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ELSIE AT HOME

By

MARTHA FINLEY

Author of "Elsie Dinsmore," "Elsie's Vacation," etc.

SPECIAL AUTHORIZED EDITION



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ELSIE AT HOME.

CHAPTER I.

The shades of evening were closing in upon a stormy March day; rain and sleet falling fast while a blustering northeast wind sent them sweeping across the desolate-looking fields and gardens, and over the wet road where a hack was lumbering along, drawn by two weary-looking steeds; its solitary passenger sighing and groaning with impatience over its slow progress and her own fatigue.

"Driver," she called, "are we ever going to arrive at Fairview?"

"One o' these days, I reckon, ma'am," drawled the man in reply. "It's been a dreadful tedious ride for you, but a trifle worse for me, seein' I get a lot more o' the wet out here than you do in thar."

"Yes," she returned in a tone of exasperation, "but I am a weak, ailing woman and you a big, strong man, used to exertion and exposure." The sentence ended in a distressing fit of coughing that seemed to shake her whole frame.

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"I'm right sorry fur ye, ma'am," he said, turning a pitying glance upon her, "but just hold on a bit longer and we'll be there. We're e'n a'most in sight o' the place now. Kin o' yourn and expecting ye, I s'pose?"

"It is the home of my daughter—my only child," she returned, bridling, "and it will be strange indeed if she is not glad to see the mother whom she has not seen for years."

"Surely, ma'am; and yonder's the house. We'll be there in five minutes—more or less."

His passenger looked eagerly in the direction indicated.

"A large house, isn't it?" she queried. "One can't see much out of this little pane of glass and through the rain and mist."

"It's a fine place, ma'am, and a good, big house," he returned. "I wouldn't mind ownin' such a place myself. It's grand in the summer time, and not so bad to look at even now through all this storm o' mist, hail, and rain."

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"Yes; I dare say," she said, shivering; "and if it was little better than a hovel I'd be glad to reach it and get out of this chilling wind. It penetrates to one's very bones."

She drew her cloak closer about her as she spoke, and as the hack turned in at the avenue gates took up her satchel and umbrella in evident haste to alight.

In the home-like parlour of the mansion they were approaching sat a lovely-looking lady of mature years, a little group of children gathered about her listening intently and with great interest to a story she was telling them, while a sweet-faced young girl, sitting near with a bit of tattling in her hands, seemed an equally interested hearer, ready to join in the outburst of merriment that now and again greeted something in the narrative.

"There is a hack coming up the avenue, Eva. Can we be going to have a visitor this stormy day?" suddenly exclaimed the eldest boy, glancing out of the window near where he stood. "Yes,

it has come to a standstill at the foot of the veranda steps, and the driver seems to be getting ready to help someone out."

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"A lady! Why, who can she be?" cried Eric, the next in age, as the hack door was thrown open and the driver assisted his passenger to alight, while Evelyn laid down her work and hastened into the hall to greet and welcome the guest, whoever she might be; for the Fairview family, like nearly every other in that region of country, was exceedingly hospitable.

A servant had already opened the outer door and now another stepped forward to take the lady's satchel and umbrella.

"Who can she be?" Evelyn asked herself as she hastily crossed the veranda and held out a welcoming hand with a word or two of pleasant greeting.

"Is it you, Evelyn?" asked the stranger in tones that trembled with emotion. "And do you not know me—your own mother!"

"Mother; oh, mother, can it be you?" cried Evelyn, catching the stranger in her arms and holding her fast with sobs and tears and kisses. "I had not heard from you for so long, and have been feeling as if I should never see you again. And oh, how thin and weak you look! You are sick, mother!" she added in tones of grief and anxiety, as she drew her into the hall, where by this time the rest of the family—Grandma Elsie, and Mr. and Mrs. Leland and their children—were gathered.

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"Sister Laura! is it possible! Welcome to Fairview," was Mrs. Leland's greeting, accompanied by a warm embrace.

"Laura! we did not even know you were in America!" Mr. Leland said, grasping her hand in brotherly fashion. "And how weary and ill you are looking! Let me help you off with your bonnet and cloak and to a couch here in the parlour."

"Thank you; yes, I'll be very glad to lie down, for I'm worn out with my journey and this troublesome cough," she said, struggling with a renewed paroxysm and gasping for breath. "But my luggage and—"

"We'll attend to all that," he said, half carrying her to the couch where his wife and her mother were arranging the pillows for her comfort, and laying her gently down upon it.

"Oh, mother; my poor dear mother!" sighed Evelyn, as she leaned over her, smoothing her hair with caressing hand, "it breaks my heart to see you looking so weary and ill. But we will soon nurse you back to health and strength—uncle and aunt and I."

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"I hope so, indeed," Mrs. Leland said in her sweet, gentle tones. "You have had most unpleasant weather for your journey, Laura, so that it is not to be wondered at that you are exhausted. You must have some refreshment at once," and with the last word she hastened away in search of it.

"And here is something to relieve that dreadful cough," said Mrs. Travilla, presenting herself with a delicate china cup in her hand.

Evelyn introduced the two ladies, and her mother, being assured that the cup contained nothing unpleasant to the taste, quickly swallowed its contents, then lay back quietly upon her pillows, still keeping fast hold of her daughter's hand, while Grandma Elsie, giving the cup to a servant to carry away, resumed her easy chair on the farther side of the room—near enough to be ready to render assistance should it be needed, yet not so near as to interfere with any private talk between the long separated mother and daughter—and her grandchildren again gathered about her. But they seemed awed into silence by the presence of the stranger invalid, whom they gazed upon with pitying curiosity, while her attention seemed equally occupied with them.

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"Your uncle's children?" she asked of Evelyn in a tone scarcely louder than a whisper.

"Yes, mamma. Edward, the eldest, you saw when he was a mere baby boy. Eric, the next, is papa's namesake. The eldest of the little girls—she is in her fifth year—is Elsie Alicia, named for her two grandmothers; we call her Alie. And the youngest—that two-year-old darling—we call Vi. She is named for her aunt, Mrs. Raymond."

"And Mrs. Travilla lives here with her daughter?"

"No; she is paying a visit of a few days, as she often does since her daughter-in-law, Aunt Zoe, has undertaken the most of the housekeeping at Ion."

"She certainly looks very young to be mother and grandmother to so many," sighed the invalid, catching sight of her own sallow, prematurely wrinkled face reflected in a large mirror on the opposite side of the room. "But she has had an easy life, surrounded by kind, affectionate, sympathising friends, while I—miserable woman that I am—have been worried, brow-beaten, robbed, till nothing is left me but ill-health and grinding poverty."

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"Mother, mother dear, don't talk so while I am left you and have enough to keep us both, with care and economy," entreated Evelyn in a voice half choked with sobs. "It will be joy to me to share with you and do all I can to make your last days comfortable and happy."

"Then you haven't lost all your love for your mother in our years of separation?"

"No, no indeed!" answered Evelyn earnestly. But there the conversation ended for the time, Mrs. Leland returning with the promised refreshment. It seemed to give some strength to the invalid, and after taking it she was, by her own request, assisted to her room, an apartment opening into that of her daughter, with whose good help she was soon made ready for her bed, the most comfortable she had lain upon for weeks or months, she remarked, as she stretched her tired limbs upon it.

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"I am very glad you find it so, mother dear," said Evelyn. "And now, if you like, I will unpack your trunks and arrange their contents in wardrobe, bureau drawers, and closet."

"There is no hurry about that, and isn't that your supper bell I hear?"

"Yes'm, suppah's on de table, an' I's come to set yere and 'tend to you uns while Miss Eva gwine eat wif de res' of de folks," said a neatly dressed, pleasant-faced, elderly coloured woman, who had entered the room just in time to hear the query in regard to the bell. "But, missus, Miss Elsie she tole me for to ax you could you take somethin' mo'?"

"She says Aunt Elsie wants to know could you eat something more, mother dear?" explained Eva, seeing a puzzled look on her mother's face.

"Oh, no! that excellent broth fully satisfied my appetite," replied Laura. "Go and get your supper, Eva, child, but come back when you have finished; for we have been so long separated that now I can hardly bear to have you out of my sight."

"Oh, mother, how sweet to hear you say that!" exclaimed Evelyn, bending down to bestow another ardent caress upon her newly restored parent. "Indeed, I shall not stay away a moment longer than necessary."

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The new arrival and her sad condition were the principal topics of conversation at the table.

"I am so glad we have such a good doctor in Cousin Arthur," said Evelyn. "I hope he can cure mamma's cough. I wish the weather was such that we could reasonably ask him to come and see her to-night," she added with a sigh.

"Yes," said her uncle, "but as it is so bad I think we will just give him a full account of her symptoms and ask his advice through the telephone. Then he will tell us what would better be done to-night, and call in to see her to-morrow morning."

The ladies all agreed that that would be the better plan and it was presently carried out. The doctor would have come at once, in spite of the storm, had it seemed necessary, but from the account given he deemed it not so.

"I will come directly after breakfast to-morrow morning," he concluded, after giving his advice in regard to what should be done immediately.

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"That is satisfactory; and now I will go at once to mamma and carry out his directions for to-night," said Evelyn.

"Remembering that we are all ready to assist in any and every possible way," added her uncle, smiling kindly upon her.

"Yes, indeed!" said Grandma Elsie; "and you must not hesitate to call upon me if you need help."

"No, no, mother dear. I put my veto upon that!" exclaimed Mrs. Leland. "You are not a really old-looking woman yet, but are not as vigorous as you were some years ago, and I cannot afford to let you run any risk of diminishing your stock of health and strength by loss of sleep or over-exertion. Call upon me, Eva, should you need any assistance."

"Very well, daughter, I shall not insist upon the privilege of losing sleep," returned Grandma Elsie with a smile, "but may perhaps be permitted to make myself slightly useful during the day."

"Yes, slightly, mother dear, and at such time as you would not be otherwise improving by taking needed rest or recreation," Mrs. Leland replied as she hastened away with Eva, with the purpose to make sure that her newly arrived guest lacked for nothing which she could provide.

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"At last, Evelyn, child! I suppose you have not been long gone, but it seemed so to my impatience," was Laura's salutation as Eva reentered her room.

"It is sweet to hear you say that, mother dear; sweet to know that you love me so," Evelyn said in moved tones, bending down to press a kiss on the wan cheek, "and I mean to fairly surfeit you with my company in the days and weeks that lie before us."

"And she only waited with the rest of us to consult our good doctor for you, Laura," added Mrs. Leland. "He has prescribed a sleeping potion for to-night, and will call to see you and prescribe further in the morning."

"I think I should have been consulted," returned the invalid in a tone of irritation; "my money is all gone and he may never get his pay."

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"Oh, don't trouble about that!" exclaimed Mrs. Leland and Evelyn in a breath, the former adding, "His charges are not heavy and it will be strange indeed if we cannot find a way to meet and defray them."

"Of course we can and will, and you are not to concern yourself any more about it, mamma," added Evelyn in a tone of playful authority. "What would be the use when you have a tolerably rich, grown-up daughter, whose principal business and pleasure it will be to take care of and provide for her long-lost, but now happily recovered mother. And here comes uncle with your sleeping potion," she added, as Mr. Leland at that moment appeared in the doorway, cup in hand.

"Here is something which I hope will quiet your cough, Laura," he said, coming to the bedside. "It is not bad to take, either, and will be likely to secure you a good night's rest."

"I don't know," she returned doubtfully, eyeing the cup with evident disfavour, "I was never good at dosing."

"You prefer lying awake, racked with that distressing cough?"

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"No," she sighed, taking the cup from his hand, "even quite a bad dose would be better than that. And it was not so bad after all," she concluded as she returned the cup, after swallowing its contents.

"Glad to hear you say so," he said in reply. "And now take my further advice—lie still and go to sleep, leaving all the talk with Eva till to-morrow. Good-night to you both." And he left the room, followed presently by his wife, who lingered only until she had made sure that all the wants of the invalid were fully supplied.

Laura had already fallen into a sweet sleep, under the soothing influence of the draught, and Eva presently stretched herself beside her, and with a heart filled with contending emotions—love for this her only remaining parent, joy in their reunion, sorrow and care in view of her evident exhaustion and ill-health, and plans for making her remaining days happy—lay awake for a time silently asking for guidance and help from on high, then fell into dreamless, refreshing sleep.

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CHAPTER II.

Morning found the invalid somewhat refreshed by her night's rest, yet too languid and feeble to leave her room, and her day was spent reclining upon a couch, with her daughter by her side. Dr. Conly made an early call, prescribed, talked to her and Eva in a cheerful strain, saying he hoped that rest and a change of weather would soon bring her at least a measure of relief and strength; but in reply to the anxious questioning of Mr. and Mrs. Leland, he acknowledged that he found her far gone in consumption, and did not think she could last many weeks.

"Poor dear Eva! how very sad it will be for her to lose her mother so soon after recovering her!" sighed Mrs. Leland. "I think we must let her remain in ignorance of the danger for a time at least."

"Yes," assented her husband; "though we must not neglect any effort in our power to prepare Laura for the great change which awaits her," he added with a look of anxiety and care.

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"Nor fail to offer up earnest petitions for her at the Throne of Grace," said Grandma Elsie, in her low, sweet tones. "Oh, what a blessing, what a comfort it is that we may take there all our fears, cares, and anxieties for ourselves and others! And how precious the Saviour's promise, 'If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that you shall ask, it shall be done for you of my Father which is in heaven!'"

"Yes, mother dear," assented Mrs. Leland, "and we will claim and plead it for our poor dear Laura, and for Eva, that she may be sustained under the bereavement which awaits her."

"Yes," said Dr. Conly, "and there are many of our friends who will be ready to join us in the petition. I am going now to Woodburn—the captain having telephoned me that one of the servants is ill—and we all know that he and his will be full of sympathy for Eva and her sick mother."

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"No doubt they will," said Grandma Elsie, "both as Christians and as warm friends of Evelyn. And it will be quite the same with our other friends."

With that the doctor bade good-morning and took his departure in the direction of Woodburn. The family there were surprised and interested by the news he had to tell of the arrival at Fairview, and of Laura's feeble and ailing condition. They were evidently full of sympathy for both mother and daughter, and had any help been needed would have given it gladly. But the doctor assured them that rest and quiet were at present the sick one's most pressing need.

"Poor dear Eva! I am so sorry for her!" sighed Lucilla when the doctor had gone. "Papa, don't you think I might make myself of use helping her with the nursing?"

"Not at present, daughter; though I can testify to your ability in that line, and your services may possibly be needed at some future time," he answered with an affectionate look and smile.

"Yes, Lu is a capital nurse, I think," said Violet, "but whatever she does is sure to be well done."

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"Thank you, Mamma Vi," returned the young girl, blushing with pleasure; "it is most kind in you to say that; but if I am thorough in anything, most of the credit belongs to my father, who has never allowed me to content myself with a slovenly performance of my duties."

"No," he said, "what is worth doing at all is worth doing well; that is a lesson I have endeavoured to impress upon each one of my children, and one which I think they have all learned pretty thoroughly."

"And they have always had the teaching of example as well as precept, from their father," remarked Violet with a look of loving appreciation up into his face; "so that it would be strange indeed if they had not learned it."

"Indeed that is true, mamma," said Grace. "It does seem to me that papa does everything he undertakes as thoroughly well as anyone possibly could."

"A very good idea for one's children to cultivate," laughed the captain. Then consulting his watch, "But it is high time we were in the schoolroom, daughters. Elsie and Ned have been there this half hour, and probably have a lesson or two ready to recite."

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"And Eva will not be with us to-day; probably not for many more days," remarked Lucilla with a slight sigh of disappointment and regret, as she and Grace rose and gave prompt obedience to her father's implied order.

"Yes," he said, "I fear so; but her first duty is to her mother."

So Evelyn herself felt, and nobly she discharged it; neglecting nothing in her power for the relief and enjoyment of the invalid who, though often fretful, exacting, and unreasonable, was yet nearest and dearest to her of all earthly creatures. The young girl's loving patience seemed never to fail, and her heart was continually going up in earnest, silent petitions that her beloved parent might be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light; that she might learn to love Him who had died to redeem her from death and the power of the grave, and to give her an abundant entrance into his kingdom and glory.

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The doubt of Laura's preparation for death and eternity, amounting to almost certainty that it was lacking, made this nursing an even sadder one than had been that of Eric, Evelyn's father, years ago. To him talk of things heavenly and divine had ever seemed easy and natural, and with the certainty that he was passing away from earth came the full assurance that he was ready to depart and be with Christ in glory.

But Laura hastily repelled the slightest allusion to eternity and a preparation for it. Evelyn's only consolation was in the knowledge that others were uniting their earnest petitions with hers, and that God is the hearer and answerer of prayer.

It was Grandma Elsie who at length succeeded in speaking a word in season to the dying woman.

"Oh, this racking cough! Shall I never be done with it?" gasped Laura, as she lay panting upon her pillow after an unusually severe and exhausting paroxysm.

"Yes; when you reach the other side of Jordan; for there in that blessed land the inhabitant shall not say 'I am sick,'" returned Grandma Elsie in low, sympathising tones. "The Bible tells us that 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.'"

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"Oh, but I am not fit for that place yet!" exclaimed Laura with a look of alarm, "and I don't want to die for years to come, though it is hard to suffer as I do. You don't think I'm a dying woman, Mrs. Travilla?"

"You know, dear friend, that no one of us is certain of life for a day or an hour," returned Grandma Elsie gently, taking the wasted hand in hers and gazing tenderly into the anxious, troubled face, "and surely it is the part of wisdom to make careful preparation for that which we must inevitably meet, sooner or later. And if our peace is made with God—if Jesus is our Friend and Saviour—it will only be joy unspeakable to be called into his immediate presence, there to dwell forevermore."

"Yes, yes, if one is fitted for it, as Eric, Eva's father, was. Death seemed only joy to him, except for leaving us. But oh, I am afraid of death! Hard as life is in my weak, ailing condition, I don't want to die, I can't bear to think of it."

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"My poor friend, my heart bleeds for you," said Grandma Elsie in low, tender tones. "'The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law.' But 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.' He fulfilled its conditions, he bore the penalty God's justice required against those who had broken it; and now salvation is offered as his free gift to all who will accept it: 'Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.'"

"Is that all? only to believe in Jesus?" Laura asked with a look of mingled anxiety, hope, and fear. "But one must repent deeply, sincerely, and oh, I'm afraid I cannot!"

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"He will help you," returned Grandma Elsie in moved tones. "'Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.' Ask him, remembering his own gracious promise, 'Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.'"

"Ah, I see the way as I never did before," said Laura, after a moment's silence in which she seemed in deep thought. "What wonderful love and condescension it was for him, the God-man, to die that painful and shameful death that we—sinful worms of the dust—might live! Oh, I do begin to love him and to hate and abhor my sins that helped nail him to the tree." With the last words tears coursed down her cheeks. "I want to be his, whether I live or die," she added; and from that hour a great change came over her; her sufferings were borne with patience and resignation; and when the end came she passed peacefully and quietly away, leaving her bereaved daughter mourning the separation, but not as those without hope of a blessed reunion at some future day, in that land where sin and sorrow, sickness and pain are unknown.

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CHAPTER III.

Through all the six long weeks of her mother's illness at Fairview Evelyn had been a most devoted, tender nurse, scarcely leaving the sick room for an hour by day or by night. She bore up wonderfully until all was over and the worn-out body laid to rest in the quiet grave; but then came the reaction; strength and energy seemed suddenly to forsake her, and thin, pale, sad, and heavy-eyed, she was but the shadow of her former self.

Change of air and scene was the doctor's prescription. She was very reluctant to leave home and friends for a sojourn in new scenes and among strangers, but receiving an urgent invitation from Captain and Mrs. Raymond to spend some weeks at Woodburn with her loved friend Lucilla, and finding that her uncle and aunt—Dr. Conly also—highly approved, she gladly accepted; all the more so because she had learned that Grandma Elsie too, whom she loved even better than ever for her kindness to the dear departed, was about to spend some days or weeks with her daughter Violet. That was an added attraction to what Evelyn esteemed one of the most delightful places, and inhabited by the dearest, kindest, most lovable people anywhere to be found.

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She was most heartily welcomed by the entire family, Lucilla and Grace being particularly joyful over her arrival.

It was delightful spring weather, and family and guests, older and younger, spent much of the time in the beautiful grounds or in driving and riding about the country.

The captain pronounced Eva hardly in a fit condition for study, and for her sake required his daughters Lucilla and Grace to pass only an hour or two daily in the schoolroom; so that they were able to give to Eva as much of their society as he considered desirable for her under the circumstances—seeing that she needed a good deal of quiet rest and sleep in order to regain the youthful vigour she had lost during the exhausting nursing of her invalid mother.

His kindness was highly appreciated by all three, and under its benign influence Eva made rapid improvement in health and spirits, enjoying every day of her sojourn at Woodburn, the Sabbath even more than any other, especially the afternoon study of the Bible in which all took part, from Grandma Elsie and Captain Raymond down to little Ned.

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The subject chosen for the first lesson after Eva's coming was the resurrection, probably selected especially for Eva's comfort in her sorrow over her mother's recent departure, to be with her no more in this life.

"Mother," the captain said, addressing Grandma Elsie, when they were all seated, each with a Bible in hand, "as you are somewhat older and certainly much wiser than I—especially as regards spiritual things—will you not take the lead to-day?"

"Older I certainly am," returned Mrs. Travilla, with her own sweet smile, "but I think not wiser than yourself, captain; and certainly I have not made the preparation for this occasion which doubtless you have. So please lead the exercises just as you would if I were not present."

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"You would prefer my doing so?" he asked.

"Very much," she replied. "The resurrection is the subject?"

"Yes; and what a glorious one! how full of comfort for all who believe in Christ! 'For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my death my body is destroyed, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold, and not another,' said the patriarch Job; comforting himself in his affliction with that blessed prospect. The doctrine of a general resurrection is expressly taught in both the Old Testament and the New, and I think we cannot spend our lesson hour more

profitably than in looking up the texts on the subject. Can you give us one, mother?"

At that Grandma Elsie opened her Bible.

"Beginning with the Old Testament," she said, "here in Psalms xlix. 15 we read: 'But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah.' Then here in Isaiah; 'Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.'" [Pg 29]

Then Violet, sitting next, read from her open Bible: "'The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, saying, Master, Moses said, if a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: likewise the second also, and the third unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.'" [Pg 30]

Eva's turn came next and she read: "'And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.'"

Then Lucilla: "'Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.'"

"Will the resurrection be of all the dead, Grace? the wicked as well as the righteous?" asked her father.

"Yes, papa," she answered; then read aloud: "'Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.'"

It was little Elsie's turn and she read a verse in Acts pointed out by her mother: "'And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.'" [Pg 31]

It was Ned's turn now and he read a passage selected for him by his mother: "'For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.'"

It was the captain's turn again and he went on with the reading: "'Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised, and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.'" [Pg 32]

"Yes," said Grandma Elsie, "we needed a divine Saviour, and Christ's resurrection proved his divinity; as Paul tells us here in the first chapter of Romans, 'And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.' Peter too teaches us that the resurrection of Christ was necessary to our salvation. It seems plainly taught in this verse of the fifth chapter of his first Epistle. 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.'"

"Yes," said Violet, "Jesus said to his disciples, 'Because I live, ye shall live also.' His resurrection is surely the pledge and assurance of that of his people." [Pg 33]

"Papa, does everybody have to die?" asked little Ned.

"Everybody except those who are alive when Jesus comes again, as he will some day in the clouds of heaven. This is what the Apostle Paul tells us about it in the letter he wrote to the Thessalonians. 'Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.'"

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words," added Evelyn softly, finishing the

quotation; "and oh, what a comfort it is!"

"There could be none greater," said Grandma Elsie. "Think of being reunited with all the dear ones gone before, and in the immediate presence of Jesus; never again to be parted from them or him or to know sin or sorrow or pain. Oh, what joy to be permitted to look upon the face of our Redeemer, to kneel at his feet, to hear his voice speaking to each one of us. 'Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another.'"

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CHAPTER IV.

"Oh, Rosie, you here? I'm delighted! I hope you have come to spend the day?" exclaimed Lucilla, as on Monday she and Grace, on leaving the schoolroom where they had been reciting to their father, passed out upon the veranda in search of Evelyn and the older ladies and found Rose Travilla seated with the others.

"Thank you; but suppose I have come intending to stay longer than that? as long as mamma does, for instance?" laughed Rose, giving and receiving an affectionate caress; for they had seen nothing of each other for several days.

"The longer the better," was Lucilla's hearty rejoinder. "Do you not say so too, Mamma Vi?" turning to her.

"Indeed I do," said Violet. "She will certainly make a most pleasant addition to our party."

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"I think you may as well accept the invitation, Rosie," her mother said with a pleased smile; "and as I know you do not care to keep your errand a secret from any of your friends here, we can call a family council and talk the matter over."

"Yes, mamma; that sounds as though you accept Solomon's teaching that 'In the multitude of counsellors there is safety.' And since he was the wisest of men we may surely consider ourselves safe in so doing. So, if you like, you may tell Lu and Gracie on what errand I came."

"Tell it yourself, child," returned her mother with an amused look.

At that Rosie held up a letter to the view of Lucilla and Grace, saying, with a smile and blush, "It is from Will Croly. He has grown tired of waiting and begs to have matters hurried up somewhat: proposes that I change my name next month, though the prescribed year of waiting would thereby be shortened by two months or more."

"Oh, do let him have his way, then!" exclaimed Grace—"at least if he will promise not to carry you off at once after the wedding—for there could not be a lovelier month for it than beautiful June, the month of roses."

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"So I should say," chimed in Lucilla, then added hastily, "though I think I'd make him wait till June of next year, rather than leave such a mother as Grandma Elsie so soon."

At that Rosie glanced at her mother and her eyes filled with unbidden tears.

"I can't bear to think of that," she said with a tremble in her voice, "but perhaps I can coax Will to settle down somewhere in this neighbourhood—bringing his father and mother along so that they won't be lonely."

"A very nice plan, Rosie dear, if you can manage to carry it out," remarked Violet.

"And I have hope that Will, at least, will favour the plan; for he seemed much pleased with this neighbourhood when he was here," said Rosie, adding with a laugh and blush, "and I know my wishes carry great weight with him."

"And we will hope that those of his parents may coincide with yours," added her mother gently; "for I am sure my Rosie would not wish to be the cause of unhappiness to them."

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"No, indeed, mamma; I can assure you it is my earnest desire to add to their happiness; not to take from it. I am strongly in hopes, however, that when they come to know you and all the rest of my dear relatives here, they will esteem it a delight to live in your midst."

"And I don't believe they can help it," said Grace. "I am sure everybody who knows Grandma Elsie, mamma, and papa—not to mention all the other dear people—loves them and their pleasant society."

"In all of which I am sure you are quite right, Gracie," said Evelyn.

"I, too," said Lulu. "But now let us hear the plans for the wedding."

"They are yet to be made," laughed Rosie.

"You will want a grand one?" Lulu said in a tone of mingled assertion and inquiry.

"Not so very," Rosie answered with a slight shake of her pretty head. "I think only the relatives and most intimate friends. They alone will make quite a party, you know. I'll want some bridesmaids. You'll be one, Lu, won't you? Unless you fear the truth of the old saying, 'Twice a

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bridesmaid never a bride."

"Pooh! what difference need that make?" returned Lulu; "since I don't intend ever to marry."

"You don't?" exclaimed Rosie.

"No; for there is not another man in the world whom I could love half so dearly as I love my father."

"Oh, well! that is only because you and the right one haven't happened to meet yet."

"Yes, Lulu," said Grandma Elsie, "at your age I thought and felt just as you do now, but some years later I found that another had gained the first place in my heart."

"But my father is so much kinder and more lovable than ever yours was," was the answering thought in Lucilla's mind, but unwilling to hurt the dear lady's feelings she refrained from expressing it, and only said with a little laugh of incredulity, "I suppose I should not be too certain, but I am entirely willing to run the risk of again acting as bridesmaid."

"So that much is settled," returned Rosie in a tone of satisfaction. "I have always counted upon Eva as another," she continued, "but——"

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"Thank you, Rosie dear, but of course I cannot serve—under present circumstances," returned Evelyn in a tone of gentle sadness.

No one spoke again for a moment; then Violet broke the silence by asking, "How many do you think of having, Rosie?"

"Perhaps six," was the reply, in a musing tone, "at least including flower girls and maid of honour. Gracie, you will be one of the bridesmaids, will you not?"

"If papa does not object, as I hardly think he will."

"Maud and Sydney Dinsmore I think will serve," continued Rosie. "And wouldn't it be a pretty idea to have Elsie Raymond and Uncle Horace's Elsie, who is about the same size, as either bridesmaids or flower girls?"

Everyone approved of that idea.

"Now, it will be in order, I suppose, to settle about the material and colour of our dresses," remarked Lucilla.

"Perhaps it might be as well to first decide at what time of year they are to be worn," suggested Mrs. Travilla in her gentle tones.

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"Yes, mamma, but—you do not want to disappoint Will, do you? And June is really the prettiest month in the year for a wedding, I think," said Rose.

"None lovelier, daughter," her mother responded with a slight sigh, "but October, my own wedding month, seems to me no less suitable."

"Why, yes, to be sure! if only Will could be satisfied to wait till then."

"It will be hardly longer than the time he was given to understand he must expect to wait," returned her mother pleasantly, "or than he ought to think my Rose worth waiting for. But at all events, daughter, we must consult with your grandpa before deciding. Have you had any talk with him on the subject?"

"No, mamma; I preferred coming to you first, and am almost sure grandpa will think it a matter for you to decide."

"Probably; yet I shall want his opinion; and besides he is your guardian as well as your grandfather."

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"Along with you, mamma; and I love him as both, he is so dear and kind."

"He is indeed," assented her mother. "He has told me more than once or twice that my children are scarcely less dear to him than his own."

"Partly because our father was his dear friend as well as his son-in-law," added Violet softly.

"Yes; they were bosom friends before I was born," her mother said with a far-away look in her eyes.

"Then you must have been very much younger than he, Grandma Elsie," remarked Grace, half inquiringly.

"Sixteen years younger. I was in my ninth year when I saw him first, and more than twice that age before I thought of him as anything but a dear, kind friend—my father's friend and mine."

"And after that he seemed to you to grow younger, did he not, mamma?" asked Rosie.

"Yes; when he joined us in Europe I had not seen him for two years, and as regarded age he seemed to have been standing still while I grew up to him; and in the daily and intimate intercourse of those months I learned that his worth was far greater than that of any other man

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of my acquaintance—excepting my father. Ah, there was never a better man, a truer friend, a kinder, more devoted husband and father than he."

The sweet voice trembled with emotion; she paused for a moment, then went on:

"He does not seem dead to me—he is not dead, but only gone before into the immediate presence of the dear Master, where I hope one day to join him for an eternity of bliss.

""Tis there we'll meet
At Jesus' feet,
When we meet to part no more.""

Again there was a brief silence, presently broken by the coming of the captain and his two younger children. All three seemed pleased to find Rosie there, greeted her affectionately, and then the captain remarked, glancing from one to another:

"It strikes me that you are all looking about as grave as if assembled to discuss the affairs of the nation. Can I have a voice in the subject, whatever it is?" [Pg 44]

"Yes, Brother Levis," replied Rosie, "I am trying to make arrangements for—doing what you have done twice. And perhaps, since you have had so much practice, you may be more capable than these other friends and relatives of giving me advice."

"Something that I have done twice? What can that be?"

"Will Croly wants to help me," returned Rosie with a laugh and a blush.

"Ah! now I understand. Is the vexing question as to the colour and material of the wedding gown?"

"Mamma thinks the first thing is to settle when the ceremony is to be performed. She does not seem to sympathise in Will's haste to have it over."

"Which is not at all surprising," returned the captain, glancing at his two older daughters. "I can quite understand the feeling. But what is the time proposed by Will?"

"June of this year."

"June seems a very suitable month, but if you were my daughter I should say not June of this year—since you are both young enough to wait for that of next or the year after." [Pg 45]

"Ah, sir! that was not the way you talked when you wanted to rob mamma of one of her daughters."

"No; but I was some years older than Mr. Croly is now, and your sister Violet very womanly in her ways."

"And I am not? Ah, well! perhaps it is fortunate for me that the decision rest with mamma and grandpa."

"So you, too, are in haste?" queried the captain, regarding her with a look of amusement.

"Not at all," she returned, drawing herself up with an air of pretended indignation. "Who would be in haste to leave such a home and mother as mine? If I consulted only my own feelings I should be more than willing to wait another year."

"Then why not decide to do so?" he asked with a quizzical look.

"Because I really have some regard for the wishes of my betrothed."

"And it makes it hard for you that the different ones you love cannot agree so that you might please them all," remarked Grace, then exclaimed, "Ah, here comes grandpa!" as at that moment the Ion carriage turned in at the great gates. [Pg 46]

Mr. Dinsmore seldom let a day pass without a more or less extended interview with his eldest daughter, and had now come for a call at Woodburn, bringing his wife with him.

When the usual greetings had been exchanged the subject of Rosie's approaching marriage and the letter from Mr. Croly, urging that it take place speedily, were introduced, and after some discussion it was decided to let him have his own way. The day was not fixed upon any farther than that it should be near the end of the month of June, and with that Rosie seemed satisfied.

"Now, mamma," she said, "I think we may go on and discuss minor details, such as dresses and ornaments for bride and attendants."

"Very well, daughter; you may give us your views on the subject. You will want your own dress of some rich white material, I suppose?"

"Yes, mamma; of Bengaline silk, richly trimmed with lace; and I must have a veil and orange blossoms; also a bouquet of bride roses and smilax. Lu and Grace, you will want white silk dresses, won't you?" [Pg 47]

"Yes," they replied. "And bouquets of white flowers," added Lucilla.

"Oh, papa, you will let me act as one of the bridesmaids, will you not?" asked Grace, turning to

him.

"I have no objection," he replied. "You may both serve, since Rosie wishes it and I see you are pleased with the idea. As for the matter of dress you may settle that for yourselves."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" both exclaimed joyously, Grace adding, "But won't you please tell us, papa, just how much we may spend?"

"Any amount which your mamma and Grandma Elsie do not consider too great," he replied in an indulgent tone. "However, I think I should not hesitate to leave that matter to the judgment of my daughters themselves; for I know that neither of you is inclined to be at all extravagant."

"No, indeed," said Violet, "they are always very careful to make sure that papa is able to afford them what they want." [Pg 48]

"It would be strange if we weren't, Mamma Vi," said Lucilla with a happy laugh, "for we know that papa loves us so dearly that he would go without things himself any time rather than deny us anything desirable."

"And I expect to put him to the additional expense of dressing Elsie handsomely for the occasion," laughed Rosie.

"Ah! is she also to be a bridesmaid?" asked the captain with a smiling glance at his little girl, who was turning her bright eyes from one to another with a surprised, pleased, yet puzzled look.

"Not just that," replied Rosie; then went on to explain her plan for giving the two little Elsie a part in the ceremony.

"Should you like to do that, daughter?" asked the captain, taking the hand of the little girl and drawing her to his side.

"I'm 'most afraid I would not know how to do it right, papa," she answered with doubtful look and tone.

"You can take lessons beforehand," he said; "but you shall do just as you please about it." [Pg 49]

"And the question need not be decided at once," remarked Grandma Elsie. "We will let the matter rest till we learn what your cousin Elsie Dinsmore thinks about joining you in it."

"Yes," said Rosie, "and fortunately we do not need to settle anything more to-day. Maud and Sydney must be consulted before we quite decide on the colour and material of the bridesmaids' dresses." [Pg 50]

CHAPTER V.

A pause in the conversation upon the veranda was broken by an exclamation from little Ned. "Cousin Arthur is coming!" he cried as a carriage turned in at the great gates and came swiftly up the driveway.

"Yes," said his father, stepping forward to meet and welcome Dr. Conly, "always a visitor we are delighted to see, whether we are sick or well. Good-morning, sir! We are all glad to see you as friend and guest, though fortunately not in need of your professional services at present. I hope the demands of other patients are not so pressing that we may not keep you here till after dinner."

"Thank you, but I can stay for only a hasty call," replied the doctor, alighting and shaking hands with one after another as they crowded about him.

"You look like the bringer of good news, cousin," said Grandma Elsie, regarding him with a pleased smile. [Pg 51]

"Yes," he said, "I feel myself a very fortunate and happy man to-day, and have come to tell my news and ask the sympathy and congratulations of you my relatives and friends. My Marian and I have a son—a fine healthy babe, now some hours old—mother and child are doing as well as possible."

The congratulations were poured forth without stint. Then Mr. Dinsmore asked, "What do you propose to call the lad?"

"Ronald. It is Marian's choice and I am well content, for it is a good name, and I highly esteem the dear old cousin who has showed such kindness to the mother."

"Yes, he is worthy of it," said Grandma Elsie. "I have always felt proud to own him as my kinsman."

"And Ronald and Conly go well together, making a very pretty name, to my thinking," said Rosie.

"Have they heard the news at Beechwood yet?" asked Lucilla.

"I think not," replied the doctor; "but I shall take it in my way home, as it will make the drive only a little longer and I need delay there but a moment." Then with a hasty adieu he took his departure.

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"Art is a very happy man to-day," Mr. Dinsmore remarked with a pleased smile, as they watched the doctor's gig on its way down the drive.

"Yes; I know of no one more worthy of happiness, and it does me good to see it," said the captain.

"And no doubt dear Marian's heart is overflowing with love and gratitude," said Grandma Elsie in low, soft tones. "I quite want to see her and her new treasure."

"Both she and Art will be very proud to show it to their friends and relatives," remarked Violet with a smile, "though he will be careful not to admit even relatives for some days yet. He is very kind and careful as both husband and physician."

"Yes," said Rosie; "he will take excellent care of Marian and have her well in time to attend the wedding, I hope."

"I think we can manage that, daughter, as we have not fixed upon the day," her mother said with playful look and tone.

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"Oh, yes, mamma! and I do intend it to be at least six weeks before I leave girlhood for married life," returned Rosie, laughing and blushing as she spoke.

"It is too serious a step to be taken hastily, my dear young sister," remarked the captain in a tone between jest and earnest; "a step that once taken cannot be retraced—a venture involving the happiness or misery of perhaps a lifetime; certainly the lifetime of one if not of both."

"Oh, you frighten me!" cried Rosie, drawing a long breath and lifting her hands with a gesture of alarm and despair; "what shall I do? Would you recommend single blessedness—you who have twice tried laying hold of the other horn of the dilemma?"

"Only for a time," he said. "Look well before you leap, as I did, and then you will be in little danger of wanting to leap back again."

"You don't? you never do?" she queried in mock surprise and doubt.

"Never!" he said with a smiling, admiring glance into Violet's beautiful eyes, watching him with not a shade of doubt or distrust in their azure depths; "never for a moment have I been conscious of the slightest inclination to do so."

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"Thank you, my dear," Violet said. "And, Rosie, let me tell you for your encouragement that I have known no more regret than has he. I am very sure that if it were in our power to reconsider, the question would be decided exactly as it was years ago."

"I believe it," responded Rosie heartily, "and that Will and I will be able to say the same when we too have lived together for years. He is good as gold, I know, and I shall try to be worthy of him."

The call to dinner here put an end to the conversation and the talk at the table was upon other themes.

Shortly after the conclusion of the meal Mr. and Mrs. Dinsmore returned to Ion, while the others, some on horseback, the rest in the family carriage, went over to the Oaks to call upon the relatives there and consult with them on the arrangements for the wedding, particularly the dress of the bride and her attendants—a subject of great interest to the ladies, especially such to the young girls, but one which the two gentlemen—Captain Raymond and young Mr. Dinsmore—were so entirely willing to leave to their decision that they presently excused themselves and walked out into the grounds, Mr. Dinsmore wishing to consult the captain in regard to some improvements that he had in contemplation.

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Then Rosie announced her errand and gave her invitation to Maud and Sydney. It was accepted promptly and with evident pleasure by both. Then Rosie went on to speak of her idea of having the two little Elsie's act as flower girls.

"My niece and my cousin, and both bearing mamma's name; about the same size, too; would it not be pretty?" she asked, and received a chorus of approving replies.

"Oh, I'd like to!" cried Elsie Dinsmore, clapping her hands in delight. "It's ever so good in you, Cousin Rosie, to choose us! and I suppose we will be dressed alike, won't we?"

"That is my idea," said Rosie, "and I presume your mothers will not withhold their consent."

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"Oh, you will let us, mamma—you and Cousin Vi—won't you?" cried the child, turning to them.

"I am entirely willing, if that suits Cousin Vi and her Elsie," replied her mother.

"As it will, I am sure," said Violet.

"Yes, mamma," said her Elsie, "I shall like it, for I am sure you and the other ladies will choose a pretty dress for us."

"Probably no prettier than some that you already own," Violet returned with an amused look. "Try not to think or care too much for dress, daughter; there are so many things which are much more important."

"But it isn't wrong to like to be tastefully dressed, is it, mamma?" asked the little girl with a slightly troubled look.

"No, I think not, dear," returned her mother with a loving smile into the inquiring eyes; "if it were wrong to love pretty things, surely God would not have made so many for our eyes to look upon—the beautiful flowers and fruits, the sunset clouds, the stars, to mention only a few—but he—our kind Heavenly Father—loves to give us enjoyment."

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"And I do enjoy all the pretty things very much indeed, mamma," responded the little girl with a look of relief and pleasure, "and I'm glad it isn't wrong; I like to see pretty clothes on you and my sisters quite as much as on myself. And don't you think papa likes to have us all nicely dressed?"

"I am sure he does; and you may feel very certain that papa approves of nothing but what is right."

"Those are exactly mine and my husband's sentiments upon the subject in question," remarked Mrs. Dinsmore in a lively tone. "But now let us hear what those girls are talking about."

"You will be married in church?" Maud was saying inquiringly.

"No," said Rosie in a tone of decision; "I mean to follow the good example of my mother and older sisters in having a home wedding."

"And you will want ushers? I was just going to ask who were to serve in that capacity."

"I believe Mr. Croly has engaged my brothers Harold and Herbert, who are his most intimate friends," replied Rosie; "but of course there will be plenty of time for all those arrangements."

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"I dare say he will ask Uncle Harold to be best man," said Grace.

"Very likely," said Rosie, "and Herbert, Chester, and Frank for ushers. We may as well make it a family affair," she added with a satisfied little laugh.

"And if either you or Will conclude that you would prefer a larger number it will be an easy matter to think of, and invite them to serve a little later," remarked Violet.

"Yes, there is plenty of time," said their mother, smiling lovingly into Rosie's bright eyes. "I am in no hurry to give my youngest daughter to even so entirely a good, worthy, and amiable young man as William Croly."

"Please do not look at it in that way, mother dear. Please remember that you are not to lose your daughter, but to gain another good son."

"That is right, Rosie; I do believe it is going to prove a gain all round," said Violet.

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"Why, of course it is," said Maud; "that is settled; so now let us consider and decide the important question what colours we are to wear on the grand occasion. Lu, you wore canary colour at Betty Norris' wedding; suppose I take that this time and you wear pink; it will become you quite as well, I think."

"I suppose so," said Lucilla, "and am perfectly willing to wear it."

"And pink beside my white will look very pretty," said Rosie. "Lu is to be maid of honor, you know, girls."

"Yes; and I for one highly approve your choice, Rosie," said Evelyn with an affectionate, admiring look at Lucilla.

"Yes; and suppose we dress your little flower girls in pink, also," suggested Mrs. Dinsmore.

That idea seemed to suit everybody.

"I like that colour," remarked Elsie Dinsmore sagely, "but I shall be particular about having very handsome material."

"It shall be handsome enough to accord well with the others," said her mother with an amused laugh.

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"I think straw colour becomes me," remarked Maud; "so that is what I shall wear, if the rest of the party approve."

"And blue will be the thing for Gracie and me," said Sydney. "What do you say to that, Gracie?"

"I am satisfied if Rosie and the rest approve," was Grace's pleasant-toned reply.

"So that is settled," said Sydney. "Wouldn't it be well for us all to go into the city to-morrow, see what we can find there to suit us, and order other things sent for?"

"What do you say to that, mamma?" asked Rosie.

"I see no objection to it," replied Grandma Elsie. "But we will consult the captain in regard to that matter," she added, as at that moment he and her brother came in.

"Ah! upon what is my valuable opinion desired, mother?" he asked in playful tones; then, in response to the explanation given, said that he thought it a very good plan, as it would surely do no harm to begin needed preparations promptly.

"Then, papa, won't you excuse Gracie and me from lessons for the next few days?" asked Lucilla. [Pg 61]

"I will; you may consider the remainder of the week a holiday," he replied.

"For Ned and me too, papa?" asked Elsie.

"Yes; if you think you can assist in the shopping."

"I should like to help choose my own things if you and mamma are willing," she said with a persuasive look from one to the other.

"I think you will be allowed a voice in the selection," he replied, patting her cheek as she leaned upon his knee, looking up affectionately and pleadingly into his face.

"Yes," said Violet, "and I am sure we shall be able to find dress goods and whatever else is needed, that will suit all three of us."

"And it will be four days' holiday we'll have," remarked Ned with satisfaction.

"You are planning to have your wedding a good deal after the pattern of Cousin Betty's, Rosie," remarked Mrs. Dinsmore.

"Yes; in some respects, for I thought it a very pretty wedding; but that ceremony took place in the church, while I mean to be married at home; also there will probably be a difference in the number of attendants and their dress," replied Rosie. "And by the way, mamma," she added, turning to her mother, "we must send Betty an invitation in good season for her to arrange matters so that she can come to my wedding. I was one of her bridesmaids, you remember, and should be sorry indeed to neglect her at this time." [Pg 62]

"She shall not be forgotten, daughter," was Grandma Elsie's ready response; "we will shortly make out a list of those you wish to invite, that none may be forgotten or overlooked."

"Yes, mamma; if our list contains only relatives and very intimate friends we will be quite a large party, should all accept."

"Now about to-morrow's shopping," said Sydney. "We need to settle when we will set out on our expedition, where we will meet, or whether we will divide our forces and each division decide questions of taste and expense independently of the others."

"As there are so many of us I think the latter plan would be the better one," said Grandma Elsie. [Pg 63]

"And as regards dress goods, we can secure samples and hold a consultation over them before making the purchases," said Violet; adding with a smiling glance at her Elsie, "that will be only fair where two or more are to be dressed alike."

"I like that plan, mamma," said the little girl, "and I do intend to be satisfied with whatever you and papa choose for me."

"With some help from my mamma and me," said the other Elsie in a tone that seemed to imply some fear that their choice might not be altogether to her taste.

"Tut! tut!" said her father. "You need not be in the least afraid that such good judges will fail to select as handsome and suitable material as could be desired."

"But please, Uncle Horace, let her have a vote on the question," said Violet pleasantly. "There may be several pieces of goods of the chosen colour, equally desirable; nor is it necessary that the two dresses should be off the same piece; only that they match in colour." [Pg 64]

"And I feel sure there will be no difficulty in settling upon which will be satisfactory to all parties," added Mrs. Dinsmore.

With a little more chat all the arrangements for the morrow's shopping expedition were concluded. Then the Woodburn party bade good-bye and returned to their home. [Pg 65]

CHAPTER VI.

The weather the next morning proved all that could be desired, and the shopping expedition a grand success—everybody being not only satisfied but charmed with the results.

Mrs. Travilla and Rosie returned to Ion that evening, but scarcely a day passed while the preparations for the wedding were going on, without more or less interchange of visits among

the young people of that place, Woodburn, Fairview, and the Oaks and Pinegrove.

Naturally the deepest interest was felt and shown by the ladies and young girls, but brothers and cousins were by no means indifferent. Harold and Herbert, though well pleased with the idea of taking their friend Croly into the family, were loath to part with Rosie, their youngest and only single sister, the only one now left in the Ion family. She had always been somewhat of a pet with them, and during these last weeks of her life with them they treated her as one for whom they could not do enough; while her manner toward them showed full appreciation of their kindness and affection. Much of her time and thoughts was necessarily taken up with the preparations for her approaching marriage; but in leisure moments she had many sad thoughts in regard to the coming separation from home and all there whom she so loved; especially the tender mother who had been, until within a few months, her dearest earthly friend.

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"Mamma dear, dearest mamma, I can hardly endure the thought of leaving you," she sighed one day with starting tears, as they sat together over their needlework in Mrs. Travilla's dressing room.

They were quite alone at the moment, Zoe, who had been with them, having just gone out with her little ones.

"No one can ever take your place in my heart or home," continued Rosie with almost a sob, "and oh, how I shall miss you—your love, your sweet motherly counsels, your tender sympathy in all my joys and sorrows—oh, mamma, mamma! at times the very thought of it all is almost unendurable, and I am tempted to say to Will that he may come to me if he likes, but that I can never tear myself away from my dear home and the precious mother who has been everything to me since I first drew the breath of life!" and dropping her work she knelt at her mother's feet, lifting to hers eyes full of tears.

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"Dear child," her mother responded in tones tremulous with emotion, and bending down to press a kiss on the quivering lips, "it gives me a sad and sore heart to think of it. And yet, daughter dear, we may hope to see each other very often—to spend weeks and months of every year in each other's society, and when we are apart to exchange letters daily; and best of all, to be in a few brief years together in the better land, never to part again."

"Ah, mamma dear, that last seems a long look ahead. At least—oh, mamma, I cannot bear the thought of—of death coming between us; and yet we can hardly hope to go together."

"No, daughter dear, but time is short, as you will realize when you have seen as many years in this world as I have; and after it will come the never-ending ages of eternity—eternity, which we are hoping to spend with our dear ones in the immediate presence of our Redeemer—united, never to part again."

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"Yes, mamma; oh, that is indeed a sweet thought. But," she added with a heavy sigh, "sometimes I fear I may miss heaven; I seem so far, so very far from fit for its employments and its joys—so often indulging in wrong thoughts and feelings—so taken up with earthly cares and interests."

"Dear daughter, look to God for help to fight against your sinful nature," replied her mother in moved tones. "He says 'In me is thine help'; 'He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.' 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.' 'Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.' These are some of his gracious promises."

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"Ah, mamma, but the question with me is, is he really my God? am I his?—truly one of his redeemed ones, his adopted children? How shall I make sure of that?"

"By accepting his conditions and believing his word, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.' 'Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.' Come now and accept his offered salvation, whether you have done so before or not; come, believing his word; 'I will in no wise cast out,' 'I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.' 'Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength; even to him shall all men come.' 'In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.' 'The just shall live by faith,' and faith is the gift of God, as we are told again and again in his Holy Word; a gift that he will grant to all who ask it of him."

There was a sound of approaching footsteps and Rosie resumed her seat, taking up the work she had dropped. They recognised the step as Harold's, and the next moment he stood in the open doorway.

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"Mamma," he said, "I am going over to Roselands and should like to take you along. You have not seen that youngest Conly yet, and Arthur considers Marian now quite well enough for a call from you. I know, too, that she is wanting to see you."

"And I to see her, the dear girl," responded his mother, laying aside her work. "Come in and sit down while I don my bonnet and mantle."

"Let me get them out for you, mamma," said Rosie, dropping her embroidery and hastening to do so.

"I should include you in the invitation, Rosie," said Harold, "but we think it safer not to let Marian have the excitement of many callers until she gains more strength."

"I thought she was doing finely," returned Rosie, bringing her mother's mantle and putting it about her with loving care.

"So she is," replied Harold with a light laugh; "but we cannot be too careful of her to satisfy her doting husband, and though eager to exhibit her new treasure to all her friends and relatives, she is entirely submissive to his will in the matter."

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"Oh, well, I can wait," laughed Rosie. "Give her my love, mamma, and tell her I am not staying away from any indifference to her or the little newcomer."

"No fear that she would ever suspect you of that, Rosie dear," her mother said, with a slight smile; "but I will assure her of your interest in both herself and baby boy. Now good-bye till my return, which I presume will be in the course of an hour or two."

"Don't hurry home on my account, mamma dear," returned Rosie. "I shall not be lonely. I have letters to write, and that will make the time pass quickly."

"It is a lovely day and the short drive with my son will be very enjoyable," Mrs. Travilla remarked, as Harold handed her into the vehicle.

"To us both, I hope, mother," he returned, giving her an affectionate look and smile. "Yours is to me the best company in the world. The roads are in fine condition," he added as he took up the reins and they started down the avenue, "the fields and gardens along the way also, and the air full of the fragrance of flower and shrub. Oh, on such a morning as this it seems a joy just to be alive and well!"

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"Yes," she responded, "oh, what cause for gratitude to the Giver of all good that you and I, and all our nearest and dearest in this world, are alive and well."

"Yes, mother; attendance upon the sick and suffering has given me a higher appreciation of the greatness of the blessing of sound health than I had in earlier days. It is saddening to witness suffering from accident and disease, but a great privilege to be able in many cases to relieve it. That last makes me thankful that I was led to choose the medical profession."

"And you have often an opportunity to minister to souls as well as bodies; one which I hope you do not neglect."

"I am afraid I have sometimes neglected it, mother," he acknowledged with a sigh, "and at others performed it in a very halting and imperfect way. But as you know—for I could not keep from you such gladness as the knowledge of that fact brought me—I have been privileged to win some souls to Christ—smooth some dying pillows—and to lead some recovering ones to devote their spared lives and restored health to the service of the Master—the Physician of souls—in whose footsteps I ardently desire to tread."

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"I know it, my dear son, and it has filled me with joy and gratitude for you, for them, and for myself—that I am the mother of one whom God has so honoured and blessed."

Then she inquired about the condition and needs of some of his poorer patients; for she made it her business to provide for their necessities and to furnish many a little luxury that helped on convalescence or smoothed the passage to the grave.

As they drove up the avenue at Roselands Dr. Conly came out upon the veranda, his face beaming with smiles.

"Ah, Cousin Elsie," he said as he assisted her to alight, "this is kind. Marian has been looking forward to your visit with longing, both to see you and to exhibit to your appreciative eyes the little one who seems to her the greatest and loveliest darling the world ever saw."

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"Ah, I can understand that," she returned with a low, pleased laugh. "I have not forgotten how lovely and what an inestimable treasure my first baby seemed to me; though I am by no means sure that each one who followed was not an equal joy and delight."

"Your second son among the rest, I hope, mother," laughed Harold.

She gave him a loving smile in response.

"Will you go up with us, Harold?" asked Arthur.

"No, thank you," he said. "I will busy myself here with the morning paper while mother makes her little call."

It was a most inviting looking apartment into which the doctor conducted his cousin, tastefully furnished and redolent of the breath of flowers; in pretty vases set here and there on bureau, mantel, and table, and blooming in the garden beneath the open windows whence the soft, warm air came stealing in through the lace curtains. But the chief ornaments of the room were its living occupants—the young mother lying amid her snowy pillows and the little one sleeping in its dainty crib close at her side.

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"Dear Cousin Elsie, you have come at last, and I am, oh, so glad to see you!" Marian exclaimed with a look of eager delight, and holding out her hand in joyous welcome. "I have hardly known

how to wait to show you our treasure and receive your congratulations."

"Dear girl, I can quite understand that," Mrs. Travilla said with a smile and a tender caress, "and I wanted to come sooner; should have done so had your good husband deemed it entirely safe for you."

"Ah, he is very careful of me," returned Marian, giving him a glance of ardent affection. "But, oh, look at our darling! His father and mother think him the sweetest creature that ever was made," she added with a happy laugh, laying a hand on the edge of the crib and gazing with eyes full of mother love at the tiny pink face nestling among the pillows there.

Elsie bent over it too in tender motherly fashion.

"He is a dear little fellow," she said softly. "I congratulate you both on this good gift from our Heavenly Father, and wish for you that he may grow up into a God-fearing man, a blessing to his parents, to the Church and the world."

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"I hope he may indeed, cousin, and I want you to join your prayers to ours that we may have grace and wisdom to train him up aright, should it please the Lord to spare him to us," said the doctor with emotion.

"I think his mother needs those prayers the most," said Marian low and softly. "I am but a foolish young thing; scarcely fit for so great a responsibility; but I am more glad and thankful than words can tell that the darling has a good, wise, Christian father to both train him and set him a good example."

"It is a cause for great thankfulness," Elsie said, "but never forget, dear girl, how very great and important is a mother's influence; especially in the early years when the strongest and most lasting impressions are apt to be made. No doubt you feel—as I often have, often do—like crying out in the midst of it all, 'Alas, who is sufficient for these things!' but what a blessing, what a comfort is the promise, 'If any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.'"

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"Oh, those are comforting texts!" Marian said with a look of relief. "I wish I were as well acquainted with the Bible as you are, cousin."

"I know more of it now than I did at your age," Elsie returned in a reassuring tone, "and you, as well as I, have it at hand to turn to in every perplexity; and if you do so you will find the truth of the words of the Psalmist, 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light unto my path.'"

"Ah, yes! an open Bible is an inestimable blessing," said Arthur, "and my Marian and I will endeavour to make it the rule of our life, the man of our counsel."

At that moment the babe stirred and opened its eyes.

"Ah, he is awake, the darling!" said Marian. "Don't you want to take him up, papa, and let Cousin Elsie have a better look at him?"

"Yes, mamma; as you know, I am very proud to exhibit my son and heir," laughed the doctor, bending over the crib, gently lifting the babe and placing it in Elsie's arms, smilingly outstretched to receive it.

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"He is indeed a lovely little darling," she said, gazing on it with admiring eyes, then softly pressing her lips to the velvet cheek. "There is nothing sweeter to me than a little helpless babe. I hope he may live to grow up if the will of God be so, and I think he is going to resemble his father," she added with a most affectionate look up into the doctor's face.

"If he equals his father in all respects, his mother will be fully satisfied," Marian said with a happy little laugh.

"Ah, love is blind, dearest," was Arthur's smiling response.

"And well for me that it is in your case, as I have often thought," she said in sportive tone, "for it seems to hide all my imperfections and show you virtues that are wholly imaginary."

"Then it is a very good and desirable kind of blindness, I think," remarked Grandma Elsie with her pleasant smile.

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"Now, Cousin Elsie, please tell me about Rosie," Marian requested with a look of keen interest. "I suppose she is both very busy and very happy."

"Quite busy and happy too, I think, except when her thoughts turn upon the approaching separation—partial at least—from home and its loved ones."

"And doubtless that thought makes you sad too, cousin," sighed Marian. "Ah, what a world of partings it is! and how sudden and unexpected many of them are."

"Yes; but there are none in that happy land to which we are journeying. Ah, what a blessed land it must be! no sin, no sorrow, pain or care, no death, but eternal life at the foot of the dear Master whose love for his redeemed ones is greater, tenderer than that of a mother for her own little helpless child."

"How intense it must be!" said Marian musingly. "I can realise that now as I never could before

my little darling came. But now, about Rosie and her betrothed. Do they not expect to settle somewhere in this region, cousin?"

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"I think that question remains yet to be fully discussed; it is certainly still undecided. Probably they will not for some time settle permanently in any one spot. Mrs. Croly is an invalid, almost constantly being taken from place to place in search of health, and never satisfied to be long separated from either husband or son—her only child."

"Ah, I'm afraid that will make it hard for Rosie," said Marian. "By the way, I think they would better bring her here and put her in our doctor's care," she added with a smiling and arch look up into her husband's face.

"Ah, my dear!" he said with a slight smile and a warning shake of the head, "don't allow yourself to take to the business of hunting up cases for me; especially chronic and incurable ones."

"But is she so bad as that?" asked Marian, turning to her cousin Elsie again.

"I suppose so," Elsie replied. "I have never been told that her case was considered incurable, but I know that she has been an invalid for many years."

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"And with no daughter to nurse and care for her! She may well deem herself fortunate in getting one so sweet and bright as Rosie."

"Rosie has had no experience as a nurse," said her mother, "but she is kind-hearted and I hope will prove a pleasant and helpful daughter to her husband's mother; as she has been to her own."

"I haven't a doubt of it. And is the wedding to come off soon, cousin?"

"The day has not yet been set," replied Mrs. Travilla, with a slight sigh at thought of the parting that must follow, "but we expect to fix upon one in the latter part of June; which I hope will give you time to grow strong enough to make one of our party. But I fear I am keeping you talking too long," she added, rising and laying the babe, who had fallen asleep again, gently back among its pillows.

"I am sure your call has done me good, and I hope you will come again soon, dear cousin," Marian said, receiving and returning a farewell caress.

"Sometime when your doctor gives permission," was Elsie's smiling reply. "Never mind coming down with me, Arthur," she added, "I know the way and have a son waiting there on the veranda to hand me into the carriage. So good-bye, and don't consider it necessary to wait for sickness among us to call you to Ion."

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CHAPTER VII.

Left alone upon the veranda, Harold sat scanning the columns of the morning paper, when a light step drew near, a pleasant voice said, "Good-morning," and looking up he found Mrs. Calhoun Conly, with a babe in her arms, close by his side.

"Oh! good-morning to you, Cousin Mary," he returned, hastily rising and gallantly handing her to a seat. "I am glad to see you and the little one looking so well."

"Thank you," she returned merrily, "it would be a pity if we failed to keep well with so many doctors about. Were you waiting to see Arthur? I believe he is in the house—probably up in his wife's room—though I have not seen him since breakfast."

"Yes, he is there, sharing with Marian a call from my mother."

"Ah! that is nice for Marian; she has been wanting to see Cousin Elsie badly. I want a call from her too, and hope she will not forget me when through with my sister-in-law."

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"Hardly, I think; it is not mother's way to forget anyone; especially so near and dear a relative as yourself, Cousin Mary. But don't set your heart on a long call this morning, for some other folks want the doctor if you don't."

"Ah! and your mother has taken up the practice of medicine, has she?"

"Well, I don't say that exactly, but certainly her advice and suggestions are sometimes more beneficial to the patient than those of her doctor son; then think of the enviable condition of the patient who can have both," returned Harold laughingly. "Ah, here comes Cousin Cal!" as a horseman came galloping up the avenue.

"Good-morning, Harold!" Calhoun said, as he alighted, giving his steed in charge to a servant, and came up the veranda steps. "I have been out in the field for some hours, overseeing the work of my men, saw you passing a few moments since with your mother, and could not resist the temptation to leave them and come in for a bit of chat with her and yourself."

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"Especially with me, of course," laughed Harold as the two shook hands and Calhoun, seating himself near his wife, took the babe, which was stretching out its arms to him with a cooing

invitation not to be resisted by the doting father.

"Mother's particular errand this morning was a call upon Marian; she is paying it now, and I presume will be down in the course of ten or fifteen minutes," added Harold.

"You will both stay to dinner, won't you?" queried Calhoun hospitably. "We'd be delighted to have you do so."

"That we would," added his wife heartily.

"Thank you," returned Harold, "but I have some rather urgent calls to make and hope to get mother to accompany me. I know of no one else who can say such comforting things to the sick and depressed."

"Nor do I," responded Mrs. Conly. "If I am in the least depressed, a call from her, or a chat with her, always raises my spirits; she can always show you a silver lining to the cloud, however dark it may be."

"Yes," said Harold, "her faith in the goodness and love of God is so strong and unwavering, and she realizes so perfectly that life in this world is short and fleeting, that which follows unending and full of bliss to all who believe in the Lord Jesus, that she is ever content with whatever Providence sends her. I never knew a happier Christian."

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"Nor I," said Mary. "I only wish we were all more like her in that respect."

"Yes," said Calhoun, "and I believe we are every one of us the happier and better for knowing her. I have been thinking that it will be hard for Rosie to leave such a mother."

"That it will," sighed Harold; "and hard for mother, and all of us indeed, to part with Rosie. But of course the members of so large a family as ours cannot expect to remain together all through life."

"Yes; weddings are apt to bring both joy and sorrow," remarked Mrs. Conly reflectively; "the forming of new ties and the breaking of old ones. One cannot altogether forget the old loves, however sweet the new may be; but when we get to the better land we may hope to have them all," she added with an appreciative glance at her husband. "Ah, how delightful that will be!"

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There was a moment's silence; then Harold said, "The wedding day having not been fixed yet the invitations have not been sent out, but I know mother is hoping to see your parents here at that time, Cousin Mary."

"That is kind," she returned with a pleased smile; "I supposed they would be invited, and that so I should have the better prospect of getting a long promised visit from them myself. But if you invite all the relatives you will have a great many guests to entertain—that is should all, or nearly all, accept. However, it is more than likely that by far the larger number will feel constrained to content themselves with sending regrets, congratulations, and gifts."

"I hope," said Harold quickly and earnestly, "I am sure we all do—that no one will feel called upon for that last. I trust that will be fully understood. The parents of both bride and groom being abundantly able to provide everything necessary or desirable, why should distant relatives and friends assist in it, perhaps at the cost of embarrassment or self-denial?"

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"But you should not deny the privilege to those who are abundantly able and would feel it a pleasure," returned Mary with playful look and tone; "which I am sure is the case with some of the relatives," she added.

"No," said Harold, "I should not deny it, but would have a distinct understanding that it was not expected or desired, at the cost of hardship or self-denial to the giver, or his or her nearer and dearer ones."

At that moment his mother stepped from the doorway into the veranda. Very warmly affectionate greetings were exchanged, she was quickly installed in an easy-chair, and some moments were spent in lively chat.

"Do take off your bonnet, Cousin Elsie, and stay and dine with us," urged Calhoun hospitably. "Our young doctor here insists that he cannot; but let him go on and visit the patients he thinks need his services, and call here again for you; unless you will allow me the pleasure of seeing you safely home later in the day."

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"Thank you, Cal," she said in reply, "but Rosie will be looking out for her mother—as I promised her I would not be gone very long—and I want to see some of my boy's patients myself, and to make a little call at Beechwood. You know they are all relatives there, and Annis and I very old and dear friends."

"Yes; and it is growing late," said Harold, consulting his watch; "so, whenever you are ready, mother, we will start."

"I am that now," she answered, rising with the words. "Good-bye, Cousin Mary. Come over to Ion whenever you can make it convenient. And when you write home be as urgent as possible in your entreaties that your parents will come to the wedding and be prepared to remain in the neighbourhood for a long visit after it is over."

"You may rest assured that I will do my very best to bring them here and for as long a stay as possible," was Mary's smiling and earnest reply.

"And never doubt, cousin, that I will do my best to second her efforts," said Calhoun, handing her into the carriage as he spoke.

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"Will there be time for a call at Beechwood, Harold?" she asked as they drove down the avenue.

"Oh, yes, mother! I think so," he replied. "I have but two calls to make on the way, and it is not likely either need be very long."

"I would not have anyone neglected for my convenience," she remarked in a cheery tone, "but should be glad to spend a half hour with Annis if I can do so without loss or inconvenience to anyone else."

"Always thoughtful for others, mother dear," Harold said, giving her a most affectionate look and smile. "I think you may trust me not to neglect my patients."

"I hope so, indeed," she responded; "and that you will never be less careful and considerate of the poor than of the rich."

Fortunately they found all doing so well that no lengthened call was necessary, and they reached Beechwood in season to allow quite a long chat between the lady cousins before it would be time for Mrs. Travilla and her son to set out on their return to Ion.

They found Mr. Lilburn and Annis seated upon the front veranda, she with a bit of needlework in her hands, he reading aloud to her. He closed his book as the carriage drove up, and laying it aside, hastened to assist his Cousin Elsie to alight, greeting her with warmth of affection as he did so. Annis dropped her work and hastened to meet and embrace her, saying:

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"Oh, but I am glad to see you, Elsie! I had letters this morning from Mildred and Zilla, both bringing a great deal of love to you and a cordial invitation to you and yours—as well as my husband and myself—to pay them a visit this summer. They have not yet heard of Rosie's approaching marriage, I find."

"But must hear of it very soon," Elsie said with a smile. "As soon as the important day is fixed upon I must send out my invitations; and you may rest assured that none of our relatives will be forgotten or neglected; certainly not one of your sisters or brothers."

"No, my dear cousin, it would not be at all like you to neglect any of them," returned Annis with a smile of loving appreciation. "Ah, Harold!" turning to him as, having secured his horse, he came up the veranda steps and joined their little group, "I am glad to see you; especially as, like a dear, good boy, you have brought your mother along."

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"Yes," he said, grasping cordially the hand she held out, "I find I am sure of a welcome anywhere when I am fortunate enough to induce mother to accompany me. Sick or well, everybody is glad to see her."

"You also, I presume; especially if they are sick."

"And can't get Cousin Arthur," he added. "A young doctor is better than none; though an old and tried physician is deemed the best—by sensible people."

"Ah, ha; ah, ha; um, hm! so it would seem, laddie, yet sometimes the young fellows hae a new trick the auld hardly ken about," remarked Cousin Ronald with a good-humoured smile. "And for my ain sel' I should care little—were I ill—whether it were Doctor Arthur or Doctor Harold that prescribed the remedies to be used."

"Or Doctor Herbert; Herbert might do just as well as either of the two, I presume," added Annis.

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"We have just come from a call at Roselands to see Marian and your little namesake, Cousin Ronald," said Mrs. Travilla. "He is a dear little fellow, and I hope will grow up in a way to do honour to the name."

"I hope he may, and to be a great comfort and blessing to the parents who have done me the honour to call their firstborn for me," returned the old gentleman, a gleam of pleasure lighting up his face. "I want to see the bit bairn myself when the mother is well enough to enjoy a call from her auld kinsman. And how soon do you think that may be, doctor?" he asked, turning to Harold.

"In a few days, sir, should she continue to gain strength as she seems to be doing now. I have no doubt she will be very glad to see both you and Cousin Annis."

"Yes; I must go along, for I want to see both the boy and his mother. Marian will make a sweet mother, I think; and Arthur an excellent father," said Annis.

"I quite agree with you in that idea," Elsie said, "and their joy in the possession of the little fellow is a pleasant thing to see. By the way, where are Cousin Ella and her little ones?"

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"Hugh has taken them out driving," replied Mr. Lilburn. "There is nothing the bit bairnies like better than that."

"I am sorry to miss seeing them, but it is time we were on our homeward route," Elsie said, consulting her watch.

They were kindly urged to remain longer, but declined, bade adieu, and were presently driving on toward Ion.

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CHAPTER VIII.

At Ion Rosie was pacing the veranda as her mother and Harold drove up. She hailed them eagerly as they alighted.

"At last! I began to think you must have yielded to a most urgent invitation to stay to dinner at Roselands, Beechwood, or Woodburn."

"No," said her mother; "invitations were not lacking, but were steadily declined for the sake of my daughter Rosie, who I knew would be sadly disappointed if her mother failed to keep her promise not to remain long away from her to-day. So here we are; and I see you have news to impart," she added with a smiling glance at a letter in Rosie's hand.

"Yes, mamma," returned the young girl, smiling and blushing as she spoke. "It is from Will, and incloses a little note from his mother—such a nice, kind, affectionate one—saying she is glad she is to have a daughter at last, and she wants to make my acquaintance as soon as possible."

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They had seated themselves, and Harold, having given his horse into the care of a stable boy, now followed them, asking in a gay, bantering tone:

"Am I intruding upon a private conference, Rosie? I know mother may be intrusted with secrets which you might prefer not to give into my keeping."

"Certainly that is so, but this is not one of that kind, and you may listen if you care to," returned Rosie with a light laugh; then she repeated the item of news just given her mother.

"Ah! I wonder if she does not want an invitation to pay us a visit," said Harold.

"Wait," laughed Rosie; "I have not told you all yet. She goes on to speak of Cousin Arthur as a physician in whom she has great confidence, and to say that she would like to be in his care for at least a time; so if we can recommend a good boarding place somewhere in this neighbourhood she, her husband, and son will come and take possession for weeks or months; at least until after the wedding."

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"By the way," said Harold, "I thought I had heard that Mrs. Croly had nearly or quite recovered her health while in Europe a few years ago. You know at the time Will was so nearly drowned they had just returned from a visit there."

"Yes," replied Rosie; "she had been greatly benefited, but her health has failed again within the last year or two—so Will has told me. I do hope she may come here—into this neighbourhood—and that Cousin Arthur may succeed in helping her very much."

"Yes, I hope so," said Harold. "He will be glad indeed of an opportunity to make some return for their very liberal treatment of him in acknowledgment of his service to their son. They feel that they owe that son's life to Arthur's persistent efforts to resuscitate him when he was taken from the sea apparently dead."

"Will himself is very grateful to him," said Rosie. "He has told me that he feels he owes his life to Doctor Arthur and that nothing can ever fully repay the obligation."

"Yes; he has talked to me in the same strain more than once or twice," said Harold. "Now I think of it, I should not be at all surprised if they would be willing to take the Crolys in at Roselands for a time. There is a good deal of unoccupied room in the house, and having her there would enable Arthur to watch the case closely and do everything possible for her restoration to health."

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"Oh, that would be a grand plan!" exclaimed Rosie. "Though perhaps it would make too much care for our lady cousins—Mary and Marian."

"Well, we won't suggest it," returned Harold, "but just tell Arthur her wishes—Mrs. Croly's, I mean—and let him give his opinion in regard to possible boarding places. Would not that be the better plan, mother?"

"I think so," she said, taking out her watch, as she spoke. "Ah! it wants but five minutes of the dinner hour. I must go at once to my rooms and make ready for the summons to the table."

It was not thought worth while to make Mrs. Croly's request a secret from any member of the family, so the matter was talked over among them as they sat together on the veranda that evening, and the different boarding places in the vicinity were considered. It was feared none of them could furnish quite such accommodations as might be desired without placing the invalid farther from her physician than would be convenient for the constant oversight of the case which they supposed he would want to exercise.

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"Well, evidently," remarked Herbert at length, "we will have to refer the question to Cousin Arthur himself. And here he comes, most opportunely," as a horseman turned in at the avenue gates.

He was greeted with warmth of cordiality and speedily installed in a luxuriously easy chair.

"I was passing," he said, "and though I don't like to be long away from my wife and boy, I felt an irresistible inclination to give my Ion relatives and friends a brief call."

"And omitting that ugly word brief, it is just exactly what we are all delighted to receive," laughed Zoe.

"Yes," said Mr. Dinsmore, "we were talking of you and wanting your opinion on a certain matter under discussion."

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"Ah, what was that?" Arthur asked in return, and Mr. Dinsmore went on to explain, telling of the desire of Mrs. Croly to put herself under his care for at least a time, and asking his opinion of the various boarding places in the vicinity.

"Boarding places!" he exclaimed. "We would be only too glad to receive her as a guest at Roselands; for as you all know I feel under great obligation to Mr. Croly, her husband; besides, it would make it much easier for me to take charge of her case. Poor dear woman! I hope she may be at least partially, if not entirely, restored to health."

"That proposal is just what one might expect of you, Cousin Arthur," said Grandma Elsie, giving him a look of affectionate appreciation; "but are you quite sure it would suit Cal's convenience, and that of your wife and his?"

"Knowing all three as I do, I can scarcely doubt it," replied Arthur; "but perhaps I would better consult them before sending the invitation to the Crolys. I will do so, and you shall hear from me early to-morrow or possibly to-night," he added. "Marian, I am sure, will feel very much as I do about it," he went on presently, "but just now the burden would fall more upon Sister Mary; so that I think I must not give the invitation unless she is entirely willing."

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"Which I feel almost certain she will be," said Rosie. "But I will wait to hear from you, Cousin Arthur, before answering my letters."

"You shall hear at an early hour," he returned.

"Mary is hoping to have her parents here for the wedding and for a long visit afterward," remarked Grandma Elsie, "but you have room enough to accommodate both them and the Crolys, I think."

"Oh, yes!" replied Arthur, "there need be no difficulty about that. Our house is large and the regular dwellers in it are far less numerous than they were in my young days. Ah, how widely scattered they are," he continued half musingly—"my sisters Isadore and Virginia in Louisiana—Molly and Dick Percival there too, with Betty and Bob Johnson; my brothers Walter and Ralph—the one in the army, the other in California. Sister Ella, the only one near at hand, living at Beechwood; Cal and I the only ones left in the old home."

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"Where you are very happy; are you not?" asked his cousin Elsie in a cheery tone and with an affectionate smile into his eyes.

"Yes," he answered, returning the smile; "Cal with his charming wife and two dear little children, I with my sweet Marian and a baby boy of whom any father might well be proud and fond. And I must be going back to them," he added, rising, and with a hasty good-night to all, he took his departure.

He was scarcely out of sight when the Beechwood and Woodburn carriages turned in at the gates, the one bringing Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Lilburn, the other Captain Raymond, his wife, and his daughters Lucilla and Grace.

All were received with warm and joyous greetings. They had started out for a drive, met and exchanged salutations, had then decided to call together upon their Ion relatives; a not very unusual proceeding.

And scarcely were they seated when Mr. and Mrs. Leland and Evelyn were seen coming up the drive, having walked over from Fairview, tempted to do so by the beauty of the evening and the prospect of the pleasure of a chat with the very near and dear dwellers in the old home at Ion, who never seemed weary of their companionship, though scarcely a day passed in which they had not more or less of it.

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Nor was the communication with Woodburn much less frequent, though it was farther away by a mile or more; for with their abundance of steeds and conveyances of various sorts, it could be traversed with such ease, expedition, and comfort that it seemed little or no inconvenience; the short ride or drive was really a pleasure; though not infrequently it was made a walk when roads were in good condition and the weather was propitious.

The welcome of the Fairview party was not less cordial than had been that of the others, and presently all were seated and a buzz of conversation ensued.

The young girls made a little group by themselves and of course the approaching wedding,

with the preparations for it, was the principal theme of their talk. Rosie, not caring to have secrets from these very near and dear young friends, told of the letters received that morning and the talk just held with Dr. Conly.

"Oh, that was noble in Cousin Arthur!" exclaimed Lucilla. "The Crolys were very generous to him, to be sure, but not at all more so than he deserved."

"No," said Rosie; "they were quite able to pay him what they did; but it isn't everyone who would have done so, and I have always thought well of them for it; and I am glad Cousin Arthur can make them some small return."

"But should he succeed in restoring Mrs. Croly to health, that will not be a very small return, I think," said Evelyn with a smile.

"No; for good health is the greatest of earthly blessings," said Grace. "One can hardly fully enjoy anything without it."

"As you know by experience, you poor thing!" said Rosie.

"Oh, no! not now."

"Have you fixed upon the wedding day yet, Rosie?" asked Lucilla.

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"No, not definitely; we have only decided that it shall be somewhere about the middle of June; or perhaps a little later. I want to make sure of having Walter here; for it would be too bad to have him miss his youngest sister's wedding."

"And you want Marian to have time to get well, too, don't you?" said Grace.

"Oh, yes, indeed! and she will be by that time; at least she seems altogether likely to be. Mamma was there to-day and found her doing nicely."

"Hark! What is that Cousin Ronald is saying?" exclaimed Lucilla, and they paused in their talk to listen.

"I want you all, old and young," he said in his blithe, cordial tones, "to come and have as good and merry a time as possible, to celebrate the third birthday of my little namesake grandson. We talked the thing over at the dinner table and all agreed that there could be no better way of celebrating that most important event."

"It certainly is a delightful time of year for an outdoor party in this region of country," remarked Mrs. Dinsmore, "and I, for one, accept the invitation with pleasure."

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"As I do," said her husband.

"And I!" "And I!" "And I!" added the others in turn.

The young girls were highly pleased: it was by no means their first invitation to Beechwood, and they felt sure of being hospitably and well entertained. Ella, Hugh's wife, had been mistress of the mansion before the marriage of the old gentleman and Annis, and so continued to be, with Annis' full consent, but there was no jarring between them; they were congenial spirits, and enjoyed each other's society. Ella was fond of the old gentleman, too,—the only father she had ever known,—and her little ones, Ronald and his baby sister, were to all a strong bond of union.

"It is to be an afternoon party, I suppose?" remarked Mrs. Dinsmore in a tone of inquiry.

"Yes," said Mr. Lilburn. "Come as early as you please, bringing all the little folks as the guests of our bit laddie. We will have an early supper for their sakes, and after that the parents can carry them home and see them in their nests as early as they like."

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"And both parents and little folks may stay as late as they like," added Annis with a smile.

"Yes," said her husband, "each and every guest may feel free to do that."

"I hope you are not too busy to come, Rosie?" said Annis, turning to her.

"Thank you, no; I should not like to miss the fun of attending little Ronald's birthday party," returned Rosie in a sprightly tone, "and you must be sure to bring him to the party I am to have some weeks later."

"That, of course, will have to be as his father and mother say," laughed Annis.

"Well, he shall not lack an invitation," said Rosie. "I do not intend that any of my relatives shall. By the way, I hope your nephew, Cousin Donald Keith, will be able to get a furlough, so that he can come. He has visited us several times, here and at the seashore, and I like him very much indeed."

"Yes, so do I," said Annis, "and I hope he may be able to come. I should enjoy showing him my new home and entertaining him there."

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"He will be in demand if he comes," said Captain Raymond. "I shall want him as my guest; for he and I are old attached friends."

"Ah, yes, I remember," said Annis. "No doubt he will want to be with you a part of his time."

"Yes," said Grandma Elsie; "and as we will all want him we will have to divide the pleasure of his visit among us—if he will allow it."

"I have always liked and admired Cousin Donald," said Violet, "and often wondered that he has remained single all these years."

"He has not happened to meet the right one yet, I suppose, my dear," the captain said with a smile. "Or, if he has met her, has failed to secure her."

"And in doing so has caused her to miss securing an excellent husband, I think," said Violet.

"In which I certainly agree with you," Annis said. "All my married nephews seem to me to be admirable husbands. I hope, Elsie, that Cyril Keith and his Isadore may be able to come to the wedding."

"So do I," responded Mrs. Travilla heartily; "and if they fail to come you may be assured it was not for lack of a warm invitation." [Pg 109]

"I hope they and all the other cousins from that region will come," remarked Mrs. Leland.

Just then the telephone bell rang.

"There! that is Cousin Arthur, I presume," said Edward Travilla, hastening to the instrument.

His answering ring and "Hello!" were quickly replied to, and the next moment he announced to the company, "It was Arthur. He says all is right, and Rosie may send as warm an invitation as possible. They will be only too glad to receive the three Crollys as their guests."

"Oh, that is good!" cried Rosie. "Now I shall be able to send my reply by to-morrow's early mail."

"Yes, Cousin Arthur was very kindly prompt; as indeed he always is," said her mother.

"Quite true, mother," said Harold; "and Herbert and I try to copy him in that, feeling that it is very necessary in a physician to be ready, able, and willing to answer a call for his services with expedition." [Pg 110]

"That it is, laddie," responded Cousin Ronald, "for a life sometimes depends on getting quick help frae the doctor. The life of a faithfu' medical mon is one of toil and self-denial; a fact that has made me wonder that you and your Cousin Herbert, here, chose it rather than a vocation that wad be somewhat easier."

"It is a hard life in some respects," Harold answered; "but there is something very delightful in having and using the ability to relieve suffering, and surely one who professes to be a follower of Christ should be seeking to do good to others rather than courting his own ease and enjoyment."

"Yes; copying the dear Master's own example," returned the old gentleman with a smile. "The dear Master who should be our pattern in all things."

"Yes," said Herbert, low and feelingly, "that is what we both sincerely desire to do."

It was still early when the callers bade good-night and took their departure; the Lilburns going first, then the Raymonds, and lastly the Lelands. [Pg 111]

All met again the next day at Beechwood, where they were joined by the other members of the family connexion and had a very pleasant afternoon, mostly taken up with sports suited to the entertainment of the little ones—three-year-old Ronald and his baby cousins.

The invitations had been sent out too late to allow time for the purchase of many gifts, but there were fruits and flowers, and some few toys; among these last, animals which ventriloquism caused apparently to say very amusing things, to the surprise and merriment of the little folks.

Then, when they began to tire of fun and frolic, they were seated about a table under the trees on the lawn, and regaled with toothsome viands, not too rich for their powers of digestion. After that they were allowed to sport upon the verandas and the grass, while the elder people gathered about the table and satisfied their appetites with somewhat richer and more elaborate viands.

They had finished their meal and were gathered in groups under the trees or on the verandas, when the sound of a banjo caused a sudden hush of expectancy. Glances were sent here and there in search of the musician, yet no one was greatly surprised that he was not visible. Several tunes were played; then followed a song in the negro dialect, which made everybody laugh. [Pg 112]

That was the winding up of the entertainment, and, as it was nearing the bedtime of the little ones, all presently bade good-bye, with truthful assurances of having greatly enjoyed themselves, and returned to their homes. [Pg 113]

CHAPTER IX.

The Woodburn carriage was quite full with the captain and his entire family, excepting, of course, his eldest son, Max, who was far away on board a man-of-war.

"Well," said Violet, as they drove out of Beechwood Avenue into the highway, "I have enjoyed little Ronald's birthday party very much, and hope you can all say the same."

"Oh, yes, mamma! I think we had good fun," exclaimed Neddie. "To be sure Ronald is only a baby boy—just about half as old as I am—but he's a very dear little fellow; and then his grandpa made a great deal of fun for us."

"Sometimes it was his papa who did it, I think," said Elsie.

"Oh, yes!" said Ned. "Papa, why don't you do such things for us sometimes?"

"Really, my son, I do not seem to have any talent in that line," returned the captain with a smile. "Your brother Max has, however, and I hope that, some of these days, he will come home and make the fun for you that you are so eager for." [Pg 114]

"Oh, I'll be so glad! And will he teach me how to do it, too?"

"I hardly think he can," his father answered, with an amused look; "at least, not till you are a good deal older than you are now."

"Well, I'm getting older every day; mamma tells me so when she wants me to behave like a little gentleman."

"Which is always, Neddie boy," Violet said, with an amused look.

"Yes, my son, both mamma and papa want their little boy to be always a little gentleman—kind, courteous, and thoughtful for others," the captain said, softly patting the little hand laid confidently on his knee.

"Lu, do you know if Rosie sent off those important letters this morning?" asked Violet.

"Yes, she told me she did; also that she had learned from Cousin Mary that Cousin Arthur had written a warm invitation from himself and his wife, and from her and Cousin Cal, and sent it by the early morning mail. I presume they will be received by the Crolys to-morrow and that two or three days later the reply will come." [Pg 115]

"I think it can hardly fail to be an acceptance," said Violet. "I shall be glad of the opportunity to make the acquaintance of Rosie's future mother-in-law,—the father-in-law too,—and I dare say Will is anxious to have them know mamma, and perhaps the rest of us."

"And, having done so they will be all the more pleased with the match," added the captain. "By the way, my dear, we must keep open house for the entertainment of family connections when they are here to attend the wedding."

"I am entirely willing," Violet answered with a smile; "as well I may be when my husband bears all the expense and does the planning, with the housekeeper's assistance, and she directs the servants, who do all the work. Really I do not know where a more fortunate woman than I can be found."

"Nor I were a more appreciative wife could be discovered," returned the captain, regarding her with a smile of profound affection. [Pg 116]

"I hope Captain Keith will be one of our guests," said Grace. "I liked him very much when he visited us that time at the seashore. Didn't you, Lu?"

As the question was asked the captain turned a quick, inquiring look upon his eldest daughter, which, however, she did not seem to notice.

"Yes," she said rather indifferently, "I liked him well enough; and I remember he was pleasant and kind at West Point—showing us about and explaining things. But even if he hadn't been so kind and obliging I should be glad to entertain him as papa's friend," she added. "Were you boys together, father?"

"No," laughed the captain; "if I am not mistaken I am fully ten years older than Captain Keith."

"Why, papa, I don't think you look like it. And you are such great friends," exclaimed Lucilla.

"Well, my child, people may be great friends without being very near of an age," laughed her father. "For instance, are not you and I great friends?"

"Oh, we are lovers," she answered with a bright smile up into his eyes. "But then we are not of the same sex." [Pg 117]

"And that, you think, makes a difference, eh?" he laughed. "But Max and Ned seem to love me nearly as well as my daughters do."

"Every bit as much, papa!" exclaimed Ned earnestly. "I do, I'm sure."

"That is pleasant to hear, my boy," his father said, smiling fondly upon the little fellow. "And I presume brother Max would say the same if he were here. Ah, we have reached home"; for at that moment the carriage turned in at the great gates.

"Our own sweet, lovely home!" said Grace, looking out upon the beautiful grounds with shining eyes. "I am always glad to get back to it, no matter where I have been."

"I too," said Lucilla; "unless my father is somewhere else," she added, giving him a most loving look.

"Ah, I wasn't thinking of being in it without papa," said Grace. "I'd rather live in a hovel with him than in a palace without him."

"I don't doubt it, my darling," he returned. "I am entirely sure of the love of both of you, and of all my children." [Pg 118]

"And of your wife, I hope," added Violet in a sprightly tone.

"Yes, indeed, my love, or I should not be the happy man I am," he responded; then, as the carriage drew up before the entrance to the mansion, he threw open the door, alighted, and handed them out in turn.

"The children seem to be tired," remarked Violet; "do you not think they might as well go at once to their beds, my dear?"

"Yes," he said. "Grace also; for she looks as weary as they."

"Thank you, papa," she said. "I am tired enough to be glad to do so. But don't be anxious," she added with a smile, as he gave her a troubled look; "I am not at all sick; it is only weariness." And she held up her face for a kiss, which he gave heartily and with a look of tenderest fatherly affection.

The two little ones claimed their turn; then Violet and the three went upstairs, leaving the captain and Lucilla alone together.

"Didn't you say you had some letters to write when you came home, papa?" she asked; "and can't I help you?" [Pg 119]

"I say yes to both questions," he answered pleasantly. "Take off your hat and come with me into the library. But perhaps you are too tired," he added hastily, as if just struck by the thought. "If so, daughter, I would not have you exert yourself to do the work now. It can wait till to-morrow morning. Or, if I find anything needing an immediate reply, I can attend to it myself, without my little girl's assistance."

"But I am not tired, papa, and I dearly love to help you in any and every way that I can," she answered, smiling up into his eyes.

"I do not doubt it in the least, my child," he said, laying his hand on her head in tender, fatherly fashion; "and you are a very great help and comfort to me; so much so that I shall be extremely loath ever to let anybody rob me of my dear eldest daughter."

"I hardly think anybody wants to yet, papa," she laughed; "nobody seems to set anything like the value upon me that you do. So you needn't be in the least afraid of ever being robbed of this one of your treasures. Ah, papa, it is so nice—such a happiness to have you esteem me a treasure, and to know that I belong to you." [Pg 120]

"A happiness to me as well as to you, dear child," he said. "Well, we will look at the letters and decide whether it is necessary to answer any of them to-night."

They had entered the library and drawn near the table while they talked. A pile of letters lay upon it. He took them up and glanced at the superscription upon each.

"Ah! here is one directed to you, daughter," he said, "and from someone in this neighborhood; for it is without a stamp."

"Probably from Maud or Sydney," she remarked.

"No," said her father, "the handwriting is evidently that of a man. Well, you may open it and see who the writer is," handing it to her as he spoke.

"If you would rather I did not, papa, I do not want to," she said, not offering to take it. "Please read it first."

"I can trust you, daughter, and you have my full permission to read it," he said in a kindly indulgent tone. [Pg 121]

"Thank you, papa; but I really prefer to have you read it first," she replied.

He smiled approval, broke the seal, and glanced over the missive.

"It is from Chester Dinsmore," he said; "merely an invitation to you to go with him to a boating party on the river, if your father gives consent."

"Which I don't believe my father will," laughed Lucilla.

"And you are not anxious that he should?" he queried with a smile.

"Not unless he is entirely willing to have me go; and hardly even then, as he is not to be one of the party."

"That is my own good little girl," he said, putting an arm about her, drawing her close to his side, and kissing her several times. "I am not willing to have you a young lady yet,—as I think you

know,—but I want to keep you my own little girl for some time longer."

"I am very glad that you do, papa," she returned, laying her head against his breast and putting her arms about his neck, "and I hope you won't ever, ever grow tired of keeping me for your own, altogether yours, with no partner in the concern," she added with a low, gleeful laugh.

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"You need have no fear that I will grow tired of it until you do," he said with a smile, and repeating his caresses. "But when that time comes do not hesitate to tell me: for, rest assured, your happiness is very dear to your father's heart. And if you would like to accept this invitation, you may do so with my full consent."

"Thank you, father dear, but I really do not care to go; I should much prefer to keep the engagement already made for that day."

"Ah! what is that?"

"Now, papa, have you forgotten that you are to take Mamma Vi, Gracie, and me into the city to do some shopping?"

"Ah, yes; I had forgotten it for the moment. But I dare say both your mamma and Grace would be willing to defer that for a day or two."

"But I wouldn't, because my father has taught me not to break engagements without very strong reasons; which I don't think I have in this case."

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He laughed a little at that. "Well, daughter," he said, "you shall do as you please about it, and I am glad to see that you are so good at remembering your father's instructions and so ready to obey them."

"Thank you, sir. And now must I answer Chester's note—or will you do it for me?"

"That shall be just as you please, daughter. Perhaps it would be as well for you to write the answer; but, if you greatly prefer to have me do so, I shall not refuse."

"May I do it on the typewriter?"

"If you prefer it, I see no objection."

"I do prefer it; it is so much easier and quicker than working with a pen," she said.

"Perhaps you would better wait until to-morrow morning, however," he suggested; "for, on thinking the matter over, you may find that you prefer to accept the invitation after all."

He was examining the rest of his mail, and she considered his proposition for a moment before replying to it.

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"Yes, papa," she said at length, "I will wait a little—perhaps till to-morrow morning—before writing my answer. And now I will get ready to write replies to those letters at your dictation."

"Yes, daughter; fortunately there are but few that call for a reply, and it need not be long in any case." He laid down the letters and took the cover from the machine as he spoke, then supplied her with paper and envelopes, put a sheet into the machine, and began dictating. They made quick work of it, and had finished in about half an hour.

Violet joined them just as Lulu took the last sheet from the machine.

"Oh," she said, "I see you are busy; but I will not interrupt."

"We are just done, my dear, and very glad to have you with us," said her husband.

"Yes, Mamma Vi, this is the last letter papa wants written for him, and you are just in time to help me decide on a reply to one of my own."

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"Willingly, if you wish it; but I should say your father's advice would be worth far more than mine," returned Violet in a sprightly tone. "Levis, my dear, do you refuse to tell her what to do or say?"

"I only advise her to follow her own inclination—if she can find out what that is," he answered, regarding Lucilla with a smile that seemed a mixture of fatherly affection and amusement.

"Yes, papa is so dear and kind he won't give me any order at all, and I am so used to being directed and controlled by him that it really seems hard work to decide for myself," laughed Lucilla.

"But what about? My curiosity is keenly aroused," said Violet, glancing from one to the other.

"An invitation for me to go boating and picnicking day after to-morrow," returned Lucilla. "You may read it," handing Chester's note to Violet. "I have no very strong inclination to accept,—especially as we are expecting to take that day for our shopping expedition to the city,—but papa seems to think I should hardly decline on that account. Still he leaves me free to decline or accept as I please, and though I have often wished he would, when he wouldn't, this time I wish he wouldn't when he will"; she ended with a hearty laugh.

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"And I suppose your conclusion is that fathers are sometimes very doubtful blessings," the captain said, assuming a grave and troubled air.

She gave him a startled look. "Oh, papa! surely you are not in earnest? surely you know that I was not?" she exclaimed beseechingly.

He smiled and held out his hand. She sprang to his side and he drew her to a seat upon his knee.

"Yes, daughter, dear, I do," he said, caressing her hair and cheek with his hand, "and I, too, was but jesting; I am troubled with no doubts of the sincere, ardent affection of my eldest daughter."

"Yes," said Violet with a smile, "I think she very nearly makes an idol of her father—which is not surprising considering what a dear, good father he is. Well, I have read the note, Lu, and I think, if I were you, I would accept the invitation. Don't you think, my dear, that we might do the shopping to-morrow?"

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"Certainly, if it suits you, my love," he replied. "I do not know why to-morrow would not suit for that business as well as the next day."

"And that leaves you free to accept Chester's invitation, Lu."

"Yes, and I begin to feel as if I might enjoy it right well if——"

"If what, daughter?" her father asked, as she paused, leaving her sentence unfinished.

"If I were perfectly sure you would not rather I did not go, papa."

"I think I can trust you to behave well, even out of my sight," he returned with a smile, and in a jesting tone; "and though I still call you my little girl, that is more as a term of endearment than anything else; and I really think you are large enough, old enough, and good enough to be trusted, occasionally, out of my sight—away from my side."

"Thank you, papa dear," she said, her eyes shining; "it is a great pleasure to hear you say that, and I certainly do intend to conduct myself exactly as I think you would wish; so now I will answer Chester's note with an acceptance of his invitation," she added, leaving her father's knee and seating herself before the typewriter. "I'll make it short and submit it to you, papa, for approval."

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"About that, too, you may do exactly as you please," he responded, stepping to her side and putting the paper in for her, as when she was about to write for him.

She made quick work, saying only what seemed necessary, submitted it to her father's and Violet's verdict, which was altogether favourable, then directed an envelope, placed the note in it, and sealed it, saying, "There! it is all ready to go early to-morrow morning, and will be no hindrance to me in getting ready for the shopping expedition."

"Which, perhaps, you will enjoy nearly as much as the boating party," remarked Violet in a jesting tone.

"Probably more," responded Lucilla; "at least if we are successful in finding very suitable and handsome wedding gifts for Rosie. Father, how much may I spend on one?"

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"I think not more than a hundred dollars."

"Oh! may I have so much as that for it? You dear, good papa!" she exclaimed.

"I am well able to afford it," he returned pleasantly, "and should be sorry to let my daughters give other than valuable wedding gifts to my wife's sister."

"Thank you, my dear," said Violet with a gratified look. "I have no doubt Rosie will appreciate your and your daughter's kindness, as she certainly ought to."

"Grandma Elsie has been very, very kind to us," said Lucilla, and her father added:

"She has, indeed! I can never forget how kindly she took my children in when I was unable to provide them with a good and happy home."

"Hark! I hear carriage wheels on the drive; we are going to have callers," exclaimed Lucilla, and, as she spoke, they all rose and went out upon the veranda to receive their guests.

They proved to be Maud, Sydney, and Frank Dinsmore, from the Oaks; and, when greetings had been exchanged, they said their errand was to speak of the boating party, and ask if Grace could go; also if Lucilla had received Chester's invitation and meant to accept it. Chester would have come himself but had an unavoidable business engagement for the evening.

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"I have given Lucilla permission to go," the captain replied, "but Grace is not strong enough for the exertion she would be likely to make without her father at hand to caution and care for her."

"Oh, I am sorry!" said Maud. "I hoped Gracie could go and would enjoy it. But I am glad we may tell Chester that Lu can."

"I have written my acceptance of his kind invitation," Lulu said, "and will send it in the morning."

"Captain," said Frank, "if you will let Miss Grace go I promise to take all possible care of her."

Won't it seem a trifle hard to her to have to stay at home while her sister and the rest of us are having such a good time?"

"I think not," the captain answered. "Grace is the best and most dutiful of daughters, always satisfied with her father's decisions; thinking he knows what is best for her. Also she loves her home and home pleasures; indeed thinks there is no other place quite equal to home."

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"It is a lovely place, that's a fact," Frank returned with a slight laugh, "but variety is the spice of life, and possibly Miss Grace's health might be better if she tried more of that spice."

"I think that if you ask her you will learn that a pleasant variety is not, and has not been, lacking in her experience of life," was the captain's pleasant-toned rejoinder.

"I am sure of it," remarked Maud. "I never knew anybody who seemed to me happier or more light-hearted than Gracie. And, oh, but she dotes upon her father!"

"As all his children do," said Lucilla, giving him a look of ardent affection.

"You will not keep my daughter out very late?" the captain said, addressing Frank in a tone of inquiry.

"No, sir; we expect to get home before dark. But if anything should happen to detain us you need not be uneasy. We will take good care of her and return her to you in safety."

"We are staying out rather late now ourselves, Frank, and I think should be starting for home," said Maud, rising and turning to Violet to begin her adieus.

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"Father," said Lucilla, turning to him when their callers had gone, "please don't let me go at all if you expect to be the least bit anxious about me. I would far rather stay at home than cause you a moment's uneasiness."

"My dear child, I must allow you a little liberty—let you out of my sight sometimes," he said with a smile. "But it pleases me that you are so ready and willing to do whatever you find most pleasing to your father," he added, pressing affectionately the hand she had put into his.

"Are you not afraid my father will make me miserably conceited—giving me so much more commendation than I deserve?" she asked with a roguish look and pleased laugh.

"I hope not; you will fall very much in my estimation if you grow conceited and vain. I do not think you that now; but, remember, love is blind, and your father's love for you is very great."

"Yes, you dear papa, I know that and it makes me, oh, so happy," she said with joyous look and tone.

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"As I think you have reason to be, Lu," Violet said, regarding her husband and his daughter with a smile of pleased sympathy.

"It is time for our evening service, and then for my daughter to go to her bed and take her beauty sleep," remarked the captain looking at his watch.

"Yes, papa," laughed Lucilla, "I need all of that kind of sleep that I can get."

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CHAPTER X.

"Ah! so you are up, Gracie dear," Lucilla said, looking in the next morning at the communicating door between their rooms. "I have been down in the grounds with papa for the last half hour, and he bade me come and tell you to dress for a drive; for we are to go on our shopping expedition to-day instead of to-morrow."

"Are we?" exclaimed Grace. "To-day will suit me as well as to-morrow; but why have papa and mamma changed their plans?"

"It is all for my benefit," laughed Lucilla. "You must know that Chester Dinsmore has been so good as to invite me to attend a boat ride and picnic with him to-morrow, and, to my surprise, papa gave me full permission to go."

"That was very kind of him," remarked Grace, "and I hope you will have a delightful time."

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"I don't know," Lulu returned, with doubtful tone and look. "I think I shall not half enjoy it without you; and papa says you are too feeble to go on such an expedition without him; you would need him to take care of you and see that you did not overexert yourself."

"Yes; and, of course, papa is right; he always knows what is best for me and all of us."

"So I think, and I did not at all expect him to say I could go. I wasn't very anxious that he should, either; though I dare say it will be very pleasant as the Dinsmore girls are going, and, perhaps, Rosie Travilla too."

"Oh, I think you will enjoy it! I hope so, I am sure," exclaimed Grace, looking both pleased and interested. "Now please tell me what dress you are going to wear to the city to-day, and advise

me about mine."

"I hadn't thought about it, yet," said Lucilla; "but there, I hear papa coming into our sitting room. I'll run and ask him what he would advise or direct about it. It is a matter of great importance, you know"; and with that she laughed merrily, turned about, and ran to meet their father.

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He decided the knotty question, promptly saying: "The gray dresses made for you both a few weeks ago will be very suitable, I think." Then he bade her help Grace and also change her own dress, because they would make an early start for the city, going very soon after leaving the table.

"I am glad to hear that, papa," she returned, "for a drive in the early morning air is so pleasant. But I wish I had no occasion to change my dress, because I fear that will take up all the time of your morning call here on Gracie and me."

"I think not, if you are prompt in your movements," he said. "I shall sit here for some little time reading the morning paper."

"Oh, I am glad of that! and perhaps, papa, if you look over the advertisements you may find something that will help us in the search for the pretty things we want to buy."

"Very possibly," he replied. "I will look them over at once."

"Thank you, sir. I'll do as you bid me and be back again as soon as ever I can; for I don't like to lose a minute of my father's morning call," she said, giving him a bright, loving look, then hurrying back to her sister.

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"We'll have to make haste, Gracie," she said, "if we don't want to miss altogether our morning chat with papa. We are to wear our new gray dresses, he says."

"That suits me nicely, for I think them becoming, pretty, and suitable. Don't you?"

"Yes; I think nobody has better taste or judgment about dress than our father."

"Just my opinion; and we may well think so, considering how many lovely dresses and ornaments he has bought for us, selecting them without the help or advice of anyone. There, sister dear, your dress is on all right and I shall make haste to change mine while you put the finishing touches to your attire."

They joined their father in a few moments, talked over the advertisements he had been examining and the question of the desirability of this and that article as a wedding gift to Rosie, but had reached no decision when the breakfast bell rang.

"Well, daughters," the captain said, "we will go down now to our breakfast and, while we are eating, talk the matter over with your mamma. She probably knows better than we what would be likely to please Rosie."

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"But we do not need to decide until we see the things, do we, papa?" asked Lucilla.

"No, certainly not, and we may find something very handsome and suitable that we have not thought of. I hope it will be a pleasure to both of you to look over the pretty things and make a selection."

"You dear father," Grace said, smiling up into his eyes, "you are always thinking of something to give your children pleasure."

"Yes," he said, returning her smile, "perhaps because it reacts upon myself, giving me a great deal of pleasure."

They found Violet and the little ones already in the breakfast room; morning greetings were exchanged, then they seated themselves at the table, the captain asked a blessing, and the meal began.

They chatted pleasantly while eating, the principal subject of discourse being their errand to the city. Violet had not heard Rosie express a desire for any particular thing, but thought they would probably see something in the stores that would strike them as handsome and suitable.

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"Is Elsie going with you to-day, papa? and am I?" asked Neddie.

"Yes, my son, if you want to go," the captain replied. "And would you like to buy some gifts for Aunt Rosie, too?"

"Oh, yes, yes indeed, papa!" cried, both children, Elsie adding: "But I have only a little money. I'm afraid it won't be enough to buy anything handsome enough for a wedding present."

"Well," their father said reflectively, "you have been good children, and I feel inclined to give you each a present of ten dollars, which you may dispose of as you like."

"Oh, thank you, papa!" both cried delightedly, Ned adding: "I s'pose it's for us to buy something for Aunt Rosie with; isn't it, papa?"

"If you want to use it for that you may; but you are not compelled to do so; you can spend it for someone else, or for yourself if you choose."

"I'm going to spend mine for Aunt Rosie," Elsie announced. "It was very nice and kind in her to choose me for a flower girl at her wedding, and I'd like to give her something very pretty; something that she would like. Mamma, you will help me to choose my present, won't you?"

"With pleasure, daughter; and I am sure your papa and sisters will help us in our selection. They all have good taste."

"And y'll all help me, too, won't you?" asked Ned. "I want to buy the prettiest thing I can find for Aunt Rosie."

"Yes; you shall have all the advice you want, my son," his father said. "And now, as you have all finished eating, we will go to the library and have family worship; then make ourselves ready and set off upon our trip to the city."

"I think we couldn't have selected a better time for our expedition," Violet said as they entered their carriage; "the air is bracing, the weather delightful, and the roads are in excellent order, are they not, my dear?"

"Yes," the captain answered, "we could ask no improvement, and I think will travel rapidly enough to reach the city in very good season." They did so and were successful in finding what they esteemed beautiful gifts for the coming bridal. And Rosie's pleasure on receiving them was as great as they, the givers, had hoped. She had many handsome and valuable presents, but none seemed to gratify her more than these from her Woodburn relatives and friends.

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"I like those gray dresses of yours, girls; they are both pretty and becoming, and very suitable for such a trip as we have taken to-day," remarked Violet as they rode homeward. "You will wear yours to the picnic to-morrow, I suppose, Lu?"

"If papa approves," answered Lucilla with a laughing look at him.

"Entirely," he said; "though I shall not insist if you prefer something else."

"That reminds me of some of my Nantucket experiences of years ago," she remarked. "Do you remember, papa, how I missed going to the 'squantum' with the rest of you because I took off the suitable dress Mamma Vi had directed me to wear, and donned some very unsuitable finery?"

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"Yes," he replied, "that was an unhappy time for both the rebellious little girl and her father."

"Yes, papa; oh, I'm afraid I gave you many a heartache in those days. I remember I wanted very much to dress in white for the clambake, some weeks after that, but you wouldn't allow it. I was a very foolish little girl, and now I am very glad I had a wise, kind father to keep me in order."

"You were not rebellious about that second disappointment," he said with a smile, "and in the years that have passed since then you have learned to be very submissive to your father's wishes and directions."

"Yes, sir, because I have found out from experience that he is far wiser than I, and always seeks my best interests."

"That is certainly what he wishes to do, daughter; for the welfare of all his dear children lies very near his heart."

"Yes, papa; you love us all, I know," little Elsie said with a bright, glad look up into his face.

"Of course papa does," said Neddie; "if he didn't he wouldn't give us money to spend, and ever so many other nice things; or take us to the city for such a good time as we have had to-day."

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"Yes, our dear papa is very good to us all," said Grace. "We have had a delightful drive, a fine time in the city, and now here we are at our own lovely home again," she added as the carriage turned in at the great gates.

"It is nearing tea time, daughters, and you had better go at once to your rooms and make yourselves neat for the evening," the captain said as he helped Lucilla and Grace to alight.

"Yes, sir," they answered and hastened up the broad stairway, following Violet and the two little ones.

"Dere's a gemman in de parlour a-waitin' for to see you, cap'in," said a servant, coming leisurely in from the back veranda.

"Ah! has he been here long?"

"'Bout ten minutes, I reckon, sah."

The captain hastened into the parlour and found Chester Dinsmore there. Cordial greetings were exchanged, and Chester received a warm invitation to stay to tea, which, however, he declined, saying that he had a little professional work on hand which must be done that evening if he was to take to-morrow for a holiday. "I came over, captain," he added, "to thank you for allowing me the privilege of taking your daughter, Miss Lucilla, to the picnic to-morrow, and to ask if—if you would not be so very kind as to remove your prohibition of—of love-making on my part, and—"

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"No, Chester," the captain said in kindly but grave accents, as the young man halted in his speech, "you surely forget that my objection was on account of my daughter's youth, and that she is only a few months older now than she was then. I do not want her to begin to think of lovers for several years yet, and am objecting to your suit for that reason only. I show no greater favour in this matter to anyone else. And you may feel that I am showing confidence in you in permitting her to go to to-morrow's picnic in your care."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir. I shall not abuse your confidence, and, though I find it hard not to be permitted to speak and use my best efforts to win the prize I so covet, it is some consolation that you treat other suitors in the same way."

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"Perhaps, too, that my daughter is equally indifferent to them all," the captain remarked with a smile. "And by the way, my young friend, don't you suppose it may be a trifle hard for Lucilla's father to resign the first place in her heart to someone else?"

"It is according to nature, sir," Chester said, returning the smile. "You served Cousin Elsie so when you stole Cousin Violet's heart; and Cousin Elsie's husband had taken her from her father. It has been the way almost ever since the world began; so I suppose it is all right."

"Yes; but a father has a right to say it shall not begin too soon with his own daughter. Wedlock brings cares and responsibilities that should not be allowed to fall too soon upon young shoulders, and it is my desire and purpose to keep my dear young daughters free from them until they reach years of maturity."

"Putting it so, captain, it does seem that you are acting kindly by them, though I must insist that it is hard on the lovers," Chester returned between a smile and a sigh. "But I think you may trust your daughter with me to-morrow without much fear that I will abuse your confidence. And I am not at all sure that I could gain anything by speaking. We are good friends,—she and I,—but I doubt if she cares a cent for me any other way."

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"As to that," the captain said in kindly tone and with his pleasant smile, "I still have the happiness of believing that, as yet, her father holds the first place in her heart. I cannot hope that it will be so always—perhaps I ought not to wish it; but I do rejoice in the firm conviction that such is the fact at present."

"No one can blame you for that, sir," Chester said, rising to take leave, "but, ungenerous as it sounds, I cannot help hoping that, one of these days, I may be able to shift your position to the second place, taking the first myself. It sounds dreadful selfish, but fathers have to give way to lovers and husbands if the human race is to continue. I hope to be here in the morning, captain, a little after nine o'clock, with a carriage, to take Miss Lu to the wharf where the boat will be lying. I promise to take the best of care of her, to do and say nothing of which her father would disapprove, and to bring her home safely, Providence permitting, before dark."

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"I have no doubt you will, Chester, and I trust her—one of my choice treasures—to you with confidence in your purpose to be the faithful guardian of her safety, and perfectly trustworthy as regards the matter of which we have been speaking," were the captain's parting words to his young visitor as he saw him out to the veranda.

"Thank you, sir; I hope to prove faithful to the trust. Good-evening," Chester returned, then sped away down the drive.

He thought it best, as did the captain also, that Lucilla should be left in ignorance of his call.

She came downstairs when the tea bell summoned the family to partake of their evening meal, and at its conclusion all gathered upon the front veranda, as was their custom. They had not been there very long when the Fairview carriage was seen to turn in at the great gates and come swiftly up the drive. As it drew up before the entrance they perceived with pleasure that it contained Mr. and Mrs. Leland and Evelyn, Grandma Elsie, and Rosie. A warm welcome was given them, all were comfortably seated—the young girls in a group together a little to one side of the older people—and soon an animated chat was being carried on by each party.

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"Well, Lu," the captain presently overheard Rosie saying, "I suppose you are invited to to-morrow's picnic; I heard you were to be—you and Gracie both. Are you going?"

"I believe I am," replied Lucilla. "I have had an invitation, and papa has given me permission to accept it; but he thinks Gracie is not strong enough to go on such an excursion without him along to take care of her."

"Yes, I suppose that is so," said Rosie. "I am sorry, for I am going and I should like to have Gracie's company. Rather than do without it I would even take Brother Levis' too," she added with a laugh and in a little louder tone, turning a playful look upon him as she spoke.

His quick ear had caught the words.

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"Can that be so, Sister Rosie," he said with assumed gravity. "Well, unfortunately, I cannot go, as I have had no invitation. Also as I have already declined the invitation for Grace, she cannot go. But I trust she is not greatly afflicted by this state of affairs."

"No, indeed, papa," responded Grace with a contented little laugh. "It is very far from being a trial to have to stay in this sweet home with you and mamma, Elsie and Ned."

"I hardly supposed you would have time and inclination to go, Rosie," said Lucilla.

"Oh, yes, indeed!" laughed Rosie. "I think it advisable to seize all the pleasures of single blessedness while I can."

"But married folks can go to picnics."

"Yes, so they can—to some of them; but this is only for the unmarried, who have gotten it up."

"Did you have a hand in that?" asked Lucilla.

"No; it was the work of our young gentlemen friends—my brothers, cousins, and some others."

"Of course you have not yet heard from your friends, the Crollys?" Lulu said inquiringly.

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"No; there has not been time; unless they had telegraphed; as, perhaps, they may, to Cousin Arthur. Speak of angels! here he comes!" she exclaimed, as, at that moment, a gig turned in at the great gates and came on rapidly toward the house.

Dr. Arthur Conly was in it, and, presently, having reached the veranda steps, drew rein, bade good-evening, and announced to his cousins Elsie and Rosie that he had received a telegram from the Crollys thanking him for his invitation and saying that it was accepted and they might be expected in a few days.

"Ah! that is good news, if it suits you all at Roselands," said Grandma Elsie.

"As I think it does, cousin," returned the doctor. "At all events they all seemed pleased; which I think is particularly kind in Sister Mary and Cal."

"Yes," said Rosie, "and I hope and believe the Crollys will prove so agreeable as guests, or boarders, that they will never regret it."

"So do I," Arthur said; "also I think that the Crollys will find us all so agreeable that they will never regret it."

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"Won't you alight and take a seat among us, doctor?" asked the captain hospitably.

"Thank you; I should enjoy doing so, but duty calls in another direction, a sick patient needing prompt attention. Good-evening to you all"; and, turning with the last words, he drove away.

"So, Rosie, you are likely soon to be able to make the acquaintance of your future mother-in-law," said Violet. "But you don't seem alarmed at the prospect."

"No; because I am not. From all Will has told me I think she must be a lovely and lovable woman; as he thinks his future mother-in-law is."

"And as all to whom she bears that relation can testify," remarked the captain with an affectionate, appreciative glance at the sweet face of Grandma Elsie.

"I, for one," said Mr. Leland heartily; "and I feel entirely sure of Zoe, the only other one to whom she bears that relationship."

"You are all very kind, very ready to pass my imperfections by," responded Mrs. Travilla's sweet voice. "And if I am a good mother, I can assure you that it is at least partly as a consequence of having good sons and daughters."

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"May you always be able to say that, mother," responded the captain heartily. "It would be a sorry sort of man or woman who could be any other than a good son or daughter to you."

"Oh, Lu!" said Evelyn presently, "didn't you tell me you were going into the city to-morrow to do some shopping?"

"Yes; but we did it to-day, in order that I might have to-morrow free for the picnic. We all went to the city and had a very pleasant and successful time."

"Shopping is apt to be very fatiguing work," said Grandma Elsie. "I see Grace looks weary. Dear child, if you feel like retiring, do not let our presence hinder you for a moment."

"Thank you, Grandma Elsie; but I don't like to miss a minute of your call," returned Grace, exerting herself to speak in a lively tone.

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"I'd like to tell about what we bought," said Ned, "but I suppose I must not."

"Better wait till you have the articles here to show, my son," said his father.

"Yes; we had to leave them to be marked; but Aunt Rosie will see them some of these days," said the little fellow.

"And she is very willing to wait till the right time comes," Rosie said, putting an arm about him and giving him a kiss; for he had gone to her side.

"I'm afraid it will be a good while to wait," he returned. "Papa was so kind, he gave us—Elsie and me—each ten dollars to do what we pleased with. Lu and Gracie had a good deal more, 'cause they are older, you know, and—"

"There, that will do, Ned," laughed his mother. "It is your bed time. Say good-night to grandma

and the rest, and Elsie and you and I will run away for the present."

The callers did not stay very long after Violet's return to the veranda, and soon after their departure the captain held his evening service and then advised Lucilla and Grace to retire at once, that the coming day might find them fully rested and refreshed.

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They obeyed with cheerful alacrity, and arose the next morning feeling none the worse for the exertion of the previous day.

Chester came promptly at the appointed hour, found Lucilla ready for the excursion, and they drove away in fine spirits. Chester spared no pains to make himself agreeable to his companion, but was careful not to do or say anything of which her father could disapprove. He brought her home again before dark, slightly fatigued, but gay and lively, with much to tell of the pleasant experiences of the day.

"Did Rosie go?" asked Grace.

"Yes, and was very merry; indeed, so we all were. We were rowing about and fishing most of the time."

"Both at once?" queried her father with an amused look.

"No, sir; we kept still enough while trying to catch the fish, and we caught as many as we could eat, then landed, made a fire,—the young men did, I mean,—cooked the fish, made coffee, and we had our dinner. We girls spread a tablecloth on the grass and got out the good things in the baskets. They were in great plenty, quite a variety, and all very good and palatable. I think the air and rowing had given us all fine appetites so that everybody ate heartily and seemed to enjoy it."

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"And you were not sorry you went?"

"No, indeed! I am much obliged to you, father, for letting me go," she added, turning to him with a look of love and gratitude.

"You are very welcome, daughter," he said, "and I am glad you enjoyed it. There is an old saying that 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,' and I think girl nature does not differ in that respect."

"Oh, you dear papa! none of your children are ever allowed to have all work and no play," she exclaimed, giving him a look of ardent affection. "You take a great deal of trouble to give us pleasure; you always have."

"Yes, indeed," said Grace; "it seems to be papa's greatest delight to give pleasure to his wife and children. Don't you think so, mamma?"

"Indeed I do," returned Violet heartily. "I have never known a more generous or unselfish person than my husband and your father."

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"And what shall I say?" queried the captain. "That when I am the person under discussion no greater flatterers can be found than my wife and older daughters?"

"Oh! we will excuse you from saying anything on the subject, sir," laughed Violet.

"Now, what kind of a time did you all have staying at home without me?" asked Lucilla. "I hope you have missed me a little."

"Of course we did," replied Grace.

"Your father missed both his daughter and his amanuensis," said the captain.

"Oh! there were letters to be answered?" she exclaimed. "Please let me do it now, papa?"

"No, dear child, I answered them myself; and if I had not I should not let you work to-night, after all the fatigue of the day."

"You are so kindly careful of me and all of us, papa," she said with a grateful, loving look into his eyes. "I am somewhat tired, but not too much so to use the typewriter, if you wanted any work done on it. It is such a pleasure to be of even a little service to my dear father."

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"And such a pleasure to your father to be served by so dear and loving a daughter," he returned; "one so valuable to me that I cannot consent to have her broken down with too much of either work or pleasure. You must go to bed presently and try to take a good night's rest after the exertions of the day."

"I am ready to go whenever my father bids me," she said in a cheerful tone; "and I want to begin my night's sleep early enough to be ready for my usual stroll with him about the grounds before breakfast."

"Yes; I should be sorry to have to take that without the pleasant company of my early bird of a daughter," he said. "I should miss her sadly."

Lucilla's eyes shone. "Thank you, papa! it is very nice in you to say that," she said, "and I dearly love those early walks with you."

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CHAPTER XI.

In less than a week after the Crolys had signified their intention of accepting the invitation to Roselands, the news of their safe arrival was communicated to the family at Ion, and as soon as the doctor thought Mrs. Croly sufficiently rested to see visitors, Grandma Elsie and Rosie called upon them there.

They were mutually pleased—Mrs. Croly delighted with the prospect of having so charming a daughter as Rosie.

And now preparations for the wedding went on rapidly, the bride-elect, and those who were to be her attendants, being particularly interested in regard to their attire for the great occasion, and keeping the dressmakers very busy in fashioning their finery.

Then, as the time drew near, relatives and friends from a distance began to arrive.

To the great joy of Mrs. Calhoun Conly her parents were among the first, and their and her near relatives from Indiana and Louisiana soon followed; their coming giving great pleasure to both her aunt Annis and herself, as well as to the Ion family. Mrs. Betty Norris and her brother Dr. Robert Johnson, their half brother Dr. Dick Percival, and his sister Mrs. Molly Embury of Magnolia Hall, with her husband, were among the later arrivals, and about the same time came Captain Donald Keith, having succeeded in obtaining a furlough for several weeks.

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He, Dr. Percival, and several others of the family relatives were at first domiciled at Woodburn, where they were made very welcome and most hospitably entertained. Donald's was the first arrival, though only a day or so in advance of the others. He and Captain Raymond met with all the old cordiality, evidently glad to renew the comradeship of earlier days, while Violet's greeting was warm and cousinly, and that of the young girls such as they might be reasonably expected to bestow upon a valued friend and relative of the family.

Donald, hardly realising how many months and years had rolled by since his last sight of them, was surprised at their growth in height and beauty, and did not wonder at their father's evident pride and delight in claiming them as his own.

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But for the few days between his coming among them and the wedding there was little opportunity for becoming intimately acquainted, so greatly interested and occupied with the preparations for it were they, and, indeed, all the family connection. He furtively watched them, however, while Captain Raymond, calling to mind a talk he had had with Donald at West Point, some years before, in regard to his eldest daughter, did the same by him whenever the two were together in his presence. He noted with pleasure that Lucilla evidently cared for Captain Keith only as a relative and friend of the family, never thinking of him as a lover or admirer of herself, or likely to become one.

"She is still satisfied with her father's affection," was his pleasing thought. "She evidently cares little or nothing for other men, and I may hope to keep her altogether my own for years to come; though there are some half dozen or more young fellows who, as I plainly perceive, are looking upon her with longing eyes."

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That fact was evident to Violet, also, and she jestingly referred to it at one time when, for a few moments, they were alone together.

"My dear," she said, "be watchful if you would not be robbed of Lu, perhaps of Gracie, also; for the dear girls are entirely too charming for you to hope to escape an effort from somebody to take them from you."

"I agree with you in that idea, but am not alarmed," he said with a look of quiet confidence, "believing that my daughters still love their father better than any other man, and are satisfied that he seeks their best good in refusing to consider them as yet old enough to leave his care and protection for that of anyone else."

"I am sure you are right," returned Violet, "and very glad I am to think I shall not lose their sweet companionship for years, if ever. I feel, though, that it would be very selfish in me to want them to miss entirely the great happiness I have found in wedded life," she added with a look of ardent affection into his eyes. "But I fear there are not many husbands equal to mine."

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"I hope there are," he said with a smile that was very loving and tender, "and I am sure it could not fail to be the case if there were many wives as worthy of love and entire devotion as is mine."

"Thank you," she said with a pleased smile. "I cannot tell you how often I rejoice in the thought of my husband's blindness to my many faults."

"If there is any such blindness, my dear, I am quite sure it is mutual," he returned with a look of amusement, adding, "and we will try to keep it up; won't we?"

"Yes, indeed," was her laughing rejoinder, "and I hope Rosie and her Will may be led to follow our good example in that respect."

"As I do," he rejoined; "and, knowing them both as I do know them, I think there is every prospect of it."

This talk was upon a side veranda where they sat watching their two little ones at play

together in the grounds.

"Papa!" cried Ned at this moment, running toward them, "didn't you hear the telephone bell? I thought I did."

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"No, my son," returned the captain; "and if it is ringing, one of your sisters will answer it, no doubt. They are both upstairs."

"It did ring, papa, and I answered it," said Lucilla, stepping from the open doorway and coming swiftly toward him. "Rosie was calling to me that there is to be a rehearsal of to-morrow's wedding ceremony, this evening, and asking if we can come over and take our parts. May we? Will you take us?"

"I say yes to both queries," was the pleasant-toned reply. "I will order out the carriage and we will all drive over directly after tea. I have been told that our gentlemen guests are all to spend the evening there or at Beechwood or Roselands."

"Oh, I like that!" exclaimed Lucilla. "And now, our wedding dresses being entirely finished, Grace and I are going to try them on. Will our father, Mamma Vi, Elsie, and Ned come up presently and see what they think of our appearance in them?"

"Of course we will," answered Violet. "I can speak for myself and the children, and have not a doubt of Captain Raymond's desire to see how well the dainty gowns become his young-lady daughters."

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"He hardly considers them young ladies yet, Mamma Vi," laughed Lulu. "And I am sure I don't want him to, for I dearly love to have him call me his own little girl," she concluded, with a look of ardent filial love and respect into her father's eyes. "I hope he will let me always be that to him."

"Always, while you wish it, daughter mine," he responded in low, tender tones, affectionately pressing the hand she had laid in his. "Now go, array yourself in your finery, and we will follow in a few moments," he added in a little louder key, and she hastened to obey.

"Oh, mamma!" cried Elsie, who had drawn near enough to overhear nearly all that had been said, "mayn't I try my wedding dress on, too? You know it is almost finished—all but sewing on a few buttons, Alma said a while ago."

"I have no objection," said Violet, rising. "Come, and I will help you put it on."

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"Your wedding dress, Elsie? you are not old enough to get married," laughed Ned. "Is she, papa?"

"No, indeed! very far from it," the captain said. "Even her older sisters are much too young for that; but they seem to so have named their new gowns because of having had them made expressly to be worn at the wedding."

"Yes, sir; I suppose that is what they mean. Aunt Rosie's will be the only real wedding dress, and I heard mamma say it was very handsome indeed. And I like my new suit you bought me to wear to the wedding; and your new one, too."

"I am glad you are satisfied," his father said. "The dress of the ladies will be noticed much more than yours or mine, but it is only right that men and boys should take pains to be neatly and suitably attired. Now I think we may follow your mother and sisters and see what they have to show us."

The dresses were pronounced by all beautiful, perfect in regard to fit, trimming, and suitability to the occasion on which they were to be worn; very becoming, also, the captain remarked in an aside to his wife; a remark to which she gave a hearty and unqualified assent.

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"We'll wear these dresses to Ion to-night, won't we, mamma?" asked Elsie.

"Oh, no, child!" replied Violet; "the rehearsal will be gone through with in ordinary attire, and these grand dresses kept perfectly fresh for the wedding. Come, now, we must make haste with the change, for the tea bell will ring presently. It is well you took a good nap this afternoon, for I fear you are likely to be kept up late."

"Probably a little later than usual," said their father, "though, as to-morrow is to be so exciting a day, I intend to bring you all home in pretty good season; that you may be able to take such a night's rest as will give you the needed strength to go through the trying ordeal."

"There, papa," laughed Grace, "you talk as if we were all going to be married."

"Dear me, but I am glad we are not!" exclaimed Lucilla, "and that I am not the one that is."

"Quite a lucid remark, my child," laughed her father. "But now I will leave you to make the necessary changes in your dress that you may be ready for a drive on leaving the tea table."

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They hastened to obey, helping each other and laughing and chatting merrily as they worked. They were ready when the summons to the tea table came, and, directly after leaving it, all entered the family carriage and drove to Ion, greatly enjoying the balmy air, the easy motion over the smooth roads, and all the sweet sights and sounds of lovely summer time in the country. They never wearied of those familiar things, daily blessings though they were.

The sun was near its setting when they reached Ion, where they found a gathering of friends and relatives unusual in its size, though not nearly so large as it would be on the coming day, when the great event was to take place.

Walter was one of the first to greet them, having reached home that morning and been ever since much excited over the situation of affairs—the prospect of losing Rosie, his youngest and only single sister out of the home nest, as a permanent resident there.

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"Glad to see you, Vi!" he exclaimed, seizing his sister, Mrs. Raymond, in a warm embrace. "Glad to see you all—Brother Levis, Lu, Gracie, and you little folks. Of course you haven't forgotten Uncle Walter in the long months since we parted in Paradise Valley?"

"No, indeed!" answered several voices.

"And we are all very glad to see you at home among us again—I must not say little brother, according to former custom, I suppose?" added Violet in merry accents; "for you have grown into a fine young gentleman."

"Thank you," he returned with a slightly embarrassed laugh. "Well, I mean to try to be, as well as to seem."

But others were crowding about, and in the exchange of greetings, questions, and answers, there were time and opportunity for no more.

There was a pleasant bustle, a good deal of mirth and laughter, the young folks going about from room to room to examine the tasteful arrangements for the grand affair of the morrow—then, the last one of those selected to take part in the ceremony having arrived, they went through their rehearsal; so that even the little flower girls might be perfect in their parts, knowing just how and when to enter the room, where to stand and what to do.

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They were greatly interested and very anxious to do all in the best possible manner, that no one might be mortified by their failure and led to regret that they had been chosen to perform that particular part. They succeeded admirably, and were delighted with the praise freely bestowed upon them by one and another of the onlookers, including the guests and the members of the different families present.

When all seemed perfect in their parts, which no one found very difficult, some simple refreshments were served, and presently after Captain Raymond and his family departed for Woodburn, Captain Donald Keith and Dr. Dick Percival accompanying them.

It was something of a disappointment to both these gentlemen that, very shortly after arriving there, Captain Raymond advised his daughters to retire, in order that they might feel entirely rested and refreshed before entering upon the exciting pleasures and fatigues of the coming day.

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"I know it is the best plan for me, papa," returned Grace in cheerful tones, and began her good-nights at once.

"For me too, since I want all the beauty sleep I can get in preparation for to-morrow," laughed Lucilla, "though of course it is by no means so necessary for the bride's attendants as for herself."

"Ah! is that because they are so much handsomer to begin with?"

"Oh, papa! please refrain from asking such hard questions!" was the response in tones of mock entreaty; "hard because they seem to imply a good deal of vanity in me. I was only meaning that, of course, the bride's appearance will attract the most attention."

"Ah! was that it? Well, my child, say good-night and go; get to bed quickly, put aside thoughts of to-morrow's gaities, and indulge in sleep so sound and refreshing that you will be ready to give your father his usual companionship in his early stroll about the grounds."

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"I'll do my best to follow all those directions, sir," she said with a bright, pleased look. "Good-night, gentlemen," turning toward the guests. "I hope you will both sleep well and find to-morrow's festivities very enjoyable." And with that she hastened away, leaving the three gentlemen alone upon the veranda, for Violet was seeing her little ones to bed.

"What a rich man you are, Raymond!" remarked Keith, half unconsciously sighing slightly as he spoke.

"You are right," returned the captain cheerily, "my wife and children being by far the most valuable of my possessions. I only wish that you and your friend here," glancing at Dr. Percival as he spoke, "were equally wealthy. But you are younger men, and may hope to become as rich as I am by the time you are my age."

"Hardly; so far as I am concerned, at least," returned Keith drily; "seeing I am already some ten or a dozen years older than you were at the time of your first marriage, Raymond."

"Yet by no means too old to hope yet to become in the near future a happy husband and father. I am at a loss to understand why you have not found a mate before this."

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"Ah, none so blind as those that won't see!" returned Keith with a slight laugh; then changed the subject of conversation by asking a question in regard to the plans of the young couple expecting to be united on the morrow.

Captain Raymond answered the query. A moment's silence followed; then Keith, turning to Dick, said: "I presume you and I are of about the same age, doctor?"

"Quite likely; and confirmed bachelors, both of us, it would seem," was the nonchalant rejoinder. "I am some years older than Cousin Vi."

"Not too old for reformation, however," remarked Captain Raymond pleasantly. "And let me assure you that a wife—such as mine, for instance—is a very great blessing; doubling the happiness of life."

"I don't doubt it, sir," said Dick; "but such an one is not to be picked up every day."

"No, certainly not. I have always felt myself strangely fortunate in securing so great a treasure."

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"As you well may," remarked Keith pleasantly; "yet your good fortune has been largely owing to your undoubted worthiness of it, Raymond."

"In which opinion I agree with you heartily, Cousin Donald," responded Violet's sweet voice close at hand, taking them by surprise, for, in the earnestness of their talk they had not perceived the sound of her light approaching footsteps. "I think there is nothing good which is beyond my husband's deserts," she added as all three rose hastily to hand her to a seat, Donald saying:

"So you overheard me, Coz! Well, please remember that it was I who brought you two together. An act which seems to have born abundance of good fruit in the happiness of all concerned."

"I think it has," she said, her husband adding, "And for which I, at least, owe you a deep debt of gratitude."

"And not you alone, my dear," said Violet; "and in return I can wish him nothing better than wedded happiness equal to our own."

"A wish in which I heartily unite with you," said Captain Raymond.

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CHAPTER XII.

Captain Raymond and his eldest daughter were out in the Woodburn grounds the next morning at their usual early hour, wandering here and there along the shaded paths and among the shrubs and flowers, noting their growth in size and beauty, gathering blossoms, and chatting together in their usual familiar and affectionate manner; Lucilla expressing her thoughts and feelings as freely and openly as though her companion had been one of her own age and sex.

"I am glad for Rosie," she said when the talk turned upon the subject of what was expected to be the great event of the day, "she seems so happy; though how she can be in the prospect of leaving the dear home of her childhood and the mother who loves her so fondly, I cannot understand. Oh, father! I do think I can never, never bear to go away from you! It seems impossible that anyone else can ever be half so dear to me, and I am so glad that you want to keep me your own little girl for years longer."

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"For all our life on earth, daughter, if you are satisfied to have it so," he returned, bestowing upon her a look and smile of tenderest fatherly affection. "You are still one of my chief treasures, which I should be very loath to bestow upon anyone else; dearer to me—as all my children are—than tongue can tell."

"Yes, papa," she said, looking up into his eyes with a joyous smile, "so you have told me many, many times; but I love to hear it just as if you had never said it before."

"As I do your expressions of ardent love for me, daughter," he returned. "Very glad I am that I am not the one who must to-day resign to another the ownership of a daughter."

"I am sorry for Grandma Elsie," said Lucilla; "but then I suppose she must feel rather used to it—having given away two daughters before."

"And having none left to be a care and trouble, eh?" laughed her father.

"No, sir; having both near enough to be seen and enjoyed every day if she chooses. Don't you hope that will be the way with you if you have to give any of yours up to somebody else?"

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"I certainly do," he said. "I should be very loath to consent to having any one of them carried off to a distance. But let us not trouble ourselves with anxious thought of what may lie in the future. Remember the dear Master's word, 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'"

"Yes, papa; and I remember your teaching me that his 'Take no thought,' means no anxiety, and that it tends greatly to one's happiness to live one day at a time, just leaving all the future in his hands."

"Yes, daughter; just as a little child leaves its future and the supply of its daily wants in the care of its parents."

"Such kind teaching, and easy to understand when one has such a father as mine," she said, with a look of grateful love.

"I am thankful, indeed, daughter, if anything in my treatment and teaching helps you to a clearer understanding of how the Master would have you to act and feel," he said in tones that spoke full appreciation of her filial affection.

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"Ah! there is our mail," he added, as a servant was seen carrying it toward the house; "so we will go in now and see if it contains anything important for you or me."

"And if there is anything you want answered on the typewriter you will let me do it at once, won't you, papa?" she asked, as they quickened their footsteps, taking the direction toward the house.

"If you have time, and wish to do so, daughter."

"Yes, sir; I have hardly anything to do till it is time for the drive to Ion."

"Unless you should find a letter, or more than one, of your own, calling for a reply," he returned, smiling down into her bright, animated face.

"That is not very likely, considering how few correspondents I have," she laughed.

They reached the veranda from one direction as the servant entered it from another, and the captain, taking the mail bag from him, walked on into the library, Lucilla following. He emptied the contents of the bag upon the table, and going rapidly over them, said: "Several letters for our guests" (laying them aside as he spoke), "one for your mamma; none for any of my children, and only two business letters for me. Well, daughter," glancing at the clock on the mantel, "you may sit down to your typewriter and answer these at my dictation; as I see there will be time to do so before the ringing of the breakfast bell. Ah, good-morning, Keith!" as at that moment that gentleman entered the room. "Here are letters which I was just about to send up to you."

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"Thank you," said Keith, taking them from his host's outstretched hand. "I am glad to have saved you the trouble. I hope you and Miss Lucilla are both quite well?" giving her a bow and smile as he spoke.

"Entirely, thank you, and have just come in from our usual early stroll together about the grounds. I hope you rested well. Take that easy-chair and don't let our presence interfere with your enjoyment of your letters."

Keith declined that invitation, saying he felt a strong inclination for a breath of the sweet morning air before the summons to the breakfast table should come; so would read his letters upon the veranda, and, with them in his hand, passed out of the room.

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"I strongly suspect that was from a polite disinclination to hinder us in our work, papa," remarked Lucilla in a sprightly tone, as her father uncovered the machine and made all things ready for her work.

"Quite likely," he responded, "for I never met anyone more truly polite and thoughtful for others. He is a Christian man and acts from Christian principles in all that he does."

"As his friend, my father, does," she said with a look of filial reverence up into his face as he stood by her side.

"And as I trust my daughter does and will ever do," he returned with grave earnestness, then began his dictation.

They made rapid work and had finished and joined Keith upon the veranda before the ringing of the breakfast bell summoned all to their morning meal.

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"Rosie has an ideal wedding day, I think," remarked Violet as she poured the coffee; "that shower in the night having laid the dust in the roads and made the air deliciously cool."

"Also refreshed vegetation," added her husband, "so that trees and shrubs and flowers are as fresh and fragrant as possible."

"The sun shines brightly, too," added Grace, "reminding one of the old saying I have so often heard quoted: 'Happy is the bride on whom the sun shines.'"

"It is pleasant to see it shining, yet I do not believe Rosie would hesitate a moment, or feel the least anxiety about its effect upon her future happiness, if the rain were pouring down," said Lucilla; "because she has great confidence in her bridegroom that is to be, and not a particle of superstition in her nature."

"That is giving her high praise," said Keith, "for there are few who are entirely free from it, though very many are hardly aware of its hold upon them."

"You are quite correct, I think, sir," remarked Dr. Percival; "we are all apt to be blind to our own feelings, and hardly conscious that our prejudices and superstitions are such, blind to our weakness—even more to the mental than to the physical."

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"Then how well it is that there is no occasion for their exercise, or for battling with them to-day," observed Violet in a sprightly tone; "and though, of course, mamma and all of us must,

when Rosie is gone, miss our constant sweet companionship with her, we ought not to mourn, but rather rejoice that she is going into a Christian family and gaining a devoted Christian for a life companion."

"Yes; that is indeed a cause for joy and gratitude," said Keith.

"Father, will Mr. Croly be any relation to us after he gets married to Aunt Rosie?" queried Ned.

"Yes, my son; brother to your mamma and me, and uncle to the rest of you."

"Meaning Neddie himself and Elsie, papa?" Grace said half interrogatively and with an amused little laugh.

"Ah, yes! he is certainly too young to be, or wish to be, that to my older daughters," returned her father with a look of amusement.

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"No danger that he will want to claim that relationship, Gracie," laughed Lucilla. "Even Walter does not, though I know you are a particular favourite with him; but he, to be sure, is still younger than Mr. Croly by some years."

"It is at two o'clock Aunt Rosie is to be married, then there will be the wedding feast, and after that the bride and groom will go on a journey," said Neddie, as if bestowing a piece of valuable information upon his hearers.

"Yes," said Elsie, "but, as everybody knows it, what's the use of telling it?"

"I thought perhaps Cousin Donald and Cousin Dick didn't know it—at least, not all of it," said Ned.

Then his father told him he had talked quite enough, and must be quiet during the rest of the meal.

"We who are to be the bride's attendants should go over early, I think," remarked Lucilla. "At least we, the older ones," she added with a smiling glance at Elsie; "the little flower girls will not be needed until somewhat later."

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"You may set your own time," her father said. "I will send you and Grace over in the family carriage, and it can return in full season for the use of anyone else who desires it. We have a variety of horses and conveyances, gentlemen, any or all of them at your service at whatever hour you may appoint," he added, turning to his guests. "There will be abundance of time for a ride or drive for mere exercise or enjoyment, before donning your attire for the grand occasion, if you wish to take it."

Both gentlemen accepted the offer with thanks, and they proceeded to lay their plans for a gallop together over some of the roads with which Dick had been familiar in his childhood, but which would be new to Captain Keith. They set out within an hour after leaving the breakfast table, and not very long afterward the young girls were on their way to Ion.

They found the house beautifully decorated with flowers from garden and conservatories, especially the room in which the ceremony was to take place.

Everybody seemed in a state of subdued excitement, Rosie half gay, half sad, her eyes filling whenever she turned them upon her mother—the dear mother who had so loved and cherished her all the days of her life with such unselfish devotion as no other earthly creature could know; how could she endure the thought of the impending separation? She could not; she could only strive to forget it, and keep her mind filled with the important step now just about to be taken, for she had already gone too far to retreat even were she sure that she wished to do so. The mother was scarcely less affected, but with her greater experience of life was better able to control and conceal her feelings. And so were the others who, though pleased with the match, still felt that this was the breaking up of some very tender ties; they would not allow their thoughts to dwell upon that, but would occupy them with the mirth and gaiety of the present.

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But to Mrs. Croly, who had so far recovered under Dr. Conly's skilful treatment that she was able to be present, it was all joy: she had always wanted a daughter, and now was gaining one after her own heart; for Rosie seemed to her all that was good, beautiful, and in every way attractive. And then, in respect to family, fortune, everything that could be thought of, she was all that could be desired. The elder Mr. Croly, too, was entirely satisfied with the match, and already felt a paternal interest in the young girl just entering his family. In fact upon both sides there was perfect satisfaction with the match.

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Everything went well; there was no bustle or confusion; minister and guests were all there in due season; bride, groom, and attendants, including the little flower girls, performed their parts without mistake or discomposure. Kisses, congratulations, and good wishes followed; then the wedding feast was partaken of leisurely and with mirth and jollity, the bridal dress was exchanged for a beautiful travelling suit, the farewells were spoken, with cheery reminders that the separation was to be but temporary, the bride expecting soon to rejoin the dear home circle. That thought was a very comforting one to her, and, though tears had fallen at the parting from her loved ones,—especially her mother,—they soon ceased their flow under the tenderly affectionate caresses and endearments of him who was henceforward to be to her the nearest and dearest of all earthly loved ones, and her face grew radiant with happiness as he had hoped to see it on their bridal day.

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CHAPTER XIII.

Nearly all the guests—relatives and dear friends—remained for some hours after the departure of the bride and groom, some conversing together upon the veranda, some wandering in couples or little companies about the grounds or sitting in the shade of the beautiful trees on the lawn.

Most of the young people, especially those of them who had been attendants of the bride and groom, gathered about Grandma Elsie—for they all loved her, and everyone felt that she had particular need of some pleasant distraction of thought just at that time, to prevent her from dwelling upon the partial loss of her youngest daughter.

Walter was, of course, one of the group, and he presently plunged into lively accounts of his college-boy experiences, very interesting and amusing to him and presumably so to others, as, in fact, they were to most if not all of his auditors, his older brothers among the rest; for it seemed to carry them back, in at least a measure, to their own Freshman days, with all their trials and triumphs, their pleasures and annoyances.

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"Did anybody do anything very bad to you, Walter?" asked Grace.

"No; not very," he replied; "hazing has been almost abolished, and what is still done is by no means unendurable.

"Oh! I must tell you of a bit of fun we had only the other day. On the porch of one of our boarding houses a countryman had set down a basket of eggs—about twenty dozen I was told—that he had brought in for customers; and there they stood, looking as tempting as possible, especially to wild young college boys, some of whom, coming there when recitations were over and the dinner hour approaching, saw them and were immediately smitten with a desire to handle, if not to taste them. One fellow snatched up an egg and threw it at another; it struck him, broke, and bespattered his clothes. He, naturally, retaliated in kind, and other fellows followed their example, the fun growing fast and furious, till every egg the basket had contained was gone, and porch, students, and their clothing were a sight to behold."

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"And what did the farmer say when he came back for his basket and found it empty?" asked Lucilla.

"He was very angry, but those who had broken the eggs paid him his full price, and he went off tolerably well satisfied, though he growled that he was compelled to disappoint his customers.

"The boarding house keeper was angry, too, but stopped scolding when told that the mischief should be repaired at the expense of those who had caused it."

"The clothes of those engaged in the row must have been in a pretty bad condition," remarked Harold.

"Yes, of course; and they had some fine tailors' bills to pay before they were again presentable."

"A shameful waste of good food provided by our Heavenly Father, that someone's hunger might be satisfied," remarked Grandma Elsie gravely. "Surely the young men engaged in it must have forgotten the teaching of our Saviour when he said, 'Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.'"

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"Mamma! I had forgotten that," exclaimed Walter, blushing vividly.

"A poor excuse, my son," she replied. "'Remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them.' Those are his own words given to Moses to speak unto the Children of Israel. Jesus was and is God; therefore what he commanded is the command of God. And since he had just proved his ability to create abundance of food, his command to avoid waste must have been given for the benefit of his hearers; and can you think he would have approved of the waste of good, nourishing food of which you have just been telling?"

"No, mother; I am convinced that it was not right; that it was, in fact, wicked waste. I must own that I had a share in it; but I promise you I will never be guilty of the like again. It does seem very wrong when one thinks of the multitudes of people in different parts of the world who are actually starving."

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"Yes, I hope you will be more thoughtful in future—will use your influence against such objectionable sport; surely bright young men and boys should be capable of finding or making better or less blameworthy fun. You may feel assured, however, that your mother is interested in all that interests you. So if you have anything more to tell of your college experiences we will be glad to hear it."

"You found the Sophs rather domineering, didn't you?" asked Herbert.

"About as much so as they dared to be, I should say," laughed Walter. "For instance, they won't let the Freshes wear white duck trousers till some time in May. Nor will they allow them to wear the colours gold and black till just at the close of their Freshman year."

"Well, that is tyranny!" exclaimed Lucilla, "and if I were a Freshman I wouldn't stand it."

"Ah! but if you didn't you might have something worse to stand," laughed Walter. Then he went on, "I must tell you about the cane spree. They have it at the time of the first full moon. The players are three men from each class—one light-weight, one middle, and one heavy-weight. The students of all classes gather in a circle around them to watch the sport. First the light-weights try a tussle for the cane; then the middles, and lastly the heavys. It is not so much strength as skill that wins, and the victors keep their canes as trophies, and are proud to show them for the rest of their lives."

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"Well, really," laughed Maud Dinsmore, "it does not strike me as anything worth taking particular pride in."

"Mayhap that is because you are only a girl, Maud," remarked Chester teasingly.

"Yes," she returned sportively, "if I were only a boy I might be as silly as the others."

"Does it strike you as very silly, Gracie?" asked Walter.

"Well, no; not for boys," she returned doubtfully, "but rather so for a man. There are so many other things in which—at least it seems to me—it would be better worth while to excel."

"Yes; so there are," he agreed with a thoughtful look. "And yet an occasional bit of sport is a good thing even for a man."

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"That is very true," said Harold; "and certainly as true for brain-workers as for any who toil with their hands."

"Doesn't it seem pleasant to be at home again, Walter?" asked Grace.

"Yes, indeed!" he exclaimed. "There is no place like home—especially home with mother in it."

"Or with father in it," added Grace as, at that moment, Captain Raymond joined the circle.

"Such a father as ours," said Lucilla, looking up at him with a smile of proud, fond affection. He returned it, accepted an offered seat, and asked Walter if he had been entertaining the company with tales of college doings and experiences.

"Yes, sir," returned the lad. "I suppose it is the usual thing for a Freshman to do on coming home at the end of his year."

"Quite; his head being pretty full of them," was the playful rejoinder. "Well, little—no, young brother—I hope the old tutor has not been entirely forgotten, in admiration and affection for the new?"

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"No, sir; no, indeed! and never will be," returned Walter, speaking with an energy and earnestness that brought a smile to the captain's lips and eyes. "I shall show myself strangely ungrateful if I ever forgot the patience and kindness with which my oldest brother instructed me; and all for no reward at all."

"Ah! there you are mistaken," said Captain Raymond pleasantly. "It was reward enough to know that I was helping to fit you for future usefulness. I hope, my boy, you will live to be an honour to your mother and a blessing to the world."

"I hope so, sir; it is my ardent wish," Walter said low and earnestly, giving his mother a most loving look as he spoke.

"And if you trust not in your own strength, but look constantly to God for help, you will succeed, my son," she responded in low, moved tones.

Just at that moment there were several additions to their group, among them Captain Keith and Dr. Percival, and the talk turned upon plans for the next few days, and after that for the summer. Most of the relatives from a distance would linger in that neighbourhood for a week or more, and entertainments of one kind and another would be given by those residents there. The Oaks, The Laurels, Fairview, Woodburn, Roselands, and Beechwood would have their turns. After that must come the inevitable breaking up and scattering of guests to their own homes or some summer resort, while most of the dwellers in that region would go northward in search of a cooler climate in which to pass the heated term. But it was not deemed necessary to settle it all now; only to arrange on which day each estate would be the scene of entertainment. It took a good deal of consultation, mingled with merry jests and happy laughter, to settle all that. Then there was a general leave taking and scattering to their homes—temporary or settled.

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CHAPTER XIV.

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The wedding had been on Wednesday. On Thursday all gathered, by invitation, at the Oaks, where Mr. and Mrs. Dinsmore gave them a royal entertainment. On Friday the same thing was repeated at The Laurels, on Saturday at Fairview, and on the following Monday all were to assemble at Woodburn.

Being a Christian, Sabbath keeping connection, no one thought for a moment of profaning the Lord's day by frivolity and merry making. Those who were able attended church in the morning;

in the afternoon the Ion and Woodburn people taught their Sunday-school classes as usual, and afterward held a Bible class among themselves at Woodburn, that being the point nearest to the schoolhouse on the Woodburn place, at which they had just concluded the exercises for the day.

Dr. and Mrs. Landreth and her brother, the Rev. Cyril Keith were, just at that time, among the guests of Captain and Mrs. Raymond, and, by the request of the little company, the minister led the exercises.

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Turning over the leaves of his Bible, "The thought strikes me," he said, "that perhaps godliness would be as good a subject for to-day's consideration as we could find. 'Godliness with contentment is great gain,' the apostle tells us. It is a duty and the part of wisdom to be contented with what God our heavenly Father has seen fit to give us of the good things of this life; for there is no happiness to be found in discontent, murmuring, and repining; envying those who seem to us to have a larger share than ours of the riches and pleasures of earth. 'We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And, having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.' Happiness does not depend upon the amount of our earthly possessions. 'Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.' That promise alone should be enough to make one contented and happy, even though possessed of but very little of this world's goods. Indeed, why should we care to have much of that which may at any moment fall from our grasp? Let us rather seek the true riches which endure unto eternal life. Let us follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. May ours be 'the path of the just which is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.'

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"But I consented, not to the preaching of a sermon, but only to the leading of the exercises in which all are privileged and desired to take a part. Let us have the reading or quoting of texts bearing upon the subject of godliness."

Then, from their open Bibles they read in turn, the older people selecting for themselves, the younger searching out references given them by their leader.

"Papa," asked Neddie, when there was a pause in the reading, "what is godliness? Does it mean the same as being a Christian?"

"Yes, my son."

"And to be a Christian is to love Jesus and try to be like him and serve him everywhere and all the time?"

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"Yes; a real, true Christian is one who follows Christ, striving to be like him in every way and to keep all his commands."

"I think I do want to, papa. Please tell me more about it."

"We must study the Bible to learn all about Christ Jesus—how he lived in this world, what he did, and what he did not do, what sort of spirit he showed—and strive to have the same spirit ourselves; for the Bible tells us 'If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his.' Jesus said, 'I must be about my Father's business,' and if God is our Father we too will be about his business."

"But how, papa? I don't understand it."

"Jesus came to save souls; and we must try to save them by leading them to him; first by serving him ourselves, then by persuading others to do the same—telling them of all his great goodness and mercy, his loving kindness, and how he suffered and bled and died that sinners might be saved—even those who hated and persecuted him. How strange it is that we do not love him more and serve him better!"

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"And how enduring is that love—the love of Christ," added Grandma Elsie. "His own word is, 'Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.'"

"And he laid down his life for us," said Mrs. Landreth. "And he himself said, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.'"

"Yes, that is the test," said Mr. Dinsmore; "we have no right to consider ourselves his disciples unless we are striving earnestly to keep all his commandments. He himself said, 'Either make the tree good and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for a tree is known by his fruit.'"

"Yes; if we love our Father we will strive earnestly to keep his commandments and not feel them to be grievous. A loving child is an obedient one," said Mr. Keith. "'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.'"

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"God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," quoted his son Donald. "In his love and in his pity he redeemed us."

Then there was a moment's pause, presently broken by Mr. Dinsmore starting the hymn "Love divine, all love excelling," in which the other voices promptly joined.

That closed the exercises for that time, and those who had come merely to take part in them

bade good-bye for that day with the expectation of returning on the following one. And those who remained behind scattered to their rooms until the summons of the tea bell brought them together again about the table, to partake of their evening meal; after which they repaired to the veranda and spent in conversation and music, suited to its sacredness, the closing hours of that Lord's day.

Captain Raymond and his wife lingered for a little upon the veranda after their guests had gone to their rooms. They sat side by side—he with his arm about her waist, her hand fast clasped in his, while her head rested upon his shoulder and her eyes looked up lovingly into his face.

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"My dear," she said softly and with a beautiful smile, "I am so happy. I love you so, so devotedly, and am so sure that your love for me is equally strong."

"I think it is, my darling—light of my eyes and core of my heart," he responded low and feelingly. "You are to me the dearest, sweetest, loveliest of earthly creatures. I can never cease wondering at my great good fortune in securing such a treasure for my own. I am rich, rich in love. My children are all very near and dear to me, and I know and feel that I am to them, but you—ah, I think you are dearer than all five of them put together!"

"Ah," she said with a joyous smile, "those are sweet, sweet words to me! And yet they make me feel almost as if I had robbed them—your children. They all love you so dearly, as you have said, and set so high a value upon your love to them."

"And it is very great: none the less because my love for you is still greater. You, my dear wife, are my second self—'bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.' It is right that our mutual love should exceed all other earthly loves."

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"Yes; and yet I fear it would make Lu—perhaps Gracie also—unhappy to know that you have greater love for anyone else than for them."

"I think they do know it, and also that it is right that it should be so. And I presume they will both some day love someone else better than their father. I cannot blame them if they do."

"Perhaps the love differs more in kind than degree," Violet said presently.

"Yes; there is something in that," he returned; "yet it is not altogether that which satisfies me. We are all bidden to love one another. 'Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it.... So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.... Let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself.'"

He paused and Violet finished the quotation.

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"'And the wife see that she reverence her husband.' Ah, it is easy for me to do that with such a husband as mine," she added. "Also, I remember that in Paul's epistle to Titus there is a passage, where the aged women are bidden to teach the younger ones to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children. And in the next verse to be obedient to their husbands. I think I have kept that command as far as I could without getting any orders from mine," she concluded, smiling up into his eyes.

"Yes, indeed, dearest," he said, returning the smile and drawing her closer to his side with a fond gesture, "where one's slightest wish is promptly and eagerly complied with a command would be altogether superfluous. And though I consider it wise and right—yes, an unquestionable duty to exact prompt, cheerful obedience from my children, I do not think I should ask it of my wife. The women of the apostle's day were not the educated, self-reliant ones of the present time; therefore our wives are hardly to be expected to conform themselves strictly to the rules he lays down for them. But if husband and wife love each other as they ought,—as you and I do, for instance,—any friction between them will be a thing of rare occurrence."

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"And when, if ever, there is any," said Violet, "I think the wife should be the one to give way—unless she feels that to yield to the wishes of her husband would be a breach of the moral law; but in that case she must remember the answer of Peter to the high priest, 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'"

"Yes," he said; "and when a parent commands something which is plainly contrary to God's command,—lying or stealing for instance,—it is the child's duty to refuse to obey. There are parents, alas! who do train their children to vice and crime, and when that is the case they, the children, must remember and act upon the teaching of the apostle, 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'"

"How I pity children who are placed in such circumstances," sighed Violet. "Oh, I often think what a cause for gratitude I have in the fact that my parents were earnest Christians, and brought me and all their children up in the fear of God; also that my children have an earnest, devoted Christian for their father."

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"And for their mother, my sweet wife," he added with emotion.

Neither spoke again for some moments. It was Violet who broke the silence.

"My dear," she said, "I wonder if you have noticed, as I have, that my cousin Donald greatly

admires our Lu."

"Ah! has he told you so, my love?" queried the captain, a touch of regret and anxiety in his tone.

"Oh, no!" laughed Violet; "but he looks at her with evidently admiring eyes, listens eagerly to anything and everything she says, and especially to her playing and singing; which are certainly worth hearing. He greatly admires her drawings and paintings, too, some of which I was showing him the other day; also her evident devotion to her father, and readiness to assist and make herself useful to him in every possible way."

"Yes," sighed the captain, "her father would hardly know what to do without her. Yet, of course, I should be far from willing to stand in the way of my child's happiness. However, I hope and believe that her father is still nearer and dearer to her than any other human creature. She has often assured me that such was the fact; not waiting to be questioned, but telling the story of her love as something in which we could both rejoice, and which she was sure was reciprocal. As it certainly is. I love her very dearly; though not more than I do each of the others. Indeed, it gives me a headache to think I shall ever be called to part with any one of them."

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"Not very soon, I hope," said Violet. "You have frequently told me you did not intend to let either of your daughters marry for years to come."

"No, I do not; and as I dread the pain, for both them and myself, which would be caused by the necessity for refusing to let them follow their inclinations in such a matter, I sincerely hope no one will succeed in winning their affections for years to come."

"Then if I am right about Donald and he asks your permission to make an offer to Lu, you will forbid him to do so?"

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At first the captain's only reply was an amused sort of smile. Then he said: "I must tell you of a talk Donald and I had, some years ago, at West Point. You perhaps remember that I took Max and Lulu there, and found Donald already at the hotel, and we spent a few days together, the children with us nearly all the time. One night I sent them early to bed, and, afterward, spent an hour or more talking with my friend alone on the piazza. In that talk he expressed a great admiration for my little girl, and—half in jest, half in earnest—asked leave to try to win her when she should reach a proper age. I told him certainly not for at least six years. It is five now."

"Then he ought to wait at least another year," remarked Violet, who had listened with keen interest to her husband's little story.

"Yes; and I hope he will feel that obligation and refrain, for the present at least, from courting her. And, though I should be sorry for my friend's disappointment, I cannot help hoping that he has not won, and will not win, my daughter's heart. I want to become neither his father, nor my daughter's cousin," he added with a slight laugh.

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"Why, yes, to be sure! I had not thought about those relationships," exclaimed Violet, joining in his mirth. "But," she added, "Donald is so distant a relative of mine that, if that were the only objection, it need not, I think, stand in the way."

"No, perhaps not. A greater objection to me, so far as I am concerned, would be the fact that, if married to an army officer, my daughter would be kept at a distance from me nearly all the time."

"And to me, as well as to you, that would be an almost insurmountable objection; for Lu and I are now the closest and dearest of friends—bosom companions. I should hardly know what to do without her—the dear, sweet girl!"

"Ah! it makes me very happy to hear and know that," he said with a glad smile, adding, "it is hardly news; for I have seen for a good while that you were very fond of each other."

"Yes; we are like sisters. I should miss Lu almost more than I shall Rosie, as we are together so much more constantly. Oh, I don't like to think of it! and I sincerely hope it may be years before she learns to love any other man well enough to be willing to leave her sweet home under her father's roof."

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"A hope in which I join with all my heart," said her husband; "and one that I trust Donald is not going to ask me to resign."

"If he does, just remind him of the exact terms of the answer you gave him at West Point," returned Violet in playful tones. "But now I think it is time for us to retire; do not you?" releasing herself from his embrace and rising to her feet as she spoke.

"Yes," he said, "I would not have my wife miss her beauty sleep."

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CHAPTER XV.

Lucilla was in bed but not asleep. She had retired to her room when the guests went to theirs, and without a formal good-night to her father, trusting to his coming to her there for a few moment's chat, as he almost always did. But he had not come, and she felt sorely disappointed. It

was a beautiful, luxuriously furnished room, this bed chamber of hers—the view from its windows, a lovely one of carefully kept grounds, cultivated fields, woods, and streams; all looking their loveliest just now as seen by the silver light of the moon, which shone in upon her through rich lace curtains, gently wafted to and fro by the summer breeze as it came in laden with the sweet scent of flowers from the garden below.

"What a sweet, lovely home I have! Oh, how much to be thankful for! good health, kind friends, and such a dear father!" she said half aloud; "but I want a good-night kiss and a word or two of fatherly affection, and it does seem as if I can't go to sleep without it. Oh, dear! can it be that he is displeased with me about anything? I am not conscious of having done anything he would disapprove."

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"Nor have you, so far as I know, daughter mine," said a pleasant voice close at her side, while a hand was laid tenderly on her head.

"Oh, papa!" she cried joyously, starting up to a sitting posture as she spoke. "I did not know you were there—did not hear you come in; but I am so glad you have come!"

"Are you?" he asked, seating himself on the side of the bed and drawing her into his arms. "Well, daughter, it is only for a moment, to bid you good-night, as usual, and see that you are in need of nothing. Tell me, are all your wants supplied?"

"Yes, sir; now that I have my father here to give me his good-night kiss and blessing. Ah! papa dear, I do not know how I could ever live away from you again. I am so glad you no longer have to go sailing away over the ocean, leaving your children behind."

"I am glad of it, too," he returned, "but I sometimes fear that the day may come when my dear eldest daughter will want to leave me for a home with someone else."

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"Indeed, father dear, you need not have the slightest fear of that," she said, laying her head against his breast with a low, happy laugh. "I am sure there isn't in the wide world any other man whom I could love half so well as I do you. I am just as glad to belong to you now as ever I was."

"And don't want me to give you away?"

"No, no, indeed!" she cried with energy. "Oh, papa! you surely are not thinking of such a thing? You have said, over and over again, that you would not,—at least not for years yet,—even if I wanted you to."

"And I say the same now; so don't be wanting me to," he returned in jesting tone, and laying her down upon her pillow as he spoke. "Now go to sleep at once, that you may be ready to rise at your usual early hour and join your father in the morning stroll about the grounds. 'The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace,'" he added in tender, solemn tones, his hand resting upon her head as he spoke.

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Then, with a good-night kiss upon her lips, he left her, and contented and happy she speedily passed into the land of dreams.

The captain, passing through Grace's room to his own, paused for a moment at her bedside, bent over her, and kissed the sweet lips; but she slept on, unconscious of the caress.

He found Violet still awake, repeated to her his little talk with Lucilla, and added, with evident satisfaction, "I feel convinced that, as yet, no one has made any impression upon her heart, that I, her father, still hold the fort there."

"Yes; I have hardly a doubt of it," returned Violet; "and it may be many a long day before she is deluded into thinking there is any other man who begins to compare to him; something that I have known for years was not the case," she concluded with a happy laugh.

The sun was hardly above the horizon when Lucilla awoke; but she sprang up hastily, with the thought that her father would soon be out in the grounds, and she wanted to be with him. There would be a great deal to attend to in preparation for their expected guests, and perhaps she could be of some assistance; at all events she would like to see all that was going on, and give her opinion on any doubtful subject.

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So she lost no time about attending to the duties of the hour and place, spending a little time upon her knees, asking for the watchful care of her Heavenly Father through all the day, that she might be kept from folly and sin, and have strength and wisdom to do every duty and meet every trial, and beseeching his blessing upon all her dear ones, not forgetting the dear brother so far away from home and kindred. Then she made a rapid but careful toilet, and hastened, with light, swift footsteps, down the broad stairway and out upon the veranda, where she found her father in consultation with Christine, the housekeeper.

Blithe good-mornings were exchanged, Christine went back into the house, and father and daughter walked out together into the grounds.

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Preparations were going on for the entertainment of the expected guests, old and young, and Lucilla was not only permitted, but invited to give her opinion in regard to them all, and any suggestions that might occur to her; which she did frankly and fully, and with the result that more than one of them was adopted; for her father wished to please her and had great

confidence in her opinion of such matters. There were croquet and tennis grounds, swings in the shade of the trees in the grove; inviting-looking seats there, and in other suitable places; there were shaded walks and winding paths through the woods; indeed, every sort of arrangement for recreation and pleasure that could be thought of and prepared for in the allotted space.

Captain Raymond and his daughter walked about inspecting everything, until they had gone over the whole place, giving all needed directions to the workmen who were busied here and there with some alterations the captain had decided upon the previous day, then returned to the house, for it was nearing breakfast time.

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They found Violet, Grace, and the two younger children on the veranda. Morning greetings were exchanged, then Lucilla hurried to her rooms to make some changes in her dress and was coming down again when the breakfast bell rang.

It was a cheerful, even merry, party that gathered about the table to partake of the meal, an excellent one; for the captain and Violet were most hospitable entertainers.

The talk ran principally upon the sports that would enliven and entertain the company during the day; suggestions from any and every one being in order; and, by the time the meal was concluded, all felt that they had every prospect of a most enjoyable holiday.

"The weather could not be more propitious than it is," remarked Captain Keith. "You began your enjoyment of it early, Miss Lu," turning to Lucilla. "I happened to be at my window and saw you and your father out in the grounds."

"Yes," she said, "papa and I usually do take a stroll about them before breakfast. He is always an early riser. I inherit the taste for it from him and, being in excellent health, can indulge it without injury."

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"Which is something to be thankful for," he said with a smile.

"Yes, indeed!" she returned heartily. "Health and strength are the greatest of earthly blessings. I would not part with them for any amount of money."

"No; money cannot buy health and strength, though they may give one the ability to earn money. You, however, have a father able and willing to furnish all you may need of it."

"Yes," said the captain in his pleasant way, "but that daughter of mine likes to make herself useful to me, and does so to such an extent that I really think she earns all she gets."

"Oh, no, papa, not half!" exclaimed Lucilla, blushing with pleasure nevertheless. "And that reminds me that I have not asked about your mail this morning. Are there some letters to be answered on the typewriter?"

"I have been as forgetful as yourself, daughter," her father answered with a slight laugh. "Scip" (to a servant in waiting), "is the mail bag on the library table?"

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"I think so, sah. Shall I fotch it hyar?"

"Yes; bring it here to me."

It was brought, opened, and found to contain letters for family and guests, besides newspapers and magazines.

They were speedily distributed to the owners, read,—some of them aloud,—and their contents talked over.

Then all adjourned to the library for the morning service of prayer, praise, and reading of the Scriptures, after which they scattered about the house and grounds.

Captain Raymond's share of the mail had included some business letters, and he called upon Lucilla to use her typewriter in preparing his replies, which she did promptly and cheerfully.

"Thank you, daughter," he said when they had finished, "you and your typewriter make my correspondence far less burdensome than it would be otherwise."

"I am so glad, papa! so glad that I can be of at least a little help to you," she said joyously. "It is such a privilege, and such a pleasure!"

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"Dear child!" he said in response. Then, as the sound of wheels on the drive without came to their ears, "Ah! our guests are beginning to arrive, and we must go out and bid them welcome."

Several carriage loads were already there, and others quickly followed till, in a very short time, all the expected relatives were present.

Then mirth and jollity ruled the hour, all—old and young—seeming in gayest spirits and ready to join in any amusement that might be proposed. Mr. and Mrs. Croly were among the guests. She had gained so materially in health and strength that she was able—resting in an easy-chair upon the veranda—to watch the sports of the younger and healthier ones with interest and enjoyment; and to converse with one and another as they came in turn to chat with her for a time. At length, finding herself alone with Grandma Elsie for a while, she turned to her, saying in a sprightly way:

"I am getting so much better under the skilful treatment of Dr. Conly that I ventured on quite a drive this morning, and we went to look at a little place, some ten or more acres in extent, about which your son Doctor Harold was telling us yesterday. It is on the river bank, the lawn sloping down to the water, and it is hardly farther from Ion than this place. It is for sale. The house is small, but pretty, and could easily be added to, and so made as large as one might wish."

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"Riverside is the name of the estate?" Mrs. Travilla said inquiringly.

"Yes; a pretty one we both—Mr. Croly and I—think, and we have about decided to buy it and enlarge and beautify the dwelling for our children,—our son and your daughter,—if you think that would please dear Rosie."

"I think it could not fail to do so," Mrs. Travilla replied, her eyes sparkling with pleasure. "It will be a great pleasure to me to have our children so near, and I was thinking of making the purchase for them myself. It was only this morning I learned that the place was for sale."

"Ah!" laughed Mrs. Croly, "don't try to get ahead of us. We want the place ourselves, and it won't hurt the young folks to wait for it till we are gone; especially as we intend it to be as much a home for them immediately as if they were sole proprietors."

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"And they will enjoy it all the more for having their kind parents with them," was Mrs. Travilla's pleased response.

Then they fell to talking of alterations and additions to the dwelling, and plans for furnishing and decorating it and the grounds.

"I am very glad indeed that you and your husband have decided to settle in this neighbourhood," said Mrs. Travilla; "glad that we are to have the pleasure of your society, and that Rosie's married home will not be at a distance from that of her childhood. I have been very fortunate in being able thus far to keep all my children near me."

"Yes, I think so; and I do not wonder that they and you wish to keep together. I feel just so in regard to my one. Ah! who are those two ladies approaching on the driveway?"

"One I call mamma," Mrs. Travilla said with a smile; "she is my father's second wife, and has been my dear mother since I was a little girl of ten. The other is Aunt Adelaide, a half sister of my father, who married a brother of Mamma Rose—Mr. Edward Allison of Philadelphia."

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"Ah, yes! I recognize Mrs. Dinsmore, now that they have drawn nearer, and Mrs. Allison as someone to whom I have been introduced; but I have met so many strangers in the last few days that I suppose I may be excused for not remembering her name and connection with you and our Rosie," she concluded with a smile, adding, "You will excuse me, I know, for claiming Rosie as mine as well as yours, because it is so sweet to me to have a daughter at long last."

"I am very glad you feel it so," Mrs. Travilla returned with a sweet, sympathising look and smile, "and I hope my Rosie will prove to you the sweet and lovable daughter that she has always been to me."

Just at that moment the other ladies joined them, and the four entered into a lively conversation, talking of Riverside and the improvements needed there, what a lovely home it would make for the Crolys, how pleasant it would be to have them so near, and how delightful for Rosie that thus she would escape the dreaded separation from her mother.

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"Yes," said Mrs. Croly, "I cannot tell you how glad I was to learn of this beautiful place, so near to Ion, for sale; for I felt badly over the thought that we were robbing Mrs. Travilla of the companionship of so sweet a daughter. Besides I am anxious to remain in this neighbourhood, that I may continue under the care of Dr. Conly; for he has helped me more than any other physician I ever tried."

That remark seemed gratifying to all three of her listeners, and Mrs. Dinsmore said: "We are glad to hear it; for Dr. Conly is dear to us all, as relative, friend, and physician."

"He has a lovely young wife," was Mrs. Croly's next remark; "and a darling baby boy of whom they are both very proud and fond."

"Yes," said Mrs. Travilla, "it does one good to see how happy they are in the possession of it and of each other. Arthur remained single for years; I think to provide, or assist in providing, for his mother, sisters, and younger brothers, but he seems to be reaping his reward now in having a wife who is a great comfort and blessing to him."

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"She is that, indeed!" said Mrs. Allison emphatically. "Ah! speak of angels—here they come!" as Dr. Conly and his young wife were seen approaching, followed by a nurse carrying the infant.

In another minute they had joined the group on the veranda, where the doctor speedily ensconced his wife in an easy-chair, placed himself in another by her side, and taking the baby from the nurse, held it up with a look of fatherly pride, asking the older ladies, "Isn't this a pretty fine specimen of babyhood, considering that he is my son?"

"Yes, indeed!" laughed Mrs. Allison, "it is singular that so poor a specimen of manhood as my nephew, Arthur Conly, should have so fine a son. But he may have got his good looks from his mother; though I do not perceive that she has lost any."

"Now, Aunt Adelaide, after that you will do well to take care not to fall ill and get into the doctor's hands," laughed Marian.

"My dear," said the doctor, "can you suppose I object to having my wife praised? or my son, even at his father's expense?"

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"No, I know you do not," she returned. "I verily believe you would sacrifice everything for him except his mother."

"Did he let you take part in any of the games?" asked Adelaide.

"Oh, I didn't ask to!" said Marian. "I have grown so lazy that I thought it more fun to watch the others."

"Captain Raymond and Violet seem to be enjoying tennis as much as any of the rest," remarked Mrs. Dinsmore, who was watching the game with keen interest.

"Yes," said Dr. Conly, "all—old and young—seem very happy and interested in their various sports; and I think are gaining health and strength from the vigorous exercise in this pure air."

Most of the company were engaged in games of one kind or another, but some few were wandering about in the alleys of the garden or wood, or sitting on the grass or some rustic bench, chatting sociably, as cousins and connections might be expected to do. Dr. Dick Percival and Maud Dinsmore were among the latter. They had had a game of tennis and were now refreshing themselves with a saunter through the wood.

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"I admire this place—Woodburn," said Maud. "Captain Raymond has, I think, made a sort of earthly paradise of it; though for that matter one might say pretty much the same of The Oaks, Ion, and several of the other family estates."

"Yes; including those down in Louisiana," returned Dick—"Viamede, Magnolia Hall, and a few others. By the way, you have never been down there, have you?"

"No, never; but I am hoping that Cousin Elsie will invite me one of these days."

"Suppose you don't wait for that, but accept an invitation from me," suggested Dick, giving her a very lover-like look and smile.

"From you?" she exclaimed, her tone expressing surprise and a little bewilderment, "are you staying there?"

"At Viamede? No, not now. I have bought a plantation not very far from there, and am trying to make it equal in beauty to Viamede. It will, of course, take some time to accomplish that; but, to me, Torriswood seems even now a very winsome place. And if I had my cousin Maud installed there, as mistress, I should be one of the happiest of men."

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"Oh! you want me to become your housekeeper?"

"Yes; housekeeper, homekeeper, heartkeeper—everything! Oh, Maud darling! can't you understand that I love you and want you for my wife, my best, nearest, and dearest friend, my heart's idol? I love you in a way that I never loved anyone else. Can't you love me in the same way—as something nearer and dearer than a mere cousin?"

Maud was blushing, trembling—wholly taken by surprise and hardly knowing whether to be glad or sorry. "Oh, Dick! how can you?" she stammered. "We are cousins, you know, and—and cousins ought not to—to marry. I have often heard Cousin Arthur say so."

"Not first cousins, nor second, but we are neither; we are far enough removed to be entirely safe so far as that is concerned. So dearest, you need not hesitate on that account, if you feel that you can love me well enough to be happy as my wife. Can you? If you cannot now, I may be able to teach you to by clever courting. But I need a wife—I do indeed; and I don't know how to wait. Don't make me wait. Can't you give me your love—at least a little of it?"

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"Oh, Dick! do you really care so much for me and my love—really love me in that way?" she asked low and tremulously, her eyes full of happy tears. "I never thought of such a thing before; but—but I do believe I can—I do love you better than any other of my cousins; better than—than anybody else in the world."

"Ah! dearest, you have made me very, very happy," he said joyously; "happier than I ever was in my life before, and I shall go home far richer than I came."

As he spoke he drew her to a rustic seat in a nook so concealed by the trees and shrubbery and the winding of the path that they were entirely hidden from view, and, putting an arm about her he held her close with silent caresses that seemed very sweet to her; for she had been an orphan for years, and often hungry for love greater than that of brother or sister.

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"Maud, dear," he said presently, "we have given ourselves to each other, and why should we delay the final step? I do not want to go back to my home alone; will you not go with me? It would make me the happiest of men."

"But—but you are going very soon, I understood—in a few days."

"Yes; it would hardly do for me to wait longer than that; but what is the use of waiting? We

know each other now as thoroughly as we ever can till we live together as man and wife."

"But I should have no time to prepare my wardrobe——"

"It is good enough, and can be easily added to when you are Mrs. Percival," he said with a low, gleeful laugh. "I am ready to take you, my darling, if you were without a single change of raiment. I do not think you know it, dearest, but I am no longer the poor relation I used to be. I have had a large practise, worked hard, and made some very fortunate investments, so that I can truly say that I am a fairly wealthy man. Ah, do give yourself into my keeping at once. I am heartily tired of my lonely bachelor life, and it will be great joy to me if I can go back, not to it, but to that of a happy married man. How a dear little wife—such as my cousin Maud would make—would brighten and make cheery that lonely home. Can you find it in your heart to refuse me the favour I ask, sweet one?"

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"I do not like to refuse you anything, dear Dick," she returned; "but it is all so sudden and unexpected; do let me have a little time to think it over and—and consult my friends and yours."

"Ah, well! I will try to wait patiently," he sighed; "wait, hoping you will grant my request."

"Oh, Dick, dear Dick! I really do feel like doing anything in the world that I can to make you happy. I will do whatever you wish, no matter what other people may say. Only," she added, as if with sudden recollection, "I suppose we must ask Uncle Dinsmore's consent."

"Yes; but I have no fear that it will be withheld. He and I are no strangers to each other; he is my uncle, too, you know, and was my guardian while I was young enough to need one. I think he will be pleased that we are going into partnership,—you and I,—and will agree with me that the sooner we begin the better."

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"Provided that allows me time to get properly ready," she supplemented with an arch look and smile.

"What preparation do you need?" he asked. "I am more than willing to take you just as you are. You look perfectly charming in that dress, and, for a wedding dress, the one you wore as bridesmaid to Cousin Rosie seems to me entirely suitable. Indeed, my darling, you look bewitchingly pretty in any and every thing you put on."

"Oh, you flatterer!" she laughed. "I can't expect other people to see with your eyes; but, after all, the principal thing is to please you. That will be my business for the rest of my life, I suppose," she added, giving him a look of ardent affection.

"And mine to please you, dearest. Shall we not follow Rosie's good example in making no secret of our engagement; at least so far as our own people here assembled are concerned? Will you let me take you back to the house now and introduce you there as my promised wife?"

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"Do just as you please about it, Cousin Dick," she said. "You are older and wiser than I."

"I certainly am older," he said laughingly as they rose, and he gave her his arm; "but if I am wiser in some respects, you doubtless are in some others. Perhaps we will find out all about that when we get to housekeeping together."

Mr. Dinsmore had joined the group on the veranda. Mr. Lilburn and Annis, Captain Raymond and Violet were there, too, and some others of the married people, among them Mr. Horace Dinsmore, Jr., of The Oaks, and his wife, as Dick and Maud came up the steps together. He led her directly to his uncle.

"We have come for your blessing, sir, Cousin Maud and I," he said in clear, distinct tones. "Will you give her to me? She is willing that you should, and I promise to do all in my power to provide for her and make her happy."

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"Why, children, this is a surprise—but a pleasant one," exclaimed Mr. Dinsmore. "Yes, I give you my blessing and wish you many happy years together."

Then the others crowded about with exclamations of surprise and pleasure, congratulations, good wishes, and questions. "How long had they been lovers?" "Did they expect to marry very soon?"

"Yes, almost immediately," Dick answered to that last. "What was there to wait for? They were old enough to know their own minds, he was well able to support a wife, and had a home ready for her. It needed some improvements to be sure, but they could be made all the better with Maud there to give her opinion and advice."

"But she must have time to prepare her trousseau," said young Mrs. Dinsmore.

"I have just been coaxing her out of that notion," laughed Dick, regarding his promised wife with admiring eyes. "I want her, and the wedding finery can be attended to somewhat later. I don't think anything could be prettier or more becoming than the dress she wore at Cousin Rosie's wedding, and why can't she be married in that?"

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"Why, it would do, I suppose!" exclaimed Mrs. Dinsmore. "It is very pretty and becoming, and, with a bridal veil added, would make a suitable and handsome wedding dress."

"A wedding dress? Who is going to be married now?" cried a girlish voice, and Sydney and

Walter were seen coming up the steps. All turned at the sound of her voice, and Dick answered:

"Your sister and I, Cousin Syd. Are you willing to take me for a brother?"

"You!" she exclaimed, "you, Cousin Dick? Why, I never dreamed of such a thing! But I have no objection; no, not the least in the world—except that you'll be taking my sister away from me; I don't like that at all."

"No, Coz, that is altogether a mistake," Dick hastened to say. "I don't want to separate you and Maud, and you have only to come along with us to escape that. You will find plenty of room and a warm welcome at Torriswood."

"Thank you," she said; "but it's so sudden I can't realise it at all yet. When did you make up your minds to get married?" [Pg 236]

"Half an hour ago, perhaps; I forgot to look at my watch to take exact note of the time."

"Oh! is that the way you do when you are taking note of a patient's pulse, or the time for administering a dose of medicine?"

But Dick was saved the trouble of replying, as relatives, older and younger, came crowding up to learn what was going on.

Chester and Frank were as much surprised as Sydney had been, but by no means displeased. They liked Dick as a cousin and had no objection to accepting him as a brother-in-law. The newly affianced had no frowns or objections to meet; everybody seemed pleased and interested, and the only queries were as to when and where the marriage should take place.

"It should be at The Oaks, of course," said young Mr. Dinsmore. "That is her home, and has been for years."

"And it was there mamma was married," said Violet, "and Maud might stand in the very same place."

"Yes, I should be glad to have her do so," said Mrs. Travilla; "and she and Dick need ask nothing more than that their marriage may prove as happy a one as mine." [Pg 237]

"Yes, Cousin Elsie, I agree with you in that," said Maud. "I will be married at The Oaks, if Dick is satisfied to have it so."

"Entirely," he said; "and now it remains only to fix upon the day and hour."

That question seemed more difficult to settle than the other; but Dick finally had his way, and the morning of the day on which he was to start for the far South was fixed upon as the time for the ceremony. The other relatives from a distance would delay their departure long enough to be present, the older Mr. Cyril Keith was chosen as the officiating minister, and everyone seemed satisfied with all the arrangements. [Pg 238]

CHAPTER XVI.

It had been a very enjoyable, but an exciting day; the little ones were weary with their sports, and all the guests, except those who were making Woodburn their temporary home, departed shortly after an early tea, and directly after the evening service of prayer and praise the ladies of the family retired to their rooms. At length Captains Raymond and Keith found themselves alone together upon the veranda.

"Raymond," said the younger man, breaking a pause in their talk, "I have a great favour to ask of you."

"Ah! what is it, Keith? Surely you do not need to be told that it would give me pleasure to do you any favour in my power."

"Ah, I fear you hardly realise how much you are promising. Do you remember the talk we had some years ago at West Point?"

"Yes; but do you remember that the subject was not to be referred to—at least the question you asked not to be repeated—for six years, and that it is now only five?" [Pg 239]

"Yes; but one year cannot make much difference, and it is highly probable that I may not be able to get here next year. Am I asking too much in begging you to let me speak now—before I go? Understand I am not asking leave to take her—your beautiful, charming daughter—away from you now, but only to tell the story of my love; for it has come to that, that I am deeply in love with her; only to tell the story and try to win a return of my affection and a promise that, at some future day, I may claim her for my own."

"I would rather not, Keith; she is only a child," Captain Raymond replied in moved tones. "But since you are so urgent, and are so old and valued a friend, I don't like to refuse you. You may speak to her; but with the clear understanding, remember, that I will on no account allow her to marry for some time to come; I do not want to allow it before she is twenty-four or five."

"Thank you," said Keith heartily; "that will be a long time to wait, but she is well worth waiting for. But do you think I have any reason to hope to win her—that she likes me in the very least?"

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"I am certain she has no dislike to you; that she feels kindly toward you as a relative and friend of the family; but I tell you candidly that I am well-nigh convinced that she has never thought of looking upon you as a lover; and it is a great happiness to me to be able to believe that she still loves her father better than any other man living."

"Still it is possible you may be mistaken," Keith rejoined after a moment's discouraged silence, "and since I have your permission, I shall try what clever courting will do for me."

A momentary silence followed, broken by Captain Raymond. "I fear I am a foolish, fond father, Keith. I have a very strong friendship for you, and there is no man to whom I would sooner trust my daughter's happiness, but yet I cannot wish you success in winning her; because, being in the army, you would necessarily take her to a distance from her home and me. But, as I have said, you may try, though with the full understanding that not for some years to come will I resign my custody of her. She is my own dear child, and, in my esteem, still much too young to leave my fostering care and assume the duties and responsibilities of wifehood and motherhood."

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"I don't blame you, Raymond, and shall not try to persuade her to go against her father's wishes in regard to the time of assuming the cares and duties you speak of," said Keith, heaving an involuntary sigh at thought of the years of bachelorhood still evidently in store for him. "I only wish I were sure of her even after serving seven years, as Jacob did for Rachel."

"Well, I shall not cheat you as Laban did poor Jacob," returned Captain Raymond pleasantly. "By the way, Cousins Dick and Maud made quick work of their courting, and the marriage is to follow very speedily. In most cases such speedy work would be risky enough, but they know all about each other—at least so far as a couple may before the knot is tied which makes them one flesh. I think very highly of both, and hope it is going to be a most happy marriage."

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"I hope it may, indeed," said Keith. "Maud will be hurried with her preparations; more so than most ladies would like, I presume."

"Yes; but really it will be just as well, I think, under all the circumstances. To-morrow we are all to spend one half the day at Roselands, the other at Pine Grove; the next day we go to Beechwood; then Thursday we are to have the wedding at The Oaks, and that night, or the next morning, most of the friends from a distance contemplate starting for their homes."

"Yes, I among the rest," said Keith.

"I need hardly say, for surely you cannot doubt it, that I should be glad to have you remain longer with us if Uncle Sam would permit it," said Captain Raymond with cordial hospitality.

"Thank you," returned Keith, "but that is more than I could expect even were there time to ask it, which there is not." Then, rising, "It strikes me that it is high time to be making ready for bed. Good-night, Raymond, my good friend; sweet sleep and pleasant dreams to you," and, with the last word, he held out his hand.

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Captain Raymond grasped it heartily, saying, "Good-night, Keith; I wish you the same. May He who never slumbers nor sleeps have us all in his kind care and keeping."

In the principal event of the past day—the engagement of Dick Percival and Maud Dinsmore—and the talk of other days and events which ensued, Mrs. Elsie Travilla's thoughts had been carried back to the happy time of her own betrothal and marriage to the one whom she had so loved as friend, lover, and husband. She seemed to see him again as he was then, to hear his low breathed words of tenderest affection, and her tears fell fast at the thought that never again in this life should their sweet music fall upon her ear.

But well she knew that the separation was only temporary; that they should meet again in the better land, where sickness, sorrow, and death can never enter, meet never more to part.

She was alone in her boudoir, and, wiping away her tears, she knelt down in prayer, asking for strength to bear patiently and submissively the loss that was at times so grievous, and craving God's blessing upon the young relatives so soon to take upon them the marriage vows. Nor did she forget her own daughter so recently united to the man of her choice, or any other of her dear ones. Her heart swelled with joy and gratitude as she thought of them all, healthy, happy, and in comfortable circumstances; her dear old father and his lovely wife still spared to her, and the dear grandchildren who seemed to renew to her the youthful days of her own children, the fathers and mothers of these.

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Her thoughts were still full of motherly and grandmotherly cares and joys as she laid her head upon her pillow and passed into the land of dreams.

When she awoke again it was to find the sun shining and the air full of the breath of flowers and the morning songs of the little birds in the tree tops just beyond her windows. She rose and knelt beside her bed, while her heart sent up its song of gratitude and praise, its petitions for grace and strength according to her day, asking the same for her dear ones also, and that she and they might be kept from accident, folly, and sin.

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As she made her toilet her thoughts again referred to Maud and her present needs, which could not well be supplied for lack of time.

"Can I not help the dear girl in some way?" she asked herself.

Then a sudden thought came to her and she hastened to a large closet, unlocked a trunk standing there, and took from it a package carefully wrapped in a large towel. Carrying it to a sofa in her boudoir she unpinned it and brought to light a dress of richest white satin, having an overskirt of point lace, and, beside it, a veil of the same costly material.

"As beautiful as ever," she sighed softly to herself. "And the dress would, I think, fit Maud, with little or no alteration. It would be something of a trial to part with them permanently, but surely I can spare them to Maud for a few hours. It would give her pleasure, for she would look lovely in them, and every woman wants to look her very best at her bridal."

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But the breakfast bell was ringing, and, putting them carefully back in the trunk and relocking it, she hastened down to the dining room.

There were a number of guests in the house, among them the Emburys of Magnolia Hall, and, naturally, the talk at the table ran principally upon the approaching marriage of Molly's brother, Dr. Percival.

"I am much pleased," she said; "Maud will make a dear little sister for me, and I hope will find me a good and kind one to her. And if Sydney goes along she will be about as good as another. Perhaps Bob and she will get up another match, and then she will be my sister. I wish Bob could have come along with the rest of us."

"Yes, I wish he could," said Mrs. Travilla. "He must take his turn at another time, leaving Dick to look after the patients."

"I think Maud feels a trifle disappointed that she has no time to get up a grand wedding dress," Molly ran on, "but the one she wore as Rosie's bridesmaid is very pretty and becoming. Still it is not white; and I heard her say that she had always been determined to be married in white, if she married at all."

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"Oh, well," said Mr. Embury, "the getting married is the chief thing, and, after it is all over, it won't matter much whether it was done in white or some other colour. I presume most folks would think it better to be married even in black than not at all."

"I think that depends very much upon what sort of husband one gets," laughed Zoe. "I got married without any bridal finery; but it was a very fortunate thing for me after all," giving her husband a proudly affectionate glance.

"Yes," he said with a smile, "and I wouldn't exchange the wife I got in that way for the most exquisitely attired bride in Christendom."

Mrs. Travilla kept her own counsel in regard to her plans for Maud's relief, until breakfast and family worship were over; but then invited Molly to her boudoir, brought out the dress and veil she had been looking at, and disclosed her plan for Maud.

Molly was delighted.

"Oh, cousin, how good in you!" she cried. "I think Maud will be wild with joy to be so nicely brought out of her difficulty. For the dress is splendid, and, as you say, hardly out of the present fashion in its make-up. And the veil is just too lovely for anything! Fully as handsome as Rosie's was, and I thought it the very handsomest I had ever seen."

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"Then I shall telephone at once to The Oaks," Mrs. Travilla said, and, passing out and down to the hall below, she did so. Calling for Maud, she asked her to come over to Ion at once as she wished to consult her on an important matter requiring prompt decision; but she would not detain her long.

Much wondering, Maud replied that she would be there in a few minutes; the carriage being at the door, and Mr. Dinsmore offering to drive her over immediately.

Mrs. Travilla gave orders to a servant that on Miss Dinsmore's arrival she should be brought directly to her boudoir; Mr. Dinsmore might come also, if he wished; and presently both appeared.

They were warmly greeted by Mrs. Travilla and Mrs. Embury, who was still with her.

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"I have something to show you, Maud, and an offer to make," Elsie said with a smile, leading the young girl forward and pointing to the dress and veil disposed about an easy-chair in a way to exhibit them in all their beauty.

"Oh!" cried Maud, "how lovely! how lovely! I never saw them before. Whose were they? Where did they come from, Cousin Elsie?"

"I wore them when—when I was married," Elsie answered in low, sad tones; "they have not been used since, but I will lend them to you, dear Maud, if you would like to use them for your bridal."

"Oh, Cousin Elsie! wouldn't I? How good, how good in you! I am too hurried to buy anything, and that lace is far beyond my purse if I had any amount of time."

"Then I am glad I thought of offering you the use of these. But now I think it would be well for

you to try on the dress and see what—if any—alteration it needs. We will go into my dressing room, and I will be your tire-woman," she added, gathering up the dress as she spoke, while Mrs. Embury took the veil.

The three passed into the dressing room, leaving Mr. Dinsmore sole occupant of the boudoir, he taking up a book to amuse himself with while they were gone. [Pg 250]

Only a few minutes had passed when they returned, Maud looking very bridelike in the dainty satin and the veil.

"Bravo, cousin! You look every inch a bride, and a lovely one at that!" he exclaimed. "I advise you by all means to accept my sister's offer. You could not do better."

"I could hardly want to do better," said Maud. "Yes, Cousin Elsie, I accept it with a world of thanks. Oh, I never dreamed of having anything so lovely to wear for my bridal dress! And I need not care that the finery does not really belong to me, for you know the old saying:

"Something borrowed,
Something blue,
Something old and
Something new."

I'll borrow these, put a bow of blue ribbon on my under waist, and—ah! the dress and this lovely lace, veil and all, will be enough of something old!" she concluded with a light, gleeful laugh. [Pg 251]

"Dear child, don't be superstitious!" Mrs. Travilla said with a rather sad sort of smile, putting an arm round her and giving her a tender kiss. "I hope and trust you will be very happy with dear Dick, for he is a noble fellow; but it will depend more upon yourself—upon your being a true, good, and loving wife—than on what you wear when you give yourself to him, or at any other time."

"Yes, I know, dear cousin," said Maud, returning the caress; "that was only my jest. I wouldn't be afraid to marry Dick in any kind of dress, or willing to marry anybody else in any kind of one. I didn't know that I was in love with him till he proposed, but now I feel that it would be impossible to love anybody else; almost impossible to live without him and his love."

"I am glad, very glad to hear it," Elsie said, "and I hope and expect that you will make a very happy couple—sharing each other's cares, toils, and troubles, as well as the joys and blessings of life."

"Yes, cousin dear; if we don't it shall not be my fault," Maud returned with emotion. "I do really want to be everything to Dick and make his life as bright and as happy as I can; and I know that is just how he feels toward me, dear fellow!" [Pg 252]

"That's right, Maud," said Mr. Dinsmore heartily, "and I think you and Dick have every prospect of making a happy couple. Well," rising as he spoke, "I am going down to have a little chat with father and mother, then must hasten home to attend to some matters about work to be done on the plantation. I suppose you and your package will be ready to be taken along, Maud?"

"Yes; if Cousin Elsie is willing to trust the handsome thing in my care now," Maud replied, looking inquiringly at Mrs. Travilla.

"Quite willing; for I know you will be careful of them," Mrs. Travilla replied with her own sweet smile. "I will fold them up and get the package ready while you resume the dress in which you came," she added as her brother left the room.

"Maud," said Mrs. Embury, "if I were you I should keep this thing a secret from everybody but your sister and Cousin Sue, until your appearance in all the glory of this satin and lace at the time of the marriage ceremony. Think of the surprise and pleasure your unexpected grandeur in it will cause." [Pg 253]

"But what if the stunning surprise should have a bad effect upon somebody," laughed Maud. "I think I'll risk it, however. Oh, Cousin Elsie! I do not know how to thank you for this great kindness!" she added with tears of joy and gratitude in her eyes.

"Then don't try, Maud, dear," Mrs. Travilla returned with a bright, sweet look into the young girl's face. "The happiness I can see that it gives you is even a greater reward than the trifling kindness deserves. And how fortunate it is that the dress fits so perfectly—as if it had just been made for you."

A few moments later Maud and Mr. Dinsmore were on their way back to The Oaks. They found Mrs. Sue Dinsmore and Sydney on the veranda, waiting in eager curiosity to learn on what business Maud had been wanted at Ion.

"To receive and bring home this package," returned Maud gaily to their excited questioning. "Come with me up to my room, and I will display to you its contents. You come, too, Cousin Horace, that you may witness their surprise and dismay. There, don't say you haven't time, for it needn't take you five minutes." [Pg 254]

"Well, perhaps I can spare that many," he returned laughingly, following the three as they

tripped up the stairway.

Maud made quick work of opening the package and displaying its contents to their view.

"Oh, oh, how beautiful! how lovely! perfectly exquisite!" were the excited exclamations of Mrs. Dinsmore and Sydney. "Whose are they? where did they come from?"

"They are Cousin Elsie's wedding dress and veil," replied Maud. "And she lends them to me to be married in. But it is to be a secret. Nobody is to know anything about it till I appear with them on—when I am to add the name of Percival to those I already bear," she concluded in a tone that seemed to indicate that she was jesting to hide an inclination to indulge in tears.

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"I highly approve," said Mrs. Dinsmore. "The things—dress and veil—are beautiful, and will make our bride look bewitchingly lovely; I strongly approve, too, of the plan of keeping the matter a close secret until the bride enters the room on the bridegroom's arm. But does the dress fit you, Maud?"

"Perfectly; as if it had just been made for me!" exclaimed Maud in tones of delight. "Oh, I do feel so glad, and so thankful to dear Cousin Elsie! I fear it must be somewhat trying to her feelings to see me wear it; but she is not one to hesitate for that when she has an opportunity to do a kindness. She is a good Christian if ever there was one."

"Indeed she is!" exclaimed Mrs. Dinsmore and Sydney in a breath.

Mr. Dinsmore had already left the room.

"But now, girls, we must bestir ourselves and make ready for the day," added Mrs. Dinsmore. "You know the morning is to be spent by the whole connection at Pinegrove, and the afternoon at Roselands. It won't take you long to get ready, will it?"

"No, only a few minutes," both answered, and she hurried away to complete her own preparations.

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"Oh, Maud, dear!" said Sydney, taking up the bridal veil and gazing admiringly upon it, "I am so glad Cousin Elsie has lent you this bit of loveliness, and that beautiful dress to be married in. You will look just bewitching; and how proud Dick will be of his bride. I wish he was here now to see these charming things. Do you mean to tell him about them and show them to him beforehand?"

"I don't know; I really haven't thought about it yet," Maud answered. "But we must make haste, now, and not keep Cousin Horace and Sue waiting."

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CHAPTER XVII.

At Woodburn Captain Raymond and his eldest daughter had had their usual early ramble together about the grounds; then, coming in, had found a large mail, containing a number of business letters for him, awaiting them.

"I hope they are such as I can answer for you on the typewriter, papa," Lucilla said cheerfully.

"Yes," he replied; "if you have time and inclination to do so."

"Always time to work for my father," she said, giving him a bright, sweet smile, as she seated herself before the machine.

"Then we will do it at once," he said, returning the smile as he uncovered the machine and put the paper in place for her. "'Business before pleasure' is a good rule, and my dear, helpful daughter makes it an easier one for me to follow than it would be without her assistance."

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"I am so glad it does, papa; so glad I am of some use to you," she returned, blushing with pleasure as she spoke.

"I know you are, daughter dear, else I should not call upon you for these services," he said heartily; then, glancing over a letter he had just opened, he began dictating.

He had not said anything to her about the talk he and Donald Keith had had the night before, nor did he intend to. So sure of the result was he that it did not seem at all necessary, and he thought the knowledge of what was before her would only cause her embarrassment and discomfort. He did not know what opportunity Keith might seize, and it seemed better to leave her in ignorance of his intentions.

"Is that all, father?" she asked presently, when several letters had been written.

"Yes, daughter," he replied; "and now we can feel free for the day. I hope it will be a pleasant one to you."

"I expect it to be, papa," she returned; "Pinegrove is a beautiful place, and the Howards are delightful people. No relation to me, but tolerably near cousins to Mamma Vi, you know."

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"Yes; Mrs. Howard being half sister to her grandfather," he said with an amused look. "They

can hardly be called near relatives, but are very estimable people, and I think the half day may be passed very pleasantly with them and the visiting relatives."

"I like Flora Howard. Papa, don't you think she might make a nice wife for Captain Keith, if only they should take a fancy to each other?"

"I hadn't thought of it. She is rather young—not much older than my daughter Lulu, I judge; so had better not be thinking of marriage for years to come."

"Yes, sir; but a good many girls do, you know; girls that haven't such a dear, good father as mine to make them feel that they never want to leave him for anybody else."

"You are sure you don't want to leave yours?" he asked with a searching, though smiling look into her face.

"Oh, papa, you can't doubt it, I am sure!" she exclaimed, giving him a look of ardent affection.

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"No, I do not," he returned; "I am very sure—since you have told me so at least a dozen times—that my dear eldest daughter loves me better than she does any other man living, and wants me to keep her all my own for years to come."

"Yes, indeed, papa," she said with a happy laugh, "that is just what I want you to do."

"Then we entirely agree. There is the breakfast bell, and I hope my daughter feels ready to obey its summons."

"Yes, sir; it is a welcome sound."

It was a bright and cheerful party that presently gathered about the table, and a lively conversation was carried on while they partook of the tempting viands. The new home about to be prepared for Rosie, its present condition, the beauty of the situation, the grounds, the building, and the improvements to be made by alterations and additions, were themes dilated upon for a time; then the approaching marriage of Dick and Maud came under discussion, and the questions were broached whether she would wear the dress she had worn as Rosie's bridesmaid, and whether she would have the same attendants.

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"I hope she will," little Elsie said. "I'd like to be flower girl again, and my dress is all ready, so that it wouldn't make any trouble or expense."

"That is very thoughtful in you, little sister," laughed Lucilla.

"I am really sorry there is no time or opportunity to buy presents for Maud," remarked Violet in a regretful tone.

"Yes, it seems a pity," said Captain Raymond; "but perhaps they can be sent on to her later. If people will marry in haste they will have to take the consequences. I hope that in this case one of them will not be repenting at leisure."

"I don't believe it will," said Violet. "They are of the same kith and kin, and know pretty much all about each other."

"Keith," said Captain Raymond, "send your plate up again; I see it is almost empty."

"Thank you, no; I want to save some appetite for the later breakfast that I am told I must share with the rest of you at Pinegrove. Our good friends there might feel hurt should I do it scant justice."

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"How soon do we go, papa?" asked Grace.

"As soon after prayers as the ladies are dressed and ready."

"The little girls and boys too, papa?" asked Ned somewhat anxiously. "Elsie and I are to go, aren't we?"

"Oh, yes, my son, and I hope will have a very pleasant time. I am glad I can trust you to be good, well-behaved children."

Donald Keith was on the watch for an opportunity to tell to Lucilla the story of his love, but none offered. They drove to Pinegrove, and afterward to Roselands, in the same carriage, but it had a number of other occupants, and the conversation was general. But, fortunately for Lucilla, she had no suspicion of his designs upon her, so was entirely at her ease with him.

The Pinegrove party was a success, everybody enjoying it fully; the very young in playing games, the older ones strolling about the grounds, chatting, laughing, singing.

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The breakfast, quite a grand affair, was served about noon, and some two hours after it was over they all left the grove for Roselands.

Little had been said at Pinegrove about the approaching marriage, but it came under discussion at Roselands, and to the extreme satisfaction of the two little Elsies it was decided that they should act as flower girls, as they had at Rosie's wedding. The same bridesmaids and maid of honour were chosen also; with the understanding that they should all wear the same dresses worn as Rosie's attendants.

"And, of course, you will wear yours, Maud," said Laura Howard. "It is lovely and very becoming, and the shade so delicate that I should think it would do almost, if not quite, as well as if it were white."

"It is very pretty, and as becoming as any I own," Maud said with a slight smile. "I haven't time to buy another, and, if one's bridegroom is all right, it doesn't really matter whether the wedding dress is perfectly white or not."

"Certainly not," laughed Dick. "I should rather by far marry the right woman in a black calico than the wrong one in the handsomest of white satins; even with Brussels or point lace on it in abundance."

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"Well, then, I may feel entirely easy," Maud said, echoing his laugh, "for I shall certainly be better and more appropriately attired than in a black dress, or calico of any colour."

"Of course you will," said Grace, "I think that dress of yours is lovely and extremely becoming. No one need be ashamed of such a wedding dress as that."

"And I am determined that she shall have a lovely wedding," said Mrs. Sue Dinsmore; "as much like what I have been told Sister Elsie's was as possible. The house shall be trimmed with abundance of flowers, and the bride and groom shall stand in the very same spot that their predecessors did; and I dare say the refreshments will be pretty nearly a reproduction of what were served that evening; as nearly as I can manage it, at all events."

"It really won't matter if there are some added luxuries, my dear," her husband remarked in a jesting tone, and with a twinkle of fun in his eye.

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"No, I presume not; it will be better to err on that side than on the other," she returned demurely. "I mean, however, to make up to poor Maud for the lack of a new wedding dress; at least so far as I can."

"As I do," said Mrs. Travilla, smiling kindly upon the expectant bride.

"And it is only the pressure of Dick's haste—the lack of time for it—that keeps her brothers from providing her with as handsome a wedding outfit as could be desired," remarked Chester, looking slightly annoyed and hurt.

"Yes, Chester, we all know that," a chorus of voices exclaimed, his Uncle Dinsmore adding: "And as we are all relatives or connections, it really matters very little. Dick may be thankful—and I don't in the least doubt that he is—to get Maud, without considering how she is attired, or of what her wardrobe consists."

"I say amen to that, uncle," smiled Dick, "and shall only enjoy speedily supplying anything lacking in her wardrobe. I'll be glad, indeed, to have the right."

"Very good in you, Dick; but it isn't the bridegroom's place to supply the trousseau," said Chester, only half mollified. "And there is no occasion, seeing her brothers are able to do it, and willing, to say nothing of her own means."

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"Oh, Ches, don't be vexed," said Maud. "It will all be right; I have a very good wardrobe, and don't mean to let Dick buy anything for me this long while."

At which Dick laughed meaningly, as much as to say: "In regard to that I shall do as I please or think best."

Chester was somewhat out of sorts; he did not like to have his sister hurried into marriage without a trousseau, and he had noticed something that displeased him still more in Captain Keith's manner toward Lucilla Raymond. It was hard, very hard, he thought, that her father would not allow him to tell her the story of his love. He would have been still more indignant had he known that Keith was allowed that privilege.

As for Keith, he was looking out for an opportunity to avail himself of the father's permission; not very hopefully, but still not in entire despair; thinking that clever courting might perhaps win her in the end. And he felt that she was worth much effort and long waiting for.

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The afternoon passed quickly and the party broke up early, partly because of the necessary preparations for to-morrow's wedding. The Oaks family, having the most of that to attend to, were the first to leave, and the others soon followed.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

Ever since gaining her father's permission to tell Lucilla the story of his love, Captain Keith had been watching for a favourable opportunity to do so, but thus far without avail.

"Now," he thought, as they drove on the homeward way from Roselands to Woodburn, "I must try to get a few moments alone with her this evening."

He did not succeed, however; there were still several guests besides himself, and Lucilla seemed to be always in request for conversation, or taking part in some game. And directly after

the evening service she slipped away to her own apartments and was seen no more that night.

In the morning it was equally impossible to catch her alone for even a moment, so busy and excited were all with regard to what was to be the great event of the day.

The ladies began their toilets soon after breakfast and were not seen again until about to enter the carriages which were to carry them to The Oaks; this time Keith had not even the pleasure of being in the same vehicle with Lucilla. [Pg 269]

Then, arrived at their destination, the young girls vanished from his sight, going into the dressing room appointed for their use in robing themselves for the ceremony.

Lucilla and Grace were to be bridesmaids,—Laura Howard, also,—and Sydney maid of honour.

Only a few minutes before their arrival Dick had been admitted to the room where his bride sat arrayed in her wedding attire—the beautiful dress and veil provided by the kindness of her Cousin Elsie.

"Oh, my darling!" he exclaimed in astonishment, "how lovely you are and how beautifully dressed. This is not the dress you spoke of wearing,—this rich white satin,—and the veil. Why, Rosie's own were not handsomer!"

"No, I think not," said Maud, smiling at his pleasure. "They are dear Cousin Elsie's own wedding garments, kindly lent to me because I had no time to procure such for myself; and I was willing—yes, very glad to borrow them, because they are so lovely and becoming, and because, you know, it is said to be good luck to have something old to wear, as well as something new. I hope my bridegroom approves?" [Pg 270]

"He could not do anything else, seeing how lovely his bride looks in them," Dick replied, putting an arm about her and holding her close with more than one tender caress. Then, holding her off a little for another and closer inspection, "Oh, Maud, darling, how lovely you are!" he exclaimed. "I feel a rich and happy man to think you are all my own, my very own. Dearest, it shall not be my fault if you do not find yourself a happy woman in the sweet, new home to which I am about to take you."

"Dick, dear Dick, I do not doubt that I shall be happy," she said softly, lifting to his eyes that were full of happy tears; "if I am not, I am sure it will be no fault of yours."

But footsteps were heard approaching and he took his arm from her waist and stood beside her with her hand in his. [Pg 271]

The door opened and the bridesmaids and groomsmen filed in. Then there were exclamations of surprise and delight.

"Oh, Maud, how lovely! how lovely! When and where did you get that beautiful dress and veil? We all thought you were to be married in your bridesmaid dress that you wore at Rosie's wedding."

"And you like this one better? and the veil that goes with it?" Maud returned with a joyous blush and smile.

"Oh, yes, yes, certainly; it is far handsomer, and so becoming! But how did you get it up so quickly?"

"I didn't. It was dear Cousin Elsie's wedding dress, and she has lent it to me to be married in. It was just like her—always so kind and thoughtful of others."

"That is true, indeed!" said Lucilla; "I do think that in all this world there is not a kinder person than dear Grandma Elsie."

Just then the little flower girls appeared in the doorway and uttered their exclamations of surprise and delight at the beauty of the bride's attire. Their mothers were just behind them, and Violet seemed as much surprised and pleased as the children. She recognized the dress and veil—which she had seen a number of times in the course of her life, and was well content that her mother had seen fit to lend them to Maud for this important time when she could not provide such luxuries for herself. [Pg 272]

"The dress fits you wonderfully well, Maud; and both it and the veil are very becoming," Violet said. "I am glad mamma had them, and thought of producing them for this occasion."

"Yes, it was very, very kind in Cousin Elsie," returned the bride, blushing with pleasure.

"And you are all ready to go down now, are you not?" asked Mrs. Dinsmore. "Everybody is here and waiting for the ceremony to begin. The appointed hour has come, too, and here is the minister," as the Rev. Mr. Keith appeared in the doorway.

At that the little procession formed at once and passed down the broad stairway, through the flower-bedecked hall, and into the large parlour where the guests were gathered. [Pg 273]

All went well; the ceremony was short but impressive, the congratulations were warm and sincere, and the wedding breakfast that followed a grand affair. Soon after it was over the bride changed her wedding dress for a neat and pretty travelling one. Then she and her new-made husband bade good-bye, entered a carriage, and started for a train that was to carry them on

their homeward way.

Most of the other relatives from a distance left for their homes during the afternoon or evening. Captain Keith had announced his intention to leave that night by a later train. He was to start from Woodburn, so he bade adieu to all the friends but that family, then went home with his friend, Captain Raymond.

After a late dinner there, he found and seized the opportunity he had so long been waiting for. Lucilla was sitting alone upon the veranda, with a book in her hand, but not reading, for her eyes were not on it. She seemed to be thinking intently of something else. But when Captain Keith took a seat by her side she welcomed him with a pleasant smile.

"So you leave us to-night," she said. "I hope you have enjoyed your visit well enough to feel a trifle sorry to go." [Pg 274]

"I have enjoyed my visit greatly," he said in reply, "and I should like to prolong it; but it will not do to play all the time. It seems lonely, too, to have to go away taking no one with me. To go as Cousin Dick did this afternoon, with a dear young wife, would not be a hardship; but to go alone is rather dismal. Don't you think it must be?"

"Yes; I have never tried it, but I should think it was. When mamma died and papa had to go away on his ship—oh, you don't know how hard it was to part with him—I still had my brother Max and dear Gracie. I had them both until a good while after papa came home to stay; so I have never been all alone."

"And I sincerely hope you never may be," he said. "But do you never feel as if you would like to have a life companion, such as Maud was given to-day?"

"A husband, do you mean? No, indeed! for then I should be obliged to leave my dear father—the best man in the world, the dearest, kindest, most loving father to me." [Pg 275]

"He is all that, I am sure," said Keith; "but, perhaps, some day you may find that you can love another even better than you love him."

She shook her head dissentingly.

"I can hardly believe it possible. It seems to me that it would just break my heart to have to leave my father or to be separated from him in any way."

Keith sighed drearily. "Miss Raymond," he said, "I love you, I love you devotedly, and if—if you have not given your affection to another, perhaps in time you may find it possible to return my love. Will you not let me hope for that?"

"Oh, don't!" she said, half rising to leave him, her face scarlet with blushes. "I don't know anything about love,—that kind of love,—and my father has forbidden me to listen to such things and—"

"But he would let you this time, for he gave me permission to speak to you and—and tell you of my love."

"That is very strange; I don't understand it," she said, sinking back into her chair with a look of perplexity and distress on her face. "Ah," brightening a little, "I think papa knew there was no danger that I would be willing to leave him for anybody else." [Pg 276]

"Yes; I suppose that was it," sighed Keith, and, at that moment, there came an interruption, very welcome to Lucilla, in the form of little Ned looking for papa. And the next moment papa himself, to find Captain Keith and hand him a letter; a servant having just brought the afternoon mail. Then Lucilla slipped away to her own room, where she stayed until summoned to the dining room by the tea bell. [Pg 277]

CHAPTER XIX.

It was a pleasant surprise to Lucilla to find Grandma Elsie and Walter there, and to learn that they had come to stay several days. So it was easy to avoid being left alone with Captain Keith, and there was no more private talk between them. When the carriage drove up to take him to his train she was on the veranda with the others, and he shook hands with her in her turn, saying, "Good-bye, Miss Lu. I shall hope to hear from your father that you are well and happy."

"Thank you; good-bye, and I wish you a safe journey," she said in reply, but without lifting her eyes to his face.

Just as she was ready for bed her father came to her room to bid her good-night as he so often did.

Taking her in his arms and looking searchingly into her eyes, "Is there anything wrong with you—anything troubling you, daughter?" he asked tenderly. [Pg 278]

"Yes, papa," she said, colouring and dropping her eyes. "Oh, why did you let Captain Keith talk to me of—of love, when you have so often told me I was much too young to even think of such

things?"

"Well, dear child," he said, "I knew it would be risking little or nothing, as I was certain I had too large a place in your heart to leave any room for him, but it seemed the only way to thoroughly convince him of that was to let him try to push himself in there. And he did try?"

"Yes, papa; and when I told him you had forbidden me to listen to such things, he said you had given him leave to speak about it to me; and that surprised me more than his speaking. You didn't want me to say yes, father?"

"No, daughter; no, indeed! I should not have let him speak if I had not been very sure that my dear child loved me too well to leave me for him or anybody else."

"Oh, I am so glad!" she exclaimed with a sigh of relief and laying her head down on his breast, "though I couldn't believe that my dear father wanted to be rid of me, or felt willing that I should love anybody else better than I love him."

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"No, dear daughter, you need never be afraid of that. But, now, good-night. Go at once to your bed, for you are looking very weary."

She obeyed, slept sweetly and peacefully till her usual hour for rising, and, as was her usual custom, joined her father in a stroll about the grounds before the breakfast hour.

"How would you and Grace like to have your friends Eva and Sydney here for a few days, daughter?" he asked as they paced along side by side.

"Oh, I think it would be very pleasant, papa!" she answered in a joyous tone. "I know Gracie would like it, and I think Sydney would, too. Eva always does. I believe she loves you almost as well as if you were her father as well as ours."

"Ah! that is pleasant news for me," he said with a smile. "I am fond of her, too, though, of course, not with just the fondness I feel for my own children."

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"Oh, I am glad you don't! I shouldn't want you to love her as well as you do me. Will you invite the girls, papa?"

"Yes; we will call to them through the telephone after breakfast."

They did so, there was a joyful acceptance from each, and before the dinner hour they had both arrived. Sydney had not gone with Maud and Dick. It had been decided before the wedding that it would be better for her to remain in a more northern region till fall, then go South to make her home with her sister.

"I was glad of your invitation, captain," she said when he helped her out of the carriage, "for I was finding it dreadfully lonesome without my sister."

"Ah! so I suspected, as did my wife, and we thought it might relieve your loneliness a little to spend a few days here with us."

"Yes; it was so kind," she responded, "so very kind! And you are here, too, Cousin Elsie, and Walter! Oh, I am sure we are going to have a fine time."

"Yes, indeed, I always do have the best of times here," said Evelyn; "especially when Grandma Elsie and Walter add their attractions to those of the Woodburn folks."

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"We will all try to make it as delightful as we can," said Grace. "Papa has kindly excused Lu and me from lessons while you stay; so we can busy ourselves with fancy work or anything we like, when we are not driving or walking; and we have some new books and periodicals that one can read aloud while the rest are doing fancy work or whatever they please. We can play games, too, so I think we will not lack for amusement."

"No, we never do, here," said Eva.

And they did not; time passed swiftly and pleasantly in the round of occupations and amusements suggested by Grace. Friday and Saturday soon slipped by, and Sunday came, bringing its sacred duties and pleasures—religious services at home, at church, then the Sunday schools, and after that the home Bible class, which all found so pleasant. They gathered upon the veranda, each with a Bible in hand; for even little Ned could now read fluently, and generally find the references for himself.

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"Will you not lead us to-day, mother?" asked the captain when all were seated.

"No," she said with her pleasant smile, "I very much prefer to have that burden borne by my son-in-law, Captain Raymond."

"And you wish him to select the subject?"

"Yes; he cannot fail to fix upon a good and interesting one."

"And how is it with you, my love?" he asked, turning to Violet.

"Suppose we take thanksgiving as our subject," she said; "we all have so much, so very much, to be thankful for."

"Indeed we have!" he returned emphatically, "and I think no better subject could be found. Neddie, my boy, can you tell papa something you have to be thankful for?"

"Oh, yes, papa! eyes to see with, ears to hear with, hands and feet, and that I can use them all; for I saw a boy the other day that can't walk at all, though he has feet, but must lie on a bed or sit in a chair all the time; while I can walk, and run, and jump whenever I want to."

"Yes, those are all great blessings," his father said. "And now, Elsie, can you think of some others?"

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"Oh, so many, papa! more than I can count," the little girl answered earnestly. "A dear, kind father and mother, and grandma among them; and, oh, so many dear relations besides; 'specially my sisters and brothers. And I am so glad I was born in this Christian land and taught about God and the dear Saviour; and have a Bible to read, and know that I may pray to God, and that he will hear me and help me to be good—to love and serve him. But, oh! I can't name all my blessings, papa, they are so very, very many."

"That is very true, daughter," he replied; "and we can all say the same; our blessings are more than we can count. But the best of all is the gift of God's dear son. 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' 'Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.' 'I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.' So says the Psalmist, and surely we can all echo his words from our very hearts. Mother, you seem to have selected a passage. Will you please read it?"

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"Yes," she said; "here in Corinthians where the apostle is speaking of the sting of death and the victory over the grave, he cries exultingly, 'But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Then he goes on, 'Therefore my beloved brethren be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.'"

"Yes; and let us all heed that exhortation," said the captain. "Evelyn, you seem to have a text ready. Will you please read it?"

"These words of Jesus," she said, "'I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you,' are they not words to be thankful for?"

"They are, indeed!" he said. "What can be more comforting than the presence of the Master? His presence and his love. 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.' Ah! what is there more worthy to be thankful for than the love of Christ! But when should we give thanks, Walter?"

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"Always, sir. Here in Ephesians I read, 'Giving thanks always for all things unto God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Again in first Thessalonians, 'We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.'"

Then Sydney, Lucilla, and Grace read in turn:

"'Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks, unto thee do we give thanks; for that thy name is near thy wondrous works declare.'"

"'And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.'"

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"Continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving.'"

They read, in turn, again and again, finding the Bible full of exhortations to thanksgiving, then joined in singing hymns of praise—not with their voices only, but with joy, and thankfulness in their hearts because of the good gifts of God, both temporal and spiritual, to them all.

So closed the Sabbath day, and after it followed a night of sweet sleep and peaceful rest.

At the breakfast table the next morning Walter asked: "Where are we going to spend our summer? Isn't it time to be thinking about it?"

The question seemed to be addressed to no one in particular. There was a moment's silence; then the captain said:

"Suppose you give us your ideas and wishes on that subject, Walter."

"Well, I haven't much choice, sir; there are so many places that are about equally agreeable to me. Anywhere with mother and the rest of you."

"Then what place would you prefer, mother?" asked the captain.

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"It is a question I have hardly considered yet," she replied. "Perhaps it might be well to hold a family council on the subject."

"May I offer a suggestion?" asked Evelyn modestly, blushing as she spoke.

"Certainly, my dear," said Mrs. Travilla.

"We will be glad to hear it," said the captain.

"Then it is that all who think they would find it agreeable will spend at least a week or two with me in my cottage on the Hudson. It was rented for a time, but is vacant now, and I want very much to be in it for a while, yet certainly not alone."

"It is most kind in you to invite us, Evelyn, dear," said Mrs. Travilla, "but our party would much more than fill it."

"Unless we should go in relays," laughed Violet; "perhaps it might be managed in that way, if Eva is very desirous to have us there."

"And perhaps there are hotels in the vicinity where most of us could be accommodated," said the captain. "We are much obliged for your invitation, Eva, and will consider the question and talk it over with the others who may choose to be of our party."

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"Oh, I think it would be fun to go there!" exclaimed Sydney. "If I can have my way, I'll pay you a little visit there, and pass the rest of the time at the seashore."

"That is what I should like to do," said Lucilla.

"And I also," added Grace; "if papa and mamma approve, and would be with us in both places."

"Of course I meant that," Lucilla hastened to say; "we would not half enjoy ourselves without them; and the children," she added, glancing at Elsie and Ned.

"It seems to me we're getting pretty big to be called that," said Ned a little scornfully. "I'll be a man one of these days."

"Not quite that yet, little brother," laughed Lucilla.

The talk in regard to the summer's excursion was renewed after family worship, as they all sat together upon the veranda. Various places were talked of, various plans discussed, but nothing could be fully decided upon without consultation with the other near relatives who might decide to be of the party.

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"Hello! here comes Doctor Herbert," exclaimed Walter, as a doctor's gig turned in at the great gates and came driving rapidly up to the house.

"What is it, Doc?" springing up and hastening down the steps as the gig halted before them.

"A letter for mother," answered Herbert, handing it to Walter as he spoke. "Good-morning, mother, and all of you. You are looking well and have no need of a doctor, I suppose?"

"Yes, we want a call from that one," said Violet. "Come in, won't you, if it is for only five minutes?"

"Well, yes; since you are so urgent and I know of no urgent call for my services elsewhere," answered Herbert, suiting the action to the word.

"Good-morning, my son," was his mother's smiling salutation, as he bent down to give her an affectionate caress. "I suppose you want to hear what Rosie has to say. I will just glance over her letter, then read aloud whatever I think she would deem suitable for you all to hear."

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It was a pleasant, cheerful letter; all seemed to be going right with the young couple, they very happy in each other. They were at Niagara Falls, expecting soon to leave there for some place on the Hudson, and afterward to visit the seashore; but their plans were not yet definitely arranged; nor would they be until Will's parents and Rosie's home friends, intending to go North for the summer, were heard from in regard to their plans and purposes.

"Well," said Herbert, when the reading of the letter was concluded, "I think we will have to hold a family council, taking in the Crollys, and decide those momentous questions. Right quickly, too, for the weather is growing very warm, and if you all stay here our firm may have too much to do."

"I think you are right, doctor," said the captain, "and lest you and Harold and Arthur should be overworked, I intend to see that that council is held promptly."

"Well, captain, suppose we appoint this evening as the time, and Roselands as the place, as the Crollys are there, and not so able as the rest of us to go about from place to place."

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"That seems a very good plan," said his mother, "but I think it will not be necessary for us all to attend. I prefer to leave the decision with the gentlemen of our party. Can you go, Herbert?"

"To the family council, mother? Oh, yes!"

"That is well," she said with a smile, "but I meant can you go North with us?"

"For a part of the time, I think; we three doctors can doubtless take turns in having a vacation."

"You ought to, I think," said Violet. "Doctors certainly need rest as much, or more, than most other people."

"Yes, they do, indeed!" said the captain; "they are, as a rule, very much overworked, I think."

"Some of them hardly so much as they might like to be," laughed Herbert. "You will be coming home soon, mother?" turning to her.

"Yes; probably to-morrow," she answered.

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He chatted a little longer, then drove away. The young people presently went off into the grounds, leaving Grandma Elsie, Violet, and the captain still sitting in the veranda, they busied with their fancy work, he looking over the morning paper.

"If you find anything very interesting, my dear, mamma and I will be glad to hear it," said Violet.

"Yes," he said, "and here is something interesting, though far from being pleasant news. Davis, one of the burglars whom Lucilla caught, has escaped from prison; gone no one knows where, and may be even now lurking in this neighbourhood. I must watch over my daughter or he may attempt to do her some harm. At the time of the trial he seemed to feel very revengeful toward her."

"Oh, that is dreadful!" cried Violet. "Indeed we must be watchful over poor dear Lu. You will not tell her, Levis?"

"I think I shall," he said reflectively; "she will need to be careful about venturing to a distance from the house, even within the grounds, without a protector; therefore I must warn her and forbid her to run any unnecessary risk. I hope it may not be long before the fellow will be caught and returned to his prison."

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"And I think it might be well for us to hasten our departure for the North for her safety," said Violet. "She would be safer there, would she not?"

"Probably," he replied, "and we will make haste to be off on that account."

"Yes; I think you should, by all means," said her mother. "Anything that I can do to assist your preparations, Vi, will be gladly done."

"I will set to work at once," exclaimed Violet.

"And I shall call my daughters in at once and set them about their preparations," said the captain, throwing aside his paper and starting even as he spoke.

The young people were much surprised by his summons and directions to his daughters, but he did not go into a lengthened explanation; merely said that he had decided to start northward in a day or two, and necessary preparations must be made as promptly as possible.

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His daughters were accustomed to rendering prompt and unquestioning obedience to their father's commands, and did so now, though much wondering at this sudden move.

Some hours later he called Lucilla aside and told her the whole story. She turned pale for a moment, then, lifting fearless eyes to his, "Father," she said, "don't be uneasy about me. I will trust in the Lord and not be afraid; I will trust in his care and yours, and I shall be safe. I am thinking of those sweet verses in the thirty-seventh Psalm, 'But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.'"

"Yes, dear child, trust in him and you will be safe," returned the captain with emotion. "I shall not go over to Roselands this evening, as I had intended, but will talk through the telephone to the friends gathered there to discuss the questions when we shall start for the North and in what spots locate ourselves for the summer."

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He did so, and before they were through with their conference it was decided that he, with his family, Evelyn, Sydney, Grandma Elsie, Walter, and all the Lelands should at once pack up, and in two days start for Eva's cottage on the Hudson.

Little preparation was needed but the packing of trunks; all were ready at the set time, started away in good health and spirits, and, travelling by rail, soon reached their destination; where we will leave them for the present.

THE END.

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