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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CLOVER AND BLUE GRASS ***

CLOVER AND BLUE GRASS

By Eliza Calvert Hall

AUNT JANE OF KENTUCKY
THE LAND OF LONG AGO
CLOVER AND BLUE GRASS
TO LOVE AND TO CHERISH
A BOOK OF HAND-WOVEN COVERLETS



How could a man find words
to thank a mother for giving
him her daughter?
Frontispiece. See page [144](#).

CLOVER AND BLUE GRASS

by

Eliza Calvert Hall

With a frontispiece by

H. R. Ballinger

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TO
MARTHA CALVERT
AND
VAL CALVERT WINSTON

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HOW PARSON PAGE WENT TO THE CIRCUS

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(The last of the "Aunt Jane" stories)

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This story, the nineteenth and last of the "Aunt Jane" stories, appeared in the *Cosmopolitan*, July 1910, after the publication of *The Land of Long Ago*. Its publication in this present volume completes the set of stories told by "Aunt Jane of Kentucky."

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"I hear there's goin' to be a circus in town next week," said Aunt Jane, "and if it wasn't for the looks of the thing, jest for the sake of old times, I'd like to go to town and stand on the old drug-store corner and watch the procession go 'round the square, like me and Abram used to do in the days when we was young and the children growin' up around us."

She broke off with a laugh relevant to some happy thought.

"I never see a show bill," she said, "that I don't think o' the time Parson Page went to the circus. Times has changed so, I reckon a preacher could go to a circus nowadays and little or nothin' be said of it. I ricollect the last time the circus come to town Uncle Billy Bascom says to me, says he: 'Jane, they tell me the church members and their children was so thick in that tent to-day that you could 'a' held a meetin' of the session right there and organized a Sunday school of any denomination whatever.' But in my day all a church member or a church member's children could do on circus day was to stand on the street and watch the procession; and as for a minister, why, it wasn't hardly considered fittin' for him to even go a-fishin', much less go to a circus. Folks used to say a good many hard things about Parson Page for bein' so fond of fishin', but there wasn't anything that could keep him away from the river when spring come and the fish begun to bite. And when folks begun tellin' tales about the fishin' in Reelfoot Lake, Parson Page never rested till he got there."

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"I reckon, honey, you know all about Reelfoot Lake?" Aunt Jane looked questioningly at me over her glasses and waited for my answer.

"Why, yes, it's a big lake where all the men go to fish," I answered hesitatingly.

The vagueness of my answer was a sure indication of shameful ignorance, and Aunt Jane shook her head disapprovingly.

"There's somethin' wrong with the schoolin' of children nowadays," she said gravely, "Knowin' what I do about Reelfoot Lake, it looks to me like the folks that make the geography books for children ought to put that lake down on the map in big letters and then tell all about it. Why, child, there ain't but one Reelfoot Lake in all the world, and every child ought to be able to tell all the hows and the wheres and the whens that concerns it. Schoolin's a mighty good thing, but every now and then there's somethin' you can't learn out o' books, and you've got to come to some old man like Uncle Billy Bascom or some old woman like me that can ricollect away back yonder. Not but what it's all hearsay with me, when it comes to Reelfoot Lake, for that was before my day; but many's the time I've heard father and Uncle Tandy Stevens tell about it."

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"Father used to say that when God created the world in six days, he forgot to make Reelfoot Lake, and when he finally did remember it, after goodness knows how many thousand years, he was so put out he didn't think about it bein' Sunday, and he jest ripped up the earth and made that lake as quick as he could. I've heard father name the day o' the month it happened, but like as not, if I tried to tell it jest so, I'd git it wrong. However, I ricollect it was back yonder in 1811, before the time o' railroads, and it must 'a' been about the middle o' December, for I ricollect hearin' father say that him and Uncle Tandy Stevens spent that Christmas on their flatboat in the middle o' the Mississippi River. They made the trip to New Orleans pretty near every year, floatin' down the Mississippi and sellin' their tobacco or hoop-poles or whatever they had to sell, and then they'd sell the flatboat and foot it back to Kentucky."

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"Maybe you think, child, I'm drawin' the long bow, tellin' about people walkin' from New Orleans to Kentucky, but that's the way it was in the old times before they had railroads everywhere. And it wasn't such a slow way of travelin', either. Father used to brag how he made the journey in jest thirteen days and a half. I reckon betwixt the dangers by land and the dangers by water a journey like that wasn't any light matter, but I've heard father say many a time that if the river wasn't too high or too low, and if the weather favored him, he'd rather go down to New Orleans in a flatboat than to go on the finest steamboat that ever was built. You know that Bible text that says, 'Behold, I make all things new.' Father said that text would come into his mind every time he went on one o' these trips. They'd float down the Little Barren River and come to the Ohio, and down that to the Mississippi, and father said when they'd make the turn and feel the current o' the big river under 'em sweepin' 'em south, away from home and into a strange country, it was jest like a man professin' religion and goin' forward to a new and better life. And the slaves they'd take along to help manage the boat, they'd begin to sing 'Swing low, sweet chariot, bound for to

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carry me home,' and Uncle Tandy, he'd jest throw up his hat and holler every time.

"Well, the time I'm tellin' you about, father and Uncle Tandy had a big load o' tobacco and a big drove o' turkeys to take down to New Orleans. Father said that every time he built a flatboat and loaded it up he thought about Noah and the ark, and this time, when he started down Barren River, it was cloudy and threatenin' rain, and the next day it begun showerin' and then clearin' off and then showerin' again, more like April than December. But when they struck the Ohio they found jest the right sort o' weather for flatboat journeyin', clear and frosty at night and sunshiny all day; and they'd been floatin' along all day and a good part of every night, as they was in a hurry to git to New Orleans and sell their tobacco before prices fell.

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"Well, the night o' the earthquake, father said it was his time to sit up and watch the fire and guide the boat, and he was glad of it; for he said there wasn't anything as peaceful and happy as the nights he'd spend on the river. With the moon and the stars over him and the big river under him it was like bein' in the hollow of God's hand. That night he was pretty busy up to twelve o'clock, lookin' out for snags and dangerous places; but about one o'clock they'd got to a place where he knew the channel was safe, and he was sittin' down leanin' against a pile o' tobacco and half dozin', when all at once he heard a rumblin' like thunder, and not a sign o' rain in the sky, and then a noise like the noise o' many waters, and the big waves begun lappin' around the boat, and the first thing father knew the boat was goin' up-stream faster than it ever had gone down. Uncle Tandy was wide awake by this time, and he called out to father to know what had happened, and father says: 'God only knows what's happened! The Mississippi River's flowin' north instead o' south.' And jest then they heard the rumblin' sound like thunder again, and Uncle Tandy says: 'The end o' the world's come, and we're travelin' up-stream to the New Jerusalem.' And while father and Uncle Tandy went floatin' up-stream half scared out o' their wits, the Goshen folks and the town folks was down on their knees prayin', and the church bells was ringin', and everybody thought the Judgment Day had come. Two or three people was so scared they professed religion.

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"Mother said she was awake when the earthquake happened. She never slept well when father was off on his river trips, and she was lyin' in bed wonderin' if he was safe, when the house begun to shake, and the dishes and pans rattled on the shelves, and there was father and Uncle Tandy travelin' back wards twelve miles; and when the earthquake was over and the river got to flowin' south again, they floated down past Cairo and saw the big lake, pretty near twenty-five miles long and four miles wide, right where there'd been nothin' but woods and dry land, and the tops o' some o' the biggest trees was stickin' up above the water, and folks from far and from near was comin' to see what the earthquake had done.

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"Father and Uncle Tandy never got through talkin' about the earthquake that Sunday mornin', and Parson Page never got tired listenin', and every time he'd come to see father, he'd manage to bring the talk around to fishin', and that'd start father to tellin' about the time the lake was made; and when father'd git through, Parson Page he'd draw a long breath and say: 'Well, that's wonderful! wonderful! It was a great privilege to be present at an act of creation, as it were, and something to be thankful for all your days.'"

Aunt Jane's voice ceased suddenly, and a bewildered look came into her clear old eyes, the look of one who has lost connection with the present by lingering overtime in the past, "What was I talkin' about a while ago, child?" she asked helplessly.

"Wasn't it circuses?" I suggested.

The cloud of perplexity rolled away from Aunt Jane's face, "Why, of course it was," she ejaculated, with an accent of self-reproof for her forgetfulness. "Didn't I start out to tell you about Parson Page goin' to the circus, and here I am tellin' about the earthquake. I'm jest like an old blind horse; can't keep in the straight road to save my life. Some folks might say my mind was failin', but if you ever git to be as old as I am, child, you'll know jest how it is. A young person hasn't got much to remember, and he can start out and tell a straight tale without any trouble. But an old woman like me—why, every name I hear starts up some recollection or other, and that keeps me goin' first to one side o' the road and then to the other."

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And having explained away her lapse of memory, Aunt Jane went cheerfully on.

"I was talkin' about church members goin' to circuses, and I started out to tell about Parson Page the time Barnum's big show come to town. I don't reckon there ever was such a show as Barnum's, nor such show bills as he put up that spring. They was pasted up all along every road leadin' into town, and under the pictures of the animals they had Bible texts. There was the Arabian horses and that Bible text from Job, 'Thou hast clothed his neck with thunder.' And under the lion's picture they had, 'The lion and the lamb shall lie down together.' And the man that put up the show bills give out to everybody that this was a show that church members could go to and take their children to, because there'd be two kinds o' tickets, one for the animal show and one for the circus, and folks that didn't favor the circus needn't go near it; but everybody, he said, ought to see the animals, for they had pretty near every beast of the field and bird of the air that the Lord had created.

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"Well, us Goshen folks, we talked it over at home and in our Mite Society. We'd always been mighty strict about worldly amusements, all of us except Uncle Jimmy Judson. He used to say: 'As long as children ain't breakin' any of the ten commandments or any of their bones, let 'em alone, let 'em alone.' But the most of the children in our neighborhood never had seen the inside of a

show tent, and of course every one of 'em was anxious to go to that show. We went to Parson Page about it, and he studied a while and says he: 'If the Lord made those animals, it surely cannot be sinful to go and see them; and I see no reason why every one in Goshen church should not attend the animal show.' Well, that was enough for us, and everybody in the church and out o' the church turned out to that show.

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"I reckon you know, child, how it is when a circus comes to town. Country folks has their own ways o' passin' the time and makin' pleasure for themselves, and town folks theirs, but a circus is one thing that brings all the country folks and all the town folks together. The country folks come to see the town and the circus, and the town folks, they turn out to see the circus and the country folks, and I reckon they got as much fun out of us as they did out o' the show, lookin' at our old-fashioned dresses and bonnets and laughin' at our old-fashioned ways.

"Well, the time I'm tellin' about, the country folks turned out as they never had before, and there was people in town from all over the county. Some of 'em, they said, had traveled half the night to git in town bright and early. I ricollect the weather was more like June than May. It hadn't rained for a long time, and when the folks begun rollin' into town, the dust rose till you couldn't see the road before you, and there was so many carriages and buggies and two-horse wagons hitched around the streets it looked like there wouldn't be room for the procession to pass. Sam Amos was standin' on the drug-store corner with me and Abram when the music begun playin' 'way down by the depot, and all the boys and young folks broke and run down Main Street to meet the band-wagon, and Sam said he didn't believe they could run any faster if they was to hear the cry, 'Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!'

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"The procession reached clean from the depot to the Presbyterian church corner, and it was worth comin' to town jest to see the horses that pulled the chariots, some of 'em as white as milk and some coal black and holdin' their heads so high, and steppin' like fine ladies and lookin' so proud and so gentle, too, and so different from the horses that we drove to our own wagons and plows that you wouldn't know they was any kin to each other. Why, that night when I shut my eyes to go to sleep I could see the big gold chariot and the white horses, and all night long they went steppin' through my dreams.

"Well, after the procession'd gone by, we went over in the courthouse yard and eat our dinner under the old locust trees, and then we went down toward the river where the tents was spread. There's some shows, honey, where there's more on the bills than there is under the tent. I've heard Sam Amos say that, and there was one show that he used to say was so blame bad it was right good. But Mr. Barnum's show was the kind where there was more under the tent than there was on the bills, and the sights us country folks saw that day give us somethin' to talk about for a long time to come. But jest as the animal show was about over, and people begun leavin', a big storm come up. I thought I heard the thunder rollin' while me and Abram and the children was lookin' at the fat woman, but of course we couldn't go home till we'd seen everything, and the first thing we knew the wind was blowin' a hurricane, and it got under the tent and lifted some o' the pegs out o' the ground, and somebody hollered out that the tent was about to fall down, and such a scatteration you never did see. We got out o' that tent a good deal quicker'n we got in, and started for town as fast as we could go, carryin' little children and draggin' 'em along by the hand; and the rain begun pourin' down, and everybody was wet to the skin before they could git to the drug store or the dry goods store or any place where folks'd take us in.

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"I ricollect Silas Petty said he reckoned it was a judgment on us church members for goin' to worldly amusements, and Abram said that couldn't be, because we'd prayed for rain the Sunday before. And—bless your life!—while the rest of us Goshen folks was standin' around in wet clothes and wishin' we could go home, Parson Page and Mis' Page was sittin' high and dry in the circus tent.

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"Parson Page said he never could tell how he got inside that circus tent. He said he set out to make a bee-line for town, intendin' to stop at the drug store till the rain was over, but the wind was blowin' and raisin' such clouds o' dust you couldn't keep your eyes open, and he was holdin' his hat on with one hand and tryin' to help Mis' Page with the other, and the crowd was kind o' carryin' 'em along, and all at once, he said, he found he was makin' straight for the door o' the big tent where the band was playin' and the circus was about to begin."

Here Aunt Jane paused and laughed until laughter almost turned to tears. "There's three ways o' tellin' this story, child," she said, as she regained her breath. "Parson Page used to tell it his way, and Sam Amos would tell it his way, and Mis' Page had her way o' tellin' it. She used to laugh fit to kill over Parson Page sayin' he didn't know how he got into the circus tent. Says she: 'Lemuel may not know how he got into the circus, but I know, I had hold of his arm, and the wind was blowin' the dust in my eyes, too, but I knew exactly which way I was goin', and I was guidin' him.' Says she: 'I had on my best silk dress, and I'd jest turned it and made it over, and I didn't intend to have that dress ruined for lack of a little shelter.' She said she never once thought about tickets, and there was such a crowd, and the wind was blowin' things every which way and there was lightnin' and the noise o' thunder, and while the folks in front of her was givin' up their tickets, the folks behind was pressin' and pushin', and between the two there wasn't anything for her to do but go into the tent, whether she wanted to or not. And she said for her part she didn't mind it a bit, for that circus tent was the cheerfulest, happiest place she ever was in. She said the music made you feel like laughin' and steppin' lively, and folks was eatin' peanuts and drinkin' lemonade, and the bareback riders was tearin' around the ring, and jest as they got fairly inside, the rain begun beatin' down on the tent, and she thanked her stars she wasn't outside. She said it

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took Parson Page some little time to find out where he was, and when he did find it out, he wanted to start right home in the rain, and she told him he could go if he wanted to, but she was goin' to stay there till the rain was over. And while they was arguin' the matter, Sam Amos come along, and Parson Page begun explainin' how he got in by accident and wanted to git out. Sam said nobody but a frog or a fish or a Presbyterian minister would object to stayin' under a circus tent in such a rain as that, and he might as well make himself comfortable. So he found a seat for Mis' Page and the parson, and he used to say he got more fun out o' Parson Page than he did out o' the circus, and he couldn't hardly see what was goin' on in the ring for watchin' the parson's face. He had his gold-headed cane between his knees and his hands on top o' the cane and his head bowed over his hands like he was engaged in prayer, and he set there as solemn as if he was at a funeral, while everybody around was laughin' and hollerin' at the clown's jokes.

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"But Mis' Page she took things fair and easy. She said she knew the Presbytery couldn't do anything with her, and she made up her mind, as she was in there and couldn't git out, she'd see all there was to be seen. The next meetin' o' the Mite Society she told us all about it, and she said if the gyirls' skyirts had jest been a little longer, there wouldn't 'a' been a thing amiss with that circus. But she said what they lacked in length they made up in width, and the jumpin' and ridin' was so amazin' that you forgot all about the skyirts bein' short.

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"Parson Page said that circus seemed as long to him as a Sunday service used to seem when he was a boy. His conscience hurt him so, and he kept thinkin' what on earth he would say, if the Presbytery heard about it, and he felt like everybody in the tent was lookin' at him, and he never was as glad in his life as he was when Sam told him the show was over and he got up to leave.

"Mis' Page said they was edgin' their way out through the crowd, and all at once Parson Page stopped and threw up his hands like he always did when somethin' struck him all at once, and says he: 'Bless my soul! I've been to this circus and didn't pay my way in.' Says he: 'That makes a bad matter worse, and I can't leave this tent till I've paid for myself and my wife.' And Sam Amos he laughed fit to kill, and says he: 'It looks to me like you'll be makin' a bad matter worse if you do pay, for,' says he, 'as long as you don't pay for seein' the show, you can say it was an accident, but if folks know you paid your way, you can't make 'em believe it was accidental.'

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"Parson Page looked mighty troubled, and he thought a while, and says he: 'Maybe you're right. My payin' won't help the looks of things any, but I know I'll have a better conscience all my life if I pay as other people have done. I haven't looked at the show,' says he, 'but I've heard the music, and I've had a shelter from the storm and a comfortable seat, and in all common honesty I ought to pay.' So they started out to find the man that sold tickets. But the ticket stand was gone, and they stood there lookin' around, the mud nearly ankle-deep, and Mis' Page said she was holdin' up her silk dress and wishin' to goodness they could git started toward town.

"Sam said he knew Parson Page's conscience would hold him there on the show-ground till he'd paid that money, so he says: 'You and Mis' Page wait here; I'll see if I can find the man you want.' And Sam hunted all over the grounds till he found the head man of the circus, and he brought him around to where Parson Page and Mis' Page was waitin' for him. Mis' Page said he was as fine lookin' and well-mannered a man as she ever had seen; and he shook hands with her so friendly it seemed like she'd known him all her life, and then he says to Parson Page, as kind as you please: 'Well, my friend, what can I do for you?'

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"And Parson Page he explained how he'd got into the show tent by accident when the storm was comin' up, and how he wanted to pay; and the showman listened mighty polite, and when the parson got through he says: 'Put up your purse, sir. You don't owe me a cent.' Says he: 'The obligation's all on my side, and it's an honor to this circus to know that we had a minister of the gospel in our audience, to-day.' The parson he insisted on payin', but the showman he wouldn't hear to it. Says he: 'If Mr. Barnum was to hear that I'd charged a preacher anything for seein' his show, I'd lose my place before you could say "Jack Robinson!"' And Parson Page said: 'Is that really so?' And the showman said: 'Upon my word and honor, it is. There's no such thing as a preacher payin' his way into one o' Mr. Barnum's circuses.'

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"Well, Parson Page put his purse back in his pocket and thanked the showman for his kindness, but he said he felt as if he wanted to make some sort of a return, and he begun searchin' around in his pockets to see if he didn't have a tract or somethin' o' that sort to give him, and he come across a Shorter Catechism that he'd been questionin' the children out of the Sunday before. And he pulled it out and says he: 'Sir, I would like to leave this little book with you as a token of remembrance.' Sam said the showman took it and looked at it and turned over the pages right slow, and at last he says: 'Great Jehosaphat! This carries me back forty years, to the time when I was a little shaver, goin' to church Sunday mornin' and listenin' to old Brother Bodley preach from the day of creation down to the day of judgment, and sittin' on the old horsehair sofa in the parlor all Sunday evenin' wrestlin' with this very catechism and prayin' for the sun to go down and wishin' I could cut all the Sundays out o' the almanac.' And he turned over the pages o' the catechism and says he: 'Yes, here's all my old friends, "Santification" and "Justification" and "Adoption."' Sam said he laughed to himself, but there was a curious look in his eyes like he might cry, too. And says he: 'Parson, I know you won't believe me, but there ain't a question in this catechism that I can't answer.'

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"And Parson Page, he looked amazed, as anybody would, and says he: 'Is it possible?' And the showman handed him the book, and says he: 'I bet you five dollars I can answer any question you ask me.' Well, of course, Parson Page hadn't any notion of bettin' with the showman, but he took the catechism and says he, jest as earnest as if he was hearin' a Sunday-school class: 'What is

sanctification?' And the showman says: 'Sanctification is an act of God's free grace wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone.'

"And Parson Page looked mighty pleased, and says he: 'That's a perfectly correct answer, but that's justification, and I asked you what sanctification is.' And the showman he thought a minute, and says he: 'You're right! You're right! I always did have trouble with justification and sanctification, and I remember how mother'd say: "Now, Samuel, can't you get it fixed in your mind that justification is an act and sanctification is a work of God's free grace?" I thought I did get it fixed one o' them Sunday evenin's when mother was workin' with me, but I see now I didn't.'

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"And then he pulled out his purse,—Mis' Page said she never saw as much money at one time in all her life,—and he handed Parson Page a five-dollar gold piece. Parson Page didn't make any motion toward takin' it; jest looked first at the showman and then at Sam in a kind o' puzzled way, and the showman says: 'Here's your money, Parson. You won it fair and square.'

"And Parson Page says: 'Sir, I don't understand you,' and he stepped back to keep the showman from puttin' the money in his hand—pretty much, I reckon, the way Brother Wilson did when Squire Schuyler was tryin' to make him take the deed to the house that was a wedding fee; and the showman says: 'Why, didn't I bet you five dollars I could answer any question in this catechism, and didn't I lose my bet?' And Parson Page says: 'Sir, I hadn't the slightest intention of betting with you. I am a minister of the gospel.' And the showman he says: 'Well, Parson, you may not have intended bettin' any more than you intended goin' to the circus, but you did bet, and there's no gettin' around it. I bet I could answer any question, and you took up the bet and asked the question; and I lost, and you won.'

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"Sam Amos said he never could forgit the look on Parson Page's face when he begun to see that he'd not only been to the circus, but that he'd been bettin' with the circus man. And he says: 'Sir, there's a great misunderstanding somewhere. Surely a minister of the gospel can ask a catechism question without being accused of betting.' And the showman he laughed, and says he: 'Well, we won't argue about that, but here's your money,' And Parson Page says: 'Sir, I shall not take it.' And the showman he looked mighty solemn and says he: 'Do you think it's right, Parson, to keep a fellow man from payin' his just debts?' And Parson Page studied a while, and says he: 'That's a hard question. I never had to deal with just such a matter before, and I hardly know what to say.' And the showman he says: 'I've got a conscience the same as you; my conscience tells me to pay this money, so it must be right for me to pay it; and if it's right for me to pay it, it can't be wrong for you to take it.'

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"Well, Parson Page studied a minute, and says he: 'Your reasoning appears to be sound, but, still, my conscience tells me that I ought not to take the money, and I will not take it.' And the showman says: 'Well, if it goes against your conscience to keep it, put it in the contribution box next Sunday,' Says he: 'I haven't been to church since I was a boy, and there may be a good many changes since then, but I reckon they're still passin' the contribution box around.' And the parson he drew back and shook his bead again, and the showman says: 'Well, you can give it to foreign missions; maybe the heathen won't object to takin' a showman's money.' And the parson says: 'Sir, I appreciate your generosity, but on the whole I think it best not to take the money.'

"Sam said the showman looked at Parson Page a minute, and then he slapped him on the shoulder, and says he: 'Parson, you may not know it, but we're pardners in this game. If it wasn't for the church, we wouldn't need the circus, and if it wasn't for the circus, we wouldn't need the church.' Says he: 'You belong to the church, and I belong to the circus; but maybe, after all, there ain't so very much difference betwixt an honest preacher and an honest showman.' And then he bowed to Mis' Page like she'd been a queen, and took Parson Page by the hand, and the next minute he was gone like he had a heap o' business to see to. And Sam Amos laughed, and says he: 'Well, Parson, circus-goin' and bettin' is enough for one day. You and me'd better go home now, before the world, the flesh, and the devil lay hold of you again.'

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"So they all started for town, Parson Page talkin' about how kind and polite the showman was, and how his conscience was clear since he'd offered to pay for his seat, and how glad he was that he hadn't taken the five dollars the showman wanted him to take. Sam said he waited till they got to the drug store, and then he told Parson Page to put his hand in his coat pocket,—he had on a black luster coat with the pocket outside,—and Parson Page put his hand in, and there was the five-dollar gold piece. Sam said that while the showman was shakin' hands he slipped the money in the pocket as quick as lightnin', and of course Sam wouldn't tell on him, because he was glad to git another joke on Parson Page.

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"Well, it was all Mis' Page and Sam could do to keep him from goin' back to the show grounds to try to find the showman and give him back his money. Mis' Page told him it was gittin' on toward night, and they had to go home, and Sam told him that the show was most likely on its way to the depot. But Parson Page shook his head, and says he: 'I can't go home with this money in my possession.' And Mis' Page reached out and took the gold piece out o' his hand and slipped it into her reticule, and says she: 'Well, now you can go home. That gold piece won't bother you any more, for it's in my possession, and I'm goin' to put it in the treasury of our Mite Society,' and that's what she did the very next meetin' we had.

"Mis' Page said that Parson Page could hardly git to sleep that night, he was so troubled and so upset, and he kept talkin' about the things he'd done because he thought they was right, and how

they'd led him into doin' wrong, and says he: 'This morning when I set out for town, I thought I knew exactly what was right and what was wrong, but now I'm so turned and twisted,' says he, 'that if anybody asked me whether the ten commandments ought to be observed, I believe I'd stop and think a long time before I answered, and then like as not I'd say, "Sometimes they ought, and sometimes they oughtn't."'

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"Well, of course the news went all over the country that Parson Page had gone to the circus, and everywhere Brother Page went he was kept busy explainin' about the rain and the crowd and how he got in by accident and couldn't git out, and by the time the Presbytery met, all the preachers had got wind of the story, and some of 'em laughed about it, and some of 'em said it was a serious matter. Brother Robert McCallum did more laughin' than anybody. He used to say that next to savin' souls he enjoyed a good joke more than anything in the world, and Sam Amos used to say that if Brother McCallum ever wanted to change his business, he could be the end man in a nigger minstrel show without any trouble.

"Brother McCallum and Parson Page 'd been schoolmates, so they both felt free to joke with one another; and the minute they'd shook hands, Brother McCallum begun laughin' about Parson Page goin' to the circus, and says he: 'Brother Page, I wish I'd been in your place.' Says he: 'I've always thought a man loses a heap by bein' a preacher. If anybody ought to be allowed to go to the circus,' says he, 'it looks like it ought to be us preachers, that's proof against temptation and that's strong to wrestle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Instead o' that we send the poor, weak sinners into the temptation and lead the preachers away from it.' Says he: 'I went to that very show, but I wasn't so lucky as you, for it was clear weather, and I didn't have a chance to see anything but the animals.'

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"And then, after sayin' all that, what did Brother McCallum do but git up the last day of Presbytery and read a paper with a lot of 'whereases' and 'be it resolveds', chargin' Brother Page with conduct unbecoming to a minister and callin' on him to explain matters. And Parson Page he had to own up to everything and explain again jest how he happened to git caught in the circus tent, and says he: 'It was a strange place for a minister of the gospel to be in, but my rule is to see what I can learn from every experience that comes to me, and I believe I learned from the circus something that, maybe, I could not learn anywhere else.' Says he: 'As I lay that night on a sleepless pillow, the Lord gave me an insight into the great mystery of predestination. I traced up the events of the day one after another. There was my betting with the showman, and I felt sorry for that. But that would not have happened if I had not sought out the showman to pay my just debt to him, and that was a right act and a right intention, yet it led me into wrong; and I saw in a flash that our own acts predestine us and foreordain us to this thing or to that. We are like children, stumbling around in the dark, taking the wrong way and doing the wrong thing, but over us all is the pity of the Father who "knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are dust.'"

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"Says he: 'I went into that tent a Pharisee, and I wrapped the mantle of my pride around me and thought how much holier I was than those poor sinful show people. But,' says he, 'I talked with the showman, and I found as much honesty and kindness of heart as I ever found in any church member, and I left the show grounds with a wider charity in my heart than I'd ever felt before, for I knew that the showman was my brother, and I understood what the Apostle meant when he said: "Now are they many members; yet but one body.'"

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"And Brother McCallum he got up, and says he: 'Well, that's more than I ever learned from any of Brother Page's sermons,' and everybody laughed, and that ended the matter so far as the Presbytery was concerned.

"But Sam Amos never got through teasin' Parson Page, and every time he'd see him with a passel o' church members, he'd go up and tell some story or other, and then he'd turn around and say: 'You ricollect, Parson, that happened the day you and me went to the circus.'"

MARY CRAWFORD'S CHART

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"With this chart, madam," said the agent, "you are absolutely independent of dressmakers and seamstresses. After the instructions I have just given, a woman can cut and fit any sort of garment, from a party gown for herself to a pair of overalls for her husband, and the chart is so scientific in its construction, its system of measurement so accurate, that anything cut by it has a style and finish seldom seen in home-made garments. I have handled many things in the course of my ten years' experience as a traveling salesman, but this chart is the most satisfactory invention of all. I've been handling it now about eight months, and in that time I've sold—well, if I were to tell you how many hundred, you wouldn't believe me, so what's the use?—and I have yet to hear of anybody who is dissatisfied with the chart. The last time I talked with the general manager of the International Dressmaking Chart Company, I said to him, said I: 'Mr. Crampton, you could safely give a guarantee with every one of these charts—offer to refund the money to any one who is dissatisfied, and,' said I, 'I believe the only result of this would be an increased sale. You'd never have to refund a dollar. About a year ago I sold one to Mrs. Judge Graves in Shepherdsville; you may know her. Her husband's county judge, and they are two of the finest people you ever saw. The judge has a brother right here in town, Campbell Graves, the grocer. Your husband knows him, I'm sure. Well, I sold Mrs. Graves this chart a year ago, and I stopped there again on this trip just to say 'how d'ye do' and see how the chart was holding out. And she said to me: 'Mr. Roberts, this chart has saved me at least fifty dollars worth of dressmaker's bills in the last year. My husband thought, when I bought it, that five dollars was a good deal to pay for a thing like that, but' says she, 'he says now it was the best investment he ever made.' I had intended to make a thorough canvass of this neighborhood, but at twelve o'clock to-day, just as I was sitting down to my dinner, I got a telegram from the house telling me to go immediately to Shepherdsville. But I'd already ordered the horse and buggy, so I ate my dinner as quickly as I could, and said I: 'I'll drive three miles out into the country and stop at the first house I come to on the right-hand side of the road beyond the tollgate, and if I sell a chart there, I won't feel that I ran up a livery bill for nothing. And the first house on the right-hand side of the road beyond the tollgate happened to be yours, and that's how I came to give you all this trouble.'"

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Here the agent paused with a pleasant laugh. He realized that the psychological moment was approaching, and he began gathering up the various parts of the chart with an air of extreme preoccupation. The gleam of a ruby ring on his little finger caught Mary Crawford's eye, and she noticed how white and well-formed his hands were, the hands of one who had never done any manual labor. She stood irresolute, fascinated by the gleam of the red jewel, and thinking of her little hoard up-stairs in the Japanese box in the top bureau drawer. Five dollars from thirteen dollars and sixty-five cents left eight dollars and sixty-five cents. It would be three weeks before John's birthday came. The hens were laying well, the young cow would be "fresh" next week, and that would give her at least two pounds more of butter per week. Then, the agent was such a nice-mannered, obliging young man; he had spent an hour teaching her how to use the chart, and she hated to have him take all that trouble for nothing.

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She looked over at her husband, and her eyes said plainly: "Please help me to decide."

But John was blind to the gentle entreaty. He had fixed ideas as to what was a man's business and what a woman's; so he tilted his chair back against the wall and chewed a straw while he gazed out of the open door. His mental comment was: "If that agent fellow could work his hands just half as fast as he works his jaw, he'd be a mighty good help on a farm."

The agent looked up with a cheery smile. He had folded the chart, and was tying the red tape fastenings.

"I've got to get back to town in time to catch that four o'clock train for Shepherdsville. I'm a thousand times obliged to you, Madam, for letting me show you the working of the chart. Sometimes I have a good deal of difficulty in getting ladies to understand the *modus operandi* of the thing. Unless a woman remembers the arithmetic she learned when she was a schoolgirl, she is apt to have trouble taking measurements. But it's a pleasure to show any one who sees into it as readily as you do. Most married women seem to give up their mathematical knowledge just as they give up their music. But you've got yours right at your fingers' ends. Well, good afternoon to you both, and the next time I come this way—"

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"Wait a minute," said Mary. "I'll take the chart. Just sit down and wait till I go up-stairs and get the money."

The agent made a suave bow of acquiescence, and then stroked his mustache to conceal an involuntary smile of triumph.

"You have a fine stand of wheat, sir," he said, turning to John and gesturing gracefully towards the field across the road, where the sun was shimmering on the silvery green of oats.

John made no reply. He scorned to talk about farming matters with a raw city fellow who did not know oats from wheat, and he was laboriously counting out a handful of silver.

"Here's your money, young man," he said dryly. "Now skip out, if you can, before Mary gets

back."

The agent gave a quick glance at the coins and thrust them into his pocket. He seized his hat and valise, darted out of the house, and was climbing into his buggy when Mary appeared at the door, breathless and distressed.

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"Come back!" she cried. "You've forgotten your money."

John was standing just behind Mary, smiling broadly, and making emphatic gestures of dismissal with both hands. The agent understood the humor of the situation and laughed heartily as he lifted his hat and drove away. Mary started to the gate, blushing scarlet with vexation and perplexity, but John held her back.

"I have heard of agents forgettin' to leave the goods," said he, "but I never heard of one forgettin' to collect his money. Go and put your money back, Mary; I paid the man."

"Then you must let me pay you," cried Mary. "I really mean it, John. You must let me have my way. I know you're hard run just now, and I never would have bought the chart, if I had not intended paying for it myself."

She tried to open John's hand to put the money in it, but John took hold of her hand and gave her a gentle shove toward the foot of the stairs.

"Go on and put up your money, Mary," he said. "If half that agent fellow said is true, I'm in about a hundred and fifty dollars. Before long, I reckon, you'll be makin' my coats and pants and the harness for the horses by this here chart."

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And Mary went, but her gentle protestations could be heard even after she reached her room and had dropped the money back into the little box that was her savings bank.

She hurried through her after-supper tasks, her mind full of the cutting and fitting she wanted to do before bed-time. Hers was a soul that found its highest happiness in work, and she unfolded the chart with the delight of a child who has a new toy. The agent's tribute to her knowledge of mathematics was no idle flattery. Her quick brain had comprehended at once the system of the chart, and she flushed with excitement and pleasure as she bent over her scale and found that her measurements and calculations were resulting in patterns of unmistakable correctness and style. It was like solving the fifth proposition of Euclid. She laid aside her work that night with a reluctant sigh, but a happy anticipation of the sewing yet to come. The anticipation was fulfilled next day by the completion of a shirt waist so striking in design and fit that even John noticed its beauty and becomingness and acknowledged that the chart was "no humbug."

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"You must wear that waist Monday when we go to town," he declared. "I never saw anything fit you as pretty as that does," and Sally McElrath echoed John's opinion when she and Mary met at the linen counter of Brown and Company's dry goods store; and Mary told her of the wonderful chart as they both examined patterns and qualities of table linen and compared experiences as to wearing qualities of bleached and unbleached damask.

There is a system of communication in every country neighborhood that is hardly less marvelous than the telegraph and telephone; and before Mary could put her chart to a second test, all Goshen knew that Mary Crawford had a chart that would cut anything from a baby sacque to a bolero, and that she was willing to lend it to any one who was inclined to borrow.

Sally McElrath was the first applicant for the loan of the chart. Whatever the enterprise, if it had the feature of novelty, Sally was its first patron and promoter. But her promptness ended here, and her friends declared that Sally McElrath was always the first to begin a thing, and the last to finish it.

Accompanying the chart was a set of explicit rules for its use, and Mary read these to Sally, explaining all the difficult points just as the agent had explained them to her.

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"Now if I were you, Sally," she said warningly, "I would try some simple thing first, a child's apron, or something like that, so that you won't run the risk of ruining any expensive goods. Everything takes practice, you know."

"Oh," said Sally confidently, "I'm goin' to make a tea jacket out of a piece of China silk I got off the bargain counter the last time I was in town."

"What's a tea jacket?" asked Sally's husband, who had been listening intently, with a faint hope that some new shirts for himself might be the outcome of Sally's interest in the chart.

"It's a thing like this, Dan," said Sally, producing a picture of the elegant garment in question.

"Why do they call it a tea jacket?" demanded Dan.

"Oh, I don't know; I reckon they wear 'em when they drink tea," said Sally.

"But we drink coffee," said Dan argumentatively.

"Well, call it a coffee jacket, then," retorted Sally. "But whatever you call it, I'm goin' to have one, if I don't do another stitch of spring sewin'."

Dan was gazing sadly at the picture of the tea jacket with its flowing oriental sleeves, lace ruffles, and ribbon bows.

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"I can't figger out," he said slowly, "what use you've got for a thing like that."

"I can't either," snapped Sally, "and that's the very reason I want it. The only things I've got any use for are gingham aprons and kitchen towels, and they're the things I don't want; and the only things I want are things that I haven't got a bit of use for, like this tea jacket here, and I'm goin' to have it, too."

"All right, all right," said Dan soothingly. "If you're pleased with the things that ain't of any use, why, have 'em, of course. Me and the children would like right well to have a few things that are some use, but I reckon we can get along without 'em a while longer. However, it looks to me as if that chart calls for a good deal of calculatin', and it's my opinion that you'd better get out your old *Ray's Arithmetic* and study up awhile before you try to cut out that jacket."

"Maybe you're right," laughed Sally. "Arithmetic always was my stumbling block at school. I never could learn the tables, and the first year I was married I sold butter with just twelve ounces to the pound, till Cousin Albert's wife told me better. She'd been takin' my butter for a month, and one Saturday morning she said to me: 'Cousin Sally, I hate to mention it, and I hope you won't take offence, but your butter's short weight.' Well, of course that made me mad, but I held my temper down, and I said: 'Cousin Ella, I think you're mistaken, I weigh my butter myself, and I've got good true scales, and there's twelve ounces of butter and a little over in every pound I sell.' And Cousin Ella laughed and says: 'I know that, Cousin Sally, but there ought to be sixteen ounces in a pound of butter. You're usin' the wrong table.' And she picked up little Albert's arithmetic and showed me the two tables, one for druggists and one for grocers; and there I'd been using druggist's weight to weigh groceries. Well, we had a good laugh over it, and I put twenty ounces of butter to the pound 'till I made up all my short weight. I never did learn all the multiplication table, and all the arithmetic I'm certain about now is: one baby and another baby makes two babies, and twelve things make a dozen. I wouldn't remember that if it wasn't for countin' the eggs and the napkins. But maybe Dan can help me out with the chart."

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"Don't depend on me," said Dan emphatically; "my arithmetic is about like yours. I know how many pecks of corn make a bushel and how many rods are in an acre, but that sort o' knowledge wouldn't be much help in cuttin' out a woman's jacket." And early the next morning Sally returned the chart, acknowledging that its mathematical complexities had baffled both herself and Dan. "And besides," she added, "I don't believe there's enough of my China silk to cut anything. I'll have to match it and get some more the next time I go to town."

One after another the neighbors borrowed Mary's chart, and each came back with the same story,—there was too much arithmetic about it, but if they brought their goods some time this week or next, would not Mary show them how to use it?

Of course she would. When did Mary Crawford ever refuse to help a neighbor?

"Come whenever you please," said she cordially. "It will not be a bit of trouble, and you'll find the chart is easy enough, after I've given you a little help on it."

They came, sometimes singly, sometimes by twos and threes, and Mary straightway found herself at the head of a dressmaking establishment from which every business feature except the hard work had been completely eliminated. The customers sometimes brought their children, and often stayed in friendly fashion to dinner or supper, as the exigencies of the work demanded a prolonged visit. Mary played the part of the gracious hostess while she cut and tried on, and planned and contrived and suggested, slipping away now and then to put another stick of wood in the kitchen stove, or see that the vegetables were not scorching, or mix up the biscuits, or make the coffee, or set the table, using all her fine tact to keep the guest from feeling that she was giving trouble.

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Mary was social in her nature, and the pleasure of entertaining her neighbors and her unselfish delight in bestowing favors kept her from realizing at once the weight of the burden she had taken on herself. But she was a housekeeper who rarely saw the sun go down on an unfinished task, and when she took a retrospective view of the week, she was dismayed by the large arrears of housework and sewing; and all her altruism could not keep back a sigh of relief as she saw Mandy Harris's rockaway disappear down the road late Saturday afternoon. She sat up till half-past ten sewing on a gingham dress for Lucy Ellen and a linen blouse for little John, and the next day she knowingly and wilfully broke the Sabbath by sweeping and dusting the parlor and dining-room.

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Monday dawned cool and cloudy, more like March than April, and when the rain began to come down in slow, steady fashion, she rejoiced at the prospect of another day unbroken by callers. By Tuesday morning April had resumed her reign. A few hours of wind and sunshine dried up the mud and put the roads in fine condition, and an extra number of visitors and children came in the afternoon. Lucy Ellen and little John were expected to entertain the latter. But Lucy Ellen and John were by this time frankly weary of company, and they had a standard of hospitality that differed essentially from their mother's. It seemed to them that hosts as well as guests had some rights, and they were ready at all times to stand up and battle for theirs. Lucy Ellen could not understand why she should be sent an exile to the lonely spare-room up-stairs, merely because she had slapped Mary Virginia Harris for breaking her favorite china doll; and little John was loudly indignant because he was reprimanded for calling Jimmie Crawford names, when Jimmy persisted in walking over the newly-planted garden. For the first time, both children had hard feelings toward their gentle stepmother, and she herself longed for the departure of the guests

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that she might take John's children in her arms and explain away her seeming harshness.

Wednesday repeated the trials of Tuesday with a few disagreeable variations, and Thursday was no better than Wednesday. By Thursday night Mary had abandoned all hope of finishing her own sewing before May Meeting Sunday. Her one aim now was to do a small amount of housework each day and get three meals cooked for John and the children, and even this work had to be subordinated to the increasing demands of the dressmaking business. At times she had a strange feeling in her head, and wondered if this was what people meant when they spoke of having headache; but sleep, "the balm of every woe", seldom failed to come nightly to her pillow, and all day long her sweet serenity never failed, even when the trying week was fitly rounded out by a simultaneous visit from Sally McElrath and Ma Harris. Sally had just "dropped in", but Ma Harris came, as usual, with intent to find or to make trouble.

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Ma Harris was John Crawford's "mother-in-law on his first wife's side", as Dave Amos phrased it, and it was the opinion of the neighbors that if John and his second wife had not been the best-natured people in the world, they never could have put up with Ma Harris and her "ways."

She had exercised a careful supervision over John's domestic affairs during the first wife's lifetime. When Sarah died, she redoubled her vigilance, and when his second marriage became an impending certainty, Ma Harris's presence and influence hung like a dark cloud over the future of the happy pair.

"There's only one thing I'm afraid of, Mary," said honest John. "I know you'll get along all right with me and the children, but I don't know about Ma Harris; I'm afraid she'll give you trouble."

"Don't you worry about that," said Mary cheerily. "I've never seen anybody yet that I couldn't get along with, and Ma Harris won't be the exception."

Popular sentiment declared that Ma Harris took her son-in-law's second marriage much harder than she had taken her daughter's death. Her lamentations were loudly and impartially diffused among her acquaintances; but it was evident that the sympathies of the community were not with John's "mother-in-law on his first wife's side."

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"I reckon old Mis' Harris won't bother me again soon," said Maria Taylor. "She was over here yesterday with her handkerchief to her eyes, mournin' over John marryin' Mary Parrish, and I up and told her that she ought to be givin' thanks for such a stepmother for Sarah's children, John Crawford was too good a man, anyhow, to be wasted on a pore, shiftless creature like Sarah, and her death was nothin' but a blessin' to John and the children."

Ma Harris soon found that she had never given herself a harder task than when she undertook to find fault with John for his treatment of Mary, or with Mary for her treatment of the children. It vexed her soul on Sundays to see John ushering Mary into his pew as if she had been a princess, but what could she say? Did not all the inhabitants of Goshen know that John had carried "pore Sarah" into the church in his strong arms as long as she was able to be carried, and nursed her faithfully at home until the day of her death? Then the children fairly adored Mary; and Mary, being a genuine mother, and having none of her own, was free to spend all her love on John's little ones. Not only this, but she treated Ma Harris with such respect and kindness that complaint was well-nigh impossible. Altogether, Ma Harris began to realize that the way of the fault-finder is sometimes as hard as that of the transgressor.

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"Well, Mary," she said, as she dropped heavily into a rocking-chair, "I heard yesterday that you had a new dressmakin' chart and all the neighbors was usin' it, and says I to Maria, 'I reckon Mary's forgot me, and I'll have to go up and remind her that Ma Harris is still in the land of the livin' and jest as much in need of clothes as some other folks.'" And she threw a withering glance in Sally's direction.

"Why, Ma Harris!" said Mary. "Didn't John give you my message? I sent you word about the chart last week, and I've been looking for you every day."

Ma Harris's face brightened, for Mary's words were as a healing balm to her wounded self-love.

"There, now!" she exclaimed, "I didn't think you'd slight me that-a-way, Mary. So it was John's fault, after all. Well, I might a' known it. It's precious few men that can remember what their wives tell 'em to do, and I used to tell Joel that if I wanted to send a message I'd send it by the telegraph company before I'd trust him with it."

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Mary breathed a breath of deep relief. Peace was restored between Ma Harris and herself, but she knew that between her two guests there yawned a breach that time and frequent intercourse only widened and deepened. Once in an uncharitable moment Sally had likened Ma Harris to Dan's old wall-eyed mare, and more than once Ma Harris had made disparaging remarks about Sally's cooking. The bearer of tales had attended to her work, and thereafter the two seldom met without an interchange of hostile words. Mary was of those blessed ones who love and who make peace, and for the next hour she stood as a buffer between two masked batteries. If a sarcastic remark were thrown out, she caught it before it could reach its mark, and took away its sting by some kindly interpretation of her own. If a challenge were given, she took it up and laughed it off as a joke. If the conversation threatened to become personal, she led its course into the safe channel of generalities; and for once the two enemies were completely baffled in their efforts to bring about a quarrel. But only Mary knew at what cost peace had been purchased, when she lay down on the old sofa in the hall for a moment's rest before going to the kitchen to cook supper

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and make tea-cakes for the May Meeting basket. After supper she sewed buttons on Lucy Ellen's frock and little John's blouse and, being a woman and young, she thought of the pale blue dimity she had hoped to wear to the May Meeting, because pale blue was John's favorite color.

But in the matter of women's clothes, John was not quick to distinguish between the new and the old, and there was nothing but loving admiration in his eyes the next morning as he stood at the foot of the stairs and looked up at Mary in a last year's gown of dark blue linen with collar and cuffs of delicate embroidery. He helped her into the carriage, and away they went down the elm-shaded road. The carriage was shabby, but there was a strain of noble blood in the horse, that showed itself in a smooth, even gait, and Mary's eyes brightened, and the color came into her face, as she felt the exhilaration that swift motion always brings.

The poet who sang the enchantment of "midsummer nights" might have sung with equal rapture of May mornings, when there is a sun to warm you through, and a breeze to temper the warmth with a touch of April's coolness; when the flowers on the earth's bosom, touched by the sunshine, gleam and glow like the jewels in the breastplate of the high priest, and the heart beats strong with the joy of winter past and the joy of summer to come.

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Mary leaned back with the long, deep sigh of perfect happiness. Of late she had been striving with "a life awry", but now her soul

"Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll,
Freshening and fluttering in the wind."

It was May Meeting Sunday. Nobody could come to use the chart, and she and John were riding together. A redbird carolled to its mate in the top of a wayside elm, and she laughed like a child.

"Listen to that sweet bird!" she exclaimed. "Why, it can almost talk. Don't you hear the words it's singing?"

"Sweet! Sweet! Sweet!
With you!
With you!"

"Smart bird," said John. "Sees you and me together and makes a song about it." And Mary laughed and blushed as her eyes met John's.

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"Oh!" she sighed, "I almost wish we could ride on and on and never come to the church. It seems a pity to lose any of this sunshine and wind."

"Just say the word," said John, "and we'll keep right on and have a May Meetin' all to ourselves out at Blue Spring, or anywhere else you say. May Meetin's just a Sunday picnic, anyway."

But Mary's conscience forbade such Sabbath breaking. It was all right to have a picnic after you had been to preaching, but to have the picnic without the previous church-going was not to be thought of.

It was a Sunday of great events. Not only was it May Meeting Sunday, but the Sawyer twins were to be baptized, and Sidney Harris and his bride were to make their first appearance in public that day. Sidney had married a young girl from the upper part of the State, and it was rumored that her wedding clothes had been made in New York, that they were worth "a small fortune." One costume in particular, it was said, had cost "a cool hundred", and every woman in the church had a secret hope of seeing the gown at the May Meeting.

According to custom, every one wore her freshest, newest raiment in honor of the day and the month. Mary usually felt an innocent pleasure in looking at the new apparel of her friends, but today, as she glanced around, she was moved by a strange feeling of irritation, weariness, and dissatisfaction. That she was wearing old clothes while every one else wore new ones gave her little concern; but just in front of her sat Ellen McElrath in the blue and white gingham waist that she and Ellen had cut out that dreadful afternoon when the sponge cake burnt up, and Ellen's little boy pulled up all her clove pinks. The back of the waist was cut on the bias, and the stripes did not hit. How she had worked and worried over those stripes and lain awake at night, wondering if she ought not to buy Ellen enough goods to cut a new back. She turned away her eyes, and there, across the aisle, was little May Johnson in the pink blouse that recalled the morning when Mary had left her churning and baking six times to show May's mother the working of that mysterious chart. And there was Aunt Amanda Bassett, ambling heavily down to the "amen corner" in the black alpaca skirt that would wrinkle over her ample hips in spite of all the letting out and taking up that had been done for it that hot afternoon when the bread burned to a crisp, while Mary was down on the floor turning up Aunt Amanda's hem and trying to make both sides of the skirt the same length. And here came Annie Matthews in the brown and white shirt waist, that was an all-around misfit because Annie had thought that three fourths of sixteen inches was eight inches, Mary blamed herself for not staying by Annie and watching her more closely. And was that a wrinkle in the broad expanse of gingham across Nanny McElrath's shoulders? It was; and Mary knew there would be some ripping and altering next week.

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Oh! if she could only shut out the sight of those hateful garments! How could she ever get herself into a reverent frame of mind surrounded by these dismal reminders of all the work and worry of the past month?

She glanced over at the old Parrish pew and Aunt Mary's countenance of smiling peace rebuked her. If Aunt Mary could smile, sitting lonely in the old church thronged with memories of her dead, surely, with John by her side and the heart of youth beating strong in her breast, she ought not to feel like crying, especially at May Meeting service.

The church was filling rapidly, and every new arrival roused a fresh train of vexatious memories. There was a rustle and flutter all over the church, a great turning of heads, and good cause for it; for down the aisle came Sam and Maria Sawyer, Sam bearing the twins, one on each arm, their long white clothes reaching far below his knees and giving him the appearance of an Episcopal clergyman in full vestments. And close behind these came Sidney and his bride, the latter smiling and blushing under a hat of white lace trimmed with bunches of purple violets, and gowned in a suit of violet cloth, whose style carried to every mind the conviction that it was indeed the hundred-dollar gown.

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Mary touched John on the arm. She tried to speak, and could not; but there was no need for speech. John understood the pallor of her face and the imploring look in her eyes. He whispered a word to the children, then he and Mary rose and passed out unnoticed.

"What's the matter?" said John in a low voice, as soon as they were fairly outside the door.

But Mary only shook her head and walked faster toward the old rockaway, which was standing in the shade of a tall chestnut tree. There she sank on the ground and began laughing and sobbing, while John, thoroughly alarmed, knelt by her, patting her on the back and saying: "There, there, Honey; don't cry," as if he were talking to a frightened child.

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The touch of his kind hands and the fresh, sweet air on her face were quick restoratives, and in a moment or two Mary was able to speak.

"Don't look so scared, John," she gasped faintly. "There's nothing much the matter; I'll be all right in a minute or two. I haven't been feeling very well lately, and I'm afraid I ought to have stayed at home to-day. It was too warm in the church; and I got to looking at the clothes the people had on, and nearly everything new was cut out by my chart, and it seemed so funny, and I felt all at once as if I wanted to cry or laugh, I didn't know which, but I'm better now."

John was listening with keen attention. Nearly all the new clothes in the church made by Mary's chart, and she so tired and nervous that she could not stay inside the church! His face grew grave and stern, but when he spoke, his voice had its usual gentleness.

"You come along with me, Mary," he said, "We'll have our Sunday meetin' out of doors, after all."

He lifted the cushions and robes from the rockaway and started towards the woods at the back of the church, Mary following with the docility of utter weariness. It was wrong, of course, to miss the May Meeting sermon, but how could she worship God with that striped shirt waist in front of her? Her temples throbbed, and there was a queer feeling at the back of her head.

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John laid the cushions on the ground and folded the robes into a pillow.

"Now, Mary, lay right down here," he commanded. "Sunday's a day of rest, and you've got to rest. Don't you worry about the children. If they get tired listenin' to the sermon, they've got sense enough to get up and come out here; and nobody's goin' to know whether you and me are in church or not. They're too much taken up with the baptizin' and the bride."

And with these assurances Mary closed her eyes, and surrendered herself to the sweet influence of the day and hour. The sunshine lay warm on her shoulders and hands, the breath of May fanned her aching head, and John, like a strong angel, was watching beside her. She heard the twitter of birds in the top branches of the giant oaks, the voices of the choir came to her softened by the distance, and her brain took up the rhythm of the hymn they were singing:

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"This is the day the Lord hath made,
He calls the hours his own;
Let heaven rejoice, let earth be glad,
And praise surround the throne."

But before the last stanza had been sung, the tension of brain and body relaxed. John saw that she slept and thanked God. He looked at her sleeping face, and the anxiety in his own deepened. For five years he had borne the cross of a peevish, invalid wife, and then he had known the bliss of living with a perfectly sound woman. He had never analyzed the nature of his love for Mary,—as soon would he have torn away the petals of Mary's budding roses to see what was at their heart,—and he did not know that the charm that had drawn him to her and kept him her lover through three years of married life, was not alone her sweet, unselfish nature, but the exquisite health that made work a pleasure, the perfect equilibrium of nerve and brain that kept a song on her lips, that made her step like a dance, and her mere presence a spell to soothe and heal. His heart sank at the thought of her losing these. He had always shielded her from the heavy drudgery that farm life brings to a woman, and now he called memory to the witness stand and sternly questioned her concerning the cause of this sudden change. She had been having a good deal of company lately, but then Mary enjoyed company. She had never complained about the unusual number of callers, but who ever heard Mary complain about anything? She was not the complaining kind. John was not a psychologist, and could not know the danger to nerve and brain that lies in enforced—even self-enforced—submission to unpleasant circumstances, but his brow

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darkened as he thought of her words: "Nearly everything new was cut out by my chart." And yet, what right had he to blame the neighbors for their thoughtlessness? If he, Mary's husband, had not been considerate of her health and happiness, why should he expect the neighbors to be so?

"It's all my fault at last," he thought remorsefully, as he leaned over the sleeping woman and brushed away an insect that had lighted on her gold-brown hair.

Yes, there were faint lines around her mouth and under her eyes, and the contour of her cheek was not as girlish as it had been a month ago.

"If that chart was at the bottom of the trouble—" But again why should he blame the chart or the agent, when the main fault was his?

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Taking off his coat, he laid it gently over her shoulders and seated himself so that the shadow of his body would screen her from a ray of sun that lay across her closed eyelids.

The minister's voice rose and fell in earnest exhortation. He was preaching an unusually long sermon that morning, and John was glad, for the longer his sermon, the longer would be Mary's sleep. As for himself, he needed no sermon within church walls. He was listening to the voice of his conscience preaching to him of things undone and of judgment to come.

"It's curious," he said to himself, "that a man can't see a thing that's goin' on right under his own eyes and in his own house and that concerns his own wife."

Suddenly a new sound was heard from the church, a duet of infant wails that drowned the minister's words, the voices of two young protestants making known their objections to the rite of infant baptism. John smiled as he pictured the scene within.

"I wouldn't be in Sam Sawyer's place now for ten dollars," he mentally declared; "holdin' them squallin' young ones, and everybody in church laughin' in their sleeves."

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The lamentations of the twins gradually subsided. The notes of the organ sounded, and the choir sang joyfully. There was a hush, then the moving of many feet as the congregation rose for the benediction; another hush, then a murmur of voices growing louder as the little crowd crossed the threshold of the church, and came into the freedom of God's great out-of-doors.

Mary opened her eyes and started up with an exclamation of self-reproach at the sight of John in his shirt sleeves and the realization that she had slept all through the minister's sermon.

"Take it easy," said John, smiling at her and putting on his coat with more than his usual deliberation. "Your hair's all right, and you look fifty per cent brighter than you did an hour ago. You needed that nap worse'n you need Brother Smith's sermon. Now sit still and let me do the talkin' and explainin'."

"Yes, Mis' Morrison," as the neighbors came hastening up with kindly inquiries, "Mary wasn't feelin' very well when we started this mornin', but she's all right now. She's been workin' a little too hard lately, and I'm afraid I haven't been as careful of her as I ought to 'a' been."

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"Bless her soul!" said Aunt Tabby McElrath, giving Mary a motherly pat on the head. "You did just right to come out here. There's nothin' like a hot church for makin' a body feel faint; and a day like this it'd be better for us all if we'd have the preachin' outdoors as well as the eatin'. Now, don't you stir, Mary. You're always waitin' on other people; let other people wait on you for once. And, John, you come with me, and I'll give you a waiter of nice things for Mary. Nobody can cook better'n Mary; that I know. But when a person ain't feelin' very well, they'd rather eat somebody else's cookin' than their own."

"Well, it depends on who the somebody is," said her niece, Sally McElrath. "I'd rather eat anybody else's cookin' than my own, whether I'm feelin' well or not; but for mercy's sake don't get anything from my basket on that waiter you're fixin' up for Mary. My cake ain't as light as it might be, and the icin' didn't cook long enough; and when it comes to bread, you all know a ten-year-old child could beat me."

The May Meeting dinners in Goshen neighborhood had long been famous. Town people who were so fortunate as to partake of one were wont to talk of it for years afterward, for the standards of housewifery in this part of the country were of the highest, and the consciences of the housewives made them live sternly up to their ideals, all but Sally. Her cooking and her housekeeping were always below the mark. But she had the wisdom to ward off censure by a prompt and cheerful admission of her failures, and none but a professional critic like Ma Harris cared to find fault with the delinquent who frankly said of herself the worst that could be said.

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May Meeting in the country is like Easter Sunday in town, a gala occasion, and it was an idyllic scene around the little country church as the congregation gathered under the trees. Stalwart men, matronly women, and youth and maiden clad in fresh apparel that matched the garb of Nature. They had worshipped God in prayer and song within church walls, and now they were to enjoy the gifts of God under the arch of his blue sky and in the green aisles of his first temple. The old earth had yielded a bountiful tribute to man's toil, and on the damask cloths spread over the sward lay the fruits and grains of last year's harvest, changed by woman's skill into the viands that are the symbols of Southern hospitality, as salt is the symbol of the Arab's.

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The minister stood, and turning his face heavenward, said grace, his words blending with the soft twitter of birds and the murmur of wind in the young leaves. Then arose a crescendo of voices,

the bass of the men, the treble of the women, and the shrill chatter of children, glad with the gladness of May, but softened and subdued because it was Sunday. And now and then the Sawyer twins lifted up their voices and wept, not because there was any cause for weeping, but because weeping was as yet their only means of communication with the strange new world into which they had lately come. The Master who proclaimed that the Sabbath was made for man, and who walked through the cornfield on that holy day, might have been an honored guest at such a feast.

When John returned with the laden tray, Mary was holding a little levee, and her sparkling eyes and happy smile told of rested nerves and brain refreshed. "For so He giveth to His beloved while they are sleeping." The minister had come up to shake hands with her and tell her that he had missed her face from the congregation. Sidney had brought his bride over and introduced her, and Mary was getting a near view of the violet dress. Her spirits mounted as she ate the delicious food Aunt Tabby had selected for her. She was surprised to find that she could look at the stripes in Ellen McElrath's shirt waist without wanting to cry, and when the meal was over she insisted on helping to clear off the tables.

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"My goodness!" said Aunt Tabby McElrath, as she placed in her basket the remains of her bread, ham, chicken, pickles, cake, pie, and jelly. "It looks to me like there'd been another miracle of the loaves and fishes, for I'm surely takin' home more'n I brought here. What a pity there ain't some poor family around here that we could give all this good food to."

"I don't know as we'd be called a poor family," said Sally McElrath, "but if you've got more than you know what to do with, just hand it over to me. It'll save me from cookin' supper to-night."

"Yes, Aunt Tabby," said Dan, "don't be afraid to offer us some of the leavin's. Jest cut me a slab o' that jelly-cake and one or two slices o' your good bread. I ain't forgot the supper I had last May Meetin' Sunday. Sally had a sick headache and couldn't cook a thing, and all I could find in the basket was a pickle and a hard boiled egg."

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There was a general laugh, in which Sally joined heartily. Aunt Tabby made generous contributions from her basket to Sally's, Dan watching the operation with hungry eyes, and then she looked around for a convenient tree trunk against which she might rest her ample back and bear a part in the general conversation.

In rural communities the church is the great social center. After the period of worship, though the hours are God's own, it is not deemed a profanation of the day to spend a little time in friendly intercourse, and only the unregenerate youth of the congregation consider it a hardship to listen to a second sermon in the afternoon.

"Now look yonder, will you?" exclaimed an elderly matron; "them young folks are fixin' to go off ridin' instead of stayin' to second service. You, Percival! You, Matty! Don't you stir a step from here, Preachin's goin' to begin again before you can get back."

Matty's right foot was on the step. Her right hand grasped the top of the buggy, and her left was firmly held by a handsome youth whose energies were divided between helping her into his "rig" and managing his horse.

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"You, Matty!" The second warning came in strong tones and with a threatening accent.

Matty turned with a bird-like motion of the head. She darted a glance and a smile over her shoulder; the glance was for her mother, the smile for the young man. The latter had failed twice in Greek and Latin, but he understood the language of the eye and lip, and the delicate pressure of the girl's fingers on his. He, too, threw a glance and a smile backward, and the next instant the two were spinning down the road in the direction of the Iron Bridge.

There was a burst of good-natured laughter from the fathers. They remembered the days of their youth and rather wished themselves in the young man's place. "Pretty well done," chuckled Uncle Mose Bascom. "I've always said that when it comes to holdin' a spirited horse and at the same time helpin' a pretty girl into a buggy, a man ought to have four hands, but Percival did the thing mighty well with jest two."

The young girls who lacked Matty's daring looked down the road with envy in their eyes. How much better that ride in the wooded road to the bridge than another dull sermon in that hot church! But the mothers of the virtuous damsels smiled complacently, thanking God that their daughters were not as other women's, and Ma Harris "walled" her eyes and sighed piously.

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"In my day," she said, "children honored their parents and obeyed 'em."

"No, they didn't," retorted Matty's mother, her face crimson with shame and vexation. "Children never honored their parents in your day nor in Moses's day, either. If they had, there wouldn't be but nine commandments. Didn't your mother run off and marry, and haven't I heard you say that that youngest boy o' yours was bringin' your gray hairs in sorrow to the grave? Matty's headstrong, I know, but she ain't a bit worse than other girls."

"That's so," said Sally McElrath, whose own girlhood gave her a fellow feeling for the absent Matty. "I say, let the young folks alone. We all were young once. For my part, I wish I was in Matty's place. Here, Dan, can't you take me ridin' like you used to do before we got married?"

"I can take you ridin' all right, Sally," agreed Dan placidly. "Yonder's the same old buggy and the same old horse and the same old road, but the ridin' would be mighty different from the ridin' we

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had before we got married. Before we started, we'd have to canvass this crowd and find somebody to take care of the children, and after we started, we'd both be wonderin' if Sarah wasn't drowned in the creek, and if Daniel hadn't been kicked by somebody's horse, and I don't believe there'd be much pleasure in such a ride."

"I reckon you're right," said Sally, laughing with the rest. "And that's why I say let young people alone; they're seein' their best days. Dan courted for me six months, and if I had to live my life over again, I'd make it six years."

Sally was one of those daring spirits who do not hesitate to say what others scarce venture to think.

"Maybe I wouldn't 'a' held out," observed Dan. "Courtin's mighty wearin' work, and I ain't a Jacob by any manner o' means."

"Well, if you hadn't held out," said Sally recklessly, "somebody else would 'a' taken it up where you left off. Oh! you women needn't say a word. If you want to pretend you like dish-washin' and cookin' and mendin' better than courtin', you're welcome to do it. But if I was just young again, I wouldn't get married till I was too old to be courted, for courtin' time's the only time a woman sees any peace and happiness. You, Daniel! You, Sally! Get up out of that dusty road."

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"Mary," said John Crawford, in a low voice, "you get your things together, and we'll follow Matty's example."

Mary hesitated. Conscience said, "Stay to preaching"; but the laughing and talk had grown wearisome to her, and the strange feeling in her head had returned. So before the hour for the second service came, they stole quietly away, their rockaway wheels cutting the trail left by the erring young people who had gone before them.

The way to the bridge was a shady avenue, the trees in that rich alluvial soil growing to extraordinary height and grandeur, and in the comfortable homes and well-tilled farms there was a cheerful presentment of the legendary "Man with the Hoe." Only one melancholy spot by the roadside marred the traveler's pleasure. It was a country graveyard, walled around with stone, surmounted with an iron railing to protect it from the desecrating tread of beast or man. Nearly a century ago the hand of some woman had planted on one of the graves a spray of myrtle and a lily of the valley, and Nature had laid her leveling touch on each grassy mound and changed the place outwardly to a garden of flowers. But neither spring's white glory of lilies and azure of myrtle, the rich foliage of summer, the crimson splendor of autumn, nor winter's deepest snow could hide from the passer-by the secret of the place. Young lovers like Matty and Percival might go by with laughter and smiles unchecked; not yet for them the thought of death. But John touched the horse to a quicker pace and looked to the other side of the road where sunny fields of grain spoke of life more abundantly, and Mary drew closer to John's side, saying in her heart: "I wish there was no death in this world."

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In the middle of the bridge they paused for a moment to look up and down the shining river, and John recalled the tale, still told by the oldest inhabitants, of the spring of '65, when the river rose forty-five feet in nine hours and washed the bridge away. Beyond the bridge the road turned to the right, following the stream in a friendly way, and terminating at a fording place opposite a large sand bar known as "The Island." A giant sycamore in the middle cast a welcome shadow in the brilliant sunshine, and a fringe of willows encircled it. Under these, near the water's edge, lay heaps of mussel shells,—white, pink, yellow, and purple,—the gift of the river to the land, and a reminder of the April freshet. The carriage wheels grated on the sand-bar, and as they caught sight of the treasures the children gave a cry of delight, for no shells from a tropic ocean are more beautiful in color than the common mussel shells of Kentucky rivers, and not infrequently a pearl is found within the tinted casket.

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"Now, gather all the shells you want," said John, "while your mother and me sit down here and rest in the shade."

Again he made a bed of the cushions from the carriage, and closing her eyes Mary fell into blissful half-consciousness. The minister had read David's psalm of rejoicing at the morning service, and one line of it, "He leadeth me beside the still waters; He restoreth my soul," floated through her brain like a slumber song, with an obbligato of rippling water and the faint whispering of willows. Once she drifted to the very shores of sleep, to be gently called back by the laughter of the children; and when they turned homeward in the late afternoon, she felt strong for the next day's burden, only she hoped that no one would come to use the chart, until she had time to finish the spring cleaning. She wanted to get back into the old peaceful routine of work, in which each day had its duties and every duty brought with it time and strength for its performance.

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Monday morning passed without any interruption, and by half-past twelve o'clock the work belonging to the day was done and dinner was over. But just as she began washing the dishes, there was a noise of wheels on the 'pike. Mary gave a start and almost dropped the dish she was holding.

"Oh, John!" she exclaimed, "see who it is." John stepped out on the back porch and looked up the road. "It looks like Sally and Dan McElrath and the two children," he said, coming back into the kitchen.

Mary compressed her lips to keep back a sigh of dismay. "Yes," she said quietly, "Sally told me yesterday she would be over some time this week to cut out a tea jacket by my chart, but I didn't expect her this soon. I was just thinking I'd go up-stairs and take a nap as soon as I got through with the dishes. But it's all right. You put a stick of wood in the stove, John, to keep my dish-water hot, and I'll go out and ask Sally in."

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John was looking at her very earnestly.

"Honey," he said, "your hair looks as if you hadn't combed it to-day. You run up-stairs and fix yourself, and I'll see to Sally and Dan."

And while Mary darted up the back stairs, John hurried softly into the parlor. He could hear Sally's high, clear voice, and the wagon was almost at the gate. It was a bold emprise on which he was bent, and the time was short. On the top shelf of the old cherry secretary that had belonged to Mary's grandfather lay the chart. Looking fearfully around, he seized it, tiptoed to the kitchen, opened the stove door, and dropped the hateful thing on a bed of glowing hickory coals. Then he put in a stick of wood, according to Mary's behest, and the next moment he was at the front door, placing chairs on the porch and calling out a welcome to the alighting guests.

"Come right in, Dan. Glad to see you both. Mary's been looking for you. Sit down here on the porch where it's cool. Here, Lucy Ellen, here's Sarah and Daniel come to play with you."

"What on earth did John mean by saying my hair needed combing?" soliloquized Mary up-stairs, as she looked in the glass at the shining braids of her hair; "I fixed it just before dinner, and it's as smooth and nice as it can be." She hurried down to see that her guests lacked no attention demanded by hospitality. John was likely to be forgetful about such matters.

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"I was just saying, Mary," Sally called out as soon as she caught sight of her hostess, "that Dan was on his way to town, and I'm going to stay here with the children till he comes back. But I want to lay the chart on my goods right away, for I'm afraid I've got a scant pattern for that tea jacket, and if I have, I can give Dan a sample of the goods, and he can bring me an extra yard from town. And if you'll bring the chart out, I'll lay off my goods right here and now, so Dan won't lose any time on my account."

"Oh! never mind about me," said Dan, with the air and accent of one who has suffered long and given up hope. "I've been losin' time on your account for the last fifteen years, and this trip ain't goin' to be an exception."

Every one laughed, for Sally's weakness was known of all men. Aunt Tabby McElrath once said that if the road from Dan's place to town was ten miles long, and there was a house every quarter of a mile, Sally would make just forty visits going and coming.

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"Get the chart, John," said Mary, "and it won't take us two minutes to find out whether there's enough goods. It's on the top shelf of the old secretary in the parlor."

John went obediently. "Where did you say that chart was?" he called back.

"On the old secretary. I saw it there just before dinner," answered Mary.

"I saw it there, too," responded John, "but it ain't there now."

Mary hastened to the parlor. "Why no, it isn't here," she exclaimed in dismay. "Who could have taken it?"

"Ask the children," suggested Sally from the porch, where she sat cheerfully rocking and fanning herself. "Whenever there's anything missing at our house, some of the children can tell who's mislaid it." But Lucy Ellen and little John with one voice made haste to defend themselves against the visitor's accusation. By this time Dan had come into the parlor, and the three stood looking at each other in silent perplexity.

Dan was openly worried over the delay, Mary was sympathetically distressed, and John's face expressed nothing but the deepest concern over the situation.

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"Maybe it's up-stairs," he said. "Suppose you and Sally run up there and search while Dan and myself'll search down here. That'll save time."

"What sort of a lookin' thing is that chart?" asked Dan, as he got down on his knees and made a dive under the sofa.

"Well, I'd recognize it if I saw it," said John, "but, come to think of it, I don't know as I could tell anybody exactly how it looks. It's something done up in a roll and tied with red tape."

"Done up in a roll and tied with red tape," repeated Dan, meditatively, opening closet doors and peering into corners, while he tried to keep in his mind an image of the lost chart as described by his fellow searcher. "Is this it?"

"Well, now that's something like it," said John. "I'll ask Mary. Here, Mary, is this it?"

Mary leaned over the railing with hopeful expectancy in her glance.

"Why, John, that's my gossamer case with the gossamer in it. I thought you knew my chart better than that. Tell the children to look, too. They'd know it if they saw it."

"I'm lookin' as hard as I can," piped Lucy Ellen from the closet under the stairs, while little John seized a long stick, ran to the henhouse, poked the setting hens off their eggs, and searched diligently in every nest for Mother's lost chart.

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"Don't stand on ceremony, Dan. Open every door you come to," commanded John, as he rummaged in the sideboard and tumbled the piles of snowy damask. Thus encouraged, Dan walked into the pantry and gazed helplessly at the jars of preserves and jelly on the top shelf. He lifted the top from Mary's buttermilk jar. No chart there.

"Done up in a roll and tied with red tape," he muttered, opening a tin box and disclosing a loaf of bread and a plate of tea-cakes.

"Here, John," he exclaimed, "this prowlin' around in other people's houses don't suit me at all. Makes me feel like a thief and a robber. I'll go out and see to my horses, and you keep on lookin'."

And John continued to look, as the shepherd looked for the lost sheep, as the woman looked for the piece of silver. Now and then he uttered an ejaculation of wonder and regret, and raised his voice to inquire of Mary if the lost had been found.

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Mary's search up-stairs was greatly hindered by Sally's digressions. Some minds move in straight lines, others in curves, but Sally's mental processes were all in the nature of tangents.

"You look in the closet, Sally," said Mary, "and I'll go through the bureau drawers."

But the novelty of being up-stairs in Mary's house made Sally forget the cause of her being there.

"Gracious! Mary, how do you keep your room so nice? This is what I call a young girl's room. I used to be able to have things clean and pretty before I was married, but Daniel and Sarah make the whole house look like a hurrah's nest. And there's your great-grandmother's counterpane on the bed, white as the driven snow, too. I wonder how many generations that's going to wear. My, what a pretty view you've got from this window. Ain't that Pilot Knob over yonder, just beyond that clump of cedars? Yes, that must be old Pilot. I've heard my grandfather tell many a time how his father camped at the foot of the knob, and sat up all night to keep the bears and wolves away."

Mary was opening doors and drawers in a hasty but conscientious search.

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"You'd better help me look for the chart, Sally," she said gently. "Two pairs of eyes are better than one, and you know Dan's in a hurry." But Sally did not move. Her eyes were fixed on the purple haze that hung over old Pilot, and her mind was lost in memories of her grandfather's legends.

"Dan's always in a hurry," she remarked placidly. "I tell him he gets mighty little pleasure out of life, rushin' through it the way he does. That white spot over on that tallest knob must be the stone quarry. If it was a clear day, I believe you could see the big rocks. And here comes a locomotive. How pretty the white smoke looks streamin' back and settlin' in the valleys."

"We might as well go down," said Mary. "There's no use looking in the spare room; that hasn't been opened for a week."

"Sally!" cried Dan, putting his head in at the front door and giving a backward glance at his restless horse, "if that note I've got in the bank is protested, you and your jacket'll be to blame. It's after two o'clock, and I can't wait any longer."

"All right," said Sally, "me and the children will go to town with you."

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"Where are the children?" asked Mary.

"My gracious! have we lost the chart and the children, too?" laughed Sally. "No, there they are, 'way down by the duck pond. Sarah! Daniel! Come right here! We're goin' to town."

"Hurry up!" shouted their father, "or I'll leave you here."

The prospect of a trip to town and the fear of being left behind doubled the children's speed and brought them breathless and excited to the front gate. Dan tossed them into the wagon, as if each had been a sack of meal, and Sally clambered in without assistance.

"As soon as I find the chart, Sally, I'll send it over to you by the first person that passes," said Mary. The loss of the chart seemed a breach of hospitality, a discourtesy to her guest, and she wanted to make amends.

"That wouldn't be a bit of use," said Sally, "for I can't tell head nor tail of the thing unless you show me. I'll drop in again in a day or so and do my cuttin' and fittin' here."

"Yes," said John heartily, "that'll be the best way. If Mary was to send you the chart, the person she sent it by might lose it, and that'd be a pity, as it's the only one in the neighborhood. You come over and bring the children with you and spend the day, and you and Mary can have a good time sewin' and talkin'."

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"That's what I'll do. Look for me day after to-morrow or the day after that. I reckon the chart'll certainly turn up by that time."

"I'm sure it will," said John, "for I'm goin' to spend all my spare time lookin' for it."

Dan clucked to the horse and shook the reins over its back.

"Well, good-by," cried Sally blithely, "I'll be certain to—"

But the rest of her words were drowned in the rattle of wheels and clatter of hoofs, for Dan was laying on the whip in a desperate resolve to get to town before the bank closed.

Mary stood silent with a hurt look on her face. How could John ask Sally to spend the day when he knew how tired she was? It was all she could do to keep the tears back.

"It's my opinion," said John, "that we'll never see that chart again. I believe it's gone like grandfather Ervin's beaver hat."

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Mary knew the story of the beaver hat. It was a family legend of the supernatural that John was fond of telling. But she had little faith that her chart had gone the way of grandfather Ervin's hat, and she went back to the kitchen, wondering how John could have been so thoughtless, and dreading the day after to-morrow that would bring Sally and those troublesome children. John followed her, and opening the stove door, he gently stirred the ashes within, thus effacing the last trace of the chart; then he took his way to the barn, where he sank down on a pile of fodder and laughed till the tears ran down his face.

"Edwin Booth couldn't 'a' done it better," he gasped. "I reckon I'll have to quit farmin' and go on the stage. Didn't know I was such a born actor. It was actin' a lie, too, but it's put a stop to Mary's troubles, and I don't feel like repentin' yet. I reckon you might call it a lie of 'necessity and mercy', like the work that's allowed on the Sabbath day."

And at that precise moment Sally was saying to Dan:

"Did you ever see a man so put out over anything as John Crawford was over not findin' that chart? If he'd lost his watch or his purse, he couldn't have put himself to more pains to find it. There never was a more accommodatin' neighbor than Mary, and John's just like her. You don't often see a couple as well matched. Generally, if one's accommodatin' and neighborly, the other's stingy and mean. But Mary wasn't a bit more anxious to find that chart for me than John was."

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That night after supper John seated himself on the front porch. The warm spring air was sweet with the perfume of May bloom, and from every pond there was a chorus of joy over the passing of winter. He heard the voices of his children and his wife talking together as Mary washed the dishes, Lucy Ellen wiped them, and little John placed them on the table. Home, wife, children, and the spring of the year! The heart of the man was glad and he smiled at the thought of the deed he had done that afternoon.

"John," said Mary, coming out on the porch with the dish towel over her arm, "hadn't you better be looking for that chart? You know you promised Sally, and I don't want her to be disappointed again."

The light from one of the front windows shone full on John's face, and something about his eyes and mouth gave Mary a sudden revelation.

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"John," she said severely, "do you know where that chart is?"

John returned her gaze with unflinching eyes. "Mary," he said slowly and deliberately, "I do not know where that chart is."

Another lie? Oh, no! When a thing is dust and ashes, who knows where it is?

But the answer did not satisfy Mary. She continued to look at him as a mother might look at a naughty child.

"John," she said, "did you—I believe—yes, I know you did. Oh, John! How could you? What made you do it?"

"Yes, I did, and I'd do it again," said John doggedly. "Do you think I'm goin' to have the neighbors tormentin' the life out of you on account of that—"

He stopped short, for a damp towel was against his face, and Mary's bare arms were around his neck.

"Oh, John! And that was the reason you asked Sally to come back. I've been feeling so hurt, for I thought it looked as if you didn't care for me. I might have known better. Please forgive me. I'll never think such a thing of you again."

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There was something damp on the other side of his face now, and reaching around John drew the tired wife down on the bench beside him and let her sob out her joy and her weariness on his shoulder.

"But it was a help," she sighed at last, wiping her eyes on her kitchen apron. "And I don't know how I'm going to do my spring sewing without it."

John stretched out his right leg, thrust his hand into his pocket, and pulled out a ragged leather purse, not too well filled.

"What's mine's yours, Mary," he said, tossing it into her lap. "Get a seamstress to do your sewing. If I catch you at that machine again, I'll make kindlin' wood and old iron out of it, and if that

agent ever comes on the place again with his blamed charts, there's a loaded shotgun waitin' for him."

OLD MAHOGANY

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"Come in, Maria Marvin, come in. No, it ain't too early for visitors. I've jest finished sweepin' and dustin', and that's exactly the time I want to see company; and when company comes at exactly the right time, they get a double welcome from me. Have this chair, and I'll lay your bonnet right here on the table.

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"Yes, I've been refurnishin' some. Got rid o' all the old plunder that 'd been accumulatin' under this roof ever since Noah built his ark, and bought a spick and span new outfit, golden oak every bit of it, and right up to day before yesterday, and to-day, and day after to-morrow, when it comes to style. I reckon Mother and grandmother and great-grandmother have turned over in their graves, but I can't help it. That old mahogany furniture has been my cross, and I've borne it faithfully from a child up, and when I saw a chance o' layin' it down, I didn't stop to think what my ancestors would say about it; I jest dropped the cross and drew one good, long breath.

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"You'd think I'd hate to part with the family belongin's? Well, you wouldn't think so if you knew how much trouble these same belongin's have been to me all my born days. You know everybody has idols. Some women make idols of their children, and now and then you'll find a woman bowin' down and worshippin' her husband, but Mother's idols were chairs and tables and bedsteads. You've noticed, haven't you, that there's always one child in a family that'll get nearly everything belongin' to the family? They'll claim this and that and the other, and the rest o' the children will give in to 'em jest to keep from havin' a quarrel. Well, Mother was the claimin' one in our family, and whatever she claimed she got, and whatever she got she held on to it. If Mother'd been content with the things that her mother handed down to her, it wouldn't 'a' been so bad, but there never was a member o' the family died that Mother didn't manage to get hold o' some of the belongin's. If there was a sale, she was the first one there, and she'd take her seat right under the auctioneer's hammer, and if she made up her mind to have an old chair or an old table, why, nobody ever could outbid her; and in the course o' time the house got to be more like an old junk shop than a home. I used to tell Mother she got everything belongin' to her dead kinfolks except their tombstones, and I wouldn't 'a' been surprised any day to come home and find one or two nice old gravestones settin' up on the mantel-piece for ornaments, or propped up handy in a corner.

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"And every piece of that old mahogany, Maria, was polished till you could see your face in it. The first thing after breakfast, Mother'd get a piece o' chamois skin or an old piece o' flannel, and she'd go around rubbin' up her chairs and tables and lookin' for scratches on 'em; and as soon as I was old enough to hold a rag, I had to do a certain amount o' polishin' every day, and when Mother's rheumatism settled in her arms, all the polishin' fell to me. It looked like the furniture was on Mother's mind night and day, and it was: 'Samantha, have you polished your grandfather's secretary?' 'Samantha, don't forget to rub off the parlor center-table.' No matter what I wanted to do, I couldn't do it till that old furniture was attended to. When I look back, Maria, it seems to me I've been livin' all my life in the valley of the shadow of old mahogany. You know how it is when the sun comes out after a long spell of cloudy weather. Well, that's jest the way it was the day that old mahogany furniture went out o' the house, and this pretty yellow furniture came in. I really believe that was the happiest day of my life.

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"Yes, there's a heap of associations connected with old furniture, and Mother's old furniture had more associations than most anybody's. I believe there was enough associations to 'a' filled every one o' the bureau drawers, and if you'd put the associations on the tables or on the beds, there wouldn't 'a' been room there for anything else. And that's exactly why I wanted to get rid o' that mahogany furniture. I believe I could 'a' stood the furniture, if it hadn't been for the associations. What good did it do me to look at that old four-poster that used to stand in the front room upstairs and think o' the time I laid on that bed six mortal weeks, when I had typhoid fever? What pleasure could I get out o' that old secretary that used to stand yonder, when every time I looked at it I could see Grandfather Stearns sittin' there writin' a mile-long sermon on election and predestination, and me—a little child then—knowin' I'd have to sit up in church the next Sunday and listen to that sermon, when I wanted to be out-doors playin'?

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"And besides my own associations, there was Mother's. She'd point out that old armchair that used to stand by the west window and tell how Uncle Abner Stearns set in that chair for six years after he was paralyzed; and that old haircloth sofa,—you remember that, don't you?—she'd tell how Grandmother Stearns was sittin' on that when she had her stroke o' apoplexy; and betwixt the furniture and the associations, it was jest like livin' in a cemetery. I told Mother one day that I was tired o' sittin' in my great-grandfather's chairs, and sleepin' on my great-grandfather's bed, and eatin' out o' my great-grandmother's china and silver, and Mother says: 'Samantha, you never did have proper respect for your family.' But, Maria Marvin, I tell you as I told Mother, I'm somethin' more than a Member of the Family: I'm Myself, and I want to live my own life, and I've found out that if people live their own lives, they've got to get from under the shadow of their ancestors' tombstones.

"What did I do with the old mahogany? Sold it. That's what I did. And if you've got any old stuff up in the garret or down in the cellar or out in the woodshed, get it out right away, for no matter how old and battered and broken up it is, you can sell it for a good price. They tell me, Maria,

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that new-fashioned things is all out o' fashion, and old-fashioned things is in the fashion. Curious, ain't it? All my life I been findin' fault with Mother because she was always hoardin' up old family relics, and now all the rich folks are huntin' around in every crack and corner for old mahogany and old cherry and old walnut,—anything, jest so it's old.

"You've heard about that rich lady that's bought the old Schuyler place? Here's her card with her name on it:

Mrs. Edith A. Van Arnheim.

"Well, last Monday mornin' about this time, jest as I was finishin' up my mornin' work, I heard a knockin' at the front door, and when I opened it there stood a strange lady all dressed in silks and satins and a young girl with her. I said 'Good mornin',' and she said: 'Does Miss Samantha Mayfield live here?' And I says: 'It's Samantha Mayfield you're talkin' to.' And she says: 'I'm Mrs. Van Arnheim. I beg your pardon for calling so early, but—have you any old furniture?' And I says; 'Old furniture? Why, I haven't got anything but old furniture.' And they both smiled real pleasant, and the young girl said: 'Oh, please let us look at it! I do love old furniture.' And I says: 'Walk right in, and look all you please. Furniture never was hurt by bein' looked at.'

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"Well, they both walked in and looked around, and for a minute neither one of 'em spoke; and then the young girl drew a long breath, and says she: 'Did you *ever* see *anything* so *perfectly gorgeous*?'

"And she rushed up to Great-grandfather Stearns's secretary like she was goin' to hug it, and says she: 'Heppelwhite! Genuine Heppelwhite! Look at those lovely panes of glass!' And then she flew over to that old bow-legged chair that stood yonder, and says she: 'Chippendale! Upon my word! Was there ever anything as exquisite as those legs!'

"And she peeped into the dining-room and give a little scream, and called her mother to come and see that old battered-up thing that great-aunt Matildy used to keep her china and glass in, and she called it 'a real Sheraton cabinet', and she went on over 'the grain of the wood' and the 'color of the wood' till you'd 'a' thought that old press was somethin' that'd come straight down from heaven. The lady didn't say much, but she looked mighty pleased, and she went around touchin' things with the tips of her fingers and examinin' the legs and arms and backs of things to see if they were in good repair. Pretty soon she turned around to me and says sort o' wishful and hesitatin': 'I suppose there's no use asking you if you'd sell any of this furniture, Miss Mayfield.' And I says: 'What makes you suppose that?' And she says: 'Because people are always very much attached to their old family furniture, and even if they don't care for it and are not using it, I find they don't care to let any one else have it.' And I says: 'Well, there's nothin' of the dog in the manger about me, ma'am, and I'm not attached to my old furniture; it's been attached to me, and I'd be thankful to anybody that would help me get loose from it.'

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"She laughed real hearty, and the young girl says: 'How perfectly lovely!' And then we went through the parlor and the hall and the dining-room, they pickin' out the furniture they wanted, while I set the prices on it. And when we got through the young girl says: 'Would you let us go up-stairs?'

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"So up-stairs we went, and there wasn't a four-poster bed or a rickety table or a broken-legged chair that she didn't say was 'darling' or 'dear' or 'gorgeous' or 'heavenly'; and they wanted pretty near everything that was up-stairs. When we got through pricin' these, the lady says: 'Is this all the old mahogany you have, Miss Mayfield?' and then I happened to think o' the garret. I hadn't set foot up there for ten years or more, but I remembered there was a lot o' old truck that Mother didn't have room for down-stairs, and it'd been stored away there ever since goodness knows when. So up to the garret we went, they holdin' up their silk skirts, and me apologizin' for the dirt. They peered around, and didn't seem to mind a bit when they got their kid gloves all soiled handlin' the old junk that was settin' around in every hole and corner. And the young girl, she'd give a little scream every time she dragged out a table or a chair, and says she: 'Miss Mayfield, this is the most interesting place I ever was in.' And I says: 'If you're interested in dirt and rubbish, I reckon this is an interestin' place.'

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"Well, if you'll believe me, Maria Marvin, they wanted everything in that garret, even down to the old pewter warmin'-pan that used to belong to Mother's sister Amanda, and that she got from her husband's family, the Hicks. And the young girl looked out o' the gable window at the south end, and says she: 'Oh! what a lovely old gyarden!' And the lady dropped the old candlestick she was lookin' at, and come and looked over the young girl's shoulder. The gyarden did look mighty pretty with the roses and honeysuckles and pinks all in bloom, and the lady said: 'Oh! how beautiful! How beautiful!' and all the rest of the time we were up in the garret, she stood there at the window and leaned out and looked at the gyarden, and after that she didn't seem to care much about the furniture. She jest let the young girl do the buyin' and the talkin', and once I heard her sigh a long, deep sigh, jest as if she was thinkin' about somethin' that happened a long time ago. And when we went down-stairs, she asked me to give her some roses and honeysuckles; and while I was gatherin' a big bunch of Mother's damask roses for her, she was walkin' up and down the paths, gatherin' a flower here and a leaf there, but to look at her face, Maria, you'd 'a' thought that she was walkin' in a graveyard and every flower-bed was a grave; and once, when she stooped down and broke off a piece of ambrosia and smelt it, I could see there was tears in her eyes. Well, Maria, they were jest as crazy about old-fashioned flowers as they were about old-fashioned furniture. I pulled a big bunch o' damask roses for both of 'em, and they said they wanted roots of all the old flowers,—Mother's hundred-leaf rose and the Maiden's Blush and the

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cinnamon rose, and all the spring flowers and even the tansy and sage. The lady said they could buy all these things, but that she believed the flowers you got out of old-fashioned gyardens like mine smelled sweeter and bloomed better than anything you'd buy. And she's goin' to give me a lot of new-fashioned flowers to freshen up my old gyarden, and with new furniture in my house and new flowers in my gyarden, why, I feel like I'm takin' a new start in life. Why, actually, Maria, I've been jest as tired of the old flowers as I've been of the old beds and tables,—the same old crocuses and buttercups and hyacinths and chrysanthemums comin' up every spring in the same old place, in the same old beds, and the same old weeds to be pulled up every year.

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"Maybe you think it's wicked in me, Maria, to feel the way I do about old things. Mother always thought so, and I remember once hearin' her tell the minister that Samantha was jest like the Athenians in the Bible, always runnin' after some new thing; and she was always sighin' and sayin': 'Samantha, you have no reverence in your nature.' And finally, one day, I said to her: 'Mother, I've got jest as much reverence as you have. The difference between us is that you reverence old things, and I reverence new ones.'

"But I mustn't forget to tell you about the old cradle, Maria. That cradle was Mother's special idol. It was a little, heavy, wooden thing, so black with age that you couldn't tell what kind o' wood it was made out of, and Mother said the first Stearnses that ever come to this country brought that cradle with 'em in the ship they sailed in. Well, that little old cradle was sittin' way back in the garret on top o' the old oak bed-clothes chest that Grandmother Stearns packed her quilts in, when she moved from Connecticut and come to Ohio. And the young girl spied that cradle, and says she: 'Oh! What a darling cradle!' And then she stopped and blushed as red as a rose, and the lady jest smiled and says: 'Would you sell me the little cradle, Miss Mayfield?' And I says: 'You may have it and welcome. If there is anything an old maid hasn't any use for, it's a cradle.'

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"They say the young girl is goin' to be married soon, and I reckon some day that pretty young thing's children'll be lyin' in the old Stearns cradle; and a lot o' that old mahogany, they tell me, goes to the furnishin' of her room. Maybe she'll be writin' her letters at Grandfather's secretary, and sleepin' on Grandmother's old canopy bed. It don't seem right, Maria, for a pretty young bride to be beginnin' life with a lot o' dead folks' furniture; but then, she won't have the associations, and it's the associations that make old furniture so unhealthy to have around the house.

"I reckon I must be some kin to the tribe o' Indians I was readin' about in my missionary paper last Sunday. Every time anybody dies, they burn everything that belonged to the dead person, and then they burn down the place he died in and build a new one. That seems right wasteful, don't it, Maria? But it's a good deal wholesomer to do that way, than to clutter up your house with dead folks' belongin's like we do. And that's why I'm gettin' so much pleasure out o' this new oak furniture. It's mine, jest mine, and nobody else's. It didn't come down to me from my great-grandmother; I went to the store and picked it out myself. No dead person's hands ever touched it, and there's not a single association hangin' anywheres around it.

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"Yes, Maria, I got a good price for everything I sold. Because I didn't want it, that's no reason why I should give it away. I could see the lady wanted it mighty bad, so I valued it accordin' to what I thought it'd be worth to her, and when I saw how willin' she was to pay my price, I was right sorry I hadn't asked more.

"She was one o' the high-steppers, that lady was, but as sweet-talkin' and nice-mannered as you please, and when she wrote out the check and handed it to me, she says: 'When can I get the furniture?' 'Right now,' says I, 'if you want it right now.' 'But,' says she, 'what will you do without furniture? Hadn't you better get in your new beds and chairs and tables before I take the old ones away?' And I says: 'Don't you worry about me, ma'am; it's only four miles from here to town, and by the time you get this old mahogany rubbish out, I'll have my new golden oak things in; so don't you hold back on my account.'

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"And she looked at me in a curious sort o' way, and says she: 'Don't you mind givin' up this old mahogany? Would you just as soon have new golden oak furniture?' And I says: 'No, I wouldn't jest as soon; I'd a good deal rather have it.'

"And she laughed real pleasant, and says she: 'I'm so glad you feel that way about it. I always feel guilty when I buy old furniture that the owner is unwilling to part with, no matter how good a price I pay for it.' And I says: 'Well, you can have a clear conscience in the matter of buyin' my old furniture. This check and the golden oak I'm goin' to buy with it is perfectly satisfactory to me.'

"And what do you reckon I'm goin' to do with that money, Maria? I reckon people think that because I've lived here all my life I've enjoyed doin' so. But I haven't. I've been jest as tired of Goshen neighborhood as I ever was of my old mahogany,—the old roads and the old fences and the old farms,—yes, and the old people, too. Maria, I get tired of everything, even myself, and now I'm goin' to travel and see the world, that's what I'm goin' to do. What's the use in livin' sixty or seventy years in a world like this and never seein' it. Why, you might as well be a worm in a hickory nut. And, Maria, I take out my old geography sometimes, when I'm sittin' here alone in the evenin', and I look at the map of North America, and there's the big Atlantic ocean on one side and the big Pacific ocean on the other; and all the big rivers and lakes in between flowin' down to the big Gulf of Mexico; and here I am stuck fast in this little old place, and the most water I've ever seen is Drake's Creek and Little Barren River! And I look on the map at the

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mountains runnin' up and down this country, the Rocky Mountains and the Alleghanies and all the rest of 'em, and the highest ground I've ever seen is Pilot Knob! I'm not afraid to die, Maria, but when I think of all the things that's to be seen in this world, and how I'm not seein' 'em, I just pray: 'Lord, don't let me go to the next world till I've seen somethin' of this one.' And now my prayer's answered. I don't know whether I'll go east or west or north or south; but I'm goin' to see the ocean, and I'm goin' to see the mountains before I die, all on account o' that mahogany furniture; I never supposed the day would come when I'd be thankful for that old plunder; but sometimes, Maria, the things we don't want turn out to be our greatest blessin's.

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"I reckon it's mighty poor taste on my part to want new furniture in place o' that old mahogany. All the time I was showin' 'em around, the lady and her daughter kept sayin': 'How artistic!' 'What classic lines!' and I reckon the reason they looked at me so curious when I said I'd rather have this golden oak, was that they was pityin' me for not knowin' what's 'artistic.' Now, I may not be artistic, Maria, but I've got a taste of my own, and what's the use in havin' a taste of your own unless you use it? I might jest as well try to use somebody else's eyes as to use somebody else's taste. That old mahogany pleased my grandmother's taste and my mother's taste, but it don't please mine; and I'm no more bound to use my grandmother's old furniture than I am to wear my grandmother's old clothes.

"Don't go, Maria. Sit down a minute longer, for I haven't told you the best part of the story yet. After the lady had said good-by and was out of the door, she turned back, and says she: 'Miss Mayfield, when I get the furniture in order, I'm going to send my carriage for you, and you must come over and see if you can recognize your old friends in their new dress and their new home.' I never believed she was goin' to send *her* carriage for *me*, Maria, but she did. And she took me all over the house, and they've made it over the same as you'd make over an old dress; and it ain't a house any longer, it's a palace. Don't ask me to tell you how it looks, for I can't. I've always wondered what sort of places kings and queens lived in, and now I know. There wasn't a room that didn't have some of my old mahogany in it, but at first I couldn't believe it was the same furniture I'd sold the lady. She'd had all the varnish scraped off, and it was as soft and shiny-lookin' as satin, even that little, old black cradle, and the lady said that when the furniture man began to scrape that, he found it was solid rosewood. We went into the library, and there was Grandfather's old secretary, lookin' so fine and grand, Maria, it took my breath clean away. There wasn't a dent or a scratch on it, and it shone in the light jest like a piece of polished silver, and the prettiest curtains you ever saw fallin' on each side of it. It looked exactly like it belonged in that room. And it does belong there. Why, as I was standin' there lookin' at it, I thought if that old secretary could speak, it would say: 'I've found my place at last.' And it come over me all at once, Maria, that the doctrine of foreordination holds good with things as well as people. That old mahogany never belonged to me nor to Mother. It jest stopped over a while with us, while it was on its way to the lady, and it was hers from the very day it was made. I tell you, Maria, things belong to the folks that can appreciate 'em. That furniture was jest chairs and tables and bedsteads to Mother and me; but the lady knew all about it, when it was made and where it was made, and the name of the man that first made it. And after we'd looked at everything in the house, she took me out to see the gyarden. Such a gyarden! She said it was jest like one she'd seen over in England, and she was plantin' the same kind of flowers in it. The beds were all sorts of shapes, and there was a pool of water in the middle with water-lilies in it, and right by the pool was somethin' that tells the time of day pretty near as well as a clock, jest by the shadow on it.

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There was a hedge planted all around the gyarden, and the gyardner was settin' out all kinds of flowers, and there was one bed of pansies and another of geraniums in full bloom, and I said: 'I don't know why you wanted my old-fashioned flowers, when you've got such a gyarden as this.' And she smiled and looked down at the geraniums, and says she: 'These flowers don't mean anything to me. But your roses and honeysuckles and pinks mean everything; they are joy and sorrow and love and youth,—everything I have had and lost.' Hearin' her talk, Maria, was jest like readin' a book. And then, she took me around to another gyarden at the back of the house, and showed me a bed, and all the roots and slips that she'd got from me were growin' in it. The gyardner 'tends to the rest of the flowers, but he never touches this bed; the lady weeds it and waters it with her own hands. Now, I don't want anything around me that reminds me of what I've had and lost, but she's one of the kind that loves associations.

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"No, I haven't re-furnished all the up-stairs rooms, Maria. What's the use o' havin' furnished rooms that you never use? Yes, it does look pretty empty, but after livin' in a jungle of old mahogany these many years, you don't know what a blessed relief it is to have a few empty spots about the house. Every house ought to have one or two empty rooms, Maria, jest for folks to rest their eyes on.

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"Yes, I did keep one piece o' the family furniture, but it wasn't mahogany. It was that little plain rockin'-chair with the oak-split bottom; there it sets in the corner. Mother used to sit in that chair when she washed and dressed us children and rocked the baby to sleep. She liked it because it was low and hadn't any arms for the baby's head to get bumped on. I can look at it and see Mother holdin' the baby in her arms and rockin' and singin':

'Hush, my babe, lie still and slumber,'

and I'd rather have that common little chair than all the old mahogany that belonged to my great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers. There ain't an unpleasant association connected with that chair, and furthermore, I don't have to polish it.

"Yes, this dress is rather gay, Maria, but don't you think it matches the golden oak furniture? I

always like to have things in keepin' with each other, and as long as I had to live in the midst o' old mahogany, it seemed natural and proper to wear brown and black and gray. But now I feel like mixin' in a little blue and red and yellow with the brown and black and gray, and when your feelin's and your clothes and your furniture correspond, it certainly does make a comfortable condition for you.

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"I'll be gettin' married next? Well, maybe I will, Maria Marvin, maybe I will. Gettin' rid o' that old mahogany seems to 'a' taken about fifty years off my shoulders, and if I should happen to find a man that'd match up with my new furniture and suit me as well as that golden oak dresser does, I may get married, after all.

"Do you have to go? Well, come again, Maria, and if you happen to meet any o' the neighbors, tell 'em to drop in and take a look at my golden oak furniture."

MILLSTONES AND STUMBLING-BLOCKS

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"I do believe that's Margaret Williams!" exclaimed Mrs. Martin, thrusting aside the curtain and peering through the tangle of morning-glory vines that shaded her parlor window. She turned away and began arranging the chairs and straightening the table cover with the nervous haste of a fastidious housekeeper unprepared for company.

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But there was no need for haste. The expected caller paused at the gate and seemed to be making a critical survey of the house and premises. Her air was that of a person examining a piece of property with a view to purchasing it. She walked slowly along the garden path, gazing up at the sloping roof and the dormer windows, and on the first step of the porch she paused and looked around at the tidy front yard, with its clumps of shrubbery, fine old trees, and beds of blossoming flowers. Within, Mrs. Martin was nervously awaiting her visitor's knock. She had taken off her kitchen apron and smoothed her hair down with her hands. But no knock was heard, for Mrs. Williams placidly continued her survey of the house and its surroundings, until the voice of her hostess interrupted her.

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"Why, Mrs. Williams! Have you been standin' out here all this time? I must be losin' my hearin' when I can't hear a person knockin' at the door."

"Nothin's the matter with your hearin'," responded Mrs. Williams, following her hostess into the shady parlor; "I hadn't knocked."

She seated herself in a rocking-chair that suited her generous proportions and began looking at the inside of the house with the same business-like scrutiny she had given the outside.

"We're havin' some pleasant weather now," said Mrs. Martin, by way of a conversational beginning.

"Mighty pleasant weather," said Mrs. Williams, "but I came here this mornin' to talk about somethin' a good deal more important than the weather."

Long acquaintance had never wholly accustomed Mrs. Martin to the straightforward bluntness that was known as "Sarah Williams' way", and a look of apprehension and faint alarm crossed her worn, delicate face.

"Oh! I hope there's nothin' wrong," she said.

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Apparently Mrs. Williams did not hear the gently uttered words. There was a look of stern determination on her face, and she drove straight on toward an objective point unknown to her listener.

"Do you know, Mrs. Martin," she asked, "how long your Henry has been courtin' my Anna Belle?"

Mrs. Martin looked bewildered.

"Why, no," she said, hesitatingly. "I don't believe I ever thought about it."

"Well," said Mrs. Williams with grave emphasis, "it's exactly one year and a month, come next Wednesday. I know, because the first time Henry ever come home from prayer-meetin' with Anna Belle was the day after I fell down the cellar stairs and broke my wrist, and I'm not likely to forget when that was. One year and one month! Now, of course, I know a certain amount of courtin' is all right and proper. It's just as necessary to court before you marry as it is to say grace before you eat; but suppose you sit down to the table and say your grace over and over again, till mealtime's past, and it's pretty near time for the next meal? Why, when you open your eyes and start to eat, everything 'll be cold, and most likely you won't have any appetite for cold victuals, and you'll conclude not to eat at all till the next meal comes round. And that's the way it is with these long courtin's. Folks' feelin's cool just like a meal does. Many a couple gets tired of each other after they're married, and there's such a thing as gettin' tired of each other before you're married."

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Mrs. Martin was listening with rapt intentness. The gift of fluent speech was not hers. She could only think and feel, but it was a delight to listen to one who knew how to express thoughts and feelings in language that went straight to the mark.

"I've always thought that way," she said with gentle fervor, as her visitor paused for breath.

"Well," continued Mrs. Williams, "I made up my mind some time ago that Henry and Anna Belle had been sayin' grace long enough, and it was time for them to marry, if they ever intended to marry. And I also made up my mind to find out what was the matter. Of course I couldn't ask Anna Belle why Henry didn't marry her. There's some things that no mother's got a right to speak of to her child, and this is one of 'em; and I couldn't say anything to Henry, for that would 'a' been a thousand times worse, but I says to myself: 'I've got a right to know what's the matter, and I'm goin' to know.'"

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Mrs. Martin was leaning forward, listening breathlessly. There was a faint flush on her cheek, and her eyes were the eyes of a young girl who is reading the first pages of a romance. Her son's

love affair had been the central point of interest in her life for a year past. But Henry was a taciturn youth, and her delicacy forbade questioning; so, in spite of the deep affection between the two, the rise and progress of her son's courtship was an unknown story to her. Two nights in every week Henry would take his way to the home of the girl he loved, and as she sat alone waiting for his return, and living over the days of her own courtship, she had felt a wistful, unresentful envy of Mrs. Williams because of her nearness to the lovers. The long wooing had been a mystery to her also, and now the mystery was about to be explained.

"I've wondered, myself, why they didn't marry," she said hesitatingly.

Mrs. Williams hitched her chair nearer to her hostess.

"And what do you reckon I did?" she asked, dropping her voice to a husky whisper.

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"I can't imagine," responded Mrs. Martin, repressed excitement in her voice and face.

Mrs. Williams leaned forward, and her voice dropped a tone lower.

"It's somethin' I never thought I'd do," she whispered, "and before I tell you, I want you to promise you'll never tell a soul."

"Of course I won't," said Mrs. Martin with gentle solemnity, and as she promised, her thoughts went back to that period of her schoolgirl life when every day brought its great secret, with that impressive oath: "I cross my heart and point my finger up to God." She bent her head in a listening way toward her caller. But the telling of a secret was too delightful a task to be hastily dispatched, and having worked her audience up to the desired point of interest, Mrs. Williams was in no hurry to reach the climax of the story. She leaned back in her chair and resumed her natural tone of voice.

"The way I happened to think there was somethin' wrong," she continued, "was this: Anna Belle had been doin' a good deal of sewin' and embroiderin' ever since Henry begun to keep company with her, and, all of a sudden, she stopped work and put everything away in the bottom bureau drawer. Well, that set me to thinkin'. If she'd put the things in the top bureau drawer, I wouldn't have noticed it, for the top drawer is the place where you keep the things you expect to finish and the things you're usin' now. But when you fold a thing up and put it in the bottom drawer, it means you haven't any use for it right now, and you don't intend to finish it for some time to come. At first I thought that maybe Henry and Anna Belle had had a fallin' out. But the next Wednesday night here comes Henry just as usual, and he's never stopped comin'; but still Anna Belle never took her things out of the bottom drawer; and the other day I happened to pass by her room, and the door was halfway open, and I saw her kneelin' down by the drawer, lookin' at the things and smoothin' them down. I couldn't see her face, but I know just how she looked as well as if I'd been in front of her instead of behind her."

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Mrs. Martin gave a sympathetic murmur, wholly unheard by Mrs. Williams, who went blithely on with her narrative.

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"When your Henry comes to see my Anna Belle, Mrs. Martin, I always make it a point to go as far away from 'em as possible, for courtin' can't be rightly done if there's folks lookin' and listenin' around. So in the winter time I have a fire in my room the nights Henry comes, and sit there, and in summer I generally go out on the back porch and let Henry and Anna Belle have the front porch, and I can truthfully say that I never interfered with Henry's courtin'. But, as I said a while ago, I made up my mind to find out what was the matter. Well, the next time Henry come, they sat out on the front porch, and I was on the back porch as usual. But I had to go into the front room once or twice after somethin' I left there, and it was so dark in the hall, I had to grope my way across right slow, and I heard Anna Belle say: 'I'm all mother has in the world,' and Henry said somethin' I couldn't hear, but I reckon he said that he was all his mother had, and Anna Belle says: 'It wouldn't be right and I never could be happy, thinkin' of your mother and my mother all alone.' Well, by that time I was in the front room and got what I went for and started back; and, as I said, the hall was dark and I had to go slow, and I dropped my pocket handkerchief, and when I stopped to pick it up, I couldn't help hearin' what Anna Belle and Henry was talkin' about."

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She leaned comfortably back in her chair and chuckled heartily as she recalled the scene.

"I reckon I might as well own up that I didn't hurry myself pickin' up that handkerchief and gettin' out o' the hall. I know eavesdroppin' is a disgraceful thing, and this is a plain case of eavesdroppin', but I trust you never to tell this to anybody as long as you live."

"You can trust me," said Mrs. Martin firmly. "I never broke a promise in my life."

"Well," resumed Mrs. Williams, "as I was savin', I stood there in the hall pickin' up my pocket handkerchief, and I heard your Henry give a sigh,—I could hear it plain,—and says he: 'Well, Anna Belle, I suppose there's nothin' for us to do but wait,' and Anna Belle says: 'I'll wait for you, as long as you'll wait for me, Henry, and longer.' And then they stopped talkin' for awhile, and I knew exactly how they felt, sittin' there in the dark, lovin' each other and thinkin' about each other, and all their plans come to a dead stop, and nothin' ahead of 'em but waitin'. Now, what do you think of that, Mrs. Martin? They're waitin'. Waitin' for what? Why, for us to die, of course. They don't know it, and if we accused 'em of it, they'd deny it hard and fast, for they're good, dutiful children, and they love us. But we're stumblin'-blocks in their way, and they're waitin' for us to die."

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She paused dramatically to let her words have their full weight with the listener. Mrs. Martin was leaning forward, her delicate hands tightly clasped, and her face alight with intense feeling. The visitor's words were like great stones thrown into the placid waters of her mind, and in the turmoil of thought and emotion she found no word of reply. Nor was any needed. The situation was an enjoyable one for Mrs. Williams. The chair in which she sat was a springy rocker, the room was cool, her own voice sounded pleasantly through the quiet house, and the look on the face of her hostess was an inspiration to further speech.

"Now, I don't know how you feel about it, Mrs. Martin," she continued, "but I never could do anything if somebody was standin' around waitin'. If I know there's anybody waitin' for dinner, I'll burn myself and drop the saucepans and scorch every thing I'm cookin'. If I'm puttin' the last stitches in a dress, and Anna Belle's waitin' to put the dress on, I have to send her out of the room so I can manage my fingers and see to thread the needle. And if Anna Belle and Henry are waitin' for me to die, I verily believe I'll live forever."

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This declaration of possible immortality in the flesh was made with such vehemence that the speaker had to pause suddenly to recover breath, while Mrs. Martin sat expectant, awaiting the next passage in the romance.

"Mrs. Martin," resumed Mrs. Williams solemnly, "if there's anything I do hate, it's a stumblin'-block. I've had stumblin'-blocks myself, people that got in my way and kept me from doin' what I wanted to do, and I always bore with them as patient as I could. But when it comes to bein' a stumblin'-block myself, I've got no manner of patience. If I'm in anybody's way, I'll take myself out as quick as I can, and if I can't get out of the way, I'll fix it so they can manage to walk around me, for I never was cut out to be a stumblin'-block."

"Nor me," said Mrs. Martin with tremulous haste, "especially when it's my own child I'm standin' in the way of. Why, I never dreamed that I was interfering with Henry's happiness. There ain't a thing on earth I wouldn't do for him—my only child."

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Mrs. Williams nodded approvingly. "I'm glad you feel that way," she said warmly, "for this is a case where it takes two to do what has to be done. And that reminds me of somethin' I saw the other day: I was sittin' by the window, and here comes a big, lumberin' old wagon and two oxen drawin' it and an old man drivin'. They were crawlin' along right in the middle of the road, and just behind the wagon there was a young man and a pretty girl in a nice new buggy and a frisky young horse hitched to it, and the horse was prancin' and tryin' to get by the ox-team, but there wasn't room enough to pass on either side of the road."

She paused and looked inquiringly at Mrs. Martin to see if the meaning of the allegory was plain to her. But Mrs. Martin's face expressed only perplexity and distress.

"Don't you see," said Mrs. Williams persuasively, "that you and me are just like that old ox-team? There's happiness up the road for Henry and Anna Belle, but we're blockin' the way, and they can't get by us. Now, what are we goin' to do about it?"

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This direct question was very disconcerting to gentle Mrs. Martin. A flush rose to her face, and she clasped and unclasped her hands in nervous embarrassment.

"Why—I'm sure—I don't know—I never thought about it," she stammered.

The guest did not press the question. Instead, she settled herself more comfortably in her chair, waved her palm-leaf fan, and went calmly on with her monologue. Apparently Mrs. Williams was merely a fat, middle-aged woman making a morning call on a friend, but in reality she was an ambassador from the court of a monarch by whose power the world is said to go round, a diplomat in whose diplomacy the destinies of two human beings were involved. Her words had been carefully chosen before setting out on her envoy, and she was craftily following a line of thought leading up to a climax beyond which lay either victory or defeat. That climax was at hand, but she was not yet ready for it. There was some preliminary work to be done, a certain mental impression to be made on her hearer, before she dared "put it to the touch."

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"I don't know how it is with you, Mrs. Martin," she continued, "but I'm not one of the kind that thinks children are made for the comfort and convenience of their parents. I've been hearin' sermons all my life about the duty of children to their parents, and I never heard one about the duty of parents to their children." She broke off with a reminiscent laugh.

"That reminds me of my Uncle Nathan, and what he said to the preacher once. You know, Uncle Nathan wasn't a church member, and he had his own way of lookin' at religious matters and he was mighty free-spoken. Well, one day the preacher was makin' a pastoral call at Mother's, and he asked for a glass of water, and when Mother brought it to him and he'd drunk it, he set the glass down, and says he to Mother: 'Did you ever think, Sister Brown, how kind it is in the Lord to give us such a good and perfect gift as pure, fresh water?' Says he: 'We're not half grateful enough for these gifts of the Lord.' And Uncle Nathan says: 'Well, now, Parson, it never struck me that way.' Says he: 'God made us with a need for water, and if he gives us water, why, it's no more than he ought to do.' And that's the way it is with parents and children. We bring 'em into the world, and there's certain things they have to have, and if we give 'em those things, it's no more than we ought to do."

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"Of course not," exclaimed Mrs. Martin warmly.

"Every child ought to have a chance for happiness," said Mrs. Williams.

"Of course he ought," said Mrs. Martin. It was uncertain to what conclusion the current of her visitor's remarks was carrying her, but Mrs. Williams' statements were so obviously true that dissent was impossible.

"And if you and me are standin' in the way of our children's happiness, we must get out of the way, mustn't we?" pursued Mrs. Williams.

"Indeed, we must," said Mrs. Martin. There was a tremor in her voice, and in her heart a growing self-reproach that she should have to be reminded of her duty to her son.

"Well, as I said before," remarked Mrs. Williams, "I'm not cut out to be a millstone or a stumblin'-block, and neither are you, and now somethin's got to be done."

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She paused. Mrs. Martin did not reply. There was a silence that threatened to become awkward. She cleared her throat and looked as nervous and confused as her hostess, then bravely resumed the charge.

"Of course they might live with one of us, but if they lived with me, you'd be jealous, and rightly so, too. And if they lived with you, I'd be jealous. And Anna Belle wouldn't be willin' to have me to live alone, and Henry wouldn't leave you alone; and then there's the mother-in-law question. Did you ever live with your mother-in-law, Mrs. Martin?"

Mrs. Martin hesitated a moment, "Yes, I did," she said, as if confessing to a misdemeanor.

"Did you enjoy it?" questioned Mrs. Williams.

"No, I didn't," replied Mrs. Martin with a decisive promptness that she rarely exhibited.

"Neither did I," echoed Mrs. Williams. "There never was but one Ruth and Naomi, and they lived so long ago nobody knows whether they ever did live. I guess Henry and Anna Belle feel just as we do about mothers-in-law, and, as I said before, what are we goin' to do about it?"

Mrs. Martin's only reply was a look of bewilderment and distress. It was evident to Mrs. Williams that she would have to answer her own question, but she delayed, for there were still a few well considered diplomatic remarks that it might be well to use before the climax was brought on. "Now, I don't want you to answer me, Mrs. Martin. You couldn't be expected to answer that question on such short notice as this. Many's the night I've stayed awake till long after the clock struck twelve askin' myself what could be done about it, and the only thing I can think of is this."

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She paused. Mrs. Martin was listening eagerly. The time had come for the final charge.

"Don't you think, Mrs. Martin,"—there was an anxious, beseeching note in the speaker's voice,—"don't you think that you and me might manage to live together? Your house is big enough for two, and it's a double house, with a hall runnin' through the middle, so you can live on one side and me on the other. And if you'll let me come and live in one side of your house, I'll deed my house to Henry and Anna Belle, and they can get married with a clear conscience. You and me can be company for each other, and we've each got enough money to supply our wants; and I'll keep house on my side of the hall, and you'll keep house on your side, and there's no need of our ever fallin' out or interferin' with each other."

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There! the deed was done, and the doer of the deed, pale with consternation over her own daring, sat waiting a reply.

But no reply came. Apparently Mrs. Martin had not heard her words, for she was looking beyond her visitor with the dreamy gaze of one who sees, but not with the eye of flesh. Was she considering the question, or was her silence a rebuke to an officious meddler? Mrs. Williams' heart was beating as it used to beat on Friday afternoons when she stood up to read her composition before the school, and she tingled from head to foot with a flush of shame.

"I don't know what you think of me for makin' such a proposition to you," she stammered. "You'll never know what it costs me to say what I've said, and I never could have said it, if it hadn't been for that nightgown put away in the bottom drawer, and the look in Anna Belle's eyes."

Still Mrs. Martin did not speak. The piteous humiliation in her visitor's eyes deepened. She must make one more effort to break the ice of that cruel silence.

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"It's not for myself; I hope you understand that. There's no reason why I should want to give up my home, but it's for Anna Belle. A mother'll do anything for her child, you know."

Mrs. Martin's eyes were fixed gravely on her visitor's face.

"Yes, I do know," she said, speaking with sudden resolution. "It's all as plain as day. I don't know what Henry will say, when he finds out that a stranger had to tell his mother what her duty was. I ought to have seen it long ago just as you did." Her voice faltered, and there were tears in her eyes.

The embarrassment and distress on Mrs. Williams' face changed to joyful relief. She drew a quick breath and laid instant hold on her wonted power of speech.

"You're not to blame at all," she consoled eagerly. "If Anna Belle was your child, you'd have seen it just as I did. A son's here and there and everywhere, but a daughter's right in the house with you, and you can read her heart like an open book. That's how I happened to know before you

did. My goodness! Is that clock strikin' eleven?" She rose with an air of deep contrition, "Here I've taken up nearly all your mornin'. But then, what's a mornin's work by the side of your child's happiness?" On the threshold she paused and stood irresolute for a few seconds.

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"I'm glad you think as I do," she said slowly; "but somethin' tells me that you ought to have time to think it over. It's no light matter to take another woman under your roof and for a lifetime, too. So give yourself a chance to consider, and if you change your mind, we'll still be friends."

The two were standing with clasped hands, and the majesty of motherhood looked forth from the eyes of each. Mrs. Martin shook her head. "I'm not likely to change my mind," she said with gentle dignity. "I love my son as well as you love your daughter."

These simple words seemed to both the conclusion of the whole matter, and they turned away from each other, forgetting the accustomed farewells.

Slowly and thoughtfully Mrs. Williams walked homeward. Her mission had been highly successful, but, instead of the elation of the victor, she felt only the strange depression that comes after we take our fate in our own hands, and make a decided move on the checkerboard of life. On her way to Mrs. Martin's she had felt sure that she was doing "the right thing"; but before she reached home, doubt and uncertainty possessed her mind. At her own gate she stopped, and resting her elbows on the top of one of the posts, she gazed at the place whose surrender meant happiness for her child. It was just a plain little cottage somewhat in need of a coat of paint, but the look in Margaret Williams' eyes was the look of a worshipper who stands before some long-sought shrine. She looked upward at the swaying branches of the elms and drew a quick breath as she thought of a day in early March—how long ago?—when *his* strong arms had wielded the pick and spade, and she, a girl like Anna Belle, stood by, holding the young trees and smiling at the thought of sitting under their shade when he and she were old. Youth was a reality then, and age a dream, but now it was the other way. Her eyes wandered over the little yard set thick with flowering shrubs and vines. Every one of them had its roots in her heart and in her memory, and a mist dimmed her eyes as she looked again at the house she had first entered when life and love were new.

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"He built it for me," she murmured, and then gave a guilty start as a clear young voice called out: "Why don't you come in, Mother?"

She passed her hand over her eyes and came smiling into the little hall where Anna Belle sat, turning down the hems of some coarse kitchen towels.

"Put up those towels," she said with motherly severity; "that's no work for a young girl. Where's that nightgown you're embroiderin'? If you must work, work on that."

The girl glanced up, and in her eyes was the look that for weeks had been like a dagger-thrust in Margaret Williams' heart.

"There's no hurry about getting that nightgown done," she said quietly.

"No hurry about the towels either," rejoined her mother. "However, it's so near mealtime there's no use beginnin' anything now. You can set the table, and I'll get a pick-up dinner for us. I stayed so long at Mrs. Martin's I can't cook much."

At the mention of Henry's mother Anna Belle colored again. A question trembled on her lips, but she said nothing, and went about setting the table in a listless, absent-minded way.

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Her mother was watching her furtively, and a pang went through her heart as she noticed how thin the girl's hands were, and how she trifled with the food on her plate.

"Pinin' away right before my eyes," she thought. "I'm glad I went to see Mrs. Martin. I've done all I could, anyway."

After the meal was over, Anna Belle, at her mother's second bidding, got out the embroidered gown and bent over the tracery of leaves and flowers. Mrs. Williams went up-stairs, presently returning with a long, narrow box of some dark wood.

"You've heard me speak of your Aunt Matilda," she said, seating herself and folding her hands over the box. "Well, this box and the things in it belonged to her, and when she died, she willed it to you, because she hadn't any children of her own, and you were the only girl in the family. I've been intendin' for some time to give it to you, and there's no time like to-day." She opened the box, took out a roll of shining silken tissue such as comes from the looms of the Orient, and threw its soft folds across her daughter's lap. Then from the scented darkness of the treasure box she drew out a berth and sleeves of filmy lace and laid them on the silk.

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"That lace cost a small fortune," she observed. "Your Uncle Harvey was a merchant, and whenever he went to the East to buy his goods, he'd bring your Aunt Matilda a fine present. This lace was the last thing he ever brought her, and—poor thing!—she didn't live to wear it."

Anna Belle had dropped her work on the floor and was fingering the lace and silk in a rapture of admiration.

"O Mother," she breathed, "I never saw anything so beautiful! Is it really mine?"

She shook out the folds of silk, gathered them in her hands, and held them off to note their graceful fall. She laid the berth across her shoulders and ran to a mirror, laughing at the effect

of the costly lace over the striped gingham; she pushed the sleeves of her dress up to her elbows and slipped the lace sleeves over her bare, slender arms. Her eyes gleamed with excitement, her lips were parted in a smile of happy girlhood, and the mother, watching with quiet satisfaction, read the thought in the girl's heart.

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"Be careful, Anna Belle," she warned, "you'll wrinkle the goods. Here, fold it this way and lay it smooth in your trunk. You may not need it now, but some day it will come in handy."

Anna Belle held the silk and lace on her outstretched hands and carried it up-stairs as tenderly as she would have carried a newborn babe. She lingered in her room a long time and came down silent and dreamy-eyed. All the afternoon she embroidered leaf and flower on the linen gown, while in imagination she was fashioning a wedding robe of silk and lace and beholding herself a bride. When the clock struck five, Mrs. Williams rose hurriedly from her chair and gathered up the lapful of mending.

"Go up-stairs, Anna Belle," she commanded, "and put on your blue muslin."

Anna Belle looked surprised. "Is any company coming?" she asked.

"What if there isn't?" replied her mother. "Don't you suppose I like to see you lookin' nice?" She walked out to the kitchen and began preparing the evening meal. All the afternoon a strange nervousness had been growing on her. She was beginning to understand the momentousness of her morning interview with Mrs. Martin, and she saw herself as one who has risked all on a single throw. She had laid bare to Henry's mother the sacred desires of her own mother-heart and the yet more sacred desires of her daughter's maiden-heart. What if this humiliation should be to no purpose? Or, worse still, suppose she had misinterpreted the fragments of conversation that she had overheard. Suppose Henry's visits were after all only friendly ones? Her hands trembled, and her whole body was in a hot flush of fear and apprehension. She glanced at the kitchen clock.

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"It won't be long till I know," she murmured. "If Henry's mother falls in with my plans, Henry'll come to see Anna Belle to-night."

She tried to reassure herself by recalling all that gentle Mrs. Martin had said, but as the moments passed, her apprehension grew, and when she tried to eat, the food almost choked her.

As soon as the dishes were washed, Anna Belle stole out to the front porch. She did not expect her lover to-night, but at least she could sit in the gathering dusk, thinking of Henry and of that wonderful wedding gown. Meanwhile Mrs. Williams was up-stairs, leaning from her bedroom window, listening for Henry's step and peering anxiously in the direction from which Henry must come. How slow the minutes were! The kitchen clock struck seven. Half-past seven was Henry's usual hour, but surely to-night he would come earlier. Ten minutes passed. She heard footsteps up the street, and her heart began to beat like a girl's. Nearer the footsteps sounded. Could that quick, firm tread be Henry's? Henry was usually rather slow of speech and movement. A hand was on the latch of the gate. She heard Anna Belle's exclamation of surprise and pleasure, then Henry's laugh and Henry's voice.

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In the love affairs of her daughter, every mother finds a resurrection of her own youthful romance, no matter how long it may have been buried; and as the young man's tones, low, earnest and charged with a lover's joy, rose on the summer air, Anna Belle's mother turned away from the window, and covering her face with her hands, tried to beat back a tide of emotions that have no place in the heart of middle age. The moments passed uncounted now, and twilight had faded into night before she heard Anna Belle's voice calling from below:

"Mother! Where are you, Mother? Come right down. Henry wants to see you;" and like one who walks in her sleep she obeyed the summons.

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They stood before her, hand in hand, smiling, breathless, encircled by the aura of love's young dream; but there was a far-away look in Margaret Williams' eyes, as she looked at their radiant faces. How many years was it since she and Anna Belle's father had stood before her mother! And now that mother's name was carved on a graveyard stone, and she was in her mother's place with a mother's blessing in her hands for young lovers.

Anna Belle was looking up at Henry, waiting for him to put into words the gratitude and happiness that filled their hearts. But the gift of the ready tongue was not Henry's. How could a man find words to thank a mother for giving him her daughter? How poor and mean were all the customary phrases of appreciation to be offered for such a gift! But while he hesitated, his eyes met the eyes of Anna Belle's mother, and with a quick impulse of the heart, his tongue was loosed to the utterance of one word that made all other words superfluous.

"Mother!" he said; and as their hands met, Anna Belle's arms were around her neck, and Anna Belle's voice was whispering in her ear: "You are the very best mother in all the world." Yet in that moment of supreme happiness for the lovers, Margaret Williams realized what she was giving up, and tasted the bitterness and the sweetness of the cup of self-abnegation that her own hands had prepared. The hot tears of anguish smarted in her eyes. But the tears did not fall, and the emotion passed as swiftly as it had come. She straightened herself in her chair and pushed Anna Belle gently away.

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"It seems to me we're makin' a great fuss over a mighty little matter," she said carelessly. "I'd have been a poor sort o' mother to stand in the way of my own child's happiness, and it wouldn't

suit me at all to be a millstone or a stumblin'-block. That's all there is to it. Now, go out on the front porch, you two, and set your weddin' day."

It was the afternoon of the wedding day, and the two mothers were sitting on the porch of their joint home, both in festal attire, and both in the state of pleasurable excitement that follows any great change, and that precludes an immediate return to the commonplace routine of daily life.

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"I might just as well be sewin' or mendin'," said Mrs. Williams, "but it seems like Sunday or Christmas day, and I don't feel like settlin' down to anything."

"There's nothing like a weddin' for makin' you feel unsettled," said Mrs. Martin, as she smoothed down her black silk dress. "It'll be a long time before we get over this day."

"It was a pretty weddin', wasn't it?" said Mrs. Williams, "And I never saw a happier lookin' couple than Anna Belle and Henry. Most brides and grooms look more like scared rabbits than anything else, but Anna Belle and Henry were so happy they actually forgot to be scared. I reckon they think that married life's a smooth, straight road with flowers on both sides, just like that garden path. You and me have been over it, and we know better."

"They'll have their trials," smiled Mrs. Martin, "but if they love each other, they can stand whatever comes."

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Williams, "love's like a rubber tire; it softens the jolts and carries you easy over the rough places in the road."

"Henry was the image of his father," said Mrs. Martin dreamily.

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"I couldn't help thinkin' of myself when I looked at Anna Belle," said Mrs. Williams. "You may not believe it, but I was as slim as Anna Belle, when I was her age."

"I wish their fathers could have seen them," sighed Mrs. Martin.

Mrs. Williams leaned toward her companion. "Maybe they did," she said in a half whisper. "I'm no believer in table-walkin' and such as that, but many a time I've felt the dead just as near me as you are, and I wouldn't be at all surprised if Henry's father and Anna Belle's father were at the weddin'."

"Every weddin' makes you think of your own weddin'," said Mrs. Martin timidly.

"So it does," assured Mrs. Williams, "and I was married just such a day as this. We'd set the fifteenth of May for our weddin', but Aunt Martha McDavid said May was an unlucky month, and so we changed it to the first of June."

"I was married in the fall," said Mrs. Martin placidly. "I remember one of my dresses was a plaid silk, green and brown and yellow, and the first time I put it on, Henry's father went out in the yard and pulled some leaves off the sugar maples, and laid 'em on my lap, and said they matched the colors of my dress. I pressed the leaves, and they're in my Bible to this day."

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"I had a dark blue silk with a black satin stripe runnin' through it," confided Mrs. Williams, "and after I got through wearin' it, I lined a quilt with it, and it's on Anna Belle's bed now."

The two women were rocking gently to and fro; both were smiling faintly, and there was a retrospective look in their eyes. Memory, like a questing dove, was flying between the past and the present, bringing back now a leaf and now a flower plucked from the shores of old romance, and they were no longer the middle-aged mothers of married children, but young brides with life before them; and as they talked, more to themselves than to each other, with long intervals of silence, the afternoon waned, the sun was low, and the little garden lay in shadow.

"What a long day this has been!" exclaimed Mrs. Williams, rousing herself from a reverie. "Why, it seems to me I've lived a hundred years since I got up this mornin'."

"I'd better see about makin' the fire and gettin' a cup of tea," said Mrs. Martin. "I can tell by the shadow of that maple tree, that it's near supper time." Then hesitatingly, as if it were a doubtful point of etiquette, "It looks like foolishness to have two fires. Mine's already laid; suppose you eat supper with me to-night."

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"I'll be glad to," responded Mrs. Williams heartily, "for I haven't half got my things in order yet." She followed Mrs. Martin to the kitchen, and together they set the table and waited for the kettle to boil. Mrs. Martin was pleased to find that Mrs. Williams preferred black tea to green, and while she was slicing the bread, Mrs. Williams disappeared for a moment, returning with something wrapped in a napkin. She unfolded it, disclosing huge slices of wedding cake, white cake, golden cake, and spice cake dark and fragrant.

"There!" she said complacently. "You and me were too flustered to eat much at the weddin', but maybe we'll enjoy a piece of this cake now."

Silently and abstractedly the two women ate the simple meal. Now and then Mrs. Martin looked across the table at the vacant place where Henry had always sat, and as Mrs. Williams ate wedding cake, her thoughts were with the daughter whose face for twenty years had smiled at

her across the little square leaf-table in the old home; also, she had a queer, uneasy feeling, as if she had spent the afternoon with her friend and should have gone home before supper. After the dishes were washed, they seated themselves again on the cool, shadowy porch. Both were feeling the depression that follows an emotional strain; besides, it was night, the time when the heart throws off the smothering cares of the day and cries aloud for its own. It was Mrs. Williams who finally broke the silence.

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"While I think of it," she said, dropping her voice to a confidential whisper, "I want to tell you what I heard Job Andrews and Sam Moreman say when they brought my trunk in this mornin'. They didn't know I could hear 'em, and they were laughin' and whisperin' as they set the trunk down on the porch, and Job says: 'Some of these days these two women are goin' to have a rippet that you can hear from one end of this town to the other,' and Sam says: 'Yes, they'll be dissolvin' partnership in less than two months.'"

"Did you ever!" ejaculated Mrs. Martin.

"I thought once I'd go out and say somethin' to 'em," pursued Mrs. Williams, "but I didn't. I just shut my mouth tight, and I made a solemn resolution right there that there'd never be any rippet if I could help it, and if there was any, I'd take care that those men never heard of it, There's nothin' in the world men enjoy so much as seein' women fall out and quarrel, and I don't intend to furnish 'em with that sort o' pleasure."

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"Nor I," said Mrs. Martin warmly. "I don't see why two women can't live in peace under the same roof. For my part, quarrelin' comes hard with me. It's not Christian, and it's not ladylike."

"Well, if I felt inclined to quarrel," said Mrs. Williams, "the thought of Sam and Job would be enough to keep me from it, and if that's not enough, there's the thought of Anna Belle and Henry. They can't be happy unless we get along well together, and we mustn't do anything to spoil their happiness."

Mrs. Martin made an assenting murmur, and another silence fell between them, Both were conscious of the strangeness of their new relation. To Mrs. Martin it seemed that Mrs. Williams was her guest, and she was vaguely wondering if it would be polite to suggest that it was time to go to bed. Mrs. Williams rocked to and fro, and the squeak of the old chair mingled with the shrill notes of the crickets. Presently she stopped rocking and heaved a deep sigh.

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"It's curious," she said, "how grown folks never get over bein' children. When I was a little girl I used to go out to the country to visit my Aunt Mary Meadows. I'd get along all right durin' the day, but when night come, and the frogs and the katydids begun to holler, I'd think about home and wish I was there; and when Aunt Mary put me to bed and carried the light away, I'd bury my face in the pillow and cry myself to sleep. And just now, when I heard that katydid up yonder in the old locust tree, I felt just like I used to feel at Aunt Mary's."

Her voice quivered on the last word, but once more she laughed bravely. A flash of comprehension crossed Mary Martin's brain. She leaned over and laid her hand on the other woman's arm.

"You're homesick," she said, with a note of deep sympathy in her voice. "All day I've been thinkin' about it, and I've come to the conclusion that you've got the hardest part of this matter. Henry and Anna Belle owe more to you than they do to me. We've both given up a child, but you've given up your home, too, and that's a hard thing to do at your time of life." At her time of life! The words were like a spur to a jaded horse. Mrs. Williams straightened her shoulders, raised her head, and laughed again.

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"Shuh!" she said carelessly, "changin' your house ain't any more than changin' your dress. I ain't so far gone in years yet that I have to stick in the same old place to keep from dyin'. But I reckon I'm like that spring branch that used to run through the field back of Father's house. It was always overflowin' and ruinin' a part o' the crop, and one fall Father went to work and turned it out of its course into a rocky old pasture where it couldn't do any harm. I was just a little child, but I remember how sorry I felt for that little stream runnin' along between the new banks, and I used to wonder if it wasn't homesick for the old course, and if it didn't miss the purple flags and the willers and cat-tails that used to grow alongside of it; but just let me get a good night's rest and my things all straightened out, and I'll soon get used to the new banks and be as much at home as you are."

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She rose heavily from her chair. "I believe I'll go to bed now," she said briskly. "Movin' 's no light work, and we're both tired."

"If you should get sick in the night or need anything," said Mrs. Martin, following her into the house, "don't fail to call me."

"I'm goin' to sleep the minute my head hits the pillow and sleep till it's time to get up," replied Mrs. Williams, "and you do the same. Good night!"

She closed the door and stood for a few seconds in the darkness. Then she groped her way to the table and lighted her lamp. Its cheerful radiance flooded every part of the little room, and showed each familiar piece of furniture in its new surroundings. Yes, there was the high chest of drawers that Grandfather Means had made from the wood of a cherry tree on the old home place; there was the colonial sewing-table, and the splint-bottomed rocker, the old bookcase, and all the rest of the belongings that she cherished because they belonged to "the family." But how strange her

brass candlesticks looked on that mantel! It was not *her* mantel, and the wall-paper was not hers. Her wall-paper was gray with purple lilacs all over it, and this was pink and green and white! And the windows and doors were not in their right places. Ah! the hold of Place and Custom! The memories and associations of a lifetime twined themselves around her heart closer and closer, and the hand of Change seemed to be tearing at every root and tendril. Pale and trembling she sank into a chair, and the same tears she had shed sixty years ago, the tears of a homesick child, fell over her wrinkled cheeks, while in her brain one thought repeated itself with a terrifying emphasis: "*I can't get used to it. I can't get used to it.*"

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But the sound of her own sobs put a stop to her grief. She brushed the tears away with the back of her hand and glanced toward the door. The other woman across the hall must not know her weakness. She rose, walked forlornly to a side window, and parting the curtains, looked fearfully out. Why, where was the lilac bush and the Lombardy poplar and the box-wood hedge? Again the hand tore at her heart; she peered bewilderedly into the night. Alas! the stream turned from its course cannot at once forget the old channel and the old banks. Again the tears came, but as she wiped them away, a fresh wind arose, parting the light clouds that lay in the western sky and showing a crescent moon and near it the evening star. Like a message from heaven came a memory that dried her tears and swept away the homesick longing. Twenty-five years ago she had looked at the new moon on her wedding night, and this was Anna Belle's wedding night—her daughter's wedding night! Fairer than moon or star, the face of the young bride seemed to look into hers; she felt the girl's clinging arms around her neck and heard the fervent whisper: "*You are the very best mother in the whole wide world.*"

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She lifted her eyes once more, not to the moon or the star, but to Something beyond them.

"O God!" she whispered brokenly, "it's harder than I thought it would be; but for my child's sake I can stand it, and anyway, I'm glad I'm not a millstone or a stumblin'-block."

"ONE TASTE OF THE OLD TIME"

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"There is no organic disease whatever," said the doctor. "The trouble is purely mental. No, I don't mean that," he corrected hastily, as he saw the look of dismay on David Maynor's face. "Your wife is not losing her mind. Nothing of that sort. Indeed, I take her to be a woman of unusually sound mentality. But, evidently there is some trouble preying on her mind and producing these nervous symptoms. The prescription I am leaving will palliate these, but it remains for you to find out what the trouble is and remove it, if you can. There are some cases where doctors are powerless, and this, I think, is one of them." He reached for his hat and bowing with professional courtesy turned to leave.

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"How much do I owe you?" said David Maynor.

The blunt question was like a sentry's challenge, and the doctor paused with his hand on the knob of the door.

"Ah—never mind about that now. A bill will be sent you at the end of the month." His tone and manner implied that this was too trivial a matter to be mentioned.

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But David Maynor's hand was in his pocket, and he was drawing forth his new seal-leather purse.

"I always pay as I go," he said stolidly. The corners of the doctor's mouth twitched, and a gleam of humor came into his eyes. "Ten dollars," he said, and while David Maynor was counting out the bills, the physician's quick glance was taking note of the expensive furniture and the utter absence of individuality, that gave the house the air of a hotel rather than a home. "The new rich," he thought with good-natured amusement, then aloud:

"Let me hear from your wife to-morrow, Mr. Maynor. But, as I said before, the case is in your hands. Good afternoon!" And with another courtly bow he was gone.

David Maynor hurried back up-stairs to his wife's bedside. "Sarah," he said, bending over her and smoothing her hair clumsily, "the doctor says there's not a thing the matter with you, except you've got something on your mind that's worrying you. He says he can't do much for you, and that I've got to find out what the trouble is and remove it, if I can."

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Sarah Maynor turned her head restlessly on the pillow. "I must say he's got more sense than I thought he had," she said, with a nervous laugh. "I was afraid he'd go to dosing me with bitters and pills. He's exactly right: no doctor can cure me." Her voice broke, and she buried her face in the pillow.

A deep anxiety settled on David's rugged features. "Why, Sarah," he said, with tender reproach in his voice, "when did you get to hiding your troubles from me? Is there anything you want? Anything I can do for you? You know you can have everything now that money can buy."

Sarah turned her face toward her husband. Her gray eyes were filled with tears, and her hands were clenched in an effort to control her feelings.

"That's just the trouble!" she cried, her voice rising into a wail. "You've given me everything that money buys, and I don't want anything except the things that love buys. I want to go back to Millville! I want to live in our own little cottage! I'm sick of this sort of life! I never was made to be a rich man's wife, and it's killing me! It's killing me! Oh! I know I'm ungrateful, Dave, but I can't help it!" Her voice broke in a storm of sobs. She covered her face with the bedclothes and shrank away from her husband's hand.

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A look of profound relief lighted David Maynor's face. "Is that all?" he exclaimed. "And here I've been putting up with everything because I thought you were pleased! My gracious, Sarah! You don't hate this life any more than I do."

Sarah lifted her head from the pillow and searched his face with her tear-reddened eyes. "Dave Maynor," she said solemnly, "are you just saying that to please me, or is it the truth?"

"I'd go back to Millville to-morrow, if I could," said David, with an emphasis that swept away all doubt of his sincerity.

Sarah fell back on her pillows with a long, sobbing breath of relief. Her tears flowed again, but they were tears of happiness, and an ecstatic smile shone through them.

"Oh! Then it's all right, Dave! It's all right!" She reached for David's hand and laid it against her wet cheek. "You see, it was just the thought that you and I didn't think alike—that was what I couldn't stand. But if you feel as I do, why, I can stand anything. You know what I mean, don't you, Dave?"

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"Of course I know what you mean, honey," said David soothingly, as if he were talking to a child in distress. "I've felt exactly the same way, ever since we left our little Millville home and come to this two-story brick house. I thought you liked it,—women always like fine houses and fine furniture,—and I wanted to please you, but I hated it from the start; and we'd always thought the same about everything, and to have this big pile of brick and mortar comin' between us at our

time of life—"

At this point words failed him. He was not in the habit of analyzing and describing his own feelings, but Sarah's eyes met his, and a look of perfect understanding passed between husband and wife. They had been living a divided life, but now they were one.

"It was my fault," said Sarah. "I ought to have stopped you in the beginning; but I knew you were trying to please me, and I didn't want to seem ungrateful—"

"Yes, honey, yes," interrupted David, "I know just how it was, and it was my fault, not yours. I ought to have asked you what you wanted, instead of takin' things for granted. Yes, if it's anybody's fault, it's mine. But what's the use in blamin' anybody? My doctrine is that when a thing *has* happened, instead of blamin' ourselves or anybody else, we just ought to conclude that it *had* to happen, and then make the best of it. This house is built; it's ours; we're in it; we don't like it; and now what are we going to do about it?"

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Sarah's face clouded at once. She and David were of one mind, but things were not "all right", for still the burden of unaccustomed wealth and luxury weighed upon her, and David's question brought her face to face with the old troubles.

"Oh! I don't know," she said wearily. "If we just hadn't left our little cottage!"

"It was that architect fellow's fault, my buildin' this house," said David ruefully. "He was a young man just startin' out in the world, and I thought I'd give him a helpin' hand. And then it didn't look right for people with the income we've got to live in a four-room cottage in Millville."

"I don't care how it looked," said Sarah fretfully, "we were in our right place there, and we're out of place here. When we lived in Millville, I'd get up in the morning, and I knew just exactly what I'd have to do, and I knew I could do whatever I had to do. But now—" She made a gesture of unutterable despair—"Why, I hate to open my eyes, I hate to get up, I hate to think there's another day before me, for I'm certain there'll be things to do that I never did before, and don't know how to do and don't want to do, even if I knew how. People come to see me and they talk about things I never heard of, and ask me to do things I can't do, and I feel just exactly as if I was caught in some kind of a cage and couldn't get out. There was that Mrs. Emerson—she wanted me to join a club she belongs to. She said it used to be a literary club, but that they'd changed their plans, and, instead of writin' papers, they'd decided to do civic work."

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She paused in her passionate confession and turned abruptly to David with a look of self-scorn that was tragic in its intensity. "Do you know what 'civic work' is, David?" David did not answer at once.

"Why, no, Sarah, I can't say I do," he said cautiously. "It seems to me I've seen that word somewhere, and maybe I could think up what it means, if you'd give me time to—"

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Sarah cut him short. "You don't know what that word means, David, and neither do I," she said with studied calmness.

David was genuinely puzzled by Sarah's evident distress over so unimportant a circumstance as the meaning of a word. "Honey," he said tenderly, "I'll go right down town and buy you a dictionary, so you can find out what that word means. But what difference does it make, anyhow?"

Once more his wife turned on him a face that was like a mask of tragedy. "What difference does it make?" she wailed. "Oh, David! Can't you see? Can't you understand? There I sat—in my own house—like a fool—not knowin' what answer to give her, just because I didn't know what that word meant! And every day something like this happens, something that makes me feel that I'm out of place, something that makes me hate myself! Can't you understand?"

Yes, David understood as well as a man could be expected to understand a woman. Many times since Fortune had smiled on him, he had been thrown with men of superior education and social position and had known momentarily the feeling of being out of place. And if Sarah's passionate words failed to convey all she felt and suffered, the despair in her eyes and the nervous twitching of her fingers brought comprehension to her husband's mind.

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"There! There!" he soothed, taking her hands in his. "You mustn't carry on this way, Sarah, or I'll have to send for the doctor again. Just give me time to think; there must be a way out of this trouble. My goodness!" He shook his head in helpless wonderment over the strange situation. "I thought we'd be through with troubles when we got rich, but it looks as if this money's the most trouble we ever had."

"It wouldn't be a trouble if we were used to it," explained Sarah. "We were born poor, and we've lived poor all our lives, and we don't know how to get happiness out of money."

David sighed. "We can't go back to Millville to live," he said thoughtfully. "At least we can't get back our old place." Sarah's face was already clouded, but at these words a deeper shadow passed over it. She had known, when she left the Millville house, that the owner of the property intended tearing down the cottage and building a tenement house for the mill-workers, and every time she thought of her house in ruins, she had a dull heartache. "I never hankered after riches," mused David, his mind still occupied with the mysterious ways of the Providence that had made him rich. "I never even tried to invent that machine. It just seemed to come to me, without any

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thinkin' or tryin' on my part; and when I patented the thing, I never supposed it would do any more than make us fairly comfortable in our old age. But here's the money comin' in all the time; it's ours, and it's honest money, and we've got to take it and make the best of it. But," tenderly, "I'm not goin' to let it worry you to death if I can help it. What is it that bothers you most, honey?"

Sarah moved her head restlessly on the pillow and sighed heavily. "Oh! everything; but I believe the servants are the worst aggravation of all."

"What's the matter with 'em?" asked David; "don't they do their work right?"

"No, they don't," said Sarah despairingly. "I never saw such cleanin' as that Bertha does—dust behind the doors and on the window sills; and she never takes up a rug, and the windows look like Jacob's cattle, all ringed and striped and streaked. And Nelly's just as bad. The dish towels are a sight, and the kitchen closet's in such a mess I can't sleep for thinkin' of it. I never could stand dust, especially in my kitchen; you know that, David. And here we are payin' these good-for-nothin' creatures every week almost as much money as you used to earn in a month! It's enough to drive me crazy." It was the lamentation of a housekeeper, a cry as old as civilization, that Sarah was uttering, and David heard it sympathetically, for his wife's troubles were his own.

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"Can't you make 'em do their work right?" he asked.

"Make 'em?" Sarah's voice rose in a petulant wail. "No, I can't. I can make myself work, but I don't know how to make anybody else work."

"Do they ever give you any back talk?" asked David.

"No, they don't," said Sarah, a dull flush crimsoning her face. "They're polite enough to my face, but, David, I believe they laugh at us both behind our backs. Two or three times I've turned around right quick, and I've seen a look on their faces that made me want to turn 'em out of the house."

David's face hardened. "Why don't you discharge 'em?" he asked grimly.

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"Oh! I don't know how," said Sarah fretfully. "It seems to me you ought to know that, without being told. I never discharged anybody in my life. I wouldn't know what to say. Don't you have to give servants warning before you turn 'em off?"

David deliberated a moment. "Either they have to give you warning, or you have to give them warning, or maybe it's both," he announced. "I guess it would take a lawyer to settle that question."

"People that don't know how to get rid of a servant have got no business with servants," said Sarah bitterly. "Here I am, a stout, able-bodied woman, holdin' my hands all day, when I ought to be doin' my own work just as I always have."

"You couldn't do your work in this house," argued David. "It would break you down if you tried it."

"There it is again," cried Sarah. "The house! It's the house that's to blame for everything. Why, it was just last week I met Molly Matthews on the street, and she turned her head away and wouldn't speak to me! Molly Matthews that nursed me when I had the fever and that's been like a sister to me all these years!"

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David's face darkened angrily. "What right has Molly Matthews to fall out with you, because you've got a better house than she has? That's just envy."

"No, it's not envy!" cried Sarah in loyal defense of the absent friend. "I know Molly as well as I know myself. She hasn't changed, but she thinks I've changed; she thinks I feel above her just because I've got this two-story brick. And I don't blame her a bit. When we left Millville and moved into town, it looked just like we had turned our backs on all our old friends. I'd feel just as Molly does, if I were in Molly's place. I've wanted to have Molly and Annie and all the rest of my friends to spend the day with me,—I've only waited because I wanted to feel at home in my own house, before I had visitors,—but now I can't do it. We've got a fine house, David, and plenty of money, but we've lost our old friends; and what is life without friends?"

The god of Mammon had showered his favors on these simple souls, but they would never be worshippers of the god. David, too, had felt the barrier of wealth rising, hard and cruel, between him and the friends of a lifetime, and his heart echoed Sarah's question, "What is life without friends?"

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"Well," he said, with an effort at lightness, "if our old friends forsake us, we'll have to make new ones."

"But I don't want new friends!" cried Sarah, with the accent of a fretful child, "Haven't I just told you I couldn't talk to that Mrs. Emerson?"

A sudden thought seemed to strike David. He took out his watch and glanced at it. "It's time for you to take another dose of the medicine the doctor left. I have to go down-town for a few minutes. You lie still and see if you can't sleep a little."

He handed her the medicine and left the room. Sarah waited till he was out of the house, and then she rose hastily from the bed and began making a hurried toilet.

When David reappeared, he found her fully dressed and the marks of tears gone from her face.

"That medicine's helped you already," he said cheerfully; "and here's a dictionary, and we'll find out what that word means."

The dictionary was an unfamiliar book to David, but after a patient search he found the strange word. "Here it is: civic, of or pertaining to a city, a citizen, or citizenship." He looked hopefully at Sarah. She shook her head rather sadly.

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"I don't know a bit more now than I did before, David, but never mind that word. I told you awhile ago that I could stand anything, if we only felt alike about it, and I'm goin' to stand this."

"That's right," said David heartily; "and while you're standing it, I'll be looking for a way out of it. I didn't build this house for you to stand, I built it for you to enjoy, and if you don't enjoy it, you don't have to live in it." At that moment the supper bell rang.

"Come on, honey," said David, holding out his hand to help her from the chair, "you'll feel better after you've had something to eat."

But Sarah only sighed and shook her head languidly. "If I'd only cooked the supper, I might feel hungry. But I just don't care whether I eat or not. I'd rather go hungry than to eat with that Nelly starin' at me."

"You stay up here, Sarah," said David with sudden determination. He wheeled a small table in front of her and hurried from the room. In a few minutes Nelly appeared with a laden tray that she set on the table.

"Mr. Maynor says if there's anything else you want, to let him know." Nelly's tone and manner were those of the well-trained servant, and she looked at her mistress with a gleam of real sympathy in her eyes.

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"This is all I want. I'm much obliged," said Sarah Maynor awkwardly.

Nelly withdrew, and Sarah began to eat, more from gratitude to David than from any sense of hunger. David was so good to her, she must get used to things for his sake. But the relief of eating without the espionage of a servant quickened her appetite, and when David rejoined her, he looked with satisfaction on the empty dishes.

"Don't worry about me, David," said Sarah, with a good attempt at a careless smile. "I've been actin' like a child, but from now on I'm goin' to behave myself." David did not answer. He appeared to be in deep thought about some important matter. He took out a pencil, did some figuring on the back of an envelope, relapsed again into the thoughtful mood, and finally went to bed silent and preoccupied.

For the next few weeks, he was away from home the greater part of the time. Many days he failed to appear at the midday meal, and often it would be dusk before he came to supper. The vague excuse of "business" satisfied Sarah, for she had the wifely faith that forbade questioning, and though David's sympathy helped her to stand the hard conditions of her daily life, she was still too unhappy to feel any keen curiosity about her husband's comings and goings. But one day David came home wearing an expression of such triumphant satisfaction that it could not be overlooked.

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"What's the matter, David?" she asked wistfully. "You look just like you did the day you got your patent."

David laughed joyously. "I feel just as I did the day I got my patent, Sarah: I've got a little business to see to after dinner, but about four o'clock I'll come around with the buggy, and we'll take a long ride. I've been workin' hard for the last few weeks, and I reckon I'm entitled to a little holiday."

That horse and phaeton had been the occasion of much comment on the part of the general public. People often smiled to see the rich inventor and his wife in their modest turnout, while men of lesser worth whizzed by in costly machines; only Sarah knew that the shining little phaeton and the gentle mare were the realization of a childish dream.

"I reckon I ought to have bought a car," said David apologetically, as he helped Sarah into the phaeton for their first ride together; "but when I was a little shaver I wanted a pony; every boy does. Nobody but God will ever know how much I wanted that pony I never got. And when I grew older, I wanted a horse just as bad as I wanted a pony, and now the time's come when I can have what I want. Some day we can get one of these big machines, but right now this little buggy and this little mare just suit me." And Sarah had acquiesced fully in these views.

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"You can't love a big machine, but you can love a horse," she said. And thereafter the horse and phaeton were the only mitigating circumstances of her new life, for they enabled her to get away, for a few happy, care-free hours, from the two-story brick and the two hateful servants. She ate her dinner with a better appetite because of the promised ride. Long before the hour appointed she was dressed and waiting with the impatience of a child, and before they had gone a mile, she had caught David's spirit of happiness, and was looking up into her husband's face with a look her face used to wear before the curse of wealth came upon her.

"Are we going to Millville?" she asked apprehensively.

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"No," said David. "We're going in that direction, but we'll stop before we get there." He understood why Sarah would not want to drive through the village; it would seem like flaunting her new wealth in the faces of her old neighbors. David's eyes sparkled, and his mouth kept curving into a smile even though there was no occasion for smiling. Sarah felt that she was on the verge of a pleasant surprise, and her eyes roved here and there searching for the possible stopping-place. There were pretty cottages at intervals along the road, and each one reminded her of her lost home. On they went, around a sharp turn in the road, and suddenly David drew rein in the shade of a huge tulip tree just in front of a little country place. A new paling fence painted gray enclosed the lot; the house was not a new one, but its coat of gray matched the fence, and a fresh green roof crowned its walls. Sarah leaned forward, her eyes alight with wonder.

"Why, Dave, it looks like our old cottage. It's exactly like it, only it's had a new coat of paint. What are we stopping here for? Does anybody live here?"

David was helping her out of the phaeton. His eyes were smiling, and the corners of his mouth twitched.

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"It does look considerably like our cottage," he said gravely. "That's why I brought you out here. I thought you might enjoy lookin' at it." He opened the gate, and they walked up the path, Sarah glancing from side to side at the newly planted shrubs and trees.

"Why, Dave, it looks just like our front yard, only everything's new. There's that little maple tree at the corner of the house, just like our maple tree at home, and all the shrubs I used to have, and planted in exactly the same places. It's right curious how much it's like our old place."

They were on the front porch now. David knocked loudly on the door. That door! Sarah's eyes were scanning it as if it were a written page from which she hoped to learn good tidings. It glistened bravely in its thick coat of white paint, but when one has opened and shut the same door for twenty years, the brush of the painter cannot wholly conceal its familiar features. Surely that was her front door!

"The folks don't seem to be at home," said David, and as he spoke, he took a key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and flung it wide open. David was no playwright, but he understood how to produce a dramatic situation and bring a scene to a successful climax. The opening of the door disclosed a narrow entry. The floor was covered with an oilcloth somewhat worn, and in front of the door lay a rug of braided rags. Against the wall stood a very ugly hatrack, and over the door leading into the room on the left was a Bible text worked in faded yarns and framed in dingy gilt. For a moment Sarah stood gazing bewildered at the familiar interior, then she grasped her husband's hand and stepped across the threshold, uttering an inarticulate expression of rapture, while David laughed aloud in pure delight.

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"Oh, David! David!" she cried, "it's my own home, my own little home! What does it mean, David? Am I crazy or dreaming or what?" She was clinging to David's arm, trembling and tearful. David patted her kindly on the hand.

"You're not crazy, honey, and you're wide-awake, too. It means that you've got your old home again, and you needn't ever go back to the two-story brick house in town unless you want to."

"But I thought the house was torn down," insisted Sarah, incredulous of the happy reality.

"So it was," explained David, "but I bought the lumber and had it all put together again. Everything's just like it used to be except the wall paper and paint. They're new."

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Oh! the miracle of it! And it was David's love that had wrought the miracle. Sarah tried to speak, tried to tell David all her happiness and gratitude, but the words were so incoherent, broken, and mixed with tears that no one but David could have understood their meaning.

"Kind?" he said, patting her shoulder. "No, there's no particular kindness about this. I've just got Doctor Bourland's prescription filled, that's all. You know he said I had to find out what the trouble was and remove it, and that's what I've tried to do."

Sarah's tears flowed afresh at this proof of David's thoughtfulness. "Oh, David!" she cried remorsefully. "I thought you didn't care for the things—*our* things! And it hurt me so!"

"Cheer up, old woman," said David. "Dry your eyes and see if I've got everything here I ought to have. You'll find some clothes in the bureau drawers, enough to last for a few days, anyhow. We're goin' to stay here awhile, till that head of yours quits achin' and your nerves get quieted down."

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But Sarah was in the kitchen now, opening drawers, doors, and boxes like a true daughter of Pandora. "Sugar—meal—soda—bacon—salt. How on earth did you manage to think of everything, David?"

"Come out in the garden," urged David. "Pretty outlook, ain't it?" he said, with a gesture toward the west where green meadows and blue hills slumbered in the late afternoon sunshine. "See the new stable and the chicken yard. I'll put up some martin boxes next week, and we'll have pigeons, too. Here's the asparagus bed, and over against the stable we'll have a little hotbed and raise early lettuce. It's too late to do much now, but I've got the walks laid off, and this time next year we'll be sittin' under our own 'vine and fig-tree.'"

Hand in hand, like two children, they wandered over their acre of ground, planning for the flower garden, the vegetable garden, and the tiny orchard and the grape arbor that were to be, till the level rays of the sun warned them of approaching evening. David took out his watch.

"Pretty near supper time," he said. "The fire's laid in the kitchen stove. I wonder if you've forgotten how to cook a meal, Mrs. Maynor?"

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Sarah answered with a laugh; and as she walked to the house and entered her kitchen, she looked as Eve might have looked, if, with her womanly tears and sighs, she had bribed the Angel of the Flaming Sword to let her pass through the gate and stroll for an hour along the paths of her lost Eden. But Sarah's Paradise Regained was the paradise of the worker. She rolled up her sleeves, tied a gingham apron around her waist, and set about getting supper with the zeal of those who count themselves blest in having to earn the bread they eat.

She set the little square table near a western window, and the sunset light fell on the cheap cloth, the ill-matched pieces of cheap china, and the plain food of the working man. It was all she could do to keep back the tears of joy when she called David in to supper. David's eyes filled, too, when he seated himself at the table. He bowed his head to say grace, but his voice failed, and their grace was a silent thanksgiving, not for food, but for the restoration of the old home and the old life.

In the midst of the meal Sarah laid down her knife and fork with an expression of dismay. "Oh, David!" she exclaimed, "what will we do about the house in town? We can't leave it in charge of those no-account servants."

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"Don't worry," said David placidly. "Ann Bryan's in charge of that house, and she'll stay as long as we're here. Ann knows how to manage servants. She used to be the housekeeper at Northcliffe Manor, you remember. I told her about the trouble you'd had, and I think you'll find Nelly and Bertha well broken in when you get back."

Sarah drew a sigh of relief. It was good to know that those hateful servants were in stronger hands than hers, and better still, that she and David could eat their meals in the privacy of the kitchen with no spying eyes upon them.

"Do the people at Millville know about this house, David?" she asked later, as they sat on the porch in the stillness and coolness of the night. David blew a puff of smoke into the darkness before he answered.

"They all know, Sarah, and I think it'll make things a good deal easier for you. Annie McGowan came by one day, when I was havin' the cottage torn down and the lumber hauled out here; she stopped to ask questions, and I told her how you pined for your old home and what I intended to do, and I guess she told all the other women, for I notice a change in everybody's face."

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"What did Annie say?" urged Sarah eagerly.

"She said she always knew your heart was in the right place."

The old home and the old friends, too! All her loved and lost possessions were found, and if David's wealth were suddenly snatched away, she would still be a rich woman. She slept soundly and woke with a thrill of rapture at the thought of the day's work before her. How many things there were to be done and how willingly she would do them, for she was back in her own place, living her own life, and finding health and happiness in daily toil. She went from task to task, rejoicing that her hand had not lost its cunning for sweeping, dusting, sewing, cooking, and all the rest of the blessed work that goes to the making of a home; "and the evening and the morning were the first day." The second day was like unto the first, and on the third day Mary Matthews and Annie McGowan came, and a broken friendship was cemented, never to be broken again.

At the end of the week David came home with a grave face. "I'm sorry, Sarah," he said, as they sat down to their supper, "but I'm afraid we'll have to break camp and go back to town to-morrow morning. I had a letter from Bates and Hammond, that big firm I told you about, and I have to go to St. Louis to-morrow morning. I can't leave you out here alone, so I reckon you'll have to go back to the two-story brick for awhile."

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He expected an outburst of tears from Sarah, but to his great relief she went calmly on, pouring his coffee and helping him to the corn bread and bacon.

"That's all right, David," she said pleasantly. "I was just wonderin' to-day how things were in town, and I'd just as soon go back as not."

David drew a breath of relief. "I think you'll find everything in good order," he said. "Ann Bryan has got Nelly and Bertha well in hand. She says they're good servants, and all they need is a tight rein to hold them to their work. She says you must look them straight in the eye when you give an order, and never let a bad piece of work pass. She says that's the secret of managin' servants."

Sarah said nothing, but there was a look on her face that Ann Bryan would have approved.

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"We have to make an early start to-morrow," continued David, "for I leave on the nine o'clock train. Ann may leave the house before we get to town. Her brother's wife is sick, and she's needed at home, and that's another reason why we ought to go back to town for awhile."

"Of course it is," agreed Sarah, "and I don't mind it at all."

David watched his wife closely, as they made preparations for leaving the next morning, but there was nothing in her manner or her words to indicate the slightest annoyance over the return to town. She seemed alert, cheerful, and more than willing to make the change, and when they came in sight of the two-story brick, David thought she looked rather pleased.

"Maybe you'd better have some one to stay with you while I'm gone," he suggested, as he kissed her good-by.

"No," said Sarah, very decidedly, "I've got some work to do, and I'd rather be alone. Take care of yourself, David, and come home as soon as you can."

She stood on the porch till David was out of sight and then walked back to the kitchen where the two servants were dawdling and gossiping over their breakfast.

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"Nelly," she said, pointing to the kitchen clock and looking the maid squarely in the face, "it's nearly nine o'clock and no cleaning done yet. Go up-stairs and open the windows so the house'll have a good airing, and then get the parlor in order first before company comes." While the astonished Nelly obeyed orders, she turned to Bertha and gave directions for the next meal. "You've got your kitchen in good order," she said approvingly, "and from now on you must keep it just this way."

"She's learnin' fast," said Nelly to Bertha an hour later, when they came together for a whispered conference in the kitchen pantry.

"Believe me!" returned Bertha, "it won't be long before I'll be cookin' six o'clock dinner instead of supper."

Sarah had ample time to work and think, for David was gone a week instead of three days. Every morning she arose with certain plans in her mind, and every night she lay down to sleep, calmly satisfied because she had carried these plans to a successful completion. The forenoons were spent in a careful superintendence of household affairs, and Nelly and Bertha were made to feel the authority of a mistress whose ideas of cleanliness and order were beyond any they had ever known. In the afternoon she put on her brown suit and went out to walk, or to call on the friendly people whose cards lay in the silver tray on her center table. Her air at such times was one of grave determination, and even David never knew with what fear and trembling and heart-sinking these first social duties were performed. She was a pleasant-faced, wholesome-looking woman; her dark, abundant hair was somewhat coarse, but it waved naturally, and she arranged it well; her skin was not fine, but it had a clear, healthy color, and her form was erect, in spite of years of drudgery. Each day a careful observer might have found some slight improvement in her dress and manner. Hitherto the putting on of clothes had been to Sarah merely a part of her day's work, something to be done with the utmost speed; but now she was learning to make a toilette, varying the arrangement of her hair and observing the fit of her garments and the effect of different colors. Her taste in clothes happened to be good, and the fine simplicity of her suit and hat offset the plainness of her manner and her evident embarrassment over the difficult function of making calls.

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"I like her," said Mrs. Emerson, the minister's wife, to Mrs. Morris, the banker's wife. "She is what you call a plain woman, and they're unmistakably 'new rich', but the newspaper paragrapher will never have anything on her. She's absolutely without pretense, and she has a world of common sense. I'm glad she's consented to join our club, for we need just such a woman in this legislative work we're undertaking."

When David wrote her the date of his home-coming, she made it a festal occasion. The house had an extra cleaning; the grocer's boy left the choicest meat, fruits, and vegetables on Nelly's kitchen table, and Bertha was ordered to make the table look as attractive as possible. Notwithstanding her longing for the old life, Sarah had always taken a timid, tremulous sort of pleasure in the fine damask, the cut glass, silver, and china that David had bought when they moved into the "two-story brick", and after she had dressed to meet David, she stole down to the dining-room to feast her eyes on the costly things that had replaced the plated spoons, steel knives, ten-cent dishes, and cotton napkins of other days. Closing the door lest Bertha should intrude on her, she gazed fondly at her possessions. She was just beginning to feel they were really hers. She touched the lace of the centerpiece and a daring thought came into her mind. Was there time to do it before David came? She rushed up-stairs, put on her hat and coat, seized her purse, and walked swiftly to a near-by greenhouse.

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"Roses?" said the florist, "certainly, madam, what kind?"

What kind? Alas! the only roses she knew by name were roses like the old-fashioned ones that grew in the gardens of the Millville people. These stately queens clad in white, pink, and crimson satin and cloth of gold, were strangers to her. She looked hesitatingly from the Bridesmaid to the Bride, from the Bride to the Jacqueminot, and the florist, seeing her perplexity, suggested La France as a desirable choice and called her attention to the perfume. Yes, she wanted a dozen,—she almost turned pale at the thought of her own extravagance,—and when the florist laid the big, soft bundle of roses and ferns on her arm, she hurried home with a fearful joy in her heart. She was used to placing flowers on her table, gay nasturtiums, delicate sweet peas, and gorgeous zinnias from her own little back-yard garden. But to buy flowers for the table had always seemed to her the acme of luxury. Often she had gazed admiringly at the treasures of the florist's window, with never a thought that such splendors of color and perfume would one day be within her reach. She had really never accepted the change from poverty to wealth, and not once had

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she put her fingers into the purse that the hand of fortune held out to her. It was David who bought the house and its furnishings, David who bought even her clothes, while she, fettered by the frugal habits of a lifetime, stood aghast at what seemed to her a reckless, sinful extravagance. But now the rich fragrance of the roses was like an enchantment. Her hands trembled, a flush rose to her cheek, and as she placed the blossoms in a cut-glass vase, unconsciously she stepped across the boundary line between the old life and the new. Those hothouse flowers and ferns were the signs of wealth, David's wealth. She was David's wife, and she had a right to every costly and beautiful thing that her husband's money could purchase. She drew back from the table to observe the effect of the flowers drooping over the heavy damask cloth set with sparkling glass and silver and delicate china; then, moved by a sudden impulse that she could not have explained, she drew one of the roses from the vase and hurried up to her room, glancing furtively back to see whether she was observed by either of the servants. Standing before the mirror, she broke off the long stem and pinned the flower at her belt, then gazed anxiously into the glass. Clearly the flower looked out of place. She unpinned it, noticing how rough and coarse her hands were when they touched the satiny rose petals. But she had seen other women wearing great clusters of such flowers, and she too must learn to wear them. She heard David's step on the pavement below; the front door opened. She replaced the rose, and turning from the mirror with an air of firm resolve, she went bravely down to meet her husband.

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Ah, the joy of reunion! All her perplexities fell away from her as she and David clasped hands and smiled at each other after the manner of long married lovers.

"Thank God for home!" ejaculated David, sinking into an easy chair. He looked around the room, looked again at his wife, and was conscious of a subtle change in the atmosphere of the house. The exquisite order and cleanliness reminded him of the housekeeping he had been accustomed to, when he and Sarah lived in the little Millville cottage; and on Sarah's face there was an expression that her husband had never before seen there, the look of a soul that is girding itself for new responsibilities and new duties. David did not understand the look, but he observed that Sarah no longer crept about the house like an awkward, frightened guest; her step and bearing were that of the mistress, and he had a thrill of exultant pride a few moments later, when he heard her address Nelly in a tone of calm command. He also saw and approved the rose at her belt, but he did not know that the flower was a symbol of all the changes that had been wrought during his absence.

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There was no self-consciousness in the manner of either when they sat down at the flower-decked table. David had seen persons of importance and transacted business of importance; he was the sort of husband who makes his wife a silent partner in all his business affairs, and the two talked at ease, forgetting the hated presence of a servant. David looked across the roses at his wife's face, serene and happy as it used to be in the old days, and again he silently blessed the doctor and his magic prescription.

"How do you feel now, Sarah?" he asked, as they seated themselves in the parlor, and Sarah took up her basket of crocheting. "You know the doctor said I must let him know how you got along."

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"I am perfectly well," said Sarah emphatically, "and what's more, I intend to stay well."

David laughed aloud with pleasure. "I'll tell the doctor how well his prescription worked. That cottage is the best investment I ever made."

"Even if we never went back to it," said Sarah thoughtfully, "it would make me happy just to know it's there and it's ours."

"That reminds me," said David, with a sudden change of manner. "Hale and Davis say they can sell this house for me any day."

"Hale and Davis?" inquired Sarah with a look of surprise.

"Real estate men," explained David.

"What right have they to sell my house?" asked Sarah almost angrily.

David looked embarrassed. "Why, Sarah, I told them you were dissatisfied; you know you said—"

"Yes, I know I did," owned Sarah hastily. Her face crimsoned with an embarrassment greater than David's. During his absence she had been born again, born from poverty to riches. This sudden change of heart and mind that had made her a new creature was a mystery to herself; how, then, could she explain it satisfactorily to her husband? "I know you'll think I'm notionate and changeable, but—I don't want to sell this house. I feel just as much at home here now as I do in the little cottage. I've got used to the servants and everything, and I want to stay, and if I did not want to, I'd stay anyhow. It's cowardly to run away or turn back when you've set out to do a certain thing, and I'm not a coward. Oh! I know I can't make you understand how I feel about it and how I came to change so, but—I *want to stay in this house.*" She paused and looked pleadingly at David. For a few seconds he was dumb with astonishment, then:

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"Good for you, Sarah," ejaculated David: "That's exactly the way I feel about it." Pride and exultation shone in his eyes. Sarah had risen to the situation, and if Sarah could, so could he.

"But can we afford to keep this house and the cottage, too?" asked Sarah anxiously.

David laughed as one laughs at the questioning of a child.

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"Wait a minute, Sarah; I've got something to show you." He rose and left the room, returning presently with a drawing-board covered with sheets of drafting paper. He drew his chair near to Sarah's, rested the board on her knees, and began an enthusiastic description of the mechanism pictured in his rough drawings. Sarah could not comprehend the complexities of wheels, pulleys, flanges, and weights that David pointed out to her, but David's mechanical genius was the glory of her life, and she looked at the drawings with the rapt admiration a painter's wife might bestow on a canvas fresh from her husband's touch.

"I've been hammering at this idea a good while," concluded David, "and I believe I've got it in working shape at last. I'll have some better drawings made this week and get them off to Washington, and if all goes well, we'll have more money than we know what to do with."

"No, we won't," said Sarah. Her lips closed to a thin line, and she spoke with defiant emphasis. "That's another thing I've learned while you were away. I know what to do with money, and I don't care how rich we are."

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David stared at his wife in unveiled amazement. Was this his wife, who a few short weeks ago was weeping over unwelcome riches and longing for a life of poverty? Sarah's face crimsoned with the confusion of the woman who is suddenly called upon to explain a change of mind, and she began her explanation, speaking slowly and hesitatingly.

"You remember I told you about that Mrs. Emerson who came to see me and ask me to join her club,—the Fortnightly, I believe they call it. Well, the day after you left, I dressed myself in my best and went to see her. And I told her that if the place was still open, I believed I'd join. She was real pleasant about it, and said she was so glad I'd changed my mind, and that they'd all be glad to have me for a member. And I said to her: 'Now, Mrs. Emerson, I'm not an educated woman, but I've got sense enough to know what I can do and what I can't do. I can't write papers and make speeches, but maybe there's some kind of work for me to do, if I join the club;' and she laughed and said that if I have sense enough to know what I could do and what I couldn't do, I'd make a fine club woman. And she said they had been studyin' *The Ring and the Book*, whatever that is, but now they've concluded to change their plan of work, and they were lookin' into the conditions of workin' people, especially workin' women, and she was sure I could help in that sort of work. And I said: 'That's very likely, for I've been a workin' woman myself, and lived with workin' women all my life.' And she said that was something to be proud of, and that every woman ought to be a workin' woman, and it was just for that reason they wanted me in the club."

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Sarah paused here and bent over to straighten out a tangle in her worsteds. David was holding a paper open before him, but his wife's social adventures were of more interest to him than any page of the *Inventor's Journal*, and he waited patiently for Sarah to resume her story.

"The next day was Wednesday, and the club met at Mrs. Morton's—she's the president."

"What Morton? Alexander Morton's wife?" interrupted David.

Sarah nodded. "Yes, Mrs. Alexander Morton. They live in the big white stone house over on First Avenue."

"He's president of the bank and about everything else in this place." David stated this fact in an un-emotional way, but his eyes gleamed with triumph. His wife and Alexander Morton's wife members of the same club!

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"When Mrs. Emerson said the club met at Mrs. Morton's, I declare, Dave, my heart stood still at the thought of goin' by myself to that club. But Mrs. Emerson said she'd come by in her carriage and take me there, and she did."

David laid down his paper and straightened himself in his chair. "How did they treat you?" he asked eagerly.

"Just as nice as they possibly could," said Sarah. "I won't mind goin' by myself next time."

David's face expressed a satisfaction and pride too deep for words. "What did they do?" he asked with the curiosity of the masculine mind that seeks to penetrate the mysteries of a purely feminine affair.

"Well, they talked mostly, and at first I couldn't see what they were drivin' at, but I kept on listenin', and at last I began to understand what they intend to do. They're lookin' into the conditions of workin' women and girls and children, and they're tryin' to get laws passed that will make things easier for people that work in mills and factories. They asked me about the hours of work at the mills, and the wages and how the mill people lived, and, David, they said when the Legislature meets this winter, they'll have to go up to the capital to get some bills passed, and they want me to go with them."

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It was impossible for Sarah to stifle the note of triumph in her voice. There was a red spot on each cheek, her eyes shone with enthusiasm, and though she might not be able yet to define the word "civic", evidently she had caught the spirit of civic work. As for David, he was speechless with astonishment and delight. If long residence in Millville had qualified Sarah for membership in the Fortnightly Club, then, after all, the world of the rich and the world of the poor were not very far apart.

"I told them about Agnes Thompson, how she lost her thumb and finger in the mill this spring,

and what the Company offered her for damages, and how hard it is for mothers with little children to leave home and work; and they want to build a day nursery where the babies and children can be looked after, and that's why I said I'd learned what to do with money." She paused and looked at David, who nodded sympathetically. "One thing that helped me to see things right," she continued, "was a sermon I heard the Sunday you were away. You know that little church just three blocks down the street back of us? Well, Sunday morning I dressed and started out, and I said to myself: 'I'll go to the first church I come to;' and it happened to be that little church down the street with the cross on the steeple and over the door 'Church of the Eternal Hope.' That's a pretty name for a church, ain't it? Church of Eternal Hope. I went in while they were singin' the first hymn, and when the preacher read his text and begun to preach, it seemed to me that something must have led me there, for that sermon, every word of it, was just meant for me. The text was: 'I know both how to abound and to suffer need,' and he said life was a school, and every change that life brought to us was a lesson, and instead of complaining about it, we ought to go to work and learn that lesson, and get ready for a new one. He said if poverty came to us, it was because we needed the lesson of poverty; and if riches came, it was because we needed another lesson; and he said the lesson of poverty was easier to learn than the lesson of wealth. Oh, David!"—Sarah's face was glowing with repressed emotion and her voice trembled,—"I wish you could have heard him, I can't remember it all, but it seemed as if he was preaching just to me, and I sat and listened, and all my troubles and worries just seemed to leave me, because I began to see the meaning of them; and when you know what trouble means, it's not a trouble any longer. And he said that there was a purpose in every life, and it was our duty to find out what the purpose was and do our best to carry it out. Now, I believe, David, that I see why all this money's been put into our hands. We were happy without it, and it made us pretty miserable at first, but it was given to us for a purpose, and we must carry out the purpose. Both of us were born poor, and we've lived with poor people all our lives, and I can see the purpose in that. We know how poor people live, we know what they need, and now we've got money"—she stopped abruptly. "Don't you see the purpose, David?"

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David was silent, but Sarah knew that the silence did not mean dissent. His wife's narrative had started a train of thoughts and emotions that would be henceforth the mainspring of all his acts. Of late the sleeping ambition that lies in the heart of every man had begun to stir, and he had dared to think timidly and doubtfully of a time when he should be, to use his own words, "something and somebody" in the world. As he listened to the story of Sarah's social adventures, his heart swelled proudly. His wife had found her place among her fellow women; he would find his among his fellow men. Before him were the doors of opportunity all "barred with gold", but he held in his hand the "golden keys" that would unlock them, and the finger of Divinity was pointing out the way he should go. Could it be that the Infinite Power had planned his life for a certain end? That he had come into the world for something more than daily toil, daily wages, and, at last, old age and death? Were his mortal days a part of some great, immortal plan? A thrill of awe shook the man as he caught a momentary vision of the majesty in a human life that expresses a divine purpose. He had no words for thoughts like these, and the silence lasted a long time. When he spoke, it was of practical affairs.

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"The club will have to meet with you one of these days, won't it?" he asked.

"It meets with me the last of the month," said Sarah, trying to speak in a matter-of-fact way.

David looked critically around the room. "This furniture's pretty nice," he said, "but I don't know how it compares with other people's."

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"The furniture's all right," said Sarah hastily. "Of course, this house doesn't look like Mrs. Emerson's. Her parlor looked as if everything in it had grown there and belonged there; this room looks as if we'd just bought the things and put them here. Maybe after we've lived here a long time, it'll look different, but there's no use tryin' to make my house look like Mrs. Emerson's or Mrs. Morton's."

"Are your clothes as good as the other women's?" inquired David solicitously.

"Suppose they're not," argued Sarah sturdily. "I'm not goin' to try to dress like other women. My clothes suit me, and that's enough."

Sarah's sturdy independence pleased David, but like a good husband, he wanted his wife to look as well as other women. "Oughtn't you to have some jewelry, Sarah? Some rings and chains and—things of that sort?" he added vaguely.

"David! David!" cried his wife half in anger, half in love. "Do you want to make me a laughing stock? My hands are not the kind for rings; and what would Molly and Annie say if they saw me wearin' jewelry? We've got enough things between us and our old friends without jewelry. Instead of rings, you can give me a check for the day nursery."

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Sarah was rolling up her work now and smiling softly. "Two weeks ago," she said, "it seemed as if everything was in a tangle just like this worsted gets sometimes. But I've picked and pulled and twisted, you might say, till I've straightened it out. You see, David, there's some things you can't understand till you get 'way off from them. As long as I was in this house, I thought I was out of place, but I hadn't been in the cottage long, till I saw that this house was just as much my home as the little cottage was. I never could have seen it, though, if I hadn't gone back to the old house."

Wise Sarah! It was well for her that the club had changed its plan of work. She would never be

able to write an analysis of *The Ring and the Book*, or throw an interpretative flashlight into the obscurity of *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*, but like the knight of the Dark Tower, she had learned that

"One taste of the old time sets all things right."

ONE DAY IN SPRING

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According to the calendar, it was the last day of March, but for weeks the spirit of April and May had breathed on the face of the earth, and those who had memories of many springs declared that never before had there been such weather in the month of March.

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In the annals of the rural weather prophets, the winter had been set down as the coldest ever known—a winter of many snows, of frozen rivers, and skies so heavily clouded that there was little difference between the day and the night. Wild creatures had frozen and starved to death, and man and beast had drawn near to each other in the companionship of common suffering. Then, as if repenting of her harshness to her helpless children, Nature had sent a swift and early spring. It was March, but hardly a March wind had blown. The rain that fell was not the cold, wind-driven rain of March; it was the warm, delicate April shower. The sun had the warmth of May, and all the flowers of field, forest, and garden had felt the summons of sun and rain and started up from the underworld in such haste that they trod on each other's heels. Flowers that never had met before stood side by side and looked wonderingly at each other. The golden flame of the daffodils was almost burnt out, and the withered blossoms drooped in the grass like extinguished torches; but hyacinths were opening their censers; tulips were budding; the plumes of the lilacs showed color, and honeysuckles and roses looked as if they were trying to bloom with the lilac and the snowball. March had blustered in with the face and voice of February, but she was going out a flower-decked Queen of May.

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The fragrant air was like the touch of a warm hand. Fleets of white clouds sailed on the sea of pale blue ether, and the trees, not yet in full leaf, cast delicate shadows on the grass. On a day like this in ancient Rome, young and old clad themselves in garments of joy and went forth to the festival of the goddess of grain and harvests; and under such skies, English poets were wont to sing of skylarks and of golden daffodils. But in the calendar of the Kentucky housewife there is no Floralia or Thesmophoria, and no smile or breath of song was on the lips of the girl who was climbing the back stairs of an old farmhouse, with a bucket of water in one hand and a cake of soap in the other, to celebrate the Christian festival of spring cleaning. The steps were steep and narrow, and every time she set her foot down they creaked dismally, as if to warn the climber that they might fall at any minute. She toiled painfully up and set the bucket on the floor. Where should she begin her work? She went into the nearest bedroom, opened the door of a closet, and looked disgustedly at the disorder within,—coats, hats, trousers, disabled suspenders, a pair of shoes caked with mud, an old whip-handle, an empty blacking box, a fishing-pole and tangled line, a hammer, and a box of rusty nails. It was not an unfamiliar sight. She had cleaned the boys' closet and the boys' room every spring for—how many years? It made her tired to think of it, and she sat down on the edge of the slovenly bed and stared hopelessly around the low-ceiled, dingy room. The mouldy wall paper was peeling off, the woodwork was an ugly brown, dirty, discolored, and worn off in spots; the furniture was rickety, the bedclothes coarse and soiled; and walls, floors, and furniture reeked with a musty odor as of old age, decay, and death. All houses that have sheltered many generations acquire this atmosphere; nothing but fire can wholly destroy such uncleanness, and some vague idea of the impossibility of making the old house wholesomely clean crossed the girl's mind as she sat listlessly on the side of the bed and stared out of the window.

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There are two kinds of homesickness. One is a longing for home that seizes the wanderer and draws him across continent and ocean back to the country and the house of his nativity. Men have died of this homesickness on many a foreign soil. The other kind is a sickness of home that draws us away from ordered rooms, from sheltering walls and roofs, to the bare, primitive forest life that was ours ages ago. It was this homesickness that made Miranda sigh and frown as she looked at that room, gray and dingy with the accumulated dirt of the winter, and thought of the task before her. While she sat, scowling and rebellious, a breeze blew in, scattering the sickly odors of the bedroom, and at the same moment she heard two sounds that seem to belong specially to the spring of the year, the bleating of some young lambs in a near meadow and the plaintive lowing of a calf that had been separated from its mother. Yes, spring was here. How she had longed for it all through the long, cold, dark days of winter! And now she must spend its sunny hours in house cleaning! A weariness of all familiar things was upon her; she hated the old house; she wanted to go,—somewhere, anywhere, and her soul, like a caged bird, was beating its wings against the bars of circumstance. She went to the window and leaned out. A branch of a maple tree growing near the house almost touched her cheek, and she noticed the lovely shape and color of the young leaves. Farther on was a giant oak whose orange-green tassels swung gaily in the breeze, and through the trees she had a glimpse of a green meadow bordered by an osage orange hedge that looked like a pale green mist in the morning sunshine. She saw and felt the glory and sweetness of the spring with her physical senses only, for in her heart there was a "winter of discontent." But while she leaned from the window, looking at the trees and sky, came one of those unexplained flashes of consciousness in which the present is obliterated and we are snatched back to a shadowy past. What was the incantation that made her feel that she had lived this same moment ages and ages ago? Was it the voice of the wind and the voice of the bird in the tree-tops? Was it the shimmer of morning mist and the gold-green oak tassels against the blue sky? Or was it a blending of all these sights and sounds? Her gaze wandered farther and farther on till it reached the horizon line where stretched a fragment of the primitive wood,

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bounded by smooth turnpikes and fenced-in fields and meadows. Serene and majestic these forest remnants stand in every Kentucky landscape, guardians of the Great Silence, homes for the hunted bird and beast, and sanctuaries where the stricken soul of man may find a miracle of healing. A wild, unreasonable longing possessed the homesick girl as she looked at that line of trees, softly green and faintly veiled, and thought of what lay in their secret deeps. All her life had been spent in the country, and yet how many years it had been since she had seen the woods in spring. *The woods in spring!* The words were like a strain of music, and as she whispered them to herself, something rent the veil between childhood and womanhood, and she saw herself a little girl roaming through the forest, clinging to her father's hand and searching for spring's wild flowers. She saw the blue violets nestling at the foot of mossy stumps, columbines and ferns waving in damp, rocky places, purple hepaticas, yellow celandine, the pinkish lavender bells of the cowslip, Solomon's seal lifting its tiers of leaves by lichened rocks around a dripping spring, and that strange white flower, more like the corpse of a flower than the flower itself, that she had found once—and then no more—growing by a fallen log and half buried under the drift of fallen leaves. Suddenly she started up, hurried from the room, and ran swift-footed down-stairs and into the kitchen, where her mother stood at a table washing the breakfast dishes.

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"Mother," she said breathlessly, "I'm going over to the woods awhile. I want to see if the violets are in bloom yet. I'll be back after awhile."

Ellen Crawford paused in her work and looked helplessly at her daughter. The mind of her child had always been a sealed book to her, and she was never without a feeling of apprehension as to what Miranda would do next. "For mercy's sake!" she said weakly. Going to the woods to look for violets in house-cleaning time, when each day's unfinished work overflowed into the brimming hours of the next day! There were no words to fit such folly, and the mother only stood stupefied, looking through the open door at the flying footsteps of her errant daughter.

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Miranda ran through the back yard where the house dog lay basking in the sun, and two broods of young chickens were "peeping" around in the wet grass, led by their clucking mothers. The cat came purring and tried to rub herself against Miranda's garments, but she thrust her aside and hurried on. These creatures belonged to the house, and it was the house from which she was fleeing. As she passed through the sagging garden gate, a casual gust of wind stirred the boughs of a water-maple tree near by, and scattered a shower of petals over her hair and shoulders, while a robin in the topmost branch sang a Godspeed to the pilgrim who was hastening to the altars of spring. Down the garden path she sped with never a glance aside at the trim rows of early vegetables bordered by clumps of iris and peonies, with now and then an old-fashioned rose that looked as if it were tired of growing and blooming in the same spot so many years. If one had stopped her and said: "Where are you going?" she could not have told him where. If he had asked: "What do you seek?" again she would have been at a loss for a reply. But she had heard a call more imperative than the voice of father or mother, more authoritative than the voice of conscience; something had passed out of her life with the passing of childhood and first youth; she was going to find the precious lost joy; and the power that guides the bird in its autumnal flight to the south and brings it north again was guiding her feet to the woods in spring.

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She pushed aside some loose palings and crept through the opening into the pasture that lay back of the garden. The cows stopped feeding and stared at her in mild surprise as she stood, irresolute and wavering, looking back at the house, where her mother was lifting the burden of the day's toil, and then at the orchard on one side, where the peach trees were faintly flushed with pink. In the middle of the pasture stood a group of elms. When the wind passed over them, their branches swayed with the grace of willows, and against the blue sky their half-grown leaves were delicate as the fronds of the maidenhair fern. The elms seemed to beckon her, and she crossed over and stood for a moment looking up at the sky "in a net",—the net of leafy branches. While she gazed upward, a sudden wind came blowing from the direction of the forest, and on its breath was the mysterious sweetness that is one of the surest tokens of spring. It is as if every tree and plant of the forest had sent forth a premonition of its blooming, a spirit perfume waiting to be embodied in a flower. Miranda drew a long breath and looked across the meadow to the freshly plowed field whose western boundary line was "all awave with trees", each clad in its own particular tint of verdure, from the silver green of the silver poplar to the black green of the cedars. The dogwood, that white maiden of the forest, was still in hiding; the wild cherry, that soon would stand like a bride in her wedding veil, was now just a shy girl in a dress of virginal green; the purplish pink of the red-bud flower was barely visible on its spreading limbs. The Great Artist had merely outlined and touched here and there with his brush the picture which later on he would fill in with the gorgeous coloring of summer's full leafage and full flowering.

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She hurried across the meadow, climbed the old rail fence, and plodded her way over the plowed ground, stepping from ridge to ridge and feeling the earth crumble under her feet at every step. It was a ten-acre field, and she was out of breath by the time she reached the other side. There was no fence between field and forest; the only boundary line was the last furrow made by the plow. On one side of this furrow lay civilization with its ordered life of cares and duties. On the other side was the wild, free life of Nature. She stopped and looked doubtfully into the sunlit aisles of the forest, as we look at old familiar places, revisited after long absence, to see if they measure up to the stately beauty with which our childish imagination clothed them. She stepped timidly through the underbrush at the edge of the wood and looked above and around. So many years had passed, and so many things had passed with the years! Perhaps the remembered enchantment had passed too. She recalled the song of the birds, and how the voice of the wind in the tree-tops had sounded against the fathomless stillness that lies at the heart of the forest. She

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held her breath and listened. Wind and leaf and bird were making music together as of old; and under the whisper and the song she felt the presence of the eternal, inviolable calm against which earth's clamor vainly beats. She recalled the rustle of the dead leaves under her feet, and the odor that the heat of the sun drew from the moist earth. There were dead leaves to-day in every path, and Nature was distilling the same perfumes and making beauty from ashes by the same wondrous alchemy she had used when the earth was young. Nothing had changed except herself. She looked around for an opening in the underbrush, some trace of a path, and then hastened fearlessly on to find the main path that led through the heart of the woods, and made a "short cut" for the traveler on foot. Besides this central path, there were numerous little by-paths made by the feet of cattle that had pastured here for a few months of the previous summer. Each one of these invited her feet, and each one led past some fairy spot—a bed of flowers, a bower of wild vines, a grapevine swing, a tiny spring from which she drank, using a big, mossy acorn cup for a goblet. She wandered from one side of the main path to the other, and thrice she walked from road to road. All winter she had been snow-bound and ice-bound within the walls of the old farmhouse, and now spring had unlocked the doors of the prison. Lighter grew her footsteps the longer she walked, and in every muscle she felt the joy of motion that the fawn feels when it leaps through the forest, or the bird when it cleaves the sunny air on glistening wing.

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Gone was the thought of time, for here were no tasks to be done, no breakfast, dinner, and supper; and the day had but three periods,—sunrise, noontide, and sunset. The house she had left that morning seemed a long way off, almost in another world; and the forest was an enchanted land where there was no ugly toil for one's daily bread. Duty and fear alike were lulled to sleep, and while the sun climbed to its zenith she roamed as care-free as any wild creature of the woods. Suddenly a cloud darkened the sun and melted into a soft, warm mist that the wind caught up and blew like a veil across the face of spring. Miranda paused, lifted her head, and held out her hands to catch the gracious baptism. It was only a momentary shower, past in a burst of sunshine, but it left its chrism on her forehead and hair and made her feel more akin to flower and tree. How many gifts were falling from the hand of spring! To the birds the joy of mating and nesting; to the roots and seeds in the dark, cold earth warmth and moisture and a resurrection morn; and to the ancients of the forest a vesture as fresh as that which clothes the sapling of the spring.

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Surely we have severed some tie that once bound us to the Great Mother's heart or this outflow and inflow of life and beauty that we call spring would touch men and women too, and then would come the Golden Age. Nature is kinder to her trees and flowers than she is to her sons and daughters. The girl who lifted her forehead to the sacrament of the rain should have received a blessing that would touch her face with the color of the rose and put the strength and grace of the young trees into her limbs. But how sad and strange she looked, flitting through the vernal freshness of the forest! Her faded calico gown hung limp over her thin body, and her hair and cheek were as faded as the gown. She should have been a nymph, but she was only a tired, worn daughter of the soil, and amid all this opulence of giving there was no gift for her except the ecstatic yearning that was welling up in her heart and leading her here and there in search of something she could not name.

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How sweet the air was! She breathed deeply as she walked, and at every inspiration a burden seemed to fall from both body and soul. Just to be alive was good—to breathe, to walk through the sun-flecked forest paths, to feel the warmth of the sunshine on her shoulders, and to know that the world of the forest belonged to her as it belonged to the bird and the bee. She had almost reached the other side of the strip of woodland, and through the trees she caught glimpses of a wheat field stretching like a pale green sea from this strip of woodland to another that belonged to a neighboring farm. She thought of a hymn her mother often sang when the drudgery of the farm permitted her soul to rise on the wings of song:

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"Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
Stand dressed in living green;
So to the Jews old Canaan stood,
While Jordan rolled between."

She lifted up her voice and sang the old hymn:

"There is a land of pure delight
Where saints immortal reign;
Infinite day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain.

"There everlasting spring abides
And never withering flowers:
Death, like a narrow sea, divides
This pleasant land from ours."

Alas! How strange and sad it sounded with the "careless rapture" of the birds. Never before had a song of death been sung in those forest aisles, and suddenly she stopped, silenced by a sense of the incongruity of such a hymn in the spring woods. Why should one sing of "sweet fields" and "pleasant lands" beyond the sea of death? Right here are pleasant lands and sweet fields, and our songs should be of the "pure delight" of this old earth. Better than such worship as ours the worship of the pagan, who went forth with music to meet the dawn and sang hymns in praise of

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seed-time and harvest.

It is not alone by "getting and spending" that we "lay waste our powers" and loosen our hold on the possessions that Nature so freely offers us. Perpetually she calls to us with her voice of many waters, her winds and bird songs. She opens and closes each day with cloudy splendors that transcend the art of poet or painter. She spends centuries making the columned sanctuaries of her forests more majestic than Solomon's temple, and lights them with the glory of the sun and stars. Life more abundant is in her air and sunshine. She offers to each soul the solitude of the wilderness, and the mountains, where Christ found rest and strength after the presence of crowds had drained him of his virtue. And we—we wrap ourselves in the mantle of Care; we build walls of stone to shut out from us all sweet influences of Nature; we sing of "an everlasting spring", and then let the fleeting hours of our earthly springs go by without once tasting their full sweetness; we look for a heaven beyond death, unmindful of the heaven within and around us; we deem the light that falls through a stained glass window more religious than the light of open day, and a waxen taper more sacred than a star; we shorten life by cutting it off from its source, and at last, worn out with sordid cares, we give our bodies back to earth without having known one hour of the real joy of life.

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Vague, half-formed thoughts like these were in Miranda's mind as she paused and looked up in response to a voice from a neighboring oak: "Chic-o-ree! Chic-o-ree!" The syllables were clear and distinct as if spoken by a human voice, and from a tree across the path came the answer: "Chic-o-ree! Chic-o-ree!" All her consciousness had been merged in seeing, but now she was aware of a chorus of voices calling, chirping, whistling, trilling, fluting, warbling from far and near, the orchestra of May assembled a month in advance of its usual time.

"If we could only live outdoors!" she whispered to herself. All the high emotions that fill the heart of a poet in spring were stirring in the breast of the country girl, and finding no way of expression they could only change into poignant longings that she herself but half understood. There was a puzzled, baffled look on her face as she stood hesitant, wondering what step to take next. So many remembered things she had found in the woods!—music, perfume, light winds and warmth and flowers and trees, but there was still something, nameless, elusive, that had once been hers, and she must find it before the day ended.

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She stooped to gather a violet growing by a fallen tree, and the second time that day a wave of memory and feeling swept over her, and in one exquisite moment she found the lost treasure! For the heart that leaped and throbbed faster at sight of the violet was the heart of a little child.

It was past the middle of the afternoon. The wind had died down to a mere occasional whisper, the birds chirped more softly, and there seemed to be a hush and a pause, as if all the creatures of the wood felt the languorous spell of the hour. Miranda looked about for a resting place. She was standing near the main path in a partly cleared space, a sort of fairy ring, in the center of which was a giant tree that had suffered a lingering death from a stroke of lightning. Lithe and graceful, with the sap of a new life coursing through their veins, its comrades were waving and beckoning to each other and welcoming the birds to leafy shelters, while, stark and stiff with decay, the stricken one stood like the skeleton at the feast, stretching its helpless arms skyward as if imploring Nature to raise it from the dead. All around it were the kings of the forest, the fruitful walnut and hickory whose leaves smell like the "close-bit thyme" on the downs of Sussex by the sea; the tasseled oak, and the elm more graceful than any graveyard willow; but moved by some hidden impulse, this girl whose youth was almost gone chose the dead tree for her own. The ground was littered with strips of bark that the electric storm had torn from the trunk. She gathered these and laid them at the root for protection from the damp earth. Then, seating herself, she leaned back against the trunk of the tree and drew a long, sighing breath of deep content. Through the woods on the other side of the path she could see the field of young wheat, and she had a vague, dreamy thought of the summer's heat that would ripen the grain and of the harvest with its terrible toil for the women of the farm. The heat of summer and the cold of winter were alike hateful to her, but no thought of either could break this blissful calm. Like an evil dream the winter was gone, and like an evil dream the summer too would go, and both would be forgotten. What mattered heat or cold? Every winter had its spring; every summer its autumn; and the heart need remember only its springs and autumns. She looked upward into the depths of pale blue ether, and followed the course of the white, drifting clouds. O, ecstasy of ecstasies! To live on such an earth with such a sky above! Looking at the sky was like looking into a vast crystal. Farther and farther into space her gaze seemed to penetrate, and presently her soul began to follow her gaze. Something in that boundless space seemed to be drawing her out of the body. Her breath was so light it would hardly have moved a gossamer; her eyelids drooped slowly and heavily, and she slept a sleep too deep for dreams.

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An hour passed, and still the mystery of sleep enfolded her. A bee hummed noisily about her head, a catbird sang in a tree near by, but she was too far away to be disturbed by any sound of earth.

"Ye are not bound!

The soul of things is sweet,
The heart of being is celestial rest—"

All this the sleeper knew. She had broken the chains of habit that mortals forge for themselves and bind on themselves; in the freedom of that spring day her soul had tasted the sweetness that lies at the "soul of things", and now in sleep she had found the "celestial rest" that lies at "the heart of being." [Pg 229]

Was that a human footstep or was it a rabbit rustling the underbrush? Was it a human voice or the note of a bird? Along the fresh path between the two roads came a man, walking with a glad, free stride and whistling softly under his breath. The joy of the season was in his face, and he was at home in the woods, for when a redbird called to its mate, the man whistled a reply and smiled to hear the bird's instant response. Suddenly he caught sight of the sleeping girl at the foot of the tree; the whistle and the smile died on his lips and he stopped short, amazed and bewildered. A woman asleep in the forest! Wonder of wonders! The sunshine flecked her face and her hair, and in the sweet placidity of sleep he hardly recognized the girl he had often seen in the country church on Sundays. What was she doing here alone and unprotected? Surprise and wonder vanished as he realized the situation, and his face crimsoned like a bashful girl's. For the moment the whole wood seemed to belong to the sleeper at whom he was gazing, and he felt the confusion of one who accidentally invades the privacy of a maiden's room. Here was no fairy princess to be wakened with a kiss, but a helpless woman who must be guarded as long as she slept, and he was a knight in homespun appointed to keep the watch. He knew, though no poet had ever told him, that sleep is "a holy thing." If it had been possible, he would have silenced the songs of the birds, and he held his breath as he turned and tiptoed softly away, looking timidly back now and then to see if she still slept. When he had gone a few rods, he stepped out of the path and took his place behind the trunk of a tree. Here he could watch and see that no other intruder passed by, and when she wakened he would be ready to follow her homeward flight. There were tasks at home awaiting his hand, but here was a work more important than any labor of farm or fireside. Steadfastly he watched and listened, while the sun sank lower, and the woods were filled with a golden glow like the radiance of many candles lighted in some great temple. [Pg 230]

Sleep is a mystery, and so is our awakening from sleep. Who can tell where the soul goes, when the body lies motionless, unseeing, unhearing, and who can tell what calls it back from those far and unremembered lands? [Pg 231]

It may have been the chill of the coming night as the sun went down, or the cry of a bird that summoned Miranda again to earth. She opened her eyes with a long, sighing breath. How heavenly to waken out of doors and see the blue sky and the swaying limbs of the trees instead of the cracked ceiling of her bedroom! Then, as full consciousness came back to her with memory of the day just passed, she saw that the sun was nearly down. Night was at hand; the birds were seeking their nests, and she must return to her home. With the thought of home came the thought of duty, of the undone work she had left behind her that morning, and her mother toiling in the gloomy kitchen. She sprang up, every sense alert, turned her face in the direction of home, and took the nearest path through the underbrush.

The watcher by the tree heard her flying steps and breathed a sigh of relief. He moved cautiously around the trunk of the oak and waited till he was sure she was out of the wood. Then he followed her trail and caught sight of her half-way across the plowed field. He watched till she was safe inside the pasture and then retraced his steps to the dead tree. Had he been living in a dream? No, for here were the withered violets lying on the ground witnessing to the reality of the last few hours. He gathered up the poor, limp flowers, placed them carefully in his waistcoat pocket and walked rapidly homeward. [Pg 232]

The sun was just on the horizon line, when Miranda reached the garden gate, and the splendor of light all around made her pause and look back to the glowing West. Clouds were gathering for a storm; every cloud was a mount of transfiguration, golden-hued or rose-colored, and the evening sky was pierced by long arrows of light that grew brighter and more far-reaching as the great central light sank lower behind the little hills. The wind was blowing across the fields, carrying with it the fragrance that night draws from the heart of the forest. One moment the sad magnificence of dying day held her spellbound, then conscience spoke again, and she hurried into the kitchen. The golden light was streaming into the room, bringing out all its ugliness and disorder, and her mother was standing by the table just where Miranda had left her that morning. [Pg 233]

"This is a pretty time of day for you to come home. Where have you been all this time?" She looked at her daughter with cold displeasure, but under the displeasure Miranda saw the expression of despair and weariness that comes of unrecompensed toil, and a pang of remorse went through her heart. She took her mother by the shoulders and gently pushed her away from the table.

"Go out and sit on the porch, Mother, and look at the sky. I'll get supper, and to-morrow I'll begin the house cleaning."

There was something in the girl's voice that checked the rising anger in her mother's heart and stilled the upbraiding words that were on her lips. She looked searchingly at her daughter and then turned silently away. Miranda went to work with a willingness that surprised herself. All the weariness and disgust of the morning were gone. She had voluntarily resumed the shackles of duty, but as she worked she looked out of the window to catch glimpses of the fading splendor

that was rounding out her flawless day, and in her heart she resolved that as long as she lived, no spring should pass without a day in the woods. She had eaten nothing since morning, but the mood of exaltation was still upon her, and even the odor of the food she cooked roused no sense of hunger. She thought of a Bible text learned when she was a child: "Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Perhaps all the splendor of color and light, all the opulence of perfume and warmth and music that make spring are words of God. All day she had been living by those words, and she knew the meaning of another occult saying of Christ: "I have meat to eat that ye know not of."

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She placed the evening meal on the table, called the family, and served them more cheerfully than ever before; and when they had eaten, she cleared the table and washed the dishes, while her mother rested again on the porch. Her hands moved mechanically over the work. She could hear the voices of her father and brothers; they were talking about crops and the weather, and the planting that must be done that week. Now and then her mother put in a word of querulous complaining over the hardship of the day just passed and of all those that were to come. She heard it as in a dream for still "the holy spirit of the spring" possessed her, and it seemed strange and unbelievable that people could be troubled over such trifles as sweeping and cleaning and cooking, when there were the woods and the great, deep peace of the woods in which all such cares might be forgotten.

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After she had set the table for breakfast, she went out on the porch. Her mother and the boys had gone up-stairs to bed, and her father was knocking the ashes from his pipe and yawning loudly. She sat down on the bench beside him and laid her hand on his knee. Such a thing as a caress had not passed between father and daughter since the latter had outgrown her childhood, and the man turned in surprise and peered through the gloom at the face of the girl, as if seeking an explanation of that familiar touch.

"Your mother says you been roamin' around in the woods all day, Mirandy," he said awkwardly. "That ain't safe for a girl. Don't you know that?"

"I wasn't afraid," she answered; "and, Father, I want to ask a favor of you." Her voice had the eager pleading of a child's. "I want you to go walkin' with me in the woods next Sunday, just like we used to do when I was a little girl." Something in her voice and the words "when I was a little girl" touched a chord of memory that had not vibrated for many a year. Perhaps the tired, hard-worked man had a glimpse of the meagerness of his child's life, for he laid his rough hand over hers and spoke with the voice she remembered he had used when she was "a little girl."

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"Why, that's a curious notion, Mirandy," he said. "What'll the preacher say, if he hears we've gone walkin' in the woods on Sunday instead of goin' to church? But I'll go just to please you, provided the weather's suitable. Now, le's shut up the house and go to bed. It's time everybody was asleep."

They went in together, and while her father closed the doors and put down the windows in anticipation of the coming rain, Miranda lighted her lamp in the kitchen and went softly up-stairs. She still felt the delicious sleepiness that comes from breathing outdoor air all day, and her nap in the woods seemed only to have given her a longing for more sleep.

At the head of the stairs were the soap and water still waiting to be used, but she could look at them now without any of the irritation she had felt that morning, for she knew the hidden meaning of the work that lay before her. Was not Nature cleaning the whole earth, purifying it with her sunshine and her wind, and washing it with her dew and rain? If men and women could only live in the wind and sun with no shelter but the branches of the trees! But since they must have houses, these, too, must know the wholesome touch of wind, sun, and water. Lovely pictures of clouds, trees, fields, birds, and flowers filled her brain and made more apparent the ugliness of her room. Her sense of smell, sharpened by breathing forest air, took instant note of the musty odors that came from walls, floors, and clothing. She pushed the bedstead near the window so that she might feel the night air blowing over her face as she slept and resolved that the next night should find that room as like to a nook in the woods as she could make it; and when the scrubbing and whitewashing were over, she would go again and again to the woods and gather the flowers of spring, summer, and autumn to sweeten the air of the old house. As she blew out the lamp, there was a rumble of thunder from the west; a wind with the smell of rain swept through the dark room, and, laying her head on the pillow, she smiled to think how the creatures of the forest would look and feel in the scented night and the falling rain. All the spring landscape on which she had gazed that day seemed imprinted on her brain, and when she closed her eyes, it passed like a panorama before her inner vision: wind-swept trees whose leafy branches waved against the pale blue sky; tremulous shadows on the fresh greensward; flowers of the garden and flowers of the forest flushing, purpling, paling, flaming, glowing in orderly beds or in wild forest nooks; long grey fences outlining farms and roads; sunlight glinting on the wings of flying birds; misty hills and little valleys sloping down to the level of the fertile fields; glory of midday and greater glory of sunset softening into the quiet, star-lit evening skies.

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What need of the painter's canvas and brush when the soul can thus imprint on its records Beauty's every line and every color to be recalled instantly from the shadows of time by Memory's magic art?

The thunder muttered fitfully, and presently the rain came, dashing against the roof like a rattle of musketry, then quieting to a steady downpour that promised to last all night. She lay still, listening drowsily to the music of the storm and seeing through her closed eyelids the flashes of

lightning. She was not tired, only sleepy and happy. The same calm that enveloped her in the forest was around her now, and soon she was sleeping as deeply and sweetly as she had slept in the afternoon. And while she slept, the man who had guarded her forest slumber sat in the darkness, dreaming, and gazing at a picture that would never fade from his brain: In the midst of the living forest a dead tree, and at its foot a sleeping girl holding a bunch of withered violets.

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Ah, well! The perfect day was over and never again would come another like it. To-morrow the sleeper and the dreamer would wake and rise to the old, dull routine of daily toil and daily weariness, but though the day was gone, its grace would abide forever, and life could never be quite the same to the one who had met face to face with the True Romance, and to the other who had lived, for a few charmed hours, the life of the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field.

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