determination in his make-up when it was fairly roused, and his hard upbringing had made him older and shrewder than his years. He lay awake late that night, thinking out ways and means, but could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion.

The next day Mrs. Elwell said, "Ches, Abner Stearns wants you to go up there for a fortnight while Tom Bixby is away, and drive the milk wagon of mornings and do the chores for Mrs. Stearns. You might as well put in the time 'fore harvest that way as any other. So hustle off—and mind you behave yourself."

Chester heard the news gladly. He had not yet devised any feasible plan for running away, and he always liked to work at the Stearns' place. To be sure, Mrs. Elwell received all the money he earned, but Mrs. Stearns was kind to him, and though he had to work hard and constantly, he was well fed and well treated by all.

The following fortnight was a comparatively happy one for the lad. But he did not forget his purpose of shaking the dust of Upton from his feet as soon as possible, and he cudgelled his brains trying to find a way.

On the evening when he left the Stearns' homestead, Mr. Stearns paid him for his fortnight's work, much to the boy's surprise, for Mrs. Elwell had always insisted that all such money should be paid directly to her. Chester found himself the possessor of four dollars—an amount of riches that almost took away his breath. He had never in his whole life owned more than ten cents at a time. As he tramped along the road home, he kept his hand in his pocket, holding fast to the money, as if he feared it would otherwise dissolve into thin air.

His mind was firmly made up. He would run away once and for all. This money was rightly his; he had earned every cent of it. It would surely last him until he found employment elsewhere. At any rate, he would go; and even if he starved, he would never come back to Aunt Harriet's!

When he reached home, he found Mrs. Elwell in an unusual state of worry. Lige had given warning—and this on the verge of harvest!

"Did Stearns say anything about coming down tomorrow to pay me for your work?" she asked.

"No, ma'am. He didn't say a word about it," said Chester boldly.

"Well, I hope he will. Take yourself off to bed, Ches. I'm sick of seeing you standing there, on one foot or t'other, like a gander."

Chester had been shifting about uneasily. He realized that, if his project did not miscarry, he would not see his aunt again, and his heart softened to her. Harsh as she was, she was the only protector he had ever known, and the boy had a vague wish to carry away with him some kindly word or look from her. Such, however, was not forthcoming, and Chester obeyed her command and took himself off to the garret. Here he sat down and reflected on his plans.

He must go that very night. When Mr. Stearns failed to appear on the morrow, Mrs. Elwell was quite likely to march up and demand the amount of Chester's wages. It would all come out then, and he would lose his money—besides, no doubt, getting severely punished into the bargain.

His preparations did not take long. He had nothing to carry with him. The only decent suit of clothes he possessed was his well-worn Sunday one. This he put on, carefully stowing away in his pocket the precious four dollars.

He had to wait until he thought his aunt was asleep, and it was about eleven when he crept downstairs, his heart quaking within him, and got out by the porch window. When he found himself alone in the clear moonlight of the August night, a sense of elation filled his cramped little heart. He was free, and he would never come back here—never!

"Wisht I could have seen Henry to say good-by to him, though," he muttered with a wistful glance at the big house across the pond where the unconscious Henry was sleeping soundly with never a thought of moonlight flittings for anyone in his curly head.

Chester meant to walk to Roxbury Station ten miles away. Nobody knew him there, and he could catch the morning train. Late as it was, he kept to fields and wood-roads lest he might be seen and recognized. It was three o'clock when he reached Roxbury, and he knew the train did not pass through until six. With the serenity of a philosopher who is starting out to win his way in the world and means to make the best of things, Chester curled himself up in the hollow space of a big lumber pile behind the station, and so tired was he that he fell soundly asleep in a few minutes.

Chester was awakened by the shriek of the express at the last crossing before the station. In a panic of haste he scrambled out of his lumber and dashed into the station house, where a sleepy, ill-natured agent stood behind the ticket window. He looked sharply enough at the freckled, square-jawed boy who asked for a second-class ticket to Belltown. Chester's heart quaked within him at the momentary thought that the ticket agent recognized him. He had an agonized vision of being collared without ceremony and haled straightway back to Aunt Harriet. When the ticket and his change were pushed out to him, he snatched them and fairly ran.

"Bolted as if the police were after him," reflected the agent, who did not sell many tickets and so had time to take a personal interest in the purchasers thereof. "I've seen

that youngster before, though I can't recollect where. He's got a most fearful determined look."

Chester drew an audible sigh of relief when the train left the station. He was fairly off now and felt that he could defy even curious railway officials.

It was not his first train ride, for Mrs. Elwell had once taken him to Belltown to get an aching tooth extracted, but it was certainly his first under such exhilarating circumstances, and he meant to enjoy it. To be sure, he was very hungry, but that, he reflected, was only what he would probably be many times before he made his fortune, and it was just as well to get used to it. Meanwhile, it behooved him to keep his eyes open. On the road from Roxbury to Belltown there was not much to be seen that morning that Chester did not see.

The train reached Belltown about noon. He did not mean to stop long there—it was too near Upton. From the conductor on the train, he found that a boat left Belltown for Montrose at two in the afternoon. Montrose was a hundred miles from Upton, and Chester thought he would be safe there. To Montrose, accordingly, he decided to go, but the first thing was to get some dinner. He went into a grocery store and bought some crackers and a bit of cheese. He had somewhere picked up the idea that crackers and cheese were about as economical food as you could find for adventurous youths starting out on small capital.

He found his way to the only public square Belltown boasted, and munched his food hungrily on a bench under the trees. He would go to Montrose and there find something to do. Later on he would gradually work his way out West, where there was more room for an ambitious small boy to expand and grow. Chester dreamed some dazzling dreams as he sat there on the bench under the Belltown chestnuts. Passers-by, if they noticed him at all, saw merely a rather small, poorly clad boy, with a great many freckles, a square jaw and shrewd, level-gazing grey eyes. But this same lad was mapping out a very brilliant future for himself as people passed him heedlessly by. He would get out West, somehow or other, some time or other, and make a fortune. Then, perhaps, he would go back to Upton for a visit and shine in his splendour before all his old neighbours. It all seemed very easy and alluring, sitting there in the quiet little Belltown square. Chester, you see, possessed imagination. That, together with the crackers and cheese, so cheered him up that he felt ready for anything. He was aroused from a dream of passing Aunt Harriet by in lofty scorn and a glittering carriage, by the shrill whistle of the boat. Chester pocketed his remaining crackers and cheese and his visions also, and was once more his alert, wide-awake self. He had inquired the way to the wharf from the grocer, so he found no difficulty in reaching it. When the boat steamed down the muddy little river, Chester was on board of her.

He was glad to be out of Belltown, for he was anything but sure that he would not encounter some Upton people as long as he was in it. They often went to Belltown on business, but never to Montrose.

There were not many passengers on the boat, and Chester scrutinized them all so sharply in turn that he could have sworn to each and every one of them for years afterwards had it been necessary. The one he liked best was a middle-aged lady who sat just before him on the opposite side of the deck She was plump and motherly looking, with a fresh, rosy face and beaming blue eyes.

"If I was looking for anyone to adopt me I'd pick her," said Chester to himself. The more he looked at her, the better he liked her. He labelled her in his mind as "the nice, rosy lady."

The nice, rosy lady noticed Chester staring at her after awhile. She smiled promptly at him—a smile that seemed fairly to irradiate her round face—and then began fumbling in an old-fashioned reticule she carried, and from which she presently extracted a chubby little paper bag.

"If you like candy, little boy," she said to Chester, "here is some of my sugar taffy for you."

Chester did not exactly like being called a little boy. But her voice and smile were irresistible and won his heart straightway. He took the candy with a shy, "Thank you, ma'am," and sat holding it in his hand.

"Eat it," commanded the rosy lady authoritatively. "That is what taffy is for, you know."

So Chester ate it. It was the most delicious thing he had ever tasted in his life, and filled a void which even the crackers and cheese had left vacant. The rosy lady watched every mouthful he ate as if she enjoyed it more than he did. When he had finished the taffy she smiled one of her sociable smiles again and said, "Well, what do you think of it?"

"It's the nicest taffy I ever ate," answered Chester enthusiastically, as if he were a connoisseur in all kinds of taffies. The rosy lady nodded, well pleased.

"That is just what everyone says about my sugar taffy. Nobody up our way can match it, though goodness knows they try hard enough. My great-grandmother invented the recipe herself, and it has been in our family ever since. I'm real glad you liked it."

She smiled at him again, as if his appreciation of her taffy was a bond of good fellowship between them. She did not know it but, nevertheless, she was filling the heart of a desperate small boy, who had run away from home, with hope and encouragement and self-reliance. If there were such kind folks as this in the world, why, he would get along all right. The rosy lady's smiles and taffy—the smiles much more than the taffy—went far to thaw out of him a certain hardness and resentfulness against people in general that Aunt Harriet's harsh treatment had instilled into him. Chester instantly made a resolve that when he grew stout and rosy and prosperous he would dispense smiles and taffy and good cheer generally to all forlorn small boys on boats and trains.

It was almost dark when they reached Montrose. Chester lost sight of the rosy lady when they left the boat, and it gave him a lonesome feeling; but he could not indulge in that for long at a time. Here he was at his destination—at dark, in a strange city a hundred miles from home.

"The first thing is to find somewhere to sleep," he said to himself, resolutely declining to feel frightened, although the temptation was very strong.

Montrose was not really a very big place. It was only a bustling little town of some twenty thousand inhabitants, but to Chester's eyes it was a vast metropolis. He had never been in any place bigger than Belltown, and in Belltown you could see one end of it, at least, no matter where you were. Montrose seemed endless to Chester as he stood at the head of Water Street and gazed in bewilderment along one of its main business

avenues—a big, glittering, whirling place where one small boy could so easily be swallowed up that he would never be heard of again.

Chester, after paying his fare to Montrose and buying his cheese and crackers, had just sixty cents left. This must last him until he found work, so that the luxury of lodgings was out of the question, even if he had known where to look for them. To be sure, there were benches in a public square right in front of him; but Chester was afraid that if he curled up on one of them for the night, a policeman might question him, and he did not believe he could give a very satisfactory account of himself. In his perplexity, he thought of his cosy lumber pile at Roxbury Station and remembered that when he had left the boat he had noticed a large vacant lot near the wharf which was filled with piles of lumber. Back to this he went and soon succeeded in finding a place to stow himself. His last waking thought was that he must be up and doing bright and early the next morning, and that it must surely be longer than twenty-four hours since he had crept downstairs and out of Aunt Harriet's porch window at Upton.

Montrose seemed less alarming by daylight, which was not so bewildering as the blinking electric lights. Chester was up betimes, ate the last of his cheese and crackers and started out at once to look for work. He determined to be thorough, and he went straight into every place of business he came to, from a blacksmith's forge to a department store, and boldly asked the first person he met if they wanted a boy there. There was, however, one class of places Chester shunned determinedly. He never went into a liquor saloon. The last winter he had been allowed to go to school in Upton, his teacher had been a pale, patient little woman who hated the liquor traffic with all her heart. She herself had suffered bitterly through it, and she instilled into her pupils a thorough aversion to it. Chester would have chosen death by starvation before he would have sought for employment in a liquor saloon. But there certainly did not seem room for him anywhere else. Nobody wanted a boy. The answer to his question was invariably "No." As the day wore on, Chester's hopes and courage went down to zero, but he still tramped doggedly about. He would be thorough, at least. Surely somewhere in this big place, where everyone seemed so busy, there must be something for him to do.

Once there seemed a chance of success. He had gone into a big provision store and asked the clerk behind the counter if they wanted a boy.

"Well, we do," said the clerk, looking him over critically, "but I hardly think you'll fill the bill. However, come in and see the boss."

He took Chester into a dark, grimy little inner office where a fat, stubby man was sitting before a desk with his feet upon it.

"Hey? What!" he said when the clerk explained. "Looking for the place? Why, sonny, you're not half big enough."

"Oh, I'm a great deal bigger than I look," cried Chester breathlessly. "That is, sir—I mean I'm ever so much stronger than I look. I'll work hard, sir, ever so hard—and I'll grow."

The fat, stubby man roared with laughter. What was grim earnest to poor Chester was a joke to him.

"No doubt you will, my boy," he said genially, "but I'm afraid you'll hardly grow fast enough to suit us. Boys aren't like pigweed, you know. No, no, our boy must be a big, strapping fellow of eighteen or nineteen. He'll have a deal of heavy lifting to do."

Chester went out of the store with a queer choking in his throat. For one horrible moment he thought he was going to cry—he, Chester Stephens, who had run away from home to do splendid things! A nice ending that would be to his fine dreams! He thrust his hands into his pockets and strode along the street, biting his lips fiercely. He would not cry—no, he would not! And he *would* find work!

Chester did not cry, but neither, alas, did he find work. He parted with ten cents of his precious hoard for more crackers, and he spend the night again in the lumber yard.

Perhaps I'll have better luck tomorrow, he thought hopefully.

But it really seemed as if there were to be no luck for Chester except bad luck. Day after day passed and, although he tramped resolutely from street to street and visited every place that seemed to offer any chance, he could get no employment. In spite of his pluck, his heart began to fail him.

At the end of a week Chester woke up among his lumber to a realization that he was at the end of his resources. He had just five cents left out of the four dollars that were to have been the key to his fortune. He sat gloomily on the wall of his sleeping apartment and munched the one solitary cracker he had left. It must carry him through the day unless he got work. The five cents must be kept for some dire emergency.

He started uptown rather aimlessly. In his week's wanderings he had come to know the city very well and no longer felt confused with its size and bustle. He envied every busy boy he saw. Back in Upton he had sometimes resented the fact that he was kept working continually and was seldom allowed an hour off. Now he was burdened with spare time. It certainly did not seem as if things were fairly divided, he thought. And then he thought no more just then, for one of the queer spells in his head came on. He had experienced them at intervals during the last three days. Something seemed to break loose in his head and spin wildly round and round, while houses and people and trees danced and wobbled all about him. Chester vaguely wondered if this could be what Aunt Harriet had been wont to call a "judgement." But then, he had done nothing very bad—nothing that would warrant a judgement, he thought. It was surely no harm to run away from a place where you were treated so bad and where they did not seem to want you. Chester felt bitter whenever he thought of Aunt Harriet.

Presently he found himself in the market square of Montrose. It was market day, and the place was thronged with people from the surrounding country settlements. Chester had hoped that he might pick up a few cents, holding a horse or cow for somebody or carrying a market basket, but no such chance offered itself. He climbed up on some bales of pressed hay in one corner and sat there moodily; there was dejection in the very dangle of his legs over the bales. Chester, you see, was discovering what many a boy before him has discovered—that it is a good deal easier to sit down and make a fortune in dreams than it is to go out into the world and make it.

Two men were talking to each other near him. At first Chester gave no heed to their conversation, but presently a sentence made him prick up his ears.

"Yes, there's a pretty fair crop out at Hopedale," one man was saying, "but whether it's going to be got in in good shape is another matter. It's terrible hard to get any help. Every spare man-jack far and wide has gone West on them everlasting harvest excursions. Salome Whitney at the Mount Hope Farm is in a predicament. She's got a hired man, but he can't harvest grain all by himself. She spent the whole of yesterday driving around, trying to get a couple of men or boys to help him, but I dunno if she got anyone or not."

The men moved out of earshot at this juncture, but Chester got down from the bales with a determined look. If workers were wanted in Hopedale, that was the place for him. He had done a man's work at harvest time in Upton the year before. Lige Barton had said so himself. Hope and courage returned with a rush.

He accosted the first man he met and asked if he could tell him the way to Hopedale.

"Reckon I can, sonny. I live in the next district. Want to go there? If you wait till evening, I can give you a lift part of the way. It's five miles out."

"Thank you, sir," said Chester firmly, "but I must go at once if you'll kindly direct me. It's important."

"Well, it's a straight road. That's Albemarle Street down there—follow it till it takes you out to the country, and then keep straight on till you come to a church painted yellow and white. Turn to your right, and over the hill is Hopedale. But you'd better wait for me. You don't look fit to walk five miles."

But Chester was off. Walk five miles! Pooh! He could walk twenty with hope to lure him on. Albemarle Street finally frayed off into a real country road. Chester was glad to find himself out in the country once more, with the great golden fields basking on either side and the wooded hills beyond, purple with haze. He had grown to hate the town with its cold, unheeding faces. It was good to breathe clear air again and feel the soft, springy soil of the ferny roadside under his tired little feet.

Long before the five miles were covered, Chester began to wonder if he would hold out to the end of them. He had to stop and rest frequently, when those queer dizzy spells came on. His feet seemed like lead. But he kept doggedly on. He would not give in now! The white and yellow church was the most welcome sight that had ever met his eyes.

Over the hill he met a man and inquired the way to Mount Hope Farm. Fortunately, it was nearby. At the gate Chester had to stop again to recover from his dizziness.

He liked the look of the place, with its great, comfortable barns and quaint, roomy old farmhouse, all set down in a trim quadrangle of beeches and orchards. There was an appearance of peace and prosperity about it.

If only Miss Salome Whitney will hire me! thought Chester wistfully, as he crept up the slope. I'm afraid she'll say I'm too small. Wisht I could stretch three inches all at once. Wisht I wasn't so dizzy. Wisht—

What Chester's third wish was will never be known, for just as he reached the kitchen door the worst dizzy spell of all came on. Trees, barns, well-sweep, all whirled around him with the speed of wind. He reeled and fell, a limp, helpless little body, on Miss Salome Whitney's broad, spotless sandstone doorstep.

In the Mount Hope kitchen Miss Salome was at that moment deep in discussion with her "help" over the weighty question of how the damsons were to be preserved. Miss Salome wanted them boiled; Clemantiny Bosworth, the help, insisted that they ought to be baked. Clemantiny was always very positive. She had "bossed" Miss Salome for years, and both knew that in the end the damsons would be baked, but the argument had to be carried out for dignity's sake.

"They're so sour when they're baked," protested Miss Salome.

"Well, you don't want damsons sweet, do you?" retorted Clemantiny scornfully. "That's the beauty of damsons—their tartness. And they keep ever so much better baked, Salome—you know they do. My grandmother *always* baked hers, and they would keep for three years."

Miss Salome knew that when Clemantiny dragged her grandmother into the question, it was time to surrender. Beyond that, dignity degenerated into stubbornness. It would be useless to say that she did not want to keep her damsons for three years, and that she was content to eat them up and trust to Providence for the next year's supply.

"Well, well, bake them then," she said placidly. "I don't suppose it makes much difference one way or another. Only, I insist—what was that noise, Clemantiny? It sounded like something falling against the porch door."

"It's that worthless dog of Martin's, I suppose," said Clemantiny, grasping a broom handle with a grimness that boded ill for the dog. "Mussing up my clean doorstep with his dirty paws again. I'll fix him!"

Clemantiny swept out through the porch and jerked open the door. There was a moment's silence. Then Miss Salome heard her say, "For the land's sake! Salome Whitney, come here."

What Miss Salome saw when she hurried out was a white-faced boy stretched on the doorstep at Clemantiny's feet.

"Is he dead?" she gasped.

"Dead? No," sniffed Clemantiny. "He's fainted, that's what he is. Where on earth did he come from? He ain't a Hopedale boy."

"He must be carried right in," exclaimed Miss Salome in distress. "Why, he may die there. He must be very ill."

"Looks more to me as if he had fainted from sheer starvation," returned Clemantiny brusquely as she picked him up in her lean, muscular arms. "Why, he's skin and bone. He ain't hardly heavier than a baby. Well, this is a mysterious piece of work. Where'll I put him?"

"Lay him on the sofa," said Miss Salome as soon as she had recovered from the horror into which Clemantiny's starvation dictum had thrown her. A child starving to death on her doorstep! "What do you do for people in a faint, Clemantiny?"

"Wet their face—and hist up their feet—and loosen their collar," said Clemantiny in a succession of jerks, doing each thing as she mentioned it. "And hold ammonia to their nose. Run for the ammonia, Salome. Look, will you? Skin and bone!"

But Miss Salome had gone for the ammonia. There was a look on the boy's thin, pallid face that tugged painfully at her heart-strings.

When Chester came back to consciousness with the pungency of the ammonia reeking through his head, he found himself lying on very soft pillows in a very big white sunny kitchen, where everything was scoured to a brightness that dazzled you. Bending over him was a tall, gaunt woman with a thin, determined face and snapping black eyes, and, standing beside her with a steaming bowl in her hand, was the nice rosy lady who had given him the taffy on the boat!

When he opened his eyes, Miss Salome knew him.

"Why, it's the little boy I saw on the boat!" she exclaimed.

"Well, you've come to!" said Clemantiny, eyeing Chester severely. "And now perhaps you'll explain what you mean by fainting away on doorsteps and scaring people out of their senses."

Chester thought that this must be the mistress of Mount Hope Farm, and hastened to propitiate her.

"I'm sorry," he faltered feebly. "I didn't mean to—I—"

"You're not to do any talking until you've had something to eat," snapped Clemantiny inconsistently. "Here, open your mouth and take this broth. Pretty doings, I say!"

Clemantiny spoke as sharply as Aunt Harriet had ever done, but somehow or other Chester did not feel afraid of her and her black eyes. She sat down by his side and fed him from the bowl of hot broth with a deft gentleness oddly in contrast with her grim expression.

Chester thought he had never in all his life tasted anything so good as that broth. The boy was really almost starved. He drank every drop of it. Clemantiny gave a grunt of satisfaction as she handed the empty bowl and spoon to the silent, smiling Miss Salome.

"Now, who are you and what do you want?" she said.

Chester had been expecting this question, and while coming along the Hopedale road he had thought out an answer to it. He began now, speaking the words slowly and gaspingly, as if reciting a hastily learned lesson.

"My name is Chester Benson. I belong to Upton up the country. My folks are dead and I came to Montrose to look for work, I've been there a week and couldn't get anything to do. I heard a man say that you wanted men to help in the harvest, so I came out to see if you'd hire me."

In spite of his weakness, Chester's face turned very red before he got to the end of his speech. He was new to deception. To be sure, there was not, strictly speaking, an untrue word in it. As for his name, it was Chester Benson Stephens. But for all that, Chester could not have felt or looked more guilty if he had been telling an out-and-out falsehood at every breath.

"Humph!" said Clemantiny in a dissatisfied tone. "What on earth do you suppose a midget like you can do in the harvest field? And we don't want any more help, anyway. We've got enough."

Chester grew sick with disappointment. But at this moment Miss Salome spoke up.

"No, we haven't, Clemantiny. We want another hand, and I'll hire you, Chester—that's your name, isn't it? I'll give you good wages, too."

"Now, Salome!" protested Clemantiny.

But Miss Salome only said, "I've made up my mind, Clemantiny."

Clemantiny knew that when Miss Salome did make up her mind and announced it in that very quiet, very unmistakable tone, she was mistress of the situation and intended to remain so.

"Oh, very well," she retorted. "You'll please yourself, Salome, of course. I think it would be wiser to wait until you found out a little more about him."

"And have him starving on people's doorsteps in the meantime?" questioned Miss Salome severely.

"Well," returned Clemantiny with the air of one who washes her hands of a doubtful proposition, "don't blame me if you repent of it."

By this time Chester had grasped the wonderful fact that his troubles were ended—for a while, at least. He raised himself up on one arm and looked gratefully at Miss Salome.

"Thank you," he said. "I'll work hard. I'm used to doing a lot."

"There, there!" said Miss Salome, patting his shoulder gently. "Lie down and rest. Dinner will be ready soon, and I guess you'll be ready for it."

To Clemantiny she added in a low, gentle tone, "There's a look on his face that reminded me of Johnny. It came out so strong when he sat up just now that it made me feel like crying. Don't you notice it, Clemantiny?"

"Can't say that I do," replied that energetic person, who was flying about the kitchen with a speed that made Chester's head dizzy trying to follow her with his eyes. "All I can see is freckles and bones—but if you're satisfied, I am. For law's sake, don't fluster me, Salome. There's a hundred and one things to be done out of hand. This frolic has clean dundered the whole forenoon's work."

After dinner Chester decided that it was time to make himself useful.

"Can't I go right to work now?" he asked.

"We don't begin harvest till tomorrow," said Miss Salome. "You'd better rest this afternoon."

"Oh, I'm all right now," insisted Chester. "I feel fine. Please give me something to do."

"You can go out and cut me some wood for my afternoon's baking," said Clemantiny. "And see you cut it short enough. Any other boy that's tried always gets it about two inches too long."

When he had gone out, she said scornfully to Miss Salome, "Well, what do you expect that size to accomplish in a harvest field, Salome Whitney?"

"Not very much, perhaps," said Miss Salome mildly. "But what could I do? You wouldn't have me turn the child adrift on the world again, would you, Clemantiny?"

Clemantiny did not choose to answer this appeal. She rattled her dishes noisily into the dishpan.

"Well, where are you going to put him to sleep?" she demanded. "The hands you've got will fill the kitchen chamber. There's only the spare room left. You'll hardly put him there, I suppose? Your philanthropy will hardly lead you as far as *that*."

When Clemantiny employed big words and sarcasm at the same time, the effect was tremendous. But Miss Salome didn't wilt.

"What makes you so prejudiced against him?" she asked curiously.

"I'm *not* prejudiced against him. But that story about himself didn't ring true. I worked in Upton years ago, and there weren't any Bensons there then. There's more behind that he hasn't told. I'd find out what it was before I took him into my house, that's all. But I'm not prejudiced."

"Well, well," said Miss Salome soothingly, "we must do the best we can for him. It's a sort of duty. And as for a room for him—why, I'll put him in Johnny's."

Clemantiny opened her mouth and shut it again. She understood that it would be a waste of breath to say anything more. If Miss Salome had made up her mind to put this freckled, determined-looking waif, dropped on her doorstep from heaven knew where, into Johnny's room, that was an end of the matter.

"But I'll not be surprised at anything after this," she muttered as she carried her dishes into the pantry. "First a skinny little urchin goes and faints on her doorstep. Then she hires him and puts him in Johnny's room. Johnny's room! Salome Whitney, what *do* you mean?"

Perhaps Miss Salome hardly knew what she meant. But somehow her heart went out warmly to this boy. In spite of Clemantiny's sniffs, she held to the opinion that he looked like Johnny. Johnny was a little nephew of hers. She had taken him to bring up when his parents died, and she had loved him very dearly. He had died four years ago, and since that time the little front room over the front porch had never been occupied. It was just as Johnny had left it. Beyond keeping it scrupulously clean, Miss Salome never allowed it to be disturbed. And now a somewhat ragged lad from nowhere was to be put into it! No wonder Clemantiny shook her head when Miss Salome went up to air it.

Even Clemantiny had to admit that Chester was willing to work. He split wood until she called him to stop. Then he carried in the wood-box full, and piled it so neatly that even the grim handmaiden was pleased. After that, she sent him to the garden to pick the early beans. In the evening he milked three cows and did all the chores, falling into the ways of the place with a deft adaptability that went far to soften Clemantiny's heart.

"He's been taught to work somewheres," she admitted grudgingly, "and he's real polite and respectful. But he looks too cute by half. And his name isn't Benson any more than mine. When I called him 'Chester Benson' out there in the cow-yard, he stared at me fer half a minute 'sif I'd called him Nebuchadnezzar."

When bedtime came, Miss Salome took Chester up to a room whose whiteness and daintiness quite took away the breath of a lad who had been used to sleeping in garrets or hired men's kitchen chambers all his life. Later on Miss Salome came in to see if he

was comfortable, and stood, with her candle in her hand, looking down very kindly at the thin, shrewd little face on the pillow.

"I hope you'll sleep real well here, Chester," she said. "I had a little boy once who used to sleep here. You—you look like him. Good night."

She bent over him and kissed his forehead. Chester had never been kissed by anyone before, so far as he could remember. Something came up in his throat that felt about as big as a pumpkin. At the same moment he wished he could have told Miss Salome the whole truth about himself. I might tell her in the morning, he thought, as he watched her figure passing out of the little porch chamber.

But on second thought he decided that this would never do. He felt sure she would disapprove of his running away, and would probably insist upon his going straight back to Upton or, at least, informing Aunt Harriet of his whereabouts. No, he could not tell her.

Clemantiny was an early riser, but when she came into the kitchen the next morning the fire was already made and Chester was out in the yard with three of the five cows milked.

"Humph!" said Clemantiny amiably. "New brooms sweep clean."

But she gave him cream with his porridge that morning. Generally, all Miss Salome's hired hands got from Clemantiny was skim milk.

Miss Salome's regular hired man lived in a little house down in the hollow. He soon turned up, and the other two men she had hired for harvest also arrived. Martin, the man, looked Chester over quizzically.

"What do you think you can do, sonny?"

"Anything," said Chester sturdily. "I'm used to work."

"He's right," whispered Clemantiny aside. "He's smart as a steel trap. But just you keep an eye on him all the same, Martin."

Chester soon proved his mettle in the harvest field. In the brisk three weeks that followed, even Clemantiny had to admit that he earned every cent of his wages. His active feet were untiring and his wiry arms could pitch and stock with the best. When the day's work was ended, he brought in wood and water for Clemantiny, helped milk the cows, gathered the eggs, and made on his own responsibility a round of barns and outhouses to make sure that everything was snug and tight for the night.

"Freckles-and-Bones has been well trained somewhere," said Clemantiny again.

It was hardly fair to put the bones in now, for Chester was growing plump and hearty. He had never been so happy in his life. Upton drudgery and that dreadful week in Montrose seemed like a bad dream. Here, in the golden meadows of Mount Hope Farm, he worked with a right good will. The men liked him, and he soon became a favourite with them. Even Clemantiny relented somewhat. To be sure, she continued very grim, and still threw her words at him as if they were so many missiles warranted to strike home. But Chester soon learned that Clemantiny's bark was worse than her bite. She was really very good to him and fed him lavishly. But she declared that this was only to put some flesh on him.

"It offends me to see bones sticking through anybody's skin like that. We aren't used to such objects at Mount Hope Farm, thank goodness. Yes, you may smile, Salome. I

like him well enough, and I'll admit that he knows how to make himself useful, but I don't trust him any more than ever I did. He's mighty close about his past life. You can't get any more out of him than juice out of a post. I've tried, and I know."

But it was Miss Salome who had won Chester's whole heart. He had never loved anybody in his hard little life before. He loved her with an almost dog-like devotion. He forgot that he was working to earn money—and make his fortune. He worked to please Miss Salome. She was good and kind and gentle to him, and his starved heart thawed and expanded in the sunshine of her atmosphere. She went to the little porch room every night to kiss him good night. Chester would have been bitterly disappointed if she had failed to go.

She was greatly shocked to find out that he had never said his prayers before going to bed. She insisted on teaching him the simple little one she had used herself when a child. When Chester found that it would please her, he said it every night. There was nothing he would not have done for Miss Salome.

She talked a good deal to him about Johnny and she gave him the jack-knife that Johnny had owned.

"It belonged to a good, manly little boy once," she said, "and now I hope it belongs to another such."

"I ain't very good," said Chester repentantly, "but I'll try to be, Miss Salome—honest, I will."

One day he heard Miss Salome speaking of someone who had run away from home. "A wicked, ungrateful boy," she called him. Chester blushed until his freckles were drowned out in a sea of red, and Clemantiny saw it, of course. When did anything ever escape those merciless black eyes of Clemantiny's?

"Do you think it's always wrong for a fellow to run away, Miss Salome?" he faltered.

"It can't ever be right," said Miss Salome decidedly.

"But if he wasn't treated well—and was jawed at—and not let go to school?" pleaded Chester.

Clemantiny gave Miss Salome a look as of one who would say, You're bat-blind if you can't read between the lines of that; but Miss Salome was placidly unconscious. She was not really thinking of the subject at all, and did not guess that Chester meant anything more than generalities.

"Not even then," she said firmly. "Nothing can justify a boy for running away—especially as Jarvis Colemen did—never even left a word behind him to say where he'd gone. His aunt thought he'd fallen into the river."

"Don't suppose she would have grieved much if he had," said Clemantiny sarcastically, all the while watching Chester, until he felt as if she were boring into his very soul and reading all his past life.

When the harvest season drew to a close, dismay crept into the soul of our hero. Where would he go now? He hated to think of leaving Mount Hope Farm and Miss Salome. He would have been content to stay there and work as hard as he had ever worked at Upton, merely for the roof over his head and the food he ate. The making of a fortune seemed a small thing compared to the privilege of being near Miss Salome.

"But I suppose I must just up and go," he muttered dolefully.

One day Miss Salome had a conference with Clemantiny. At the end of it the latter said, "Do as you please," in the tone she might have used to a spoiled child. "But if you'd take my advice—which you won't and never do—you'd write to somebody in Upton and make inquiries about him first. What he says is all very well and he sticks to it marvellous, and there's no tripping him up. But there's something behind, Salome Whitney—mark my words, there's something behind."

"He looks so like Johnny," said Miss Salome wistfully.

"And I suppose you think that covers a multitude of sins," said Clemantiny contemptuously.

On the day when the last load of rustling golden sheaves was carried into the big barn and stowed away in the dusty loft, Miss Salome called Chester into the kitchen. Chester's heart sank as he obeyed the summons.

His time was up, and now he was to be paid his wages and sent away. To be sure, Martin had told him that morning that a man in East Hopedale wanted a boy for a spell, and that he, Martin, would see that he got the place if he wanted it. But that did not reconcile him to leaving Mount Hope Farm.

Miss Salome was sitting in her favourite sunny corner of the kitchen and Clemantiny was flying around with double briskness. The latter's thin lips were tightly set and disapproval was writ large in every flutter of her calico skirts.

"Chester," said Miss Salome kindly, "your time is up today."

Chester nodded. For a moment he felt as he had felt when he left the provision store in Montrose. But he would not let Clemantiny see him cry. Somehow, he would not have minded Miss Salome.

"What are you thinking of doing now?" Miss Salome went on.

"There's a man at East Hopedale wants a boy," said Chester, "and Martin says he thinks I'll suit."

"That is Jonas Smallman," said Miss Salome thoughtfully. "He has the name of being a hard master. It isn't right of me to say so, perhaps. I really don't know much about him. But wouldn't you rather stay here with me for the winter, Chester?"

"Ma'am? Miss Salome?" stammered Chester. He heard Clemantiny give a snort behind him and mutter, "Clean infatuated—clean infatuated," without in the least knowing what she meant.

"We really need a chore boy all the year round," said Miss Salome. "Martin has all he can do with the heavy work. And there are the apples to be picked. If you care to stay, you shall have your board and clothes for doing the odd jobs, and you can go to school all winter. In the spring we will see what need be done then."

If he would care to stay! Chester could have laughed aloud. His eyes were shining with joy as he replied, "Oh, Miss Salome, I'll be so glad to stay! I—I—didn't want to go away. I'll try to do everything you want me to do. I'll work ever so hard."

"Humph!"

This, of course, was from Clemantiny, as she set a pan of apples on the stove with an emphatic thud. "Nobody ever doubted your willingness to work. Pity everything else about you isn't as satisfactory."

"Clemantiny!" said Miss Salome rebukingly. She put her arms about Chester and drew him to her. "Then it is all settled, Chester. You are my boy now, and of course I shall expect you to be a good boy."

If ever a boy was determined to be good, that boy was Chester. That day was the beginning of a new life for him. He began to go to the Hopedale school the next week. Miss Salome gave him all Johnny's old school books and took an eager interest in his studies.

Chester ought to have been very happy, and at first he was; but as the bright, mellow days of autumn passed by, a shadow came over his happiness. He could not help thinking that he had really deceived Miss Salome, and was deceiving her still—Miss Salome, who had such confidence in him. He was not what he pretended to be. And as for his running away, he felt sure that Miss Salome would view that with horror. As the time passed by and he learned more and more what a high standard of honour and truth she had, he felt more and more ashamed of himself. When she looked at him with her clear, trustful, blue eyes, Chester felt as guilty as if he had systematically deceived her with intent to do harm. He began to wish that he had the courage to tell her the whole truth about himself.

Moreover, he began to think that perhaps he had not done right, after all, in running away from Aunt Harriet. In Miss Salome's code nothing could be right that was underhanded, and Chester was very swiftly coming to look at things through Miss Salome's eyes. He felt sure that Johnny would never have acted as he had, and if Chester now had one dear ambition on earth, it was to be as good and manly a fellow as Johnny must have been. But he could never be that as long as he kept the truth about himself from Miss Salome.

"That boy has got something on his mind," said the terrible Clemantiny, who, Chester felt convinced, could see through a stone wall.

"Nonsense! What could he have on his mind?" said Miss Salome. But she said it a little anxiously. She, too, had noticed Chester's absent ways and abstracted face.

"Goodness me, I don't know! I don't suppose he has robbed a bank or murdered anybody. But he is worrying over something, as plain as plain."

"He is getting on very well at school," said Miss Salome. "His teacher says so, and he is very eager to learn. I don't know what can be troubling him."

She was fated not to know for a fortnight longer. During that time Chester fought out his struggle with himself, and conquered. He must tell Miss Salome, he decided, with a long sigh. He knew that it would mean going back to Upton and Aunt Harriet and the old, hard life, but he would not sail under false colours any longer.

Chester went into the kitchen one afternoon when he came home from school, with his lips set and his jaws even squarer than usual. Miss Salome was making some of her famous taffy, and Clemantiny was spinning yarn on the big wheel.

"Miss Salome," said Chester desperately, "if you're not too busy, there is something I'd like to tell you."

"What is it?" asked Miss Salome good-humouredly, turning to him with her spoon poised in midair over her granite saucepan.

"It's about myself. I—I—oh, Miss Salome, I didn't tell you the truth about myself. I've got to tell it now. My name isn't Benson—exactly—and I ran away from home."

"Dear me!" said Miss Salome mildly. She dropped her spoon, handle and all, into the taffy and never noticed it. "Dear me, Chester!"

"I knew it," said Clemantiny triumphantly. "I knew it—and I always said it. Run away, did you?"

"Yes'm. My name is Chester Benson Stephens, and I lived at Upton with Aunt Harriet Elwell. But she ain't any relation to me, really. She's only father's stepsister. She—she—wasn't kind to me and she wouldn't let me go to school—so I ran away."

"But, dear me, Chester, didn't you know that was very wrong?" said Miss Salome in bewilderment.

"No'm—I didn't know it then. I've been thinking lately that maybe it was. I'm—I'm real sorry."

"What did you say your real name was?" demanded Clemantiny.

"Stephens, ma'am."

"And your mother's name before she was married?"

"Mary Morrow," said Chester, wondering what upon earth Clemantiny meant.

Clemantiny turned to Miss Salome with an air of surrendering a dearly cherished opinion.

"Well, ma'am, I guess you must be right about his looking like Johnny. I must say I never could see the resemblance, but it may well be there, for he—that very fellow there—and Johnny are first cousins. Their mothers were sisters!"

"Clemantiny!" exclaimed Miss Salome.

"You may well say 'Clemantiny.' Such a coincidence! It doesn't make you and him any relation, of course—the cousinship is on the mother's side. But it's there. Mary Morrow was born and brought up in Hopedale. She went to Upton when I did, and married Oliver Stephens there. Why, I knew his father as well as I know you."

"This is wonderful," said Miss Salome. Then she added sorrowfully, "But it doesn't make your running away right, Chester."

"Tell us all about it," demanded Clemantiny, sitting down on the wood-box. "Sit down, boy, sit down—don't stand there looking as if you were on trial for your life. Tell us all about it."

Thus adjured, Chester sat down and told them all about it—his moonlight flitting and his adventures in Montrose. Miss Salome exclaimed with horror over the fact of his

sleeping in a pile of lumber for seven nights, but Clemantiny listened in silence, never taking her eyes from the boy's pale face. When Chester finished, she nodded.

"We've got it all now. There's nothing more behind, Salome. It would have been better for you to have told as straight a story at first, young man."

Chester knew that, but, having no reply to make, made none. Miss Salome looked at him wistfully.

"But, with it all, you didn't do right to run away, Chester," she said firmly. "I dare say your aunt was severe with you—but two wrongs never make a right, you know."

"No'm," said Chester.

"You must go back to your aunt," continued Miss Salome sadly.

Chester nodded. He knew this, but he could not trust himself to speak. Then did Clemantiny arise in her righteous indignation.

"Well, I never heard of such nonsense, Salome Whitney! What on earth do you want to send him back for? I knew Harriet Elwell years ago, and if she's still what she was then, it ain't much wonder Chester ran away from her. I'd say 'run,' too. Go back, indeed! You keep him right here, as you should, and let Harriet Elwell look somewhere else for somebody to scold!"

"Clemantiny!" expostulated Miss Salome.

"Oh, I must and will speak my mind, Salome. There's no one else to take Chester's part, it seems. You have as much claim on him as Harriet Elwell has. She ain't any real relation to him any more than you are."

Miss Salome looked troubled. Perhaps there was something in Clemantiny's argument. And she hated to think of seeing Chester go. He looked more like Johnny than ever, as he stood there with his flushed face and wistful eyes.

"Chester," she said gravely, "I leave it to you to decide. If you think you ought to go back to your aunt, well and good. If not, you shall stay here."

This was the hardest yet. Chester wished she had not left the decision to him. It was like cutting off his own hand. But he spoke up manfully.

"I—I think I ought to go back, Miss Salome, and I want to pay back the money, too."

"I think so, too, Chester, although I'm sorry as sorry can be. I'll go back to Upton with you. We'll start tomorrow. If, when we get there, your aunt is willing to let you stay with me, you can come back."

"There's a big chance of that!" said Clemantiny sourly. "A woman's likely to give up a boy like Chester—a good, steady worker and as respectful and obliging as there is between this and sunset—very likely, isn't she! Well, this taffy is all burnt to the saucepan and clean ruined—but what's the odds! All I hope, Salome Whitney, is that the next time you adopt a boy and let him twine himself 'round a person's heart, you'll make sure first that you are going to stick to it. I don't like having my affections torn up by the roots."

Clemantiny seized the saucepan and disappeared with it into the pantry amid a whirl of pungent smoke.

Mount Hope Farm was a strangely dismal place that night. Miss Salome sighed heavily and often as she made her preparations for the morrow's journey.

Clemantiny stalked about with her grim face grimmer than ever. As for Chester, when he went to bed that night in the little porch chamber, he cried heartily into his pillows. He didn't care for pride any longer; he just cried and didn't even pretend he wasn't crying when Miss Salome came in to sit by him a little while and talk to him. That talk comforted Chester. He realized that, come what might, he would always have a good friend in Miss Salome—aye, and in Clemantiny, too.

Chester never knew it, but after he had fallen asleep, with the tears still glistening on his brown cheeks, Clemantiny tiptoed silently in with a candle in her hand and bent over him with an expression of almost maternal tenderness on her face. It was late and an aroma of boiling sugar hung about her. She had sat up long after Miss Salome was abed, to boil another saucepan of taffy for Chester to eat on his journey.

"Poor, dear child!" she said, softly touching one of his crisp curls. "It's a shame in Salome to insist on his going back. She doesn't know what she's sending him to, or she wouldn't. He didn't say much against his aunt, and Salome thinks she was only just a little bit cranky. But *I* could guess."

Early in the morning Miss Salome and Chester started. They were to drive to Montrose, leave their team there and take the boat for Belltown. Chester bade farewell to the porch chamber and the long, white kitchen and the friendly barns with a full heart. When he climbed into the wagon, Clemantiny put a big bagful of taffy into his hands.

"Good-by, Chester," she said. "And remember, you've always got a friend in me, anyhow."

Then Clemantiny went back into the kitchen and cried—good, rough-spoken, tender-hearted Clemantiny sat down and cried.

It was an ideal day for travelling—crisp, clear and sunny—but neither Chester nor Miss Salome was in a mood for enjoyment.

Back over Chester's runaway route they went, and reached Belltown on the boat that evening.

They stayed in Belltown overnight and in the morning took the train to Roxbury Station. Here Miss Salome hired a team from the storekeeper and drove out to Upton.

Chester felt his heart sink as they drove into the Elwell yard. How well he knew it!

Miss Salome tied her hired nag to the gatepost and took Chester by the hand. They went to the door and knocked. It was opened with a jerk and Mrs. Elwell stood before them. She had probably seen them from the window, for she uttered no word of surprise at seeing Chester again. Indeed, she said nothing at all, but only stood rigidly before them.

Dear me, what a disagreeable-looking woman! thought Miss Salome. But she said courteously, "Are you Mrs. Elwell?"

"I am," said that lady forbiddingly.

"I've brought your nephew home," continued Miss Salome, laying her hand encouragingly on Chester's shrinking shoulder. "I have had him hired for some time on my farm at Hopedale, but I didn't know until yesterday that he had run away from you. When he told me about it, I thought he ought to come straight back and return your four dollars, and so did he. So I have brought him."

"You might have saved yourself the trouble then!" cried Mrs. Elwell shrilly. Her black eyes flashed with anger. "I'm done with him and don't want the money. Run away when there was work to do, and thinks he can come back now that it's all done and loaf all winter, does he? He shall never enter my house again."

"That he shall not!" cried Miss Salome, at last finding her tongue. Her gentle nature was grievously stirred by the heartlessness shown in the face and voice of Mrs. Elwell. "That he shall not!" she cried again. "But he shall not want for a home as long as I have one to give him. Come, Chester, we'll go home."

"I wish you well of him," Mrs. Elwell said sarcastically.

Miss Salome already repented her angry retort. She was afraid she had been undignified, but she wished for a moment that Clemantiny was there. Wicked as she feared it was, Miss Salome thought she could have enjoyed a tilt between her ancient handmaid and Mrs. Elwell.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Elwell, if I have used any intemperate expressions," she said with great dignity. "You provoked me more than was becoming by your remarks. I wish you good morning."

Mrs. Elwell slammed the door shut.

With her cheeks even more than usually rosy, Miss Salome led Chester down to the gate, untied her horse and drove out of the yard. Not until they reached the main road did she trust herself to speak to the dazed lad beside her.

"What a disagreeable women!" she ejaculated at last. "I don't wonder you ran away, Chester—I don't, indeed! Though, mind you, I don't think it was right, for all that. But I'm gladder than words can say that she wouldn't take you back. You are mine now, and you will stay mine. I want you to call me Aunt Salome after this. Get up, horse! If we can catch that train at Roxbury, we'll be home by night yet."

Chester was too happy to speak. He had never felt so glad and grateful in his life before.

They got home that night just as the sun was setting redly behind the great maples on the western hill. As they drove into the yard, Clemantiny's face appeared, gazing at them over the high board fence of the cow-yard. Chester waved his hand at her gleefully.

"Lawful heart!" said Clemantiny. She set down her pail and came out to the lane on a run. She caught Chester as he sprang from the wagon and gave him a hearty hug.

"I'm glad clean down to my boot soles to see you back again," she said.

"He's back for good," said Miss Salome. "Chester, you'd better go in and study up your lessons for tomorrow."

The Strike at Putney

The church at Putney was one that gladdened the hearts of all the ministers in the presbytery whenever they thought about it. It was such a satisfactory church. While other churches here and there were continually giving trouble in one way or another, the Putneyites were never guilty of brewing up internal or presbyterial strife.

The Exeter church people were always quarrelling among themselves and carrying their quarrels to the courts of the church. The very name of Exeter gave the members of presbytery the cold creeps. But the Putney church people never quarrelled.

Danbridge church was in a chronic state of ministerlessness. No minister ever stayed in Danbridge longer than he could help. The people were too critical, and they were also noted heresy hunters. Good ministers fought shy of Danbridge, and poor ones met with a chill welcome. The harassed presbytery, worn out with "supplying," were disposed to think that the millennium would come if ever the Danbridgians got a minister whom they liked. At Putney they had had the same minister for fifteen years and hoped and expected to have him for fifteen more. They looked with horror-stricken eyes on the Danbridge theological coquetries.

Bloom Valley church was over head and heels in debt and had no visible prospect of ever getting out. The moderator said under his breath that they did over-much praying and too little hoeing. He did not believe in faith without works. Tarrytown Road kept its head above water but never had a cent to spare for missions or the schemes of the church.

In bright and shining contradistinction to these the Putney church had always paid its way and gave liberally to all departments of church work. If other springs of supply ran dry the Putneyites enthusiastically got up a "tea" or a "social," and so raised the money. Naturally the "heft" of this work fell on the women, but they did not mind—in very truth, they enjoyed it. The Putney women had the reputation of being "great church workers," and they plumed themselves on it, putting on airs at conventions among the less energetic women of the other churches.

They were especially strong on societies. There was the Church Aid Society, the Girls' Flower Band, and the Sewing Circle. There was a Mission Band and a Helping Hand among the children. And finally there was the Women's Foreign Mission Auxiliary, out of which the whole trouble grew which convulsed the church at Putney for a brief time and furnished a standing joke in presbyterial circles for years afterwards. To this day ministers and elders tell the story of the Putney church strike with sparkling eyes and subdued chuckles. It never grows old or stale. But the Putney elders are an exception. They never laugh at it. They never refer to it. It is not in the wicked, unregenerate heart of man to make a jest of his own bitter defeat.

It was in June that the secretary of the Putney W.F.M. Auxiliary wrote to a noted returned missionary who was touring the country, asking her to give an address on mission work before their society. Mrs. Cotterell wrote back saying that her brief time was so taken up already that she found it hard to make any further engagements, but she could not refuse the Putney people who were so well and favourably known in mission circles for their perennial interest and liberality. So, although she could not come on the date requested, she would, if acceptable, come the following Sunday.

This suited the Putney Auxiliary very well. On the Sunday referred to there was to be no evening service in the church owing to Mr. Sinclair's absence. They therefore appointed the missionary meeting for that night, and made arrangements to hold it in the church itself, as the classroom was too small for the expected audience.

Then the thunderbolt descended on the W.F.M.A. of Putney from a clear sky. The elders of the church rose up to a man and declared that no woman should occupy the pulpit of the Putney church. It was in direct contravention to the teachings of St. Paul.

To make matters worse, Mr. Sinclair declared himself on the elders' side. He said that he could not conscientiously give his consent to a woman occupying his pulpit, even when that woman was Mrs. Cotterell and her subject foreign missions.

The members of the Auxiliary were aghast. They called a meeting extraordinary in the classroom and, discarding all forms and ceremonies in their wrath, talked their indignation out.

Out of doors the world basked in June sunshine and preened itself in blossom. The birds sang and chirped in the lichened maples that cupped the little church in, and peace was over all the Putney valley. Inside the classroom disgusted women buzzed like angry bees.

"What on earth are we to do?" sighed the secretary plaintively. Mary Kilburn was always plaintive. She sat on the steps of the platform, being too wrought up in her mind to sit in her chair at the desk, and her thin, faded little face was twisted with anxiety. "All the arrangements are made and Mrs. Cotterell is coming on the tenth. How can we tell her that the men won't let her speak?"

"There was never anything like this in Putney church before," groaned Mrs. Elder Knox. "It was Andrew McKittrick put them up to it. I always said that man would make trouble here yet, ever since he moved to Putney from Danbridge. I've talked and argued with Thomas until I'm dumb, but he is as set as a rock."

"I don't see what business the men have to interfere with us anyhow," said her daughter Lucy, who was sitting on one of the window-sills. "We don't meddle with them, I'm sure. As if Mrs. Cotterell would contaminate the pulpit!"

"One would think we were still in the dark ages," said Frances Spenslow sharply. Frances was the Putney schoolteacher. Her father was one of the recalcitrant elders and Frances felt it bitterly—all the more that she had tried to argue with him and had been sat upon as a "child who couldn't understand."

"I'm more surprised at Mr. Sinclair than at the elders," said Mrs. Abner Keech, fanning herself vigorously. "Elders are subject to queer spells periodically. They think they assert their authority that way. But Mr. Sinclair has always seemed so liberal and broad-minded."

"You never can tell what crotchet an old bachelor will take into his head," said Alethea Craig bitingly.

The others nodded agreement. Mr. Sinclair's inveterate celibacy was a standing grievance with the Putney women.

"If he had a wife who could be our president this would never have happened, I warrant you," said Mrs. King sagely.

"But what are we going to do, ladies?" said Mrs. Robbins briskly. Mrs. Robbins was the president. She was a big, bustling woman with clear blue eyes and crisp, incisive

ways. Hitherto she had held her peace. "They must talk themselves out before they can get down to business," she had reflected sagely. But she thought the time had now come to speak.

"You know," she went on, "we can talk and rage against the men all day if we like. They are not trying to prevent us. But that will do no good. Here's Mrs. Cotterell invited, and all the neighbouring auxiliaries notified—and the men won't let us have the church. The point is, how are we going to get out of the scrape?"

A helpless silence descended upon the classroom. The eyes of every woman present turned to Myra Wilson. Everyone could talk, but when it came to action they had a fashion of turning to Myra.

She had a reputation for cleverness and originality. She never talked much. So far today she had not said a word. She was sitting on the sill of the window across from Lucy Knox. She swung her hat on her knee, and loose, moist rings of dark hair curled around her dark, alert face. There was a sparkle in her grey eyes that boded ill to the men who were peaceably pursuing their avocations, rashly indifferent to what the women might be saying in the maple-shaded classroom.

"Have you any suggestion to make, Miss Wilson?" said Mrs. Robbins, with a return to her official voice and manner.

Myra put her long, slender index finger to her chin.

"I think," she said decidedly, "that we must strike."

When Elder Knox went in to tea that evening he glanced somewhat apprehensively at his wife. They had had an altercation before she went to the meeting, and he supposed she had talked herself into another rage while there. But Mrs. Knox was placid and smiling. She had made his favourite soda biscuits for him and inquired amiably after his progress in hoeing turnips in the southeast meadow.

She made, however, no reference to the Auxiliary meeting, and when the biscuits and the maple syrup and two cups of matchless tea had nerved the elder up, his curiosity got the better of his prudence—for even elders are human and curiosity knows no gender—and he asked what they had done at the meeting.

"We poor men have been shaking in our shoes," he said facetiously.

"Were you?" Mrs. Knox's voice was calm and faintly amused. "Well, you didn't need to. We talked the matter over very quietly and came to the conclusion that the session knew best and that women hadn't any right to interfere in church business at all."

Lucy Knox turned her head away to hide a smile. The elder beamed. He was a peace-loving man and disliked "ructions" of any sort and domestic ones in particular. Since the decision of the session Mrs. Knox had made his life a burden to him. He did not understand her sudden change of base, but he accepted it very thankfully.

"That's right—that's right," he said heartily. "I'm glad to hear you coming out so sensible, Maria. I was afraid you'd work yourselves up at that meeting and let Myra

Wilson or Alethea Craig put you up to some foolishness or other. Well, I guess I'll jog down to the Corner this evening and order that barrel of pastry flour you want."

"Oh, you needn't," said Mrs. Knox indifferently. "We won't be needing it now."

"Not needing it! But I thought you said you had to have some to bake for the social week after next."

"There isn't going to be any social."

"Not any social?"

Elder Knox stared perplexedly at his wife. A month previously the Putney church had been recarpeted, and they still owed fifty dollars for it. This, the women declared, they would speedily pay off by a big cake and ice-cream social in the hall. Mrs. Knox had been one of the foremost promoters of the enterprise.

"Not any social?" repeated the elder again. "Then how is the money for the carpet to be got? And *why* isn't there going to be a social?"

"The men can get the money somehow, I suppose," said Mrs. Knox. "As for the social, why, of course, if women aren't good enough to speak in church they are not good enough to work for it either. Lucy, dear, will you pass me the cookies?"

"Lucy dear" passed the cookies and then rose abruptly and left the table. Her father's face was too much for her.

"What confounded nonsense is this?" demanded the elder explosively.

Mrs. Knox opened her mellow brown eyes widely, as if in amazement at her husband's tone.

"I don't understand you," she said. "Our position is perfectly logical."

She had borrowed that phrase from Myra Wilson, and it floored the elder. He got up, seized his hat, and strode from the room.

That night, at Jacob Wherrison's store at the Corner, the Putney men talked over the new development. The social was certainly off—for a time, anyway.

"Best let 'em alone, I say," said Wherrison. "They're mad at us now and doing this to pay us out. But they'll cool down later on and we'll have the social all right."

"But if they don't," said Andrew McKittrick gloomily, "who is going to pay for that carpet?"

This was an unpleasant question. The others shirked it.

"I was always opposed to this action of the session," said Alec Craig. "It wouldn't have hurt to have let the woman speak. 'Tisn't as if it was a regular sermon."

"The session knew best," said Andrew sharply. "And the minister—you're not going to set your opinion up against his, are you, Craig?"

"Didn't know they taught such reverence for ministers in Danbridge," retorted Craig with a laugh.

"Best let 'em alone, as Wherrison says," said Abner Keech.

"Don't see what else we can do," said John Wilson shortly.

On Sunday morning the men were conscious of a bare, deserted appearance in the church. Mr. Sinclair perceived it himself. After some inward wondering he concluded that it was because there were no flowers anywhere. The table before the pulpit was bare. On the organ a vase held a sorry, faded bouquet left over from the previous week. The floor was' unswept. Dust lay thickly on the pulpit Bible, the choir chairs, and the pew backs.

"This church looks disgraceful," said John Robbins in an angry undertone to his daughter Polly, who was president of the Flower Band. "What in the name of common sense is the good of your Flower Banders if you can't keep the place looking decent?"

"There is no Flower Band now, Father," whispered Polly in turn. "We've disbanded. Women haven't any business to meddle in church matters. You know the session said so."

It was well for Polly that she was too big to have her ears boxed. Even so, it might not have saved her if they had been anywhere else than in church.

Meanwhile the men who were sitting in the choir—three basses and two tenors—were beginning to dimly suspect that there was something amiss here too. Where were the sopranos and the altos? Myra Wilson and Alethea Craig and several other members of the choir were sitting down in their pews with perfectly unconscious faces. Myra was looking out of the window into the tangled sunlight and shadow of the great maples. Alethea Craig was reading her Bible.

Presently Frances Spenslow came in. Frances was organist, but today, instead of walking up to the platform, she slipped demurely into her father's pew at one side of the pulpit. Eben Craig, who was the Putney singing master and felt himself responsible for the choir, fidgeted uneasily. He tried to catch Frances's eye, but she was absorbed in reading the mission report she had found in the rack, and Eben was finally forced to tiptoe down to the Spenslow pew and whisper, "Miss Spenslow, the minister is waiting for the doxology. Aren't you going to take the organ?"

Frances looked up calmly. Her clear, placid voice was audible not only to those in the nearby pews, but to the minister.

"No, Mr. Craig. You know if a woman isn't fit to speak in the church she can't be fit to sing in it either."

Eben Craig looked exceedingly foolish. He tiptoed gingerly back to his place. The minister, with an unusual flush on his thin, ascetic face, rose suddenly and gave out the opening hymn.

Nobody who heard the singing in Putney church that day ever forgot it. Untrained basses and tenors, unrelieved by a single female voice, are not inspiring.

There were no announcements of society meetings for the forthcoming week. On the way home from church that day irate husbands and fathers scolded, argued, or pleaded, according to their several dispositions. One and all met with the same calm statement that if a noble, self-sacrificing woman like Mrs. Cotterell were not good enough to speak in the Putney church, ordinary, everyday women could not be fit to take any part whatever in its work.

Sunday School that afternoon was a harrowing failure. Out of all the corps of teachers only one was a man, and he alone was at his post. In the Christian Endeavour meeting on Tuesday night the feminine element sat dumb and unresponsive. The Putney women never did things by halves.

The men held out for two weeks. At the end of that time they "happened" to meet at the manse and talked the matter over with the harassed minister. Elder Knox said gloomily, "It's this way. Nothing can move them women. I know, for I've tried. My authority has been set at naught in my own household. And I'm laughed at if I show my face in any of the other settlements."

The Sunday School superintendent said the Sunday School was going to wrack and ruin, also the Christian Endeavour. The condition of the church for dust was something scandalous, and strangers were making a mockery of the singing. And the carpet had to be paid for. He supposed they would have to let the women have their own way.

The next Sunday evening after service Mr. Sinclair arose hesitatingly. His face was flushed, and Alethea Craig always declared that he looked "just plain everyday cross." He announced briefly that the session after due deliberation had concluded that Mrs. Cotterell might occupy the pulpit on the evening appointed for her address.

The women all over the church smiled broadly. Frances Spenslow got up and went to the organ stool. The singing in the last hymn was good and hearty. Going down the steps after dismissal Mrs. Elder Knox caught the secretary of the Church Aid by the arm.

"I guess," she whispered anxiously, "you'd better call a special meeting of the Aids at my house tomorrow afternoon. If we're to get that social over before haying begins we've got to do some smart scurrying."

The strike in the Putney church was over.

The Unhappiness of Miss Farquhar

Frances Farquhar was a beauty and was sometimes called a society butterfly by people who didn't know very much about it. Her father was wealthy and her mother came of an extremely blue-blooded family. Frances had been out for three years, and was a social favourite. Consequently, it may be wondered why she was unhappy.

In plain English, Frances Farquhar had been jilted—just a commonplace, everyday jilting! She had been engaged to Paul Holcomb; he was a very handsome fellow, somewhat too evidently aware of the fact, and Frances was very deeply in love with him—or thought herself so, which at the time comes to pretty much the same thing.

Everybody in her set knew of her engagement, and all her girl friends envied her, for Holcomb was a matrimonial catch.

Then the crash came. Nobody outside the family knew exactly what did happen, but everybody knew that the Holcomb-Farquhar match was off, and everybody had a different story to account for it.

The simple truth was that Holcomb was fickle and had fallen in love with another girl. There was nothing of the man about him, and it did not matter to his sublimely selfish caddishness whether he broke Frances Farquhar's heart or not. He got his freedom and he married Maud Carroll in six months' time.

The Farquhars, especially Ned, who was Frances's older brother and seldom concerned himself about her except when the family honour was involved, were furious at the whole affair. Mr. Farquhar stormed, and Ned swore, and Della lamented her vanished role of bridemaid. As for Mrs. Farquhar, she cried and said it would ruin Frances's future prospects.

The girl herself took no part in the family indignation meetings. But she believed that her heart was broken. Her love and her pride had suffered equally, and the effect seemed disastrous.

After a while the Farquhars calmed down and devoted themselves to the task of cheering Frances up. This they did not accomplish. She got through the rest of the season somehow and showed a proud front to the world, not even flinching when Holcomb himself crossed her path. To be sure, she was pale and thin, and had about as much animation as a mask, but the same might be said of a score of other girls who were not suspected of having broken hearts.

When the summer came Frances asserted herself. The Farquhars went to Green Harbour every summer. But this time Frances said she would not go, and stuck to it. The whole family took turns coaxing her and had nothing to show for their pains.

"I'm going up to Windy Meadows to stay with Aunt Eleanor while you are at the Harbour," she declared. "She has invited me often enough."

Ned whistled. "Jolly time you'll have of it, Sis. Windy Meadows is about as festive as a funeral. And Aunt Eleanor isn't lively, to put it in the mildest possible way."

"I don't care if she isn't. I want to get somewhere where people won't look at me and talk about—that," said Frances, looking ready to cry.

Ned went out and swore at Holcomb again, and then advised his mother to humour Frances. Accordingly, Frances went to Windy Meadows.

Windy Meadows was, as Ned had said, the reverse of lively. It was a pretty country place, with a sort of fag-end by way of a little fishing village, huddled on a wind-swept bit of beach, locally known as the "Cove." Aunt Eleanor was one of those delightful people, so few and far between in this world, who have perfectly mastered the art of minding their own business exclusively. She left Frances in peace.

She knew that her niece had had "some love trouble or other," and hadn't gotten over it rightly.

"It's always best to let those things take their course," said this philosophical lady to her "help" and confidant, Margaret Ann Peabody. "She'll get over it in time—though she doesn't think so now, bless you."

For the first fortnight Frances revelled in a luxury of unhindered sorrow. She could cry all night—and all day too, if she wished—without having to stop because people might notice that her eyes were red. She could mope in her room all she liked. And there were no men who demanded civility.

When the fortnight was over, Aunt Eleanor took crafty counsel with herself. The letting-alone policy was all very well, but it would not do to have the girl die on her hands. Frances was getting paler and thinner every day—and she was spoiling her eyelashes by crying.

"I wish," said Aunt Eleanor one morning at breakfast, while Frances pretended to eat, "that I could go and take Corona Sherwood out for a drive today. I promised her last week that I would, but I've never had time yet. And today is baking and churning day. It's a shame. Poor Corona!"

"Who is she?" asked Frances, trying to realize that there was actually someone in the world besides herself who was to be pitied.

"She is our minister's sister. She has been ill with rheumatic fever. She is better now, but doesn't seem to get strong very fast. She ought to go out more, but she isn't able to walk. I really must try and get around tomorrow. She keeps house for her brother at the manse. He isn't married, you know."

Frances didn't know, nor did she in the least degree care. But even the luxury of unlimited grief palls, and Frances was beginning to feel this vaguely. She offered to go and take Miss Sherwood out driving.

"I've never seen her," she said, "but I suppose that doesn't matter. I can drive Grey Tom in the phaeton, if you like."

It was just what Aunt Eleanor intended, and she saw Frances drive off that afternoon with a great deal of satisfaction.

"Give my love to Corona," she told her, "and say for me that she isn't to go messing about among those shore people until she's perfectly well. The manse is the fourth house after you turn the third corner."

Frances kept count of the corners and the houses and found the manse. Corona Sherwood herself came to the door. Frances had been expecting an elderly personage with spectacles and grey crimps; she was surprised to find that the minister's sister was a girl of about her own age and possessed of a distinct worldly prettiness. Corona was dark, with a different darkness from that of Frances, who had ivory outlines and blue-black hair, while Corona was dusky and piquant.

Her eyes brightened with delight when Frances told her errand.

"How good of you and Miss Eleanor! I am not strong enough to walk far yet—or do anything useful, in fact, and Elliott so seldom has time to take me out."

"Where shall we go?" asked Frances when they started. "I don't know much about this locality."

"Can we drive to the Cove first? I want to see poor little Jacky Hart. He has been so sick—"

"Aunt Eleanor positively forbade that," said Frances dubiously. "Will it be safe to disobey her?"

Corona laughed.

"Miss Eleanor blames my poor shore people for making me sick at first, but it was really not that at all. And I want to see Jacky Hart so much. He has been ill for some time with some disease of the spine and he is worse lately. I'm sure Miss Eleanor won't mind my calling just to see him."

Frances turned Grey Tom down the shore road that ran to the Cove and past it to silvery, wind-swept sands, rimming sea expanses crystal clear. Jacky Hart's home proved to be a tiny little place overflowing with children. Mrs. Hart was a pale, tired-looking woman with the patient, farseeing eyes so often found among the women who watch sea and shore every day and night of their lives for those who sometimes never return.

She spoke of Jacky with the apathy of hopelessness. The doctor said he would not last much longer. She told all her troubles unreservedly to Corona in her monotonous voice. Her "man" was drinking again and the mackerel catch was poor.

When Mrs. Hart asked Corona to go in and see Jacky, Frances went too. The sick boy, a child with a delicate, wasted face and large, bright eyes, lay in a tiny bedroom off the kitchen. The air was hot and heavy. Mrs. Hart stood at the foot of the bed with her tragic face.

"We have to set up nights with him now," she said. "It's awful hard on me and my man. The neighbours are kind enough and come sometimes, but most of them have enough to do. His medicine has to be given every half hour. I've been up for three nights running now. Jabez was off to the tavern for two. I'm just about played out."

She suddenly broke down and began to cry, or rather whimper, in a heart-broken way.

Corona looked troubled. "I wish I could come tonight, Mrs. Hart, but I'm afraid I'm really not strong enough yet."

"I don't know much about sickness," spoke up Frances firmly, "but if to sit by the child and give him his medicine regularly is all that is necessary, I am sure I can do that. I'll come and sit up with Jacky tonight if you care to have me."

Afterwards, when she and Corona were driving away, she wondered a good deal at herself. But Corona was so evidently pleased with her offer, and took it all so much as a matter of course, that Frances had not the courage to display her wonder. They had their drive through the great green bowl of the country valley, brimming over with sunshine, and afterwards Corona made Frances go home with her to tea.

Rev. Elliott Sherwood had got back from his pastoral visitations, and was training his sweet peas in the way they should go against the garden fence. He was in his shirt sleeves and wore a big straw hat, and seemed in nowise disconcerted thereby. Corona introduced him, and he took Grey Tom away and put him in the barn. Then he went back to his sweet peas. He had had his tea, he said, so that Frances did not see him again until she went home. She thought he was a very indifferent young man, and not half so nice as his sister.

But she went and sat up with Jacky Hart that night, getting to the Cove at dark, when the sea was a shimmer of fairy tints and the boats were coming in from the fishing grounds. Jacky greeted her with a wonderful smile, and later on she found herself watching alone by his bed. The tiny lamp on the table burned dim, and outside, on the rocks, there was loud laughing and talking until a late hour.

Afterwards a silence fell, through which the lap of the waves on the sands and the far-off moan of the Atlantic surges came sonorously. Jacky was restless and wakeful, but did not suffer, and liked to talk. Frances listened to him with a new-born power of sympathy, which she thought she must have caught from Corona. He told her all the tragedy of his short life, and how bad he felt, about Dad's taking to drink and Mammy's having to work so hard.

The pitiful little sentences made Frances's heart ache. The maternal instinct of the true woman awoke in her. She took a sudden liking to the child. He was a spiritual little creature, and his sufferings had made him old and wise. Once in the night he told Frances that he thought the angels must look like her.

"You are so sweet pretty," he said gravely. "I never saw anyone so pretty, not even Miss C'rona. You look like a picture I once saw on Mr. Sherwood's table when I was up at the manse one day 'fore I got so bad I couldn't walk. It was a woman with a li'l baby in her arms and a kind of rim round her head. I would like something most awful much."

"What is it, dear?" said Frances gently. "If I can get or do it for you, I will."

"You could," he said wistfully, "but maybe you won't want to. But I do wish you'd come here just once every day and sit here five minutes and let me look at you—just that. Will it be too much trouble?"

Frances stooped and kissed him. "I will come every day, Jacky," she said; and a look of ineffable content came over the thin little face. He put up his hand and touched her cheek.

"I knew you were good—as good as Miss C'rona, and she is an angel. I love you."

When morning came Frances went home. It was raining, and the sea was hidden in mist. As she walked along the wet road, Elliott Sherwood came splashing along in a little two-wheeled gig and picked her up. He wore a raincoat and a small cap, and did not look at all like a minister—or, at least, like Frances's conception of one.

Not that she knew much about ministers. Her own minister at home—that is to say, the minister of the fashionable uptown church which she attended—was a portly, dignified old man with silvery hair and gold-rimmed glasses, who preached scholarly, cultured sermons and was as far removed from Frances's personal life as a star in the Milky Way.

But a minister who wore rubber coats and little caps and drove about in a two-wheeled gig, very much mud-bespattered, and who talked about the shore people as if they were household intimates of his, was absolutely new to Frances.

She could not help seeing, however, that the crisp brown hair under the edges of the unclerical-looking cap curled around a remarkably well-shaped forehead, beneath which flashed out a pair of very fine dark-grey eyes; he had likewise a good mouth, which was resolute and looked as if it might be stubborn on occasion; and, although he was not exactly handsome, Frances decided that she liked his face.

He tucked the wet, slippery rubber apron of his conveyance about her and then proceeded to ask questions. Jacky Hart's case had to be reported on, and then Mr. Sherwood took out a notebook and looked over its entries intently.

"Do you want any more work of that sort to do?" he asked her abruptly.

Frances felt faintly amused. He talked to her as he might have done to Corona, and seemed utterly oblivious of the fact that her profile was classic and her eyes delicious. His indifference piqued Frances a little in spite of her murdered heart. Well, if there was anything she could do she might as well do it, she told him briefly, and he, with equal brevity, gave her directions for finding some old lady who lived on the Elm Creek road and to whom Corona had read tracts.

"Tracts are a mild dissipation of Aunt Clorinda's," he said. "She fairly revels in them. She is half blind and has missed Corona very much."

There were other matters also—a dozen or so of factory girls who needed to be looked after and a family of ragged children to be clothed. Frances, in some dismay, found herself pledged to help in all directions, and then ways and means had to be discussed. The long, wet road, sprinkled with houses, from whose windows people were peering to see "what girl the minister was driving," seemed very short. Frances did not know it, but Elliott Sherwood drove a full mile out of his way that morning to take her home, and risked being late for a very important appointment—from which it may be inferred that he was not quite so blind to the beautiful as he had seemed.

Frances went through the rain that afternoon and read tracts to Aunt Clorinda. She was so dreadfully tired that night that she forgot to cry, and slept well and soundly.

In the morning she went to church for the first time since coming to Windy Meadows. It did not seem civil not to go to hear a man preach when she had gone slumming with his sister and expected to assist him with his difficulties over factory girls. She was surprised at Elliott Sherwood's sermon, and mentally wondered why such a man had been allowed to remain for four years in a little country pulpit. Later on Aunt Eleanor told her it was for his health.

"He was not strong when he left college, so he came here. But he is as well as ever now, and I expect he will soon be gobbled up by some of your city churches. He preached in Castle Street church last winter, and I believe they were delighted with him."

This was all of a month later. During that time Frances thought that she must have been re-created, so far was her old self left behind. She seldom had an idle moment; when she had, she spent it with Corona. The two girls had become close friends, loving each other with the intensity of exceptional and somewhat exclusive natures.

Corona grew strong slowly, and could do little for her brother's people, but Frances was an excellent proxy, and Elliott Sherwood kept her employed. Incidentally, Frances had come to know the young minister, with his lofty ideals and earnest efforts, very well. He had got into a ridiculous habit of going to her—her, Frances Farquhar!—for advice in many perplexities.

Frances had nursed Jacky Hart and talked temperance to his father and read tracts to Aunt Clorinda and started a reading circle among the factory girls and fitted out all the little Jarboes with dresses and coaxed the shore children to go to school and patched up a feud between two 'longshore families and done a hundred other things of a similar nature.

Aunt Eleanor said nothing, as was her wise wont, but she talked it over with Margaret Ann Peabody, and agreed with that model domestic when she said: "Work'll keep folks out of trouble and help 'em out of it when they are in. Just as long as that girl brooded over her own worries and didn't think of anyone but herself she was miserable. But as

soon as she found other folks were unhappy, too, and tried to help 'em out a bit, she helped herself most of all. She's getting fat and rosy, and it is plain to be seen that the minister thinks there isn't the like of her on this planet."

One night Frances told Corona all about Holcomb. Elliott Sherwood was away, and Frances had gone up to stay all night with Corona at the manse. They were sitting in the moonlit gloom of Corona's room, and Frances felt confidential. She had expected to feel badly and cry a little while she told it. But she did not, and before she was half through, it did not seem as if it were worth telling after all. Corona was deeply sympathetic. She did not say a great deal, but what she did say put Frances on better terms with herself.

"Oh, I shall get over it," the latter declared finally. "Once I thought I never would—but the truth is, I'm getting over it now. I'm very glad—but I'm horribly ashamed, too, to find myself so fickle."

"I don't think you are fickle, Frances," said Corona gravely, "because I don't think you ever really loved that man at all. You only imagined you did. And he was not worthy of you. You are so good, dear; those shore people just worship you. Elliott says you can do anything you like with them."

Frances laughed and said she was not at all good. Yet she was pleased. Later on, when she was brushing her hair before the mirror and smiling absently at her reflection, Corona said: "Frances, what is it like to be as pretty as you are?"

"Nonsense!" said Frances by way of answer.

"It is not nonsense at all. You must know you are very lovely, Frances. Elliott says you are the most beautiful girl he has ever seen."

For a girl who has told herself a dozen times that she would never care again for masculine admiration, Frances experienced a very odd thrill of delight on hearing that the minister of Windy Meadows thought her beautiful. She knew he admired her intellect and had immense respect for what he called her "genius for influencing people," but she had really believed all along that, if Elliott Sherwood had been asked, he could not have told whether she was a whit better looking than Kitty Martin of the Cove, who taught a class in Sunday school and had round rosy cheeks and a snub nose.

The summer went very quickly. One day Jacky Hart died—drifted out with the ebb tide, holding Frances's hand. She had loved the patient, sweet-souled little creature and missed him greatly.

When the time to go home came Frances felt dull. She hated to leave Windy Meadows and Corona and her dear shore people and Aunt Eleanor and—and—well, Margaret Ann Peabody.

Elliott Sherwood came up the night before she went away. When Margaret Ann showed him reverentially in, Frances was sitting in a halo of sunset light, and the pale, golden chrysanthemums in her hair shone like stars in the blue-black coils.

Elliott Sherwood had been absent from Windy Meadows for several days. There was a subdued jubilance in his manner.

"You think I have come to say good-bye, but I haven't," he told her. "I shall see you again very soon, I hope. I have just received a call to Castle Street church, and it is my intention to accept. So Corona and I will be in town this winter."

Frances tried to tell him how glad she was, but only stammered. Elliott Sherwood came close up to her as she stood by the window in the fading light, and said—

But on second thoughts I shall not record what he said—or what she said either. Some things should be left to the imagination.

Why Mr. Cropper Changed His Mind

"Well, Miss Maxwell, how did you get along today?" asked Mr. Baxter affably, when the new teacher came to the table.

She was a slight, dark girl, rather plain-looking, but with a smart, energetic way. Mr. Baxter approved of her; he "liked her style," as he would have said.

The summer term had just opened in the Maitland district. Esther Maxwell was a stranger, but she was a capable girl, and had no doubt of her own ability to get and keep the school in good working order. She smiled brightly at Mr. Baxter.

"Very well for a beginning. The children seem bright and teachable and not hard to control."

Mr. Baxter nodded. 'There are no bad children in the school except the Cropper boys—and they can be good enough if they like. Reckon they weren't there today?"

"No."

"Well, Miss Maxwell, I think it only fair to tell you that you may have trouble with those boys when they do come. Forewarned is forearmed, you know. Mr. Cropper was opposed to our hiring you. Not, of course, that he had any personal objection to you, but he is set against female teachers, and when a Cropper is set there is nothing on earth can change him. He says female teachers can't keep order. He's started in with a spite at you on general principles, and the boys know it. They know he'll back them up in secret, no matter what they do, just to prove his opinions. Cropper is sly and slippery, and it is hard to corner him."

"Are the boys big?" queried Esther anxiously.

"Yes. Thirteen and fourteen and big for their age. You can't whip 'em—that is the trouble. A man might, but they'd twist you around their fingers. You'll have your hands full, I'm afraid. But maybe they'll behave all right after all."

Mr. Baxter privately had no hope that they would, but Esther hoped for the best. She could not believe that Mr. Cropper would carry his prejudices into a personal application. This conviction was strengthened when he overtook her walking from school the next day and drove her home. He was a big, handsome man with a very suave, polite manner. He asked interestedly about her school and her work, hoped she

was getting on well, and said he had two young rascals of his own to send soon. Esther felt relieved. She thought that Mr. Baxter had exaggerated matters a little.

"That plum tree of Mrs. Charley's is loaded with fruit again this year," remarked Mr. Baxter at the tea table that evening. "I came past it today on my way 'cross lots home from the woods. There will be bushels of plums on it."

"I don't suppose poor Mrs. Charley will get one of them any more than she ever has," said Mrs. Baxter indignantly. "It's a burning shame, that's what it is! I just wish she could catch the Croppers once."

"You haven't any proof that it is really them, Mary," objected her husband, "and you shouldn't make reckless accusations before folks."

"I know very well it is them," retorted Mrs. Baxter, "and so do you, Adoniram. And Mrs. Charley knows it too, although she can't prove it—more's the pity! I don't say Isaac Cropper steals those plums with his own hands. But he knows who does—and the plums go into Mehitable Cropper's preserving kettle; there's nothing surer."

"You see, Miss Maxwell, it's this way," explained Mr. Baxter, turning to Esther. "Mrs. Charley Cropper's husband was Isaac's brother. They never got on well together, and when Charley died there was a tremendous fuss about the property. Isaac acted mean and scandalous clear through, and public opinion has been down on him ever since. But Mrs. Charley is a pretty smart woman, and he didn't get the better of her in everything. There was a strip of disputed land between the two farms, and she secured it. There's a big plum tree growing on it close to the line fence. It's the finest one in Maitland. But Mrs. Charley never gets a plum from it."

"But what becomes of them?" asked Esther.

"They disappear," said Mr. Baxter, with a significant nod. "When the plums are anything like ripe Mrs. Charley discovers some day that there isn't one left on the tree. She has never been able to get a scrap of proof as to who took them, or she'd make it hot for them. But nobody in Maitland has any doubt in his own mind that Isaac Cropper knows where those plums go."

"I don't think Mr. Cropper would steal," protested Esther.

"Well, he doesn't consider it stealing, you know. He claims the land and says the plums are his. I don't doubt that he is quite clear in his own mind that they are. And he does hate Mrs. Charley. I'd give considerable to see the old sinner fairly caught, but he is too deep."

"I think Mr. Baxter is too hard on Mr. Cropper," said Esther to herself later on. "He has probably some private prejudice against him."

But a month later she had changed her opinion. During that time the Cropper boys had come to school.

At first Esther had been inclined to like them. They were handsome lads, with the same smooth way that characterized their father, and seemed bright and intelligent. For a few days all went well, and Esther felt decidedly relieved.

But before long a subtle spirit of insubordination began to make itself felt in the school. Esther found herself powerless to cope with it. The Croppers never openly defied her, but they did precisely as they pleased. The other pupils thought themselves at liberty to follow this example, and in a month's time poor Esther had completely lost control of her little kingdom. Some complaints were heard among the ratepayers and even Mr. Baxter looked dubious. She knew that unless she could regain her authority she would be requested to hand in her resignation, but she was baffled by the elusive system of defiance which the Cropper boys had organized.

One day she resolved to go to Mr. Cropper himself and appeal to his sense of justice, if he had any. It had been an especially hard day in school. When she had been absent at the noon hour all the desks in the schoolroom had been piled in a pyramid on the floor, books and slates interchanged, and various other pranks played. When questioned every pupil denied having done or helped to do it. Alfred and Bob Cropper looked her squarely in the eyes and declared their innocence in their usual gentlemanly fashion, yet Esther felt sure that they were the guilty ones. She also knew what exaggerated accounts of the affair would be taken home to Maitland tea tables, and she felt like sitting down to cry. But she did not. Instead she set her mouth firmly, helped the children restore the room to order, and after school went up to Isaac Cropper's house.

That gentleman himself came in from the harvest field looking as courtly as usual, even in his rough working clothes. He shook hands heartily, told her he was glad to see her, and began talking about the weather. Esther was not to be turned from her object thus, although she felt her courage ebbing away from her as it always did in the presence of the Cropper imperviousness.

"I have come up to see you about Alfred and Robert, Mr. Cropper," she said. "They are not behaving well in school."

"Indeed!" Mr. Cropper's voice expressed bland surprise. "That is strange. As a rule I do not think Alfred and Robert have been troublesome to their teachers. What have they been doing now?"

"They refuse to obey my orders," said Esther faintly.

"Ah, well, Miss Maxwell, perhaps you will pardon my saying that a teacher should be able to enforce her orders. My boys are high-spirited fellows and need a strong, firm hand to restrain them. I have always said I considered it advisable to employ a male teacher in Maitland school. We should have better order. Not that I disapprove of you personally—far from it. I should be glad to see you succeed. But I have heard many complaints regarding the order in school at present."

"I had no trouble until your boys came," retorted Esther, losing her temper a little, "and I believe that if you were willing to co-operate with me that I could govern them."

"Well, you see," said Mr. Cropper easily, "when I send my boys to school I naturally expect that the teacher will be capable of doing the work she has been hired to do."

"Then you refuse to help me?" said Esther in a trembling voice.

"Why, my dear young lady, what can I do? Boys soon know when they can disobey a teacher with impunity. No doubt you will be able to secure a school easier to control

and will do good work. But here, as I have already said, we need a firm hand at the helm. But you are not going yet, Miss Maxwell? You need some refreshment after your long walk. Mrs. Cropper will bring you in something."

"No, thank you," said poor Esther. She felt that she must get away at once or she would burst into heartsick tears under those steely, bland blue eyes. When she got home she shut herself up in her room and cried. There was nothing for her to do but resign, she thought dismally.

On the following Saturday Esther went for an afternoon walk, carrying her kodak with her. It was a brilliantly fine autumn day, and woods and fields were basking in a mellow haze. Esther went across lots to Mrs. Charley Cropper's house, intending to make a call. But the house was locked up and evidently deserted, so she rambled past it to the back fields. Passing through a grove of maples she came out among leafy young saplings on the other side. Just beyond her, with its laden boughs hanging over the line fence, was the famous plum tree. Esther looked at it for a moment. Then an odd smile gleamed over her face and she lifted her kodak.

Monday evening Esther called on Mr. Cropper again. After the preliminary remarks in which he indulged, she said, with seeming irrelevance, that Saturday had been a fine day.

"There was an excellent light for snapshots," she went on coolly. "I went out with my kodak and was lucky enough to get a good negative. I have brought you up a proof. I thought you would be interested in it."

She rose and placed the proof on the table before Mr. Cropper. The plum tree came out clearly. Bob and Alf Cropper were up among the boughs picking the plums. On the ground beneath them stood their father with a basket of fruit in his hand.

Mr. Cropper looked at the proof and from it to Esther. His eyes had lost their unconcerned glitter, but his voice was defiant.

"The plums are mine by right," he said.

"Perhaps," said Esther calmly, "but there are some who do not think so. Mrs. Charley, for instance—she would like to see this proof, I think."

"Don't show it to her," cried Mr. Cropper hastily. "I tell you, Miss Maxwell, the plums are mine. But I am tired of fighting over them and I had decided before this that I'd let her have them after this. It's only a trifle, anyhow. And about that little matter we were discussing the other night, Miss Maxwell. I have been thinking it over, and I admit I was somewhat unreasonable. I'll talk to Alfred and Robert and see what I can do."

"Very well," said Esther quietly. "The matter of the plums isn't my business and I don't wish to be involved in your family feuds, especially as you say that you mean to allow Mrs. Charley to enjoy her own in future. As for the school, we will hope that matters will improve."

"You'll leave the proof with me, won't you?" said Mr. Cropper eagerly.

"Oh, certainly," said Esther, smiling. "I have the negative still, you know."

From that time out the Cropper boys were models of good behaviour and the other turbulent spirits, having lost their leaders, were soon quelled. Complaint died away, and at the end of the term Esther was re-engaged.

"You seem to have won old Cropper over to your side entirely," Mr. Baxter told her that night. "He said at the meeting today that you were the best teacher we had ever had and moved to raise your salary. I never knew Isaac Cropper to change his opinions so handsomely."

Esther smiled. She knew it had taken a powerful lever to change Mr. Cropper's opinion, but she kept her own counsel.