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OLDFIELD

A KENTUCKY TALE OF THE LAST CENTURY

BY NANCY HUSTON BANKS

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To My Father

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OLDFIELD

I

THE LITTLE SISTERS

The old white curtain was slightly too short. Its quaint border of little cotton snowballs swung clear of the window ledge, letting in the sunbeams. The flood of light streaming far across the faded carpet reached the high bed, and awakened Miss Judy earlier than usual on that bright March morning, in the Pennyroyal Region of Kentucky, a half century ago.

Miss Judy was always awake early, and usually arose while her sister lay still fast asleep on the other side of the big bed. She had learned, however, to creep so softly from beneath the covers, and to climb so quietly down the bed's steep incline, that Miss Sophia was hardly ever in the least disturbed. Moreover, Miss Judy always kept a split-bottomed chair standing near her pillow at night. This served not only as a stand for the candlestick and matches,—so that the candle need not be blown out before Miss Sophia was comfortably cuddled down and Miss Judy was in bed,—but it also furnished a dignified and comparatively easy means of ascending the bed's heights. On descending, Miss Judy had but to step decorously from the mound of feathers to the chair and to drop delicately from the chair to the floor.

To have seen Miss Judy doing this must have been a sight well worth seeing. She was so very pretty, so small, so slight, so exquisite altogether. Old as she was, she had still the movements of a bird. Her sweet old face was as fair as any girl's, and as ready with its delicate blushes. Her soft hair, white as falling snowflakes and as curly as a child's, was burnished by a silver gloss lovelier than the sheen of youth. And her beautiful eyes were still the blue of the flax flowers.

Lifting her shining, curly head on that sunny morning, Miss Judy cast a glance of dismay at the ruthless sunbeams lying on the carpet, and she could not help a slight start. Then she held her breath for a moment, turning her blue eyes on the back of Miss Sophia's nightcap, in a look of anxious love. It always gave Miss Sophia a headache to be aroused suddenly. Miss Judy was afraid that the involuntary movement might have startled her. They were very tender of each other, these two poor little sisters. And they were very, very polite to one another; more polite to one another than they were to others, if that were possible. Miss Sophia, who could not always remember the smaller matters of fine breeding where other people were concerned, never forgot the smallest courtesy toward her sister. Miss Judy, who was ever the pink—the sweetest, old-fashioned clovepink—of politeness to everybody, always treated Miss Sophia with such distinguished consideration as was a lesson in manners to see. And no one ever smiled: it was too lovely to be laughed at—too sincere to be absurd. Lying down side by side every night of their long and blameless lives, they formally wished each other pleasant dreams, and bade one another a ceremonious good night. Rising every morning—separately, with delicate regard for the simple mysteries of one another's toilet—they greeted each other at breakfast as two high-bred strangers might meet in some grand drawing-room.

Leaning upon her elbow, Miss Judy now listened for a space to her sister's breathing. She could always tell when all was well with Miss Sophia's slumbers, by a mild little puffing sound, which did no harm, but which nothing would ever have induced Miss Judy to mention to Miss Sophia or to any one. The puffs continuing peacefully, Miss Judy smiled lovingly and, laying the cover back with no more noise than a mouse makes, she flitted birdlike from the mound of feathers to the chair and thence to the home-made rug. She was always careful to stand on the rug while dressing, in order to save the carpet. Miss Sophia also always meant to stand on it, but she sometimes forgot that as she did many other things. The carpet was long past saving, as it was long past further fading; but neither Miss Judy nor Miss Sophia had begun to suspect the fact. To them it was still the elegant all-wool three-ply which their mother had spun and woven and sewed with her own hands. Accordingly, Miss Judy now hastened to spread a strip of rag carpet in the

sun's path, before commencing to dress. The big, bare room was cold, the handful of chips, which had made a cheerful blaze at bedtime, having died out during the night. But Miss Judy did not know that she was shivering. She was not in the habit of thinking of her own comfort, and it did not occur to her to kindle a fire with the chips which were in the basket beside the hearth, until such time as Miss Sophia should need the warmth. She merely dressed as fast as she could, lingering only over the last look in the mirror lying along the top of the tall chest of drawers. Such a queer old mirror! Long and narrow in its frame of tarnished gilt, with a faded landscape painted on each dim end, which was divided from the rest of the glass by a solemn little column. The chest stood so high and Miss Judy was so small that it was not easy for her to get a good look at her straight little back. But there was no other way of making sure that the point of her white muslin kerchief was precisely on a line with the bow of her black silk apron strings. And any irregularity in this matter would have shocked Miss Judy as being positively immodest. She managed, however, by standing on the very tips of her toes, to see that all was as it should be. Settling her cap, she bent down, and noiselessly taking the basket of chips, kindled a fire in one corner of the wide, empty fireplace, thinking with a loving glance at the bed that the room would be comfortably warm when Miss Sophia got up. Finally, she went into the passage to open the front door.

All the Oldfield front doors were set open in the morning and left open all day, whenever the weather was reasonably mild; except during the summer, when very few of them were closed at any time, either night or day. Miss Judy alone, of the whole village, always closed hers at bedtime all the year round. And she did not do it because she was afraid, though everybody knew how timid she was. It never occurred to her, during the whole of her gentle, innocent life, that there could be in the world a living creature who would wish to do her any harm. There was really nothing for the most timid to fear in that quiet, peaceful, pastoral country. To be sure, Alvarado, The Terrible, sometimes dashed into the village—unexpected, dazzling, fascinating, bewildering—and out again like a lightning flash. Then most of the men did indeed disappear as suddenly as though the earth had opened and swallowed them up. But Alvarado never noticed the women, and he never came at night. That is, no one ever claimed to have *seen* him galloping by after nightfall. Late watchers with the sick, who were the only late watchers in Oldfield, sometimes told fearsome tales of thunderous hoofs at midnight and of sparks that flew blue through the darkness. But Miss Judy had never seen or heard anything of the kind. She had never seen Alvarado at all, except in the distance and surrounded as he always was by a cloud of dust and mystery. She was ever slow to believe evil of any one and she rather leaned to Alvarado's side. It was unchristian, she thought, to ascribe all sorts of wickedness to a man about whom no one actually knew anything beyond the fact that he was a stranger and a foreigner and had been most unfortunate. Moreover, he had been and was still very unhappy, and the unfortunate and the unhappy had always a friend in Miss Judy. Then the romance of his marriage appealed strongly to her imagination. It was, of course, very wrong, and even very wicked, for him to have tricked and frightened poor Alice Fielding into marrying him, but he could hardly have known that she loved another man. Nobody seemed to have known it until too late,—not even John Stanley whom she loved,—and Alvarado also had loved her. There was never any doubt of that. He had not been quite in his right mind since her death, many years before. In Miss Judy's tender judgment he was much more to be pitied than to be feared. No, Alvarado had nothing to do with Miss Judy's closing her door at bedtime. She had closed it long before he had ever been heard of in that country. She closed it simply and solely because she considered it the *proper* thing to do, on account of there being no men-folks about the house. The other lone women of Oldfield closed theirs too—when they remembered to do it—without a murmur, no matter how hot the nights were, simply and solely because Miss Judy closed hers; for no right-minded member of the whole community ever needed a better reason for doing, or not doing anything, than to know that Miss Judy deemed it proper or improper.

This quality of leadership is always interesting, wherever found, and it is nearly always hard to explain. In Miss Judy's case it was even harder to make out than it commonly is. The singularity of her supremacy had nothing to do with her poverty. Neither poverty nor riches would appear ever to have anything to do with the quality of leadership in any part of the earth, and none of Miss Judy's neighbors could be considered either very poor or more than well-to-do. The most utterly incomprehensible feature of Miss Judy's long and absolute reign was, perhaps, her total lack of every personal characteristic of the autocrat. It is certainly not the usual qualification for autocracy to be as gentle and shy as Miss Judy was—or as distrustful of self and as trustful of others—or as self-forgetful and as thoughtful of every one else. The little lady was far too timid and soft of spirit knowingly to lay down laws for any one: she was only strong and firm enough to cling timidly to her own gentle convictions through a hard life of privation, as a dove clings to its nest through the fiercest storms.

She never dreamt that she *was* an autocrat. When she noticed the universal and marked deference with which she was always treated, she thought it was because her father had been greatly respected, and her mother much beloved. It was quite natural that they should have been, Miss Judy thought in justification of her own shining by a reflected light. They had been justly prominent among the earliest settlers of the Pennyroyal Region, coming with their two infant daughters when Virginia—like a rich and generous queen—first began giving away the county of Kentucky, to the sons who had served her in the Revolution. Those were glorious days! To tell about them now sounds like a fairy tale. And yet they were sad days as well. For, great though the honor was and dazzling as was the reward, the officers so honored and rewarded must have known that the claiming of these lands meant lifelong exile for their families and for themselves. It would appear so, at all events, since few came who could stay nearer to civilization. The more

fortunate ones stayed on in the old Virginia homes, content with holding cloudy titles to vast estates lying in this unknown wilderness of Kentucky; and with rearing there splendid castles in the air. So very cloudy, indeed, were many of these titles sent to Virginia by irresponsible agents, that litigation over them has only recently ceased in the local courts. Other officers were too poor to employ agents either good or bad, and these were consequently compelled to go in person, or to lose the grant of land. Among those reduced to this sore strait was Major John Bramwell, Miss Judy's father, who had won distinction as a captain of horse in the War for Independence. The home-coming found him utterly stranded. His small patrimony was long since spent, and his wife's ample fortune had shrunk to a mere pittance. He knew no means of earning a livelihood, knowing even less of the business of peace than most soldiers know. Hopelessly in debt, he knew not where to turn for relief; he knew not how to find bare bread for his family. The new home and the fresh start in the far-off county of Kentucky offered the only refuge. The young wife consented to go, as she would have consented to anything he wished or thought best; for she was the gentlest of women, and her faith in her husband was absolute. Thus it was that they gathered up the few fragments of the old happy life, and, taking their two little ones, rode sadly away into exile.

Sad indeed and heavy-hearted must have been all those first gentle-people who thus rode away from their old homes in Virginia over the Alleghanies into the wilderness of Kentucky, bearing tender little children in their arms. Miss Judy was much too young to remember that terrible journey, and Miss Sophia was only a baby, but they both knew all about it as soon as they were old enough to understand. They always wept when they heard how tired the delicate little mother was before the awful mountains were crossed—no matter how often they heard the story. They always smiled when they heard how glad all the weary pilgrims were to find a broad-horn waiting to bear the little band down the Ohio—though they heard the story over and over again. And they always followed the broad-horn with ever new interest, on and on down that long, long river through the primeval forest growing to the water's edge. Forest, forest, forest everywhere for hundreds of miles, till they came—with the travellers—almost to the vast mouth of the mighty river near which the Pennyroyal Region lies.

Miss Judy was not sure that it was called so when she entered it, an infant in her father's arms. She always thought it more likely that the whole of Kentucky may still have been known as The Dark and Bloody Ground, so great were still the sufferings of the brave men and braver women who were still giving their lives to redeem it from darkness and blood. But there never was the slightest doubt in Miss Judy's mind that these gentle-people coming now were braver than any who had come before—the bravest because they were the gentlest. It always made her own gentle heart beat, as if to strains of martial music, to be told in the little mother's soft voice of the leaving of the broad-horn's frail protection, and of the undaunted plunge into the depths of the wilderness. Yet there were dangers there to be met which courage itself must flee from. These fearless Virginians who did not shrink from facing savages, nor from encountering wild beasts, shrank and fled appalled before the more frightful dangers then lurking all along the banks of the lower Ohio. There, hidden under the beauty of the almost tropical vegetation, was the hideous rack of the fever and ague, waiting ready to torture the strength out of the men, the heart out of the women, and the very lives out of the children. There, beneath the noble trees and above the wide open spaces, rolling like gentle prairies—sunlit, flower filled, so richly covered with wild strawberries that the horses' hoofs were dyed rosy-red—there the deadly mystery of "the milk-sickness" was already spreading its invisible shroud over the whole beautiful land.

Fleeing from these perils more to be feared than the cruelest savages, and more to be dreaded than the fiercest wild beasts, the travellers went further into the heart of the wilderness, seeking the safety of higher ground; on and on, following the buffalo tracks which still traversed the country from end to end like broad, hard-beaten highways. One of these led them along a range of hills and into a fertile little valley, and it was here that the Virginians finally found a resting-place. It was here in this vale of rest, folded between these quiet hills, that the village of Oldfield grew out of that settlement, and here that it stands to-day scarcely altered from its beginning. Over the hills—there on the east where tender green of the crowning trees melts into the tenderer blue of the arching clouds—there still lies the untouched strip of broad brown earth, which the people of to-day call the Wilderness Road, just as those wandering Virginians called it when they first found it.

The forest crowded close to the valley, but the sun shone bright where the giant trees stood farther apart. Then the skies of Kentucky were as blue as the skies of Italy, just as they are now, so that the sunshine and the peace of the spot, and the pure air of the wooded hills, gave the wayfarers heart to believe themselves safe from the terrors of the Ohio. The homes which they built were all humble enough, the merest cabins of rough logs, since they had nothing else wherewith to build. Major Bramwell's house was no better than the rest. Like most of the settlers' cabins it had two low, large rooms with a closed passage between and a loft above. But it is the mistress who makes the real home,—wherever reared; the mere building of it has little to do with its making. And the softest little woman, who is neither very brilliant nor very wise, can work miracles for her husband and her children, no matter where her wings may rest upon the earth. This one, softer and less wise than many, not only made a real home of perfect refinement out of that log hut in the wilderness, but she reared her daughters—amongst white men rougher than the wild beasts, and near red men infinitely fiercer—as gently as any royal princesses were ever trained in any old palace for the gracing of courts.

It was easy enough to train Miss Judy, whose nature responded to exquisiteness as an æolian

harp responds to the breeze. Miss Sophia was different, but the little mother did not live long enough to find it out. Perhaps no true mother ever lives long enough to find anything lacking in her child. Miss Sophia was standing on the threshold of womanhood, and Miss Judy had barely crossed it, when the little mother died, worn out by hardship and broken-hearted by exile, but cheerful and uncomplaining to the last, as such mothers always are.

Is it not amazing that a small, soft woman can leave such a large, hard void in the world? Is it not bewildering to learn, as most of us do, sooner or later, that those whom we have always believed we were taking care of, were really stronger than ourselves, and that we have always leaned on them. The very foundations of life seem falling away, when the truth first comes home to the heart. No one knew what Major Bramwell felt or thought when the gentle wife who had yielded in everything first left him to stand alone. He was naturally a silent, reserved man, and misfortune had embittered him. Within the year following her death he returned to Virginia for a visit, apparently unable to endure the exile without her. His daughters were lonely too, but they were glad to have him go. That is, Miss Judy was glad, and Miss Sophia was always pleased with anything that pleased Miss Judy. They were still content, believing him to be happier, when the visit went on into the second year, and even into the third. But as the fourth and the fifth passed, they grew anxious, and the neighbors wondered, and gradually began to shake their heads. News travelled slowly over the Alleghanies even yet, but it was whispered at last that the major would never come back,—that he could not,—because he had been arrested for old debts left unpaid when he came to Kentucky, and that he was thus held "within prison bounds."

The Oldfield people could never tell whether the sisters were aware of the truth. The neighbors noticed that as the years went by Miss Judy said less and less about his coming back, though she spoke of him as often and as proudly as ever, and that Miss Sophia, who never had much to say about anything, now rarely mentioned her father at all. They heard from him, however, at long intervals. The neighbors were sure of so much concerning the major, by reason of Miss Judy's being sometimes compelled to borrow the two bits to pay the postage on the letter. Nothing else ever forced her to borrow, though she had not a penny to call her own for weeks together, and Miss Sophia—poor soul—never had one. Everybody in Oldfield knew when anybody got a letter. The stage carrying the mail came twice a week. The postmaster, who was also a tailor, always locked the door of his little shop as soon as he had taken the mail-bag inside. He could not read writing very readily, and he did not wish to be hurried. The villagers fumed outside as they looked through the one smoky, broken window, and saw him deliberately spelling out his own letters, sitting down with his feet on the stove. In the winter when the days were short, and it began to grow dark early, they used to stuff something into the stovepipe which came out of a broken pane, so that the smoke soon compelled him to open the door. In the summer the heat prevented the postmaster's keeping the door closed for any great length of time; but no matter what the season most of the Oldfield people were waiting when the mail came; consequently, everybody knew what everybody else received. And then Miss Judy used to give out kind messages to the neighbors from her father's letters; messages which did not sound at all like the major. But Miss Judy was wholly unconscious that her own sweetness colored whatever it may have been that her father had really written. She was as unconscious of this as of any reason that she herself might have had for growing sour, as her lovely youth faded, neglected like the wild flowers blooming unseen in the shadowy woods.

The quiet lives of the little sisters thus went on uneventfully from youth to maturity. They were as utterly alone, so far as association with their own class was concerned, as if they had lived on a desert island. Only the occasional letter from their father marked the passing of the years. They were sheltered by the old log house, and they subsisted somehow on what grew from its bit of ground. It was the same now that it had always been; it was still the same, except that the little sisters had passed unawares into middle age, when they heard that their father was dead.

No one ever knew whether the daughters were told the whole sad truth: that this gallant old soldier of the Revolution, who had done much for the winning of Independence, had died in prison bounds for debts which he was never able to pay. Miss Judy's beautiful eyes were dim with weeping for a long time. Miss Sophia was sad for many months through sympathy with her sister's grief. Miss Judy took the purple bow off Miss Sophia's cap and a blue one off her own and dyed them black. Their Sunday coats, as they called two thread-bare bombazines, were black already, and their everyday coats had also been black before turning brown. So that those two poor little bits of lutestring ribbon were the only outward signs of new bereavement.

II

THE OLDFIELD PEOPLE

Living was leisurely down in the Pennyroyal Region of those old days. About the middle of the last century, some twenty years after the major's death, the weeks and months and years went by so quietly that his daughters grew old without knowing it.

No one indeed ever thought of Miss Judy as old. Charm so purely spiritual as hers has never any age. And then it would seem as if an element of perpetual youth often lingers to the last around a lovable unmarried woman as it rarely does around the married. The rose keeps its beauty and

sweetness longest when left to fade ungathered.

Possibly Miss Judy may have been a shade slighter than she had been twenty years before, although she was never much stouter than a willow twig. Her hair can hardly have been whiter than it had been ever since anybody could remember, and it was just as curly, too, notwithstanding that she tried harder every day to brush it till it was prim and smooth, as she thought white hair should be.

Miss Sophia had never seemed very young, and she now appeared little if at all older. Her dark hair never whitened, and if the gray streaks over her placid temples had broadened slightly, it was no more trouble than it used to be to reach up the chimney and get a bit of soot on the tip of her finger—while Miss Judy was out of the room or looking the other way. It was an innocent artifice, but it remained always the darkest secret between the sisters. And this was probably not quite so dark a secret as Miss Sophia supposed it to be, since she, being so very plump, could not stand on tiptoe to look in the mirror, as Miss Judy did. Consequently, it was perhaps inevitable that the touching up intended for the gray streaks over Miss Sophia's placid temples, sometimes fell unawares on her honest little cheeks, or her guileless little ears.

Almost unaltered as the sisters were, their environment was, if possible, even less changed by the quiet passing of the uneventful years. For all outward changes, this March morning on which Miss Judy looked out over the sleeping village might have been the first morning after the first settlers had made their homes in this vale of peace. The folding hills were yet covered by the primeval forest. The log houses built by the Virginians still straggled beside a single thoroughfare. The highway, too, was the same buffalo track which they had followed through the wilderness—just as crooked in its direction, just as irregular in its width, just as muddy in winter and dusty in summer, and it was called the "big road" now, just as it had been in the beginning. And the sleepers in the still darkened houses were, with scarcely an exception, the descendants of the sounder sleepers in the graveyard on the furthest, highest hilltop. For the people of that far-off Pennyroyal Region came and went in those old days only with the coming and the going of the generations.

The night's shadows still lingered among the great, black tree-trunks draping the leafless boughs, but the sun's radiant lances were already lifting the white mists from the lowlands. Soft sounds coming up from the silent fields echoed the gentle awakening of flocks and herds, deepening, as the light brightened, into the eternal matin appeal of the dumb creature to human brotherhood. The birds alone were all wide awake and vividly astir. Flocks of plovers wheeled white-winged across the low-hung sky. A lonely sparrow-hawk swung high on seemingly motionless pinions. There were redbirds, too, and bluebirds and blackbirds—pewees, thrushes, vireos, kingfishers—all flocking in with the red and gold of the sunrise, making the dun meadows bright and melodious with their plumage and song. Miss Judy saw and heard them in pleased surprise. She could not recall having seen any of them that season, save two or three melancholy robins, drooping in the cold rain of the previous day. But here they all were, and singing as if *they* had no doubt that spring had come, however doubtful mere mortals might be.

It was light enough now to see the tavern which stood on the edge of the village. The sign of the tavern, a big rusty bell hung in a rough, rickety wooden frame, stood clear against the gray horizon, dangling its rotting rope, which few travellers ever came to pull.

The court-house and the jail faced the tavern from the other side of the big road. The court-house, with its stately little pillars and its queer little cupola, looked like some small and shabby old gentleman in a very high, very tight stock. There were two terms of circuit court, lasting about a month, one in the spring and one in the fall. The quarterly and the county courts convened at stated periods. The magistrate's court, which was also in the court-house, was held usually and almost exclusively as the peace of the colored population might require. Fortunately, the magistrate was regarded with a good deal of wholesome awe, and it was fortunate that he lived in the village, inasmuch as his pacific services were likely to be needed at irregular and unexpected times. The county judge, however, found it entirely convenient to live in the country, on a farm near Oldfield, though he rode into the village and spent an hour or so in his office nearly every day. Judge John Stanley of the higher court lived a long way off, quite on the other side of the district, coming and going twice a year with the convening and adjournment of the spring and fall terms. He had lived in Oldfield when a young man, and up to the time that a terrible thing had happened. He was not to blame, yet it had blighted his whole life; it had driven him in horror away from the place which he had loved. It was a great loss to him to be separated from Miss Judy, the only mother he had known. But he used to return to Oldfield now and then until another misfortune made the place forever unendurable to him. After this only the drag of his duty and his fondness for Miss Judy ever brought him back, and he went away again as soon as he could. He always called upon her when he came, and always went to bid her good-by before going away; but he visited no one else and knew nothing of the village outside the strict line of his official duties.

Adjoining the court-house was the county jail, a tumble-down pile of mossy brick. Only the bars across the window indicated the character of the building. A prisoner was occasionally enterprising enough to pull out the bars, but they were always put in again sooner or later. There were two rooms, one above and one below, with a movable ladder between. When, at long and rare intervals a stranger was brought to the jail as a prisoner, he was put in the upper room and —as an extreme measure of precaution—the ladder was taken away during the night. Both the rooms were apt to be chilly in cold weather on account of the broken window-panes, yet the jail

was on the whole more comfortable than many of the cabins in which the negroes lived, and any one—no matter what the color of his skin—can endure a good deal of cold without great discomfort, when abundantly and richly fed. The jailer, Colonel Fielding, and his family never thought of taking so much trouble or of being so mean and selfish as to make any difference in the food sent to the jail and that which was served on their own table. Now and then in the winter the turkey and the pudding would, it is true, get rather cold in transit, the jail and the jailer's residence being some distance apart; but the prisoners did not mind that. They used to stand at the windows good-humoredly hailing the passers-by to kill time; and waiting with such patience as they could muster for the coming of the good dinner, especially when they knew that there was more "quality" company than usual in the jailer's house. The colonel, a beautiful old man—tall, stately, clear-eyed, clean and upright in heart and mind and body—was a gentleman of the old school who had never earned a penny in all the days of his blameless life. Such a picture as he was to look at, with his long silver hair curling on his shoulders and his tall erect form draped in the long cloak which he wore like a Roman toga!

"By the o'wars!" he used to declare, "the older I am the faster and thicker my hair grows. As for my cloak—it's the only suitable thing, sir, for a gentleman's wear."

His house had always been the social centre of Oldfield. When his friends elected him to the office of jailer, deeming that the best and easiest way of providing for him, since it was the nearest to a sinecure afforded by county politics, his family became still more active leaders of society. In those good old days of the Pennyroyal Region, a gentleman of birth and breeding might engage in any honest avocation, without the slightest injury to his social position. The only difference that the colonel's election to the office of jailer made to his family and his neighbors was, that the salary enabled him to indulge his hospitable and generous inclinations more fully. The salary was small, to be sure, but it was more than he had ever had before. About this time, too, the colonel's five beautiful daughters—all famous beauties—were in the perfection of bloom, and none of them had yet married, thus beginning the breaking up of the happy home. Such dinners, such suppers, such dances as there were in that plain old house! The colonel's handsome, indolent, sweet-tempered wife used to say that they were always ready for company, because they had the best they could get every day. Usually there was not the slightest conflict between the colonel's large social obligations and his small official duties. On the contrary, the more fine dinners and suppers he gave the higher the prisoners lived, and the happier everybody was. In fact, the colored vagrant who managed to get into the jail when winter was near—when there were no vegetables in anybody's garden, no fruit in anybody's orchard, no green corn in anybody's field—was regarded by his fellows as very fortunate indeed.

It chanced, however, that a wandering stranger was one day locked in among the prisoners who were otherwise all home-folks. On that very evening the Fielding girls were giving a grand ball and supper, to which the whole fashion of the county was invited. The prisoners, with the exception of the stranger, were as deeply interested in what they saw and heard of the great stir of preparation as the guests could possibly have been. The stranger probably knew nothing of his companions' glowing and confident expectation of a generous share of the feast. If they told him anything of the feasting which the next day was sure to bring, he either did not believe it, naturally enough—having had most likely some experience with jails and jailers—or he preferred liberty to luxury. At all events on that eventful evening the colonel, whose mind was full of the ball, incidentally forgot to lock the door of the jail. The strange prisoner had, therefore, nothing to do but to open the door as soon as the jailer's back was turned; and this he did at once, disappearing in the darkness, never to be seen or heard of again. The other prisoners had tried to prevent his going, and they now did their utmost to give the alarm. They hallooed long and loud at the top of their strong lungs. But the wind was blowing hard in the wrong direction, the jail was too far from the house, and they could not make themselves heard above the music and dancing and laughter and drinking of toasts. Finally one of them, who was a sort of leader because he wintered regularly in the jail, offered to go to the colonel's house in order to let him know what had occurred. And he did go—willingly too—although the night was very cold and very dark, and the mud so deep that the very bottom seemed to have dropped out of the big road. The colonel himself with his youngest daughter was leading the Virginia reel, and just going down the middle to the tune of *Old Dan Tucker*; so that the bearer of the evil tidings had to wait a few moments looking in on the ball before he found a chance to tell his story. It was a cruel blow to come at such a time, and the colonel felt it sorely. The prisoner reported to his companions, after his return alone to the jail, that he thought "Marse Joe was about to swear" then and there. It was in vain that the colonel's guests hastened to reassure him; to tell him that it would be a great saving to the county—so all the gentlemen said—if every one of the lazy black rascals could be induced to run away. But the colonel felt the wound to his pride. It was a matter touching his honor. And finally, finding him inflexible in his determination to do his duty under the circumstances, the men present offered—almost to a man—to go with him when he went to search for the fugitive; and they kept their word on the following day about noon when the sun was warmest, just to please the colonel, although they knew beforehand how futile the pursuit would be with vast canebrakes near by and the Cypress Swamp just beyond the hills.

That memorable night of the ball was long, long past when this March morning dawned. The colonel was very old now and very feeble, with dimmed memories and utterly alone. He had lost his wife years before. His five beautiful daughters were married and gone. Alice, the most beautiful of all, the youngest, the brightest, the highest spirited, was dead after the wrecking of her young life. The old man had aged and failed rapidly since Alice's death. He, who used to be so cheerful, sat brooding at first, turning his aching memories this way and that way, trying to see

whether he might not have done something to prevent the soft-hearted child from being frightened into marrying a man whom she feared almost as much as she disliked. He was always thinking about it in those early days after her death in the bloom of youth and beauty, but he rarely spoke of it even then, and after a time he was allowed to forget. Mercifully memory faded as weakness increased. The gentle, unhappy old man became ere long again a gentle, happy child, and yet—even to the last—when aroused to glimmering consciousness the gallant manner of the courtly gentleman of the old school came back. Miss Judy thought she had never seen so polished a bearing as the colonel's had been and would be—in a way—as long as he lived. She wondered uneasily that morning, as she looked toward his house, whether the servants took good care of him; and she made up her mind to be more watchful of him herself. She was much afraid that the rain might make his rheumatism worse.

Next to the colonel's, coming down the big road, was the Gordon place, the largest and best kept in the village. The house was a low rambling structure of logs, whitewashed inside and out. The rooms had been added at random as suited the comfort and convenience of the family. It was not the habit of the Oldfield people to consider appearances. It was not the habit of the widow Gordon to consider anything but her own wishes. It may have been on account of this imperiousness, this open and scornful disregard of everything and everybody except herself and her own comfort, that she was always called "old lady Gordon" behind her back. She lived alone with a large retinue of servants in the comfortable old house, spending her days in a state of mental and physical semi-coma from over-eating and over-sleeping, using both like lethean drugs. Miss Judy alone sometimes thought that old lady Gordon so used them and pitied her. Old lady Gordon, who had a strong keen sense of humor, almost masculine in its robustness, would have laughed at the idea of Miss Judy's pity. She was the richest member of that community in which all living was simple, and in which the extremes of riches and poverty were not known as they are known to the greater world. Most of the Oldfield people dwelt contentedly in the middle estate which the wisest of men prayed for. None was poorer than Miss Judy, who had only a pittance of a pension, the old house, and the scrap of earth; none, that is, except Sidney Wendall, who, although she owned the log cabin which sheltered her family and the bit of garden lying by its side, had not a penny of income for the support of her three children, her husband's brother, and herself. Yet Miss Judy managed to provide for Miss Sophia—and herself also as an afterthought; and Sidney provided for her family without difficulty, though in both cases a steady, strenuous effort was required.

Among the few who were really well-to-do, were Tom Watson and Anne his wife. Their house, facing Miss Judy's across the big road, was rather more modern than the rest of the Oldfield houses, and it was better furnished. And yet as Miss Judy looked at its closed blinds she sighed, thinking how little money had to do with happiness, when it could give no relief from pain of mind or body. More than a year had dragged by since the master of that darkened household had been brought home after the accident which had crushed the great, strong, passionate, undisciplined, good-hearted giant into a helpless, hopeless paralytic—as the lightning fells the mighty oak in fullest leaf. The mistress of the stricken home had always been what the Oldfield people called a "still-tongued" woman, and she was now become more silent than ever. The house had never been a cheerful one, save as the noisy master blustered in and out. Now it was sad indeed: now that both husband and wife knew that he could never be any better, never otherwise than he was, although he might live for years.

Miss Judy wondered as she gazed, whether Doctor Alexander, living a little further along the big road, had yet told Anne the whole truth. After a moment she was sure that he had not. He was the kindest of bluff-spoken men. And what would be the use—since neither Anne nor the doctor nor the power of the whole world of sympathy or science could do anything more? She was glad to see the doctor's curtains still drawn. He needed all the rest he could get; he was always overworked in his practice for twenty miles around. And Mrs. Alexander, the doctor's wife, was one of the rare kind, who are always ready to sleep when other people are sleepy and to breakfast when other people are hungry: a much rarer kind, as even Miss Judy knew, unworldly as she was, than the kind who always expect others to be sleepy when *they* wish to sleep and to be ready to eat when *they* are hungry.

In the unpainted, tumble-down house next to the doctor's, somebody was awake and stirring. Miss Judy guessed it to be Kitty Mills, and she knew it was more than likely that the poor woman had not been in bed at all. It was nothing uncommon for old man Mills, Kitty's father-in-law, to keep her busy in waiting upon him the whole night through. It was utterly impossible for Kitty, or anybody else, to please him, but Kitty never seemed to mind in the least; she merely laughed and tried again—over and over with untiring kindness and unflagging patience. Miss Judy never knew quite what to make of Kitty Mills, though she had lived just across the big road from her through all these years. Miss Judy could understand submission without resistance easily enough; she had submitted to a good many hard things herself, without a murmur. But she could not comprehend the acceptance of unkindness and injustice and ingratitude and endless toil and hardship with actual hilarity, as Kitty Mills accepted all of these things, day in and day out, year after year. And there she was now singing, blithe as a lark! Well, such a disposition as Kitty's was a good gift, Miss Judy thought almost enviously, as though her own disposition were very bad indeed. Then she began to reproach herself for uncharitable thoughts of old man Mills's daughters. They may have had their reasons for bringing their father to Kitty's house to be nursed by her, instead of nursing him themselves. Perhaps they had brought him because they believed Kitty would take better care of him than they could, knowing how faithfully she had nursed their mother who had been unable to leave her bed for years, and, indeed, up to her death, only a few months before.

We cannot look into one another's hearts, so Miss Judy reminded herself. No doubt we should judge more justly if we could. And Sam, Kitty's husband, was really a good, kind man, and maybe he *would* work sometimes were it not for the misery in his back, which always grew worse whenever work was even mentioned in his presence. Still Miss Judy could not see, try as she might, how Kitty Mills could laugh till she cried, when old man Mills snatched up the dinner which she had cooked on a hot day and flung it out the window—dishes and all.

Looking farther along the big road, Miss Judy saw that the Pettuses also were awake and stirring about. The bachelor brother and the maiden sister were both early risers. Mr. Pettus kept the general store, and he liked to have it open and ready for trade when the farmers taking grain and tobacco to market drove the big-wheeled wagons with their swaying ox-teams through the village on the way to the river. Miss Pettus arose with the first chicken that took its head from under its wing, her main interest in life being concentrated in the poultry-yard. She always held that any one having to do with hens must be up before the sun; and she used to tell Miss Judy a great deal about the Individuality of Hens, the subject with which she was best acquainted and upon which she discoursed most entertainingly and instructively. Miss Judy always listened with much interest and entire seriousness. Gentle Miss Judy had not a very keen sense of humor; it is doubtful if any really sweet woman ever had.

"The folks who think all hens are alike except the difference that the feathers make outside, don't know what they are talking about!" Miss Pettus once said, in her excited way. "Hens are as different inside as folks are. Some hens are silly and some have got plenty of sense, only they're stubborn. There's that yellow-legged pullet of mine. *She's* so silly that she is just as liable to lay in the horse-trough as in her nice, clean nest. Every blessed morning, rain or shine, unless I'm up and on the spot before she can get into the trough, old Baldy eats an egg with his hay, and I'm expecting every day that he'll eat her. And there's that old dorminica, the one that Kitty Mills cheated me with when we swapped hens that time. Well, the old dorminica ain't a *bit* silly. She's just out and out contrary. The great, lazy, fat thing! Set she *won't*—do what I will! And Kitty Mills *knew* she wouldn't—knew it just as well when we swapped as I know it this minute. There's no use trying to persuade me that she didn't. It's awful aggravating, because the dorminica's the heaviest hen I've got. Well, night before last I made up my mind that I'd *make* her set, whether she wanted to or not. When it began to get dark and she sauntered off to go to roost, I caught her and put her down on a nest full of fine, fresh eggs—set her down real firm and determined, like *that*—as much as to say 'we'll *see* whether you don't stay there,' and then I turned a box over her so that she couldn't get out if she tried. But I couldn't help feeling kind of uneasy, with fresh eggs gone up so high, clear to ten cents a dozen. The next morning at break o' day, cold and rainy as it was, I put on my overshoes and threw my shawl over my head, and went to take a peep under the box. And there—you'll hardly believe it, Miss Judy, but I give you my word as a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church—there was that old dorminica *a-standing up*!"

Miss Judy had said at the time what a shame it was to waste nice eggs so, and she had spoken with sincere feeling. She had been cherishing a secret hope that she might get a few eggs from Miss Pettus to complete a setting for Speckle. Miss Judy had saved ten eggs with great care, keeping them wrapped in a flannel petticoat; but Speckle, the docile and industrious, could easily cover fifteen and was quite willing to do it. Now, Miss Judy's hope was lost through the dorminica's contrariness. She thought about this again with a pang of disappointment, as she heard the cackling and confusion going on in the Pettus poultry-yard, which told the whole neighborhood that Miss Pettus was wide awake and actively pursuing her chosen walk in life.

Sidney Wendall, the widow, was another early riser, as one needs be when earning a living for a whole family by one's wits. Sidney's house, the poorest and smallest of all the village, was the last at that end of the big road, and stood higher than the others, far up on the hillside. As Miss Judy looked toward it that morning, she was not thinking of Sidney but of Doris, her daughter, whom Miss Judy loved as her own child. At the very thought of Doris a new light came into her blue eyes and a lovelier flush overspread her fair cheeks. She stood still for a moment, gazing wistfully, waiting and longing for the far-off glimpse of Doris, which nearly always sweetened the beginning of the day. On that wet March morning there was no flutter of a little white apron, no sign of a wafted kiss. Miss Judy sighed gently as her gaze came back to her own yard. There were two japonica bushes, one standing on either side of the front gate, and as Miss Judy now glanced at them she was startled to see what seemed to be a roseate mist floating among the bare, brown branches, still dripping and shining with the night's rain.

III

PHASES OF VILLAGE LIFE

A rosy mist often floated between Miss Judy and the bare, brown things of life. She knew it, realizing fully how many mistakes she made in seldom seeing things as they actually were. She had never been able to trust her own eyes, and now they were not even as strong as they used to be, although they were as blue as ever. The japonica bushes were only a few paces distant, the front yard being but the merest strip of earth; yet the ground was very wet, and Miss Judy was wearing prunella gaiters. They were the only shoes she had; they were also the only kind she had ever known a lady to wear. Shoes made of leather, however fine, would have seemed to Miss Judy

—had she known anything about them—as much too heavy, too stiff, and altogether too clumsy for the delicate, soundless step of a gentlewoman.

Moving out on the sunken stone of the door-step, she was still unable to tell with certainty whether the japonicas were actually budding. She stood peering helplessly, almost frowning in her effort to see. It was really important that she should know as soon as possible. The coming of spring was important to everybody in the Pennyroyal Region, where every man was a farmer—the merchant, the lawyer, the doctor, and even the minister; and where every woman had a garden, large and rich like old lady Gordon's, or small and poor as Miss Judy's was. And the buds of the japonica were the gay little heralds of the spring, coming clad all in scarlet satin, while the rest of nature wore dull and sombre robes. Flashing out from their dark hiding-places at the first touch of the sun, the sight of them stirred the ladies of Oldfield as nothing else ever did. The men, too, always noticed this first sign of spring's approach. But it was the burning of the tobacco-beds on the wooded hillsides, the floating of long, thin banners of pale blue smoke across a wintry sky, which moved the men. It was only in the breasts of the gentle gardeners of Oldfield that the bursting forth of the japonica buds, these vivid points of flame, always fired a perennial ambition. For the housewife who could send a neighbor the earliest cool, green lettuce, or the first warm, red radishes might well be a proud woman, and was a personage to be looked up to and to be envied during all the rest of the year. And was it not rather a pretty ambition and even a laudable one? Have not most of us noted pettier ambitions and far less laudable ones in a much larger world?

Aside from this public and universal interest and anxiety concerning gardening time, Miss Judy had good private reasons for wishing to get an early start. Early vegetables were more profitable than late ones in Oldfield as elsewhere. Of course Miss Judy never thought of selling any of the things that grew in her little garden. She would have been shocked at the suggestion. No one in Oldfield ever sold anything, except Mr. Pettus, who kept the general store, and who sold everything that the Oldfield people needed. It is true that Miss Judy had a regular engagement with Mr. Pettus to exchange green stuff for sugar or knitting materials, or a yard of white muslin to make Miss Sophia a tucker, or a bit of net to freshen her cap, and occasionally even some trifle for herself. *That*, however, was an entirely different matter from vulgarly selling things. Mr. Pettus understood the difference quite as clearly as Miss Judy did, and he always took the greatest pains to show his appreciation of her thoughtful condescension in letting him have the vegetables. He was always most generous too in these delicate and complicated transactions. It upset Miss Judy somewhat, at first, to find him willing to give more sugar for onions than for genteeler vegetables, especially in the spring. But it was never hard for Miss Judy to give up when no real principle was involved; and necessity makes most of us do certain things which we disapprove of. So that, sighing gently, Miss Judy squeezed her heartsease and mignonette into a smaller space, and planted more onion-sets.

She was thinking about those onion-sets as she looked at the japonica bushes, trying to see whether they were actually budding. She could not, as a lady, admit even to herself how largely her sister's living depended upon the ignoble bulbs even more than upon the refined produce of the little garden. Her own living also depended upon this bit of earth; but that was not nearly so important, from her point of view. Miss Sophia came first in everything, even in the annual consideration of the problem of the onion-sets. Miss Judy, thinking that the house in which gentlewomen lived should never smell of anything but dried rose leaves, asked Miss Sophia if she did not think the same. Miss Sophia, who had thought nothing about it, and who objected to the odor of onions only because it made her very hungry, answered "Just so, sister Judy," very promptly and very decisively, as she always answered everything that Miss Judy said. Consequently the tidy calico bag containing the onion-sets was banished to the kitchen for the winter, to become a source of secret uneasiness to Miss Judy the whole season through. Merica, the cook, was not so dependable a personage as Miss Judy could have wished her to be. There was indeed something disturbingly uncertain in her very name. Miss Judy always thought it must be *A*-merica, but Merica always stoutly insisted that her whole real true name was Mericus-Ves-Pat-rick-One-of-the-Earliest-Settlers-of-Kentucky, and Miss Judy gave up all further discussion of the subject simply because she was overwhelmed, not because she was convinced.

Remembering that the onion-sets had been quite safe when she last looked at them, Miss Judy felt a renewed anxiety to know certainly whether the japonicas were budding. And the only way to know was to get her fathers far-off spectacles. These were privately used by both the little sisters upon great emergencies, such as this was. But they had never been put on by either in public; and Miss Judy was much startled at the thought of putting them on at the front door. Moreover, they were always kept carefully hidden in the left-hand corner, at the very back of the top drawer of the chest of drawers in the little sisters' room, and Miss Sophia was still asleep. Miss Judy could tell by the way the sun touched the sunken stone of the door-step that it wanted two or three minutes of the time when she always rolled the cannon-ball which held the door open, as a polite hint to Miss Sophia to get up. Under the unusual circumstances, however, Miss Judy felt justified in rolling it at once. It was a big ball weighing twenty-five pounds, and it was a good deal battered by distinguished service. It had come indeed from the battle-field at New Orleans, and there was a tradition that it was the identical cannon-ball which had killed the British general. Miss Judy, however, could never be brought to entertain any such dreadful belief. She was quite content and very, very proud to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that many of those gallant Kentuckians who rushed in at the last desperate moment—travel-worn, starving, ragged, and armed only with hunters' rifles—to do such valiant service in turning the tide of that momentous battle, were true sons of the Pennyroyal Region. Miss Judy was aware of the strange

and unaccountable misstatement concerning the conduct of the Kentuckians, made by General Jackson in his report of the battle. But she was also aware that the general—who was not as a rule very quick to take things back—had corrected that misstatement so promptly and so thoroughly, that it had not been necessary for General Adair to ride from Kentucky to New Orleans to fight a duel with him about the slander, although that gallant Kentuckian was all ready and eager to go.

And was there not also that remarkable song, celebrating the part taken by "The Hunters of Kentucky" in the battle of New Orleans? Everybody was singing it when Miss Judy was a girl; and although she could not sing she had often hummed the ringing chorus:—

"Oh, dear Kentucky,
The Hunters of Kentucky;
Dear old Kentucky,
The Hunters of Kentucky."

And she had even repeated the five stirring verses without making a single mistake:—

"You've read I reckon, in the prints,
How Pakenham attempted
To make Old Hickory wince
But soon his scheme repented;
For we with rifles ready cocked,
Thought such occasion lucky;
And soon around our general flocked
The Hunters of Kentucky.

"The British felt so very sure
The battle they would win it,
Americans could not endure
The battle not a minute;
And Pakenham he made his brag
If he in fight was lucky,
He'd have the girls and cotton bags
In spite of old Kentucky.

"But Jackson he was wide awake
And not scared at trifles,
For well he knew what aim to take
With our Kentucky rifles;
He led us to the cypress swamp,
The ground was low and mucky,
There stood John Bull in martial pomp
And here was old Kentucky.

"A bank was raised to hide our breast—
Not that we thought of dying—
But we liked firing from a rest
Unless the game was flying;
Behind it stood our little force,
None wished that it were greater,
For every man was half a horse
And half an alligator.

"They did not our patience tire,
Before they showed their faces,
We did not choose to waste our fire,
So snugly kept our places;
But when no more we saw them blink
We thought it time to stop 'em—
It would have done you good, I think,
To see Kentucky drop 'em."

Then gentle Miss Judy, repeating these lines, used to grow almost bloodthirsty in trying to repeat the things which she had heard her father say about this,—the part played by the hunters of Kentucky at the battle of New Orleans,—as having been the first recognition of marksmanship in warfare. Miss Judy had no clear understanding of what her father had meant, but she usually repeated what he had said about the sharpshooting of the hunters whenever she spoke of the battle. She thrilled with patriotism every time she touched the cannon-ball. It was so big that both her little hands were required to roll it into the hollow which it had worn in the floor of the passage.

Miss Sophia obeyed the solemn rumble of the cannon-ball as she always obeyed everything that she understood—docile little soul. She was almost as slow of mind as of body. A round, heavy, dark, uninteresting old woman, utterly unlike her sister, except in gentleness and goodness. On Miss Sophia's side of the bed were three stout steps, forming a sort of dwarf stairway, and down this she now came slowly, backwards and in perfect safety. But Miss Sophia's getting to the floor

was yet a long way from being ready for breakfast. It was hard to see how so small a body, so simply clothed, could get into such an intricate tangle of strings and hooks and buttons on every morning of her life. Miss Judy's sweet patience never wavered. She never knew that she was called upon to exercise any toward Miss Sophia. The possibility of hurrying Miss Sophia did not enter her mind even on that urgent occasion, when her need of the far-off spectacles made it uncommonly hard to wait. Finally, there being no indication of Miss Sophia's progress, other than the subdued sounds of the struggle through which she was passing, Miss Judy timidly approached the door of the bedroom. It was open, but she delicately turned her head away as she tapped upon it to attract Miss Sophia's attention, before asking permission to come in. Miss Sophia invited her to enter, giving the permission as formally as Miss Judy had asked it. Miss Judy apologized as she accepted the invitation, saying that she hoped Miss Sophia would pardon her for keeping her back turned, which she was very, very careful to continue to do. She did not say what it was that she wanted to get out of the top drawer. The far-off spectacles were rarely mentioned between the sisters, and Miss Sophia never questioned anything that her sister wished to do.

Still scrupulously averting her gaze, Miss Judy found what she wanted, and sidled softly from the room, thanking Miss Sophia and holding the spectacles down at her side, hidden in the folds of her skirt. Stepping out on the door-stone, she looked cautiously up and down the big road. It was still deserted, not a human being was in sight. Only a solitary cow went soberly past, with her bell clanging not unmusically on the stillness. Nevertheless, Miss Judy gave another glance of precaution, surveying the highway from end to end from the tavern on the north to Sidney Wendall's on the south. As the little lady's eyes rested for a moment upon the house on the hillside, a girl came out as though the wistful gaze had drawn her forth. Miss Judy's blue eyes could barely make out the slender young figure standing in the dazzling sunlight; but she knew that it was Doris, and she did not need the sight of her sweet old eyes to see the wafting of the kiss which the girl threw. Miss Judy's own little hands flew up to throw two kisses in return. She straightway forgot all about the spectacles. She no longer cared how large the huge frames might look on her small face, nor how old they might make her appear.

It was always so. At the sight of Doris, Miss Judy always ceased to be an old maid and became a young mother. For there is a motherhood of the spirit as well as the motherhood of the flesh, and the one may be truer than the other.

IV

THE CHILD OF MISS JUDY'S HEART

It is among the sad things of many good lives, that those who love each other most often understand each other least.

No mother was ever truer than Sidney Wendall, so far as her light led. None ever tried harder to do her whole duty by her children, and none, perhaps, could have come nearer doing it by Billy and Kate, given no better opportunities than Sidney had.

It was Doris, the eldest child, and the one whom she loved best and was proudest of—the darling of her heart, the very apple of her eye—that Sidney never knew what to do with. From the very cradle she had found Doris utterly unmanageable. Not that the child was unruly or self-willed; she was ever the gentlest and most obedient of the three children. It was only that the mother and the child could not understand one another. That was all; but it was enough to send Sidney, whom few difficulties daunted, to Miss Judy, almost in tears and quite in despair, while Doris was hardly beyond babyhood.

"You can always tell a body in trouble what to do," she appealed to Miss Judy. "Maybe you can even tell me what to do with that child. I know how rough I am, but I don't know how to help it. I'm bound to bounce around and make a noise. I don't know any other way of getting along. And then there are Billy and Kate. They won't do a thing they're told unless they're stormed at. Yet if I shout at them, there's Doris turning white, and shaking, and looking as if she'd surely die. I tell you, Miss Judy, I feel as if I'd been given a fine china cup to tote and might break it any minute."

Miss Judy, the comforter of all the afflicted and the adviser of all the troubled, said what she could to help Sidney. Doris *was* different from other children. There was no doubt about that and about its being difficult to know how to deal with such a sensitive nature. Miss Judy said that she did not believe, however, that any other mother would have done any better than Sidney had—which comforted Sidney inexpressibly. The little body could not think of anything to advise. She did not know much about children, and she had not much confidence in her own judgment in matters concerning them. So that, at last, after a long talk and for lack of a clearer plan, Miss Judy proposed that Sidney should bring Doris the next morning when setting out on her professional round, and should leave the little one with Miss Sophia and herself. Miss Sophia might think of the very thing to do; without living in the house with Miss Sophia it was impossible to know how sound and practical her judgment was—so Miss Judy told Sidney. The kind proposal lightened Sidney's heart and she accepted it at once. She had her own opinion as to the value of Miss Sophia's ideas, but she responded as she knew would please Miss Judy; and she was sure at all events that Miss Judy, who was just such another sensitive plant, would know what to do with

Doris.

Miss Judy on her side was not nearly so confident. When Sidney had gone and she began to realize what she had undertaken, she was a good deal frightened. She not only knew almost nothing about children, as she had confessed to this troubled poor mother; but she had always been rather afraid of them. It had always seemed to her an appalling responsibility to assume the forming of one of these impressionable little souls; she had often wondered tremblingly at the lightness with which many mothers assumed it. And here *she* was—rushing voluntarily into the very responsibility which she had always regarded with awe—almost with terror. More and more disturbed and perplexed as she thought of her foolish rashness, she nevertheless mechanically set about getting ready for taking charge of Doris during the next day, and perhaps for many other days, until she had at least tried to see what she could do for the child. As a first step in the preparation she climbed the steep stairs to the loft, which she had not entered for years, and brought down an old doll of Miss Sophia's, and dusted it and straightened its antiquated clothes; putting it in readiness for the ordeal of Doris on the following morning.

"She can sit on the home-made rug, you know, sister Sophia," said Miss Judy, nervously.

"Just so, sister Judy," promptly and firmly responded Miss Sophia, who never noticed where anybody sat.

"And don't you think it would be a good idea to have Merica make a pig and a kitten out of gingerbread? They might perhaps amuse the child, and keep her from crying. A half pint of flour would be quite enough, and we *have* to have the fire anyway because it's ironing day. Then Merica picked up a big basket of chips behind the cabinet-maker's shop this morning."

"Just so, sister Judy," answered Miss Sophia, who left all provision for fire and for everything else wholly to her sister. "And she might make *us* some gingerbread too, while she's about it."

"To be sure!" exclaimed Miss Judy, looking at Miss Sophia in loving admiration. "So she can. How quick you are to see the right way, sister Sophia. I never seem to think of things as you do."

But even as she spoke, a thought flashed uneasily across her mind, causing her sweet old face to beam less brightly. What if the child would *not* sit on the home-made rug? She had never been used to carpets—poor little thing. What if she crumbled the gingerbread all over everything, as Miss Judy had seen children do, time and again! The thought of such desecration of the carpet that her mother had made, for which she had carded the wool and spun the warp and woven the woof, all with her own dear little hands, made Miss Judy feel almost faint. The risk of such danger threw her into more and more of a panic. She hardly slept that night, troubled by dread of what she had so thoughtfully undertaken. She was pale and trembling with fright when Sidney brought Doris and left her early on the following day.

But the child sat quite still on the rug where her mother had placed her; and she did not cry when Sidney went away, as Miss Judy feared she would, although her lips quivered. She soon turned to look at the doll, which Miss Judy hastened to give her to divert her attention,—looking at it as tender little mothers look at afflicted babies. Then she gave her attention to the gingerbread kitten, and, later, to the gingerbread pig; and Miss Judy was pleased, though she could hardly have told why, to notice that Doris ate the pig first and hesitated some time before eating the kitten.

Miss Judy gave an involuntary sigh of relief when both the pig and the kitten had disappeared without leaving a crumb. She instinctively turned toward Miss Sophia with a pardonable little air of triumph, and was disappointed to find her asleep in her chair. Thus Miss Judy and Doris were left alone together, and presently the quiet child lifted her grave brown eyes to the little lady's anxious blue ones and they exchanged a first long, bashful look. Doris was not old enough to remember what she thought of Miss Judy at that time; but Miss Judy always remembered how Doris looked—such a wonderfully beautiful, gentle little creature—as she sat there so gravely, looking up with her mites of hands folded on her lap. After a time, as Miss Sophia slumbered peacefully on, the shy child and the shyer old lady began to make timid advances to one another. Doris undressed the forlorn old doll with cautious delight, and Miss Judy dressed it again with exquisite care while Doris leaned on her knee, hardly knowing what she did, so intense was her breathless interest in what Miss Judy was doing. The shyest are always the most trusting, if they trust at all. When Sidney, returning from her rounds, came by at nightfall to take Doris home, the child was no longer in the least afraid of Miss Judy; and Miss Judy was not nearly so much frightened as she had been at first.

Yet it was, after all, surprising, considering how timid they both were, that they should so soon have become tenderly and deeply attached to each other. But every day that Sidney brought Doris and left her, she was happier to come and more willing to stay; and erelong the day on which she had not come would have been an empty one and dull indeed for Miss Judy. One bright morning they had been very, very happy together. Miss Sophia nodded as usual in her low rocking-chair, and Miss Judy was darning her sister's stockings while Doris played at her feet.

"Miss Dudy," the child said suddenly, raising her large, serious eyes to Miss Judy's sweet face with a puzzled look; "was it you or my mammy that borned me?"

Miss Judy started,—blushing, smiling, looking like a beautiful girl,—and bending down she gathered the little one in her arms and held her for a long time very, very close. From that moment her love for Doris assumed a different character.

It was a love which grew with the child's growth; which watched and fostered every new beauty of character as the girl blossomed into early womanhood, beautiful and sweet as a tall white flower. Gradually Doris became as the sun and the moon to Miss Judy, the first object when she arose in the morning, her last thought when she lay down at night. Yet this devotion to Doris, and absorption in the girl's interests and future, did not lessen in the least her devotion to Miss Sophia, her ceaseless watchfulness over her welfare, her tender care for her happiness. Her love for Doris never touched her love for her sister at any point. The two loves were so distinct, so unlike, so widely apart that there could be no conflict. It is true that Miss Judy's love for Miss Sophia was also strongly and tenderly maternal. But Miss Judy's gentle heart was so full of this mother-love—single and simple—that some of it might have been given to the whole human race. Her love for Doris was something much more exclusive, something infinitely more subtle than this, which is shared in a measure by every womanly woman. It was the romantic, poetic love which is given by loving age to lovable youth when it recalls life's dawn-light to the twilight of a life which has never known the full sunrise.

With ineffable tenderness Miss Judy yearned to lead Doris toward the best, the finest, the highest, toward all that she herself had reached, and toward much which she had missed. The quaint, the antiquated, the absurd, the enchanting things that the little lady taught the little child, the young maiden! There was nothing so coarse as Shakespeare and nothing so commonplace as the musical glasses. Shakespeare seemed to Miss Judy, who knew him only by hearsay, as being a little too decided, a little too distinctively masculine. It was her theory of manners that girls should learn only purely feminine things. The musical glasses she would have deemed rather undesirable as being less modish than the guitar, and consequently not so well adapted to the high polishing of a young lady of quality, of such fine breeding as she had determined that Doris's should be. The guitar which led Miss Judy to this conclusion had belonged to her mother. Its faded blue ribbon, tied in an old-fashioned bow, still bore the imprint of her vanished fingers. The ribbon smelt of dried rose leaves, as the old music-books did too, when Miss Judy got them out of the cabinet in the darkened parlor, and gave them to Doris, smiling a little sadly, as she always smiled when thinking of her mother. Miss Judy preferred Tom Moore's songs, because they were very sentimental, and also because they were the only ones that she knew. She had never been able to sing, but she had very high ideals of what she called "expression," and she could play the guitar after a pretty, airy, tinkling old fashion. So that Doris, having a low, sweet voice of much natural music and some real talent for the art, learned easily enough through even Miss Judy's methods of teaching; and came erelong to sing of "Those endearing young charms" and "The heart that has truly loved" in a bewitchingly heart-broken way; while the faded blue ribbon fell round her lovely young shoulders.

It was really a pity that no one except Miss Sophia saw or heard those lessons—which must have been so well worth seeing and hearing. Miss Judy and Doris were both so entirely in earnest in all that they were doing. Both were so thoroughly convinced that the things being taught and learned were precisely the things which a young gentlewoman should know. Yet nobody but poor Miss Sophia, who was asleep most of the time, ever had so much as a glimpse of all that was constantly going on in this forming of a young lady of quality. It was another part of Miss Judy's theory of manners that everything concerning a gentlewoman, young or old, must be strictly private. When, therefore, it came to such delicate matters as walking and courtesying—as a young lady of quality should walk and courtesy—not even Miss Sophia was permitted to be present. Miss Judy took Doris into the darkened parlor and raised the shades only a cautious inch or two, so that, while they could see to move about, no living eye might behold the charming scene which was taking place. And there in this dim light, the dainty old lady and the graceful young girl would take delicate steps and make wonderful courtesies—grave as grave could be—all up and down, and up and down that sad old room.

Let nobody think, however, that Miss Judy thought only of accomplishments, while she was thus throwing her whole heart and mind and soul into the rearing and the training of this child of her spirit. The substantial branches of education were not neglected. Miss Judy tried untiringly to help Doris in gaining a store of really useful knowledge. She did not know so well how to go about this as she did about the music and the courtesy. She knew little if any more of the hard prosaic side of the world than Doris herself knew—which was nothing at all. But she had a few good old books. Her father had been a true lover of the best in literature, and her mother had been as fond of sentiment in fiction as in real life. These books, thick, stubby old volumes bound in leather, gathered by them, were Miss Judy's greatest pride and delight. She therefore led Doris to them in due time, impressing her with proper reverence, and thus the girl became in a measure acquainted with a very few of the few really great in letters, and learned to know them as they may be known to an old lady and a young girl who have never had a glimpse of the world.

Miss Judy had but one book which was less than a half century in age. That one book, however, was very, very new indeed and so remarkable that Miss Judy held it to be worthy of a place with the old great ones. She had already read it several times, and yet, strange to say, she had not given it to Doris to read. Of course she had told her about it as soon as it came from the thoughtful friend in Virginia who had sent it. But, for certain reasons which were not quite clear to herself, she was doubtful about its being the kind of a book best calculated to be really improving to Doris. She had read it aloud to Miss Sophia (who tried her best to keep awake), and she was confidently relying upon her judgment, which she considered so much sounder and more practical than her own, in making the decision. It was quite a serious matter, and Miss Judy was still earnestly though silently considering it after breakfast on that morning in March.

"The more I think of it the surer I feel that the main trouble with Becky was that she had no proper bringing up, poor thing;" remarked Miss Judy suddenly and rather absently, as if speaking more to herself than to her sister.

They sat side by side in their little rocking-chairs as they loved to sit, and they were busily engaged in sorting garden seeds. That is, Miss Judy was sorting the seeds while Miss Sophia held the neat little calico bags which Miss Judy had made in the fall, while Miss Sophia held the calico. Still, Miss Sophia's coöperation, slight as it seemed, really required a good deal of effort and very close attention. It was all she could do to keep the bags on her round little knees; nature, who is niggardly in many things, having denied the poor lady a lap.

"Who?" asked Miss Sophia, staring, and struggling with the seed-bags. "*What* Betty?"

"Why, Becky Sharp, of course," said Miss Judy.

She was much surprised, and a little hurt that Miss Sophia should so soon have forgotten Becky, when they had talked about her until they had gone to bed on the night before, to say nothing of many other times. But she was only a bit hurt, she was never offended by anything that Miss Sophia did or said, and she went on as if she had not been even disappointed. "We must make up our minds as to the advisability of giving Doris the book to read before long. I was just wondering whether *you* thought as I think, sister Sophia, that if Becky's mother had lived she would have been taught better than to do those foolish things, which were so shockingly misunderstood. I firmly believe that if Becky had been properly brought up, poor thing, she might have made a good woman. I have been waiting for a good opportunity to ask *your* opinion. What would *we* have been, without our dear mother?" she urged, as though pleading with Miss Sophia not to be too hard on Becky. "And she was always so poor, too. Mercifully *we've* never had actual poverty to contend with, as—poor Becky had. Most of the trouble came from that—Becky herself said it did, you remember, sister Sophia."

"Just so, sister Judy," responded Miss Sophia, warmly, and without a shade of reserve, although she had but the haziest notion of who Becky was, or had been, or might be; and speaking with such firm decision that Miss Judy felt as if the matter were really about decided at last.

V

AN UNCONSCIOUS PHILOSOPHER

There is much more in the way that a thing is said than we are apt to realize. Miss Sophia always repeated her vague and unvaried formula, whenever Miss Judy seemed to expect a response, and she always did it with such an effect of firm conviction as renewed Miss Judy's confidence in the soundness of her judgment and value of her advice. In this satisfactory manner the little sisters were again discussing the new book several weeks later, when the spring was well advanced. They had thus debated the serious question of Doris's being or not being permitted to read the new novel, for an hour or more; and they might have gone on discussing it indefinitely, as they did most things, had not Sidney Wendall come in quite unexpectedly.

As the Oldfield front doors set open all day, there was not much ceremony in the announcement of visitors. The caller usually tapped on the door and entered the house forthwith, going on to seek the family wherever the members of it were most likely to be found. Sidney now gave the tap required by politeness, and then, hearing the murmur of voices, went straight through the passage and into the room in which the sisters were sitting. They both glanced up with a look of pleased surprise as Sidney's tall form darkened the doorway. Miss Judy could not rise to receive Sidney on account of having an apronful of late garden-seeds. Her sister was holding the calico bags, as usual; and then Miss Sophia's getting out of a chair and on her feet was always a matter of time and difficulty. But their faces beamed a warm welcome, and Miss Judy called Merica away from the ironing-table in the kitchen to fetch the parlor rocking-chair for Sidney to sit in, which was in itself a distinguished attention, such as could not but be flattering to any guest. And when Sidney was seated, Merica was requested to draw a bucket of water fresh from the well, so that Sidney might have a nice cool drink.

Sidney, whom no one ever thought of calling Mrs. Wendall, was a large, lean, angular woman. She had come in knitting. She always knitted as she walked, carrying the big ball of yarn under her strong left arm. Her calico sunbonnet was always worn far back on her head. She took it off that day as soon as she sat down, and hung it on the knob of the chair. Then she removed the horn comb from her hair, let it drop, shook it out, twisted it up again with a swish—into a very tight knot—and thrust the comb back in place with singular emphasis. Everybody in Oldfield knew what those gestures meant. Nobody seemed to notice what wonderful hair she had. It was long, thick, silky, rippling, and of the color of the richest gold. It was most beautiful hair—rich and dazzling enough to crown a young queen—and most strangely out of place on Sidney's homely, middle-aged head; with its plain sallow face, its pale shrewd eyes, its grotesquely long nose, its expression of whimsical humor, and its wide jester's mouth.

The Oldfield people were so well used to seeing Sidney take her hair down, and twist it up again, even in the middle of the big road, that they had long since ceased to observe the hair itself. It

was the meaning of the gestures that instantly caught and held the eager interest of the entire community. For, whenever Sidney took off her bonnet, and let down her hair and shook it vigorously and swished it up again into a tighter knot, and put the comb back with a certain degree of emphasis, everybody knew that there was something interesting in the wind. Poor Miss Sophia, who was not quick to understand many things, knew what *those* signs meant, and when she saw them that day she straightened up suddenly, wide awake, and breathing hard as she always was when trying her best to keep the track of what was going on, and forgetting all about the seed-bags, which abruptly slid over the precipice, wholly unheeded. Even Miss Judy, who so disliked gossip, could not help feeling somewhat agreeably excited and turning quite pink, as she remembered that she had never known Sidney's news to do any harm, to wound any one, to injure any one, or to make mischief of any description. She had often wondered how Sidney *could* talk all day long, day after day, year in and year out, going constantly from house to house without doing harm sometimes through sheer inadvertence. She now looked at Sidney in smiling expectancy, turning a rosier pink from growing anticipation.

The mere fact of an unexpected visit from Sidney was enough to throw any Oldfield household into a state of delightful excitement. Sidney's visits were like visits of Royalty; they always had to be arranged for in advance, and they always had to be paid for afterwards. It was clearly understood by everybody that Sidney went nowhere without a formal invitation given some time in advance, and an explicit and sufficient inducement. Yet there was nothing in this to her discredit; she was far from being the mere sordid mercenary that Royalty seems now and then to be. Sidney was an open, upright worker in life's vineyard, and did nothing discreditable in holding herself worthy of her hire. It was necessary for her to earn a living for five needy souls; for her three children, her husband's brother, and herself. There were not many avenues open to women-workers in any part of the world in the day of Sidney's direst need. There were fewer where she lived than almost anywhere else throughout the civilized earth. She did what she might do; she learned to earn bread for her family by the only honorable means in her power. She studied to amuse the people of the village who had no other source of entertainment. She raised her adopted profession until it became an art. It is probable that she had the comedian's talent to begin with. She certainly possessed the comic actor's mouth. And then she doubtless soon learned, as most of us learn sooner or later, that it is more profitable to make the world laugh than to make it weep. At all events the part that she played was nearly always a merry one. Only once, indeed, during the whole of her long professional career, was she ever known to come close to tragedy; but those who were present at the time never forgot what she said, how she said it, nor how she looked while saying it.

It happened one night at old lady Gordon's, over the supper table. The party had been a gay one, and Sidney had been the life of it, as she always was of every gathering in Oldfield. She had told her best stories, she had given out her latest news, she had said many witty and amusing things, until the whole table was in what the ladies of Oldfield would have described as a "regular gale." It was not until they were rising from the supper, still laughing at Sidney's jokes, that she said, in an off-hand way—as if upon second thought—that she would like to have some of the dainties, with which the table was laden, to take home to her children. Before old lady Gordon had time to say, "Certainly, I'll fix up the basket," as everybody always said whenever Sidney made that expected remark, Miss Pettus blazed out:—

"How *can* you!" she cried, turning in her fiery way upon Sidney. "How can you sit here, eating, laughing, and spinning yarns, when you know your children are hungry at home—and never think of them till now?" Her little black eyes were flashing, and she looked Sidney straight in the face, meaning every word that she said.

The very breath was taken out of the company. The ladies were stricken speechless with amazement and dismay. Even old lady Gordon had not a thing ready to say. Sidney, too, stood still and silent for a moment, resting her hand on the back of her chair. She turned white, standing very erect, looking taller than ever, and very calm—a figure of great dignity.

"I think of my children first, last, and all the time," she said quietly and slowly after an instant's strained silence. Her cool, pale eyes met Miss Pettus's hot black eyes steadily.

"But I don't think it best to talk about them too much;" she went on calmly. "Do any of you ladies think my children would get their supper any sooner if I came here whining about how hungry they were? Would you ever invite me to come again if I did that—even once? Would you, Mrs. Gordon? Would you invite me to *your* parties, Miss Pettus? Wouldn't you, and you, and all of you"—turning from one to another—"begin right away to regard me as a tiresome beggar and my children as paupers? I am afraid you would. It would only be human nature. I'm not blaming anybody. But—I don't intend to risk it. I think things are better as they stand now. I amuse you and you help me. I give you what you like in exchange for what my children need. It's a fair trade; you're all bound by it to regard me and my children with respect."

Miss Pettus was crying as if her heart would break long before Sidney was done speaking. She fairly flew at her and, throwing her arms around Sidney's neck, begged her forgiveness with a humility such as no one ever knew that hasty, hot-tempered, well-meaning little woman to show over any other of her many mistakes. Never afterward would she allow Sidney to be criticised in her presence. She quarrelled fiercely with the doctor's wife for saying that she really could not see how Sidney got her news, and for quoting the doctor's opinion that it must come over the grapevine telegraph. Miss Pettus would have had her brother send Sidney's children a portion of everything that his store contained. But Sidney would not accept from any one a pennyworth

more than she earned. If Miss Pettus wished to send the Wendall family a pound of candles after Sidney had supped with her, spicing the meal with news and anecdote, all very well and good. Or if, after Sidney's making a special effort to enliven one of Miss Pettus's dinner parties in the middle of the day, that lady suggested giving Uncle Watty a pair of her brother's trousers, Sidney was glad and even thankful. To get her brother-in-law's clothes was, indeed, the hardest problem she had to solve. And then, when Uncle Watty had done with the trousers, they could be cut down for her son, Billy. Under such proper circumstances, Sidney accepted all sorts of things from everybody—anything, indeed, that she chanced to want—with as complete independence and as entire freedom from any feeling of obligation, as any artist accepts his fee for entertaining the public.

The obligation commonly imposed by hospitality had consequently no weight whatever with Sidney, and in this, also, she was not unlike some other celebrities. She did not hesitate to express her opinion of old lady Gordon, whose supper she had eaten on the previous evening, when Miss Judy, knowing about it and wishing to start the conversational ball rolling, now asked how things passed off. Sidney had swapped her spiciest stories for old lady Gordon's richest food. Old lady Gordon was perfectly free to think and to say what she pleased about those stories (provided she never mentioned them before Miss Judy); and Sidney, on her side, held herself equally free to think and to say what she thought of her hostess and of the supper too, had that been open to criticism—which old lady Gordon's suppers never were.

"That old woman is a regular *Hessian*," was Sidney's reply to Miss Judy's innocent inquiry.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Judy, quite startled and rather shocked. "Really, Sidney, I don't think you should call anybody such a name as that."

"Well, I'd like to know what else a body is to call an old woman who hasn't got a mite of natural feeling."

"But we have no right to say that either of anybody. We can't tell," pleaded gentle Miss Judy.

She was wondering, nevertheless, as she spoke, what could have occurred at old lady Gordon's on the night before. It was plain that the news which Sidney was holding back for an effective bringing forth must have had something to do with the visit. However, it was always useless to try to make Sidney tell what she had to tell, until she was quite ready. Even Miss Sophia was well aware of this peculiarity of Sidney's, and, breathing harder than ever in the intensity of her curiosity and suspense, she leaned forward, doing her utmost to understand what was being said in leading up to the news. Miss Judy, of course, understood Sidney's methods perfectly, through long and intimate acquaintance with them; and then, aside from the fact that Sidney could not be hurried, Miss Judy always tried anyway to turn the talk away from unpleasant themes.

"Did you remember to ask Mrs. Gordon about Mr. Beauchamp?" Miss Judy now inquired, adroitly bending Sidney's thoughts toward a delightful subject in which they were both deeply interested. "Did she know whether he used to be a dancing-master in his own country, as we have understood? I do hope you haven't changed your mind," she added earnestly. "It is really most important for Doris to learn to dance."

"No, I haven't changed it a bit. I've got the same Hard-shell, Whiskey Baptist mind that I've had for the last forty years. But it isn't as *I* think about dancing, or anything else that Doris is concerned in. It's as you think—"

"No—no, you mustn't say that," protested Miss Judy.

"I do say it, I mean it, and I intend to abide by it," declared Sidney, laying her knitting on her lap and loosing rings of yarn from her big ball and holding them out at arm's length. "You've always known better what was good for Doris than I ever have. When it comes to a difference of opinion I'm bound to give up."

Miss Judy blushed and looked distressed. "It is really such an important matter," she urged timidly. "A young lady cannot possibly learn how to walk and how to carry herself with real grace, without being taught dancing. If I only had some one to play the tune, I might teach Doris the rudiments myself; or sister Sophia might, if she hadn't that shortness of breath, and if I could play any instrumental piece on the guitar except the Spanish fandango. That tune, however, is not very well suited to the minuet, which is the only dance that we ever learned. Mother taught us the minuet, because she thought it necessary for all well brought up girls to learn it just for deportment, though she knew we should probably never have an opportunity to dance it in society."

Thus reminded of the many things that they had missed, Miss Judy turned and smiled a little sadly at Miss Sophia, as though it were the sweetest and most natural thing in the world to speak of Miss Sophia's dancing the minuet,—poor, little, round, slow Miss Sophia! And Miss Sophia also thought it sweet and natural, her dull gaze meeting her sister's bright one with confiding love as she murmured the usual vague assent.

"And did you think to ask Mrs. Gordon whether Mr. Beauchamp—" Miss Judy hesitated at the Frenchman's name, which she pronounced as the English pronounce it, and delicately touched her forehead.

"She said he was perfectly sane except upon that one subject, and the kindest, honestest soul alive," said Sidney, whisking the ball from under her arm and reeling off more yarn.

Miss Judy's sweet old face and soft blue eyes wore the dreamy look which always came over them when her imagination was stirred. "How romantic it is and how touching, that he should have believed, through all these years of hard work and a menial life, that he is Napoleon's son, the real King of Rome."

"Well, it don't do any harm," Sidney, the practical, said. "He don't dance with his head. It seems to me, too, I've heard that lots of crazy folks were great dancers. Anyway, you may tell him, as soon as you like, that I'll knit his summer socks to pay him for showing Doris how to dance, and you may say that I'll throw in the cotton to boot. I always like to pay the full price for whatever I get. If he still thinks that isn't enough, you might tell him I'm willing to knit his winter ones too, but he's got to furnish the yarn—there's reason in all things."

"You are sure that Mr. Beauchamp used to be a dancing-master?" asked Miss Judy.

"Old lady Gordon told me she had heard something of the kind, but she said she had never paid any attention. She never does pay any attention to anything unless she means to eat it," Sidney said.

"Poor old lady Gordon," sighed Miss Judy. "She hasn't much except her meals *to* attend to or think about. She must be very, very lonely, all alone in the world."

"I've never seen any sign of her being sorry for herself," responded Sidney, knitting faster, as she always did when warming to her subject. "I never heard of her making any such sign when her son and only child went away and died without coming back. I never heard or saw her show any anxiety about *his* son and only child, that she's never laid her eyes on, though he's now a grown man. I never heard a hint from her about him last night—till she had eaten the last ounce of the pound-cake; and drunk the last drop of the blackberry cordial. Then she remembered to tell me that this only grandson of hers is coming at last."

Here was the news! Miss Sophia settled back in her chair with a deep breath of satisfaction. Miss Judy exclaimed in interested surprise. Very few strangers came to Oldfield, consequently the advent of a young gentleman from a distant city was an event indeed. No wonder that Sidney had made as much of it as she could. Miss Judy, and even Miss Sophia, felt the high compliment paid them in being the first to whom Sidney had taken the thrilling intelligence. It was, in fact, the highest expression of Sidney's gratitude to Miss Judy, and fully recognized as such by both the little sisters, who appreciated it accordingly.

When Sidney was gone on her way to distribute the great news at the various points which promised the largest results, Miss Judy went into the darkened parlor, the other of the two large rooms which the house contained. It was rarely opened, and never used except when, at long and rare intervals, a formal caller, of whom there were not many in that country, was invited to enter it and to feel the way to a chilly, slippery seat. There were two good reasons for the room's disuse. One was that social preëminence in the Pennyroyal Region demanded a dark and disused parlor, although it did not militate against a bed in the living room. Formal visitors expected to grope their way through impenetrable gloom to invisible seats. Accidents sometimes happened, it is true, as when, upon one occasion, old lady Gordon, in calling upon Miss Judy shortly before Major Bramwell left for Virginia, sat down in a large chair, without being aware that it was already occupied by the major, who was a very small man. The second good reason for the room's not being used was that in cool weather Miss Judy could not get fuel for another fire. It was all that Merica could do, all the year round, to find enough wood for one fire; the stray sticks dropped from passing wagons, an occasional branch fallen from the old locust trees which lined the big road, and the regular basket of chips picked up behind the cabinet-maker's shop, barely sufficing to keep up a small blaze in the corner of the fireplace in the living room, which was also the sisters' bedroom.

Miss Judy groped her way cautiously through the darkness of the chilly parlor, and raised the shades far enough to let in a slender shaft of sunlight. She looked around the room with a soft sigh. It was so full of sad and tender memories, and so empty of everything else. The portraits of her father and mother, painted very young, hung side by side over the tall mantelpiece. The intelligent force of her father's face and the soft beauty of her mother's came back to Miss Judy anew whenever she looked at their likenesses. On the opposite walls hung the portraits of her paternal grandfather and grandmother, painted when they were very old. The old gentleman, a judge under the crown in Virginia, had been painted in his wig and gown. His fine face was hard and stern, and Miss Judy often wondered whether he ever had forgiven his son for fighting against the king and the mother country. The old lady's face was as sweet and gentle as Miss Judy's own, and there was a charming resemblance between the pictured and the living features. But the grandmother's face wore an expression of unhappiness, and the granddaughter's was never unhappy, although it was sometimes sad for the unhappiness of others and the pain of the world.

The portraits had been taken out of their frames, so that they might be brought over the Alleghanies with less difficulty. They had never been reframed, and there was something inexpressibly melancholy in their hanging thus, quite unshielded, against the rough, whitewashed logs. Melancholy, vague and far-off, pervaded indeed the whole atmosphere of the shadowed room. It floated out from a broken vase of parian marble which was filled with dried rose leaves, brown and crumbling, yet still sending forth that sweetest, purest, loneliest, and saddest of scents. It clung about the angular, empty arms of the few old chairs, dim with brocade of faded splendor. It lay on the long old sofa—with its high back and its sunken springs—like the wan

ghost of some bright dream that had never come true. But the tenderest and subtlest sadness came from the fading sampler which Miss Judy's mother had worked in those endless days of exile in the wilderness. Ah, the silent suffering, the patient endurance, the uncomplaining disappointment, wrought into those numberless stitches! And yet, with all, perhaps bits of brightness too,—a touch of rose-color here, and a hint of gold there—such as a sweet woman weaves into the grayest fabric of life.

Miss Judy, sighing again, although she could not have told why she always sighed on entering the darkened parlor, now knelt down beside the sofa, and drew a small box from beneath it. But she did not open the box at once; instead, she seated herself on the floor and sat still for a space holding the box in her hand, as if she shrank from seeing its contents. At length, slowly untying the discolored cord that bound the box, she lifted the cover, and took out a pair of satin slippers. They had once been white, but they were now as yellow as old ivory, and the narrow ribbon intended to cross over the instep and to tie around the ankle had deepened almost into the tint of the withered primrose. The slippers were heel-less, and altogether of an antiquated fashion, but Miss Judy did not know that they were. She was doubtful only about the size, for they seemed very small even to her; and she thought, with tender pride, how much taller Doris was than she had ever been, even before she had begun to stoop a little in the shoulders. Turning the slippers this way and that, she regarded them anxiously, with her curly head on one side, until she at last made up her mind that Doris could wear them. They might be rather a snug fit, but they would stay on, while Doris was dancing, all the better for fitting snugly. Yet Miss Judy still sat motionless, holding the slippers, and looking down at them, long after reaching this conclusion. The most unselfish of women, she was, nevertheless, a truly womanly woman. She could not surrender the last symbol of a wasted youth without many lingering pangs.

VI

LYNN GORDON

The slippers had belonged to a white dress which Miss Judy used to call her book-muslin party coat, and this treasure was already in Doris's possession. It had been very fine in its first soft whiteness, and now, mellowed by time, as the slippers were, into the hue of old ivory, and darned all over, it was like some rare and exquisite old lace. Doris thought it the prettiest thing that she had ever seen; certainly it was the prettiest that she had ever owned. When, therefore, the slippers came to join it as a complete surprise, she took the party coat out of its careful wrappings, and, after a close search, was delighted to find one or two gauzy spaces still undarned. It was a delight merely to touch the old muslin. She held it against her cheek—which was softer and fairer still, though Doris thought nothing of that—giving it a loving little pat before laying it down. There were household duties to be done ere Doris would be free to get her invisible needle and her gossamer thread, and to begin the airy weaving of the cobwebs.

There was only one room and a loft to be put in order, but Doris always did it while her mother was busy in the kitchen, getting ready for the day's professional round. Sidney was exceedingly particular about the cleaning of her house, insisting that the "rising sun" of the red and yellow calico quilt should always be precisely in the middle of the feather bed, and that the gorgeous border of sun-rays should be even all around the edges. The long, narrow pillow-cases, ruffled across the ends, must also hang just so far down the bed's sides—and no farther. The home-made rug, too, had its exact place, and there must never be a speck of dust anywhere.

The house was said to be the cleanest in Oldfield, where all the houses were clean. Some people believed that Sidney scrubbed the log walls inside and outside every spring, before whitewashing them within and without. Be that as it may, the poor home had, at all events, the fresh neatness which invests even poverty with refinement.

Doris slighted nothing that morning, although she was naturally impatient to go back to the book-muslin. Yet it seemed to take longer to get the house in perfect order than ever before. The trundle-bed in which Kate and Billy slept was particularly contrary, and it really looked, for a time, as if Doris would never be able to get it entirely out of sight under the big bed. It was settled at last, however, and she had taken up the party coat and had seated herself beside the window, when her mother entered the room.

Sidney cast a sharp glance at the white cotton window curtain to see if it were drawn exactly to the middle of the middle pane, or rather to the hair line, which the middle of the middle pane would have reached, had Doris not put the sash up. Sidney, rigid in her rudimentary ideas of propriety, considered it improper for a young girl to sit unshielded before a window in full view from the highway. It made no difference to Sidney that nobody ever passed the window, except as the neighbors went to and fro, or an occasional farmer came to the village on business. Sidney was firm, and Doris, the gentle and yielding, did as she was told to do. The coarse white curtain was accordingly now in its proper place. Sidney noted the fact, as she cast a sweeping glance around the room, seeking the speck of dust which she seldom found and which never escaped her keen eyes. Doris put the book-muslin aside and arose as her mother came in, and she now stood awaiting directions for the management of the household during the day. Sidney's professional absences lasted from nine in the morning until six in the evening every day, winter and summer,

the whole year round, Sunday alone excepted. During these prolonged absences the care of the family rested upon Doris's young shoulders, and had done so ever since she could remember. It may have been this which gave her the little air of dignity which set so charmingly on her radiant youth. She now listened to her mother's directions, gravely, attentively, respectfully, as she always did.

"Everything is spick and span in the kitchen," Sidney said, setting the broom on end behind the door and rolling down the sleeves over her strong arms. "Make the children stay in the back yard till the school bell rings. Don't let them go in the kitchen. They clutter up things like two little pigs. And don't let them get at the cake that Anne Watson sent. We'll keep that for Sunday dinner. It's mighty light and nice. It lays awful heavy on my conscience, though. I really ought to go to see poor Tom this very day. I ought to go there every day and try to cheer him up. But I've got so many places engaged that I actually don't know where to go first. Remember—don't let the children touch the cake. Give 'em a slice apiece of that pie of Miss Pettus's. And there will be plenty of Kitty Mills's cold ham for them and for Uncle Watty too."

"Yes'm," answered Doris, assenting to everything which her mother told her to do or not to do. Trained by Miss Judy, she would no more have thought of speaking to an older person or to any one whom she respected, without saying "sir" or "madam," than a well-bred French girl would think of doing such a thing. Miss Judy and Doris had never heard of its being "servile" to do this. They both considered it an essential part of good manners and gentle breeding. Many old-fashioned folks in the Pennyroyal Region still think so.

Untying her gingham apron, and hanging it beside the broom, Sidney put on her sunbonnet, and, firmly settling her ball of yarn under her left arm, began to knit as she left the door-step on which Doris stood looking after her.

Sidney paused for a moment at the gate after dropping the loop of string over the post, and looked up at the little window in the loft.

"It would, I reckon, be better to let your Uncle Watty sleep as long as he likes. He's kinder out of the way up there, and better off asleep than awake, poor soul, when he hasn't got any red cedar to whittle. I noticed yesterday that he had whittled up his last stick. He never knows what to do with himself when he's out of cedar. I'll try to get him some. Maybe old lady Gordon's black gardener Enoch Cotton will fetch some from the woods, if I promise to knit him a pair of socks."

An expression flitted over Doris's face, telling her thoughts. Sidney, seeing it, felt in duty bound to rebuke it.

"Now, Doris—mind what I say—as young folks do old folks, so other young folks will do them when their turn comes. I never knew it to fail. We all get what we give, no more, no less. It always works even in the end, though it may not seem so as we go along. See that your Uncle Watty's breakfast is real nice and hot. Make him some milk toast out of Mrs. Alexander's salt-rising—if it's too hard for his gums. Old lady Gordon said she would have Eunice fetch me a bucket of milk every day. You won't forget?"

Doris again said "yes, ma'am" and "no, ma'am" in the proper place, listening throughout with the greatest attention and respect, and trying very hard not to think about the book-muslin party coat.

Sidney twitched the string which held the gate to the post, to make sure that it was firmly tied. "That crumpled-horn of Colonel Fielding's could pick a lock with her horns. Now remember about Uncle Watty. He's had a hard time, poor old man, ever since his leg was broken. If Dr. Alexander had been here, it would have been different. I should just like to give that fool of a travelling doctor a piece of my mind. Him a-pretending to know what he was about, and a-setting your poor Uncle Watty's broken leg east and *west*, instead of north and *south*!"

Doris's cheek dimpled, but she answered dutifully as before. She had her own opinion as to how much the latitude or longitude of Uncle Watty's left leg had to do with his general disability. She could remember him before the leg was broken, and she had never known him to do anything except whittle a stick of red cedar. Youth, at its gentlest, is apt to be hard in its judgment of age's shortcomings. Doris knew how good her mother was as she watched her walking down the big road, with her long, free, swinging stride, with her sunbonnet on the back of her head, and her knitting-needles flashing in the sun. But she wondered if there were no other way. She hated to see her set out on these rounds, she had hated it ever since she could remember, and had gone on hating it as vehemently as it was in her gentle nature to hate anything. The mother never had been able to make Doris see from her own point of view, and Doris had never been able to make her mother understand the intensity of her own sensitiveness, or the soreness of her silent pride. Many a day, as Doris sat sewing beside the window in seeming contentment, she was restlessly seeking some means of escape; almost continually she was trying to find a way to lift the burden from her mother—striving to see something wholly different that she herself might do. Going back to her book-muslin on that morning, she was wondering whether Mrs. Watson or Mrs. Alexander might not need some needle-work done. Perhaps she could earn a little money in that way, and they could live on very little. But hers was not a brooding disposition, and she was soon singing over the old party coat. Then the school bell reminded her that the children's faces and hands must be washed before they went to school; and by the time they were sent off down the big road, Uncle Watty was ready for his breakfast. Doris carried out her mother's directions to the letter. She poured his coffee, and sat respectfully waiting until he had finished eating, and

then she washed the dishes, and put them away.

Returning to her seat by the window, she glanced now and then at Uncle Watty, who had seated himself under the blossoming plum tree to enjoy a leisurely, luxurious pipe of tobacco, having recently swapped a butter paddle, which he had whittled out of red cedar, for a fine old "hand" of the precious weed. It was, however, most unusual for Uncle Watty's whittling to assume any useful shape, or, indeed, any shape at all. Every morning, except Sunday, he hobbled off down the big road, to take his seat before the store door on an empty goods-box, with his pocket-knife and his stick of red cedar, ready for whittling. Year after year, the box and Uncle Watty were always in the same spot, moving only to follow the sun in winter and the shade in summer; and the heap of red cedar shavings always grew steadily, ever undisturbed save as the winds scattered them, and the rains beat them into the earth. When Uncle Watty finally came hobbling around the corner of the house that day, and went away in the direction of the store, Doris looked after him, wondering—rather carelessly, and a little harshly, after the manner of the young and untried—what could be the meaning of an existence which left a trail of red cedar shavings as the sole mark of its path through life. But that perplexing thought also passed as the other had done. She began thinking of the dancing lessons, growing more and more absorbed in the darning of the party coat. She wished she knew whether Miss Judy had ever worn it to a real dancing party. She had never heard of one's being given in Oldfield, excepting of course the famous ball at the Fielding's, near the jail, on the night that the prisoner escaped; long, long before she was born. Most of the Oldfield people thought it a sin to dance. Miss Judy must have looked very pretty in the book-muslin. Doris laid it on her lap, and, turning to the window, gave the curtain an impatient toss, pushing it to one side. There was no use in keeping it half drawn when never a soul ever went by. And the sun was shining, almost with the warmth of midsummer, on this glorious May-day. When the spring was still farther advanced, when the leaves were larger on the two tall silver poplars standing beside the gate, lifting a shimmering white screen from the soft green earth to the softer blue sky; when the climbing roses, already blooming all over the snowy walls, were more thickly festooned; when the Italian honeysuckle hung its rich bronze garlands and its fragrant bloom from the very eaves of the mossy roof—then Doris might push the curtain farther back, but not before, no matter how brilliantly the sun shone or how entirely deserted the big road was. As Doris sat sewing and thinking, it seemed to her that her mother was unnecessarily strict. She had even thought it wrong to allow her to learn to dance. Miss Judy had found much difficulty in persuading her. However, she had consented at last, and presently Doris, all alone in the old house, began singing blithely, oblivious of everything except the anticipation of the dancing lessons and the pleasure of darning the party coat. The song was one of Allan Ramsay's, a languishing love-song which Miss Judy's mother had sung. But as Doris's thoughts danced to inaudible music, and her needle flew daintily in and out of the soft old muslin, the words and the tune soon tripped to a gayer measure than they had, perhaps, ever known before.

The birds, too, were lilting gayly on that perfect May morning. A couple of flycatchers were breakfasting in mid-air. It is impossible to conceive of a daintier way to satisfy hunger; as a Kentucky poet has said: "It is, apparently, all color and rhythm—with green boughs and violet sky for canopy, the pure air for a table—and in its midst the sweet bouquet of the woods." And the flycatcher was but one of many beautiful melodious creatures thronging between heaven and earth. Brown thrashers by twos and fours flitted back and forth across the big road, leaving one green wheat-field for another of still richer verdure. A happy pair of orioles, flashing orange and black, were darting—bright as flame and light as smoke—through the tallest silver poplar, building an air-castle almost as wonderful, and nearly as fragile, as those that young human lovers build. With the fetching of each fine fibre, the husband fairly turned upside down, and hung by his feet, while singing his pride and delight. The wife, more modestly happy, quietly rested her soft breast on the unstable nest—with all a woman's trust—as though the home were founded upon a rock, as all homes should be, and hung not by a frail thread at the hazardous tip of an unsteady bough as—alas!—so many homes do. It was steady enough just now, when love was new and the spring was mild, and only the southern breeze stirred the white-lined leaves with a silken rustle. The soft cooing of the unseen doves sounded far off. The bees merely murmured among the honeysuckle blooms. The humming-bird, which was raying rubies and emeralds from the hearts of the roses, came and went as softly as the south wind.

Doris smiled at the sylvan housekeeping of the orioles, which she watched for awhile, letting her sewing rest on her lap. But tiring soon of the little drama of the silver poplar, as we always tire of the happiness of others, the girl's eyes wandered wistfully through the fragrant loneliness to the wooded hills which gently folded the drowsy village. The trees, delicately green, almost silver gray, in their tender foliage, were still fringed by the snow of the dogwood, and the misty beauty of the red buds; and the cool, leafy vistas, sloping gently down toward the village, met the sea of blossoming orchards, breaking in wide, deep waves of pink and white foam at the foot of the hills. But Doris had seen those same trees, and hillsides, and orchards every May-time of her eighteen years, and sameness, however grateful to older eyes, has never a great charm for youth.

Doris's eyes came back to the book-muslin with a keener interest. As she sat there, sewing and singing, in the soft light that filtered through the old curtain, the girl was beautiful, almost tragically beautiful, for her uncertain place in the world. Her slender throat, like the stem of a white flower, arose from the faded brown of her dress as an Easter lily unfolds from its dull sheath. Her radiant hair, yellow as new-blown marigolds, clustered thick and soft about her fair forehead, as the rich pollen falls on the lily's satin. Her delicate brows were dark and straight; and her curling lashes, darker still, threw bewitching shadows around her large, brown eyes. Her

face was pale with a warm pallor infinitely fairer than any mere fairness. Her lips, which were a little full, but exquisite in shape and sweetness, were tinted as delicately as blush roses. Her small, white hands, with their rosy palms and tapering fingers, bore no traces of hard work. But Doris was not thinking of her hands as, without turning her head, she put out one of them for another length of thread. The spool was a very small one, and it stood rather unsteadily on the uneven ledge of the window, and it rolled when Doris touched it. Instinctively she tried to catch it, and to keep it from falling to the ground outside the window. She had been reared to neatness and order, and to economy which valued even a reel of cotton too much to see it needlessly soiled. Of course Doris tried to catch the falling spool,—and that was the way everything began! It was all as simple and natural and purely accidental as anything could have been. And yet at the same time it was one of those inscrutable happenings which make the steadiest of us seem but feathers in the wind of destiny.

Only a moment before that foolish little spool began to roll, the big road seemed entirely deserted. Not a human being was in sight—Doris was sure that there was not, because she had looked and looked in vain, and had longed and longed that there might be. Nevertheless, as the little reel started to fall, and Doris darted after it as suddenly and swiftly as a swallow, there was a young man on horseback directly in front of the window, appearing as strangely and as unexpectedly as if he had sprung out of the earth. And, moreover, he was looking straight at Doris, with hardly more than a couple of rods between them, when she burst into full view in the broad light of day, appearing like some beautiful bacchante. The white curtain fell behind her radiant head as the breeze caught and loosed the golden strands of her hair, and the sun flashed a greater radiance upon its dazzling crown. She saw him, too, with a startled uplifting of her great shadowy dark eyes as she bent forward—while her exquisite face was still smiling at her own innocent thoughts, and her rose-red lips were still a little apart with the singing of the old love-song.

The white curtain then swung again into place. It was full of thin spots which Doris could see through; but she was so startled, and her heart was beating so fast at first, that she shrunk back without trying to look. How right her mother had been, after all. That was her first feeling. When she recovered self-possession enough to peep out, she saw that the young man's horse was curveting back and forth across the big road in a most alarming manner. This continued for a surprising length of time before Doris observed that, whenever the horse seemed about to stop, the rider touched him with the spur. Such a flash of indignation went over Doris then as quite swept away the last trace of embarrassment. How could he do such a cruel and such a meaningless thing! She wondered still more why he dismounted, and, throwing the bridle reins over his arm, began walking up and down in front of the window, gazing closely at the ground as though looking for something that he had lost. Doris noticed that he glanced at the window every time he passed it, and she knew that she ought to go out and help him find what he had lost. That was a matter of course in Oldfield manners. It is the way of most country people to take a keen and helpful interest in everything that a neighbor does; and city people deserve less credit than they claim for their indifference to their neighbor's affairs, which is too often mere selfishness disguised. Notwithstanding this local social law Doris did not stir, held motionless by an influence which she could not understand. She had known at once who the young man was. Too few strangers came to Oldfield for her to fail to place him immediately as the grandson of old lady Gordon, the young gentleman from Boston, whose coming everybody was talking about. She noted through the worn places in the old curtain how tall he was and how dark and how handsome. She could not decide what kind of clothes his riding clothes were. At last he mounted his horse and galloped up the hill, and then Doris returned serenely to the darning of the book-muslin party coat.

VII

THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA

Within the hour Lynn Gordon rode back down the hill, and passed the window very slowly, watching the curtain as a star-gazer awaits the passing of a cloud.

The baffling width of white cotton hung still unstirred; Doris was no longer sitting behind it, but the young man had no means of knowing that she had gone. As the hand on the reins unconsciously drew the horse almost to a standstill, the doctor and his wife left their seats on the porch of their house over the way, and came out to the gate to speak to him. They had met him at his grandmother's on the previous evening, and they had been old friends of his father. Lynn sprang from the saddle and, leading his horse, crossed the big road to shake hands with them.

"Have you lost something?" asked Mrs. Alexander.

"Oh, no—yes—I have lost a jewel—a pearl," the young man replied rashly.

The doctor's lady exclaimed in surprise. Jewels were rarely lost or found in that country. The gems oftenest lost were the sparkling seeds which flashed out of the jewel-weed; the finest pearls ever found were those which the mistletoe bore.

"Dear me, what a pity," lamented Mrs. Alexander. "And how was your pearl set?"

"It wasn't mine. I didn't notice how it was set. Oh, yes, I did. It was set amid roses and honeysuckle and humming-birds against a field of spotless snow," Lynn said, still more lightly.

The doctor's wife was not a dull woman. She understood his tone, though she did not understand what he meant. She had been eagerly scanning the big road, as far as she could see; thinking that a jewel dropped near by on the highway—unrolling like a broad band of brown velvet from the far green hills on the north to the farther green hills on the south—must sparkle and flash, showing a long way off in such brilliant sunshine. Now, however, she knew that Lynn was not in earnest, and she turned with a smile on her own face to meet the laughing frankness of his fine dark eyes. But a glance was just passing between the young man and the older man, and she caught that also, with the vague, helpless uneasiness, tinged with resentment, which every woman feels at seeing a sign of the freemasonry of men.

But a doctor's wife learns to overlook a good many things which she would like to have explained, if she be a sensible woman, as Mrs. Alexander was. This one merely said:—

"You are a joker, I see, as your father was. Nobody ever could tell when he was serious. Come in and sit with us. It's nice and cool these early mornings on the porch. Tie your horse to the fence. I thought when I saw you getting down from the saddle, that you meant to hitch him to Sidney's, and I was just going to call and ask you to tie him to ours instead. The doctor's horses pull boards off our fences every day, but it doesn't matter, because he keeps somebody to nail them on again; while Sidney has nobody but herself to depend upon."

"And even the resourceful Sidney—being a woman—can't drive a nail," remarked the doctor, deliberately.

He knew how well worn the truism was, but he used it designedly, as a toreador uses his scarf. He liked to see his wife flare up. Her kind eyes grew so bright and her wholesome cheeks so red, and it was always so delightfully easy to get her in a good humor again. It is a tendency which is very common in large men with amiable little wives like Mrs. Alexander, and one which is very uncommon in smaller men with wives of a different disposition.

Lynn Gordon, as an unmarried man, naturally knew nothing of these matters and blundered on, disappointing the doctor's confident expectations by asking the lady a question, which turned her attention in another direction. He inquired who Sidney was, seeing an opportunity for learning something about the girl behind the silver poplars.

There was no subject upon which Mrs. Alexander was more willing to talk, nor one upon which she could talk more eloquently, and she accordingly began at once to give Lynn the history of Sidney Wendall, whom she held to be a most interesting as well as a most admirable and remarkable character. It was no easy or simple thing, so the doctor's wife said, for a woman of the Pennyroyal Region to earn a family's living. In that country no white woman could work outside her own home (were there anything for her to do) on account of coming into competition with black laborers. And Sidney had received no training to lift her above the laboring class, having had even less than the average country education. And yet, as the doctor's wife pointed out, she had managed to maintain her family and herself in reasonable comfort and universal respect. It was all very well for the men to laugh at Sidney and make fun of her news and her gossip. It was all very well for them to say—as the doctor said, according to his wife, who flashed her eyes at him—that Sidney made her news out of the whole cloth when she did not get it over the grapevine telegraph. Everybody knew how hard men always were on any woman who was not pretty. As though poor Sidney could help the length of her own nose! Let the mean men make fun as much as they pleased! The indignant lady would like, so she said, to see one of them who had done his duty in the world more nobly than Sidney had done hers. She would also like, so she declared, to see one of them who kept as strict guard over what he said about his neighbors, and who was as free from evil-speaking and mischief-making, as Sidney was—for all her talking that they were always so ready to ridicule.

The doctor leaned back in his chair, beaming at his wife. He was very proud of her when she talked and looked as she was doing now, and he was truly sorry when she was compelled to pause for sheer lack of breath.

"I am afraid I don't know the lady of whom you are speaking," Lynn said, as soon as he had a chance to speak. "I haven't been here, you know, since I could remember. Do you mean some one who lives over there in the house behind those silver poplars?" And then, he added artfully, "It seems to be deserted."

"There is where Sidney Wendall lives, but she is never at home in the daytime. Her business takes her out. But Doris, the eldest daughter, is at home. She has always taken care of the house and the other children, and even of Uncle Watty. She used to do it when she wasn't so high," the doctor's wife said, holding her hand about three feet from the porch floor. "Such a lovely, golden-haired, dark-eyed, delicate little changeling, in that homely, rude, rough-and-tumble brood."

"Is this beautiful Doris a child still?" inquired the young man, deceitfully leading on nearer to what he wished to learn.

"Oh, no. I was speaking of years ago. Doris is about grown now, and prettier than ever. You'll be sure to see her. There are very few young ladies in Oldfield. She seldom goes out, though. She stays close at home and takes care of things just as she always has done. It must be a lonely, dreary life for a girl,—and such a beauty too,—but she never seems to mind it. I heard her singing

this morning about the time that you rode up."

"I met Sidney coming out of the Watsons' gate when I went in to see Tom in passing," the doctor said suddenly, and with a different manner. "I wish, Jane, that you would ask Sidney, the first time you see her, to go there as often as she can. Send her something, and tell her that I think her going would cheer up Tom."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Alexander, scathingly. "Then Sidney's 'gab,' as you ungrateful men call it, has its uses after all!"

"I am not jesting now, my dear. I am seriously disturbed about Tom Watson. So far as I am able to judge, there is nothing more that surgery or medicine can do for him. The time has come, now when we have done our utmost for his body, that we must find some relief for his mind. He must not be allowed to sit there propped up by the window, staring out at the big road, and never trying to speak even the few indistinct words that he might utter, and always brooding, brooding —over his own awful condition, I'm afraid."

"Well, I've done what I could," said the doctor's wife, quickly, as though her husband's words bore some unspoken reproach. "I know my double duty to a neighbor and a patient of yours, John. But I can't go to see Tom Watson again. You never saw such a sad sight, Mr. Gordon. I actually dream about it after I have seen him. That is where the Watsons live," she said, pointing to the house. "I go every morning to the cross fence between our house and theirs, taking some little thing for Tom just to show that I have been thinking about him, and I call Anne to the other side of the fence and ask her how he is. But doing even that hurts her and hurts me, for she knows that I know that he never can be any better."

"And I think he knows it too. That is the most terrible thing of all," the doctor said, musingly, as if turning over ways and means in his mind.

Mrs. Alexander looked at Lynn with a sudden dimness shadowing the brightness of her kind eyes. "You don't know the Oldfield people, Mr. Gordon, though you are really one of us. Unless you had known Tom Watson as we knew him, you can hardly understand how terrible and how strange his present condition seems to us. He used to be a great, strong, noisy, reckless, hot-tempered dare-devil, but as tender-hearted as a child and liked by everybody, black and white, big and little, in the whole country."

A sudden recollection caused her to smile at her husband, forgetting that she had just been scolding him and that he richly deserved it:—

"You remember, John, that time when Tom kept those bear cubs tied up in his back lot. One day the biggest of them got loose and caught Sidney as she was going home with a pitcher of milk which Anne had given her. Sidney was almost scared out of her wits, and screamed as loud as she could, till the bear squeezed her so tight that she couldn't make another sound. But she never let go the pitcher—never even loosed her grip—and kept on holding it out of the cub's reach, long after she couldn't scream any more. Tom went running. Can't you see him now, John? and hear him shouting at every jump: 'Let go, Sid. Good Gad—woman! are you going to let the bear hug the life out of you before you'll give him that spoonful of milk?'"

"And to think of poor Tom as he is now;" she went on presently, the smile fading. "I will speak to Sidney as you suggest, John. I will send her a basket of sweet potatoes and urge her to go as often as she can. Anne would never think of asking any one to come, but I know she would be pleased to have Sidney drop in. She's always like a fresh breeze on a hot day even to well folks. She told me, however, the other morning that Tom Watson never seemed to notice anything that she had to say. She said that, no matter how hard she tried to entertain him, he kept on staring out at the empty big road, just sitting there, not trying to speak, and looking like a dead man only for his restless, burning eyes."

"And yet he may live for years just as he is now," the doctor said. "But we must not give up trying to help him because he can never be any better. I must devise some sort of relief. It will not do to let him sit there, like that, all day, day after day—maybe for years. I tried this morning to find out what he was thinking about. I also tried to learn from Anne what his tastes were, what sort of things he had liked or was interested in before he met with the accident. His sight is much impaired, and he seems never to have been anything of a reader. I doubt whether he ever had any indoor interests, except playing cards. All that I can remember is that he used to gamble like the very devil."

"Shame on you, John, to be raking up that against the poor fellow, as he is now," protested the doctor's wife, indignantly.

"Nonsense! Who's raking anything up?" the doctor responded. "I was merely trying to think of some way of diverting his mind. I thought perhaps a game of cards—"

The doctor's wife uttered a smothered little shriek: "John *Alexander*! What are you thinking of to speak of card-playing in Anne Watson's house?"

The doctor grew calmly judicial, as all good husbands grow when their wives become unduly excited. "I am well aware of Anne's prejudice. I know precisely how strong—"

"Strong!" repeated his wife, interrupting him. "It's the strongest thing—the only really strong thing—*in* Anne—that, and her religion. Her horror of card-playing is a part of her religion. It's

bred in her bone. She got it from her father, the elder. Some people thought he was actually out of his head about cards. And Anne believes as firmly as he believed it, that cards are Satan's chief weapon, and that even to touch them is to imperil the soul. She believes it as firmly as she believes in baptism for the remission of sins; as firmly as she believes that there is a heaven and a hell."

All this breathless outpouring the doctor waved aside: "As I have already said, my dear, I know perfectly well what Anne's feeling used to be. Now, however, in Tom's hopeless condition she will, of course, look at the matter with more reason."

"Now *isn't* that like a man?" appealed Mrs. Alexander, to no one in particular, since she could hardly appeal to her visitor against his own sex. "Wouldn't anybody but a man know that Anne would only stand the firmer for that very reason? Any woman would see in a moment that the very fact of Anne's knowing that her husband's mortal life was hopelessly wrecked, could not fail to increase her resistance against a thing which she believes must lose him the life everlasting."

The doctor took his feet down from the porch railing, and tapped his pipe against the post with an unnecessary amount of noise. Lynn Gordon looked hard at the silver poplars on the other side of the big road. Different men have different ways of giving outward expression to the embarrassment which every man feels at a woman's innocent frankness regarding spiritual things. Neither of these men spoke for a space. The doctor was casting about for the surest and swiftest way of fetching his wife back to some ground on which he felt rather more at home, and decidedly more secure of his own footing.

"Anne knew that Tom was a born gambler; she knew it before she married him. Nobody but a woman—a fanatical visionary like Anne—would have been foolish enough to expect to change a leopard's spots."

"It doesn't strike me as particularly foolish for Anne—or for any other woman—to expect her husband to keep his promise not to get any *new* spots," the lady retorted, with all the promptness and spirit that her husband anticipated.

The doctor glanced at the young man as triumphantly as he dared, and the young man returned the doctor's glance as non-committally as he could. They had both often observed before this, as most observant people observe at some period of their lives, that while a man will defend another man whenever he can, regardless of his own feelings toward the individual, he has never a word to say in defence of men; and that, while a woman will seldom defend another woman without strong personal reasons, she is always ready, *cap-a-pie*, to defend women, through thick and thin.

Nevertheless, the doctor was again a trifle disappointed to find his wife content with firing a single shot, and he presently said, trying to urge her on:—

"I have not disputed the fact that Anne Watson is a good woman. Tom no doubt made the promises that such men always make when they want to win some pretty girl, and he doubtless hoped to be strong enough to keep them. But I cannot allow a patient of mine to die or to fall into melancholy because he has failed to keep promises that many good men break; or because his wife lacks common sense; no matter how good she may be or what sort of religion she may be living up to. If Tom wants to play cards,—as I think that he does, as I am nearly sure that he does, —I shall certainly find him a partner if I can. I would play with him myself if I knew how."

"Let me do it, doctor," said Lynn. "I know something about several games. It would give me real pleasure to do anything in my power for your patient."

Mrs. Alexander said nothing more in opposition; she merely looked her thoughts. When, therefore, it was arranged, as the young man was leaving, that he should come on the following morning to go with the doctor to see Tom Watson about the game of cards, the lady merely gave her smooth auburn head a side-wise toss, as if to say they would all see how it turned out.

VIII

AT OLD LADY GORDON'S

Lynn rode slowly by the Watson house, thinking of its tragedy, which had thus touched him so soon after his coming to this quiet village, the seeming abode of peace. It was his first partial realization that the folded green hills cannot shut away the pain of the world. He was too young and too strong, and had not suffered enough in mind or body, to know that quiet and peace only make the heart ache more keenly with the sorrow of living.

And this was no more even now than a partial perception. He was but twenty-two, yet in the springtime of life; and the earth also was still in the season of its perpetual youth. The green of new leafage now tinted the thinning white of the blossoming orchards; the green and the white and the last rosy sweetness of apple blossoms were yet melting slowly into the rich verdure of the hillsides. But the snowy spray of all the exquisite flowering drifted fast before the incoming summer tide. Already the wild flowers were almost done blooming in the woods, and the scented meadows were growing red with clover blossoms.

The largest, richest fields lying on both sides of the big road, knee-deep in clover and dotted with cattle, belonged to the Gordon estate. Ultimately they would all be his own, but he was not thinking of this as he looked at them that day. He had never thought of making Oldfield his home, having long cherished other plans. Yet, as he looked at the old house, it was a pleasant sight on that May morning, with its low white walls bowered in dense shrubbery and its mossy roof overhung by giant elms. There were many maples, also, and a cypress tree stood beside the gate, swinging its sombre plumes so close to the ground that the young man did not see a cart standing before the gate until he was almost upon it. Coming nearer, he saw that it belonged to a butcher who had driven in from the country, and that it was well filled with his wares. The butcher stood astride a plank which had been laid across the front wheels, and he was busily engaged in turning over the pieces of meat, evidently seeking something to please the mistress of the house. Old lady Gordon sat at the open window in her accustomed place, looking grimly on; and the small Frenchman who managed her farm waited beside the cart, standing in silence, glancing anxiously from its contents to the mistress and back again. The butcher scowled, as he tossed the steaks, the joints, and roasts about, thinking angrily how much more trouble it always was to please old lady Gordon than all the rest of the easy-going people living along his semi-weekly route. Finally, however, he found a piece which seemed promising, and he handed it to the small Frenchman, who took the huge joint,—holding it as if it were a sword,—and jauntily carried it across the lawn to the window and held it up for the mistress to decide upon. She gave only one contemptuous glance at it; one was enough to cause its rejection with great scorn.

"No, I won't have that!" she called out in her loud, deep, imperious voice, speaking to the butcher over her manager's head. "How many times must I tell you that I don't like the bony parts?"

Monsieur Beauchamp suddenly dropped the joint as if it had burnt him, and started as if he had been stung. His face flushed scarlet, and he drew himself up to his fullest height.

"Ah, madame," he said poignantly yet proudly, "I am stab to ze soul to hear you say zat you do not like ze Bonapartes!"

"For gracious' sake!" old lady Gordon exclaimed, taken quite off her guard; and dropping her turkey-wing fan in her start of amazement.

In another moment she remembered, and forthwith did what she could to soothe the little Frenchman's deeply wounded feelings. She turned away her head as her grandson drew near, and put up the turkey-wing fan to hide the smile which she could not control, when her gaze chanced to meet his as he looked on, a silent and interested spectator of the scene.

"Why, Mister Beauchamp," she said, quite gravely, as soon as she could speak at all, "I am amazed at your thinking that I meant any disrespect to your relations. How in the world could you think such a thing? I give you my word of honor, that I have always believed the Bonapartes to be the only human beings ever created expressly to rule over the French."

Monsieur had begun to soften almost as soon as the mistress had begun to explain, and by the time the explanation was finished, he was fairly beaming with delight. One hand was already holding his hat, but the other was free, and this he now laid upon his heart, bringing his small heels together in a most impressive bow. And then, smiling and quite happy again, he picked up the rejected joint of mutton and carried it back to the cart very cheerfully indeed. The turning over of its contents was accordingly resumed for some time longer, until old lady Gordon consented at last to allow the butcher to leave a large roast. She shouted after him, nevertheless, as he rattled away; telling him at the top of her strong voice that he need not think that she would take another piece as tough and lean as this piece was; that he need have no such expectation the next time he came round.

She told Lynn the story of the Frenchman when the young man had entered the room in which she always sat and, with her permission, had thrown himself down on the couch under the window. But she could not answer his question about Monsieur Beauchamp immediately, because Eunice, the fat black cook, chanced to come in just at that moment for a consultation over the dinner, and the meals in old lady Gordon's house were always the subjects of very grave consideration, requiring a considerable length of time.

While the mistress and the cook were thus conferring, the young man gazed carelessly, and yet curiously, around this large low room in which his grandmother lived, and had spent the greater part of her life; and in which his father had been born. The low ceiling had been covered with canvas years before, but the original white of the canvas had long since turned to a smoky brown. The walls, which had never been plastered, were also covered with canvas, and afterward had been hung with old-fashioned wall-paper in hunting scenes. These had faded into a general effect of hazy dimness, but Lynn's keen young eyes made out the hunters, the hounds, and the game, as he lay idle with his long arms under his handsome dark head, wondering what sort of man his grandfather had been. He had heard it said that rooms are like the people who live in them, and, recalling the saying, he wondered again whether this room was now as it used to be in his grandfather's time. There stood his grandfather's secretary in one corner, still filled with papers, just as he must have left it. The bed in the opposite corner must also have stood in the same place for many a year. It had been a very stately edifice, a magnificent structure, in its day. It even yet upheld a heavy tester of faded crimson damask, gathered to the centre under a great golden star of tarnished splendor. It had evidently once been of imposing height, and it was still of unusual width, but it had lost something of its height with age, as human beings do. It had been much too high for old lady Gordon to climb into and out of, as easily as she liked, when she

began to grow stouter and more indolent, and it was not her way to submit to any inconvenience which she could avoid. So that the thick mahogany legs of the grand old bed had been sawed off by degrees—as old lady Gordon's ease required—till it now squatted under its big, dusty red tester like some absurd turbaned old Turk. Lynn smiled as he looked at it, letting his gaze wander on to the tall chest of drawers, to the high-backed split-bottomed chairs, to a great oaken chest at the foot of the bed—to all the homely, comfortable, unbeautiful things.

Looking at his grandmother, who was still absorbed in the consultation with the cook, the young man suddenly felt how like her face his own was; feeling it with the curiously mingled uneasiness and satisfaction which come to most of us when we recognize ancestral traits in our own spirits, our own minds, or our own bodies. She was a large, tall old woman, still handsome and even shapely, despite her many years and her great weight. Her chin was square and her forehead broad, yet her grandson was somehow pleased to think that his own chin was more delicately rounded, and that his forehead was higher than hers while not less broad, and that his mouth was clearer cut. Still, the strong likeness was there, in every one of the features of their two faces and most of all in their eyes—long, large, deep, thick-lashed, heavy-browed, and as black as human eyes ever are; and now as old lady Gordon turned her head, the young man saw with a kind of shock that his grandmother's eyes were almost as young, too, as his own. For young eyes in an old face are not a pleasant sight to see. It seems better for the ageless, unwearied spirit, thus looking out, to have grown old with the wearied body, so that both together may be ready for the Rest.

Old lady Gordon noticed her grandson's gaze, as soon as Eunice had gone from the room, and recognized the admiration which partly occupied his thoughts. She accordingly smiled at him, settling comfortably back in her broad, low rocking-chair. She wore a loose flowing wrapper of fine white muslin, as she always did in warm weather. In the winter she always wore the same garment made of fine white wool, covering it with a long black cloak on the rare occasions upon which she left the house during cold weather. It was a most unusual dress and one of peculiar distinction, but old lady Gordon took neither of these facts into the slightest account. She wore the fine white muslin in the summer because it was cooler than anything else; and she wore the white wool in the winter for the reason that, while warm and soft, it would wash with less trouble than colored stuffs, when she dropped things on it at the table, as she did at almost every meal. It is, perhaps, often just as well that we cannot know the causes which bring about many pleasing and even poetic results. Old lady Gordon's servants, especially Dilsey the washerwoman, held opinions somewhat different from hers concerning the greater convenience of constantly wearing white in winter as well as in summer. But old lady Gordon never took that into account either; neither that nor anything whatsoever that ever touched her own comfort at all adversely.

"Come and hand me my bag, I want a cough-drop," she said to Lynn that day, yawning. "It's too far round on the back of the chair for me to reach it."

Lynn sprang to serve her and handed her the bag. It was the first time that he had seen it; that is to say, it was the first time that he had really observed the bag; he must, of course, have seen it, since no one ever saw old lady Gordon without it. During the day it always hung on the back of the chair in which she sat when not at the table; when she sat at the table it always hung on the knob of the dining-room chair. Through the night it always swung from the post of her bed close to her hand. When she drove out in her ancient coach the bag went with her. And a wonderful bag it was! There were many more things in it than mere cough-drops. There were various other sorts of drops—drops for the gouty pain which sometimes assailed old lady Gordon's toe, and drops of good old brandy for cramp after over-eating. And there were candles and matches, all ready for lighting if she should chance to grow wakeful through the night, and always plenty of novels; and numerous simple toilet articles, such as a hairbrush and comb, together with biscuits and hair-oil and tea-cakes and handkerchiefs and an occasional piece of pie. It would indeed be hard to think of anything that old lady Gordon could have needed or desired, during the day or the night; or even have fancied that she wanted, without finding it ready to her hand in that wonderful bag. There was a hand-bell in it, too, though the bell usually lay at the very bottom of the bag, under everything else, because there was hardly ever any occasion for ringing it. The bag was a very gradual evolution, like most complete inventions. Old lady Gordon herself had given a good deal of thought for a good many years to the bringing of it to its ultimate state of perfection; and Eunice the cook and Patsey the housemaid had both concentrated their attention upon it more and more as the mistress's wants and demands increased; until it had now become so comprehensive that Eunice rarely had to be summoned out of her cabin, at midnight, to give old lady Gordon a lunch; and Patsey was able, as a rule, to sleep the whole night through on her pallet in the passage outside the mistress's door; no matter whether that lady might suddenly crave refreshment, or whether several kinds of drops might be needed in consequence of a too hearty supper.

When old lady Gordon had taken the cough-drops out of the bag, and Lynn had replaced it on the back of her chair, within easier reach, she answered his question, which he had almost forgotten in his wondering observation of the bag.

"You were asking about little Beauchamp," she said. "Your grandfather found him somewhere and brought him home with him a long time ago. He has been here ever since. I don't remember how long ago that was. I don't know anything about him before he came. I hardly noticed him, in fact, until after your grandfather's death, when I found him useful in helping me manage the farm."

The grandson looked at the grandmother in silence, paying little heed to what she was saying of

the Frenchman. He was wondering why she said "your grandfather" instead of saying "my husband." He had already noted that she invariably said "your father" instead of saying "my son." He knew little of women's ways, having lost his mother before he could remember, so that his life had been mostly among men, and he knew nothing whatever of his grandmother. Yet he felt, nevertheless, that a wife and mother who had loved her husband and her son would not speak of them to her grandson as "your grandfather" and "your father," as his grandmother did. He had also a curious, half-amused, half-indignant feeling that her doing so was intended to make him feel somehow responsible for something which she disliked, and did not wish to assume responsibility for herself.

"I never thought of asking your grandfather where he found him," old lady Gordon went on indifferently. "Most likely it was in New Orleans. The few foreigners in this country mostly came from there. Your grandfather used to go there pretty often with flatboat-loads of horses. But it doesn't matter where Beauchamp came from in the first place. He's mighty useful to me now, wherever it was. I really don't see how I could get along without him. He is a faithful, honest, industrious little soul. Of course that bat in his belfry flies out now and then—as you saw and heard. I try to remember it, but I forget sometimes. And how could a body guard against such an unheard-of thing as that was?" She laughed lazily, fanning herself with the turkey-wing, and rocking slowly and heavily. "He isn't a bit luny about anything else, and he is just as useful to me as if he didn't believe he was the son of Napoleon Bonaparte. I don't care if he thinks he's Julius Cæsar himself. What's the odds—since it never interferes with his work? And his wife's a treasure too, in a different way. There's nothing French or flighty about her. She belongs around here—somewhere in the Pennyroyal Region. I don't know or remember where he picked her up. She is a great, slow-witted, homely, slab-sided drudge, almost twice his size. And such a worker! She never turns her head when he calls her the 'Empress Maria.' She just goes straight along, hoeing the garden and making butter. But—all the same—she thinks the sun rises and sets in him."

The young man laughed. "Fine! And he no doubt thinks she hung the moon."

His grandmother looked at him more attentively than she had done hitherto. She had never been thrown with men of quick mind, and was not accustomed to such ready response. She liked quickness of perception as she liked all bright and pleasant things; and she disliked slowness of understanding as she disliked everything tiresome—like the sybarite that she was.

"Certainly he does. That's always the way," she in turn responded, smilingly. "The worse mated the married seem to be—to outsiders, the better they appear to suit one another. Talk about 'careful, judicious selection!'" Old lady Gordon made an inarticulate but eloquent sound of scornful incredulity. "If you were to rush out there in the big road this minute—with your eyes shut—and seize the first passer-by, you would have just as much chance of knowing what you were doing—what you were getting—as you ever will have!"

Lynn wondered again what sort of a man his grandfather could have been. And his young mother, whom he had never known? Had this cynical old woman disapproved of her, had she been unkind to her? There is always something repellent to wholesome youth in the cynicism of the old. Feeling this, Lynn said rather coldly that he had thought little of such matters, he had been too much absorbed in other things, in laying life plans which must be quite apart from all thoughts of love and marriage for a good many years. The mere mention of these cherished plans brought a flush to his dark cheeks, and caused him to sit more proudly erect. They were seldom far absent from his mind, and the main thought lying nearest the heart is never long unspoken by frank young lips. It was less than a year since he had been graduated from the Harvard Law School, but his deep-laid plans lay far back of his graduation. He could hardly remember when he had not seen the path of his ambition straight and distinct before him. It was a steep one, to be sure, and hard and long, as the road to the heights must ever be. But he had faced all this wholly undaunted, knowing the power within himself, and the additional strength which fortune had given him. Yet he was a modest young fellow, and simple-hearted as well as single-minded. There was in him little vanity in his personal gifts, little pride in his inherited possessions. He simply recognized these as lucky accidents, for which he could claim no credit; holding them merely as the means whereby he might hope, more confidently than most young men, to reach the utmost limit of his ambition. The right to practise law was already his, and the rest of the way upward must open as he pressed earnestly and untiringly onward,—the bar, the bench, the supreme bench, those must be within the winning of any man having fair ability, unbounded capacity for hard work, and abundant means to wait for its fruition; and he knew himself to be possessed of all these. This seemed to him the highest ambition possible to an American, as perhaps it was, in those days when the ermine was still held unspotted, high above the mire of politics.

And yet, notwithstanding these lofty aims and matured plans, Lynn Gordon was very young, hardly more than a boy, after all, in many things, so that he soon began to talk with boyish openness of the herculean task which he thus had set himself in sober earnest. His grandmother listened with such intense interest, such thorough understanding, and such complete sympathy as surprised herself far more than it surprised her grandson. She was taken wholly unawares,—not dreaming of finding him anything like this,—having looked forward to his coming with but lukewarm enthusiasm.

The old who have been disappointed in almost everything that they have ever set their hearts upon, cease, after a while, to expect anything, and learn to shield themselves against further disappointment by real or assumed indifference. Old lady Gordon in her fierce pride had never owned, even to herself, how deep and bitter and lasting had been her disappointment in her own

son. It counted for nothing with her that he had been what many would have considered a good man, though not an intellectual man in the estimation of any one. To his mother his goodness had seemed but the negative virtue of an undecided character and a mediocre mind. For the best love of a nature like hers cannot be born of mere toleration, even in a mother's heart. This mother—being what she was—might perhaps have come nearer to forgiving the things which were lacking, had this only child been a daughter. A woman like old lady Gordon never expects much of another woman, even though she be her own daughter. But she always expects everything of every man, especially when he belongs to her own family, and thus it was that old lady Gordon never could wholly forgive her only son. Least of all could she ever quite forgive him for being his father over again; an almost unpardonable offence which other poorly gifted children have committed in the eyes of other embittered mothers, who have illogically expected, as poor old lady Gordon had expected, to gather figs from thistles.

When she had first faced the truth in the prime of life, her fierce pride had raised the iron shield of pretended indifference, and she had upheld it so long that it had gradually grown into the rusty armor of age's insensibility. And yet, through all its steely coldness, the young man's warm words now struck fire. A deep glow came into the impassive, handsome old face, and a warm light into the hard, fine old eyes, as she looked at this spirited, strong, determined, capable young fellow, with his brilliant face aglow, and his intelligent eyes alight. She suddenly felt him to be much more her own spirit and flesh and blood than his father had ever been. It seemed for an instant as if her own strenuous youth, with its impassioned visions of conquest—so long forgotten—came rushing back through the eloquent lips of her grandson.

IX

A ROMANTIC REGION

But, alas, the habits of age are always fixed, and its enthusiasms are mostly fleeting. At breakfast, on the next morning, old lady Gordon was as stolidly absorbed in the food which she was eating as she usually was in her meals. Her cynicism, her indifference, too, had all come back.

Both came promptly into play, when Lynn chanced to remember his promise to play cards with the sick man, and mentioned it, which he had forgotten to do on the day before, in the intenser interest of the talk about his own future. The old lady smiled sardonically and chewed on deliberately, while the young man gave an account of what had taken place at the doctor's house.

"Anne won't allow it," she finally said. "If anything could have changed her or have taken the nonsense out of her, it would have been seeing Tom go to destruction, mainly because she went to meeting. A woman like Anne takes to religion just as immoderately as a man like Tom takes to gambling."

Lynn did not speak at once. He was feeling the uneasiness which comes over right-minded youth at any sign of irreligion in the old.

"I thought every man liked his wife to go to church, however seldom he might go himself," he finally advanced hesitatingly.

"And so he does, when he doesn't happen to want her to stay at home," said old lady Gordon, with a cynical laugh. "But I've never known a husband pious enough to like his wife's religion to interfere with his own comfort or wishes. And Tom really needed Anne a good deal more than her church did. There are men who are as sure to go wrong if their wives leave them alone, as ships are to drift without their rudders—and Tom Watson was one of these. He had little or no intellectual resources,—none at all, probably, within himself,—and he was consequently entirely dependent upon companionship. That sort of male animal always is, and if he can't get good company he takes bad, simply because he has to have company of some kind. Every sensible woman understands that sort of man, especially if she is married to him; and she knows, too, just what she's got to do, unless she's willing to take the certain consequences of not doing it. Any other woman than Anne would have thought she was lucky when Tom didn't take to anything worse than cards."

Lynn was glad when the breakfast was over. He did not like his grandmother in this mood nearly so well as he had liked her in the kindly responsive one of the night before; and yet, although he knew her but slightly, he felt sure that this mood was more natural, or, at all events, more habitual, to her, than the other. It was most likely this instinctive feeling which had unconsciously kept him—during the talk with her on the previous day—from speaking of the beautiful girl whom he had seen. He now felt more distinctly, though still without knowing why, that he did not wish to hear his grandmother speak of her or of her environment, as he now knew that the old lady would speak. He already understood enough, remembering the kind things which the doctor's lady had told him, to anticipate the different presentation of the widow Wendall and her family that his grandmother would certainly make.

He left her as soon as he could, offering his engagement with Dr. Alexander as a ready excuse. Passing out into the quiet, empty big road, he walked along under the old locust trees which lined one side of the way. The locusts were flowering, and the long clusters of pure white flowers,

swinging among the dull gray-green of the feathery foliage, filled the fresh air of the May morning with wholesome sweetness. The shrubs in the yards, bordering the length of the big road with the vivid verdure of new leaves, were also in bloom. The young man smelled the honeysuckle blossoming thick over the sick man's window, but he did not look that way. He looked, naturally enough, in the opposite direction, where the silver poplars stood, since the interests and the sympathies of youth must always lie on the other side of life's big road, away from all affliction and pain.

He was not sorry to find that the doctor had gone into the country in answer to an urgent call, and that the visit to the invalid consequently must be postponed. He was sorry, however, to see the white curtain of the house behind the poplars hanging precisely as it had hung on the previous day; and, although he walked to the top of the hill beyond the house and, turning, strolled slowly back again in front of the window, he had no second glimpse of Doris. Thus idly strolling, he went along the big road, stopping now and then to lean over a fence to look at the hyacinths and tulips, which were at their sweetest and brightest in most of the front yards; or to linger beside the rosy clover fields to drink in the fragrance and to watch the vernal happiness of the birds. He paused occasionally to lift his hat smilingly to the friendly faces which smiled at him from the vine-wreathed windows and the wide-open doors; but, loiter as he might, he saw nothing more of the girl of whom he was thinking and hoping to meet, and although he delayed his return as long as he could, he was still back at his grandmother's house all too soon.

No one could walk through Oldfield a second time on the same morning without a visible or audible explanation to a public who had plenty of leisure to note the few passers-by, and to speculate upon their possible destination, and to discuss the most probable reasons for their going up or coming down the big road. Lynn had an instinctive perception of this, little as he knew of the life of the village. Accordingly he now paused uncertainly at his grandmother's gate and stood still, not knowing what to do with the perfect day, with the ideal Ides of May.

Looking idly toward the northern hilltops, he saw the figure of a horseman suddenly break the sky line and rush galloping downward into the village. Onward thundered the big black horse and his strange rider, sweeping by like a whirlwind, and speeding on and on, till they vanished over the southern hilltops. A light cloud of dust floated for a moment between the farthest green and the farthest blue, and then that too disappeared, and the coming and going of the wild apparition might well have been some trick of a fantastic imagination. And yet Lynn had received a curiously distinct impression of the man's appearance in this space of time, brief almost as a lightning flash. He had seen the foreign dress, the great boots so long that they were slit to the knee; the blood-red handkerchief tied loosely around the neck, and, most distinctly of all, the sinister expression of the dark, deeply lined face and the wildness of the black eyes under the wide, flapping, soft brim of the large sombrero hat. Altogether it was so strange, so unreal an interruption of the peace of this pastoral spot, that the young man could only stand silent gazing after it in bewildered surprise.

"That's Alvarado! You've seen one of the sights of the country," his grandmother called out to him from her place by the window.

"Who is Alvarado?" he asked, when he had entered the room.

"That is a question which a good many people have been asking for a good many years, and nobody has ever had a satisfactory answer," old lady Gordon replied.

Smiling her sardonic smile, she deliberately turned down the leaf of the novel which she had been reading as usual, and laid it on her lap. She was always amused by these histrionic appearances of Alvarado which so terrified most of the Oldfield people. It had indeed long been known all over the Pennyroyal Region that, while other folks always drove hastily into the nearest fence corner whenever they saw Alvarado coming, old lady Gordon invariably kept straight along in the middle of the big road—never turning one hair's breadth to the right or the left—and that Alvarado was always the one who had to turn out. She said nothing of this, however, and thought nothing of it; but she told her grandson all that she knew or that any one knew of Alvarado.

He was a Spaniard who had suddenly appeared in the vicinity of Oldfield, some twenty-five years before. No one had any knowledge of him previous to that time, and no one had ever known where he came from. Yet, for some reason never clearly understood, his coming had, nevertheless, been associated from the first with the scattering of the Gulf pirates which had followed the deposing of their last king. It is true that Lafitte was long since gone to render his awful account of the terrible deeds done in the body—with perhaps his desperate service at the battle of New Orleans as the largest item on the other side of the blotted ledger. But the death of Lafitte in 1826 did not immediately free the Gulf from its fearful scourge. The passing of piracy was gradual, very gradual indeed, and even long drawn out, as the traders of the Pennyroyal Region knew only too well, through their close and continual connection with New Orleans by route of the flatboat. There was, therefore, to the minds of the Oldfield people, nothing improbable in the continued existence of numbers of Lafitte's followers, who were younger than himself and consequently not yet really old men. Still, while there was no impossibility or even any improbability in Alvarado's being a comrade of Lafitte, there appeared no actual proof that he ever had been. According to old lady Gordon's account, the principal grounds of suspicion were these: his appearance, which was otherwise unaccounted for, just at the time that the pirates were being driven from the Gulf and out of the Gulf states; his frequent, long, and mysterious absences at sea after his coming to live in the vicinity of Oldfield; the fabulous sums of gold and silver fetched home by him from these voyages, when he was known not to have any

visible means of making money; the many curious weapons of marine warfare scattered through his strange house, which was half a fort, half a farmhouse, and wholly barbaric in its rough richness of furnishing; the generally credited rumor that he habitually wore a coat of mail; the well-known fact—open for every passer-by to see—that he kept a horse standing continually at his gate, day and night, for years, saddled and bridled, with pistols in the holsters, apparently ready for instant flight.

Many of these things old lady Gordon had seen with her own eyes. Most of them she knew to be true, but she had never gone to his house, although he had at one time received a measure of social recognition, when—according to old lady Gordon—there had been something like real society in Oldfield. He was rather a handsome man after a sinister, foreign fashion, although he had been past youth when he first came to Oldfield, and he had a dashing way with him which fascinated the unobservant. It was in this manner that he was thrown with Alice Fielding, the colonel's prettiest and youngest daughter, so old lady Gordon said.

"You mean the old gentleman whom I saw yesterday? That stately, beautiful old man with the silver hair curling on his shoulders, and wearing the long black cloak?" Lynn said.

"That's the man, but I wish you might have seen him in those days. He was just about as fiery as Alvarado, though in a slightly more civilized way, and he never wanted Alice to have anything to do with him. He never wanted the Spaniard around his house at all. No man like Colonel Fielding—English in every drop of blood—ever wants anything to do with any foreigner. But there's no use in trying to manage a girl like Alice Fielding,—a little, soft, say-nothing, characterless thing,—there's nothing in her strong enough to get a good firm hold on. She's blown like a feather this way and that way by the strongest influence—good or bad—that she falls under. You'll find the kind, and plenty of them, all over the world. The Fielding negroes used to say Alvarado threw a spell over Alice. I presume he did, but it was the spell which that sort of man always throws over that sort of girl. She was a flighty, vain little creature, and flattered of course by his being so madly in love. That was plain enough for anybody to see. Nobody ever doubted that he loved her. But she had never thought of marrying him until she was terrified into doing it. She was probably in love with John Stanley so far as she was capable of loving any man. It was said they were upon the verge of becoming engaged to be married. I don't know about that, but there was no doubt of John's loving her. It took him years to get over her marriage to Alvarado."

"I don't understand. Why did she marry him?" asked Lynn.

"Through sheer fright mixed with a kind of silly romance, as nearly as anybody ever could make out. It happened in this way. There was some kind of a party at Colonel Fielding's. There always was something going on while his girls were young and gay; and there is plenty of room in the jailer's residence for any kind of entertainment—and many's the ball and dinner they gave! That night Alvarado was one of the guests, as he often was. Nobody knows what led up to the outbreak, but he suddenly fell on the floor in convulsions, stiff and stark and black in the face, and actually foaming at the mouth—a sight, they said, to make the strongest shudder. The doctor was hurriedly called out of the supper room and at once shut the door of the room in which Alvarado was lying—at the point of death as everybody thought. As the guests huddled together whispering, it flew all over the house that he had taken poison and that he refused to take an antidote unless Alice would consent to marry him. Your father was there and saw her go into the room, and he said afterwards that she looked as much like a dead woman then, as she did a year later when she lay in her coffin. No one, except those who were in the room, ever knew what happened, but the colonel presently came to the door and sent for the preacher. It was a dancing party, or he would have been there already, as almost everybody else was. But it didn't take long to fetch him, and he married Alvarado to Alice Fielding then and there."

"And John Stanley?" inquired Lynn.

"He knew nothing of the marriage till he came to see Alice on the next Sunday as he always did. He didn't live in Oldfield at that time. He had gone away soon after another unlucky affair which most men wouldn't have worried about, but which seems to have had a lifelong effect upon him. He was always a sensitive, high-strung fellow and deeply religious—full of lofty ideals and all that sort of thing—even then, when he was hardly more than a lad. He had come here only a week or so before to take an assistant's place in the clerk's office. He was a cousin of Jack Mitchell, the county clerk—that's the way he happened to come. Well, Jack Mitchell was a politician and as high a talker and as low a doer as was to be found betwixt the Cumberland and Green River, which is saying a good deal. I reckon he couldn't be more than matched in these days. I haven't noticed much change in politicians during the last quarter of a century. Jack had been elected by a large majority, and was reëlected, and had his hand fairly on a higher rung of the political ladder, when he made a false step and slipped. The trouble came from a foolish quarrel caused by drink. Jack Mitchell always was quarrelsome when in liquor, and on that day he happened to accuse another Kentuckian of cowardice. That, of course, was crossing the dead-line. It was just the same then that it is now and always will be, till our blood and training are different. And the fact that the man who had been branded as a coward was a worthless loafer, made no more difference then then it would make now. The wretch who had been 'insulted' rose up, as soon as he was sober enough, and borrowed a shot-gun and went to wipe out his dishonor, just as if he had been a real gentleman. Jack, with his usual luck, was not in the office when his enemy, who was still drinking heavily, suddenly appeared in the doorway, levelling the gun. He was not so drunk, though, that he didn't know that he was aiming at a boy whom he had never seen before, in place of the man whom he had come to kill. He knew it well enough, for he muttered

something about killing the young one if he couldn't get the old one. But John Stanley was too quick for him. Jack's pistol lay handy, as it always did, as pistols always do, hereabouts. The boy hardly knew what was happening before he had shot dead a man whose name he didn't know—a man whom he had never seen or heard of before."

"What a strange story," Lynn said. "I think I have never heard a stranger one."

"Oh, I don't know about it's being strange. Of course somebody had to be killed," old lady Gordon responded indifferently.

"Somebody had to be killed—and why?" repeated Lynn, wonderingly; for, although to the manner born he was not to the manner bred.

"Oh, well, when things get into that shape somebody's bound to be killed! When a Kentuckian is accused of cowardice he has to kill somebody to prove his courage. There's nothing else to be done—apparently. And it might as well have been Betts as anybody else."

She yawned, and swayed her turkey-wing fan.

"It would all have blown over and have passed, as all such things pass in this country, if John Stanley hadn't been morbid about it, if he had been at all like other people. Of course he was acquitted at the examining trial. There were plenty of witnesses to the fact that he fired in self-defence. The family of the man who was killed never made a motion toward taking the matter up, and they would have been ready enough to do it if they could have found any pretext for blaming John. They were, in fact, rather looked down on for taking it so easy. But John has never forgiven himself; he has always thought he might have done something else than what he did. He has rarely mentioned it to any one, but I understand that he once told Miss Judy that, if it were to do over again, he would run the risk of being killed himself rather than take the life of any human being. As I have said, he was always very religious, even then, and this was, I suppose, the reason why he brooded so over the affair. To this day he's more like a praying monk shut up in a cell than he's like the famous judge of a large circuit."

"Of course he never married," said Lynn.

"Oh, yes, he did—but not for a long time; not for years and years after that Spanish tiger had made an end of that foolish little kitten. Alice lived only a few months. They said that Alvarado wasn't unkind; that he even tried to be kind in his way. But Alice seemed to hate him—as much as she was capable of hating anybody—when she found out how he had tricked her; that he hadn't taken poison at all when he pretended he had, and that the awful-looking foam on his lips had come from chewing soap."

"Don't—don't!" cried the young man. "Leave the romance. Tell me about Judge Stanley—though he too has done what he could to spoil the story by marrying. What sort of woman is his wife? Poor little Alice!"

"I've never seen his wife. She has been here only once or twice, for a few days at a time. They say she is a high-flier and very ambitious. John didn't begin to go up very high in the world till after he had married her. She no doubt makes him a much better wife than Alice ever could have made. A silly, big-eyed, clinging, crying little woman who doesn't weigh a hundred pounds can drag down the strongest man like a mill-stone around his neck. That apparently harmless little creature managed to ruin the lives of two big strong men—each worth half a dozen of her for all useful purposes. John Stanley certainly has never seen a day's happiness, and there can be no sort of doubt that Alvarado has been partially demented ever since her death. His craziness seems to take the form of senseless litigation. He appears unable to keep away from the court-house when he knows that John Stanley is here, and he is always bringing lawsuits on ridiculous pretexts, so that the judge is compelled to rule them out of court. Alvarado is forever trying to find a chance to pick a quarrel with the judge, but he might just as well give it up. He will never be able, no matter how hard he tries, or how insulting he may be, to drag John Stanley into a duel or even into a quarrel."

"Why?" asked the young man in surprise, not understanding. "Is the Spaniard such a terrible person? Is the judge afraid?"

"Afraid—John Stanley afraid!" repeated old lady Gordon, scornfully. "He never knew what fear was. For calm, cool, unflinching courage in the face of the greatest danger, I have never known his equal. If I could remember and tell you some of the brave things that that man has done. Why, when he was only a lad he seized a lamp which had exploded and coolly held it in his bare hands—with the blazing oil burning the flesh to the bone—till he could carry it to a place of safety, rather than endanger the lives of other people by throwing it down. No longer than a year or two ago he nearly lost his own life by saving an old negro woman from a runaway horse. John Stanley is no more afraid of Alvarado than he is of me. It's all on account of his queer notions of religion, of humanity, and of the sacredness of human life. It all grew out of that unlucky accident of his youth, a matter that another man would not have given a second thought to. His fear, his horror of shedding blood has gradually grown more and more intense, until it seems to have become a positive mania. Nothing now can ever drive him from it. Alvarado may as well give up trying to provoke him into a quarrel. But he on his side is quite as determined as John Stanley. He will never give it up; he's no doubt been at the court-house hatching some plot this very day. I often wonder what the end will be, should both of the men go on living. To think of all the wrong and wretchedness that one foolish baby face can cause!"

Lynn did not cry out again, half in earnest and half in jest, begging his grandmother to spare romance; but he got up, silently, and took a turn or two about the room. He was genuinely shocked to find himself feeling the repulsion which her lack of womanliness forced upon him. The merciless cynicism revealed by everything that she said might have amused him had he heard it from another person; but he was uncontrollably repulsed by it coming from his father's mother. He was glad when she began to speak of other subjects, and less moving ones, although these also were interwoven with the history of the Pennyroyal Region.

She was not a native of Oldfield. Her birth-place lay farther up in that country on the "Pigeon Roost Fork of the Muddy, which is a branch of Green River," on the very spot thus described by Washington Irving's Kentucky classic. But Irving had only heard of "Blue Bead Miller," the famous hunter and Indian fighter, whom he has immortalized in that charming tale under his real name; and old lady Gordon had known him in her childhood and early youth. Many a time she had seen him in her father's house, where he would often come, bringing his rifle, "Betsy," for her mother to "unwitch." And this, her mother—who was young and city-bred, and full of wondering interest in all these strange ways of the wilderness—would always do with girlish delight, gravely running her slim white fingers up and down the grimy barrel, as one who works a beneficent charm, while the grim old woodsman looked on with unquestioning faith.

Near this old home on the Pigeon Roost Fork was the Roost itself, that marvellous mecca of the wild pigeons, where countless billions of gray wings darkened the great woods on the sunniest midday; and where unnumbered trillions of the weightless, feathered little bodies crushed the great limbs of the mightiest giants of the forest. And this wondrous sight, too, old lady Gordon had seen many times, long before Audubon saw it to describe it for the wonderment of the whole world.

She had not much to tell of the bridegroom with whom she came as a young bride to live in Oldfield; she spoke mainly of journeying on horseback over the Wilderness Road, and of passing the place called "Harpe's Head," which had then been very recently named for a most hideous tragedy. It was a story full of grewsome romance, this tale of the unheralded coming of two monsters among a simple, honest, scattered, yet neighborly, woods-people. The two were brothers, or claimed to be, but there was no outward likeness between them. One was small, and not in any way calculated to attract attention; while the other was far above the ordinary stature of men, and so ferocious of aspect that the very sight of him chilled the beholder with fear. Neither of the men ever wore any head covering, and both had wild, manelike, red hair, and complexions of "a livid redness"—whatever that may have been—such as left a lasting impression of horror upon all who encountered them. They were soon known throughout the length of Wilderness Road as Big Harpe and Little Harpe. They lived close to the road, and almost immediately after their coming travellers began to disappear, never to be heard of again, or to be found long afterward to have been murdered. A very pall of terror spread gradually over the whole Pennyroyal Region; arson, robbery, and atrocities unspeakable followed murder after murder, and yet the few, far-apart people of the terror-stricken country could only tremble in helpless fear, till the murder of a woman led to the tracing of the long, wide, deep track of blood and crime to the door of the Harpes.

"When they murdered a woman, the whole country rose up as one man. And it was just the same then that it is now when the same thing happens," old lady Gordon said grimly. "The best men in the Pennyroyal Region—as good and as God-fearing men as could be found in the world—hunted the Harpes like wild beasts. They beat the whole wilderness for the monsters, until they found them at last. Little Harpe managed to escape; it was not known how, and he was never seen or heard of again. But it was Big Harpe who had been the leader; he was the one that the men wanted most, and they now had him fast like a wild animal in a trap. Yet not one of his captors touched him; not one of them spoke to him; they all merely sat still with their eyes on him, and waited for the woman's husband to come."

"History repeats itself—especially in Kentucky," Lynn said.

Old lady Gordon smiled her most sardonic smile. "The skull of Big Harpe's head stayed on the end of a pole by the side of the Wilderness Road through a good many years. The place where it was put up is still called 'Harpe's Head'—I presume it always will be."

All this was before old lady Gordon came as a young bride to live in Oldfield; but another band of robbers and assassins still terrorized that part of the Pennyroyal Region. The cavern in which the band made its den was on the other side of the Ohio River, but it was Kentucky that suffered most from its ravages. Many a richly laden flatboat was never heard of after it was known to have stopped at the entrance to Cave-in-Rock, as the place was called in the beginning of the last century, and as it is called at the present time. Many a gold-laden boatman, who had unknowingly passed down the river without stopping at the Cave-in-Rock, was beguiled into entering it on his way homeward—only to vanish forever off the face of the earth. The cavern would seem to have offered powerful temptations to the unwary traveller. The cave itself was then as it is now a most curious and interesting survival of prehistoric times. It is a single chamber in the solid rock, opening at the river's brink, two hundred feet long and eighty feet wide, its sides rising by regular stages after the manner of the seats in an amphitheatre. Its walls are covered with strange carvings cut deep in the stone; there are representations of several animals unknown to science, and there are also inscribed characters which have led those learned in such matters to believe the cavern to have been the council house of some ancient race. But nothing was known of these things while Cave-in-Rock remained the hiding-place of

robbers and assassins. The terrified country round about Oldfield knew the place only by vague hearsay as a drinking, gambling resort, wherein boatmen and all unwary travellers going up or down the Ohio were lured to destruction. No one who entered the awful mystery of the cavern ever came out to tell what he had seen or what had befallen him. It seemed—so old lady Gordon said—as if the hand of the law would never be able to lay hold upon actual proof of the crimes committed at Cave-in-Rock, but when the band was ultimately run to earth, an upper and secret chamber was found to be filled with the bones of human beings.

The grandmother and the grandson sat silent for a space after she grew weary of story-telling. They were thinking in widely different ways of the wild, true tales of these terrific passion storms which had swept Kentucky throughout her existence. Was another fair portion of the good green earth ever so deep-dyed in the blood of both the innocent and the guilty?

"And yet through all we have always been a most religious people," the young man said musingly.

"Very!" responded the old lady, who was growing hungry. "None more so. We've about all the different religions that anybody else ever had, and we've started one or two of our own."

X

RELIGION IN OLDFIELD

It is in the quiet village, remote, as this was, from the rushing change of city life, that the fervor of religion always appears warmest and seems to linger longest.

In Oldfield everybody went to church twice a day on Sunday, in winter and in summer, and through the rain as well as through the sunshine. That is to say, everybody except old lady Gordon and Miss Judy Bramwell, neither of whom ever went at all.

There was nothing strange or inconsistent in old lady Gordon's staying away. She was generally held by everybody to be as an out-and-out heathen, whereas in reality she was merely a good deal of a pagan. And she was not in the habit of accounting to anybody for what she did or did not do, being equally indifferent to private and public opinion.

But Miss Judy's never going was a much harder thing to understand. For the little lady was not only the model for the whole community in week-day matters, but she was also known to be a most devout Episcopalian, so that, taken altogether, the fact that she never went to church remained always an impenetrable mystery, notwithstanding that the Oldfield church-goers discussed it untiringly on almost every Sunday of their lives. Nor did Miss Judy, who was the soul of guileless frankness in everything else, ever offer any sort of an explanation for this unaccountable remissness. She could not make any untrue excuses, and she would not give the real reason; her gentle heart being much too tender of her neighbors' feelings to admit of her mentioning the truth, so long as she was able to hide what she was bound in conscience to feel.

"They are doing the best they can, you know, sister Sophia," she would say, almost in a whisper, as the neighbors passed on Sundays; and she would steal on tiptoe to close the door, so that Merica might not overhear. "They are not to blame, poor things; it is their misfortune and not their fault, that they don't know the difference between a meeting-house and the Church, and between a lecture and the Service."

"Just so, sister Judy," Miss Sophia would respond, more befogged if possible over consecration and apostolic succession than she was over most things. When, however, after a time, she came gradually to comprehend that this stand, taken privately by Miss Judy, would spare herself the exertion of walking to the meeting-houses, both of which were at the other end of town, she became so decided in her support of Miss Judy's position as to remove the last shade of doubt from that mild little lady's mind. Nothing of all this was ever suspected by any third person, but in the absence of any actual knowledge, it ultimately came to be taken for granted that Miss Judy stayed at home on Sundays and read the prayer-book to her sister because Miss Sophia was not equal to the long walk to church and back, especially in bad weather. Miss Judy of course said not a word either to confirm or to contradict this impression, which strengthened as the years went by. But she always gave the neighbors so sweet a smile when they passed on the way to meeting that everything seemed to everybody just as it should be.

One of the churches belonged to the Methodists and the other to the denomination known as The Disciples of Christ. The town was not large enough to supply two congregations or to support two preachers; and it was consequently necessary to hold services in each of the churches on alternate Sundays in order to insure a sizable congregation and a moderate support for the circuit rider and the Christian elder, when they came from their farms in another part of the county to preach on their appointed days; thus giving freedom to all and favor to none.

A single contribution box served for the two churches. This, which was in reality a contribution bag, was a sort of inverted liberty cap made of ecclesiastical black cloth, and lined with churchly purple satin. When not in use it usually stood on the end of its long staff in what was called the Amen corner of the Methodist church. The office of taking it down from its accustomed resting-place, and of carrying it over to the Christian church when needed there, had belonged from time

immemorial to Uncle Watty. It is not certain to which of the two denominations Uncle Watty himself belonged. It was, indeed, never a very clearly established fact that he was a member of any denomination, but this uncertainty had nothing whatever to do with the lifelong holding of his office. It seemed to everybody to be the right and proper thing for Uncle Watty to take up the collection, mainly for the reason that he always had done it, which is accepted as a good and sufficient reason for many rather singular things in that region. Miss Judy, who knew about it, as she knew about everything, although she never saw him do it,—since she never went to meeting,—always considered it a particularly kind and delicate arrangement, devised by some thoughtful, feeling person expressly to save Uncle Watty the embarrassment of having nothing to put in the bag himself. But Uncle Watty apparently took another view of it; and, like a good many people who do little themselves and exact much from others, he was extremely rigorous and almost relentless in his handing of the contribution bag. Its tough, hickory handle was equal to the full length of the benches, and no man, woman, or child might hope to evade its deliberate presentation under the very nose, and its being steadily held there, too, until Uncle Watty thought everybody's duty was fully done.

When there was a fifth Sunday in the month, both of the regular preachers came to the village, inviting any other preacher who chanced to be in the vicinity to join in the debate which then took the place of the sermon, and which was held in the court-house, on neutral ground, as it were. Sometimes the Cumberland Presbyterians and the Hard-shell Baptists took part, and now and then a Foot-Washing Baptist came along, so that these fifth Sundays were usually memorable occasions in Oldfield. Occasionally, to be sure, there was some slight friction, as was, perhaps, unavoidable under the circumstances; but, on the whole, this rotation in creeds and dogmas gave remarkable general satisfaction. The exceptions were very few and purely personal in character, the gravest and most important growing out of an unfortunate dispute between Miss Pettus and the Christian elder over the ownership of a runaway pig. The controversy ended in the reverend gentleman's getting the pig. When, therefore, on the following Sunday—through some singular mischance—he chose as a text: "Children, have ye any meat?" Miss Pettus not unnaturally felt that he was wantonly adding insult to injury, and, rising from her seat in the front of the church, the indignant lady—holding herself haughtily erect and her head very high—walked straight down the whole length of the middle aisle and out through the women's door. It was a year or more before she could be induced to go back again to hear the elder preach, notwithstanding that he did everything in his power (like the good man that he was) to convince her of his innocence of any thought of offence. But she tried to forgive him—which is all that the best of us can do—and she ultimately succeeded, in so far that she returned to the meeting-house on his day. She could not help, however, saying at the time, when coming out, how much she disliked levity in the pulpit, be it Christian or Methodist; yet she admitted afterward, when cooler, that he might have meant no irreverence, though there was no gainsaying his levity, when he announced at the close of the sermon that he would preach again on the second Sunday, "the Lord willing;" but that he would preach again on the fourth Sunday "whether or no." There are always plenty of overcritical people besides Miss Pettus to be found everywhere. Some of those living in Oldfield complained that the circuit rider pounded so much dust out of the pulpit cushion that they took cold from continual sneezing every time he preached. Others were inclined to criticise the too vigorous elocution of the elder when he warmed to the warning of his flock against the shifting sands of dangerous doctrines, bidding them build their house of faith upon a rock, so that it might fall *n-o-t* when the winds *b-l-e-w*.

Sidney, who called herself a Whiskey Baptist, and who consequently regarded herself and was regarded by others as something of a free lance—in theology as in most other things,—used to express her opinions of the shortcomings of both the Methodists and the Christians with entire frankness, but always more in jest than in earnest. Indeed, all these trivial faultfindings were no more than the passing expression of sectarian jealousy, and harmless as heat lightning, so that, on the whole, religion flourished in Oldfield.

It was a pleasant, peaceful sight to see the people coming out of their green-bowered houses on that radiant May morning. The old locust trees were at the sweetest and whitest of their flowering; the light, fine foliage seemed to float on the south breeze, and the long clusters of snowy flowers swung gently to and fro over the heads of the church-goers, like silvered censers filling the air with richest incense. And there at the base of every fragile spray—emblem of life's mortality—lay the bud of the next year's leaf—symbol of life's immortality. But the simple people, walking beneath, went on their way heeding only the beauty, and the sweetness, and the warmth of the sunshine. They greeted one another after the friendly custom of the country, which gave a greeting even to strangers,—and these church-goers were all old friends. Only the young man leaving old lady Gordon's gate might be accounted a stranger. Yet his ancestors also slept on the highest, greenest hillside, under the long grass over which the soft wind was running with swift, invisible feet. There were no strangers even there, where all the tombstones bore familiar names; the new ones freshly inscribed, gleaming white and erect against the green; the older ones showing gray as they leant; the oldest, lying brown and prone, and crumbling slowly back to earth.

The cracked bell of the wooden church rang with the homesick sound, full of a homely pathos that richer-toned bells never give tongue to. In response to its pathetic call the people went on toward the meeting-house in little groups, chatting with one another. Anne Watson was among the first now as always, when the preaching was to be in her own church. Her faith enjoined the weekly "breaking of bread," and it had ever been a sore trouble to her that the opportunity was not given oftener than twice a month in her own church. In her grave uneasiness of conscience

she had sought to do her duty in the other church whenever she could. But this had been before her husband was stricken; since that time she had not felt compelled to leave him, except for the service in her own church. But the feeling that she must go there now became more imperative in its demands, if possible, than it ever had been. Therefore, when the bell began to ring that day, Anne put on her bonnet and came to take an hour's anxious leave of her husband.

She was a tall, delicately built woman, too thin and too unbending to be graceful, and yet too quiet and too dignified to be awkward. Her straight features were neither noticeably pretty nor decidedly plain, and her face was pale without being fair. Her hair, of an ashen shade, clung to her hollow temples; there was not one loose lock, or the suggestion of a ripple under her quakerish bonnet. The straight skirt of her lead-colored dress hung flat, as the skirts of such women always hang, falling to her feet in unbroken lines. It was her eyes alone which made Anne Watson's appearance utterly unlike that of any other woman of her not uncommon type. And even her eyes were neutral in color and slightly prominent, as the eyes of such women nearly always are, but so singularly and luminously clear that a white light seemed to be shining behind them.

She fixed these wonderful eyes on her husband as she stood before him ready for church, and yet loath to leave him, and still lingering to see if she might not do something more for his comfort during her absence. She drew the stand nearer to his shaking uncertain hands, after turning the pillows at his helpless back and straightening the cushion under his powerless feet. When she could find nothing more to do, she bent down silently and kissed his scarred forehead. There was nothing for her to say, nothing for him to hear. At the door she looked back, and again from the gate, before passing out to hasten toward the church as though her haste in going might the sooner fetch her back.

All along the big road the people were coming. The doctor and his wife were not far behind Anne, and following them came Miss Pettus and her brother, accompanied by Sam Mills. The old man, his father, was worse that morning, or thought he was, which amounted to the same thing, so that Kitty had been compelled to stay at home as usual; but she leant over the front gate, looking after her husband, with her bare red arms rolled in her apron and her honest face beaming with happy smiles as she hailed the passers-by, until the old man's harsh, querulous voice was heard calling her into the house. From the opposite direction, also, the pious people of Oldfield were approaching the meeting-house, the men to enter one door and the women another. Even the children were strictly divided, the boys sitting with their fathers and the girls with their mothers. Once when a man, who was a stranger and unacquainted with Oldfield customs, wandered in and unknowingly took a seat on the women's side, a scandalized shock passed over the entire congregation. It was a serious matter, to be gravely discussed for many a day thereafter.

On the church steps stood Lynn Gordon, intent upon watching and waiting for the coming of the girl whom he had come hoping to see. So intent was he that he was not aware of the glances cast upon himself by those passing into the building. Yet he was well worth looking at, for he was a handsome young fellow, and dressed, moreover, as no one had ever before been dressed in Oldfield. His pantaloons, made of dove-colored canton cloth, were tight beyond anything ever seen in that part of the country, and held to his high-heeled varnished boots by a strap under his arched instep. His long-waisted, short-skirted coat of dark blue was lined and trimmed with rich goffered silk. His waistcoat was of a buff color and *en piqué*, for, strange—incredible, indeed—as it may seem, Paris at that time set the fashions for fine gentlemen as well as for fine ladies, and the London papers gravely recorded weekly what the Frenchmen were wearing. Lynn Gordon's hat, too, was of the latest French mode, just brought over for the Boston dandies on the eve of his leaving Harvard. Its brim was very wide and slightly curled, and its crown was high and widened perceptibly toward the top. His tie, a large, loose bow of black brocade, gave the final touch of elegance.

There was nothing modish in poor little, country-bred, Doris's dress when this fine gentleman saw her coming behind all the rest, after he had almost given her up. The skirt of Miss Judy's book-muslin was much too narrow for the requirements even of Oldfield fashions, but Doris did not know it, and the young man was not thinking of it as he saw her first, far up the big road, descending its gradual slope beneath the flowering locust trees. The gentle breeze caught the ivory softness of her skirt, pressing it into enchanting curves around her slender limbs; a long, thin white scarf streamed back from her shoulders, and the white ribbons of her straw hat floated out behind her golden head. The thought which arose in Lynn's mind as he thus saw Doris approaching was not of any fleeting fashion, but of a living Winged Victory lovelier than any antique sculpture.

He lingered at his post on the steps till she ascended them and went by him into the church, and he noted the little flurry of delicate color which followed her shy side glance. But she did not pause, entering the meeting-house at once, by way, of course, of the women's door, and going straight up the aisle to a seat reserved for her between her mother and Uncle Watty. The young man had never seen either Sidney or her brother-in-law, but he knew who they were as soon as he caught sight of them. And the sight was something of a shock. And yet what did it matter, after all? he asked himself. The girl's beauty and refinement of appearance were only the more remarkable because she came of such humble, homely people. He could not take his eyes from the heavy braids of shining gold gleaming below the white straw hat; and although he was unable to see the beautiful face from the place in which he sat, he was nevertheless vividly conscious of its soft dark eyes and its exquisite rose-red mouth; and he fancied that he could distinguish her voice in the old-fashioned hymn, given out two lines at a time by the preacher.

He kept the back of the charming head in view all down the aisle, when the sermon was over and the congregation arose to leave the church. But Colonel Fielding was at the outer end of the bench on which the young man had been seated, and it required some minutes for the old gentleman's friends to help him regain his feet. Poor, feeble old man! And then everybody was talking to everybody else while passing down the aisle. It was the custom in Oldfield for neighbors thus to greet one another after the sermon, and Lynn consequently found himself hemmed in and could move only with the crowd; so that notwithstanding his strenuous though quiet efforts to reach the door of the men's side, before Doris could reach the entrance on the women's side, she had already passed out and was well on her way homeward when he reached the big road.

He was keenly disappointed, and stood for a moment undecided what to do or which way to go, until the doctor and his wife spoke to him. They were almost the last of the home-going procession at that end of the village; and the young man joined them in the lingering hope that the girlish figure in white, fluttering ahead, might be overtaken, since he now saw that it was not, after all, so very far in advance. Mrs. Alexander undoubtedly would present him, so he thought; she could hardly do anything else; and, so hoping, he walked on up the big road, listening as best he could to what she was saying. But the slender young shape in white went rapidly on and did not linger, and never once looked back. Sidney turned at the gate and nodded to her neighbors; but Doris passed through it without pausing, and disappeared under the low arch of silver leaves.

Again Lynn went back to his grandmother's house, thinking of Doris, but again he refrained from speaking of her, although he hardly knew why, unless it was because he shrank from the harshness of his grandmother's cynical comments. Old lady Gordon asked about many of the people whom he had seen at church, but it did not occur to her to mention the daughter of Sidney Wendall. Nevertheless, the girl clung to Lynn's thoughts through all the warm idle afternoon hours of the perfect spring day. Talking half-heartedly, absently, of other things, he still thought of her, even until the evening, coming little by little to think of her as the most beautiful girl whom he had ever seen. He knew, upon reflection, that meeting her was merely a question of a short time in a place so small as Oldfield; and he was not quite sure that, after all, he really wished to make her acquaintance. It would be best, perhaps, considering the career which he had laid out for himself, that he should know as few young women as possible. Moreover, it seemed most unlikely, from all that he had heard of Doris Wendall and of her family and training and environment, that she could possess any charm other than a beautiful face. Yet at the same time he ardently admitted that merely to look upon such rare beauty was a delight to such a worshipper of beauty as he knew himself to be.

He smiled at his own weakness and folly, when he found himself going toward the tall poplars at the close of the long day. The supple tops of the great trees bent white against the darkening sky. But although the leaves no longer dazzled as when they turned their silver lining to the noonday sunlight, they were still too restless and too thick to be seen through, and, smiling again at his foolish craving for another glimpse of beauty, the young man went on, hoping for better luck as he came back. Going beyond the eastern hills which rimmed the village, he paused and looked down and far out over the wide lowlands; at the emerald seas of wheat flowing with waves of purple shadows; at the springing vivid lines of young corn, stretching to the dim distant horizon; at the rich, dark green of the vast tobacco fields already beginning to be dotted by the small, thick-leaved plants; at the red herds, and at the white flocks dimly visible through the fleecy mists trailing above the meadows. He stood still, leaning on a fence and listening to the gentle lowing of far-off cattle, and the homely barking of distant dogs, which were the most distinct sounds. Then, as he listened, lingering, the music of the woods and fields grew fainter—fainter, till it became hushed with the falling of the twilight. Only the whip-poor-will's lonesome cry—the vesper bell of the birds—rang out at long intervals from the dark willows fringing a far-away stream.

The dusk falls very slowly and very softly over the Pennyroyal Region, settling like the exquisite gray down from some wonderful brown wings. It was falling, but still lingering between daylight and darkness, when Lynn Gordon turned at last toward the village. He could not see the people sitting in Sunday quiet and peace on their vine-wreathed porches; but he heard them talking in low tones of the humble little things that make the sweetness of home. A feeling of longing came over him such as he had never known before; a yearning for the home which had never been his, for the loved ones whom he could not remember. The fireside smell of smoking tobacco mingled with the scent of the homely flowers blooming in the yards and gardens. Great white moths fluttered back and forth across the deserted highway, seeking the sweetest of those shy blossoms which yield their beauty and fragrance only to the gloaming.

As the young man approached the poplars, sombre now as cypress trees in the deepened twilight, a sudden breeze stirred the leaves and swayed the branches. But the fleeting glimpse of white at which he started forward so eagerly, proved to be nothing more than a bunch of pale roses drooping beside the window. There was not a glimmer of light behind the curtain, and as he strolled on along the big road the lights in all the houses went out one by one, as the simple people, drowsy from the day's unaccustomed idleness, sought their early rest. Tom Watson's lamp alone shone afar, throwing its beams a long way down the big road, and the sight of it suddenly touched the young man's softened heart with keenest pity, reminding him, almost reproachfully, of the promise which he had quite forgotten.

At his grandmother's house all was dark and still; the dogs leaping to meet him knew him well enough not to bark, and he sat down on the porch to smoke a cigar. He could always think more

clearly when smoking, and he wished now to think as clearly as possible. For the past two days his thoughts had been wandering, as he rarely allowed them to wander, far away from his life plans. Firmly he now bent them back; intently he surveyed every up-hill step in the direction of his high ambition; calmly he faced the full length and difficulty of the struggle between him and his goal, without thought of faltering or fear of failure. He said to himself, as the young who have never measured their strength against their weakness often say to themselves:—

"I will not do any of those things which I firmly set on that side; I will do all these things which I calmly range on this side: the shaping of a man's life lies in his own hand; it has but to be powerful enough to grasp and firm enough to hold."

It is easy to be calm and common to be sure on starting in life's race. And, indeed, this young fellow was better trained and equipped for the running of it than most young men are. Feeling this intelligently, but without undue conceit, he now threw back his broad shoulders and lifted his proud head. The arrogance of youth takes no heed of the slight chances that defeat great plans, no heed even of the divinity that shapes mortal hewing. He looked absently at the red rim of the climbing moon, and scarcely noting that, as its disk grew larger and its beams grew brighter, a mocking-bird, at home with his beloved in one of the giant elms, began a murmuring melody, as though he were wooing his mate in dreams. Yet, as the paling, brightening moon arose higher and higher, till it hung a great shield of burnished silver on night's starry wall, the mocking-bird's song grew clearer and sweeter, till, soaring to the moonlit heavens, it arose to a very pean of love triumphant.

XI

BODY OR SOUL

Lynn set out on his errand of mercy very early the next morning. The eternal freshness of dawn seemed still to be lingering amid the cool shadows of the wooded hillsides. The woods and fields alike were still bubbling with matin song. Heavy drops of dew still hung on the blue-eyed grass, sparkling in the sunlight like happy tears.

The doctor, however, was ready and waiting. The day's work began with the sunrise in Oldfield, and no one in all the region round had more to do between the rising and the setting of the sun, or indeed between its setting and rising again, than John Alexander always had. Ah, those village doctors of the old time! It is known in a way to all who think, how large a part they must have had in the making of these far-off corners of our great country, and yet the greater part can never be known. A doctor's memory is the greatest catholic confessional of humanity—and forever sacred. It is only the trivial, the whimsical outer edges of the deep experiences of these old-time country doctors that history may ever touch. Being human, they growled aloud sometimes over these trifles, as the doctor was growling when Lynn Gordon found him on that May morning.

A patient, a sufferer from chills and fever, which were still the scourge of the Ohio lowlands, had come to him on the day before for quinine. The doctor had given it to him in solution, the only form in which it was then known to country practitioners. Quinine was a costly medicine in those days, under the heavy tax which was removed long afterwards through the most earnest and even impassioned efforts of a Kentucky statesman, who, in a memorable speech, eloquently implored Congress to keep, if it would, its tax on silks and laces and precious stones but—for humanity's sake—to allow his constituency to have all the free quinine that they wanted.

"I gave this chap a big bottle of quinine," the doctor said. "He paid a stiff price for it, too, and I saw him put it in his saddle-bags with great care. Nevertheless, he managed somehow to crack the bottle, and, when only a part of the way home he found that it was leaking. He couldn't think of losing the quinine,—it had cost too much,—and he saved it by drinking that whole bottleful at a gulp. Well, he certainly had the benefit of it, none of it was wasted; but I feel a little tired from being up most of the night and having had pretty brisk work to keep him alive. What fools these mortals be;" the doctor yawned, as he struck his pipe musingly on the porch railing, thus ranging his thoughts while clearing his pipe of ashes. "And here's this other hard job, that's quite as unnecessary, on hand for to-day, and no more to be shirked or put off than the other was. Well, come along," he said, reluctantly laying down his pipe, the sole luxury that he allowed himself. "We may as well be going; ''twere well it were done quickly,'" he quoted again, for this rugged country doctor knew his Shakespeare as a man may know a book when he reads only one.

They went down the porch steps, talking of indifferent matters, pausing a moment at the gate, long enough for Lynn to speak a few words in return for the greeting which the doctor's wife gave him from the window. The Watson house was near by,—only a few paces down the big road,—and they were almost immediately standing before its open door. There the doctor halted with the look of one who musters his forces after having set his thoughts in order. He drew himself up and threw back his shoulders as if settling to a firm purpose with a new determination, and he finally buttoned his coat. That poor old shabby coat! Ah! that dear old coat! So eloquent in its faded shabbiness of the many fierce storms and the many merciless suns which had beaten upon his tireless ministrations to suffering humanity! And the buttoning of the doctor's old coat was always as the girding of a warrior's armor for battle.

The young man standing beside him on the steps gave him a careless side glance. He did not understand the meaning of what he saw, and he merely smiled at its apparent absurdity. A moment later he followed the doctor into the house, all unafraid, as youth often enters upon the most appalling of the mysteries of living.

It was Anne who met them and gave them an impassive good-morning, and silently led them into the room in which her husband was sitting. The sick man, propped up in his usual seat by the window, looked round when they came in, and murmured some indistinct greeting. But his miserable, restless eyes went back almost at once to their ceaseless quest of the deserted big road, stretching dully toward the dim, distant horizon.

"How are you to-day, Tom?" asked the doctor, perfunctorily, and then he continued without waiting for a reply to his inquiry, "We are not going to let you mope like this, old boy. I've been trying to think of something to help you—to fill the time. It's after a man gets out of bed that the worst tug comes—while he is still tied to the house and yet not actually ill. We mustn't let him mope, must we, Anne?" he said.

He turned to the silent, motionless woman who sat by without so much as the natural feminine rustle of garments.

Anne looked at him through the white light of her clear eyes, but she did not speak. She had been well called a "still-tongued woman."

The doctor, glancing away, went on uneasily, yet determinedly:—

"But I am not sure what Tom would like. I don't think he cares for backgammon or checkers or dominoes or any of those milk-and-water games. You don't know anything about chess, do you, Tom?" he asked.

The stricken man made no reply; he could utter but few words and those only with indistinctness and difficulty. He did not even turn his head; the turning of it ever so slowly was hard and caused him great pain.

"I scarcely think chess would be the thing anyway—it's too heavy and requires too much thinking to be good for an invalid. You must have something light and amusing. That's the sort of game we must give you to keep you from moping."

The doctor spoke to the husband, but his eyes were on the wife and regarding her anxiously, though his lips were smiling.

There was no responsive smile on Anne's pale face. It was quite still and grave as it always was, but a thin cloud of alarm seemed suddenly rising in her clear gaze, as white smoke floats over the crystalline sky of a winter's day. But yet she said not a word.

The doctor also fell unexpectedly silent, with his eyes fixed sternly on the back of the sick man's chair and a frown gathering between his shaggy, grizzled brows, as it always gathered when he was sorely perplexed. He was only an old-fashioned country doctor—merely a good man first and scientist afterwards. So that he now sat speechless, casting about in his troubled thoughts for the gentlest words wherewith he must wound the quiet, pale-faced woman, whose very lack of comprehension appealed to his great heart as all helplessness did. He saw, as only doctors can see, how frail was the body holding this strenuous spirit. As he thus sat silent, gathering courage, the utter stillness of the room grew tense. The young man, sitting on the other side of the chamber, silent and ill at ease, moved uneasily, keeping his eyes on the floor. The soft, monotonous murmur of the bees in the honeysuckle over the window sounded unnaturally loud and shrill.

At last the doctor spoke distinctly and firmly, but without looking at Anne:—

"There is only one thing to do. We must find a partner for Tom—Mr. Gordon here has kindly offered—and we must give him a real good, lively game of cards."

It was out now, and he was glad and sorry at the same time.

Anne gave a startled cry, inarticulate, like the terror of a dumb creature. She recoiled as if a black pit had opened at her feet.

"Tom's need is very great. He is very, very weak," the doctor urged, in the space of the recoil.

Anne instantly flew to her husband as the mother bird flies to the fallen fledgling, and laid her little trembling hands on his broken shoulders, as the mother bird spreads her weak wings between helplessness and danger.

"I will take care of him," she said, speaking out of that tender, protecting maternal instinct which is the divine part of every good woman's love for her husband.

"I can see no other way," the doctor urged gently, not knowing what else to say.

"There must be some other way! Surely our Father never forces us to commit sin. Surely in His mercy He gives us a choice;" Anne panted, like a frightened wild creature at bay.

Yet she faced the two men steadily over her husband's powerless head, her clear eyes clouded darkly now, and her set face as white and as inscrutable as the cold mask of death.

"I can only say again what I have said before," the doctor repeated weakly, glancing at Anne and quickly looking away.

"The way will mercifully be opened unto me. A light will be shown as a lamp to my feet."

Anne's murmured words were barely to be heard, yet they bore, nevertheless, to the three men who listened, the full strength of her faith, firm as the Rock of Ages.

The doctor arose hurriedly and went out into the passage, and stood for a while in the doorway, looking at the quiet big road, at the peace of the green earth, and at the sunlight flooding the blue heavens. When he turned back his sunken eyes were wet and he could not meet Anne's gaze nor the sick man's, which was also turned upon him with all its dumb, restless, desperate misery —with all its terrible voiceless clamor for relief.

"I don't know what to do," he said, trying to speak lightly, but sighing in spite of himself and spreading out his hands. "I suppose we'll have to give it up, Tom, old fellow. Well, maybe Anne knows best after all. These wives of ours usually do know better what is good for us than we know ourselves. A good wife is always more to be depended upon than medicine when a man's pulling through a tedious convalescence. You don't need any more medicine. I am coming, though, every day, if I can—just as a neighbor, to see how you are getting along."

He turned away from the sick man. He could not look at him without being compelled to renew the struggle with Anne; that infinitely cruel, that ineffably piteous struggle which wrung his own heart, and which would be useless in the end. He took one of Anne's cold little hands in his warm large clasp, thinking how small and weak it was to hold so firmly to its mistaken ideals, how much more firm than his own, which was not strong enough to hold to an unmistakable duty. And then he and Lynn Gordon went away, as best they could go, both feeling as the conscientious and the impressionable must always feel after having, however unwillingly, stirred the depths of the deep, still pool of another's life.

Out of the house, and out of hearing, the doctor became, however, once more himself in a measure. He smote his powerful thigh with his strong hand, and upbraided himself aloud for most disgraceful moral cowardice. He convicted himself, almost in a shout, of having deserted Tom Watson—poor devil—and of having virtually run away, like the veriest coward, simply because he knew that, in a moment more, he would have been crying like any child. And all on account of the silly fanaticism of a woman with a mind no wider than a cambric needle—sheer foolishness, morbid sentimentality—and much more of the same tenor, while Lynn Gordon laughed at him a little nervously.

"But, foolish or wise, she believes what she does believe. By the eternal, I'd like to hear any man doubt it! Why, young sir, that little slim, unbending splinter of a woman is the stuff that they threw to the beasts in old Rome!"

There was no consciousness of heroism in Anne's own sadly humble thoughts. When the doctor and the young man were gone, she bent down silently and kissed her husband with tender timidity, as if begging his forgiveness for what she could not help. Kneeling by his side, as she often knelt in her unwearying service, she strove to look into his averted face, and to meet and to hold his miserable eyes with her own clear gaze, from which the clouds were fast drifting away. The white light behind her strange eyes had sunk low under the shock, and had died out in the stress of terror; but it was gradually beginning to rise and shine again through the crystal windows of her soul. Her husband did not look at her; he seemed not to hear what she said; he was staring after the two men who were walking away down the big road, his look straining to follow them as a chained animal strains its fetters toward companionship. Anne saw nothing of this; she was not a bright woman, and entirely without imagination. She saw only that he did not notice her, that she was far from his thoughts. And she was used to being over-looked by her husband, and accustomed to being forgotten by him. She arose and went quietly across the room, and brought a footstool, and sat down upon it by his side, laying her head on the arm of his chair, with her hands folded on her lap.

She was not weeping,—she had never been a crying woman,—and in truth she was not more unhappy at this moment than she had been for years. She was, indeed, even less unhappy, now that the shock was well over and the danger safely passed. A feeling of peace was in truth already hovering in her breast, though very timidly, as a frightened dove comes slowly back to its nest. This spirit of peace had begun to brood in Anne's lonely heart soon after her husband's hurt, although Anne herself was scarcely aware of the fact. Through the endless months of his greatest suffering she had been not only upheld, but comforted, by the growing belief—changing little by little to exaltation—that the torture was but a fiery furnace intended for the purification of her husband's soul and her own—for she, too, suffered with every pang which wrenched his shattered body. It was a terrible faith, and yet it was the faith of the martyrs; and Anne held not back from sealing it, as they sealed it, with life itself,—ay! even unto the dear life of her husband, which was infinitely dearer to her than her own. For she loved him as none save a nature such as hers can love; with an intense, narrow, almost fierce and wholly terrible concentration. It was a love which had almost entirely excluded every one else; not only every other man, but her father and mother and sisters and brothers, all had been shut out from her inmost heart, from her earliest youth till this latest moment when she sat unnoticed by her husband's side. He had never loved her with

the best love that he was capable of giving. Love is perhaps never quite equal, certainly it never seems equal, in any marriage. The one always loves more, or less, than the other. And then, in circumscribed lives, such as Anne's and Tom's were, both men and women choose the one whom they prefer from among the few whom they chance to know; they cannot choose from a large number which might possibly have induced a different selection. But the width of the world would not have altered Anne's choice. And a love like hers changes no more with time than it is influenced by environment; it is too little of the flesh, and too much of the spirit to age, or to wither, or to grow cold. Even her husband's neglect had made no difference through all the unhappy years of her married life; even his disregard of religion did not lessen or alter her love, although it put her and her husband farther apart than they might otherwise have been, and came nearer than all else to breaking her heart. She could bear the loss of happiness in her daily life; she could bear to be deprived of her husband's society day after day and night after night, by interests and associations in which she had no part,—living was but waiting, anyway, to Anne. But she could not bear the thought of the Long Time without the beloved. To Anne, as much as to any mediæval saint in any rock-ribbed cell, the longest, happiest earthly life measured nothing against a glorious eternity. Her husband was handsome, spirited, high-hearted, masterful, compelling, and kind, too, in his careless way; another woman might have been happy and proud to be his wife; but Anne's heart had ached from first to last for the one thing of which she never spoke, and for which she was always praying.

Then came the accident, striking down the strong man at the height of his powers, as the lightning blasts the mighty oak in full leaf. Stunned at first, Anne, rallying, felt the blow as a manifestation of offended Power. A mind like hers works in strangely tortuous ways. But after a while she began to see in this awful affliction a means of grace thus given when all else had failed; and it was then that the wan ghost of happiness began to visit Anne's desolate breast. The world had been violently wrenched away from her husband's grasp, which otherwise would, most likely, never have loosed; it might perhaps now come to pass—through mercy cloaked in cruelty—that his thoughts would turn heavenward. So poor Anne thought, and thus it was that when, to all outward seeming, the husband's hopeless convalescence was the last settling down of darkest despair, in reality a shining rainbow of hope first began to span the wife's long-clouded content.

Was it then possible for Anne to listen for a moment to this incredible, monstrous, destroying thing which the doctor had urged? Could she by listening endanger this late-coming chance for the salvation of her husband's soul in consenting to the sinful relief of his bodily need? The thought of yielding never crossed her mind, nor the shade of a shadow of doubt that she was right. It was to her simply a question of her conscience standing firm against her love. Anne—fortunate in this, however unfortunate in all other respects—always saw the way before her, open, and straight, and very, very narrow. To her clear sight a sharp, distinct line ever divided right from wrong; on this side everything was snow-white, on that side everything was jet-black. There were no myriad middle shades of gray to bewilder Anne's crystal gaze. Living were less hard for some of us—some, too, as conscientious as Anne—if all could see, or even think they see, as clearly through the whitish, grayish, blackish mists, so that they also might be able unerringly to tell where the pure white ends and the real black begins.

XII

MISS JUDY'S LITTLE WAYS

When the doctor's deep voice roared out what he thought of any man who failed in his duty for fear of offending anybody's prejudices, Miss Judy, who was busy among the shrubbery in her yard, overheard him, and was quite frightened by the severity of his tone, though she did not catch the words. She knew him to be the mildest of absent-minded men, and she accordingly fluttered around the house, wondering what could be the matter.

She had been engaged in tying up a rose bush which grew at the side of the door, and which was too heavy laden with its sweet burden of blush roses. She was holding a big bunch in her hand as she hurried toward the gate, blushing when she saw the gentlemen, till her delicate face was as pink as the freshest among her roses. The doctor brightened and smiled, as everybody brightened and smiled at the sight of Miss Judy. He opened the gate before she reached it, knowing that she would never tempt ill luck by shaking hands over it. When they had shaken hands, he presented Lynn Gordon, whom she had not met, and who stood a little apart, thinking what a pretty old lady she was.

"Miss Judy," said the doctor, before she had time to ask what had happened, "what do you think of playing poker?"

"Mercy—me!" exclaimed Miss Judy, opening her blue eyes very wide in blank amazement. And then, catching her breath, she became mildly scandalized.

"Well—really, doctor!" she began, blushing more vividly, making her little mouth smaller than usual, "primping" it, as she would have said, and bridling with the daintiest little air of prudery, which she never would have dreamt of putting on for the doctor alone, but which seemed to her to be the proper manner before a strange young gentleman—and one from Boston too. "I have never been required to think anything of any gambling game! Such matters were left entirely to

gentlemen; they were not mentioned before ladies in my day."

"Bless your little heart!" exclaimed the doctor. "If I've said a word that you don't like, I'm ready to go right down on my knees in the dust—here and now—in the middle of the big road."

Miss Judy smiled, shaking her little head till the thin curls behind her pretty ears were more like silver mist than ever. In gentle confusion she began dividing the bunch of blush roses into halves, giving one to the doctor and the other to Lynn. She had known his father, she said shyly to the young man, and his mother also, although not so well, since the latter had not been brought up in Oldfield as his father was.

"But, Miss Judy, I want to talk to you seriously about card-playing," the doctor persisted. "You see you have got us all into the selfish habit of bringing every one of our burdens to lay them on your little shoulders. Unselfishness like yours does harm; it breeds selfishness in others."

Miss Judy protested that she had not the least idea of what he was talking about; but she saw that he was in earnest, and she straightway forgot all her quaint airs, and listened with deepest interest and tenderest sympathy to his story of his perplexity over the hopeless case of Tom Watson, and over the unbending attitude of Anne.

"The passion for gaming is just as strong in that poor fellow as it ever was. I had suspected it before, but I wasn't sure until to-day," the doctor went on, looking across the way at the sick man's window. "I disapprove of gambling as much as any one, but I can't for the life of me see any harm that could possibly come now to that poor unfortunate, from any sort of a game—if anybody can possibly stand it to play with him."

Miss Judy looked puzzled and a little alarmed. "Were you—do you wish *me* to play with him?" she faltered, rather shocked, yet wondering if she could learn, and quite ready to try.

The doctor was too deeply absorbed—too seriously troubled—to smile as he usually did at Miss Judy's sweet absurdities, appreciating them almost as much as he valued her heart of gold. In truth he hardly heard what she said.

"Maybe you can make Anne see how different things are now," he went on musingly, and somewhat hesitatingly, as though the possibility had suddenly occurred to him. "Women understand one another," he added, uttering a fallacy accepted by many a sensible man and rejected by every sensible woman.

The fair old face on the other side of the gate grew grave in its perplexity. Quick to decide for herself in any matter of principle, Miss Judy was slow to decide for any one else. She did not consider herself wise, and it was hard, she thought, for the wisest to put herself in another's place, and no one—so she believed—could judge justly without so doing. She knew Anne's prejudice, that had been well known always to all the Oldfield people; but she had never ventured to form an opinion as to whether Anne had ever been justified in taking such a stand, which appeared strange to Miss Judy even in the beginning, and stranger now in Tom's extremity. She had merely wondered, as everybody had; but it was always harder for Miss Judy than for almost any one else to understand how there ever could be any actual conflict between love and faith, which were always and inseparably one and the same to her.

"I am not sure," she faltered, with a flutter of timidity, and blushing again. "Anne is such a good woman—so much better and wiser than I am—and so very reserved. I should hardly dare approach her, even if I were sure of being in the right. And I am far from being sure. Suppose we consult sister Sophia?" she said suddenly and with her pretty face lighting at the happy thought. "You know, doctor, that her judgment is much sounder, much more practical, than mine. She sometimes has very valuable ideas—when I don't at all know what to do."

Miss Judy turned to the young man with a soft little air and a touch of gentle pride that charmed him: "I am speaking, sir, of my sister, Miss Sophia Bramwell."

Thus delicately proclaiming Miss Sophia to be a personage whom it was an honor as well as an advantage to know, Miss Judy went indoors to ask, with the usual elaborate, punctilious ceremony, if she would be so kind as to take the trouble to come out to the front gate, where the doctor was waiting to consult her in an important matter; and where it would give herself the greatest pleasure to present old lady Gordon's grandson—who was waiting with the doctor,—provided, of course, that the introduction would be entirely agreeable to Miss Sophia. There were excellent reasons why Miss Judy thus begged Miss Sophia to come out instead of inviting the gentlemen to come in, but neither of the sisters then or ever spoke of these, nor of any other merely sordid things. It took Miss Judy some time, however, to make the request of Miss Sophia as politely as she fondly considered her due; and although it did not take Miss Sophia long to say "Just so, sister Judy," with all the accustomed promptness and decision, several minutes necessarily elapsed before she was really ready to appear. There was the getting up from, and the getting out of, her low arm-chair, always a difficult, tedious process; and there was the further time required for reaching up the chimney to get a bit of soot; and for fetching the heavy footstool clear across the big room to stand upon, in order to see in the mirror. Yet all this must be done ere she could go out. The sun was shining too brilliantly for even Miss Sophia to venture into the broad daylight without taking more than the usual precaution. Even she could not think of going out after having applied the soot haphazard, as she sometimes did in emergencies. But, fortunately, time was no consideration in Oldfield; and Miss Sophia was at last safely descended from the footstool and fully prepared to face the daylight and also the strange young gentleman

from Boston.

Lynn could not help staring a little, thus taken unawares; unconsciously he had expected Miss Sophia to be like her sister. But the deference with which Miss Judy laid the case before her struck him as an exquisite thing, too fine and sweet and altogether lovely to be smiled at, either openly or secretly. He did not know then—as he soon came to understand—that Miss Sophia's ready and firm response was an unvaried formula which vaguely served most of her simple conversational requirements. But he did know, as soon as he saw the little old sisters together, how tenderly they loved one another. Miss Judy looked at him with undisguised pride in Miss Sophia, shining in her flax-flower eyes, turning again as pink as the sweetest of the blush roses, with delight in the firm promptness with which Miss Sophia responded. There was only the slightest involuntary movement of her proud little head toward her sister when the gentlemen were upon the point of leaving; but it nevertheless reminded the doctor to take Miss Sophia's hand before taking her own, when he bent down to touch their hands with his rough-bearded lips in old-time gallantry, half in jest and half in earnest, but wholly becoming to him no less than to the two serious little ladies.

The gentlemen were no sooner gone, leaving the sisters—or Miss Judy at least—to think over what had been said, than she began forthwith to devise ways and means of showing her sympathy with her neighbors, Anne and Tom, in their terrible affliction. Her first impulse was always to give—and she had so little to give, dear little Miss Judy! It now happily occurred to her, however, that Tom might like a taste of early green peas. Anne's were barely beginning to bloom, as Miss Judy could see by looking across the big road, and as she told Miss Sophia. No wonder Anne had neglected to plant them till late, poor thing! Who would have remembered the garden in the midst of such awful trouble as hers? And then it was still quite early in the season,—Miss Judy had gathered the first peas from her own vines only that morning, while the tender pale green pods were still wet with dew, as properly gathered vegetables should be. And, although she had gone carefully over the vines, cautiously lifting each waxen green tendril, fragrant with white blossoms, she had found but a handful of pods which were really well filled.

"But they are very sweet and delicate, and they will not seem so few if Merica puts them on a slice of toast and runs over with them while they are piping hot, before they have time to shrivel," Miss Judy said, smiling happily at her sister as she bustled about, getting a pan ready for the shelling of the peas.

Miss Sophia's face fell. She had been looking forward to those peas ever since breakfast. And she remembered that Miss Judy had sent Tom the earliest asparagus. But she assented as readily and as cheerfully as she could, and, drawing her low rocking-chair closer to Miss Judy's, resignedly settled herself to help with the shelling of the peas. The tinkling they made as they fell in the shining pan soon lulled her, for she never could sit still long and keep awake, so that she presently fell to nodding and straightening up and nodding again. Straightening up very resolutely, she began rocking slowly, trying in that way to keep from going to sleep.

"The creak of that old chair makes me sleepy too," said Miss Judy, smilingly, yet looking a little sad. "It sounds to-day just as it did when mother used it to rock us to sleep—just the same peaceful, contented, homely little creak. There!" she said as the last plump pea tinkled on the tin. "And I declare, sister Sophia, just look at all these fine fat hulls! Why, we can have some nice rich soup made out of them, as well as not!"

"Just so, sister Judy," Miss Sophia responded eagerly, at once wide awake and sitting up suddenly, quite straight. "And with plenty of thickening too."

"To be sure! What a head you have, sister Sophia," Miss Judy cried, admiringly. "And then we'll have something to send old Mr. Mills as well as Tom. Just to please Kitty," she added, seeing the shade which came over Miss Sophia's face, and misunderstanding its source. "It is ten to one but he will be in one of his tempers and throw the soup out of the window, as he did that dinner of Kitty's—dishes and all. But we can instruct Merica to hold on to the bowl till Kitty herself takes it from her. It always pleases Kitty so, for anybody to show the old man any little attention. And, after all, he is not so much to be blamed, poor old sufferer. Being bedfast with lumbago must be mighty trying to the temper. And then Sam, too, is threatened with a bad pain in his back every time he tries to do any work. It actually appears to come on if he even thinks about working, or if a body so much as mentions work before him. Maybe that's what makes Sam a bit irritable with the old man sometimes. But Kitty never is. All his crossness, all his unreasonableness, all his fault-finding—which is natural enough, poor old soul—just rolls off her good nature like water off a duck's back. She only laughs and pets him, and goes on trying harder then ever to please him. Did you ever see anybody like Kitty, sister Sophia?"

Miss Judy had arisen, gathering up her apron, which was filled with the pea-shells; but she now paused, holding the pan, to await Miss Sophia's reply with the greatest, keenest interest,—as she often did,—as though Miss Sophia, who had never been separated from her longer than two hours at a time in the whole course of their uneventful lives, might have known some peculiar and interesting persons, whom she herself had not been so fortunate as to meet. This was one of the things which made them such delightful company for one another. When, therefore, Miss Sophia now said, "Just so, sister Judy," with great promptness and decision, Miss Judy was newly impressed with the extent and soundness of her sister's knowledge of human nature.

Tripping briskly out of the room carrying the peas and the pea-shells (to which Miss Sophia had secretly transferred her expectation), she entered the kitchen, full of thoughts of the delicate

cooking of the peas, and was surprised to find Merica missing. Yet the day was Monday, and the smoke from the invisible and mysterious wash-kettle floated up from a newly kindled fire behind the gooseberry bushes. Miss Judy did not know what to make of Merica's absence at such a time; and she stepped down from the rear door of the passage to the grass of the back yard and called. There was no answer, and Miss Judy stood hesitating a moment in puzzled astonishment, but as she turned there was a sudden rush—sounds of scuffling, a smothered shriek—and the girl fell over the fence, striking the ground with limbs outstretched, like some clumsy bird thrown while trying to fly. The fence, which divided Miss Judy's garden from old lady Gordon's orchard, was a very high one, but Miss Judy was more shocked than alarmed at seeing Merica come over it in so indecorous a manner.

"What does such conduct mean, Merica?" she said severely.

The girl had never heard her gentle mistress speak so sharply—but she herself was past mistress of deceit. She therefore gathered herself up as slowly as possible, in order to gain time, deliberately smoothing down her skirt and carefully brushing off the dirt. The mask of a dark skin has served in many an emergency. Merica could not entirely control the guilty shiftiness of her eyes, but she did it in a measure, and she was quite ready with a deceitful explanation almost as soon as she had recovered her breath. She knew from long experience how easy it was to deceive Miss Judy, the most innocent and artless of mistresses. She also knew—as all servants know the sources of their daily bread—the weak spot in Miss Judy's armor of innocence and artlessness. Accordingly, looking her mistress straight in the face, Merica now said brazenly that she had been over to old lady Gordon's to get the strange young gentleman's clothes; and Miss Judy, blushing rosy red, dropped the subject in the greatest haste and confusion, precisely as Merica expected her to do. The little lady was indeed so utterly routed that she gave the order for the steaming of the peas very timidly; and when Merica, seeing her advantage, followed it up in a most heartless manner by insisting upon boiling them instead, Miss Judy gave way without a struggle, and went silently back to the house as meek as any lamb.

She did not mention the matter to her sister; the delicate subject was, in fact, rarely mentioned between them, and it was, of course, never spoken of to any one else. To be sure, everybody in Oldfield had seen Merica coming and going with carefully covered baskets, which, nevertheless, proclaimed the laundry with every withe—as some baskets do, somehow or other, quite regardless of shape; but the fetching and the toting, as Merica phrased these transactions, were usually in the early morning when the neighbors were busy in the rear of their own houses; or in the dusk of evening when the gloaming cast its shadow of softening mystery over the most prosaic aspects of life. And everybody also saw the smoke arising every Monday morning from beneath the wash-kettle, hid in its bower of gooseberry bushes; but no one in all the village would have been unkind enough to ask or even to wonder, whether all the white bubbles arising with the steam could be portions of the two little ladies' own meagre wardrobe. It is true that on one occasion, when Sidney was very, very hard pressed for a new story,—as the most resourceful of professional diners-out must be now and again,—she had been overly tempted into the spinning of a weird and amusing yarn, about seeing a long, ghostly pair of white cotton legs, of unmistakably masculine ownership, flapping over the gooseberry bushes in a high wind as she went home after dark on a certain wild and stormy night. But she could hardly sleep on the following night, her uneasy conscience pricked her so sorely, and, setting out betimes the next morning, she made a round over the complete circuit of the previous day, unreservedly taking back the whole story. And never again did she yield to the never ceasing temptation to make capital of Miss Judy's little ways, about which, indeed, many a good story might have been excellently told.

That small gentlewoman herself, naturally, never dreamt of doing anything so indelicate as to look behind the gooseberry bushes while the clothes were in the tubs or the kettle or drying on the line. Sometimes, when she was compelled to send Merica away on an errand while the wash-kettle was boiling, she would take the girl's post temporarily and would punch the white bubbles gingerly with the clothes-stick to keep them from being burned against the side of the kettle; but she always blushed very much and was heartily glad when Merica returned to her duty. The simple truth was that Miss Judy thought it right to allow Merica, on her own proposal, to earn in this manner the wages which she and her sister were unable to pay, since they could give her but a nominal sum out of their little pension, which was all that they had. And yet, although this was the case, she saw no reason for talking about a disagreeable thing which she was thus forced to put up with. She never spoke of anything unrefined if she could help it. And those who knew her shrinking from all the more sordid sides of household affairs, and from all the commonplace and unbeautiful aspects of life, seldom if ever approached her with anything of the kind.

Far, indeed, then, would it have been from the rudest of the Oldfield people to have hinted to Miss Judy of certain matters which were plain enough to every one else. Miss Pettus alone thought Miss Judy ought to be told of Merica's scandalous "goings-on."

"I saw her and Eunice yesterday, in old lady Gordon's orchard, a-fighting over Enoch Cotton like two black cats—right under that poor little innocent's nose—and she never knowing a blessed thing about it!" Miss Pettus fumed.

But Sidney put her foot down. Miss Judy should not be told: and there was to be "no if or and" about it, either. "What's the use of worrying Miss Judy? She could no more understand than a baby in long clothes. And what's the odds, anyway?" demanded this village philosopher. "If they ain't a-fighting about Enoch Cotton they'll be a-fighting about somebody else."

Mrs. Alexander sided with Sidney. It would be a shame to tell Miss Judy; as Sidney said, it would be like going to a little child with such a tale; and the doctor's wife strengthened the impression made by her own opinion by saying that the doctor said Miss Judy must not be told. He simply would not allow it—that was all.

Kitty Mills, too, opposed the telling of Miss Judy earnestly enough, but she could not help laughing at the recollection of a scene which she had witnessed a few days before; and which she now went on to describe to the ladies who were holding this conclave.

"I happened to be raising the window of Father Mills's room,—he likes it down at night no matter how hot it is, and wants it raised and lowered all through the day,—and I saw Merica run out of Miss Judy's kitchen, and jump the back fence. She couldn't have more than 'lighted on the ground on the other side, when the air was filled all of a sudden with aprons and head-handkerchiefs—and smothered squalls. And bless your soul, there sat Miss Judy by the front window, knowing not a breath about what was going on over in the orchard—calm and sweet as any May morning and pretty as a pink—the dear little thing,—darning away on Miss Sophia's stocking, till you couldn't tell which was stocking and which was darn; and talking along in her chirrupy funny little way about that Becky (whoever she is), for all the world as if she were some real, live woman living that minute, right on the other side of the big road; and there was poor Miss Sophia a-listening, pleased as pleased could be, and mightily interested too, though it was plain to be seen that she had no more notion of what Miss Judy was talking about than the man in the moon;" and Kitty Mills took up her apron to wipe away the tears that had come from laughing over the picture thus conjured up.

Old lady Gordon did not enter into the conclave. She thought nothing about Miss Judy in connection with the rivalry between Eunice and Merica for the heart and hand of her black coachman, Mr. Enoch Cotton. Indeed, she thought nothing at all about the matter. In passing it seemed to her quite in the usual order of colored events. It had not up to that time touched her own comfort at any point. Eunice, knowing her mistress, was careful, even in the height of her jealous rages, even when she met Merica in the orchard by challenge to combat, to guard the excellence and the regularity of old lady Gordon's meals, thereby insuring against any interference from her.

"Just give Miss Frances her way and she'll give you your way, and that's more than you can say for most folks; lots of folks want their way and your way too, but Miss Frances don't."

Eunice had said this to Enoch, who was comparatively a newcomer, speaking in the picturesque dialect of her race, which is so agreeable to hear and so disagreeable to read. Having determined, as a mature widow knowing her own mind, to take Enoch Cotton unto herself for better or worse, it seemed to Eunice best to instruct him with regard to the keeping of his place as the gardener and the driver of the antiquated coach in which old lady Gordon, who never walked, fared forth at long and irregular intervals. This helpful instruction had been given before Merica's entrance into the field came cruelly to chill the confidence existing between Eunice and Enoch Cotton. It was during this completely confidential time that Eunice had also told him that it was entirely a mistake to suppose the mistress to be as hard to get along with as some people thought she was. The main thing, the only thing in fact, was to keep from crossing her comfort.

"*I*'ve got nothing to do but to cook what she wants cooked in the way she wants it cooked, with her batter cakes brown on both sides; and to be careful to have the meals on the table at the stroke of the clock. You've got nothing to do but to raise plenty of the vegetables she likes, and to have the coach 'round at the front gate to the minute by the watch. We won't have any trouble with Miss Frances so long as we do what she wants and don't cross her comfort. If you ever do cross it—even one time—then look out!"

Eunice had eloquently concluded these valuable hints, silently nodding her head, with her blue-palmed black hands on her broad hips. And Enoch Cotton—alas! learned his lesson so well that, although old lady Gordon became gradually aware of his inconstancy, she saw no reason to interfere in Eunice's behalf.

Miss Judy, the only person whose comfort was really imperilled, sat chatting that day with Miss Sophia, all unconscious, till the peas were cooked. She then went out to put them in her mother's prettiest china bowl—the little blue one with the wreath of pink roses round it—and daintily spread a fringed napkin over the top. Maybe Tom might notice how pretty it looked, Miss Judy said to Miss Sophia, though he noticed sadly little of what went on around him. Anyway, it would be a compliment to Anne to send the peas in the best bowl. Miss Judy hesitated before putting the soup in the next best bowl. It would be a serious matter indeed if the old man should seize it and fling it out of the window before Kitty could stop him, as he often did with her cooking and her dishes. Still, it did not seem quite polite to Kitty to send it in a tin cup, so that, after Miss Judy had consulted Miss Sophia, who assented very quickly and firmly,—fearing that the rest of the soup might get cold,—Merica was given the second best bowl also, but charged not to let go her hold on it until Kitty herself took it out of her hand.

"Give it to old Mr. Mills with sister Sophia's compliments," Miss Judy said, with unconscious irony.

Miss Sophia ate her portion of the soup with much satisfaction, while Miss Judy watched her with beaming eyes, turning at length to follow Merica's progress with a radiant gaze. It always made her happy to do anything for any one; and she never felt that she had very little to do with. As

Merica came out of the Watsons' gate and started up the big road with the bowl of soup, Miss Judy, in her satisfaction, could not help calling the girl back to ask whether Tom Watson appeared to notice the wreath of roses. It was a bit disappointing to have Merica say that she hardly thought he had. Then Miss Judy, sighing a little, gave the servant further directions, telling her to go on from the Mills' house up to Miss Pettus's to ask for the loan of the chicken-snake which Mr. Pettus had killed that morning. Miss Judy was afraid that Miss Pettus would forget to hang it before sundown (white side up) on the fence to fetch rain, which was really beginning to be needed very much by the gardens. If Miss Pettus neglected it till the sun went down, there would of course be no use in hanging it on the fence at all, so that, to make sure, it was better for Merica to borrow it and fetch it home when she came. Merica sullenly demurred that the snake would not stay on the stick, and that it would crawl off as fast as it was put on; adding rather insolently that she could not be all day putting a garter-snake on a stick and having it crawl off every step of the way down the big road—with a fire under the wash-kettle. But Miss Judy gently assured her that the garter-snake—or any other kind of a serpent—would stay on a stick if it were put on tail first. It stuck like wax then, Miss Judy said, and could not crawl off, no matter how hard it might try.

"And when you've got the garter-snake tail-first over the stick, you might stop and remind Miss Doris not to be late in coming by for me to go with her to-morrow morning to take her dancing lesson. No, wait a moment; you had best ask her if she will be so very kind as to come to see me this evening, so that we may practise some songs—particularly 'Come, rest in this bosom, my own stricken deer'—and then we can talk over the dancing lesson," said Miss Judy.

There were not many days during the whole year, and there had hardly been a whole day for many a year, on which Miss Judy and Doris could not find some good and urgent reason for seeing one another.

XIII

THE DANCING LESSON

Miss Judy's ideas of chaperonage were very strict. It would have seemed to her most improper to allow Doris to take the dancing lesson alone. Not that she thought any harm of the dancing-master; Miss Judy thought no harm of any one. Her ideals were always quite apart from all considerations of reality. It made no difference to her that only the neighbors were usually to be met on the way, and that on the morning of the first lesson the big road lay wholly deserted when she passed out of her little gate with Doris by her side—she herself so small, so timid, so frail, and Doris so tall, so valiant, so strong. Yet the sense of guardianship, full of deep pride and grave delight, filled her gentle heart even as it must have filled the Lion's when he went guarding Una.

It was a pity that Lynn Gordon missed the pretty sight. He had passed Miss Judy's gate before she came forth with her charge, and now, all unconscious of his loss, strolled idly on in the opposite direction. Doris was in his mind as he went by the silver poplars, but he caught no glimpse of her through the thick foliage, and could barely see the snowy walls of the house. Slowly he walked on as far as the brow of the hill at the southern end of the village, as he had done once before, and stood for a moment again looking out over the land. Then, turning, he retraced his aimless steps.

The day was like a flawless diamond, melting into the rarest pearl where the haze of the horizon purpled the far-off hills. The sapphire dome of the heavens arched without a cloud. Below stretched the meadows, lying deep and sweet in new-cut grass and alive and vivid and musical with the movement, the color, and the song of the birds. He did not know the names of half of them; but there were vireos, and orioles, and thrushes, and bobolinks, and song-sparrows, and jay-birds, and robins—all wearing their gayest plumage and singing their blithest songs. Even the flickers wore their reddest collars and sang their sweetest notes, as if vying with the redwings which flashed their little black bodies hither and thither as flame bears smoke. The scarlet tanagers also blossomed like gorgeous flowers all over the wide green fields. And the bluebirds—blue—blue—blue—gloriously singing, seemed to be bringing the hue and the harmony of the radiant heavens down to the glowing earth.

The melodious chorus was pierced now and then by a note of infinitely sad sweetness, as a bird lamented the wreck of its hopes which had followed the cutting of the grass. But the mourner was far afield, so that its sweet lament was but a soft and distant echo of the world-pain which forever follows the passing of the Reaper. The young man heeded it as little as we all heed it, till our own pass under the scythe. He stopped to lean on the fence, drinking in the beauty and fragrance, thus unwittingly disturbing the peace and happiness of a robin family which was dwelling in a near-by blackberry bush. The head of this flowering house now flew out, protesting with every indignant feather against this unmannerly intrusion of a mere mortal upon a lady-bird's bower. Trailing his wings and ruffling his crest, he sidled away along the top of the fence as if there were nothing interesting among those blossoms for anybody to spy out—in a word, doing everything a true gentleman should do under such circumstances, no matter how red his waistcoat may be. Another robin sang what he thought of the situation, expressing himself so plainly from the other side of the big road, that even the young man understood; while still

another robin, too far away to know what shocking things were going on, poured out a rapturous song as though all living were but revelling in sunshine.

Lynn Gordon turned away, thinking with a smile what a wonderful thing love must be, since it could so move the gentlest to fierceness, as he had just seen; and could bring the fiercest to gentleness, as he had often heard. Smiling at his own idle thoughts, he wandered on. The loosened petals of the blackberry bloom drifted before him like snowflakes wafted by the south wind. The rich deep clover field on the other side of the way was rosy and fragrant with blossoms. The wild grape, too, was in flower, its elusive aromatic scent flying down from the wooded hillsides, as though it were the winged, woodland spirit of fragrance.

Approaching the woods at the foot of the hills, Lynn saw a log cabin, which he had not seen before, although he knew that the land upon which it stood was a part of the Gordon estate; part of the lands which would one day be his own. As his careless glance rested on the cabin, strains of music coming from it caught and fixed his attention. Some one was playing an old-fashioned dance tune on a violin, and Lynn unthinkingly followed the stately measure till he found himself standing unobserved before the humble dwelling from which it came, free to gaze his fill at a scene revealed by the open passage between the two low rooms.

The passage walls were spotless with white-wash, and the shadows of the trees standing close behind showed deeply green beyond. Against these soft green shadows and on one side of the passage stood the white-haired Frenchman. His fiddle was under his chin, held tenderly as though it were a precious thing that he dearly loved. His head was a little on one side and his eyes were partially closed,—like the birds,—as if he too were under the spell of his own music. His right arm, jauntily raised, wielded the bow: his left toe was advanced, then his right, now this one, now that one—advancing, bowing, retiring—all as solemn as solemn could be.

And more serious if possible than Monsieur Beauchamp was Doris herself, facing him from the opposite side of the passage; grave, indeed, as any wood nymph performing some sacred rite in a sylvan temple. When the young man saw her first, she stood poised and fluttering, as a butterfly poises and flutters uncertain whether to alight or to fly. The thin skirt of the book-muslin party coat, delicately held out at the sides by the very tips of her fingers, and lightly caught by the soft wind, spread like the wings of a white bird. The slippers, heel-less and yellow as buttercups, were thus brought bewitchingly into view—with the narrow ribbon daintily crossed over the instep and tied around the ankle—as they darted in and out beneath the fluttering skirt. Her golden hair, loosed by the dance and the breeze, fell around her shoulders in a radiant mantle, growing more beautiful with every airy movement. The exquisite curve of her cheek, nearly always colorless, now faintly reflected the rose-red of her perfect lips as the snowdrift reflects the glow of the sunset. Her large dark eyes were lost under her long dark lashes, and never wandered for an instant from the little Frenchman's guiding toes. And Doris understood those toes perfectly, although she knew not a word of the dancing-master's native language, and not much of her own when spoken by him, as he now mingled the two, quite carried away by this sudden and late return to his true vocation. She followed their every motion as thistledown follows the wind: stepping delicately, advancing coquettishly, courtesying quaintly—as Miss Judy had taught her,—and retiring, alluring, only to begin over and over again. It was all as artless, as graceful, and as natural as the floating of the thistledown; and such a wonderful dance as never was seen on land or sea, unless—as the young man thought, with the sight going to his head like royal burgundy—the fairies might have danced something of the kind on Erin's enchanted moss within the moonlit ring.

On fiddled the old Frenchman and on winged the young girl, both of them far too deeply absorbed in the serious business in hand to notice the onlooker, till Miss Judy came, actually running and almost out of breath. She had seen the young man's approach to the cabin, but she was too far away to reach it before him, although she had come as quickly as she possibly could. Hastening, she sharply reproached herself for having been persuaded to go so far from the cabin to look at Mrs. Beauchamp's strawberry bed. It was, of course, utterly impossible to have foreseen this young gentleman's appearance. Nevertheless, she should not have left Doris, poor child, alone for a moment—none knew that better than herself. And now to see what had come of her unpardonable thoughtlessness! What would this stranger think of Doris, or of any well brought up girl, whom he thus found neglected? At this thought Miss Judy, for all her mildness, ruffled with indignation as a hen ruffles at any rough touch upon her soft little chicks. She would try, she said to herself, to retrieve her mistake. She would do her best to show this grandson of old lady Gordon—who made fun of everybody—that her Doris was no ignorant rustic, roaming the woods all forgotten by her proper guardians. As she ran, much agitated and even alarmed, the little lady mechanically looked over her shoulder and put her little hands behind her back to make sure that the point of her neckerchief was precisely where it should be. She never felt quite equal to a difficult undertaking until she was certain of the point's exact location, and now, having learned by long practice to tell with some degree of certainty by touch,—on account of its being so hard to look in the long mirror,—she now thought that it was in its proper place, and she accordingly entered the green-shadowed end of the passage with a very high air. Her manner was indeed as high and even haughty a manner as could possibly be assumed by a very small, very gentle old lady, who was blushing, and trying to get her breath after a rush across a ploughed field. The greeting which she gave Lynn Gordon was therefore noticeably cold; also the introduction to Doris was plainly wrung from her by politeness, and given with marked reluctance. So that the young man, not understanding in the least, naturally wondered greatly at the change in the little lady, who had been so winningly gracious on the previous day.

Monsieur Beauchamp's eager hospitality did something to make Lynn feel less like an unpardonable intruder. And madame, also, was kind in her matter-of-fact way. She took no notice whatever of her husband's introducing her as the Empress Maria. Acting as though she had been deaf she placed chairs for her guests, and then went out to fetch them some new crab cider in thick glass tumblers on a large deep plate. An inflexible custom of Oldfield required that a guest should be offered some kind of refreshment, no matter what the time of day. Fortunately, there was no rigid rule as to the kind of refreshment; one kind would do as well as another, provided only that something was offered promptly. Each Oldfield housekeeper had her own preference, her own specialty. Miss Pettus might with perfect propriety offer a piece of fried chicken at three o'clock in the afternoon to a guest who had dined at one; old lady Gordon might order a full meal at any hour for any one who dropped in between meals, to her own and everybody else's entire satisfaction; Miss Judy might serve a handful of gooseberries, either green or ripe, on her mother's prettiest plate, and the guest always remarked how pretty it was, whether she dared eat it or not. Mrs. Beauchamp accordingly felt herself to be uncommonly lucky in having this newly made, still sweet, crab cider to offer her visitors. She had seen the time when she had been obliged to hand a glass of toddy, and that, too, without a sprig of mint or a bit of ice.

It was quite as much a part of Oldfield manners to accept the refreshment as to offer it. Miss Judy took her glass of cider and sipped it daintily, saying how nice it was, yet managing while doing this to make it quite plain that the intruder was meant to feel that *he* had no share in the sweet graciousness extended to her hostess. The eyes of the two young people met involuntarily, and although Doris, coloring, dropped her eyes in confusion, Lynn saw the sudden dimpling of her cheek. It was the second time they had looked at each other; Doris had given him one startled, fleeting glance, with a frightened exclamation and a hurried dropping of skirts, when she had first seen him standing in front of the passage, looking at her as she danced. He now found no opportunity to speak to her. Miss Judy arose to take Doris away as soon as courtesy would allow her to do so without seeming to slight Mrs. Beauchamp's cider. She was ever more careful of the feelings of her inferiors than of her equals, if that were possible. She was quite determined, nevertheless, to withdraw at once. The lesson might be resumed another day, she said to Monsieur Beauchamp, gently but firmly, adding that Miss Wendall's mother and uncle were doubtless expecting her. And this Miss Judy said loftily, almost haughtily, in a tone calculated to inform the young gentleman that Miss Wendall's mother and uncle were personages to be reckoned with. As Miss Judy left her seat, Doris also arose and started to get her hat, which was hanging against the wall. Lynn Gordon eagerly sprang up and took it down and handed it to her. He had no thought, however, of accepting his dismissal, when Miss Judy, after taking leave of the dancing-master and his wife with a grand little air which puzzled the worthy pair exceedingly, merely inclined her head stiffly in his direction. Instead, he coolly went before her and Doris to the gate, and, after holding it open till they had passed out, calmly followed them, carefully taking his place by Miss Judy's side, and away from Doris.

For a few paces Miss Judy was silent with surprise, rigid with displeasure. She went, carrying her little head very high indeed, and taking dainty, mincing steps. She held up the front of her black bombazine by a delicately small pinch of the cloth between her forefinger and thumb, and her little finger was very elegantly crooked. Her sweet face was set as a flint. She was stern in the determination to set Doris right in the estimation of old lady Gordon's grandson—this handsome, mannerly, young gentleman, who might nevertheless have his grandmother's disposition as well as her features, for all Miss Judy knew. Yet her stiffness began to thaw under Lynn's genial frankness as a light frost melts under a warm sun. He was tactful considering his age, his inexperience, and especially his sex—if tact be ever a matter of age and experience, as it is almost always one of sex. He had, too, a gay, boyish way about him which was very winning, and which gradually disarmed gentle Miss Judy almost completely within the length of a couple of rods. Within three rods she began to talk quite naturally, the only lingering sign of her mildly fixed purpose being the unusually didactic turn of her remarks.

"You know, I presume, Mr. Gordon," she said primly and with significant distinctness, as one who weighs her words, "that this is the oldest portion of Kentucky. There is, as I am well aware, a widespread but erroneous impression that the Blue Grass Region is older than this; but no well-read person could possibly fall into such an unaccountable error. The real Kentucky pioneer was Thomas Walker, who came from Virginia through Cumberland Gap into the south-eastern part of the state in 1750, and made explorations coming this way;—not Daniel Boone, who first entered the northern and middle part of it as late as 1769. The Blue Grass people are not to blame, perhaps, for honestly believing their section to be the oldest in Kentucky, since most of them have been brought up to believe it; but it is really surprising that, with a good many reading citizens who know something of history, they should cling to this extraordinary misbelief in opposition to all written and unwritten history of the state. The first house, too, was built here in the Pennyroyal Region, near Green River. Why, my dear sir, I can give you personal assurance that the ruins of this first house in Kentucky are still to be seen. I have never seen them myself," added Miss Judy, scrupulously; "but many friends of mine have seen them."

When the young man had shown himself to be as much surprised and impressed as she thought he should be, Miss Judy went on with growing confidence. She called his further attention to the fact that this Green River country was also the sole region of Virginia's military grants to her officers of the Revolution. Miss Judy cautiously disclaimed any knowledge of what the mother state might have done for the soldiers of the line—with a soft touch of condescension. But she spoke with authority in saying that Virginia had never granted a foot of land—north of Green River—to any officer of the War of Independence.

"I am not speaking of lands that may have been bought by officers from the Indians, or of lands that may have been taken up by officers as by other settlers. Lands so acquired are doubtless scattered all over the state. I am speaking only of grants of lands in Kentucky, given by Virginia to her officers of the Revolution for military services. These—one and all—were given here, in this Pennyroyal Region, and nowhere else; it was here, therefore, that those distinguished soldiers came to live and to die, after doing their duty to their country. And it was their coming that made this Pennyroyal Region so utterly unlike the rest of Kentucky."

"Indeed! Yes, I see," responded Lynn Gordon, with his eyes on Doris's dimpling cheek.

And then Miss Judy's soft heart suddenly smote her with the feeling that she had perhaps been too severe. She had unconsciously been stepping more and more mincingly, holding the pinch of black bombazine higher and higher, and crooking her little finger more and more jauntily.

"I have been told that there are some perfectly sincere persons living in the Blue Grass Region who honestly believe that their estates were granted to an officer ancestor for service in the Revolution. And these deluded persons are not so much to be blamed as to be pitied for being brought up to believe something that is not true. It is their misfortune, not their fault, poor things!"

Sure now that she was growing harsh indeed and almost cruel, Miss Judy gracefully turned the talk in a less serious direction, toward one which was, nevertheless, still calculated to impress this stranger with the character of the country.

"Of course you know the heraldic herb of the Pennyroyal Region," she said smilingly, as she pointed to an humble, unpretentious bunch of rather rusty green, growing thick all along the wayside. "We who live in it are fond of it and proud of it too, as fond and proud of it as England ever was of the rose, or France of the lily, or Scotland of the thistle, or even Ireland of the shamrock."

"How interesting," said the young man, still looking at Doris—not at the pennyroyal.

Doris glanced also at him, feeling great pride in Miss Judy's easy acquaintance with heraldic matters, and wishing to see if he were as much impressed as she thought he ought to be.

"Yes, I think it *is* interesting," continued Miss Judy, making her small mouth smaller by pursing it up in the dainty way that she would have ascribed as primping. "In fact, the pennyroyal has long been of far greater importance to the world at large than might be supposed by those who have not looked into the subject. You know, I presume, that many of the old English poets have mentioned it in their most famous works, and always with the greatest respect."

"Indeed," exclaimed the young man again, with his gaze fixed upon the sweet curve of Doris's velvet cheek.

"Chaucer and Dryden and Drayton and Spenser—every one of these fathers of English poesy has something to say of the pennyroyal," Miss Judy went on airily, still quite firmly resolved to let old lady Gordon's grandson see—no matter how polite he might be—that Doris's friends were well-read and cultured persons, however much to the contrary his first impression may have been. "Their mentions of it are mostly very mysterious, though; they speak of it as 'a charming, enchanting, bewitching herb.' All of them, indeed, describe it in that manner, if I remember correctly—though one does forget so easily," the little lady added, as if she read Chaucer and Dryden and Drayton and Spenser every day of her life. "I am quite sure, however, that Drayton refers to it 'in sorceries excelling.' And I also seem distinctly to recall the witches of *The Faerie Queene* as cleansing themselves of evil magic by a bath of pennyroyal once a year—I don't, though, recollect what they bathed in during the rest of the time. Spenser calls it out of its true name, however, as I remember his reference to it. He says that the witches bathed in 'origane and thyme'; but everybody knows well enough that origane was the pennyroyal's name in Spenser's day. Chaucer and Drayton knew it in their time as 'lunarie,' but they all meant neither more nor less than our own pennyroyal and nothing else."

As the three walked slowly up the big road under the flowering locusts, Miss Judy, relenting more and more, gradually became quite her sweet, friendly self. She finally admitted, with the gentle frankness natural to her, that she had never quite been able to understand these mysterious poetic references to such a simple homely thing as the pennyroyal, which she had known ever since she could remember. She now freely acknowledged that its character must have altered with the passing of the ages, or must have been changed by the coming from the old world to the new. And yet, on the other hand,—as she pointed out to the young man in a tone of confidence,—there were the famous old simplists, belonging to the very time and the very country of these fathers of poetry, who had known and prized an herb which was much like the pennyroyal of to-day, and which they had called "honesty."

"This certainly must have been identical with our own heraldic pennyroyal," Miss Judy declared. "For that surely is the honestest little thing growing out of the earth. So upright, so downright. So absolutely uncompromising! Sturdy, erect, wholesome, useful, clean, bristly, and square of stem, it holds its rough leaves steady and level at the full height of its reach; standing thus, it never bends; falling, it always goes the whole way down; pulled up, its roots come all at once. So that there is no half-heartedness of any sort in this most characteristic product of southwestern Kentucky."

There was a shade of uneasiness in the proud glance which Doris now stole at Lynn, with a sudden uplifting of her lovely dark eyes. He could but admire Miss Judy's learning, she thought, and yet she could not help seeing, with a tender sense of humor, how exquisitely quaint the little lady's manner was.

Lynn grew bold, reading the look and the unconscious, embarrassed, half smile. "But, Miss Bramwell, pray tell me, does not the pennyroyal belong to the whole state? I have always taken it to be a member of the mint family."

Miss Judy, stepping still more mincingly, and holding the pinch of black bombazine higher than ever, tossed her little head as she acknowledged the possibility of a distant relationship. She intimated that she considered this too far off to count, even in Kentucky, where kinship appeared to stretch farther than anywhere else in the world. And she forthwith repudiated for the sturdy pennyroyal all the traits and the habits of the whole disreputable mint tribe—root and branch.

"Never under any circumstances will the honest pennyroyal be found lolling supinely in the low, shady, wet haunts of the mint. The true pennyroyal—you should know, my dear sir—stands high and dry, straight out in the open. And it stands on its native heath, too," Miss Judy said, smiling herself now, and quite forgetting all discomfiture and all displeasure. "The pennyroyal never had to be fetched from somewhere else—as the blue grass was—to give *its* name to *its* region!"

They had reached Miss Judy's gate by this time, and when Lynn mechanically opened it, the little lady passed through it before she realized that propriety required her to go all the way home with Doris, since the young gentleman evidently did not intend stopping short of Sidney's threshold. But the shyness which was natural to her, and which had dropped away from her only at Doris's need, suddenly came over her again. She stood still, uneasy, blushing, and gazing after the young couple who were strolling on under the flowering locusts. A look of apprehension quickly clouded the blue of her sweet old eyes with real distress. It was clearly wrong for her to have left them. She had made another mistake; her neglect had again placed Doris in a false light. It would be hard, indeed, to set this worst remissness right. She would gladly have called to Doris even then, had she not feared to embarrass her further. The tears welled up, but she brushed them away, so that not one step of the young people's progress up the hill might be lost to her wistful sight. Suddenly she cried out in such dismay that Miss Sophia, dozing as usual, was startled wide awake, and came to see what was the matter, as soon as she could rise from her chair and reach the door.

"Look at that poor, dear child!" cried Miss Judy, quite overcome. "Just see what she is doing, sister Sophia! And that, too, is all my fault. How was Doris—dear, dear little one—to know that she must never dream of taking off her gloves in the presence of a gentleman, when I have never thought to point out to her the indelicacy of doing such a thing?"

And Doris would not know what to do when they reached the house. If Sidney were only at home, it would not be so bad—so Miss Judy said. But Sidney was sure to be out "on-the-pad," as she herself described her professional rounds, never suspecting that she might be using a corruption from the French of *en balade*. Miss Judy knew Sidney's habits too well to hope for any help from the chance of her being at home. She—dear little lady—was quite in tears now and almost ready to wring her hands.

Meanwhile, the young man and the young maid went happily along under the white-tasselled locusts, between the sweet-scented green fields and the blooming gardens, toward the silver poplars. They, themselves, were not thinking of the conventionalities, nor troubling their handsome heads about the proprieties. Doris was chatting shyly, expressing Miss Judy's thoughts in Miss Judy's phrases with most winning quaintness, and at the same time with an unconscious revelation now and then of her innocent self. A gleam of sweet humor shone fitfully from her soft, dark eyes as firelight flickers through the dusk, and in this, at least, gentle Miss Judy had no part. Doris told, with the dimple coming and going and many swift, shy, upward glances, of Monsieur Beauchamp's bordering the lettuce beds with *fleur-de-lis* because—as he said—they were the imperial lilies of France; and of the scorn of the Empress Maria, who pulled them up as soon as his back was turned,—so that his feelings should not be wounded,—although she was quite determined thus to make room for the early turnips. And then, gaining confidence from Lynn Gordon's rapt attention, Doris went on to approach literature. She had an instinctive feeling that Miss Judy would have advised books as a theme for polite conversation with a stranger. She had read, so she said, Goldsmith's poems and some of Moore's; Miss Judy thought Burns's poetry better suited to a gentleman's than to a lady's taste, so Doris said. She acknowledged knowing very little about novels, except *The Children of the Abbey* and some of Miss Jane Austen's tales. Miss Judy thought, so Doris went on to say, that prose was less refined than poetry and more apt to be worldly; so that she considered it best to wait till one's ideals were well formed and firmly fixed, before reading very many novels. Miss Judy thought a great deal of ideals; she considered them, next to principles, the most important things in the world, Doris said earnestly, looking gravely up in Lynn Gordon's face. There was one novel, however, that Doris was most eager to read. It was a very, very new one, and it was called *Vanity Fair*. Perhaps Mr. Gordon might have heard of it—then quickly—possibly he had even read it. She colored faintly when he said that he had read it and that he scarcely thought her quite old enough yet to enjoy it, although it was a great book.

"So Miss Judy thinks," sighed Doris. "Perhaps she will allow me to read it when I am older. Anyway, she lets me read all the poetry in her mother's dear old *Beauty Books*, and it's beautiful. The poems haven't any names signed to them, but that doesn't matter. They go with the pictures

of the lovely, lovely ladies—all with such small waists and such long curls, the whole picture in a wreath of little pink roses and tiny blue forget-me-nots—those dear old *Beauty Books* that smell so sweet of dried rose leaves!"

XIV

MAKING PEACE

Sidney was not only out "on-the-pad" that day, but she came home later than usual. The children and Uncle Watty were hungry and waiting impatiently for the basket; and there were many urgent household duties to be done before bedtime. Doris made one or two shy attempts to speak of her dancing lesson and the incident which had occurred in connection with it. But speaking to Sidney in the rush of her domestic affairs was like trying the voice against the roar of a storm. So that Doris was compelled to put off the telling till the next morning.

On the next morning, however, there was even less chance for a quiet word than there had been on the night before. Sidney was up betimes, to be sure, and bustling round, but it was merely in order to be ready for an important engagement, a most important one, which brooked no delay. It was barely nine o'clock when she set off up the big road, with her ball of yarn held tightly under her left arm, and her knitting-needles flying and flashing in the sunlight. Her sunbonnet was pushed as far back on her yellow head as it could be, to stay on at all, and such was her stress of mind that she took it off and hung it on the fence, and let her hair down and twisted it up again, thrusting the comb back in place with great emphasis, no less than three times, within the few minutes during which Doris stood at the gate looking after her.

It was a hard task which lay before Sidney that day. She was the peacemaker, as well as the funmaker, for the entire community. One fact was as well known, too, as the other, but there was nothing like an equal demand for the two offices; for the Oldfield people dwelt together, as a rule, in such harmony as Sidney found, not only monotonous, but even a little dull now and then. It is but natural to wish to exercise a talent, and to be unwilling to hide it, when we know ourselves to be possessed of it in no common degree. When, therefore, some foolish joke of Kitty Mills's set the long-smouldering sense of wrong fiercely blazing in Miss Pettus's breast, Sidney could but feel that her longed-for opportunity had come at last. She was not in the least daunted by the knowledge that the quarrel was an old one, newly broken out afresh like a rekindled fire, and consequently much harder to mend, or even to control, than if it were new. Nor had her ardor been lessened in the slightest by finding that everything which she had said on the previous evening had served but as oil to the flame of Miss Pettus's burning wrath. Sidney's self-confidence and courage, being of the first order, only rose with all these obstacles. They merely put her all the more on her mettle, and she had rested well and confidently through the night, satisfied to have secured Miss Pettus's promise not to say or to do anything until the following morning. Ten hours' sleep must cool even Miss Pettus's temper in a measure, Sidney thought, like the real philosopher that she was, and she herself would be better prepared with arguments after time for reflection. Miss Pettus had flared up like gunpowder, then as always, when least expected, so that Sidney had hardly known at the moment what to say.

And for all her reliance upon her own strength and tact, she had none too fully realized the necessity for prompt action. It was lucky, indeed, that she was early; for, early as she set out, she met Miss Pettus coming down the big road "hotfoot," as Sidney said afterward, already on the way to see Kitty Mills. It was not of the slightest use, Miss Pettus cried,—beginning as soon as she came within speaking distance of the peacemaker,—not of the least use in the world for Sidney to begin again arguing about Kitty Mills's never meaning to cheat anybody. She, Miss Pettus, was sick and tired of having things smoothed over, and of being told and told that she was mistaken. She was not mistaken. The facts stood for themselves: Kitty Mills had said when she swapped the dorminica for the yellow-legged pullet and a bit to boot, that the dorminica laid big eggs. Let Kitty Mills deny that if she dared! Then let Sidney, or the whole of Oldfield, come and look at the little eggs that that dorminica did lay. It was bad enough to be so cheated in a hen trade, without having it thrown up to you almost every day of your life, in some silly joke. What did Kitty Mills mean, except insult, by sending her word that she couldn't expect a fat hen to lay the same up hill and down dale. And then, as if that were not enough, what did Kitty Mills do, but send back that same yellow-legged pullet, and even the very same bit, offering to swap again. All this Miss Pettus demanded breathlessly in unabated excitement.

"I give you, and anybody else, my solemn word, as a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, that that was the tenth time that the identical yellow-legged pullet and the identical bit have been toted up this hill and toted down again. Kitty Mills offers to swap back every time she thinks of it, just to be aggravating. No, you needn't talk to me, Sidney. Kitty Mills means to show me that she believes it's the pullet and the bit that I care about, not the principle of the thing."

Plainly it was now become a case for diplomacy, not for further argument. Sidney, therefore, said simply, like a wise woman, that she would go at once and try to make Kitty Mills see how foolish she had been.

"I told Miss Pettus," Sidney said later to Kitty Mills, when giving her an account of this encounter with Miss Pettus, "that there was no more satisfaction in quarrelling with you than in fighting a

feather bed. But I couldn't do much with her. Nobody can budge 'er, once her dander is up. I left her there, planted right in the middle of the big road, with her skirt dragging behind, and held high before, showing her pigeon-toes turned in worse than ever, and her bonnet hung wild over her left ear, as it always is when she's in one of her tantrums. And now I've come after you, and I want you to stop laughing,—right off the reel, too,—and listen to what I've got to say. I'll vow I don't know what to make of you myself, Kitty Mills! What's this I hear about all the Millses a-swarming down from Green River, and about you're inviting them to dinner? It certainly does seem as if the more they pile on you the better you like it."

Mrs. Mills, trying to stop laughing, and wiping her eyes, protested (laughing harder than ever) that Sidney was talking nonsense. She declared that nobody was piling anything on her. She said that she was always delighted to have Sam's sisters come, because Sam liked to have them, and Father Mills liked it, too.

"Well, they oughtn't to like it; they ought to be ashamed to like it. It's nothing less than scandalous to allow it, when you've got to cook the dinner after nursing all night, and the weather's getting real warm," said Sidney, sharply, jerking out a knitting-needle, and slapping the ball of yarn back under her arm.

"But you know, Sidney, neither Sam nor Father Mills have much enjoyment. Sam's had a mighty hard time this winter, with the misery in his back, coming on whenever he tried to do anything; and all his bad luck too."

"What bad luck?" demanded Sidney, hard-heartedly.

"Why, didn't you know about his corn? Every ear of his share of the crop, that his tenant raised on that field of mine, rotted right in the pen, when nobody else lost any. I declare I can't yet see how it was."

"Did Sam cover his pen as everybody else did?" asked Sidney, relentlessly.

Kitty Mills stared, growing grave for an instant or two, being much puzzled. She wondered what in the world the question could possibly have to do with her husband's loss of his corn.

"No. He didn't cover the corn," she replied, much at a loss still. "He thought the winter was going to be drier than it turned out to be. And he doesn't often make mistakes in prophesying about the weather. He's a mighty close, good observer of all the signs. I've known him to sit still a whole day, without getting out of his chair, watching to see whether the ground-hog saw its shadow."

"Yes, I lay that's all so. I reckon he would sit still long enough to find out almost anything," responded Sidney, dryly. "There's not much use in talking to you, Kitty Mills; you're just as unmanageable in your way as Miss Pettus is in hers. But I know how to get round her if you'll help me do it. You know as well as I do how good-hearted she is, in spite of that peppery temper of hers."

Kitty Mills nodded silently, laughing again so that she could not speak.

"Well, I want you to let me ask her to come down here and take care of the old man, while you are getting dinner for that gang of Millses—when they swarm down from Green River. I would offer to do it myself, but I think I can help you more by talking to the Millses while you are busy about the cooking."

"Of course you can," assented Kitty Mills, eagerly. "And you mustn't let me forget to fix up a basket full of the nicest things for Uncle Watty and the children."

"Never mind about that now. Only I'll tell you that I'm not going to pack off the cooked victuals. You've got all the work you can do. But you may give me something raw. We won't bother now about the basket. The main thing is to settle this everlasting old dorminica! I never was so tired of anything in all my born days, as I am of that contrary old hen, and there's only one way to settle her. If you'll let me ask Miss Pettus to come, she will do it in a moment—just to make you ashamed of yourself," Sidney said, trying not to smile, knowing that to do so would be to start Kitty Mills laughing again.

The quarrel having been thus adjusted, Sidney went to tell Miss Judy about it, knowing how pleased she would be to hear it, even though the news seemed to describe a mere truce rather than to be a declaration of peace. The little lady was just crossing the big road, returning from a visit to Tom Watson and from a futile effort to cheer Anne. She stopped at her own gate, feeling depressed by what she had just seen and looking rather sad, and waited for Sidney to come up, welcoming her as one welcomes a strong, fresh breeze on a heavy day. They sat down in the passage, where Miss Sophia was already seated, and the two little sisters listened to all that Sidney had to tell of the quarrel, without the vaguest notion that they were hearing a truly humorous account of an utterly absurd affair. Instead, they began listening with the gravest concern, which turned gradually to the happiest relief.

Miss Judy's thoughts, however, were too full of Doris and the dancing-lesson and the events of the previous day to talk long about anything else. She accordingly told Sidney the whole story in minutest detail, as soon as she could get in a word, wondering somewhat that Sidney had not already heard it from Doris, until the circumstances were explained. With the mention of the young man the same thought stirred, silently and secretly, in both the women's breasts, naturally enough, since they were both true women. It had, indeed, stirred in Miss Judy's innocent heart

while she lay dreaming with her blue eyes open in the darkness of the preceding night. But neither Miss Judy nor Sidney spoke of what they were feeling rather than thinking. Women rarely voice these subtle stirrings of the purely feminine instinct, if indeed they have any words for what they thus feel. All that Sidney said was to remark, in a matter-of-fact tone, that she must be going, as the sun was getting high, and she had several pressing engagements to keep before she would be free to fulfil her promise to help Kitty Mills entertain that gang of Millses, swarming down from Green River.

"If I can get away in time—for I'm engaged to take supper with Mrs. Alexander, as the doctor has gone 'way out on one of his long trips to the country—I'll drop in at old lady Gordon's and see what the old Hessian is about."

Miss Judy shook her little curly head at Sidney's calling any one such a hard name. She could not let such a serious matter pass without remonstrance. Yet at the same time she smiled and looked rather mysterious. She had secretly hit upon a nice little plan while talking about Doris and the young gentleman, and she could hardly wait till Sidney was out of hearing before disclosing it to Miss Sophia.

"Of course I couldn't mention it to Sidney until I knew your opinion, sister Sophia. I am sure, though, that I am only expressing your ideas—less well than you would express them yourself—when I say that it is our plain duty to do something at once, to show our high regard for Doris, something to place her in a proper social light at a single stroke. It is all important that a girl should be properly launched;" Miss Judy went on as though she had given long and deep consideration to the subject, and as if she and Miss Sophia were the all-powerful social dictators of a large and complicated circle of the highest fashion. "Just think what a difference it might have made for us, had our dear mother lived and Becky's too, poor child."

"Just so, sister Judy," responded Miss Sophia, with the greatest promptness and decision.

"I thought I could not be mistaken as to your views and wishes," said Miss Judy, truly gratified. "And you don't think, do you, that it is at all necessary for us to do anything very elaborate or—expensive?" she continued, as if it were solely a consideration of the finest taste. "To my notion a tea would be most genteel, most highly refined; but you are, of course, the one to decide. Your judgment is always more practical than mine. I should not dare rely upon my own in so important a matter. But as I look at it, a tea would serve as well or better than anything else we could do to show everybody—including old lady Gordon and her grandson, who may not, being a stranger, and seeing Sidney and Uncle Watty, understand how Doris has been brought up—the high estimation in which we hold the dear child."

"Just so, sister Judy," responded Miss Sophia, with positively inflexible firmness and almost abrupt promptness, when she now began to understand that eating was in question.

"It is really a very simple matter to arrange a tea," Miss Judy went on eagerly, her sweet face growing rosy. "There's mother's sea-shell china, so thin, so pink, and so refined. And there's her best tea-cloth that she planted the flax for, and bleached and spun and wove and hemstitched—all with her own dear hands. I am sure that the darn in the middle of it won't show at all, if we set the cut-glass bowl over it. And we can fill the bowl so full of maiden's blush roses that the nick out of the side will never be seen. Mother's sea-shell china and the blushes are about the same color. Why, I can actually see the table now—as if it were a picture—all a delicate, lovely pink!" cried little Miss Judy, blushing with eagerness, and all a delicate, lovely pink herself. "And the food must be as dainty as the table. Something very light and appetizing. Isn't that your idea, sister Sophia?"

Miss Sophia assented as usual, but not quite so promptly, nor quite so cordially, and anybody but Miss Judy must have seen how her face fell. She had known so many things that were light and appetizing, and so few that were really satisfying—poor Miss Sophia!

"Delicate slices of the thinnest, pinkest cold tongue will be the only meat necessary. Anything more would be less genteel, and I am almost certain that Mr. Pettus would exchange the half of a beef's tongue for the other head of early york. Don't you remember, sister Sophia, how much he liked the other two—the ones he took in exchange for the sugar?" Miss Judy chirruped on, with growing enthusiasm. "And Merica could make some of her light rolls, and shape a little pat of butter like a water-lily, and put it in the smallest tin bucket with the tight top and let it down in the well by a string, till it got to be real cool and firm. For dessert we've the tiny jar of pear preserves which we've been saving so long. Nothing could be more delicate than they are, clear as amber, with the little rose-geranium leaf at the bottom of the jar, giving both flavor and perfume, till you can't tell whether it looks prettiest, tastes nicest, or smells sweetest."

Miss Judy's flax-flower eyes, bright with delightful excitement, were fixed on Miss Sophia's face, without seeing, as grosser eyes would have seen, that Miss Sophia's mouth actually watered. There was a momentary silence; and then an uneasy thought suddenly clouded Miss Judy's beaming, blushing countenance.

"I had forgotten about that new-fashioned dish. Of course we must have some of those delicately fried potatoes, some like we had at old lady Gordon's supper; they are cut very, very thin and browned till they are crisp and beautiful—dry and rustling, as the golden leaves of the fall. Yes, I am afraid the tea will not be really complete, will not be quite up to the latest fashion, unless we have a little dish of those. And we haven't any potatoes, except the handful of peach-blows that we have saved for planting." She sighed in perplexity, looking at her sister.

"Just so, sister Judy," responded Miss Sophia, more promptly and more firmly, if possible, than she had yet spoken.

Miss Judy sat for a moment in dejected silence, turning the matter over in her mind. Miss Sophia rocked heavily, the sleepy creak of her low chair mingling pleasantly with the contented murmur of the bees in the honeysuckle.

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Judy, her face illuminated by a bright inspiration. "How dull of me not to think of it before. *Now* I see how we can eat the peach-blows and plant them too! We have only to pare them very thin, being very, very careful to leave all the eyes in the peel. Then we can plant the peel and fry the inside."

"But they won't grow," protested poor Miss Sophia, almost groaning and quite desperate, foreseeing the long winter fast which must follow this short summer feast.

"Oh, but they'll have to, if we plant them in the dark of the moon," said Miss Judy, with unabated enthusiasm.

Miss Sophia, now on the verge of tears, turned her broad face away, so that Miss Judy should not see how overcome she was, and that eager little lady sprang up, without suspecting, and ran to climb on a chair in order to look in the tea-caddy. This always stood on the mantelpiece in their room. It was drier there, Miss Judy said; it was also safer from Merica's depredations, but Miss Judy said nothing about that. There was a momentary dismayed silence as a single quick glance noted the stage of its contents. She set the caddy in its place, and descended slowly from the chair, thinking deeply.

"Sister Sophia, do you happen to know whether Mr. Pettus has been getting any boxes of tea lately?" she asked casually, almost indifferently, as though it were an entirely irrelevant matter of but small consequence.

Miss Sophia, who kept better advised as to the edible side of the general store than she did regarding most things, nodded with reviving spirit.

"Then I really must go down there at once. It's a shame for me to have neglected a plain duty so long. You and I both know, sister Sophia, how much it means to Mr. Pettus to be able to tell his customers what we think of his teas. He has certainly told us often enough that our opinion has a considerable commercial value. For this reason—and on account of his being so obliging about exchanging things—it isn't right for us to be unwilling to taste any other variety than the one we like. Mr. Pettus unfortunately is aware that we care personally for no kind except the English breakfast. That no doubt makes him backward in asking us to sample the other varieties. And that is not right, nor at all neighborly, you see, sister Sophia," so Miss Judy argued, believing every word she said, with all her honest, kind little heart.

"Just so, sister Judy," responded Miss Sophia, as readily and unreservedly as Miss Judy could have wished.

Forthwith Miss Judy began to get ready for going to the store. She got out the lace shawl, which had been her mother's, and which was darned and redarned till little of the original web was left. She took it out of its silver paper and folded it again with dainty care, so that the middle point would just touch the heels of her heel-less prunella gaiters. Any crookedness in the location of that middle point would have shocked Miss Judy like some moral obliquity. The strings of her dove-colored bonnet of drawn silk must also be tied "just so" in a prim little bow precisely under her pretty chin. Miss Sophia was always anxiously consulted as to the size and the angle and the precision of that little bow, as if she had been some sharp critic, who was most difficult to please. And then, when Miss Judy had drawn on her picnic gloves of black lace, she unrolled the elaborate wrapping from her sunshade, which was hardly bigger than a doll's parasol, and turned it up flat against its short handle. Finally, having pinned a fresh handkerchief in a snowy triangle to the left side of her small waist so that her left hand might be free to hold up her skirt, she took the dainty pinch of black bombazine between her forefinger and thumb, and, with the sunshade in the other little hand, sailed off down the big road, smiling back at Miss Sophia.

She was always a brisk walker, and she had nearly reached the front of the store before Mr. Pettus knew that she was coming. But Uncle Watty, fortunately, saw her approach from his post of lookout over the whole village, as he sat on the goods-box in the shade, whittling happily, the pile of red cedar shavings rising high and dry through the windless, rainless summer days. Without stirring from his comfortable place, Uncle Watty was thus enabled, by merely putting his head in the door, to give Mr. Pettus instant warning of Miss Judy's nearness. Even then there hardly would have been time for Mr. Pettus to make the usual preparation for the little lady's visit, had she not stopped to shake hands with Uncle Watty and to inquire about the misery in his broken leg. She lingered still a moment longer to ask, with all the deference due a weather prophet of Uncle Watty's reputation, when he thought there would be rain, this being indeed a matter of importance, with the consideration of the planting of the peach-blow peel lying heavy in the back of her mind.

Mr. Pettus, meanwhile, made good use of the limited opportunity. Hastily taking up a large clean sheet of brown paper, he quickly divided it into six squares with the speed and skill of long practice. These squares he then hastily laid at regular spaces along the counter. Reaching round for his scoop, he ladled out a generous quantity of tea, all of a kind. He had but one chest of tea, yet when the contents of the scoop was distributed in six separate heaps, it looked quite as

different as he meant it to look, and as Miss Judy believed it to be.

She came in, radiant with smiles, fanning herself almost coquettishly with her sunshade, and congratulating Mr. Pettus on the growth of his business, as her beaming gaze fell upon the array of teas. To think that he should find demand for half a dozen varieties! And, by the way, that was the very thing which she had come expressly to see him about. Then followed the usual long and polite conversation. Mr. Pettus again apologized for asking Miss Judy to sample so many kinds of tea, knowing that she really liked but one kind. Miss Judy, never to be outdone in politeness, protested on her side that it was not the slightest trouble to herself or Miss Sophia, whose judgment was more reliable than her own, to test the six varieties, and, indeed, as many more as might be necessary. She really would feel hurt, so she said, if Mr. Pettus ever again thought of hesitating to send them every variety in his stock. She admitted that she should never have been so thoughtless as to let him find out that her sister and herself had a preference for one kind above another. But she begged him to believe that it was mere thoughtlessness, not any wish to be disobliging. The upshot of it all was, that the six heaps of tea were made into a parcel too large for Miss Judy to carry, and Uncle Watty, who had been an interested listener from his seat on the goods-box, kindly offered to bring it with him and leave it at Miss Judy's door on his way home that evening.

Miss Judy thought Uncle Watty's offer most kind, so very kind, indeed, that she straightway began to be troubled about inviting him to the tea-party. She, herself, did not mind his leg at all; it only made her more sorry for him, and she knew that the same was true of Miss Sophia. It was not his fault, poor soul, that his leg had been set east and west, instead of north and south, as Sidney said. Maybe young Mr. Gordon would not mind either; he certainly seemed to be kind-hearted. But there was his grandmother, who was such a game-maker. Old lady Gordon did not mean any harm, perhaps; Miss Judy never believed that any one meant any harm. Still, Doris might be mortified if she thought Uncle Watty was being criticised—which would be the cruelest thing that Miss Judy could imagine, and the furthest from the secret object of the entertainment. She was frightened, and ready for the moment to give up the tea-party. Then, brightening, she began to hope that something would occur to spare Uncle Watty's feelings—and yet keep him away from the tea-party. Thus she thought as she went home, and thus she continued thinking aloud after she fancied that she was consulting Miss Sophia.

"For of course we can't give the tea without inviting old lady Gordon. Her social position makes it essential that she shall be invited if Doris is to be properly launched," Miss Judy said just as though she were some artful, calculating schemer, dealing with some keen and suspicious stranger who was likely to raise objections. "And I am sure that I merely express your views, when I say that we could not be so discourteous as to invite old lady Gordon without also inviting her grandson, when he is a guest at her house."

And Miss Sophia answered all this artfulness firmly, even sternly, as if she were an able abetter, standing ready to carry out the dark, deeply laid plot.

XV

SIDNEY DOES HER DUTY

These pleasant plans were entirely unsuspected by Sidney. She felt, however, the need of something of the kind, and—with characteristic energy—entered forthwith into the making and the carrying out of some of her own, of a different kind, though leading in the same direction.

The call upon old lady Gordon, a first step, turned out a good deal of a disappointment. Lynn Gordon was, to be sure, in attendance upon his grandmother when Sidney appeared, and she thus secured a glimpse of him, but nothing more satisfactory, nothing nearly approaching acquaintance. As ill luck would have it, old lady Gordon, who rarely left home, chanced to be just starting to "make a broad," as the Oldfield people described visiting beyond the village. The ancient family carriage, with its fat pair of old grays, already waited at the front gate in the shade of the cypress tree. On the back of the coach was a trunk-rack, put there, doubtless, at the building of the vehicle in the days when the country gentry travelled far in their own coaches, and had need of their wardrobes on the road. Under the reign of the present mistress, who had not for years gone farther than a single day's journey from home, the trunk-rack had been turned to other than its original uses, and on that particular morning it bore a large hamper of food. This was so full and heavy that it had been all that Enoch and Eunice could do to carry it between them; and, now when it was securely strapped in its place and Enoch was seated upon the box of the coach, Eunice stood leaning over the fence, with her arms rolled in her apron, giving Enoch final directions for the serving of the luncheon, so that there might be no trouble with the mistress.

Old lady Gordon was coming down the front walk of mossy, greening bricks, leading from the door to the gate; and she looked a handsome, stately figure in her flowing white dress, notwithstanding her age and her weight. But Sidney's gaze and Sidney's interest were not for old lady Gordon; they were for the tall young man on whose arm she leaned, as if she liked to lean on it, not as if she needed its support. It was the first time that Sidney had seen him nearer than across the meeting-house. When she now observed how like his grandmother he was, she

suddenly stopped quite still and, laying her knitting on the gate-post, took off her bonnet and let her hair down and twisted it up again, very, very tight indeed.

"Good morning, Sidney. You know my grandson," old lady Gordon said carelessly, going straight on to the carriage.

She liked Sidney as she liked everybody who never bored her, but it did not occur to her to allow Sidney's—or anybody's—coming to interfere with her "making a broad" or doing anything that she wished to do. Accordingly she now ascended the folding steps of the coach, which were already unfolded for her convenience, and with her grandson's assistance deliberately settled herself in perfect comfort by unhasting degrees. Her bag, which a little negro boy presently came running to bring, was then hung inside the carriage close to her hand.

"Now!" said old lady Gordon. "Jump in, Sidney, and I'll take you home. It will not be at all out of my way, and you can tell me the news as we go along."

Sidney, surprised, stood hesitating. She had been looking on, taking notes for future conversational uses. It was not every day that she could gather such good materials; and she had not lost a detail of this starting of old lady Gordon to "make a broad." And, while busily laying these matters away in the rich storehouse of her memory, Sidney had, at the same time, been calculating with certainty upon the fine opportunity for making the young man's acquaintance which old lady Gordon's going would give her. It is the first instinct of a wise mother to learn all that she can,—advantageous or otherwise—of any man who may look toward her young daughter. It is the last instinct of the wise mother to learn anything to the disadvantage of any man at whom her daughter may look. Sidney, wise enough in her blunt, straightforward way, was far from being a designing woman; she was merely trying, in her blundering manner, to do what she believed to be her duty by Doris. Naturally, then, she hesitated, unwilling to lose this good chance of making Lynn Gordon's acquaintance, the best that she was ever likely to have.

Old lady Gordon glanced at her impatiently, as she would have done at any hindrance. She had not the faintest inkling of what was passing through Sidney's mind. She had never thought it as well worth while to try to understand Sidney, as Sidney had always found it useful and easy to understand her. Old lady Gordon simply wished to take Sidney along in order that she might hear the news, as she would have taken the morning paper,—had Oldfield had one,—to toss it aside after turning it inside out. She saw plainly enough that for some reason Sidney was unwilling to come with her, but she did not care about people's unwillingness if they did what she wished. Old lady Gordon never made any mystery of her selfishness. She was too scornful of the opinion of others to care what anybody else felt or thought, or said or did, so long as she got what she wanted. All this was well known to Sidney; it was also perfectly plain to her that, if she did not take the seat in the carriage, old lady Gordon would make Lynn take it and go at least part of the way. Like the philosopher that she was, Sidney accordingly took the seat. One of the wide folding steps was then shut up, and on the remaining step the little negro perched himself,—just as Lady Castlewood's page used to perch on hers. No reason for his going was apparent then, or ever. But a little negro boy always had ridden on the step of old lady Gordon's coach, and the fact that a thing always had been done, has always been a good and sufficient reason for many singular things in this Pennyroyal Region—as already remarked ere this. And thus, everything now being settled to old lady Gordon's entire satisfaction, the ancient coach rumbled heavily away through the dust.

However, the heavy wheels had hardly made a dozen revolutions before they were at the Watson homestead, which was the place nearest to old lady Gordon's. There Sidney called to Enoch Cotton to put her down; and get down she would and did, in spite of old lady Gordon's impatient protest that there had been no time for the telling of news; regardless even of her hasty, half-contemptuous offer to send Uncle Watty and the children a bag of flour. Sidney had her own ideas of dignity and self-respect; moreover, she held to them more firmly than prouder people, having finer ones, often hold to theirs. Yet she was always good-natured, no matter how firm, and she now merely laughed, as old lady Gordon drove away as angry as she ever thought it worth while to be over anything save some interference with the regularity and the perfection of her meals.

Sidney took off her sunbonnet and hung it on the fence, and let her hair loose and twisted it up again, while having her laugh out before going in the house. There was not a grain of malice in her frank shrewdness. Adversity's sweet milk had been her daily drink, ever since she could remember. Old lady Gordon herself would have been amused at the good-humored account of her own starting to "make a broad," could she have heard Sidney telling Tom and Anne Watson about it. For that handsome old pagan had a wholesome sense of humor. But Tom Watson apparently did not hear; his miserable, restless eyes never turned toward Sidney, never for a moment ceased their fruitless quest of the empty big road. Only a pale shadow of a smile flitted over Anne's white, tense face. And Sidney, seeing that her efforts were wholly wasted, soon arose to go on her way, and Anne went with her to the gate—as far as she ever went from her hopeless post, except for the breaking of bread on the Sundays when there was preaching at her own church; and for an hour now and then, on prayer-meeting nights, when she felt that her own supplications alone were not strong enough. She held Sidney's large, firm, rough, capable hand longer than usual, as if she instinctively sought strength and courage in clinging to it. Her clear eyes, too, were full of a silent, unconscious appeal, and Sidney said, in answer to the look, that she would come again the next day and every day, if her coming could help in the least. Anne simply bowed her head; she did not attempt to speak, and in truth there was nothing to be said.

She made no mention of any inducement to Sidney to come; she did not think of it, nor indeed did Sidney. Yet, when Anne did think of it, later in the day, she was glad to send a large basket, and Sidney was more than glad to have it sent.

That night Sidney dreamt of Tom,—as a good many people did after seeing him,—and the thought of him so weighed upon her on awakening at dawn, that she hurried through with her housework in order that she might go to Anne. But she had only the earliest morning hours for domestic duties, the rest of her time being always fully occupied with her professional rounds; and she found much to do every morning before starting out. On this particular morning there were unusual affairs of rather a pressing nature. Uncle Watty had discovered a bumblebee's nest under the mossy roof close to his bed. It was never the way of Uncle Watty to submit to any discomfort which he could avoid by complaining, and he was not unnaturally anxious to have this removed without unnecessary delay. Sidney, ready and resourceful, quieted his fears. She knew —so she declared—just how to get the bumblebee's nest down without the least trouble or hurting any one. As soon, therefore, as the kitchen was in order, she bustled into the room where Doris sat sewing behind the white curtain. Sidney put the broom on end in its accustomed place, and began rolling down her sleeves, getting ready to move upon the citadel of the bumblebees. When a thing—large or small—must be done, Sidney was not one to let the grass grow under her feet. She had reached the door of the passage, meaning to climb to the loft and to awaken Uncle Watty as a mere matter of precaution before beginning operations, when Doris's voice caused her to pause.

"I haven't had a chance, mother, to tell you that Mr. Gordon was here yesterday in the cool of the evening, before you came home. He didn't come in. He only went into the garden," Doris said, simply.

Sidney stopped and stood still, silently gazing at her daughter.

"He came to see the pretty-by-nights. He said he had never seen them open with the falling of the dew," the girl went on, like a child.

"Anybody's welcome to look at the pretty-by-nights," responded Sidney, with cautious non-committal indifference.

"I told him I knew you wouldn't care," said Doris, more confidently. "And then he asked if he might come early this morning to look at the morning-glories. He thought they must be lovely—such big ones, red, white, and blue—all over that side of the house."

"They're well enough in their place," said Sidney, off-hand. And then, carelessly, after an instant's pause, "What did you say?"

"He said he was coming—before I could say anything." Doris thus placed the responsibility where it belonged, made timid again by her mother's manner, which she did not understand. "He may be here now, at any moment."

"Well, it won't hurt the morning-glories a mite to be looked at," said Sidney.

She stood still a moment longer, turning this unexpected announcement in her mind. Then, without another word, she went back to the kitchen and took up the plate containing Uncle Watty's breakfast, which she had left on the stove to keep warm. He could eat it cold for once, she resolved, as she passed through the room. Doris, humming over her sewing, and looking now and then down the big road, did not see what her mother was doing. Strong, active, Sidney swiftly gained the loft, making as little noise as possible. Uncle Watty's bedchamber was a corner of the loft cut off from the rest by a rough partition, and she approached the door of it with noiseless caution. Uncle Watty never thought of locking or even of shutting it, but Sidney, after setting the breakfast on the floor, inside the door, now closed it softly and turned the key. There was an old chest sitting near by, and this she managed to drag across the door without much noise. Then she listened for a space, with her ear against the door, to make sure that Uncle Watty was still fast asleep, and to consider the security of the barricade. Satisfied now that all was secure, that he could not get out, however hard he might try, she went downstairs, feeling that she had done her utmost for Uncle Watty as well as for Doris. She was faithful in her service to her husband's brother; she had accepted him as a sacred legacy when her burden was already heavy enough. She had never allowed the fact that he would not do anything for his own support to affect her regard for him, nor to lessen her efforts to provide for him; she had never minded his whittling, nor his mis-set leg, except to be sorry for him. And yet, notwithstanding all this, she, with her shrewd common sense, saw no good that it could do him, or Doris, or anybody, for him to come bumping and stumbling down the ladder just at the time when the young gentleman from Boston was likely to be calling upon Doris. Recalling the likeness to his game-making grandmother, which had struck her as so marked on the previous day—which had indeed impressed her as being of "the very same cut of the jib," as Sidney phrased it to herself—she made up her mind, then and there, that he should see no reason to laugh at Doris or Doris's kin, if she could help his seeing Uncle Watty.

Coming now into the room where Doris still sat quietly sewing, in the dull brown dress, Sidney was tempted to tell her to put on the blue gingham which Mrs. Alexander had given her; but on second thought did not. Secretly she doubted whether any other color would reveal the soft, pure whiteness of Doris's skin so perfectly as the faded brown. She accordingly left the girl to her own devices, and contented herself with seeing, with even more than the usual care, that the rising sun of red and yellow calico was precisely in the middle of the bed, that the trundle-bed was quite

out of sight under the big bed; that the snowy scarf over the chest of drawers fell perfectly straight at the fringed ends; and that the best side of the rag rug, the sole covering of the rough, well-scoured floor, was turned up. Finally, she hurried into the garden and gathered a great, tall bunch of blue larkspur, and put it in her best white pitcher, and set it on the chest of drawers. She gazed at it with her head critically on one side, after setting it down; and, indeed, the vivid coloring of the homely flowers against the whitewashed logs was a pleasing sight, which might have gratified a more exacting taste than hers.

An uneasy remembrance of Kate and Billy suddenly flashing into her quiet mind, disturbed it, and sent her seeking them in haste. It was unlucky that the day chanced to be Saturday, otherwise they might at once have been despatched to school, and so kept out of the way without Doris's knowing anything about it. Sidney was not clear as to why she did not wish Doris to know that she meant to keep them out of the way. Her daughter's sensibilities, refined by nature, and super-refined by Miss Judy's training, were a long way beyond Sidney's primitive comprehension. She had, however, a general idea that all very young girls were what she called skittish, and most of them, consequently, greatly lacking in sound common sense. So that it seemed to her, on the whole, best to do her own duty as she saw it, saying nothing one way or another, and leaving Doris alone. Sidney had no doubt concerning her own duty. In the circle in which she had been reared, the young man who failed to find a clear and open field the first time he came to see a girl was sure not to come again. He understood as a matter of course, and as he was intended to understand—when he found any of the family near by—that he was not expected or desired to come again. It was consequently a perfectly plain and simple case from Sidney's plain and simple point of view. She did not know what Doris thought of the young man; she did not care what the young man thought of Doris. She had no distinct ultimate object. No mother was ever farther from any arbitrary purpose, or even the remotest wish, to take the shaping of her daughter's future in her own hands. Sidney, honest, strenuous soul, meant simply and solely to give Doris a chance, without hindrance, to shape it for herself.

Thus, as single-minded as it is ever permitted any woman to be, Sidney took the broom from its resting-place behind the door, and fared forth to mount guard over Billy and Kate. The children were peacefully at play in the back yard under the cherry tree. They had been forbidden to touch the cherries, which were to be exchanged for shoes at the store, and they only glanced wistfully up at the reddening branches now and then, as they went on with their harmless game of mumble-peg. Sidney turned an empty tub upside down and seated herself upon it, between the children and the house, with the broom across her knees. It was a sight which they had never seen before, this amazing spectacle of their mother thus sitting silent and idle on a week-day. But children do not marvel over the unusual as grown people do, and after a glance or two of surprise, these two played on peacefully until they heard the click of the gate latch. Then they made a dash for the front yard to see who was coming, as they were accustomed to do, and as Sidney was fully prepared for their doing now. Keenly alert, she was instantly on her feet, and, rushing between them and the gate, she waved them back with the broom, flourishing it and using it as a baton of command. The children halted, staring open-mouthed, too much astounded at first to make a sound. And then, frightened by their mother's strange behavior, they huddled together against the cherry tree and broke into loud, terrified wails. Sidney, disconcerted and quickly changing her tactics, did what she could to silence them by gentle means. She tried to soothe them in whispers, and failing, finally offered to bribe them to be quiet. If they were perfectly quiet till the company went away, she would give them, so she whispered, one of Miss Pettus's cherry pies.

"The one with the—cross-barred—top," sobbed Billy, intentionally raising his piercing voice several keys as he made this stipulation.

Sidney nodded. The boy's shrewdness in thus taking advantage of an unusual opportunity pleased her. Billy would never let chances pass him by as they had passed his poor father. Kate's behavior was always a reflection of Billy's, and there now came a lull. But Sidney did not relax her vigilance in the least, and still sat immovable on the tub with the broom resting on her shoulder like a sentinel's bayonet. The children, more than ever wondering, though silently, did not return to their game, but clung to the shelter of the cherry tree, excitedly peering round it in growing wonder at their mother's unaccountable conduct. The little group now made a singular spectacle, one so very singular indeed, that no neighbor could think of passing without inquiry. Fortunately, however, no one went along the big road for several minutes. Meantime Sidney, sitting bolt upright and rigid on the tub, with her back to the house, and with her eye on the children, and the broom over her shoulder, ready for action, followed with her keen ears everything going on in the room. She heard the deep tones of the young man's dominant voice, and the soft murmur of Doris's shy replies. She knew by the sounds when the two young people went out of the house to look at the morning-glories, although the vines were on the other side of the house and quite out of her sight. Thence she traced them with intent listening, though she could not hear what they said, to the trellis over the garden gate, now richly hung with the mauve beauty and sweetness of the virgin's-bower. And then into the garden among the sunflowers and hollyhocks and columbine and larkspur and heartsease and the riot of June roses, common enough, yet gay and sweet as the rarest. Sidney could tell just where they paused as they wandered about the little garden; now they were looking at the sweet-williams, now at the spice-pinks, and now they were bending over the bunch of bleeding-heart, with its delicate waxen sprays of pink and white hearts—strung in rows like a coquette's cruel trophies. To Sidney, thus keenly, alertly keeping track, everything seemed going well; Billy and Kate too now moved quietly as though to return to their game of mumble-peg, so that, almost reassured, she was about to lower the broom, when she was

disturbed by hearing her name called.

She sprang up, motioning with the broom, signalling the children to be still, and turned to see the doctor's wife leaning over the fence, and beckoning to her.

"What on earth is the matter?" asked that lady. "I've been watching you from my porch—"

She broke off, falling silent, at an energetic, imperative gesture from Sidney, and she moved along down the line of the fence, farther away from the garden, in response to Sidney's mysterious signals.

"Hush. Speak low," said Sidney, bending over the fence and speaking herself in a hoarse whisper, "Doris has got a *beau*!"

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Mrs. Alexander under her breath, but not as yet much enlightened as to the cause of the extraordinary manœuvres which she had witnessed. "And who is it?"

"Old lady Gordon's grandson," said Sidney, trying vainly to keep the triumphant note out of her voice.

The doctor's wife involuntary pursed up her mouth; had she been a man, she certainly would have whistled. "Indeed!" was all she found to say.

"And why *not*?" Sidney flashed out, replying to the look rather than to the word. "*Why* not—I ask you, Jane *Alexander*? I have never gone around bragging about Doris's pretty looks and ladylike ways, which goodness knows she owes to the Lord and to Miss Judy, not to me; but if there's another girl in this whole Pennyroyal Region that can hold a candle to her—"

"Mercy sakes alive," gasped the doctor's wife. "What's the use of your going on like that to me, Sidney? You know as well as I do what the doctor and I have always thought of Doris."

But Sidney, aroused as only a slight—whether real or supposed—to a favorite child can arouse the most calmly philosophical mother, might have said a good deal more in support of Doris's smartness and sweet disposition—these and other things were in truth on the very tip of her tongue, when, fortunately for the doctor's wife, a sudden noise drew their attention toward the roof of the house. Uncle Watty had at last succeeded, after much difficulty and several unheard shouts, in getting his head out of the garret window close to the chimney, and, now catching sight of Sidney, he indignantly demanded to know why he could not open his door, and peremptorily ordered her to come at once and let him out. She went flying over nearer to the window and in a low-toned diplomatic parley persuaded him to wait a few minutes, finally even inducing him to take in his head until she could come. It was only a momentary interruption, but it gave Mrs. Alexander time to think, and, when Sidney returned to the fence, still holding herself with cold, resentful dignity, the doctor's wife was ready with a softening proposition inviting Kate and Billy to go home with her to help gather cherries on the shares.

"Very well," said Sidney, shortly. She was not by any means entirely placated, but she never rejected a good bargain merely on account of some private feeling. "There's no need, though, for them to go out through the front gate. They can just as well get through this hole in the fence. It's big enough if they squeeze tight," she added, still on guard.

She gave the children an assistant shove which carried them through the narrow space of the broken board, hushing them to continued silence by making a hissing sound through her teeth.

"There!" she exclaimed, under her breath, when the two trembling, bewildered culprits stood beside the doctor's wife in the big road, casting curious glances from their mother to the house. "Now, Jane, see that they whistle every minute of the time they are in the cherry tree; or I won't have a cherry and you won't have many, and these children will be drawn into double bow-knots. Mind now—don't let 'em stop whistling for a single minute."

Mrs. Alexander nodded understandingly as she took the children by the hand to lead them away; nevertheless, Sidney thought it best to make sure by giving the broom a last threatening flourish. Then she returned to her post on the tub, facing the house, however, during the rest of the hour through which she faithfully fulfilled sentinel duty.

XVI

THE SHOCK AND THE FRIGHT

The children thus flown like birds out of a cage, Sidney managed to get Uncle Watty down the stairs and off to his seat before the store door, all unobserved by the young couple, who were so absorbed in the bleeding-heart, so enchanted under the virgin's-bower, so enthralled by the heartsease. When at last Lynn Gordon himself was gone, Doris found her mother quietly at work in the kitchen, and saw no trace of the heroic measures which she had resorted to. Doris asked timidly why she had not come in while the visitor was there, feeling instinctively that this was what Miss Judy would have done. But Sidney answered quite promptly and conclusively that she was too busy to waste her time thinking of strange young men, so that Doris was more than ever

abashed, and turned silently back to her sewing and to her thoughts.

Sidney now directed her own attention to the bumblebees. She went to the front gate and called Tom Watson's black boy, her strong, clear, fearless voice ringing out suddenly on the morning stillness. She had already hired him to come by promising to mend his Sunday jacket; if he would help her get rid of the bumblebees' nest. He accordingly appeared at once in answer to her call, which reached him in his master's stable, and he carried his fishing-rod in his hand, this also being a part of the bargain. He handed Sidney the rod, and taking from her a piece of rope, which she held in readiness, he went up the rough logs at the corner of the house, and ran over the roof as swiftly and as surely as any simian ancestors could have scampered through the green heights of the tropical forests. He let the rope down within Sidney's reach. She, meantime, had fetched a jug of boiling water from the kitchen, and when she had tied this uncorked vessel to the end of the rope, he drew it up again till the jug came close under the eaves and immediately below the dangerous bunch of gray gauze; whereupon he made the rope fast to one of the curling boards of the mossy roof, all according to Sidney's direction. This done, he sped over the roof again on his hands and knees and hastened down the wall for safety, knowing what was to come. Sidney barely gave him time to drop from the corner logs to the ground, and then, grasping the fishing-pole firmly in her strong hands, she gave the edge of the roof a sharp, quick blow. The bumblebees flew out in an angry cloud, but Sidney, the dauntless, stood at her post. She struck the roof another sharp, quick blow—and another, tap-tap-tap, like some gigantic and most industrious flicker. And forthwith the bumblebees began to go zip-zip-zip—straight into the steaming mouth of the crater. It was a short shrift, and, after it, a simple matter to punch down the nest itself with the fishing pole when the last bumblebee was drowned. That ended Sidney's interest in the programme, but the negro boy was still curious, so that he took the jug into the middle of the big road to pour out its contents, and he was much gratified, with the cruelty of his age and sex, to find something like a quart of boiled bumblebees.

Sidney, free now from pressing domestic affairs, bustled into the room where Doris sat undisturbed, singing softly over her sewing.

"I must go by Tom Watson's the first thing," Sidney said, putting on her bonnet, settling her ball of yarn under her left arm, and beginning to knit. "Anne seems to be at the end of her row, poor soul. I don't believe that Tom notices anybody's coming or going. I'm sure he doesn't mine. He just sits there with his awful eyes wandering up and down the big road. But if it comforts Anne the least bit to have me go, I'm perfectly willing to keep on trying. Anyway, I'll look in there a moment before starting out on my regular round."

"I hope you can get home early," said Doris, shyly. "Mr. Gordon spoke of coming again to-day, in the cool of the evening, to look at the moonflowers."

Sidney stopped suddenly in the middle of the floor, just as she had done earlier in the morning, and looked at Doris without making an immediate reply. She took off her bonnet and shook her hair down, twisting it up again with extreme tightness.

"Well! I reckon he, or anybody else, can look at the moonflowers just the same whether I'm here or not," she said, dryly, settling the huge horn comb with emphasis. Putting on her bonnet, she began to make her knitting-needles fly, as she moved toward the door.

"Please, ma'am," pleaded Doris, bashfully. She was smiling, yet quite in earnest, in her request.

"I'll be here in plenty of time," replied Sidney, diplomatically.

She went straight across to the doctor's house, and, calling its mistress to the gate, asked in a low voice if she would be so neighborly as to keep Billy and Kate until bedtime, or until she herself came by for them. Mrs. Alexander was surprised; she had never before known Sidney to ask, or even to accept, any help in the care of her children. She had always been scrupulously careful to avoid troubling any one with them. For this reason the doctor's wife agreed readily enough to keep Kate and Billy all night, if so doing would oblige Sidney in the slightest. She would have said the same at any time, but she was especially glad to get such an early opportunity to make up the misunderstanding of an hour or two before. So far as she knew, Sidney never had actually fallen out with any one; but Mrs. Alexander had nevertheless no wish to risk such a calamity, knowing full well how dull life in Oldfield would be without a daily chat with Sidney. And then, above all, she really liked and admired and respected her. So that, altogether, she was quite warm and even cordial in her willingness to keep Kate and Billy. She told Sidney that the doctor was away on one of his long trips, and that it would be company to have the children; the obligation would be wholly on her side.

Sidney then went on down the big road well content, her knitting-needles flying faster and faster, as they always were under any unusual stress of thought. She nodded to Anne Watson, calling out as she hurried by, that she would come back to see Tom as soon as she could go to the store to speak to Uncle Watty. She found the old man sitting in his accustomed place on the goods-box at the shady side of the store door. She paused close beside him, fanning herself with her bonnet, after she had taken it off to let down and twist up her hair. For she knew very well that all the tact and art at her command would be needed to persuade Uncle Watty not to come home to supper, and to stay at the store—open and shut—till bedtime. Uncle Watty was never the one to give up his own wishes, if he could help it, or to sacrifice his supper without a struggle.

"But you can have a real good, comfortable supper right here," urged Sidney, lowering her voice, so that Mr. Pettus and his one customer might not hear. "You're mighty fond of cheese and

crackers. I'll see that you have as much of both as you can eat." She hesitated, and then, seeing that she was to be pushed to the limit of her resources, and knowing from long experience that Uncle Watty would exact the full pound of flesh, she added; "And I'll tell Mr. Pettus to give you a glass of apple toddy, too, real strong and piping hot!"

"Till the court-house clock strikes nine, then, and not a minute later," growled Uncle Watty.

Sidney was quite satisfied. She was used to getting what she wanted under difficulties. It always made her happy to succeed at all, and it never made her bitter to fail, even after much trying—this real village philosopher. How invincible she was that June day! How her knitting-needles flashed in the sunlight, flying ever faster and faster! And yet, full as her thoughts were of her own affairs, she did not forget or neglect Tom Watson. Indeed, not one of the day's regular engagements was forgotten or slighted or over-looked. She talked also as usual about almost everything under the shining sun; but her thoughts were always of the moonflowers and of Doris and of old lady Gordon's grandson.

At sundown she went to take supper with Miss Pettus, an agreement to that effect having been entered into upon the day of the truce. But she said as soon as she entered the house, that she must leave immediately after supper, as it was absolutely necessary for her to see Miss Judy before going to bed that night. Miss Pettus, whose curiosity was excessive, did not ask what she must see Miss Judy about. No one ever asked Sidney questions about her own private affairs, freely as everybody always questioned her about public matters. This may perhaps have been one of the secrets of her memorable success. Miss Pettus was merely a little miffed to see how absent-minded Sidney was. What was the use of having cream muffins when Sidney hardly noticed what she was eating! Then when Sidney asked to be allowed to leave the basket—which had been well filled for the children and Uncle Watty—till she came for it the next morning, this was such an unheard-of request that Miss Pettus's curiosity could hardly be held in leash; yet Sidney went her way without saying a word in explanation.

Dusk was already falling, and the gathering clouds in the west hastened the gloaming. Sidney passed her own house, taking care to walk on the other side of the big road, but she could make out Doris's slim white figure moving among the flowers, and she also recognized the tall, dark form near by, notwithstanding the dim light. The murmur of the gay young voices, too, musically melted into the scented stillness. Sidney did not know that she was smiling as she listened, and went on wondering what they were talking about. And she did not ask herself why she was glad that the honeysuckle smelt so sweet that night, and that so many of the great white moths were fluttering among the moonflowers.

She found Miss Judy sitting in the passage with Miss Sophia, as they were always to be found at that time on a warm evening. They were talking to each other as usual; that is to say, Miss Judy was talking of Becky, and Miss Sophia was listening, with the never-flagging interest and complete content which they ever found in one another's conversation and society. Nevertheless, they were heartily pleased to greet Sidney, and Miss Judy was particularly gratified by her coming in just at that moment. The little lady had seen Lynn Gordon passing up the big road early in the morning, and—quite in a quiver—had asked Miss Sophia if she thought he was on the way to call on Doris. Of course, she did not dream of asking Sidney anything about it, but she knew that she would tell her without being asked, in the event that he had gone to see Doris. And Sidney did tell her at once, since the telling was precisely what she had come for—that, and a consultation concerning such future steps as Miss Judy might think must needs be taken. Miss Judy hung upon every prosaic word, coloring it with her own romantic fancy, blushing rosily in the sheltering dimness of the passage, glowing with the new warmth which was fast gathering around her gentle heart. It was a bit of a disappointment that Sidney did not say what the young gentleman himself had said, or what he did or how he looked while with the dear, dear child. Miss Judy almost asked, she wanted so much to know everything there was to tell. It did not occur to her that Sidney had not been present. It did not occur to Sidney that she could have been—much less that she should have been. So utterly unlike were these two good, honest women, who were giving their whole minds to the happiness and welfare of the girl whom they both loved with their whole hearts. Most of all Miss Judy was longing to know whether Lynn had said anything of making another call. She could tell a good deal from that, she thought guiltily, feeling herself a very Machiavelli. Yet she hesitated to ask. It might possibly seem a little indelicate, a little inconsiderate of Doris, in case the young gentleman had not named another time.

"I don't think it will rain before morning," she said, observing Sidney's glance at the clouds. "Young Mr. Gordon does seem real friendly," she went on tentatively. "Perhaps he will come again—sometime."

"He's there now—twice to-day!" said Sidney, triumphantly. With the training of her profession she had awaited the most impressive moment for this crowning announcement.

Miss Judy was stunned; there was a tremor of alarm in her voice when she spoke, after a momentary silence of frightened bewilderment. "Do you mean to say, Sidney, that Mr. Gordon is at your house—with Doris now—to-night?"

Sidney nodded coolly, trying not to show the complacency which she could not help feeling. "Yes. I saw him in the garden with Doris as I came down the big road—on the other side."

Miss Judy tried to think for a space. Then she said, delicately but uneasily, "Are you quite sure

that Uncle Watty and the children will—will know how to do the honors?"

"Well, they can't do any harm! I've taken care that they couldn't. They're not there—not a blessed one of 'em! The children are over at the doctor's. Uncle Watty is down at the store, and he'll stay there, too, till bedtime—open or shut!"

As Sidney thus told what she had done, she tossed her yellow head, giving free rein to what she honestly felt to be just pride.

Miss Judy sprang up with a smothered scream. "Sidney *Wendall*! *Do* you mean to tell me that you have left Doris—that poor, poor child—to receive a perfect stranger entirely alone? Oh—oh—we must run to her. What will he think now? The other was bad enough, but this can never be made right! Run!"

She sank back in the chair, pressing her hand to her heart, which was fluttering, as it always fluttered under agitation, like some winged thing trying to escape, as perhaps it was.

"You go—don't wait for me," she gasped. "I'll—explain and—and—beg your pardon—when I get my breath. Go—go—*go*!"

Sidney had risen in blank amazement, which swiftly changed to high dudgeon under Miss Judy's incoherent reproaches. From the agitated outburst to the breathless close she had not the vaguest comprehension of the cause of Miss Judy's excitement and distress. But she saw that they were serious, and her anger vanished forthwith. She had long since fallen into the habit of doing whatever Miss Judy wished, even when she could not understand; no matter whether it agreed with her own views or not, and wholly regardless of her own stalwart opinion of that little lady's fastidious ideas, which she thought of as Miss Judy's "pernickety notions." In anything and everything concerning Doris, especially, Sidney always gave way at once without an instant's demur, and she did so now, as soon as she had sufficiently recovered from her amazement to comprehend what it was that Miss Judy wished her to do. Her good humor, too, came back quickly; it was never absent long, and she cheerfully started toward home without more urging. She went at once, stepping out of Miss Judy's sight with long, swinging strides, but soon slacking her pace, unconsciously smiling now as she sauntered. A woman who has been married is apt to smile at an unmarried woman's views of love and courtship and kindred matters. Sidney stood ready to defer to Miss Judy in most things, humbly conscious of her own ignorance and honestly willing at all times to confess it. When, however, it came to men-folks—laughing silently, Sidney loitered on up the big road, knitting much faster than she walked, for her needles flew just as swiftly and surely in the darkness as in the light.

Miss Judy shed a few gentle tears in the gloom of the passage. Her first distinct feeling was acute distress for the child of her heart. Then it was a cruel personal disappointment to have her plans for Doris's social advancement so shockingly upset. But presently Miss Judy's cheerful spirits began to rally; the tea might perhaps still place Doris properly before old lady Gordon's grandson, but it would be much harder now, owing to Sidney's distressing thoughtlessness.

"Yet she is not so much to blame, after all, poor thing," said Miss Judy, wiping her eyes, as her heart began to beat more naturally. "Sidney was not brought up as we were; we are bound in fairness to consider that, sister Sophia," pleaded Miss Judy, as if fearing that Miss Sophia might be too hard on Sidney.

Miss Sophia straightened up and opened her eyes, surprised to find Sidney gone; but she responded as usual with firm promptness. Indeed, when she had thus responded several times, more and more decidedly, as Miss Judy went on arguing with herself and thinking that she was discussing the situation with Miss Sophia, the former came gradually to feel that all would yet be well with Doris—as Miss Sophia believed and said.

The storm-clouds piled higher and blacker, and the lightning flashes lit them now and then; but Miss Judy, looking out the open door of the passage, said that she thought the cloud-bank lay too far south for them to get a shower, that it had drifted too far away from the rain quarter. The darkness deepened fast, however. Sudden gusts of wind stirred the dust of the big road, and set little columns of it whirling along the darkening highway; but there was still nothing to disturb the little sisters, sitting peacefully, contented, close together in their low rocking-chairs. Miss Judy was now chirruping quite like herself, and Miss Sophia listening and nodding alternately in happy content. Nearly asleep, she did not hear the soft rustle of Miss Judy's bombazine skirt as it slipped off in the darkness.

"You don't mind, do you, sister Sophia?" said Miss Judy, feeling, nevertheless, bound to apologize in respect for her sister. "It's too dark for any one passing to see. And it does make the back breadths so shiny to sit on them, no matter how lightly you try to sit down," she added, as if she could sit any other way, dear little atom of humanity!

Nine o'clock was their bedtime, winter and summer, although it must be said that Miss Sophia was always perfectly willing to go to bed earlier. That night they arose, as they always did, on the solemn, lonesome stroke of the court-house clock, and turned up their little rocking-chairs side by side, with the seats to the wall, tilting them so that the cat could not make a bed of the patchwork cushions, and thus be tempted from her plain duty of attending to the mice in the garret and the rats in the kitchen. The chairs being thus settled, as if for the saying of their prayers all night, Miss Judy bent down, and, taking both hands, rolled the cannon-ball out of the hollow which it had worn in the daytime, and sent it rumbling into the hollow which it had worn

in the night-time. Shutting the door, she then dropped the wooden bar across it as a mere matter of routine propriety, and, after this was done, the little sisters began to undress with their backs to one another. When they were at last quite ready to retire, when Miss Sophia was in bed and Miss Judy was on the point of ascending by means of the chair, before blowing out the candle, there was some polite discussion and a good deal of hesitation whether or not to close the window at the foot of the bed. The ultimate decision was to leave it open, Miss Judy thinking this best on account of the night's being so warm, and the clouds having drifted so far round that there appeared little likelihood of rain before morning; and Miss Sophia's thinking that she thought as Miss Judy did, in this as in everything else. The window was accordingly left open, and this final question being settled, the little sisters laid themselves down side by side, and bade one another a formal good night, and wished one another pleasant dreams, and were soon sleeping the sleep of gentle innocence and of sweet peace with the whole world.

But while they slept it happened unluckily that the clouds drifted back to the rain quarter. An ominous murmur arose louder and louder, coming nearer and nearer; the branches of the old elm suddenly swept the mossy old roof, and about midnight the tempest broke in its utmost fury. At the same instant two little nightcaps with wide ruffles lifted themselves from the pillows, unseen and unheard by each other in the darkness of the night and the crash of the storm. Both the little sisters were terrified. They were always very much afraid of a storm, and this one was terrifying indeed. But love gives courage to the most timid. And they were very, very tender of one another, these two gentle, little old sisters. Miss Judy thought of Miss Sophia's rheumatism, with the wind furiously beating the rain clear across the room, almost to the very bed. Miss Sophia thought of Miss Judy's heart trouble, which she had had a touch of that very night, and she dreaded, for her sister's sake, lest the lightning begin to flash, as the thunder boomed nearer and louder. But the loving are the daring, and each forgot her own terror in fear for the other. At precisely the same moment the two little old sisters began to get up and to leave their opposite sides of the high bed. Miss Judy, usually much quicker of movement than Miss Sophia, now moved so slowly in order not to disturb her, that she was longer than ever before in reaching the floor by way of the chair. Miss Sophia, on the other hand, hurried down the dwarf staircase backward, like a fleeing crab, fairly driven by alarm and her loving concern for Miss Judy. So that—still utterly unaware of one another's being awake, much less astir, such was the uproar of the blast and the downpour of the rain—they crept tremblingly round the opposite corners at the foot of the bed, in the blackness of the room, with tightly shut eyes, with outstretched arms guarding their faces, and thus ran into violent collision.

Neither Miss Judy nor Miss Sophia could ever recall very clearly what happened after that. The neighbors remembered only hearing, above the tumult of the tempest, blood-curdling screams and shrieks of fire, and murder, and theft, in tones which none of them recognized. The Oldfield people, men, women, and children, alarmed and panic-stricken, sprang from their beds, and rushed to the rescue through the storm and darkness in their nightclothes. The doctor alone was dressed, as he had not gone to bed, having just got home from the country. It was he—thus already afoot—who led all the rest, catching up his lantern, which was still lighted, and clubbing his umbrella for a weapon as he ran, as much alarmed as any one of all those who were rushing to the rescue. A single kick from his great boot shattered the wooden bar and burst open the front door. The outcry continuing, led him and those who followed close upon his heels to the bedchamber. When he held up the lantern, there stood the little sisters, locked together in a death-grip and quite out of their senses with fright. Their gentle little hands, which had never touched one another nor any living creature save with kindness, were fiercely clutched in each other's gray hair, hooked like bird-claws through the shreds of their tattered nightcaps; their mild eyes, which had seen only love in all their tranquil lives, were still closed against the first horrors which they had ever encountered; their soft voices, which had never before been harsher than the cooing of doves, now shrilled by wordless terror, still pierced the roar of the tempest with ceaseless shrieking. Thus it was that all the horrified neighbors found them. The doctor never knew whether he was laughing or crying when he picked them both up—one on each arm—and put them to bed as though they had been his own babies.

Dear little Miss Judy! Poor little Miss Sophia! That night comes back to most of us with a smile that is tenderly close to tears.

XVII

LOVE'S AWAKENING

But there never was any open smiling over the events of that memorable night. Miss Judy herself regarded what had happened far too gravely to allow of its seeming trivial or amusing to any one else. Indeed, she so plainly shrank from all mention of it that it was rarely spoken of at all. Everybody saw how pale she turned whenever it was mentioned, and how she pressed her little hand to her heart. So that, as no one ever knowingly gave the little lady pain, the memory soon dropped into kind oblivion.

The only reminder of it was the more frequent pressure of Miss Judy's hand to her heart, which had always been a weak, soft, fluttering little thing, and a new paleness of her sweet face which merely made its delicate blushes more lovely. The shock had been very great, there could be no

doubt of that, and there was not much likelihood of her forgetting it; but it was ever Miss Judy's way to put painful things behind her as quickly as possible, and to turn her face toward sweetness and peace as naturally as a flower turns toward the sunlight.

And she really was very happy during those first days following the fright. Her happiness always came at second hand, as perhaps the purest happiness always comes. She was happy because Doris was happy—young, beautiful, joyous, sparkling with health and spirits. Seeing this, Miss Judy found nothing lacking in her own life. And then she was so delightfully busy in building air-castles. She was, to be sure, nearly always busy in doing this, but she seemed now to have a firmer foundation to build upon than usually came within her reach. Doris and Lynn met at her house on these bright summer days, almost every day, and sometimes twice a day. Doris came at first oftener than she had ever come before, and stayed longer, on account of her own and her mother's anxiety about the effect of the shock upon Miss Judy's health. They knew how frail was the small tenement housing Miss Judy's quenchless spirit. They almost held their breath for days after that unmentionable night. The entire community, indeed, was alarmed; even old lady Gordon thought it worth while to send her grandson to see how Miss Judy was, and to warn him against saying why he came lest he frighten her. Finding Doris with Miss Judy, the young man naturally went again on the next day—and the next and the next—without being sent. Thus gradually it came about in the natural order of events that Doris and Lynn met daily in Miss Judy's house; that she saw them constantly together, and that her greatest, loveliest air-castle thus grew apace. Every day added to its height and its beauty, till its crystal minarets, towering through rainbow clouds, touched at last the sapphire key-stone of the arching heavens.

Doris and Lynn knew nothing of all this. They were merely drifting—as youth usually drifts—with the sweet summertide. In those glowing, fragrant days the season was at its greenest and sweetest. The crystalline freshness of spring still lingered in the dustless air, which was just beginning to gather the full fervor of the summer sunshine. Nature now was at her busiest, her kindest, and her cruelest—glad, blossoming, bewildering, alluring—wreathing her single relentless purpose with gayest flowers and most intoxicating perfume. The vivid beauty of the full leafage, gold-flecked by the glorious flood of sunlight, was not yet dimmed to the browning of a leaf's tip; every emerald blade of grass held its brimming measure of sap; the rank grass under foot, the thick foliage overhead, the earth and the air alike, teemed with life and pulsated with wings. And every living thing, seen or unseen, high or low, was being swept onward by the same resistless power toward the common altar. The lacelike white of the flowering elder covered the whole earth with a delicate bridal veil. Here, there, everywhere, floated the snowy foam of myriad blossoms—the crest of creation's tidal wave.

And the young man and the young maid also went the way of all innocent healthy young creatures in ripening summer, thinking little more of the titanic forces moving the world, than the birds and the bees and the butterflies. Lynn was wiser and older than Doris; yet he too was still young, and still far from any real maturity of wisdom. His knowledge of life was such as may be gained by a student who goes through a great university with a definite ambition steadily before him; and who comes from it into the world with a clear, clean, and upright conception of what a man who earnestly means to hold a high place in it should be and should do. But he was only a boy grown tall after all, and he had never seen so beautiful a girl as Doris was, or any one of such indefinable charm or of such ineffable grace.

He looked down at her as she walked by his side one day, going up the big road. They took daily walks together now without objection from any source. Only dear little Miss Judy, with her funny notions of chaperonage—which nobody understood any more than many other of the little lady's dainty whims, and which everybody indulged and quietly smiled at, as at many another of her odd, sweet ways—would ever have thought of objecting. It was, indeed, an old, well-established, and highly respected custom of the country for young men and young maids to walk alone together. Seeing them do this, the Oldfield people merely smiled kindly, as kind people do at young lovers anywhere—and sometimes nodded at one another, thus silently saying that all was well, that this was just as it should be. The very fact of these daily walks alone together made everything perfectly open and clear. Even Miss Judy's rigid scruples on the score of propriety gradually relaxed, as Doris and Lynn went so openly and frankly from her side to stroll toward the graveyard, day after day.

From time immemorial the graveyard had been the favorite trysting-place of Oldfield lovers. Perhaps the graveyard of every far-off old village always is the lovers' chosen resort. It is certainly nearly always the most beautiful and the most retired spot, yet it is also usually close by, for in death, as in life, humanity holds closer together in the country than in town, and the dead are not laid so far from the living. And then, to the young everywhere, death itself always seems so distant that its earthly habitations have no real terrors. No sadness ever comes to happy youth from the mere nearness to the Eternal Silence; nothing of the Great Mystery, vast as the universe and inscrutable as life, ever sounds for the happy young with the sighing of the wind over the long, long, green, green grass growing only over country graves, the saddening sound which older and less happy ears always hear. None of that unutterable feeling of the pain of living, and the peace of dying, ever wrings the hearts of happy lovers at the moan of the gentlest breeze through the graveyard cedars, where it seems to those who are older and sadder to moan as it never does elsewhere.

Certainly, neither of the two young people, sitting that day on the rustic benches under the tallest cedar, either heard or thought of any of these sad things. Lynn heard mainly the music of the mating birds, and thought mostly of the exquisite curve of the fair cheek almost touching his arm.

It was so satiny in its smoothness, so velvety in its softness, and so delicately tinted with the faint, yet warm, glow of rich, rare red, which gleams out of the deep heart of a golden tea-rose. And the glory of her wonderful hair! He felt, as he looked down upon her radiant head, so close to his shoulder, that he had never realized how wonderful its dazzling crown was, until he saw it now with the wondrous light of the sunset re-gilding its fine gold, and with the south wind ruffling its loveliness into more bewitching disorder. As he gazed, a sudden gust leaped over the far green hilltops and lifted the wide brim of her white hat, thus revealing the full beauty of her face.

Lynn saw it, with a sharp indrawing of his breath. A yearning so keen, so deep and tender, as to cross the narrow border between pleasure and pain, rushed into the young man's heart. It has been said what an ardent lover of beauty he was. The feeling which swept over him now was the yearning that every true lover of the beautiful feels at the sight of great beauty: the hopeless desire to hold it forever unchanged—be it the delicate flush on an exquisite cheek, which must go as quickly as it comes, the freshness of a perfect flower which must fade with the rising of the sun, or the miracle of the dawn which must soon vanish before the noontide glare. Doris seemed to him Beauty's very self, to be worshipped with all his beauty-worshipping soul, not merely a beautiful girl to be loved with all his human young heart.

She wore that day a dress of faded pink muslin, very thin, very soft, very scant, so that it clung close to her slender, supple form—a poor old dress, so old that no one could remember whose it had been first. The bodice opened daintily at the throat in the pretty old fashion known as "surplice" to the Oldfield people; and on the glimpse of snow which drifted between the modest edges of the opening—where the lily of her fairness lay under the rose of the muslin ruffles, just where the sweet curve of her throat melted into the lovely roundness of her bosom—there nestled a little cross of jet held by a narrow band of black velvet, tied around her neck and whitening its whiteness as jet whitens pearl. Such a poor little ornament! Such a poor old dress! And yet the picture that they made when Doris wore them!

Looking at her, Lynn knew well enough that he had but to loose his firm hold upon himself ever so little, to love her as he might never be able to love another woman. He never had seen, and never expected to see, such beauty as this of Doris's, for the true lover of beauty knows its rarity. And nothing else in the world so appealed to him; no charm of mind, or heart, or spirit, could ever quite make up for the lack of it, notwithstanding that he valued these qualities also, and held them higher than thoughtless youth often holds them. And yet, despite his frank recognition of the truth, he still had no thought of allowing himself to love Doris Wendall. Perhaps, all unsuspected even by himself, the instinct of the Brahmin was in him too; of a certainty, what is bred in the bone is apt to come out in the flesh. But if this were true, if he were influenced by any feeling of caste, he certainly did not suspect it. He was not vain, with the common, harmless vanity of most young men; nor was there in him any unbecoming pride of birth or position. He thought that he was held back solely by his determination to let nothing turn him from his life plans. He was wholly sincere in believing that he was strong enough to stand firm, to keep himself from loving Doris, as he knew he could love her. The thought that she might love him had never crossed his mind. The thought of being able to win her was as far from him as the thought of reaching out his arms to gather a star—so high above all earthly things had his beauty-worship enshrined her.

"I wonder what you are thinking about," he said suddenly, that day, with his eyes still on the curve of her cheek. "Of late I have begun to believe that you don't any longer think Miss Judy's thoughts exclusively," he went on, banteringly, in the freedom which now existed between them. "More than once I have seen unmistakable signs of thoughts of your own, thoughts which, moreover, were not in the least like Miss Judy's."

Doris turned with a dimpling smile, and lifted her wide-open, frank brown eyes to his darker ones. "You must not laugh at dear Miss Judy. I never allow anybody to do that. I can only wish my thoughts were always as good and sweet as hers."

"I haven't made any comparison. I've merely mentioned a difference," Lynn said, laughing teasingly, in the hope that the rare tinge of color might linger longer on her fair cheek.

And yet, in a way, he had been quite in earnest in what he had said. It was a fact that he had marked a great change in Doris, that he had come gradually to see that a simple, sound strength of mind, a sort of wholesome common sense, lay under her gentle purity as solid white rock lies under a limpid brook.

"Well, it is quite true, I suppose, that Miss Judy never thought, in all her life, of what I was thinking of just then, and what I have been thinking of a great deal lately," Doris said, slowly, shyly, as if approaching a difficult subject.

"And what is that? What were you thinking or dreaming of, when I awakened you just now," the young man asked.

"I wasn't dreaming at all. I was wide awake. I was wondering how—" with an effort, after a momentary hesitation, and in a tone so low that he barely heard, "how a girl might earn a living for several persons—for a whole family." And then, after a longer pause, a quick breath, and a sudden deepening of the rare red of her cheek, "So that her mother need not work so hard."

It was the first time that she had spoken to him of this secret wish, so long cherished. She had, indeed, seldom mentioned her mother to him in any manner whatever. The reserve was not in the

least because she was ashamed of her—such a feeling was unknown to Doris. She respected her mother and loved her, knowing, as no one else could know, how good a mother she was, how utterly unselfish, how absolutely upright, before the perpetual necessity which drove her to earn the family's bread in the only way that she knew. With her whole heart Doris loved and honored her mother. But, alas! their tastes were so unlike, their thoughts were so different, their whole lives were so far apart. And neither love nor honor nor any other of all the tenderest, noblest feelings of the truest heart, can ever bring together those whom cruel nature has set forever apart. For it is one of the mysteries of the sorrow of living that the deep rivers of many earnest lives are thus set to run side by side, and yet forbidden ever to mingle from the beginning to the end; from the unknown fountain of life to the unsounded sea of death.

Lynn had noticed more than once that a shadow fell over Doris's gentle spirits whenever, on their strolls together, they caught a glimpse of Sidney. It was usually in the distance that they saw her, going up or down the big road, with her long, free, fearless step, her bonnet on the back of her head, and her knitting-needles flying as she walked. For, notwithstanding that Lynn had gone to her house almost daily now for weeks past, she had managed, by hook or by crook,—as she would have expressed it,—to hold to her original intention of keeping out of the way, of giving him a fair field and no favor, as she said to herself. Yet the young man had gathered, nevertheless, although he scarcely knew how, a tolerably correct impression of the compelling personality of Doris's mother. Little by little he had begun, consequently, to perceive the unusual and contending influences which had made this beautiful girl what she was; and the knowledge caused him to wonder what she would become, now that she was beginning to be herself, now that the strong forces of her own character were already in revolt.

He had also divined something of Doris's dislike of her mother's means of earning a living; but he was still far from knowing how strong the feeling was, or that it had grown with her growth, gradually and steadily, until it had taken a great sudden leap—thus coming as close to bitterness as her gentle nature could ever come—soon after she had met himself. Nor had he observed that day, as they climbed the hillside to the graveyard, that Doris had seen her mother far off and that a shadow had fallen at once over the brightness of her innocent talk, through which a soft gayety often shone as color gleams out of the whiteness of the pearl.

"Do you know any girls who work? That is what I was thinking about," she went on timidly, turning her eyes away and looking toward the hills enfolding the valley; the near green hills beyond which she had never been, the far empurpled hills rimming all that she knew of the world.

"*Do* you know any working girls?" she repeated. "White girls, I mean, of course. I was wondering—I thought that if so—perhaps you might know what kind of work they do. The kind of work that might be done by a young gentlewoman of good breeding."

It was quaintly charming to hear the last thing that Miss Judy would have thought of, or dreamed of saying, so staidly uttered, in that little lady's own prim manner and in that little lady's own old-fashioned words. Lynn could not help smiling, although there was no doubting Doris's earnestness, and notwithstanding that there was something in her look and tone which touched him.

"I'll have to think," he said, half in jest and half in earnest. "No, on the spur of the moment, I am almost sure that I don't know any working girl who might be described in just those terms. There are doubtless many working girls who are ladies, but they would scarcely be likely to call themselves by such an antiquated name. They wouldn't even know themselves by so antiquated a description."

She did not smile; silently, gravely, she turned her dark eyes on his face; her own face was lovelier than ever in its wistfulness, and her dark eyes softer than ever in their unconscious appeal.

"But I am in earnest," she persisted. "Have you ever known any—any girl—like me—who worked?"

His eyes were grave too, now, and they were looking straight down into hers. "I have known very few girls of any kind," he said gently. "And I have never known one—in the least like you."

A rosy light, bright as the reflection of the sunset's glow, flashed over her face and beamed from her eyes. She did not know why she suddenly felt so happy. She bent down in sweet confusion and gathered a handful of the long, green grass, and began braiding the emerald blades with trembling fingers. Lynn watched her hands in the false security of his own strength, heedless of the spell which they were innocently weaving. He followed every movement of the little white fingers, so delicately tapering and so exquisitely tipped with rose and pearl; and he saw—as he saw all beauty—the rosy velvet of the soft little palms, and then his greedy gaze roved further and fed upon the perfection of the small feet which neither the poor little slippers nor the long grass could hide. The intensity of his gaze unconsciously brought a sort of nervous flutter into the little hands; the girl felt it, although she was not thinking of it, and her hands dropped suddenly on her lap. Her gaze, uplifted, met his again, helplessly entreating, almost with the look of a frightened child groping its way through the dark.

"But there must be girls who work. I must find out what they do. I must learn how to do it too—whatever it is. Won't you help me?"

Her lips were quivering and her eyes were full of tears.

"My dear child! Dear, dear Doris! How can I help you? You to enter the arena to struggle with brutal gladiators for the spoils which belong to the strongest and the fiercest? Help *you* to do this —you soft, lovely, tender little thing!"

He did not know that love thrilled in every tone of his voice, that passion barbed his words, winging them straight home to the girl's awakened heart. He did not know that—for her—love all at once shone out of his eyes, dazzlingly, blindingly, as a great wide door opens suddenly upon a chilly twilight, revealing all the alluring warmth, all the glowing flame of the home firelight within.

"Dear little one," he went on, blindly, with infinite tenderness, "the only work appointed for one like you is to make a paradise out of a home. A woman like you was created to be carried over life's rough places in a good man's strong arms. There is only one place in the world for you. Only one—only the warm, sweet corner of the household fire, safe behind the heads of children."

Doris was leaning toward him with her transparent face upturned, and he saw a sudden tender light tremble over its sweetness as dawning sunbeams run over rippling water, and—startled, fascinated, awed—he watched its deepening wonder, its growing radiance, its wondrous illumination, as the white curtain fell away from the lighted shrine of a spotless soul. There now followed an instant's tense waiting, with the girl's rose-red lips apart and a-quiver; with the starry darkness of her eyes softly aglow, as the evening star glows through the warm twilight; with her exquisite face sensitively alight, as the spring's tender new leaves stir, and dimple, and shimmer under a sudden shower of golden sunlight,—and then swiftly a shadow fell, as a wind-swept cloud covers the sun, sweeping all the quivering sunbeams out of sight.

Unexpectedly as a swallow darts downward, Doris bent to gather up the forgotten braid of long green grass. Lifting it with a queer little laugh, she held it out to him with a movement which was almost mocking and wholly unlike her gentle self. Her dark eyes, grown suddenly very bright, seemed actually to be laughing at him.

"Is this the kind of braids that the mermaids wear hanging down their backs?" she said, lightly. "No, I remember that their locks of seaweed flow loose, but I am sure that they are no greener than this."

He took the braid and stared at it unseeingly, as if it had been in truth some such marvel as a mermaid's hair. He did not see that she hardly knew what she was saying. In a crisis such as this it is nearly always the woman who first recovers herself, no matter how young and innocent she may be, nor how wise the man in the ways of the world. And Lynn Gordon was young, too, and far from being wise—almost as far as Doris Wendall was. He knew little of women; he had not had experience to teach him the subtlety of the simplest feminine creature; he had forgotten for the moment that even the dove is artful enough to lure danger away from her love secret.

He himself was agitated, confused, perplexed, and, most distinctly and painfully of all, he was wounded by a vague sense of injury—really hurt by a feeling that Doris had trifled with him, that she had not met his sincerity with the earnestness which he felt that he had a right to expect. He had spoken from his very heart; he had meant every word that he had said,—meant it as tenderly and as truly as the fondest, most faithful of elder brothers could speak to the most well-beloved of sisters. And yet Doris had turned from him carelessly, almost floutingly, with this light, meaningless talk about the mermaid's hair. In offended, wounded silence he gave the braided grass again into her hand, and she took it laughingly, and looked at it absently for a moment,—at this long, long, green, green grass springing from human dust,—and then she tossed it into the air so that the wind caught it, bore it a little way, and, tiring, softly laid it down on a tombstone, thus giving back its own to the dead.

Doris stood up, and the breeze bent the faded muslin about her slender young body in longer and more enchanting curves. She pointed, still smiling, to the purple clouds now pinnacling the west, and said that it was time to be going homeward. As they went down the grassy path which wound around the hillside, she talked quietly of indifferent things, much as she always did, somewhat less at random, perhaps, yet with all the accustomed gentleness and kindness and brightness and sweetness.

So that, although Lynn had little to say in response, his composure came back and his feeling of injury went away. By the time they had reached the silver poplars, dulled under the falling dusk, the chill had entirely passed, and happiness again warmed his honest heart. For such is the foolishness of love that knoweth not itself. For such a dull fellow is this giant Ambition, who must ever be vanquished by Love, the boy.

XVIII

AN EMBARRASSING ACCIDENT

The fluttering of Miss Judy's heart still kept her from fixing a day for the tea-party, anxious as she was to do so. Certain small domestic irregularities also interfered with her plan. For some time

past she had been much disturbed and perplexed by Merica's disappearing at unusual hours and in a most unaccountable manner, so that her simple and methodical household affairs had lately become gravely disordered.

On the morning after she had seen Doris and Lynn returning through the fragrant dusk from their visit to the graveyard, she felt so happy and strong that she resolved to give the tea-party on the following day, no matter how her heart might misbehave. It was really silly, as she said to Miss Sophia, to give up important things merely because your heart tried, every now and then, to jump out of your mouth and sometimes would hardly beat at all. It was so silly that she did not intend to do it any longer. But on going to the kitchen, in order to put her plans in motion at once, she was dismayed to find Merica missing, as she had been very often of late. Miss Judy saw, too, that the fire had not been kindled behind the gooseberry bushes; that not a single spiral of blue smoke arose above the thick green screen. She consequently began worrying in her mild way, wondering where Merica could be, and what the girl could mean by such unheard-of neglect of duty, especially on Monday morning. Hurrying around the house, the little lady went to the gate and looked anxiously up and down the big road. No one was in sight except Tom Watson, sitting in his accustomed place; but the sight of him always brought Miss Judy to an humble and almost frightened sense of her own mercies. She shook her head, and then bent it reverently, making with her little hand an unconscious gesture, which called up thoughts of the sign of the cross.

Ashamed to be worrying over such a small matter with Tom Watson's affliction in view, she forgot all about Merica, and, following her instinct to do something for those who were suffering, she went into the house to hold a consultation with Miss Sophia as to whether they had anything which they might send to Tom Watson, since they could do nothing else for him.

"There's that pretty tender little head of late lettuce," said Miss Judy, tentatively. "I am afraid, though, that Tom won't care much about it, but I can't think of anything else. And it's only to show our sympathy, anyway," she pleaded, seeing the reluctance in Miss Sophia's face and misunderstanding its meaning. "It would really make quite a picture if we were to put it on mother's best china plate, the one with the wreath of roses. And it would please poor Anne, whether poor Tom notice or not."

So busy was Miss Judy by this time, bustling about, preparing the little offering, that she hardly observed Merica's sudden reappearance, and did not think to hold her to an accounting for her absence. Merely telling her to make haste in starting the fire behind the gooseberry bushes, so that she might run across the big road with the plate of lettuce as soon as possible, Miss Judy thought only of giving pleasure to her neighbors. When the rose-wreathed green gift was ready the girl said, rather sullenly, that she did not see how she could be taking things to everybody all over the neighborhood and watching the boiling of the clothes at the same time, Miss Judy replied gently, though with a vivid blush, that she herself would watch the wash-kettle. This was an unpleasant task which the little lady had rarely attempted, but now she bravely entered upon it without flinching.

The white mysteries of the wash-kettle were by this time thickly veiled by a snowy cloud of steam. Its contents, boiling furiously, lifted big bubbles dangerously close to the dry, hot edge of the great black kettle. Miss Judy gingerly took up the wet stick which Merica had laid down, and timidly tried to push the bubbles away; but the harder her weak little hand pushed, the higher and bigger the bubbles arose. Frightened, and not knowing what else to do, Miss Judy knelt beside the steaming caldron, looking amid the smoke and steam like some pretty little witch working some good incantation, and tremblingly drew one of the blazing brands from beneath the kettle. As she moved the brand, a fountain of sparks from it shot upward, to come showering down, and one of these fell upon the biggest and whitest of the bubbles. Miss Judy saw this as it settled, and, although the kettle's contents were an indistinguishable, foaming mass, she knew instinctively that it was not one of Miss Sophia's or one of her own garments, which had been burned. She sank down on Merica's stool, near the gray border of spice pinks, with her limbs shaking so that she could not stand, and her heart beating as it had never beaten before or since the night of the fright. When she could move to get up, she crept over to the kettle and firmly pushed the black spot out of sight. But she said nothing to Merica about it, when the maid returned, more sour and sullen than she had gone away. In silence and dejection Miss Judy went back to the house, and tried to think what was best to do. Ordinarily she turned to Miss Sophia for advice in trouble or perplexity, resting with perfect trust upon the counsel which she thought she received. But this serious accident, which must distress her sister, she now locked in her own bosom. Had Lynn Gordon's shirts been ordinary shirts she felt that the matter would have been very much simpler. By severer economy, she thought that she might possibly have been able to buy him a new garment; although it was hard even for Miss Judy to see how the economy which they practised could be severer than it always was. But the little pension for their father's military services would not be due for another six months, and, moreover, Miss Judy would not have known where or how to get the costly, mysterious garment had she had the money, or how to find the fine tucks and the finer embroidery, which she had admired so greatly, though secretly, of course. She knew how fine the needle-work was, because she herself had been an expert needle-woman in the days when her blue eyes were stronger. For a moment a wild hope of copying the burned shirt, of working the same little rim of delicate tracery around the button holes, darted thrillingly across her troubled mind; but in another instant it was dismissed—wholly gone—with a sigh. She remembered, blushingly, that she had once heard Sidney say that the Queen of Sheba could not make a shirt that the King of Sheba would wear. Miss Judy did not

remember ever having read in the Scriptures anything about the King of Sheba, but she had confidence in Sidney's opinions of a good many matters which she felt herself to be no judge of. No, there was plainly nothing to be done, except to darn the hole as neatly as possible, and to tell Lynn the simple truth. Luckily, Miss Judy had reason to believe that the injury had not been to the splendid, embroidered, tucked, and ruffled bosom. She blushed again more vividly—and then she turned very white as a sudden thought stabbed her like a dagger. Ah, the poor little heart! It was fluttering indeed now, and beating its soft wings like a caged wild bird.

The effect of the accident upon Doris's prospects—that was the dread which suddenly struck terror to Miss Judy's heart! What would the young gentleman and his worldly, critical grandmother think, when they thus knew that she and Miss Sophia were aware of what was going on behind the gooseberry bushes? Up to this crisis the means by which Merica earned the larger portion of her wages had seemed so distinctly apart from Miss Judy's own affairs, that she had felt no personal concern about it, beyond an occasional and passing embarrassment. Now, however, the matter became, all at once, widely different. How could she offer Doris the disrespect of making an explanation? Come what would that must be avoided, for Doris's dear sake, let the cost be what it may. A few gentle tears trickled down Miss Judy's cheeks as she sat patiently darning Miss Sophia's stockings, while the latter rocked and nodded, observing nothing unusual.

Many fanciful, impractical schemes flitted through Miss Judy's mind, rather sadly at first, but gradually turning toward her natural hopefulness. The end of her thoughts now, as always, was self-sacrifice, and the sparing of others, her sister and Doris above all. If the worst came to the worst, she could get the doctor to buy a new garment; he would know what to get and where to get it,—he would even loan her the money if she were forced to borrow. Meantime, with innate optimism, she was hoping for the best, relying upon being able to mend the burned hole, which might not be so large or so black, after all. Miss Judy's cheerful spirit could no more be held down by ill luck than an unweighted cork can be kept under water. When she laid her little head beside Miss Sophia's that night, her brain was still busily turning ways and means. If the severest economy became necessary, her sister still need not know. Once before (when their father's funeral expenses were to be met), she had been entirely successful in keeping the straits to which they were reduced from Miss Sophia's knowledge. Fortunately that hard time had come in the winter, and a turkey sent them by Colonel Fielding as a Christmas present stayed hard frozen, except as it was cooked, a piece at a time, for Miss Sophia, till the whole immense turkey had been eaten in sections by that unsuspecting lady. Miss Judy chuckled in triumph, lying there in the darkness, remembering how artful she had been in keeping Miss Sophia from observing that she herself had not tasted the turkey, and of her deep diplomacy in merely allowing Miss Sophia to think it a fresh one, every now and then, without telling an actual fib. It was warm weather now, to be sure, which made a difference—and poor Colonel Fielding could send no more presents, but the way would open nevertheless, somehow; dear Miss Judy was always sure that the way would open. No matter how severely they might have to economize in order to spare Doris a great mortification, Miss Sophia need not be deprived of her few comforts. And it was for this, to spare her sister, that Miss Judy resolved to remain silent, much as she valued Miss Sophia's advice. In the darkness of the big old room a little thin hand reached out and softly patted Miss Sophia's broad back with a protecting tenderness, full of the true mother-love.

At midnight Miss Judy arose, and creeping cautiously from her sister's side, noiselessly crossed the big, dark room, a ghostly little white figure. It was not hard to find her thimble, needles and thread, and her father's near-by spectacles, even in the darkness, since everything in that orderly old house was always in the same place; and when she had found them, she softly took up the candle and matches from the chair beside the pillow, and with her trembling hands thus filled, she stole across the passage toward the parlor. She opened the door as stealthily as any expert burglar, and closed it behind her without the faintest creak. Then, softly putting down the other things, she lighted the candle, and shading it with a shaking hand, looked around for the basket of rough-dry clothes, which, for privacy more than for any other reason, was always put in the parlor over night between washing and ironing. The stiffness with which some of the well-starched garments asserted themselves rather daunted Miss Judy when she first caught sight of them. Nevertheless, she went resolutely on, and soon found what she sought. She blushed as she gingerly drew it from among the rest, the delicate color tinting her whole sweet face, from its pretty chin to its silver frame of flossy curls. Turning the shirt over, she gave an unconscious sigh of relief to find how small the burned place really was. Burned it was, however, and she threaded her smallest needle with her finest thread and set about darning it then and there, with infinite patience and exquisite skill. As she worked, sitting on a low footstool beside the great basket, with the candle flickering upon a chair (such a pretty, pathetic little figure!) her thread involuntarily wrought delicate embroidery. While she thus wrought, she wished that she knew where gentlemen usually had their monograms embroidered on garments of this description. She could not remember ever having seen any on her father's—and she had never seen anybody else's, she remembered, suddenly blushing again. Yet she could not help feeling a little bashful pride in her handiwork. She even held it up and looked at it critically, with her curly head in its quaint little nightcap on one side,—like a bird listening to its own song,—before putting the garment back in the basket exactly where she had found it, as a measure of precaution against Merica's observing any change and gossiping about it. Every care must be taken on Doris's account. And then this being secure, Miss Judy blew out the candle and stole like a shadow back to her place by her sleeping sister, and lay down with a last sigh of relief; feeling to have done the best she could for her, for Doris, and for Lynn. She did not think of herself.

With her mind thus temporarily at rest, she soon fell asleep and dreamed a radiant vision of Doris. There was some new and wondrous glory around the girl's beautiful head, but Miss Judy could not make out what it was, though she gazed through the sweet mist of her soft dream with all her loving heart in her eager eyes. There also seemed to be some wonderful little white thing in Doris's lovely arms, resting on her breast as a bud rests against a rose; and as the light shone brighter and brighter over the rose-clouds of the silvery dream, Miss Judy saw that the rays about the girl's head were the aureole of motherhood.

"How strange our dreams are," she said to Miss Sophia, smiling and blushing, while they were engaged in the usual polite conversation over their frugal breakfast. "We dream of things we never thought of."

"Just so, sister Judy," responded Miss Sophia, who never dreamt at all unless she had the nightmare.

But the feeling of causeless happiness with which Miss Judy awakened on that morning passed by degrees into a renewed sense of uneasiness. The sound of Merica's irons banging in the kitchen appeared to arouse scruples which had merely slumbered through the night. Was it, after all, ever right to do wrong to one person in order to benefit another, even though the injured might never know of the injury? So she wondered in new alarm. It was the first time in Miss Judy's simple, gentle, unselfish life that she had been fronted by this common question, which fronts most of us sooner or later and more or less often; and she knew even less how to meet it than do those who meet it more frequently. Deeply troubled, hopelessly perplexed, she silently debated the right and the wrong of what she had done and was doing, through all the long hours of that peaceful summer day. It would have comforted her greatly to have asked Miss Sophia's advice, but she felt that any knowledge of the accident, however remote, must be distressing, and she still spared her in this as in everything else.

"Don't you think, sister Sophia, that many of poor Becky's mistakes came from not knowing just what was right? It isn't always easy for any of us to tell. We can't be so much to blame—when we are unable to see our way," she said, after a long silence, hanging wistfully upon Miss Sophia's reply.

"Just so, sister Judy," responded Miss Sophia, with such decisive firmness as made Miss Judy feel for the moment that there could be no uncertainty; that it surely must be as Miss Sophia said.

But the sight of Doris and Lynn strolling by on their daily walk set the balance wavering again. She felt the constraint in her own manner while she chatted with them over the gate. She saw the wondering and somewhat anxious gaze which Doris fixed upon her, and she tried to laugh and speak naturally. But in spite of all that she could do, the uneasy sense of wrong-doing grew steadily. She had not before fully realized how fine the young man's linen was—till she guiltily regarded it over the gate. Its very fineness and the number of its tucks filled her with a conviction of guilt toward him. She was strongly tempted to call the young couple back and make a clean breast of it. Then the fear of some possible humiliation of Doris held her from it. So that she went on, sorely troubled, still turning the matter this way and that, till a sudden thought gave her a fresh shock of fear. When the young man saw the darned place, as he was bound to do some time or other, he would be sure to think it Merica's doing. There could be no two sides to the right or wrong of allowing *that* to happen. Quite in a panic now, fairly driven into a corner, from which there was no escape, Miss Judy sprang up, and rushed out to stop the doctor, who chanced to be passing at that very moment.

He got down from his horse and came up to the fence, throwing the bridle over his arm, always willing and glad to have a word with Miss Judy, no matter how weary he might be. He saw at once that she was deeply agitated, and that her blue eyes were full of tears. A country doctor of the noblest type—as this one was—is the tower of strength on which many a community leans. He touches most of the phases of life, perhaps; certainly he comes in contact with every phase of his own environment. He is, therefore, seldom to be taken completely by surprise, however strange a story he may hear. Yet Dr. Alexander now looked at Miss Judy for a moment in utter bewilderment after she had poured out hers; his thoughts—astonishment, amusement, sympathy, understanding, and, above all, affection—coming out by turns on his rugged, open face, like rough writing on parchment.

"God bless my soul!" he said. "Who ever heard of such a thing! My dear, dear little lady! Why, you'd do that young jackanapes the honor of his life if you burnt his shirt off his back!"

Miss Judy blushed and showed how shocked she was at such loud and indelicate mention of such an intimate article of clothing.

"But I am really in great trouble," she urged gently, her eyes filling again. "If you would only tell Lynn, doctor. It seems an indelicate thing for a lady to speak of to a gentleman. If you would only break it to him, and explain to him how it happened, and that Merica was not to blame—and—and that Doris knew nothing—nothing in the world—about Merica's business."

"Of course I'll tell him," the doctor agreed heartily. "I'll tell him every word that you've told me," he said, mounting his tired old horse, which was almost as tired as he was himself. "And let the young rascal so much as crack a single smile, if he dares;" the doctor added to himself, as he rode off, looking back and carrying his shabby hat in his big hand, as long as he could see the quaint, pathetic little figure standing at the gate.

XIX

INVOKING THE LAW

That night the little lady slept the sweet sleep of a tender conscience, set wholly at rest by a full confession. Old lady Gordon also rested well, after having taken some drops out of the bag hanging at the head of her bed, thus settling an uncommonly hearty supper. So that neither of the ladies either heard or dreamed of a drama which was being enacted that same night under the dark of the moon, and which threatened to turn into a tragedy with the light of the next morning.

It was true—as has been said before—that old lady Gordon had known all along of the trouble brewing between her own cook and Miss Judy's maid of all work. She had also observed the growing fierceness of their rivalry for the heart and hand of her gardener and coachman, Enoch Cotton, but she had not, even yet, thought of interfering, since the affair had progressed without the slightest interference with her own comfort. She had merely laughed a little, as she always did at any candid display of the weakness of human nature; though she had incidentally given Eunice a characteristic word of advice.

"Don't make any more of a fool of yourself than you can help, Eunice," old lady Gordon said, with careless scorn. "You're going about this matter in the wrong way. Stop all this foolery, all this quarrelling and fighting, and stop it now—right off the reel, too. And I'll give you a big red feather for your hat. One red feather is worth more than any number of fights,—for getting a man back."

Eunice thanked her and accepted the present in dignified silence, but without saying what she herself thought of it as an antidote for man's inconstancy to woman, and her mistress had no means of knowing whether she ever really tried it or not. In fact, the whole matter passed out of old lady Gordon's mind as an unimportant incident which had amused her for a moment. And there was nothing to recall it, the warning which she had let fall having made Eunice more than ever cautious in keeping out of her mistress's sight all sign or sound of what was going on.

Thus it was that the danger grew quietly and in darkness, utterly unknown to everybody except the three dusky persons most closely concerned. It had long been unsafe for Merica to come into Eunice's kitchen, and it now became dangerous for her even to venture inside the back gate, when coming for the young master's clothes or taking them home. Eunice was the very soul of frankness with all save her mistress, the only human being of whom she ever stood in awe. She accordingly made no sort of mystery of her intentions to any one else; on the contrary, she told Enoch Cotton, in the plainest language at her command, just what she meant to do:—

"Ef ever dat reg'lar ebo darst set her hoof over dat doo' sill agin!"

And Enoch knew that she meant what she said, and that she would do it, whatever it was. The only doubt was as to the meaning of "ebo." The term may have been merely an abbreviation of ebony and nothing worse than a slur upon Merica's complexion. And yet it can hardly have been anything quite so simple and harmless, if only for the reason that Eunice was the blacker of the two rivals—if there be degrees in blackness; and, moreover, Eunice's way of using the word really made it sound like the very worst thing that one colored person could possibly say against another. At any rate, Enoch Cotton felt that the crisis was come, and he warned Merica, as any honorable man—regardless of the color of his skin—stands bound to guard, so far as he can, the girl whom he means to marry in the uncertain event of his being able to escape the widow who means to marry him. Merica was a little frightened at first, and she readily agreed to Enoch Cotton's elaborate plan of fetching the young master's clothes to the althæa hedge every Monday morning at sunup, and of handing them to her there over the fence, shielded from Eunice's argus eyes by the thick dusty foliage and the dull purple flowers. The girl also consented to her lover's waiting at the hedge every Tuesday evening at sundown to take the clothes when she fetched them back and handed them to him, under shelter of the leafy screen. Eunice saw Enoch Cotton going and coming, and knew full well what these manœuvres meant; but the althæa hedge stood directly in front of her mistress's window, so that Eunice could only bide her time, in masterly inactivity, bound hand and foot to the burning rack of jealousy. Most bitterly trying of all was the fact that at night—and every night—while she was still busy in ministering to her mistress's wants, Enoch Cotton nearly always disappeared, and, try as she would, she could not learn whither he went.

In the rear of Miss Judy's garden, close to a secluded corner, was a half-leaning, half-fallen heap of butter-bean poles, rankly covered with vines. That little lady called it a bower, and thought it very pretty indeed. She had been somewhat disappointed at first when her butter-beans ran all to vines and did not bear at all. She had expected a good deal of those butter-beans; they had been so nice and fat and white when she planted them, and they had doubled out of the earth in such thick loops of luscious whiteness when they first came up. She had indeed told Miss Sophia that she thought there would be enough butter-beans to exchange for two (and maybe three) pairs of stockings, which Miss Sophia had needed for some time; possibly there might be so many that she herself could have a pair. But when the vines utterly failed to bear, and did nothing but riot in rank and tangled greenness over the bending, falling poles, Miss Judy consoled Miss Sophia and comforted herself by observing how very pretty and romantic the bower was. And when she

observed, later in the summer, that Merica had formed a habit of going to sit in the bower every night, as soon as the day's work was done, she was quite consoled.

"Sitting there all alone must surely tame her in a measure, poor thing," Miss Judy said to Miss Sophia. "It would benefit all of us to have more time for quiet reflection. Think of the difference it must have made to Becky if she hadn't been so driven."

Accordingly Miss Judy was delicately careful to keep away from the bower, for fear of disturbing Merica's reflections. Eunice had never approached it nor even suspected its existence, thinking, when she noticed it at all, that the green tangle of vines was a mere neglected heap of butter-bean poles. Her ceaseless, fruitless search had heretofore always been turned toward the dark windows of Merica's deserted kitchen and cabin. And thus it was that the girl in comparative safety awaited her lover's coming night after night, under the dark of the moon or after its going down, as the savage women of her tribe must have awaited their warrior lovers in the deepest jungles of Africa. Nevertheless, Merica's heart was the heart of her feminine type all the world over, within and without civilization. With her, as with all her kind, to love and be loved was not enough; the other woman must see and know, before her triumph could be entirely complete. In vain Enoch Cotton pleaded and protested, and even tried again to frighten her. Every word that he uttered only made her the more determined to parade her victory openly, in utter disdain of all restraint, in unbounded contempt of all concealment. What was there for her to be afraid of? she demanded. Was she not younger than Eunice and better-looking and several shades lighter in color? And was not her hair ever so much straighter than Eunice's, when freshly combed out on a Sunday, after being tightly plaited in very small plaits and carefully wrapped with string through the whole week? Finally, she and her lover came so close to a violent quarrel that he dared not say anything more; and although Merica ceased urging the point, she was fully resolved to overthrow the screen of the althæa hedge, to scorn its protection, at the earliest opportunity. This came sooner than she hoped for, on the evening following the accident when the fatal spark had fallen upon the wash-kettle's biggest, dryest bubble. Enoch, gravely alarmed, was waiting as usual in the shelter of the althæa hedge, but she passed him boldly, leaving him trembling with fear and gray with terror; and, marching fearlessly up to the kitchen door with a challenging giggle, she thrust the basket of clean clothes through it and under Eunice's very nose. Then she turned deliberately and flaunted off, with a loud laugh of scornful, mocking defiance.

For an instant the black widow was daunted, overwhelmed, dumfounded, utterly routed, by the brown girl's unexpected and brazen audacity. She could do nothing at first but stand glaring after her in dumb, powerless fury. Enoch had disappeared as though he had sunk into the earth; as more self-possessed and more courageous men have done under similar circumstances. Eunice, thus left alone, could only gather her self-possession gradually, as best she could, and try to think, and think, and think. She still kept perfectly quiet; there was not one outward sign of the turmoil of her fierce spirit. She thought and waited till night came on, and until her mistress had gone to bed, and even until she felt sure that old lady Gordon was sound asleep. And then, led by the blind instinct which leads the wild animal through the trackless forest in search of its mate, Eunice stealthily opened the door of her solitary cabin, and noiselessly went forth. She crossed the shadowed orchard through the soundless darkness, a black and terrible shape of vengeance, and crept softly, her bare, heavy feet padding like the paws of a tiger, on and on, straight to the bower.

What happened then only the rivals ever knew. Enoch Cotton himself did not know. He fled at the first onslaught, as braver and whiter men have done under the same desperate and hopeless conditions; he—and they—could do nothing else; could not prevent the conflict, and could not take part. Enoch could only take refuge in instantaneous and wordless flight.

Neither Eunice nor Merica had ever a word to say of what transpired after Enoch was gone and they were left alone to have their wild, furious will of each other. The wrecked bower, of which hardly one pole remained upon another or one vine clung untorn from the others, silently told a part of the story. Eunice's face looked like a red map of darkest Africa, and Merica's face was much mottled by deep blue bruises; Eunice limped about her work on the following morning, and Merica cooked breakfast with one hand, having the other in a sling. And still, oddly enough, neither Eunice nor Merica bore herself quite as the victorious nor yet quite as the vanquished. There was, in truth, an air of tense uncertainty on both sides. Nowadays, everybody would know what was to follow under such circumstances; both sides nowadays would make instantaneous and vociferous appeal to the law as soon as the court was open. But things were different then, and this special case was peculiarly complicated. Eunice was a slave and had consequently no clearly discernible individual rights or privileges under the law. Merica on the other hand was free, and this fact, while placing her socially far beneath Eunice, gave her, nevertheless, certain rights before the courts which her rival as a slave could not enjoy. Accordingly it was with pride and satisfaction unspeakable that Merica set out, unobserved, soon after breakfast, to do what Eunice fully expected her to do, which was, to swear out a warrant for Eunice's arrest. This legal formula was, however, known to Eunice and to Merica, as it is known to most litigants of their race to-day, as a "have-his-carcass," which sounds to be a much larger and a much graver thing. Having, then, seen this document safe in the constable's hand, and having been duly assured of its prompt service, Merica went home as quietly as she had come away, and slid unseen through a hole in the fence, soothed by the completeness of the legal victory which she foresaw, and which could not fail to make her the admired and envied of all her race, which then found—as it still finds—a strange distinction in any sort of legal recognition, either good or bad.

The officer nevertheless took his own time in serving the warrant. It was not the Oldfield way to

hurry over the doing of anything. Moreover, he had, perhaps, had a rather wide experience of colored quarrels, notwithstanding the fact that they were brought into court much more rarely at that period than they have been since. And then, no one, however daring or energetic, ever hastened under any circumstances to interfere with the old lady Gordon's affairs. Was it not known—as has been related—that when Alvarado himself dashed along the big road and everybody else drove into the fence-corner till he went by, old lady Gordon always kept straight along the middle of the big road, and it was Alvarado that went round. Bearing this recollection in mind, the constable strolled very slowly down the highway toward the Gordon place, and he was glad to catch sight of Eunice in the garden, gathering vegetables for dinner. It was better than finding her nearer her mistress. He laid his hands on the top of the garden fence and swung himself over the pickets.

"Good morning, Eunice," he said, walking toward her between the tall rows of yellow-flowering okra, from which she was picking tender green pods, for a delicious soup which only herself knew the recipe for.

"Good morning, Mr. Jim," responded Eunice, calmly. She knew at once what he had come for. There was a nice distinction in her calling him "Mr. Jim," rather than "Marse Jim," a subtle social distinction which was quite as clear to the constable as to herself, and one which he did not like.

"I've got a warrant here for your arrest for attempted murder," he accordingly said somewhat less mildly. "You'll have to come along with me to jail."

"Yes, sir," answered Eunice, respectfully, but adding calmly, as if stating an accepted and unalterable fact: "Yes, sir, but in course I'll have to ask Miss Frances first. I can't stop a-gathering her vegetables while the dew's on 'em—lessen *she* say so. You know that, Mr. Jim, just as well as I do. Miss Frances's vegetables ain't to be left a-layin' round to swivel in the sun—no, sir, they ain't!"

The officer hesitated; he took off his rough straw hat, and looked for a moment as if he meant to scratch his head. But remembering the dignity of office, he fanned himself instead. "Well, come on up to the house, then, and I'll speak to your mistress," he said, with more composure than he felt.

They turned toward the house, the officer leading the way, and Eunice walking in her proper place behind him, carrying in her large, clean, white apron the okra, the beets, the cucumbers, and tomatoes, and all the other fresh and good, green and red things which she had already gathered for the daily noontide feast.

Old lady Gordon's keen eyes caught a glimpse of the constable and the cook a long way off; and she hailed them sharply as soon as they were within hearing: "What's this? What are you doing, Eunice? What are *you* here for, Jim, at this time of day?"

The officer, a good-looking, good-humored young giant, bared his head with an embarrassed smile. He made a brief explanation, turning his hat in his awkward hands, and resting his huge bulk first on one foot and then on the other.

Old lady Gordon hardly allowed him to finish what he found to say, which was very little. "Now, what's the use of your telling me any such nonsense as that, Jim Slocum? You know I'm not going to let you come here, interfering with my cook's getting my dinner."

"Yes, ma'am," said Jim, deferentially. "I do hate to inconvenience you, ma'am. But you see, ma'am, there's the law and here's the warrant. I'm bound to do what the law requires—I'll have to serve it."

"Indeed, you won't do anything of the kind! Who ever heard of such impudence!" exclaimed old lady Gordon. "The very idea! Taking my cook away from getting my dinner to lock her up in jail! Upon my word, Jim Slocum, I thought you had some sense. But I'm not going to allow you to annoy me or get me stirred up on a warm morning like this. I'm not even going to discuss the matter. Just you run along now, Jim, that's a good fellow, and let Eunice alone—she's busy—and don't bother me any more."

She settled herself back in her wide, low chair, and began to wave the turkey-wing fan with one hand, turning the leaves of her novel with the other.

"But you see, ma'am, it's a mighty grave charge, attempted murder,—the state—"

"Grave fiddlesticks!" retorted old lady Gordon, looking up from her novel with real fire blazing now in her fine dark eyes. "The state!" with infinite scorn. "What difference would it make to me if it were the United States? I tell you I won't have another word!"

Her raised voice, the lower tone of the officer's mild, but firm, persistence, the hurried gathering and smothered whispering of the servants around the windows and doors, all these combined had finally attracted the attention of Lynn Gordon, who was absorbed in reading in his own room overhead, and he now came hurrying downstairs. Entering his grandmother's room, he looked in surprise at the group which he found there; at her, at the constable, and lastly at Eunice, who had stood quietly by throughout the whole controversy with the manner of a coolly disinterested spectator. The officer turned eagerly to Lynn with the relief that every man feels upon the entrance of another man into a difficult business transaction with women.

"Maybe you can persuade your grandmother to let Eunice go," the constable said, addressing him, when a few words had made the matter clear to Lynn. "It is really the quickest way to get her cook back. The county judge is in town; I saw him tying his horse to the tavern hitching-post as I passed coming down here. He'd hurry up the case and get it over in no time to accommodate your grandma, being as they're kinder kin—him and your grandma's folks."

"Mr. Slocum is right, grandmother. That is certainly the quickest way, and the easiest," Lynn said. "Let Eunice go and I'll defend her; I'll take her as my first case,—shall I?" he added smilingly, looking at old lady Gordon.

"I don't care what any of you do, so long as you let me alone and have Eunice back here in time to get my dinner. What have you been up to, anyway?" she said, suddenly turning to Eunice as if the nature of the charge had just occurred to her for the first time. "Well, you'd better be back in plenty of time to boil that blackberry roll, that's all I've got to say to you. Lynn, send somebody to tell Davy,—that's the judge, Judge Thompson,—to tell Davy Thompson that I would be much obliged if he would go to the court-house at once and get this bother over, so that Eunice may be back within an hour. Please ask him to take the trouble to hurry; tell him I asked it. Send Enoch Cotton—where is Enoch, anyway?" she said, glancing over the assemblage of black masks crowding the windows and doors.

Enoch—naturally enough—was not to be found then nor for hours afterward, but another servant was despatched running in his stead; and then the procession moved briskly out through the side gate and on up the big road toward the court-house. Eunice walked behind the officer as manners required, but there was nothing abject in her carriage. She held her head high, feeling glad that she happened to be wearing her gayest bandanna head-handkerchief and that her white apron was still spotlessly clean. Hers was an imposing figure, and she knew it, and consequently bore herself with dignified pride. Her friends, too, began to flock around her as the procession advanced, thus swelling the crowd; and the white people living along the big road came to the doors and windows of their houses to see what was going on.

From the opposite direction approached a much larger and longer procession, headed by Merica, fairly flamboyant in an ecstasy of triumph, and tailed by dusky ragged figures, some of them little black children, trailing in the distance, indistinct as a smoky antique frieze. Merica's forces largely outnumbered Eunice's, as the attacking army nearly always outnumbers the defending force. Merica came marching at the very forefront, as if to the throb of inaudible drums and to the waving of invisible banners. Eunice trod more slowly, as the garrison goes cautiously to man the walls.

There was one tense, dangerous moment when the opposing forces met at the court-house steps; but the judge, the prosecuting attorney, and the prisoner's counsel chanced, luckily, to arrive at the same instant, so that, owing to their restraining presence, the danger passed with no greater violence than an exchange of threatening glances between the contending parties. Side by side the furious factions crowded into the small court-room, and straightway the examining trial of Eunice for attempted murder was then and there begun, without an instant's delay.

And yet everything was done decently and in order. It was a complete surprise to the defence to find that the assault which had taken place in the butter-bean bower was entirely ignored in the indictment. The charge was that Eunice had put poison in the well from which Merica drew water, thereby attempting to kill, to murder, and to do deadly harm etc., to the plaintiff. The prosecuting witness testified that she had heard a noise about daylight; that on going to the well she had found an empty box, which she was certain had contained rat-poison, lying beside it; and that a white powder which she was mortally sure was the rat-poison itself—and nothing else—was plainly to be seen floating on the surface of the water. Such was the case made out by the prosecution. It was not at all what the defence was prepared for, but the prisoner's counsel showed himself to be a person of resources upon sudden demand. He readily admitted that the prosecuting witness might have heard a noise about daylight. There were, as he had himself observed, a great many cats in that part of the village. Also he admitted with equal readiness that she might have found an empty box which had once contained a rat-poison. He pointed out the fact that this particular variety of rat-poison was in such general use in Oldfield,—where rat-poison was one of the necessities of life, not merely one of its luxuries,—that the empty boxes which had contained it were to be found almost anywhere. As for the alleged poison itself, which a notoriously untruthful and untrustworthy witness had just testified to seeing still afloat on the surface of the water in the well, after the acknowledged lapse of several hours—the court could judge the worth of that evidence without any assistance from the defence.

Here Mr. Pettus unexpectedly appeared in the court-room. He kept the rat-poison, as he kept everything in daily Oldfield demand, and he had been hurriedly summoned as an expert witness for the defence, and he now took the stand. He testified to having handled that particular variety of rat-poison in very large quantities for many years. He claimed, on cross-examination, to be perfectly familiar with the kind of box used by the manufacturers of the rat-poison, and he gave it as his opinion that the particular box in question—the one which he then held in his hand, and which he was examining minutely—had been used for several other purposes, and harmless ones, apparently, since being emptied of its original deadly contents. He called the attention of the court to the fact that a particle of sugar still adhered to one corner, while a grain of coffee still lingered in another corner. Finally, when the prisoner's counsel was quite ready for the grand stroke, he allowed the witness—who was an amateur chemist in the line of his business—to testify from his own personal knowledge of the rat-poison that it dissolved instantly upon coming

in contact with water.

"And yet, your Honor, the prosecution rests its case upon the testimony of an ignorant, vindictive savage, who swears—who solemnly testifies under oath, your Honor—that she saw this identical poison, and no other, floating on the surface of the water in the well several hours after she claims to have heard a noise; that it was there, plainly to be seen, several hours after my innocent client is known to have been at work in her mistress's kitchen and was seen in her mistress's garden, openly and constantly in view of the whole community. I can summon any number of unimpeachable witnesses—"

"The declaration is dismissed. The complaint is denied for lack of evidence," said the judge, as seriously as possible. "Call the next case."

"You may go home now, Eunice," said Lynn, smiling.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," said Eunice, calm as ever, and deliberately dropping a clumsy courtesy.

She courtesied still more clumsily to the court and to Mr. Pettus, and to all the white persons present, and then she turned slowly and ponderously, like some large and heavy royal personage, and she cast openly a high glance of infinite scorn over the humbled heads of her enemies. They might flock like coal-black crows as much as they had a mind to, she remarked in the dialect which they best understood; they were no more to her than the dust of the big road which she had "trompled under foot." She had white folks for her friends, she said triumphantly. With this single parting volley she went slowly and calmly down the court-house steps and set off homeward, bearing herself with all the arrogance of Semiramis returning victorious to Nineveh.

"Well, so you are back in time! No," said old lady Gordon, holding up the turkey-wing fan with a restraining gesture and resuming her novel with a yawn, "I don't want to hear a word about it. I know well enough that you ought to be in the penitentiary. Go on and get my dinner."

At the other end of the village Merica, deeply dejected, utterly crushed, stole toward home close in the shelter of the fence. She was returning entirely alone, as the leader of a lost cause nearly always returns, if he return at all. One by one her followers had dropped away, one disappearing here in a back yard, another vanishing there in a wood-lot, till all were gone. Desertion is the bitter hemlock of defeat that the vanquished are always forced to drink. The board was still off the fence at its farthest corner; Merica had squeezed through the hole on her flamboyant departure, so that Miss Judy might not see her and prevent her going; and she now dragged herself through it again on her downcast coming back, and thus reached the coveted shelter of her own domain and was able to hide her diminished head wholly unobserved by her unsuspicious, gentle little mistress.

"Merica's very quiet this morning. I haven't heard her stirring," Miss Judy said to Miss Sophia, as they sat placidly side by side in their little rocking-chairs—swaying gently—as they so loved to sit. They were talking, too, with that inexhaustible interest in one another's conversation which made their lifelong companionship the beautiful and perfect thing it was.

"Perhaps the poor creature is distressed over the falling down of the bower. She seemed to be real fond of it. And how strange to think there could have been such a violent storm without a drop of rain or our hearing the wind. I thought at first that we might have the bean-poles set up again, but the poles are broken and the vines are actually torn up by the roots. Oh, yes,—going back to what we were discussing before I happened to think of the bower,—I am sure that you are quite right in thinking that Doris's character has developed very rapidly of late. Her ideals really appear surprisingly well formed for so young a girl. And, as you say, there could hardly be anything unsettling now in her reading about the troubles that poor Becky went through. It can hardly do the dear child any harm now even to read about the mistakes which poor Becky made. For you know, sister Sophia, Becky was really good-hearted. You remember that Amelia might have gone sorrowing all her life, but for Becky's being so kind-hearted."

Miss Judy pleaded as though Miss Sophia was some keen and merciless critic from whose stern justice she strove gently to save the innocently erring.

"Just so, sister Judy," responded Miss Sophia, so promptly, so firmly, so comprehensively, so conclusively, that Miss Judy beamed at her, positively radiant with admiration, and sighed a deep sigh of relief and satisfaction at having the long and sorely vexing question thus thoroughly disposed of at last.

XX

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN FAITH AND LOVE

About that time of the year an aspect of great, glowing beauty and a feeling of deep, sweet peace always comes to this beautiful, pastoral country.

The long, warm days are then of the rarest gold, and the short, cool nights are of the purest silver. The ripened grain has been garnered, and its golden sheaves no longer tent the rich, broad lands. The tall, tasselling corn now flows free in rippling, murmuring, ever widening silvery

seas. The ocean of the vast tobacco fields rolls and rolls its mighty billows of deepening green into the darkening purple haze of the misty horizon. The wooded hillsides are now very still, and dark blue shadows linger all day among the trees—which stir scarcely a leaf—waiting to creep down toward the village at nightfall to meet the snow-white mist loitering over the resting meadows. The birds, too, are resting, half asleep in the heart of the ancient wood; they sing more seldom and their songs are sweeter and softer and come forth touched with a tender melancholy. The very shrilling of the crickets in the long grass sounds less shrill, and seems to rise and fall with the waves of heat. The butterflies, clustering on the commonest wayside weeds like tropical flowers, hardly move their dazzling wings of yellow and white, waving them as languorously as a flower unfurls its petals. And then—in those radiant days—the thistledown also softly spreads its pinions of gossamer silver, and, borne on the breath of the south breeze, it wings its weightless way over all the snow-masses of the elder bloom, and burnishes its lacelike whiteness into the luminous border of the veil which the midsummer heaven lends to the midsummer earth.

The honeysuckle over Tom Watson's window was thinning under the heat and bronzing under the drouth. Its leaves, green-yellow, drifted languidly down to the browning grass of the neglected lawn. So that there was scarcely a cool shadow left to shield the wretchedness of the stricken man, sitting day after day in the spot to which destiny had chained him; or one to cover the sadness of the wife, keeping her hopeless vigil by his side, in open view for every passer-by to see. It was a sight to wring any heart, and the Oldfield people were always kind to one another and always helpful—as simple, poor people are everywhere. But in this sad case there seemed no way to help, nothing that any one could do. No one might penetrate the dumb horror of the sick man's awful gaze, straining all the desolate day through, as long as the light lasted, toward some unseen and unreachable thing, as a wild creature strains dumbly at its chain. No one could pass the silence of Anne's reserve to share, to lessen, or even completely to comprehend the conflict ceaselessly waging within the high, narrow walls of her spirit.

Up to the beginning of this strife Anne's heart and soul had gone more nearly abreast, more evenly side by side, than most women's hearts and souls are able to go through life. The one nearly always goes before the other in every true woman's breast. And the path of Anne's spirit was very narrow, much narrower than that in which most women tread; so that, at this last steep pass, there was not room for both to go together, and thus her heart and her soul were forced to strive, the one with the other, for the right of way. There was never a moment's doubt in Anne's single, simple, and most strenuous mind as to which should lead. Now, as always, the road between right and wrong lay straight, clear, and open before her feet. There never was the slightest danger of her wandering or wavering. But oh, the agonized wringing of her heart, the almost unendurable travail of her soul—in this death struggle for her husband's salvation! And yet she suffered the anguish unflinchingly, her very love forbidding her conscience to yield, to barter the hope of the life everlasting for the relief of a few broken years. And every day the conflict grew fiercer as her husband's growing strength increased his piteously powerless resistance to restraint, and fed the flame of his desire for cards, now as strong as any ruling passion ever was in death. Impassive as Anne was by nature, she used sometimes to wonder if she would be able to bear it any longer and live. Her heart was breaking, her soul was almost at bay, so desperate was the strife between the two.

It is one of life's cruel ironies that the deepest feeling must often find trivial and even absurd expression. In poor Anne's first blind casting about for something to divert her husband's thoughts, in her first futile trying to remember what he used to like,—and she had known very little of his tastes in the days of his strength,—the recollection of seeing him read the county newspaper, which was published weekly in a neighboring town, came suddenly out of the mists of her memory. She sent for the paper and tried to read it to him, beginning at the top line of the first column and going straight through to the last line on the last page, fearing lest she might miss the article which he most wanted to hear. But Anne was not a good reader, and a clouded mind and a racked body do not make a patient listener. Tom gave no sign and he did not try to speak; but Anne saw his miserable, unresting eyes wander away to the far-off purpled hills, beyond which lay the free, bright world; and his thoughts—but who dare wonder whither his thoughts wandered?

After the failure in the reading of the newspaper, Anne turned to books. There were no new books in Oldfield, had poor Anne known the new from the old, and there were few of any kind. Miss Judy had more than any one else, and she was eager in offering all that had belonged to her father, as well as the handful of more recent ones gathered by her own simple tastes; and these last she urged upon Anne as being lighter and more cheerful, and consequently more suited to the cheering of an invalid. She was quite sure, so she said, smiling to hearten Anne, that Tom would like to hear about Becky; he had always liked lively, good-hearted people—like himself. But Anne instinctively chose the major's books instead, shrinking from all lightness as unsuited to her husband's need, and believing, as a woman of her type usually believes, that a man is most interested in what she herself least understands.

When the reading of the dry old books had failed even more completely, if possible, than the reading of the newspaper, Anne tried to talk to her husband; and that was the hardest of all. She had always been a silent woman, well named "still-tongued"; and now that her sad heart lay in her bosom like lead, she found less and less to say, so that this last attempt was the most complete and the saddest of her many repeated defeats. It was then, when at the end of her own resources, that she held to Sidney's hand, and asked with her appealing eyes for the help which she knew not how to beg with her lips. After this Sidney went every day to see Tom, and told him,

as amusingly as she could tell anything, of everything that was going on, no matter whether he listened or not. And she also sent Doris, who went often (taking Miss Judy's guitar at that little lady's suggestion) to sing to the invalid, and who was careful to choose her gayest songs and to play nothing less cheerful than the Spanish fandango; and it really seemed, once in a while, as if a light came into the sick man's darkened gaze as it rested upon the girl as she tinkled the old guitar, with the broad blue ribbon falling around her beautiful shoulders.

The whole village was, in truth, unwearying in its kindness all the long days, through all those long months; but there were, nevertheless, the lonely hours of the endless nights to be passed alone, when the desperate husband and the despairing wife dumbly faced the appalling future,—a burning, unlighted, empty desert,—stretching perhaps through many terrible years. And even then Anne stood firm, with her sad, steady eyes ever on the white heights which she saw beyond the black gulf, wherein she strove perpetually with the powers of darkness for her husband's soul.

She never left him now for a moment, night or day, except when there was preaching in her own church and her faith required the "breaking of bread"; and at rare long intervals to go to prayer-meeting, when she felt her strength failing and hoped to find in the prayers of others new strength for her own ceaseless petitions. One night of midsummer, when the bell began to ring for prayer-meeting, she felt that she must go. She accordingly arose—reluctantly as she always left him—and went into the bedroom and put on her quakerish bonnet. Then she came back and stood before her husband, seeking wistfully to do something more for his comfort before leaving him, as she never forgot to try to do. She turned the cushions at his back to make them softer, and moved the pillows behind his head so that it might rest easier, and straightened the cover over his powerless knees. These poor things, which she always did, were all that she ever could do. She would return soon, as soon as she could, she said, as she always said, bending down to press her pale lips to his scarred forehead. At the gate she stopped and lingered, looking back, as she always looked, sorely loath still to leave him even for an hour of uplifting prayer.

Night was near. The last red gold of the sunset had paled from the highest, farthest hilltop, where the graveyard lay. The tombstones—the new white ones that stood so straight, the older gray ones that leaned, the oldest brown ones that had fallen—all were dim now in the soft glory of the afterglow, as many of the cold, hard things of this world are softened by the tender light from the world above. The dusk was already creeping down the darkling arches of the wooded hillsides. Mists were already arising from the low-lying meadows, trailing long white cloud-fleeces, all starred with fireflies, thus making a new heaven of the old earth.

Through the gloaming and the stillness Anne's lonely figure went steadily, swiftly onward toward the church. Lynn Gordon noted the tense paleness and the strange exaltation of her still face, when he met and passed her on the big road, faint as the light was, and the sight of it touched him, though his own mind was lightly at peace and his own heart was over-flowing with thoughtless happiness. The impression of suffering that her face had given him was still in his mind when he drew near the window beside which the sick man sat, and because of it, or some other motive that he did not stop to fathom, he suddenly stood still, and after a hesitating pause, and a longing glance toward the silver poplars, he opened the gate and crossed the yard and went to the window to speak to Tom Watson. Nothing was farther from his thoughts than any intent of going into the house—as he told the doctor afterwards when speaking of what followed.

"It was like mesmerism. I have not the vaguest idea of how it really happened. His awful eyes drew me, when I didn't want to go. They dragged me into that house as if a giant hand had been laid upon my collar. The first thing that I knew the negro boy who waits on Watson had set out a table and put the lamp on it, and had laid a pack of cards between him and me." The young man shuddered at the recollection. "I hope I may never again see anything like that poor wretch's face when his palsied hands first touched the cards which I dealt him. I tried to remind myself that there couldn't be any harm in such a game and that there might be some good. But to see such a passion as his for gambling looking out of a dead man's face is a sight which I hope never to look upon again."

The lamplight shone far down the big road that night, and Anne saw it almost as soon as she left the meeting-house on her lonely way home. At the sight her heavy heart seemed to leap as if it would escape from its cell of pain; and then, faint with deadly fear, it seemed to fall back as though it could never beat again. Too near to fainting to stand, she sat down on the roadside, and remained without moving for a long time. She was all alone in the darkness, no one else was going her way; and no one passed along the deserted thoroughfare. She knew at once what the streaming lamplight meant; and she tried to think what was best to do, now that the worst was come. She arose tremblingly at last, when she had rallied strength enough, and she went on feebly through the still blackness of the night, like a woman suddenly stricken with great age. She did not know that she was weeping, and the great, slow, heavy tears of the rarely moved fell unheeded down her white cheeks. The gate was open, as Lynn Gordon had left it, and she entered the yard noiselessly, passing the window like an unseen shadow and with an averted face. On the steps at the back of the house she sank down almost prone and lay motionless, hardly conscious, she knew not for how long. The heavy tears still fell silently and unnoticed, as the hardest rain falls without storm. She was trying to think, but she could not; she could do nothing but pray. And she prayed—praying as one having great faith does pray when a tidal wave from life's troubled sea sweeps over a stranded soul. For Anne's faith stood, even now, firm as a mighty rock anchored to the foundations of the earth. And through all the darkness and turmoil of this supreme spiritual stress a single ray of white light shone steadily as a beacon to her tossed

spirit. The abomination had not come through any weakness of hers; her faith had not yielded to her love.

The next perfect day had worn slowly to another glorious sunset when Anne went again down the big road, but this time toward the Gordon place. Lynn saw her coming, and he arose from his seat on the porch, where he chanced to be sitting alone with his cigar, and went to meet her, thinking how foolish it was for him to be smitten at the first sight of her by a sense of guilt and a painful conviction of having done her an injury. He tried to throw off the feeling with a smile, as he stood holding open the gate for her to enter.

There was no answering smile on Anne's pale face, yet its perfect calmness and the steadiness of her clear gaze reassured him somewhat. Her voice also was quite calm and steady when she said that she could not come in to see his grandmother, as he invited her to do; and after a momentary hesitation added that she had come solely to give him a message from her husband—one that she could not send by any one else.

"Tom has sent me to ask if you will play cards with him again to-night," she said deliberately, in a curiously level tone, as if weighing every word, and with her clear eyes fixed with singular intensity on the young man's face.

"Why—of course I will—I'll be delighted to," Lynn responded eagerly, with much relief. He had not expected her to say anything of this kind. "But, my dear Mrs. Watson, you needn't have taken the trouble to come all this distance yourself to ask me. I should have come willingly, no matter who had brought the request. Mr. Watson had only to tell me when he wished me to come."

"That is why I came. I wanted to make sure that you would come just the same, whether I asked you or not," said Anne, still looking at him with her luminous clearness of gaze, the white light behind her eyes shining high and bright.

"Certainly," he replied quickly, made uneasy by her look, though he knew not why and did not in the least understand what was in the mind of this quiet woman of few words.

She stood silent for a moment, so frail, so pale, under the gloom of the low, dark boughs of the cypress tree, that she seemed more spirit than flesh. Then she silently turned away her clear eyes, in which sorrow lay heavy as stones at the bottom of a still crystal pool. She stood for a moment silently looking far over the shadowed fields, above which the white banners of mist were already afloat on the evening breeze. Her inscrutable gaze then wandered toward the cloud mountains towering in the west, their snowy summits rifted by rivers of molten gold, and flooding the peaceful earth with unearthly beauty.

"Until I knew whether anything that I could say or do would make any difference—about your coming—I could not see my way," she said, turning back, her strange eyes again looking straight into his perplexed eyes. "Now that you have told me, I must do what is right—as nearly as I can."

"I don't understand," faltered the young man. "Would you like me to come with you now—at once? I am quite ready."

"I can't let you—or any one—do for my husband what I am not willing to do for him myself. I can't ask another to commit sin for him in my stead. If it must be done, it is *I* who must do it—not any one else."

She spoke calmly, but with infinite sadness, and her pale face turned a shade paler, if it could be paler than it had been when she first appeared beneath the gloomy cypress boughs.

The young man was startled, bewildered, touched. He no longer felt like smiling at Anne's taking the matter seriously; there was no longer anything absurd in her attitude. His impulsive heart, always quick to see and to respond to the real, the fine, and the high, filled now with a sudden rush of sympathy for this quiet woman with the white face and the spare speech, for all her narrow mind and her stern faith.

"But, my dear madam, you don't know how to play cards, do you?" he protested confusedly, at a loss what to say or to do.

"No," said Anne, with an involuntary movement of shrinking. "But I thought—I can't see my way. It is the first time. I don't seem to be able to tell right from wrong. But I thought that if—if you would teach me—that is if it wouldn't be wrong for me to ask you—even to do that!"

"How could it be wrong?" he said gently. "I have never thought that there was any harm in card-playing merely for amusement. I will gladly teach you what I know, which isn't a great deal, nor hard to learn."

"The path is dark before my feet. I can only stumble on till the light be given," murmured Anne, as if thinking aloud, even as though she were praying.

"Let's go now," said Lynn, taking a sudden resolution. "If you are not yet satisfied, we can talk it all over as we walk along."

Anne assented silently; they passed out from beneath the shadow of the cypress tree and went on

their way up the deserted, darkened big road, but neither found another word to say. The light of the lamp, awaiting the game on the sick man's table, already shone far to meet them, and when its beams fell on Anne's face Lynn turned his eyes away.

But she did not falter; she led the way through the gate and straight into the room where that awful, dumb figure sat, striving to shuffle the cards with its poor palsied hands, and with the gambler's terrible eagerness flaming in his eyes. Anne laid off her bonnet, and without speaking took the player's place opposite her husband.

Lynn was as silent as Anne herself, but he quietly placed himself, standing, beside her, thinking as he did this and glanced at her that the look of exaltation on Anne's white, still face must have been the look that the martyrs wore when they entered the arena to confront the wild beasts. He felt awed by the solemnity of the scene. He hardly dared move or speak, it so weighed upon him, but he explained the rules and the terms of the game as simply and as briefly as he could. He never forgot the sudden dilation of Anne's eyes and the dimness that followed, as though the white light behind them had suddenly flared high before going out, when he first put the cards in her hands and the game began.

"You must draw—you draw to a straight flush. Mr. Watson stands pat," said Lynn, in a hushed tone, feeling as if he were desecrating some holy place—starting at the sound of his own voice as though it sounded through a cathedral.

"I draw to a straight flush. Mr. Watson stands pat," repeated Anne's pale lips, as a pious soul in extremity might murmur a Latin prayer which it did not understand.

"Now you raise him," prompted Lynn.

"Now I raise you," echoed Anne.

"Ah, he calls you and takes the pot."

"He calls me and takes the pot."

Thus begun, the game went on by surer degrees through the terrible hours of the horrible night, till a later bedtime than Tom Watson had known since he had ceased to be the keeper of his own time. The next morning it was resumed as soon as breakfast was over, and continued day after day and night after night. The teacher wearied after the first day, though he came oftener than he might have been expected to come, since he was young and happy, and there were other and pleasanter things drawing him away. But Anne learned fast—faster, perhaps, than she had ever learned anything else. There are few things that the slowest-witted woman cannot learn when her whole heart and soul hang upon the learning. It was therefore not long before she could play alone, after a fashion, and from that time on she played ceaselessly through every waking moment, stopping only for the meals that neither husband nor wife could eat. So that every morning Anne sat down to the card-table, silently imploring pardon for the sin which she was about to commit; every night she lay wearily down on her sleepless bed, praying for forgiveness for the sin which she had committed during the day. And always Anne played with the unaltered belief—firm as her belief in the plan of salvation—that she staked on every game the relief of her husband's body against the saving of his soul.

XXI

WHAT OLDFIELD THOUGHT AND SAID

Thus it was that all the peace and beauty of those glorious midsummer days brought neither rest nor pleasure to Anne.

The quiet awakening of the tranquil world, soft as the tenderest trembling of a harp; the first musical tinkling that came murmuring up from the misty meadows with the earliest stirring of the flocks and herds; the gentle calling of the dumb creatures; the aerial flute notes wafted down the leafy arches of the dew-wet woods; the palest glory of the dawn coming for the perpetual refreshment of the earth; the final coronation of the Day King with the marshalling of his dazzling lances through the royal red and gold of the hilltops,—all these wonders of a marvellously beautiful world were to Anne but the dreaded daily summons to the renewal of a hopeless conflict.

It was like her never to think of sitting elsewhere than in the old place—at her husband's side by the open window—after beginning to play cards. It would have been utterly unlike her to have thought of doing anything else, to have considered for a moment what her neighbors might think or say. For hers was a nature condemned at its creation to a loneliness even greater than that in which every soul must forever dwell apart. All her life she had lived as one alone on a desert island. Now, under this supreme anguish of living, the amazed gaze of the whole world, its approval or its disapproval, would have been to her—had she thought of it—no more than the moaning of the winter wind through the graveyard cedars.

And yet, naturally enough, this utter unconsciousness upon Anne's part did not lessen in the least the shock which the entire community felt on seeing her—Anne Watson—of all women in all the

world at the card-table by the open window, in view of everybody passing along the big road! Those who first saw the incredible sight could scarcely believe their own eyes. Those who first heard of it utterly refused to credit it until they had made a special trip up and down the big road, twice passing the window, in order to see and to make sure for themselves. And then, when there was no longer room for doubt or dispute, a sort of panic seized the good people of Oldfield. With this appalling backsliding of Anne Watson's the whole religious and social fabric seemed suddenly going to pieces.

Only Lynn Gordon and the doctor knew the truth. Lynn had not told his grandmother of Anne's visit nor of her request. His grandmother was not one to whom he would have spoken of anything which had touched him keenly or moved him deeply. And he had even not told Doris, whom he would most naturally have trusted, certain of being understood, certain, too, of sympathy for Anne. A feeling of delicate consideration for Anne, a sense that she had trusted him, only because she could not do otherwise, that she had opened her reserved heart to him, who was almost a stranger, only because she was forced to do it, under terrible necessity,—all these mingled feelings had a part in holding him silent. To the doctor alone he felt that he should give a full account of what had taken place. But when he tried to tell even him, Lynn unexpectedly found it very hard to make Anne's motives and position as clear to another person as he had felt them to be. He realized for the first time that she had somehow made him feel much more than she had been able to put into words. She had so few words—poor Anne—and the few that she had were meagre indeed. The impulsive, warm-hearted young fellow stammered, and reddened, and laughed at himself, in a manly embarrassment that was a pleasant thing to see, as he tried clumsily to put the matter before the doctor in its true light, and in a way to do justice to Anne. Fortunately the doctor understood at once, and might have understood had the young man said even less than he finally found to say. That friend of humanity had learned something of Anne's character during her husband's long illness. Two earnest natures, stripped for a shoulder to shoulder contest with death over a sick-bed, come as near, perhaps, to knowing one another as any two souls may ever approach. A doctor's very calling, moreover, must reveal to him—as hardly the confessional can reveal to another man—the winding mazes of the simplest, sincerest woman's conscience.

When the doctor went home after talking with Lynn, he tried to show his wife that there was no occasion for the widespread excitement over this unaccountable change in Anne. He hoped that an off-hand word to his wife might have some effect in settling the swirl of gossip which circled the village, faster and faster, with Anne's continued appearance at the card-table, as the continual casting of pebbles agitates a stagnant pool. But Mrs. Alexander, good, kind, charitable woman though she was, could only sigh and shake her head. She said that she had never understood Anne, but that she had always respected her sincerity, no matter how widely she herself might differ in opinion. But what could anybody think or say of Anne's sincerity now? The doctor's wife cast a shocked, frightened, glance at the Watson house. Such open, flagrant backsliding really was enough to make the lightning strike.

And Mrs. Alexander's view was the one held by most of the Oldfield ladies, all of whom took the incomprehensible affair much to heart. Only Miss Judy and Kitty Mills saw nothing to alarm, nothing to wonder at, nothing in the least unnatural in Anne's change of attitude. But then, Miss Judy was well known to believe that everybody always had some praiseworthy motive for everything, if others were only clear-sighted enough to perceive it. Her pure mind was a flawless crystal, reflecting every ray of light from many exquisite prisms, but sending nothing out of actual darkness. And no one ever regarded seriously the views of Kitty Mills, who was notoriously willing for every one to do precisely as he liked, as nearly as he could, without any explanation or any reason whatever, so that her opinion had the very slight value which usually pertains to the opinions of the easily pleased. All the other Oldfield ladies were too deeply shocked, too utterly amazed, to know what to think, or what to say, or what to do. They could only gather in solemn, excited conclave at one another's houses, and discuss the situation daily and almost hourly, with growing wonder and bated breath.

Sidney was, of course, the central figure in this, as in all other things vital to the life of the village. As much at a loss for once as the dullest, she held nevertheless to her high esteem for Anne, and in canvassing the strangeness of the latter's conduct from house to house, as she felt compelled to canvass it, she invariably spoke of her with great kindness, even while admitting that it would be hard for a Philadelphia lawyer to find out what Anne meant by whirling round like a weathercock. It is likely that Sidney took off her bonnet and let down her hair oftener, and shook it out harder, and twisted it up tighter, at this time, than at any other period of her entire professional career. She used, indeed, to stop all along the big road—anywhere—and hang her bonnet on the fence, while she shook her hair down and twisted it up again; and her knitting-needles flew faster than they had ever done before or ever did afterward. One day, as she happened to be entering the doctor's gate to keep an important engagement with Mrs. Alexander, she saw Miss Pettus standing before the Watson house, gazing at the window,—which had now become the stage of a mystery play,—and not only gazing, but staring as if some dreadful sight had suddenly turned her to stone. Sidney called to her, but she did not turn or respond in any way for some minutes; and when she finally joined Sidney and the doctor's wife on the latter's porch, where they were sitting, she was really pale from agitation and actually sputtering with excitement.

"Chips!" she gasped, sinking into a chair. "Poker chips. I saw 'em with my own eyes and heard 'em with my own ears! I give you both my sacred word as a member of the Methodist Episcopal

Church in good standing."

"Poker chips are neither here nor there," said Sidney, in the lofty, judicial tone which she had maintained throughout the controversy.

She eyed Miss Pettus, however, silently and a little severely, as she loosed several rounds of yarn from her big ball, and held them out and deliberately shook them apart at arm's length. It did not please her to hear of poker chips—or anything else of interest—through Miss Pettus or any other person. It was her own special and exclusive province to discover and distribute the news. She felt much as the editor of a great daily newspaper might feel if some casual passer-by should drop in to tell him of the day's greatest public event.

"Poker chips are neither here nor there," she repeated coolly, and almost contemptuously, as one looking to larger things. "No matter what Anne Watson does, and no matter how she does it, there's one thing that you may always be sure of, Miss Pettus, and that is—that she believes she is doing right."

"Who said she didn't?" retorted Miss Pettus. "Have I said anything about the right or wrong of it? I don't care anything about the right or wrong of card-playing. Some folks think one way and some another—and they may go on thinking so for all me. What I do say is that a body ought to stick to what she does believe, whatever it is, no matter whether she's a Methodist like me or a Christian like Anne."

"Well—'pon my word!" exclaimed Sidney, seeing a chance for reprisal, and furtively winking the eye next to the doctor's wife. "To hear you talk, Miss Pettus, folks would think there wasn't anybody but Methodists and Christians. Where, pray, do the rest of us come in? There's Jane there—a Cumberland Presbyterian, dyed blue in the wool. Yonder's Miss Judy, an Episcopalian of the highest latitude and the greatest longitude, and a-training Doris to be just like her. And here am I—a Baptist—a Baptist born and a Baptist bred—and a Whiskey Baptist at that."

"If I were you, Sidney Wendall," replied Miss Pettus, with offended dignity, "I wouldn't make fun of my own religion if I did make fun of every other earthly thing I came across. You know as well as I do, and as Jane here does, that there is no such thing as a Whiskey Baptist—and never was and never will be."

"No such thing as a Whiskey Baptist?" exclaimed Sidney, pretending to be wholly in earnest, and slyly winking again at the doctor's wife. "Then what, may I ask, would you have called my own father and his only brother—two church members in good and regular standing, and two as good and highly respected citizens as this Pennyroyal Region ever had, to boot? What else could you call them, I ask you, 'Mandy Pettus? Didn't they always pay their debts on the stroke of the town clock, and to a hundred cents on the dollar? Didn't they always vote the straight Democratic ticket for fifty years, without ever a scratch from end to end? Didn't they always get drunk on every county court day of their lives, and keep sober all the rest of the year? No Whiskey Baptists indeed!"

"What's all that tirade got to do with what I said about Anne's—and everybody's—being what they pretend to be?" fumed Miss Pettus. "That's what I said and what I'll keep on saying as long as I have the breath to speak my honest mind. And I'll say it about anybody, no matter who, just the same. Chopping and changing till a body don't know where to find you, looks to me just as bad in one denomination as another. And levity in those who ought to be serious-minded is levity to me wherever I find it. Now, look at our own circuit rider, only last Sunday! After that powerful sermon which warmed up the whole town, and shook the dry bones, what did he do?—right out of the pulpit, too,—but stop and hang over the fence like a schoolboy for a laughing confab with Kitty Mills! There she was, of course, standing out in the broiling sun with nothing but her apron thrown over her silly head, while you could hear old man Mills scolding her, the whole blessed time, at the top of his peevish voice. It was perfectly scandalous and nothing but scandalous to see such goings-on on the Lord's Day. Kitty was telling him about her late young turkeys getting out in that last hard rain and holding up their heads with their mouths wide open, till the last one of them drowned. As if there was anything uncommon or funny in that; as if everybody didn't know that young turkeys always did that whenever they got a chance. And the simpletons were both laughing as if they'd never heard such a joke, and as if it had been Monday instead of Sunday, and the circuit rider hadn't had any good work to do."

"Maybe he thinks that is a part of his good work," said the doctor's wife, gently. "Kitty Mills surely needs all the kindness she can get outside her own family, poor thing, though she doesn't seem to know it."

Sidney smiled at a sudden recollection. "I passed there yesterday, in the heat of the day, and saw her in the garden bending over and pulling the weeds out of her handful of vegetables. It made me real uneasy to look at her leaning down so long and steady, and her so short and stout, and I said so. But she only laughed till she cried, and declared there wasn't any danger except to her corset-boards. Then, when she could speak for laughing, she said she had saved almost enough to stick her bunch peas. And,—if you'll believe it,—Sam left the garden gate open last night, and the pigs got in and eat every one of 'em up."

"The corset-boards?" gasped Miss Pettus, in a tone of blank amazement, which implied, nevertheless, that she would not be in the least surprised at anything happening to Kitty Mills.

Sidney eyed Miss Pettus humorously, as she loosed more rounds of yarn from her big ball,

holding it out again at arm's length; but there was no time for any reply had she thought it worth while to make one, for Mrs. Alexander's cook appeared in the doorway just at that moment, to say that supper was ready, and, following the hostess, the guest went to enjoy it without allowing it to grow cold. The table had been set on the back porch, which was on the side of the house that was most pleasant at that hour. And a truly pleasant place it was, with its whitewashed pillars, its cool green curtains of Madeira vine, so waxen of leaf and so frost-like in flower, and with its green and restful environment of grass and fruit trees. The table stood directly before the back door of the open passage. Sidney's seat faced the big road, and she had scarcely seated herself, when, chancing to glance up, she saw Lynn and Doris as they passed, going along the big road. She said nothing, however, of having seen them; she was always reserved about her own private affairs, and then she was still holding fast to her early determination to leave the young couple entirely free to follow the natural lead of their own hearts. But the glimpse of them reminded her of an uneasy suspicion that old lady Gordon was not so minded, a suspicion which had occurred to her that day for the first time. Now, therefore, with the unhesitating decision characteristic of her in all things, she resolved, then and there, to talk it over with Miss Judy as soon as she could get away from the supper table.

But it was never easy for Sidney to get away; a hostess, paying the stipulated price of a high-priced entertainer, rightfully expects to get the worth of her fee. No one knew this better than Sidney herself, and she accordingly so exerted her utmost ability, so put forth her most brilliant talent, that she fully made up for the shortened time; and the only regret upon the part of the hostess was that such a delightful entertainment should ever come to an end. Miss Pettus, also, was sorry to have Sidney go; and, now quite restored to good humor, she whispered to her, as they parted at the gate,—one going up the big road and one going down,—that she meant to send Kitty Mills a couple of young turkeys that very night, just to keep her from behaving so like a simpleton the next time the circuit rider went by, and just to make her see how shamefully she had behaved about that stubborn old dorminica.

Out into the dim, dusty highway Sidney now swung, with her long, free, fearless, independent step, which seemed to ask nothing of life and the world but to be allowed to go her own way; walking and knitting as fast as though the dusk had been daylight. Reaching Miss Judy's house she found the little sisters sitting happily side by side just within the open door of the unlighted passage, as they always were to be found at that time on the summer evenings. Miss Judy was talking in her soft, bright little way, which reminded the listener of the chirruping of a happy bird; and Miss Sophia was listening with enthralled interest between lapses of unconscious nodding. And now, as always when they talked together, both had the eager manner of having never before had a really satisfying opportunity to exchange vividly novel views and intensely interesting experiences, so that they hardly knew how to make enough of this truly delightful chance.

They were glad, nevertheless, to greet Sidney, as everybody always was; and Miss Judy said, as soon as Sidney had come within speaking distance, that Lynn and Doris had stopped for a moment to ask how she was feeling, and that she had told them she felt almost strong again,—nearly sure, indeed, of being able to give the tea-party on the coming Thursday.

"I am really mortified at not having given it before this time," she went on, blushing unseen in the gloaming. "It does seem too bad, this spoiling of lovely plans just on account of a foolish shortness of breath. It was such a disappointment to sister Sophia, not to have the tea-party while the blush roses were in bloom, for they match mother's best cups and saucers perfectly. And then came the cinnamon roses—they might have done fairly well, though they are not quite so delicate a shade, but they also have bloomed and faded long ago. Now the hundred-leaf roses will have to do—as I was just saying to sister Sophia when you came, Sidney—although their hearts are rather too dark to be as pretty as the others would have been. But we must give the tea-party anyway, blush roses or no blush roses, without any more delay, since I have thoughtlessly mentioned it to old lady Gordon, who never makes any allowances and who is rather critical."

"Oh, you told her, did you?" exclaimed Sidney. "Then that accounts for what I came to see you about."

"I felt that it was due to Doris that I should tell her; that she should know that only circumstances over which we had no control have so far prevented our paying the dear child the compliment of a formal introduction to society," said Miss Judy, with her pretty, comical, society air.

"Well, it explains what old Lady Gordon said to me without rhyme or reason when she met me on the big road yesterday—stopping her coach in the middle of the big road to do it, too,—something that she never took the trouble to think of before."

Sidney leaned forward and peered up and down the highway to make sure that no one was within hearing, and she listened for an instant to Miss Sophia's deep breathing in the still darkness of the passage.

"Now, mark my words, Miss Judy," she then said, in a guarded undertone. "That old Hessian means to interfere. She is going to make trouble. I feel it in my bones."

"Why?" cried Miss Judy, startled and bewildered. "What do you mean, Sidney? What did she say?"

"She said—without rhyme or reason, as I've told you—that her grandson was going away very soon to begin the practice of his profession, and that he hadn't any time to waste on any

nonsense, like old women's silly tea-parties. She didn't call him by his name, either, as she always has called him heretofore. She called him 'my grandson,' in that high and mighty, stand-off-and-keep-your-place way that she knows how to put on, when she wants to and ain't too lazy. Now, mark my word, Miss Judy. Trouble's a-coming!"

"Oh, how could any one be unkind to that dear child," cried Miss Judy, almost in tears.

"I'd like to see anybody try it, while I'm 'round," said Sidney, with the fierceness that appears in the humblest barnyard hen when her chick is touched. "I'm all ready and a-waiting. Just let old lady Gordon so much as bat her eye and I'll give her goss. I'll tell her the Lord's truth, if she never heard it before. I'll tell her to her face that no Gordon that ever stepped ever was, or ever will be, fit to dust my Doris's shoes, so far as being good goes—or smart and good-looking either. This young Gordon is decent enough, I reckon, as young men go. And his father went pretty straight because he hadn't the spunk or the strength to go crooked. He was like a toad under a harrow, poor soul! He was so tame that he'd eat out of your hand. But even that old Hessian never harrowed or tamed the old man, who was a match for her. No-siree! Not while he had the strength to hop over a straw. Why, the whole woods were full of his wild colts."

"Ah, indeed! I never knew that the old gentleman ever had any interest in horses," Miss Judy murmured absently, almost tearfully, not thinking in the least of what she was saying.

"That was a long time ago," said Sidney hastily, remembering suddenly to whom she was speaking. "What the old folks were in their young days is neither here nor there. It makes no difference now. This young Gordon seems to be a fine young fellow, but, fine or coarse, all that I ask of that old Hessian, or of anybody, is to do as I do, and to let him and Doris alone, and not to meddle; just to give the two young things a fair field and no favor. And that's what she and everybody's got to do, too, or walk over Sidney Wendall's dead body."

"Don't—don't," entreated Miss Judy's soft voice, coming out of the quiet darkness with a tremulous gentleness, and telling of the tender tears in her blue eyes. "Let not your heart be troubled, dear friend. All will be well with the child. All is sure to come right at last, if we are but as patient and as trusting and as true and as faithful and as loving—above all as loving—as we should be. For love *is now—as it was in the beginning, and ever shall be*—the strongest thing in the world."

XXII

THE UPAS TREE

When Miss Judy, thus urged, set the day for the tea-party, naming even the hour, she forgot for the moment that the higher court of the district convened its summer session on the day which she had appointed. And this fact made it impossible to give the party on that day. Not because she had ever had or ever expected to have anything to do with any court of law—for coming events do not always cast their shadows before—but because she expected a visit from Judge Stanley on the evening of his first day in town. For she always knew just when to look for him; during many years he had come on the same day of the month, at the same hour and almost at the same minute. And Miss Judy had through all those years been in the habit of making certain delightful preparations for his visit, which nothing but her love and anxiety for Doris ever could have caused her to forget, and which not even that could now induce her to forego.

She looked forward from one of these visits to the next as to the greatest honor, and, after her love for Doris and her tenderness for her sister, the greatest happiness of her life. She knew how great a man this quiet, gray-haired, famous jurist was to a wider world than she had ever known; and the flattery of his open and exclusive devotion filled her gentle heart with sweet and tender pride. But there was something far tenderer and sweeter than pride in the feeling with which Miss Judy awaited the coming of John Stanley; for he was always John Stanley, and never the famous judge, to her. She had loved him before he became a judge, even before he had become a man. She had learned to love him soon after his coming to Oldfield, when he was a mere lad, and her own youth was not long past. She had loved him then as a young and happy mother loves a son who is all that the happiest, proudest mother could wish—noble, gifted, handsome, spirited, fearless—loving him as such a mother loves such a son when they are young together. She loved him afterward with a still more tender love—when, in the space of a pistol shot, he had changed from a light-hearted boy into a sad, silent man—loving him then as a tender mother loves a son who has suffered and grown strong.

His blamelessness in the hideous tragedy which had darkened his life, and the nobility with which he bore himself throughout the monstrous ordeal of blood, claimed all that was strongest and finest in Miss Judy's nature, and touched her romantic imagination as all the brilliant success which came to him later never could have done. It was not for such innocent gentleness as Miss Judy's ever fully to understand the meaning of the tragedy; to comprehend how much more terrible it was than the cruelest destiny of any one man, how much farther reaching through the past and the future than the length of any one man's life. John Stanley himself understood it at the time but dimly. Only by degrees did he come to see the truth: that his forced taking of the life of a man whom he did not know, whom he never had seen or heard of, had not been simply an

unavoidable necessity in self-defence, as he had tried to believe,—nor an accident, as the verdict of the law and public opinion had decreed, seeing that it was accidental only so far as his instrumentality was concerned; that he himself was not the victim of chance—*but the helpless transmitter of traditional bloodshed*.

It was revealed to him at the trial which acquitted him, that the man whom he thus had been compelled to kill had been driven—ay, even hounded—by public opinion into seeking the life of the man who had taunted him, and in so doing into finding his own death at the hands of a lad who had no quarrel with any one. It was then shown him that the slain and the slayer were equal sacrifices to this monstrous tradition for the shedding of blood. So that, as he began to see, and as he continually looked back upon this blighting tragedy of his boyhood, it thus became—to John Stanley, who was a thinker, and a christian, even in his youth—infinitely more terrible than any really accidental or necessary taking of another's life would have been. He saw in this monstrous deed which he had been forced to commit, the direct result of a tradition of bloody vengeance: the unmistakable outcome of generations of false thinking, of false believing, of false teaching, of false example, of false following; all the rank growth from one poisonous root, all deeply rooted in a false sense of "honor," which, planted by the Power of Evil, had grown into the very life of the people, until it now towered, a deadly upas tree, darkening and poisoning that whole sunny country, almost as darkly and killingly as its murderous kind had ever darkened and poisoned beautiful Corsica.

When that awful truth first became plain to John Stanley—plain as the handwriting on the wall—it altered not only his character, but the whole trend of his life. From the day that he had first seen it through the bloody tragedy of his youth, John Stanley had watched the growth of the poison tree with ever deepening horror. He had seen its deadly shade pass the limits of the wrong which could never be washed out by the shedding of all the blood that ever flowed in human veins; he had watched its creeping on to trivial and even fancied offences, till it touched trifling discourtesies, till it reached at last inconceivably small things—the too quick lifting of a hat to a lady, the too slow response to the bow of another man—causing trifles light as air to be measured against a human life. As John Stanley thus looked on,—horror-stricken,—at the working of this deadly poison throughout the body of the commonwealth, he came gradually to believe it to be even more deadly and more widespread than perhaps it really was. His dread and fear of any form of violence, his horror of any lightness in the holding of life, his abhorrence of bloodshed under any provocation, grew with this morbid brooding through sad and lonely years, until they imperceptibly went beyond the bounds of perfect sanity, passing into the fixed idea which much lonely thinking brings into many sad lives.

And John Stanley's life was still lonely, notwithstanding his late marriage. Miss Judy felt this to be true, although she could not have told how she knew. It always had been a source of distress to her that she could know nothing of his wife, the beautiful, brilliant woman of fashion whom he had married only a few years before. Miss Judy thought wistfully that she would know why John seemed still so sad and lonely if she could only see his wife. But the judge's fine-lady wife apparently found no inducement to come to Oldfield; so that Miss Judy was compelled to be content with asking how she was, whenever John came, and with hearing him say every time that she was well—and nothing more.

But Miss Judy was not thinking about the judge's wife on that midsummer night. It was enough for her perfect happiness merely to have him there, settled for the evening in her father's arm-chair, which was fetched out of the parlor for him and never for any one else. It was delight only to look at him, smiling at her across the passage—wherein they sat because it was cooler than the room—quite like old times. He was a very handsome, very tall man, of slender but muscular build, stooping slightly from his great height through much bending over books. His head was fine, with a noble width of brow; his thick hair, once very dark, was now silvered about the temples; but his eyes were as dark as ever, and undimmed in their clear, steady brightness. His face was sensitive in its clean-shaven delicacy, and pale with the pallor of the student. It was not so sad though on that night as usual, nor nearly so grave. He was rested and soothed and cheered—this famous man of large affairs—by listening to Miss Judy's gentle twittering, so kind, so loving. It pleased him to see the little things that she had done in preparation for his coming. He smiled at the sight of the small basket of rosy peaches daintily set about with maidenhair fern. He did not know that in order to get the fruit Miss Judy had made a hard bargain with the thrifty Mrs. Beauchamp, who had the only early peaches,—a very hard bargain whereby the little lady went without butter on her bread for a good many days. Nor did he suspect that she had climbed to the top of the steepest hillside trying to reach the woods, regardless of the fluttering of her heart; or that she had ventured bravely even into the shadiest dell, heedless of her fear of snakes, in order to get his favorite fern to wreathe his favorite fruit. Perhaps no man ever knows what the pleasing of him costs a loving woman; certainly no loving woman ever takes the cost into account.

But then, on the other hand, perhaps no woman, however loving, ever can fully realize how much unstinted tenderness may mean to the greatest, the gravest, the most reserved of men, when he has never found it in his own home or anywhere else in all the cold world, which he has conquered by giving up the warmth and sweetness of life—as they must be given up by every conqueror of the region of perpetual ice. Miss Judy's gentle love now enfolded him like a soft, warm mantle, so that the chill at his heart melted away. It was then very sweet on that fragrant midsummer night, to this sad and weary man, to hear Miss Judy babbling gently on. He did not always listen to what she said; but the sound of her soft voice seemed for the moment to take

away all weariness and pain, as she talked to him of the people and the things that he had known in his youth. She said about the same over and over, to be sure, almost every time he came, but that made no difference whatever; it was the sweetness of her spirit, the peace of her presence, that the great judge craved and loved and rested upon.

"And now, John, here are a few peaches—just the kind you like," Miss Judy said, in her artlessly artful little way, as if the pretty basket had only that moment fallen from the clouds—as she always said when he had sat a certain length of time in her father's chair in the coolest corner of the passage.

"Why,—so they are!" exclaimed the judge, in delighted surprise, as he always exclaimed when the peaches were offered precisely at the time when he expected them to be. "How in the world do you always remember—never once forgetting—from year to year? And these are the prettiest of all. See the rose velvet of that peach's bloom."

And then Miss Judy, delighted, and beaming, bustled about, spreading her mother's best napkin over the judge's knees and under the plate (the prettiest one with the wreath of forget-me-nots), wishing with all her loving heart that she might find a pretext for tying something around his dear neck. When she had put an old silver knife in his hand,—after being as long about it as she could be—conscientiously,—she gave Miss Sophia also a share of the rosy feast, and then sat down with a sigh of complete content, and looked at them positively radiating happiness; the happiness which only such a woman can feel in seeing those whom she loves enjoying pleasures and privileges which she never claims nor even thinks of, for herself.

And thus passed the first two hours of the three hours that the judge always spent with Miss Judy on the first evening of his coming to Oldfield. There was something which he felt that he must say before he went away, but he shrunk from saying it, fearing to disturb Miss Judy; and so put it off as long as he could, waiting indeed till the last. He was not sure that it was a matter of real importance; he was rather of the opinion that it was not of any actual consequence, and yet he could not help mentioning it in justice to Miss Judy. In glancing over the docket for the term, as he usually glanced immediately upon reaching the village, he was surprised to find that a suit had been brought against the estate of Major Bramwell for the payment of a note given by him to Colonel Fielding. Looking farther, he saw that the note had been transferred to Alvarado years before, and that the suit was brought in the Spaniard's name. This was the shadow now coming over the judge's visit to Miss Judy—this, and the blacker shadow cast by the past whenever John Stanley was compelled to remember the existence of the Spaniard, and the passion, cruelty, and deceit which had so ruthlessly shut the light out of three hapless lives. He never thought of him if he could help it; he never had been known to speak of him nor heard to call his name. When Alvarado—mad with hate and jealousy that death itself had not been able to soften or to cool—had continued to thrust himself into the court upon first one wild pretext and then another wilder pretext, during term after term, the judge had steadily looked away, had steadily held himself from all anger as well as all violence, avoiding the clash which the madman sought. The coolness and skill of the jurist had enabled him to do this without great difficulty up to the present time, and he had no fear of not being able to do the same in the present case. He was not even any longer afraid of himself. Still, it was necessary that he should explain the matter to Miss Judy, since she must almost certainly hear of it and might naturally be hurt at his silence. His first impulse had been to send the amount of the note with interest to the holder of it by some third person, and so to dispose of the suit without Miss Judy's knowledge. But a second thought made plain to him that the money was not what the Spaniard wanted, and that such a step, even if possible, would be utterly useless. It would also be worse than useless to appeal to Colonel Fielding or to try to learn how and when the note had come into Alvarado's possession. The old man had always been a child in heart; he was now a child in mind. And then—the unhappiness of John Stanley's youth had so warped his maturer judgment of the causes of his misery—he had never been able to hold Alice Fielding's father quite without blame for her sacrifice. No, he could not go to Colonel Fielding, not even now, in his age and feebleness, not even for Miss Judy's sake.

The strong often find it hard to understand how blamelessly the weak may yield to violence. The wise, for all their wisdom, hardly ever can see how innocence itself may lead the unwise into the pit digged by the wicked. No, John Stanley could not go to Colonel Fielding, who, although but as an innocent, helpless child himself now, alas! had been the father of the girl whom he had loved, and who had been given to a bloodthirsty beast in human form. No, he could not do that, even for Miss Judy's sweet sake. So John Stanley thought, under a sudden great wave of the old bitterness, with the pain of memory rushing back as if the flood of wretchedness had engulfed him but yesterday. He could do nothing else than tell Miss Judy, and he must tell her at once—lest she hear it from some other source—and so gently that she could not be frightened, timid as she was. There need be no trouble about the mere money; he did not consider that at all; unknown to Miss Judy, he could shield her from that. Nor was there any danger of so much as a collision of words with the Spaniard, now or at any time. Nothing that could ever come to pass—nothing in the vast power of evil—could make him, whose hands had once been innocently dyed in a fellow-creature's blood, lift his hand against another man, or force him to utter one word to tempt another to raise a hand against himself.

Little by little the shadow had deepened, till Miss Judy saw it in his sensitive face, and had begun to grow uneasy before he spoke.

"Do you know, or, rather, did you ever know, anything about your father's having given his note to Colonel Fielding," he said, finally, when he could wait no longer. "A note of hand, and without

security, I believe."

Miss Judy's blue eyes opened wide in startled surprise. Then she blushed vividly; even by the poor light of the one flickering candle the judge could see the rose color flush her fair face, which had been so pale of late. Her father's debts had ever been a sore subject, and, although it was now many years since they had been recalled to her memory by mention, her sensitiveness had not lessened in the least.

"No, I do not," she said, with a touch of stiffness. "Our father was not in the habit of speaking to us of business. He thought that gentlewomen should be shielded from all sordid matters," she added, her gentle tone marking a wider distance than had ever before existed between John Stanley and herself.

The judge felt it, and realized instantly that he had made a bad beginning, one very far indeed from his intention.

"But why do you ask?" inquired Miss Judy, while he hesitated.

"My dear Miss Judy, nothing was further from my thoughts than to startle or offend you; but you know that—I only meant to tell you that—that a small matter has arisen which—that an unimportant suit has been filed—"

Miss Judy arose suddenly, and stood before him like a sentinel guarding a post. "Am I to understand, John, that some one is suing my father for debt," she said stiffly, and almost coldly; but the stiffness and coldness now were not for him. "Tell me all about it at once, please."

"It is nothing to trouble you. If such a note be in existence, it must have been barred by the statute of limitation long ago. How long has it been since your father died?" asked the judge.

"Over twenty-five years,—twenty-six years this coming October." And as Miss Judy spoke she turned, with a soft sigh, and looked tenderly at Miss Sophia, and was glad to see that she was fast asleep, sitting straight up in her chair.

"And this note, if given at all, must, of course, have been drawn before that date. Your father was in Virginia a long time."

"Yes," sighed Miss Judy, glancing again lovingly and protectingly at Miss Sophia. "It is very painful to sister Sophia and myself to remember how long."

"Don't think any more about it," said the judge. "There can be no necessity for your giving it another thought. The length of time, the statute of limitation, protects you. The note cannot possibly be of any value."

Miss Judy stood still for a moment in perplexed thought, with her little hands very tightly clasped before her.

"But if my father gave the note,—if he ever owed Colonel Fielding the money, and it never has been paid, I don't see that time can make any difference," she said at last, a little absently and a little uncertainly, as if she did not yet quite understand, but was, nevertheless, firmly feeling her way to the light.

"Well, most people would think it made a difference," the judge responded, smiling in spite of his sympathy with her troubled perplexity.

"I can't believe that Colonel Fielding can have meant to bring such a suit. He loved my father and honored him above all other men. I cannot believe that he would knowingly smirch the memory of his best friend; unless, poor old man, his mind is entirely gone. And why has the note not been known about before? Why have I never been told—all these years? Are you sure, John, that there is no mistake? Are you sure that the colonel has actually brought the suit?" asked Miss Judy, piteously, with her blue eyes—clouded and filling with tears—fixed on the judge's face.

"It is not the colonel," murmured the judge.

"Then who is it?" persisted Miss Judy, with growing bewilderment and distress. "Who comes at this late day claiming that my father did not pay what he owed,—when he could have paid?"

"Alvarado," John Stanley said, in so low a tone that she barely heard, thus forced himself to utter the name of the Spaniard for the first time since it had become to him an unspeakable thing.

"John—John, I humbly beg your pardon. I didn't dream—oh, my son," Miss Judy cried, forgetting her own trouble.

She ran to him and laid her tender little hands on his broad shoulders, and gazed into his pale, calm face, all unconscious that her own was quivering and wet with tears—tears for the pain which she saw in his set face, for his sacrificed youth, for his lost happiness—tears most of all for gentle Alice Fielding, the girl whom he still loved, although she had rested so long in the grave of the broken-hearted.

XXIII

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Misfortune never comes singly to a community any more than to an individual. No life anywhere may ever stand or fall quite alone, so are the living all bound together. In a village where every door stands wide and all lives are in the open, and where no high, hard walls rise between the people,—as they do in a city,—the bond is closer than it can be elsewhere. So that the uneasiness which the judge communicated so unwillingly to Miss Judy on that quiet midsummer night was the beginning of the end of the peace of many of the good people of Oldfield, for a long time afterward.

Sorely troubled, Miss Judy had lain awake hour after hour looking into the darkness, and trying to see the way to do that which she knew was right. She had seen her duty distinctly enough as soon as the judge's meaning was clear; the only uncertainty was as to the means of doing it. The money must be paid, the length of time during which it had been owing only making the payment more urgent. No loophole of the law could afford any means of escape to a sense of honor as fine and true as hers. Such a possibility did not cross her mind as she lay thinking in the silence of the night, which was broken only by the peaceful little puffing sound that came tranquilly from Miss Sophia's side of the big, high bed. Miss Judy again softly put out her thin little hand in the dark, and softly patted her sister's round, plump shoulder with protecting tenderness, as she always instinctively caressed her when trouble drew near. Come what would, this sister, so tenderly loved, should not know or suffer any privation that could be prevented. It would be hard to keep her from knowing if the payment of the note should require the entire amount of the next pension money, which was every cent they would have for months. Still, Miss Judy remembered how she had managed, several times ere this, in keeping other unpleasant things from her sister's knowledge, and she now lay revolving transparent schemes and innocent fictions, alternately smiling and sighing, half proud and half ashamed of her own deep duplicity.

The result of the night's reflection was that she went early on the next morning to the tavern to see Judge Stanley, hoping to be able to speak to him before he left his room for the court-house. But some little delay had been required—so at least Miss Judy imagined—in order to allay Miss Sophia's suspicions, and the judge was already gone when Miss Judy reached the tavern. She hesitated for a few moments, blushing, embarrassed, confused, and utterly thrown out of her plans. She had never entered the court-house; she had never heard of a gentlewoman's doing such a thing. The very thought of approaching the door of it shocked her as something improper and almost immodest. And yet it was absolutely necessary for her to see the judge immediately, so that she might tell him of her decision before the case could be called. She would do almost anything rather than allow her father's honored name to be dishonorably mentioned in the hearing of the people of Oldfield, who had revered him all their lives, and looked up to him as the finest of gentlemen, the most valiant of soldiers. Without giving herself time to shrink or to flinch, she turned desperately and hurried toward the court-house, as she would have marched to the cannon's mouth.

The court was barely opened, the judge was just taking his seat on the bench, when the sheriff came and told him that Miss Judy was at the door and would like to see his Honor if he "would kindly step outside." The sheriff smiled in bringing him the message, his broad, kind face broadening and growing kinder with the affectionate indulgence which everybody always felt for Miss Judy's harmless peculiarities. Even the judge's grave face relaxed somewhat, lighting and softening, as he promptly arose from the bench and went to do the little lady's bidding. He found her on the other side of the big road, and not at the door of the court-house, where he had expected to find her. She had, indeed, hastily retreated as far as she dared, after sending for him, and now stood awaiting him, terrified and trembling, at being even as near the door as she was—hovering like a bird just alighted but ready to take flight. In her agitation she held the front breadth of her best bombazine very, very high indeed, so that her neat little prunella gaiters were plainly visible, and even her trim ankles were quite distinctly in sight; and there were also unmistakable glimpses of snow-white ruffles of an antiquated fashion, like the delicate feathers about the feet of a white bantam.

"I wanted to see you, John, before the suit could come up," she began pantingly at once. "I thought it all over last night,—after you were gone."

"Everything is right, Miss Judy. I considered the matter again when I went back to the tavern. Don't give it another thought. The suit is barred by limitation long ago," the judge said gently, as if soothing a frightened child.

"But is it really a note of my father's? Did he ever owe the money? And is it true that the debt never has been paid? That is what I wish to know," persisted Miss Judy, with all the earnestness of a woman who knows well the meaning of her words.

Her blue eyes were uplifted to his face, and she read in it the answer which he would have been glad to withhold.

"Then it must be paid," she said firmly, promptly, conclusively. She had been drifting out of her depth ever since the stunned plunge of the first shock; but she now felt solid ground once more under her feet. "There is my dear and honored father's pension for his services in the War for Independence. A portion of that could scarcely be better used than in discharging any pecuniary obligation of his, which he may naturally have forgotten, or chanced to overlook."

This was said loftily, almost carelessly, as though the large size of the pension made any

unexpected demand upon it a mere trifle, and with a gentle, sweet look of pride. The judge could not help smiling, notwithstanding that he was touched and even troubled, knowing how grave a matter any call for money must be to Miss Judy. Looking down upon her from his great height, he thought he never before had known what a frail pretty little creature she was, nor how deeply, purely blue her eyes were, with the blue of fresh-blown flax-flowers, nor how like silver floss her hair was, till he now saw it new burnished by the sunlight. But he stood in silence, uncertain what to say, fearing to wound her.

"And the amount of the note? How much is it?" Miss Judy asked suddenly, after the momentary silence.

Nothing could have been more like her, more entirely characteristic of her whole life, than that this question, which would have been the first with many, should have been the last with her. Yet now that it had occurred to her, she held her breath with fear. If it should be more than the amount of the whole pension,—more than she had or ever hoped to have in the wide world,—what should she do then?

"It was drawn for a hundred dollars. I have not yet calculated the interest," the judge answered reluctantly.

Miss Judy gasped and turned white; the earth seemed suddenly sliding beneath her feet. Then in another instant a scarlet tide swept the paleness from her alarmed face. The blood in her gentle veins was, after all, the blood of a soldier, and she fought on to the last trench.

"It must be paid, as soon as possible," she said formally, as if speaking to a stranger; but she laid her trembling little hand in John Stanley's warm, firm clasp with a look of perfect love and trust before she turned from him and went on her troubled way homeward.

He stood still for a moment when she had left him, gazing after the little figure in black fluttering against the warm wind. Then he turned slowly and went back to his seat on the bench, and the routine of the court forthwith began to drone throughout the long, hot day. A feeling of foreboding, a vague dread of some unknown calamity, had hung over him when he had first awakened on that morning; as though a formless warning had come through the mists of unremembered dreams. He was not able to cast off the depression which it caused, and the feeling deepened with the dragging of the heavy hours. But it wavered still without distinct form. It had nothing to do with his hourly, momentary expectation of seeing the Spaniard's threatening face and wild eyes confronting him through the gloom of the low-ceiled court-room. He was used to the sight and he never had feared it, save as he always feared himself and the enforced shedding of blood. The only unusual thing was that Alvarado should not be in his accustomed place that day, as he invariably had been heretofore, whenever the judge had been on the bench; but this fact gave the judge no uneasiness, he hardly thought of it at all, for his mind was filled with other things. He leaned his aching head on his hand as the business of the court droned dully along and the heat grew steadily greater. He thought, vaguely, that it must be the heat and the scent of the catalpa flowers which weighed so heavily upon him. For a few large, white bells swung uncommonly late amongst the heavy, dusty foliage of the catalpa trees, crowding close to the deep windows, darkening the court-room and shutting out every breath of the fitful, sultry breeze.

He left the court-house as soon as he could get away, and strolled slowly toward the farthest, highest hillside, whither he often went at the close of a tiring day. The warm wind had died out of the valley, but the air would, so he thought, be cooler on the hilltop; a cool breeze nearly always stirred the tall cedars of the graveyard, as if with the chill air of the tomb. He found the gate open, as it always was. There was never any need for closing it. Within were no gilded bones to be stolen: without were no inhuman robbers of graves. So that here those who rested within had nothing more to fear; and those who strove without could not be barred when they also came to stay.

Leaning on the fence, he turned and looked down upon the drowsing village; at the men, white and black, who were going homeward with the unhasting pace of the country; at the black women with milk-pails, crossing the back lots whence the cows were calling; at the farmers, already far in the distance, riding away from court; at the great road wagons, with their mighty teams of four and six horses. These great wagons were the huge ships of this vast inland sea of wheat and corn and tobacco, and now but lately launched, heavy-laden, with the newly garnered grain.

And then, as his wandering, absent gaze fell near by, upon the path from the village leading up the hillside, he saw that Lynn and Doris were slowly climbing it after him toward the graveyard. He had met the young man at the tavern on the previous day, and he had known his father. He had always known Doris in the distant way in which he knew all the people of Oldfield, with the sole exception of Miss Judy. He therefore greeted them with the formal courtesy that he gave to every one; and he talked with them for a few moments, in his grave, impersonal way, but he was disappointed in his wish for solitude, and he lingered no longer than good breeding required. He did not stay to go over to an isolated corner of the graveyard as he had intended, to see if the tangle of weeds and briers, which makes the desolation of neglected burial-grounds, had been taken away from one solitary grave, as it always was when he came and never at any other time. He could not do this in the presence of any one, so that, lifting his hat with a faint smile, he now turned his face toward the village and the tavern.

At the foot of the hill he happened upon the little Frenchman, who sat groaning by the roadside, unable to walk because he had wrenched his ankle, spraining it very badly, in getting over the fence.

"But it is not that I do care for the pain. Bah!" cried monsieur, with a Gallic gesture and an inflection that belonged to no nation and was wholly his own. "It is—hélas!—the ploughing for the spring wheat. A man may not hobble after the plough, neither may he follow with crutches."

"Oh, you needn't trouble about that. There's plenty of time, and you can't plough, anyway, until a rainfall has softened the ground," said the judge, kindly.

"The black man, devoid of intelligence, who tills the fields of monsieur the doctor, ploughs to-day in the dust. Should the grain of the fields of monsieur the doctor grow quicker and thrive better than the grain of the fields of madame the mistress, whose fields I myself do till, then I shall surely mortify."

"There's nothing to be done in the fields now," the judge said, trying not to smile. "Let me help you," bending over and offering his strong arm and broad shoulder. "You'll be all right again in good time for the spring wheat. A sprained ankle is no Waterloo!"

The Frenchman shrunk, dropping away from the outstretched arm as though it had struck him down. His face, open and transparent as a child's, had been confidingly upturned; now it fell, reddened and clouded with anger, indignation, and shame. Falling back, he tried at once to rise again, only to sink—groaning and helpless—more prone than before, while hissing through his clenched teeth something about *le sentiment du fer*.

"It is the fatal misfortune of my father that you do insult!" he said fiercely, in English, striving vainly to maintain an icy civility. "When it is that I may again stand on my feet, your Highness will perhaps—"

"Come, come, Beauchamp. You are suffering. Here, let me help you."

"*Jamais! Jamais!*—not to ze death!" cried monsieur, shrieking with mingled rage and pain.

The judge, from his calm height, looked silently down on the pathetic little form stretched at his feet, at the gray head resting now on the hard earth, and, seeing the dignity, the tragedy, which strangely invested it, a great surge uplifted the deep pity for the mystery and the sorrow of living which always filled his sad heart.

"As you please about that, Mr. Beauchamp. But you must allow me to pull off your boot before your leg becomes worse swollen. You are risking permanent injury by keeping it on; the hurt seems more serious than any mere sprain," he said, with the gentle patience that great strength always has for real weakness.

And then this stately gentleman, this famous judge, knelt down in the dust of the common highway, beside this poor distraught, angry, resisting, atom of humanity, and tenderly released the injured ankle from the pressure that was torturing it.

"Now, that's better," he said, rising, and looking round in some perplexity. "Ah, yonder is a cart coming up the big road. I can get the driver of it to take you home."

He spoke to the negro who was driving the swaying oxen, and gave him some money, and stood waiting until he saw the Frenchman lifted carefully and safely into the cart, and well started on the way toward his home. Then the judge went on his own lonely, homeless road to the tavern. The lengthening shadows of the hills were already darkening the valley, although a wonderful golden light still lingered above the summits, making the new moon look wan. There was only daylight enough for the judge to see old lady Gordon sitting alone at her window, and seeing her, he was reminded that it was his duty to tell her of the accident which had befallen the manager of her farm.

She looked up suddenly, almost eagerly, at the sound of his approach, and peered into the gloaming with the sad intentness of weary eyes which are no longer sure of what they see. When she recognized the judge, she suddenly settled heavily back in her chair with an abrupt movement of angry disappointment. She did not thank him for coming to tell her, and she did not ask him to come in. She merely nodded with the rude taciturnity which, with her, always marked some disturbance of mind.

XXIV

OLD LADY GORDON'S ANGER

For this breaker from a sea of troubles, gradually overspreading all Oldfield, had now gone so far that it had stirred, at last, even the long unstirred level of old lady Gordon's vast indifference.

It had been many a long year since she had been moved to such anger as she was feeling on that day; few things seemed to her worth real anger; she accepted almost everything with careless, almost amiable, tolerance. Selfishness as absolute as hers often wears a manner very like good

nature, because it is far too great to be moved by trifles.

Poor old lady Gordon! She had managed to sink her disappointment in self-indulgence, as wretchedness too often sinks itself in opium. She had eaten rich food because the eating of it helped to pass the dull days of her distasteful life; she had read all the novels within her reach—good, bad, and indifferent—because reading was not so tiresome as thinking, when there was nothing pleasant to think about; she had laughed at many follies and mistakes which she saw clearly enough, because it seemed to her useless to try to prevent folly or the making of mistakes.

And yet none knew the true from the false better than this honest, scornful old pagan, who had buried more than one talent, more than ordinary intelligence, under habitual sloth of mind and body; and none had a more genuine respect for all that was finest and highest. But her own early striving toward it had met too complete a defeat for her—being what she was—to go on striving or to think it worth while for others to strive. A nature like hers can never submit, unembittered and unhardened, to wrong and unhappiness; nor is it ever winged by the spiritual so that it may rise above its false place in the world. It can only beat itself against the stone wall of environment, or recoil in fatalistic indifference. And in this last poor old lady Gordon had found refuge so long ago that she had quite forgotten the pain—and the pleasure—which comes with suffering through loving.

And then, after she had thus lived through many wasted days, and many empty nights, it seemed as if this grandson had come at the eleventh hour to open the door of her prison-house. She had not believed it at first; more than a half-century is so long to wait for everything which the heart most craves, that it cannot believe at once when its supreme desire seems about to be granted at last. But, nevertheless, old lady Gordon's pleasure and pride in her grandson had grown fast and steadily through those perfect days and weeks of summer. It had pleased her more and more to hear his strong, gay young voice ringing through the silence of the dull old house. It had pleased her more and more to look at his bright, handsome young face across the table, which had been lonely so long. It had pleased her most of all to have his cheering young presence—so overflowing with hope and spirits—at her side, through the dreary hours of the lingering twilight, when she had been forced, in the solitude of the old time, to face alone the dreaded muster of disappointment's mocking spectres.

Thus had old lady Gordon regarded her grandson in the beginning of her acquaintance with him. But she gradually began to know him, to see him as he really was, to think that he might be what he meant to be. And so, little by little, this hard, embittered, lonely old soul came finally to believe that a grudging fate was, after all, about to grant to her age the true son of her own heart, of her great pride, of her unbounded ambition—the son whom it had so cruelly denied to her youth and maturity. Then there came a strange and piteous stirring of all her long-numbed sensibilities; a powerful, and even terrible, uprising of all her intensest feelings. It was as if a mighty old grapevine, long stripped of fruit and foliage, long fallen away from every living thing, long trailing along the earth—deeply covered with mould and weeds—as if such a mighty, twisted, hard old grapevine were suddenly to put forth strong new tendrils, and, entwining them around a young tree, should thus begin to rise again toward the last light of life's sunset.

And now, just as this late warmth was sending its rays through the chill veins of unloved and unloving old age,—the coldest and the saddest thing in the whole world,—old lady Gordon once more found herself facing the same danger which had wrecked all her earlier hopes. She had shut her keen old eyes to it at first, and had merely smiled, although she had seen her grandson's interest in Doris quite clearly ever since its commencement. The girl seemed to her so far beneath her grandson in station as to be safely outside any serious consideration. For no Brahmin was ever more deeply imbued with the prejudice of caste than this slothful old lady Gordon; and no consideration other than a serious one could disturb her in the least. Moreover, she rested for a while upon her confidence in Lynn's singleness of purpose, believing in his determination to allow nothing to turn him from the pursuit of his ambition. But later, as the summer days went by and she saw him giving more and more of his time to this yellow-haired, brown-eyed, sweet-spoken, soft-mannered daughter of the village news-monger, and less and less to the thought and study of his chosen profession, a doubt entered her mind, and began to rankle like a thorn in the flesh. As she was left more and more alone, till she had scarcely any of her grandson's society, which was now become so sweet, she had time to remember the folly and weakness of his father, and the folly and wickedness of his grandfather. These dark memories, surging back, as she brooded in solitude, brought old bitterness to her new uneasiness; and yet, recalling many mistakes which she had made in the old time through the rashness of inexperience, she still kept silence, resolving not to fall into such errors again. She did not speak slightingly of the girl, recalling that as one of her most fatal errors; and she was also withheld by a grim sense of justice which was always lurking, half-forgotten, within her hard old breast. She accordingly wisely confined herself to passing comments upon Sidney, and to occasional references to Uncle Watty, directing most of her witty, satirical talk toward love and marriage in the abstract. One day she read Lynn a couple of lines from an old novel which said that:—

"Falling in love is like falling downstairs; it is always an accident, and nearly always a misfortune."

She had many such dry and stinging epigrams at her sharp tongue's end in those days, when she was using wit, satire, irony, and ridicule as weapons to defend her late-coming happiness. Poor old lady Gordon! it was very hard. Selfishness always makes opposition bitterly hard, and it is hard indeed to have been compelled to wait through the space of a generation for the supreme

desire of the heart. It was harder than a nature so imperious as hers could endure, to meet such ignoble interference at this eleventh hour, now that its late fulfilment seemed so near, now that she herself had so little time for longer waiting.

So thus it was that scornful impatience gradually gave way to bitter anger, to the fierce, compelling anger of the autocrat long unused to having her will crossed, much less lightly set aside, and, least of all, to having it totally disregarded. It was lightly and even gayly that Lynn had gone his own way in opposition to hers; but when their wills had clashed slightly once or twice, old lady Gordon had seen that they were made of the same piece of cold steel. She had recognized the fact with a queer mixture of pride and displeasure, but the recognition had turned her away from all thought of force, and she had henceforth resorted to subtler measures. She had tried—with a gentleness so foreign to her nature that it was pathetic—to keep him at her side, as a tigress might softly stretch out a paw—every cruel claw sheathed in velvet—to draw a cub away from danger. But this too failed, as the efforts of the old to hold the young always must fail when nature calls. And thus it was that the lingering twilights of those last summer days found old lady Gordon again alone, as the judge had found her; again solitary at lonely nightfall; again—with the long night so near—gazing into the gathering darkness at the ghostly assemblage of all her dead hopes.

Lynn did not come that night until she had turned and tossed through more than one sleepless hour. At breakfast the next morning they had little to say to one another. It was nearly always so now, although Lynn had scarcely noted the fact that all ease and confidence had gone out of their companionship. He was always in haste of late to get away; every morning he went earlier to join Doris, forgetting all about the law books which lay on the table in his room, and which his grandmother used to go and look at and turn over—most piteously. She now used rarely to stir from her chair except to do this. Every evening he was later in leaving Doris, and slower in coming home; and he never lingered now on the dark porch to think over his plans. And day by day old lady Gordon's secret wrath burned more fiercely, although she still kept it carefully covered with the ashes of assumed indifference. But on the evening of the judge's visit her long-smouldering anger had, for the first time, burst into flame beyond her control. She had seen Lynn and Doris passing on their way to the graveyard; she had watched the flutter of the girl's white skirt at her grandson's side all along the slow, winding way up to the high hilltop. The sight had been as wind and fuel to raging fire. It was well for the judge that he had not lingered while the flames thus raged; it was well for Lynn that he had been for the moment beyond the reach of his grandmother's burning contempt; it was well for Doris—though as innocent of all offence as one of the white lambs feeding on the hillside—well that her return was unseen in the gloaming; it had been well—most of all—for this fierce old spirit itself that certain strong, dark drops, from the bag hanging at the head of her bed, could lay for a few hours the mocking ghosts of dead hopes, all slain by folly and weakness, even as this last one seemed now being put to death before her very eyes.

The morning found her spent in strength; and the fire of her anger, although uncooled, was again covered by the silence of exhaustion. Moods of silence were, however, not unusual with her, and Lynn was too deeply absorbed in his own pleasant thoughts to observe his grandmother's ominous brooding. When the meal was over, with the exchange of hardly a dozen thoughtless words upon his part, and of taciturn responses upon her side, Lynn took up his hat and went out of the house and toward the gate. Pausing under the cypress tree, he looked back and smiled and waved his hand; and then he went swiftly along the big road toward the silver poplars.

Old lady Gordon sat quite still in her chair, gazing after him with darkly drawn brows, with her turkey-wing fan lying forgotten on her lap, and her novel cast, neglected, on a chair by her side. She had not told Lynn of the accident to the manager of the farm; she had not spoken of her intended visit to the Frenchman on that morning; she had not asked her grandson to go with her, although she walked with difficulty and even with pain, and longed with age's helplessness to have him near by to lean upon. When Lynn was quite out of sight she arose—a fine, majestic old figure in her loose white drapery—and started across the fields, making her slow, painful way to the Beauchamp cottage. She found the Frenchman in bed, and, seeing how seriously he was hurt, and remembering the farm work which must go undirected, she was not in a better humor when she turned her face homeward. Still she held her wrath with an iron hand, exercising perhaps the greatest self-control that she had ever brought to bear upon anything during her whole life. She even forced herself to make some gruffly civil response when Lynn came back to dinner at noon, and hastened away again as soon as he could, with a few hurried, happy words and another gay smile and careless wave of his hand. But all through the afternoon hours of that long, dull, solitary day old lady Gordon's anger grew as thunder clouds gather, and when, after supper, Lynn again took up his hat and turned, intending again to leave her, the brewing tempest suddenly burst upon him.

"Have you ever stopped to think where all this philandering must lead? It's high time," she broke out, hoarse with passionate rage.

The young man, holding his hat in his hand, wheeled and looked at his grandmother in utter amazement, startled, almost alarmed, by the violence of her tone and by the suddenness of the attack.

"I don't understand. I don't know in the least what you mean," he said honestly enough, and yet, even as he spoke, a glimmering consciousness came into his open face.

"Oh, yes, you do. You know perfectly well, but I'll put it plainer if you want me to," she went on,

roughly, sneeringly.

Lynn reddened, putting up his hand with a gesture imposing silence. "Perhaps I do understand something of what you mean," he said hesitatingly, with the hesitation which every right-minded man feels at referring—however distantly—in any such connection to a girl whom he reveres. "And if I do understand anything of what you mean, you must allow me to tell you that there has been no philandering, nor any semblance of it."

"Then what do you call it?" she demanded, with even greater violence and roughness than before. "May I ask how you characterize this perpetual dawdling, all day and nearly all night, at the heels of a girl whose rank is hardly above that of a servant—a girl whom even the son of your father, or the grandson of your grandfather, could scarcely be fool or rake enough to think of—except as something to philander after."

She hurled the brutal words at him as she would have thrown stones in his face, far too furious to think or to care how they might hurt.

He recoiled, shocked, revolted, by the sight of such unrestrained anger in age. It seemed an incredibly monstrous thing. Then he stood still, looking at her with a cool courage which matched her flaming rage. He now moved farther away, but it was solely because he felt a sudden extreme repulsion.

"Pardon me," he said icily, moving still farther, still nearer the open door. "It is you who do not understand. There certainly is nothing that any one else can possibly have misunderstood. I have been scrupulously careful all along that there should not be. I have guarded every act, every word, every look—"

Old lady Gordon burst out laughing like a coarse old man deep in his cups.

"Oh ho!" she scoffed. "So that's how the matter stands, is it? How high-minded! How prudently virtuous! How perfectly Sidney's daughter must understand. How highly the girl must appreciate it. Of course she does understand and appreciate your prudence, your thought—of yourself. What woman wouldn't? Even a simpleton of a country girl must have been overcome by it. She can't help forgiving you for trying your best to make her fall in love with you, if you have been as steadfast—as you say you have—in warning her that you didn't mean to fall in love with her. How she must honor and admire you!" she taunted, with something masculine in her voice, and laughing again like a coarse old man.

The shafts of her merciless scorn pierced the armor of the young man's cool calmness like arrows barbed with fire. It seemed to him for an instant as though flame suddenly wrapped him from head to foot. He felt literally scorched by a burning sense of shame, although, dazed and bewildered, he could not yet see whence it came. The blood rushed into his face, into his head; his eyes fell; he could not keep them on his grandmother's mocking, scornful face.

Old lady Gordon's fiery gaze did not fall, but it softened. A strange look, one which was hard to read, came to replace the expression of contemptuous anger. There was still some scorn in it, yet the scorn was curiously mingled with vanity.

"Well, after all, you are more like me than you're like the men of the family," she said abruptly, with a sudden return to her usual manner.

Lynn could not speak; he could not look at her. He silently bent down and took up his hat, which had dropped from his nerveless grasp, and with bowed head he went silently out into the shielding dusk.

XXV

THE REVELATION OF THE TRUTH

The first wound received by true self-respect is always a terrible thing. And the truer the self-esteem and the better founded, the more the slightest blow must bruise it. The deepest stabbing of the derelict can never hurt so much or be so hard to heal. It may indeed be doubted whether a touch on the real quick of a fine sense of honor ever entirely heals.

A man coarser and duller than Lynn Gordon was, less high-minded, less essentially honorable, could not have suffered as he was suffering when he went out that night into the dusky peace of the drowsing village. Yet he could hardly tell at first whence came the blow which had wounded him so deeply. The suddenness of the arraignment had dazed him; the violence of the attack had stunned him; so that he was conscious mainly of a strange bewilderment of pain and humiliation, as though he had been struck down in the dark.

He went through the gate as if walking in a distressful dream, and turned toward the silver poplars, as he had turned at that time of the evening for many weeks, but turning through sheer force of habit, scarcely knowing whither he went. It was not yet quite nightfall; the starlight was just beginning to meet the twilight, only commencing to arch vast violet spaces high above the dim trees on the far-folded hills. The silvery mists, ever lurking among the fringing willows of the

stream murmuring through the meadows, were already rising to cloud the lowlands with fleecy whiteness, radiantly starred with fireflies. The few languid sounds of living heard in the day, now had all passed away before the coming of night. Only the plaintive song of the white cricket came from the misty distance; only the lonely chime of the brown cricket rang from the near-by grass; only the chilling prophecy of the katydid's cry shrilled through the peaceful silence of the warm, fragrant gloaming.

But the softest dusk of heaven, the completest peace of earth, is powerless to calm the storm which beats upon the spirit. Lynn Gordon strode on as though to confront the full glare of life's fiercest turmoil. He was driven by such stinging humiliation as he had never expected to know; he was goaded by such pain of mind as made his very body ache. So that he thus went forward, swiftly, fiercely, for a score of paces, and then he stopped and stood still, arrested by a sudden thought which was as blasting as a flash of lightning. For an instant his hot and heavy-beating heart seemed to cease its rapid throbbing and to grow suddenly cold with sickening fear. Another moment and he felt as if a living flame wrapped him again from head to foot, so intolerable was the burning shame that flashed over him. Had Doris seen him—as his grandmother had seen him? Had Doris recognized in his guarded attitude toward her an intended warning to guard her own heart—as his grandmother had said? Had Doris felt—as his grandmother had charged—that he had thus offered her the most unpardonable indignity that an honorable man can offer a modest woman?

Under the shock of the thought he recoiled from it as too monstrous to be true. That exquisite, spotless child! That sacred embodiment of peerless beauty! He could have groaned aloud as the unbearable thought clung like a flaming garment. Yet he could not cast it from him; and out of the smoke of memory there now came swirling many little half-forgotten incidents. Small things, which had then seemed at the time to be trifles light as air, now came back, seeming confirmations strong as proof of holy writ. Under the light of this fiery revelation one recollection stood out more distinctly than any other. He remembered giving Doris some simple little gift. He saw again in this dim, unpeopled dusk, even more clearly than he had seen it then, the bewitching brightness of her beautiful face, the soft radiance of her lovely, uplifted eyes, as he had put the bauble in her eager little hands. And now, while he still saw her thus, he heard his own voice saying an incredible thing. He now heard himself—not some dull, blundering, brutal dolt—saying something vague about its being strictly an "impersonal" sort of present.

Ay, he heard again the very tone in which his own voice uttered these inconceivable words. And then he saw again the dawning bewilderment which crept over the sunny transparency of the exquisite face; the slow shadowing of the soft dark eyes, raised so frankly, so confidingly to his; the quick-coming, quicker-going, quiver of the sweet rose-red lips. At last, as though the glass through which he had seen darkly were miraculously become as clear as crystal, he saw again the quivering fall of the long, curling lashes over the lily cheeks, which reddened suddenly, as they rarely did, before growing swiftly whiter than ever; the sudden proud lifting of the golden head, which naturally drooped like some rare orchid too heavy for its delicate waxen stem: the brave, steady, upward look from the soft eyes, now suddenly grown very bright: the abrupt laying down of the simple gift by the little hand, which was always so gently deliberate in all that it did: the hasty moving away of the slender form, which had, up to that time, rested at his side in the perfect trust which only the timid ever give.

All this rushed back, bringing an unendurable self-revelation. The firmest, deepest foundations of his character were shaken in his own estimation. His pride of uprightness, his pride of intelligence, his pride of good breeding, his belief in his own right feeling, his reliance upon his own quickness of perception, his faith in his fineness of sensibility,—all these now stood convicted of weakness and falsity. Faster and more confusedly many self-delusions flew through the stress of his mind, as burning brands are borne by violent gusts of wind. Thus was hurled the recollection of that day in the graveyard, the day from which had dated this growing aloofness of Doris, an aloofness so gentle that he had mistaken it for timidity; the day from which had dated her increasing unwillingness to continue these daily strolls—an unwillingness so subtle that he had taken it for nothing more than natural anxiety about Miss Judy. Not until this moment had he had the remotest suspicion of the truth, even though it had gradually frozen the sweet freedom of her innocent talk into the silence of cold constraint.

He had been standing still, bowed under this intolerable weight of humiliation, crushed beneath this overwhelming burden of self-reproach. Now he went slowly onward, unseen and unheard, through the gathering darkness and the deep dust. When he came within sight of the light shining behind the white curtain over the one window of Doris's humble home, he paused again and leaned on the fence and looked at the window for a long time. He felt that he could not go nearer it that night, that he could not face Doris until he had more fully faced his own soul. As he gazed at the white light, he thought how like it was to the girl herself, so simple, so clear, so steady, so open, shielded only by the single whiteness of purity. A soft breeze coming over the hills rippled the silver leaves,—grown as dark now as the sombre plumes of the cypress tree,—and stirred the white curtain as if with spirit hands. And then as he lingered there came to him a wonderful change of feeling. The thought of her stole softly to him through the warm starlight, sweet as the breath of the white jessamine. A great, deep tenderness welled up in his heart and went out to her, sweeping all before it—all untrue dreams of ambition, all false thinking, all self-delusion. Then he knew that he loved her; then he knew that he had loved her from the instant that his eyes had fallen upon her, a vision of beauty framed in roses; then he knew that he would love her with the highest and finest love that was his to bestow—so long as he should live.

When this bitter-sweet truth came home to his troubled heart, it brought with it a calm, tender sadness. Even as he recognized it he felt that his own blind folly, his foolish conceit of wisdom, had robbed him of whatever chance, whatever hope he might have had, of winning her love in return. The fatal, unforgivable blunders into which he had fallen so blindly must forever stand in the way. And he hardly dared think there ever could have been any hope, even had he not so hopelessly offended. For humility is always the hall-mark of true love. To be loved by the one beloved is always true love's most wondrous miracle.

With a last lingering look at the light shining through the white curtain, Lynn turned slowly and went down the big road toward his grandmother's house, now lying dark and silent beneath the tall trees which stood over it and amid the thick shrubbery which crowded around it. The passionate emotion with which he had left it had passed wholly away. The love filling his mind and heart, as with the sudden unfurling of soft wings, left no room for anything hard or unkind or bitter. He had almost forgotten the hard words with which his grandmother had so cruelly stoned him; he had wholly forgiven them. For newly awakened love can forgive almost any harshness in the awakening. He was not, in fact, thinking of his grandmother at all; he was thinking solely of Doris, and was planning to see her at the earliest possible moment on the morrow. It was not easy of late to see her alone; he realized this now with a guilty pang which touched his new peace with the old pain. Only on the previous evening he had found her gone from her home, without leaving a message for him, as she always used to leave one. Only by the merest accident had he met her coming out of Miss Judy's gate; only by the most urgent persuasion had he been able to induce her to take the accustomed walk to the graveyard, which she used always to be so ready and even eager to take. Ah, that walk up the hillside, which had been as a torch to the tinder of his grandmother's anger! For that, also, as for everything else, he alone was to blame. It was too late to undo what had been done; but never again through any fault of his should evil speaking or evil thinking approach her spotless innocence. It was not for his strong arms to protect her; his own folly had forfeited all hope of that sweetest and most sacred privilege. Nevertheless, he might still beg her to forgive him, even though he knew that forgiveness was impossible for an offence such as his. And he might still tell her that he loved her and ask her to be his wife, although he knew only too well that she would refuse. And then, having done what he could, he would go on with his work. He had not forgotten his ambition, nor had he thought of giving it up; but his old foolish belief that the happiest marriage must hamper a man's life plans had gone with the rest of his blinding delusions. He no longer thought of needing both hands free for the climbing of ambition's unsteady, long ladder. It now seemed to him that he never could win anything worth the winning without Doris to hold up his hands; that nothing either great or small was worth the winning unless shared by her. And his self-delusion had forever lost him all hope of this. Yet he might still beg her to forgive him, he might still tell her that he loved her and ask her to be his wife. Nothing should deny him that honor and happiness—if he were but spared to see another morning's light.

It came with all the misty glory of the late southern summer. There was something melancholy, something foretelling the saddest days of the year, in the sighing wind which drifted the browning leaves of the old locust trees, wafting them down to the thinning grass. The dim woods belting the purpled horizon already lifted banners of scarlet and gold, waving them here and there on the hillsides, among the fast-fading verdure. The sumac bushes were already binding the foot of the far green hills with brilliant bands of crimson. The near-by blackberry briers were already richly spotted with red. The trumpet-vine, with the dazzling cardinal of its splendid flowers and the rich, dark green of its luxuriant foliage, already made all the crumbling tree-trunks and all the falling rail fences gorgeous mysteries of beauty. The golden-rods were already full-flowering, already gilding the meadows where the black-eyed Susans, too, were aglow, and where the grass was still vividly green beneath the purple shadows cast by the distant hills—the sad, beautiful, dark shadows which slant before the coming of fall. Beyond the shadows and beyond the hills, the summer sun still flooded the warm fields, turning the vast billowing seas of tobacco from blue-green into golden green. And the wide, deep corn-fields, now flowing in silver-crested waves, were already melting into molten gold.

The great ships of this vast inland ocean of grain—the huge, heavy-laden wagons, rising high at the ends like the stem and stern of a vessel, and drawn by doubled and trebled teams—already labored, swayingly, on their way to the Ohio River to deliver their cargoes of wheat to the big steamers which were waiting to bear them away to the whole world. Many of these lurched thunderingly by Lynn Gordon, wholly unheeded, as he went on that morning to seek Doris Wendall. It was very early, as early as he could hope to find even Doris awake, notwithstanding that she awakened with the birds. The wild morning-glories, clinging, wet, fragrant, and sparkling, on all the fences along the wayside, were not closed, and still held out their fragrant blue cups, striped with red like streaks of wine, and brimming with dew. The evening primroses also had forgotten to close, and were still blooming bright and sweet, close in the corners of the fences. Lynn bent down to gather the freshest and sweetest, because it somehow reminded him of Doris, though he knew not why or how. As he straightened up he suddenly saw her!—with a great leap of his heart. There she was, within a stone's throw, just entering Miss Judy's gate. He was not quite near enough to speak had he found any words; and, although he went swiftly toward her with the long, firm stride of a strong-willed man approaching a distinct purpose, she had flitted out of sight before he reached the gate. He was not sure that she had seen him, but he felt that she had; and the feeling brought back the new distrust of himself, the new lack of confidence in his own judgment, the new insecurity in his own knowledge of what was best to do. All these strange and painful feelings, which he had never known till the humbling revelation of the previous night, rushed together now, to hold him dumb and helpless, with his unsteady hand

on the little broken gate.

He turned with a nervous start at a sound by his side. Sidney had drawn near without his seeing her. She stood within a few paces, looking at him, and knitting as usual, but with a look of trouble on her honest face. Silently he bowed and stepped aside, holding the gate open for her to pass through.

"You've come to ask about Miss Judy," she said, lowering her voice. "I'm afraid she isn't any better. Doris came on ahead of me, but I haven't seen her since, so that I have had no news from Miss Judy for nearly an hour."

"I—I didn't know she was ill," said Lynn, simply.

"Well, your grandmother did. I sent her word last night that we hardly expected Miss Judy to live till daybreak." Sidney spoke a little severely, and she looked at him with frank curiosity.

"I am sincerely grieved. What is it?" the young man faltered.

"It seems to be the same old weakness of the heart that she's always had. Any kind of a shock has always made it worse, and this foolish lawsuit of that crazy Spaniard's—over an old no-account note of her father's—gave her the hardest blow she's had this many a year, poor little soft soul. It didn't make any difference to her that the note wasn't worth the paper it was written on, and that it had been outlawed long ago. She has always had her own queer little notions about things, and you couldn't shake her, either, mild as she has always been. And she's always worshipped her father, so that she couldn't bear to have anything against his name. He never worried himself much about his debts. The major was very slack-twisted in business matters, just between you and me. But the angel Gabriel, himself, couldn't make Miss Judy believe that, even if he were mean enough to try. Last night she came by my house, going on to see Mr. Pettus. She hoped he might buy the house, and that she could raise the money in that way. But she fainted before she could tell him what she wanted, and he carried her home in his arms. Such a poor, light, little mite of a thing! She's been unconscious most of the time since, but whenever she comes to herself she tries to say something about selling the house—in a whisper, so that Miss Sophia won't hear. Then she begins to worry, wondering what Miss Sophia will do if the house is sold, and honestly believing that poor Miss Sophia will feel disgraced if it isn't, when Miss Sophia neither knows nor cares a blessed thing about the whole matter, so that she's let alone to eat and sleep. I am going into the room now to stay with Miss Judy while Doris goes home for a little rest. She wouldn't leave the bedside for an instant last night. Wait for her," Sidney added, assuming a blank, meaningless expression. "When she comes out she can tell you how the poor little soul is."

With a strange tightening of the throat and a tender aching in his breast, Lynn then stood waiting, with his eyes on Miss Judy's window. It seemed a long time before Doris came out, and when she finally appeared, there was something indefinable in her manner which made him feel that she had not come of her own accord. But she was very calm, very quiet, very sad, and very pale; and her soft dark eyes were softer and darker than ever with unshed tears. She merely said that her mother had sent her to say that there was no change. The doctor had decided that there could be but one. And when she had said this she quietly turned back toward Miss Judy's room. No, she answered in reply to his keenly disappointed inquiry, she was not going home. She could rest and sleep—after—Miss Judy was gone. There was so little time now that they could stay together.

XXVI

THE TRAGEDY

The news of Miss Judy's illness reached the judge as he was leaving the tavern for the opening of court. It was then too late for him to go at once in person to ask how she was, as he wished to do, and as he otherwise would have done. But he nevertheless turned back and went to his own room, long enough to write her a few hurried lines telling of his deep and tender concern.

And when this was written he was not satisfied. He sat hesitating for a moment, listening absently to the ringing of the court-house bell. Then, again taking up his pen, he went on to beg her not to give another troubled thought to the note or to the suit. He wrote that possibly the case might come for trial on that very day,—writing this as lovingly, as tenderly, as he could have written to his mother whom he had never known,—and going on to tell her that he wished her to know, only for her own peace of mind, that the payment of the note, both principal and interest, had already been arranged for, and would be made, if possible, before the opening of court. This was, so he wrote, to be quite regardless of the decision in the case, and solely to set her mind wholly at rest. After writing thus far he still sat thinking, feeling as if he had not yet said just what he meant to say, as if he had not been quite tender enough of the little lady's tender sensibilities. With his pen poised he looked out at the passing wagons and at the crowd gathering around the court-house, taking no heed of anything save the anxiety in his mind. At last a sudden, gentle smile illuminated his grave, pale face, as he added another paragraph:—

"Of course you understand, my dear little friend, that this money is advanced as a loan which you may repay at your convenience. You will also understand, I am sure, that I should not have taken

the liberty of thus settling your private business without your consent, had I not heard of your illness and feared that you were not able to attend to it yourself. As soon as you are well enough you may scold me as much as you like for my presumption. It is, however, to be between ourselves; no one else must know."

He gave the letter to a negro boy and watched him fly like an arrow through the clouds of dust which were hanging heavy over the big road. He saw the child's hazardous dash between the great wagons, close to the high, grating wheels, under the huge, clanking trace-chains, almost under the beating iron hoofs. For this quiet morning of late summer chanced to be the one out of the whole year when the grass-grown solitude of Oldfield's single street became a thronged, clamorous, confused thoroughfare.

But the judge cared nothing for all this unwonted turmoil, beyond the safe, swift passage of the messenger bearing his letter. He did not know that Miss Judy was too ill to read it, and he was longing to have it reach her before she could hear any troubling news through the possible coming up of the case. Turning slowly toward the court-house, he was thinking solely of her, and the thought of her illness deepened the sorrow for the pain of the world which always lay heavy on his sad heart. As he thought of this gentle soul, whose whole life had been loving sacrifice for others, and whose very life might now be demanded for the wrong-doing of others, the sorrowful mystery of living perplexed him more sorely than ever. As he thought of this other innocent woman suffering, it might be even unto death, through a madman's causeless hatred of himself—even his great faith, measured by his judicial mind, seemed for the moment to shrink.

Feeling his danger, he tried to wrench his thoughts away and to turn them from this morbid brooding. He strove so strenuously that he presently was able to fix his attention on the matters of merely human law and justice which began to come before him, as soon as he had taken his place upon the bench. Thorough training and long practice helped him so that he was gradually able to bring his eminently legal mind to bear upon the wearying routine of the docket with the unerring precision of some marvellous machine.

His fine face was still pale, but there was nothing unusual in its paleness, and it now grew calm and collected under the very intensity of his spirit's stress. For the farthest spiritual extremity lies cold and still beyond all human passion, as the supreme summit of perpetual ice rises cold and still above all human life. There was, therefore, no change in his attitude of mind or body when he suddenly saw the dark, threatening visage and the wild, bloodshot eyes of the Spaniard confronting him through the crowded gloom of the heated court-room. He was accustomed to the sight; it had faced him at every term of his court. There was consequently no disturbance, not the slightest uneasiness in the abrupt turning away of his eyes. His sole feeling was one of unutterable weariness of the struggle of living, of utter sickness of mind and heart and soul. He was so weary that he did not even fear himself, so utterly weary that he was—for the moment—no longer afraid even of the unexpected escape of his own fierce temper, always so hardly held in leash. He no longer dreaded the sudden breaking of the steel bars of his own stern self-control, the greatest danger that he had ever found to fear.

When the case against the estate of Major John Bramwell came to trial in its due turn, during the dragging hours of the long, hot afternoon, the judge weighed that also, as he had weighed all which had come before, and as he intended weighing all which were to come after—coolly, calmly, scrupulously—according to the letter of the law. Having so weighed it, and found it wanting, he dismissed the complaint on account of time limitation, and assigned the costs to the plaintiff, as he would have done in any similar case under like circumstances. Then he passed composedly to the deliberate consideration of further business, and the hot, heavy hours droned on.

Through it all he had scarcely glanced at Alvarado; in truth he had scarcely thought of him save as a party to one of the many suits before the court. He had had no opportunity to learn that the Spaniard had refused to accept the money, offered early in the day, in payment of the note. He did not observe Alvarado's leaving the court-room after the decision. He did not know that the man was waiting on the steps when he himself hastened out after the adjournment of court.

Thus it was that the long-coming crisis found him at last wholly unprepared. Thus it was that the blow from the heavy handle of the Spaniard's riding-whip struck him without warning. It sent him, stunned and reeling, down the steps. His hand went out, through blind instinct, and caught one of the portico pillars, so that he did not fall quite to the earth; and he was on his feet instantly, springing to his great height, to his tremendous power—towering above the surrounding crowd. As he arose, he made one furious leap, like the magnificent bound of a wounded lion, straight at the Spaniard, who stood—still as a statue—braced for the encounter.

A cry of terror had gone up from the crowd when the blow had been struck. Many restraining arms were now raised, as the white fury flashed over the judge's pale face, as rare and deadly lightning glares from the paleness of a winter sky. And then this appalling danger-signal faded even as it flashed forth. The cry of the crowd was suddenly hushed, its swaying was suddenly stilled. There now followed a strange pause of strained waiting!

Every man's eyes were on the judge. No man gave a glance to the Spaniard; every man knew what he meant to do. But the judge—it was on his noble figure and on his fine face that every man's eyes were riveted. Every man knew his horror of violence of any description, and his abhorrence of the taking of human life under any provocation. Yet every man, thus looking on, held it to be impossible for any man to suffer the degradation which this man had just suffered,

without resistance. For in every man's eyes this was, with but one exception, *the most binding of all the many traditions for the shedding of blood*.

No man might suffer it, and ever hope to hold up his head among his fellow-men, without killing, or at least trying to kill, the man who had so degraded him. Breathless, indeed, was this instant's terrible waiting! The bloodthirsty wild beast, which lurks forgotten in most men's hearts, now leaped up in its secret lair, scenting blood, and stared fiercely out of the fierce eyes fixed on the judge. And not one of all these men—all so feeling, all so believing—could credit the evidence of his own senses when he saw this man, who stood so high above other men in body, in mind, and in reputation, now stand still, making no farther advance. Even less could they believe what their own eyes beheld, when they then saw him draw back, slowly and silently, from the nearness to the Spaniard to which that single uncontrollable bound had carried him. And so the crowd stood —stricken dumb and motionless-for a breath's space! Then—suddenly—every upraised arm came down as the judge's powerful arms fell at his side. Calmly, almost gently, he turned, and, raising his majestic form to its fullest height, and lifting his noble head to its highest level, he rested his calm, clear gaze on the murderous passion of the Spaniard's eyes. It was a long, strange look. It was a look which filled every man who saw it with a feeling of awe; even though not one, of all those who were looking on, could comprehend its meaning. It was a look such as not many are permitted to try to comprehend: it was a look such as no mortal men can ever have seen, save it may have been the few who stood close to the foot of the Cross.

In his own room at the tavern, late on that afternoon, the judge felt more alone than ever before through all his lonely life. He had already begun to suffer the mental reaction which nearly always follows great spiritual exaltation. He was even now thinking of what he had done—what he had *not* done—as if he were another person. He most distinctly saw its inevitable, far-reaching, and never-ending consequences. He realized that he, no more—perhaps even less—than any other man, could expect to evade them or hope to live them down. The very fact of his prominence could but make the matter more widely known and more disastrous in its results. The high office which he held—though it personified the law—would only make his breaking of this unwritten law all the more unpardonable. Suddenly he felt completely overwhelmed by the weariness of life, which had so weighed upon him through the day. In terrifying fear of himself he sprang to the open window and hurriedly leaned out, finding a measure of safety in the mere presence of the people passing on their way home from court. But some of them looked up, and stared at him curiously, so that he drew back. He had not closed the door of his room, and he was glad to hear footsteps in the passage, although he merely turned his head without speaking when the man, to whom he had given the money for the payment of the note, came in quietly, and laid it on the table within reach of his hand. Nor did the man speak,—there was nothing for any one to say,—but he stood for a moment hesitatingly, irresolutely; and then, still without speaking, he drew a pistol from his pocket, and laid it on the table beside the money.

When he was gone the judge got up and closed the door, and took the pistol in his hands, which were beginning to tremble now as they had never trembled before. Hastily he put the temptation down, and walked to the door and opened it again: taking swift, aimless turns up and down the room. At the sound of footsteps again passing along the passage, he called to a servant and asked for some water. The presence of any one would protect him against himself. Turning this way and that, aimlessly, he turned once more to the window, and threw it higher and pushed the curtain further back—as far this time as it would go. He then leaned out again, caring nothing now for the curious gaze of the passers-by, caring only that he might escape this overpowering, horrifying, paralyzing fear of himself.

The highway was heavily overhung with clouds of dust as the huge wagons with their mighty teams, which had passed in the morning, now rumbled homeward, returning from the journey to the river. Through the dark haze the judge could see only the proud face of his wife, and it seemed to his fevered fancy that her cool smile was cooler than ever with something very like scorn. It seemed to his sick imagination that he could see again the half-contemptuous shrug of her graceful shoulders, the half-scornful lift of her handsome brows, with which she always greeted any disregard of the established order. Above the rude sounds of the iron-bound wheels, the clanking chains, and the beating hoofs, he heard the music of the light laugh with which she had always mocked his own deviations. She had called him an idealist, a dreamer—even a fanatic —half in jest, half in earnest. But this was different. She would not laugh at this, which must alter her position in the world as well as his own. And then, as he thought of this, a doubt for the first time assailed him, piercing his breast like a poisoned spear. Had he the right—toward her? She had married a man who stood fair before all men. Again, in the anguish of this last thought, this new dread, this worst doubt, the deadly fear of himself rushed over him. Weakened and sickened in body by the anguish of mind which was rending him, he dared not turn his head toward the table where the temptation lay within such easy reach of his shaking hand.

Leaning as far as possible the other way, he caught sight of the old Frenchman, toiling along the big road on crutches, threading a passage through its unusual turmoil with difficulty and pain. Then the wind tossed the deep dust and sent it swirling upward in thick, dark clouds, shutting the highway from the judge's unseeing sight. He had hardly been conscious of seeing Monsieur Beauchamp; everything was passing in a fearful dream. He scarcely heard a new, strange roar which now suddenly arose above the voices of the passing people, above the rumble, the rattle, and clash of the passing wagons and the heavy beating of many great hoofs. But he heard more consciously as this came nearer and louder, like the rapid, roaring approach of a sudden terrible storm. He saw clearly enough when the cause of the violent sounds burst over the highest hilltop,

and dashed down its side—as a gigantic wave is driven by a hurricane,—a huge wagon thundering behind six mighty, maddened, runaway horses. Like some monster missile it was hurled this way and that, crashing terrifically from side to side of the big road; and threatening the whole highway with destruction. Like death-dealing thunder-bolts the flying iron hoofs gave little time to flee for safety, but the danger appeared to give wings to every living creature, brute and human alike. The old Frenchman alone stood still, paralyzed by fright and unable to move. His crutches dropped from his powerless grasp, so that he could no longer even stand, and—tottering and shrieking for help—he fell helpless, prone upon the highway straight in the track of that huge, blurred, black bulk of Force which was being whirled toward him with the speed of a cyclone by the storm-flight of those frenzied horses.

And then the judge's vision magically cleared, and he saw the little Frenchman—his weakness, his utter helplessness—as if by a lightning flash. The judge, starting up with a leap, was down the stairs and running along the big road almost as soon as he realized what it was that he was going to meet. He was such a powerful man, so quick and strong of mind and body, so prompt, so able, so fearless in the doing of everything that he thought right! Ah, the pity of it all!

He could not see the old man upon first reaching the highway. Blinding dust-clouds hung more heavily than ever over the wild, furious confusion of the big road. The people, terror-mad, were fleeing, each one thinking only of his own peril. The drivers, panic-stricken, whirled the clashing wagons hither and thither, utterly bewildered. The horses, helpless and terrified, plunged amid the clanking of the entangled trace-chains. The dense clouds of smothering dust hung like a blinding pall. But the judge knew where the little Frenchman was lying and sprang straight toward him and found him in time,—barely in time to bend down, to lift him in his mighty arms and toss him like a feather far beyond danger. But there was no more time,—not an instant,—and then the judge himself went down as a church spire falls before a tempest,—down into the dust of the earth under the awful, crushing hoofs of the maddened horses, down under the cruel, cutting tires of those merciless wheels,—down to death, giving his life for the humblest of his fellow-creatures.

XXVII

THE LAST ARTFULNESS OF MISS JUDY

To Lynn Gordon, as to most of the Oldfield people, it seemed as if this sleepless night—the saddest ever known to the village—never would end. And yet, when he arose at last, with the first faint glimmer of the day's gray, and looked out through the dew-wet dimness of the green boughs at the softly whitening east, a sudden feeling of peace fell upon his deeply troubled spirit.

The sorrow and terror of the darkness fled away, like evil birds of the night, so peaceful did the world appear, so free from all pain and wrong and cruelty and death, now that the soft white dawn-light—cool, sweet, calm, pure as ever—was coming for the perpetual refreshment of the earth. Under this fresh whiteness from heaven all living creatures looked to be resting untroubled, completely in harmony with one another. Three little screech-owls sat as a single bunch of gray feathers, motionless among the shadows which still lingered in the nearest tree. Three little brownish heads merely turned slowly as he appeared at the window, and six big eyes regarded him calmly, as though all belonged to the one small bunch of dark gray feathers, still huddled sleepily together almost within reach of his hand.

From the darker and more distant trees gradually swelled the twitter of many bird voices, rising into a rapturous chorus as the east became rifted with rose and seamed with silver. Every member of this divine choir was singing his softest and sweetest in celebration of the dawn's eternal renewal of creation. And then, as the rose brightened into royal red, and the silver melted into molten gold, at the nearer approach of sunrise, the oriole—already wearing the sun's golden livery—sent forth his ringing welcome to the king, a greeting so brilliant and so ancient as to make the trumpeter's mediæval salute to the emperor seem but a poor dull thing of yesterday.

With this heavenly music in his ears and this seeming peace and happiness before his eyes, Lynn Gordon could hear no sound of the sorrow of living, nor could he see any sign of the pain of the world. An unconscious smile even lifted for a moment the weight from his heart as he idly watched a merry couple of nuthatches, those gay "clowns of the green tent of the woods," tumbling up and down a giant elm. He did not see the solitary butcher bird, nature's most cruel executioner, sitting in motionless, sinister silence in the dark depths of a great thorn tree, nature's cruelest scaffold.

As the light grew brighter the young man's eyes followed the wood smoke arising from the tall chimney of the tavern in slender, thin spirals of pale blue, and going straight up to the bluer blue of the warm, windless sky. With the sight, the deep sadness of the night came back suddenly and overwhelmingly. It was not a terrible dream; it was a more terrible reality. Under that old mossy roof, so simple, so peaceful-seeming, lay all that was mortal of the noblest presence, the noblest mind, the noblest heart that this isolated corner of the earth had ever given to the greater world.

Before a tragedy so overwhelming every earnest soul striving in Oldfield stood awed, although it was not given to many to comprehend that the greatest awe which even the simplest felt was for

the awful Mystery of Life. Never in the history of the village had its simple people been so slow in taking up the petty burden of daily struggle and strife. It seemed as if the least imaginative must be feeling the littleness of all earthly things.

Even old lady Gordon's look and manner were almost gentle, certainly more gentle than her grandson had ever seen them. Scarcely a word passed between the two after bidding each other good morning on meeting at the breakfast table; and she saw him go in silence when the uneaten meal was over. He hastened straight up the road, looking neither to the right nor the left. Doris was with Miss Judy; he knew that she was, because he had haunted the house through the greater part of the terrible night, and, although he had not been able to speak to her, he had seen her shadow on the white curtain of Miss Judy's room. The sight had comforted him somewhat at the moment, but he now was longing more than ever to see her, to speak to her—longing with the unspeakably softened tenderness that comes to love through grief.

And he saw her through the window from Miss Judy's gate. The poor old white curtain, with its quaint border of little snowballs, had been pushed back as far as it would go, much farther than it ever had been before when Miss Judy was lying in the high old bed. There was too desperate need for every wandering breeze, for every straying breath of air, for appearances to be remembered. Miss Judy herself could no longer guard the sacred privacy of that spotless chamber. She could no longer even blush faintly when the doctor laid his shaggy head against her hard-laboring little heart, listening for its weak fluttering, and hearing the soft knell of the pericardial murmur. For even this, which rings so harshly from sterner breasts, rang softly from Miss Judy's gentle breast. Yet it rang unmistakably, nevertheless, and there was nothing more that the doctor could do—nothing save to grieve, and he never stood idle for futile grieving when the suffering needed him elsewhere. After the doctor was gone to other duties, only Miss Sophia sat at the bedside, striving piteously to realize what was happening; and Doris alone hovered silently over it and flitted softly around it; doing the little that she found to do, and holding back her tears for Miss Judy's sake. But many others who loved Miss Judy were already gathering, and waited in the passage, looking out at the passers-by and shaking their heads speechlessly and sadly at those who paused at the gate to make anxious inquiry.

Lynn Gordon did not enter the house, and he quickly turned his eyes away from the uncurtained window. Even his reverend gaze seemed a profanation of the holiness of that quiet, shadowed old room, whence the soul of a saint was so near taking its flight from the earth. He crossed the narrow strip of front yard with noiseless steps and sat down on a broken bench under the window. He could hear Miss Sophia's heavy breathing as the little sister tried to understand; and he caught the soft rustle of Doris's skirts as the girl moved now and then in her loving ministrations; he could almost hear the swaying of the fan in her hand. Presently he became conscious of a familiar scent—faint, pure, delicate, like the spirit of perfume. He did not know at first what it was, but it seemed to float out through the open window; and after a little while he knew it to be the old-fashioned, natural, wholesome sweetness of dried rose leaves, the fragrance which had always clung round Miss Judy's life, the fragrance which would forever cling round her memory.

As he sat there waiting,—as so many were now waiting,—others came and went. Anne Watson crossed the big road before sitting down to the card-table, and stood for a moment at the door, talking in a low tone to some one whom Lynn could not see. But her husband's wistful, restless, compelling gaze followed her, drawing her back, and she did not linger. Nothing, not even her grateful affection for Miss Judy, could hold her long away from her post; nothing, save death alone, could ever free her from it. And even after death—! What then? Always, Anne Watson was asking herself that question; never was she able so to answer it that her soul was set at rest. She now went slowly and sadly to her place at the card-table, and she did not leave it again that day. But Lynn Gordon, keeping his vigil, saw her strange, mystical gaze wander many times from the burning stake to which she was bound,—a hopeless, tortured captive for life,—to the shadowed peace of the window behind his head. Ah, the inscrutableness of those strange eyes. The eyes of Anne Watson were the eyes of a fanatic, yet none the less the eyes of a martyr.

He glanced now and then at the people who were coming and going so stilly and so sadly through the little broken gate. All gave him a friendly nod in passing, no matter whether they knew him or not, for that was the kind custom of the country. But no one stopped to speak to him; all appeared to be too deeply absorbed in their own sad thoughts.

Only Kitty Mills smiled at him, and she did not know that she smiled, for her light heart was heavy enough that day. But she never had known what it was to have her eyes meet other eyes without smiling; and her merry brown ones smiled now of themselves without her knowledge, through mere force of habit. They had been sad indeed an instant before, and her round ruddy cheeks were drawn and pale, and bore traces of tears. She had been tirelessly running back and forth between her own house and Miss Judy's, coming and going more often than any one else, as often, in truth, as she found herself momentarily released from her father-in-law's ceaseless clamor for attention, and as his querulous summons recalled her to her perpetual bondage. His shrill, imperious cry now suddenly made itself distinctly heard through the reigning stillness; through that awesome stillness which reigns wherever death is expected; that stillness which awes all, save the very young, who feel too far away to be afraid, and the very old, who are come too near to heed the awe.

In response to the call Kitty Mills started to run across the big road as she had sped many times that day, and in so doing she encountered Miss Pettus, who had gone home and was now

returning in great haste, bearing a small covered dish with the greatest care. At the sight of her the sadness instantly flitted from poor Kitty Mills's face—which was newly wet with tears—and the old quizzical, bantering challenge flashed into it without her dreaming that it was there. But Miss Pettus saw it as quickly as it came, and her fiery temper flared up forthwith, like a flame in a sudden gust of wind. Her sharp little black eyes snapped with all the old fire, although they were red and swollen with weeping and watching the whole night through. Her homely, hard, faithful features stiffened at once with all the old scornful wrath as she caught Kitty Mills looking at the dish.

"*Yes*, it's a chicken for Miss Judy! And no bigger than a bird either—and tenderer too. There's no law—that I know of—against my having late chickens, even if that stubborn old dorminica *won't* set," she said, as fiercely defiant as ever.

She gave the usual contemptuous toss of her head in its gingham sunbonnet, and the accustomed excited swish of her starched calico skirt, as she passed Kitty Mills. And then she turned for the parting shot, which she could not even then bring herself to forego:—

"What if I *have* cooked this chicken for Miss Judy with my own hands? Don't *I* know as well as you do that she can't eat it—nor anything else—ever again in this world? And what's that got to do with my cooking this chicken, and thinking that—maybe Miss Judy might feel a little better—if"—with a burst of angry sobbing, "—if she could see Miss Sophia eat it. She always liked that better than anything for herself. You know as well as *I* do, Kitty Mills, that she always was just that silly and soft!"

Miss Pettus went on toward the gate, and Lynn Gordon got up to open it for her, some passer-by having thoughtlessly dropped over the post the loop of faded blue ribbon which served in the place of a latch. How like Miss Judy that poor little scrap of daintiness was! As he stood holding the gate back for Miss Pettus to pass, seeing that her hands were full, he heard the rumble of wheels, the rattle of some approaching vehicle. The great, brown cloud of dust lifted, drifting farther down the big road, and out of it came an old-fashioned buggy drawn by an old gray horse. This was driven by a white-haired negro, who had once been Colonel Fielding's coachman, and who was now long since become his nurse. Beside the driver sat the colonel himself, and Lynn sprang to assist him in getting down from the buggy; but the negro made a sly restraining gesture, and when the young man came near he saw that the colonel's beautiful old head was shaking strangely, and that his fine old eyes appeared not to see what they were resting upon. The colonel gazed vaguely down at Lynn before he spoke:—

"Ah, yes—my compliments to little Mistress Judy. *That* was what I came to say. Will you be so very kind, young sir, as to give my compliments to the elder of the major's daughters, and also to the major himself? Say, if you please, that Colonel Fielding has called this morning to pay his compliments to her and to her honored father. A man of honor, sir, a soldier, and a gentleman. Gad—sir—what more would you have? What more could any man be?" he said, suddenly turning upon his servant with a piteous touch of bewildered asperity.

"*Toe*-be-shore, sir! *Toe*-be-shore!" said the old negro, soothingly.

"I—I seem—to disremember something," the colonel went on, forgetting this momentary, formless annoyance. He sat still and silent for a space, trying to remember why he had come. He put his shapely hand to his high forehead in mild confusion. His thick, curling, silver hair fell around his face and upon his shoulders in rather wild disorder.

"Little Judy is a mighty pretty girl—delicate, sweet, and fair as a sweet-brier blossom. No prettier nor sweeter girl ever footed the Virginia Reel in this whole Pennyroyal Region. You will give her and her honored father my message, if you please, young sir. 'Colonel Fielding's compliments and also Miss Alice Fielding's compliments to Major Bramwell and his daughter.' You will not forget?"

"I will not forget, sir," said Lynn Gordon, as steadily as he could speak.

"And—and what else was it? What else did I come for? Tell me this instant, you black rascal!" the colonel now cried, again turning upon his servant in excited, displeased bewilderment. "What do you mean—I say, sir—by sitting there without saying a word? What was it I wanted to say about that young John Stanley, who's eternally hanging round my house? What did somebody tell me about him—only this morning? What's the matter with you, can't you speak, boy?"

The old negro's heavy lips were trembling so that he could not have spoken had there been anything to say. He sat bolt upright, gazing straight before him at the dust of the deserted highway; his ragged coat was as carefully buttoned as his fine livery used to be; he held the reins—broken and spliced with rope—over the poor old horse, which stood with a dejected droop, precisely as he used to hold the fine, strong, lines over his master's spirited bays.

"Well—drive on home, then," the colonel said, after a moment's hesitation, suddenly recovering his usual mildness. "Perhaps I may remember—and if so you may fetch me back."

Lynn watched the buggy disappear amid the thickening clouds of dust, and when it was out of sight he turned with a sigh toward the people who were still coming and going, looking sadder when they went than when they came. He was surprised to see how many were passing through that humble little broken gate, with its pathetic fastening of a loop of faded ribbon, too weak to bar a butterfly. He had not thought there were so many in all Oldfield, counting both black and white, for both were now coming and going. He presently realized that some of these sad comers

and sadder goers were not Oldfield people, that some lived farther away, and this knowledge filled him with greater surprise. For he would not have supposed that Miss Judy was known by any one beyond the compassing hills, so completely had her life seemed bound about by the wooded borders of the village. He had never known until now how far-reaching the influence of gentleness may be; he had never realized until this moment that goodness always wins more friends than greatness.

He said something of this to the doctor's wife, when she came softly after an hour had passed and silently sat down beside him on the bench under the window. She did not reply at once, but she took his hand and pressed it with the sympathy which common trouble begets in every feeling heart. She did not know how keenly he was craving sympathy, how sorely he himself was needing it, how bruised and broken he was by the spiritual crisis—the greatest of his life—through which he was passing so hardly. It was only that her tender heart was tenderer than ever, because she had come direct from the tavern.

Thus the two sat for a few moments in silence, listening to the soft sounds which came at long intervals from the shadowed quiet within Miss Judy's room. At length the doctor's wife began to talk in the hushed tone which the feeling use near the dying—who appear to hear nothing but the Call; and near the dead—who appear to hear nothing—nothing for evermore. She said that Miss Judy had not been told of the judge's death; and that she mercifully knew nothing of the horror which had gone before the tragedy. There was no need now that she ever should know, so the doctor's wife said, with filling eyes. It would be time enough when the two met on the Other Side. And then—with that resistless reaching toward the unknowable, which always moves us when we feel the Mystery near, so near that it appears as if we have but to put out our hand to seize the invisible black wings which forever elude mortal grasp—she asked him if he believed that Miss Judy would know even then. She, herself, she said, could not see how a soul as gentle as the soft one then fluttering to escape its frail earthly prison, or how a soul as just as the one which had already found sacrificial release from a life of suffering, could be happy in heaven if it still knew the pain and the wrong and the cruelty of this world. But, however that might be, all would surely be well hereafter with these two. The doctor's wife, rising to go back to the tavern, where other sad duties were yet waiting to be done, declared this with conviction. These two had not had their just share of happiness here; in fairness it must be awaiting them elsewhere, she concluded, lapsing into the simple audacity of everyday faith.

Lynn walked with her a little way along the big road, and when she had gone some distance and he still stood looking after her, he heard again the sound of wheels and saw a vehicle approaching through the clouds of dust. He thought at first that the colonel had "remembered" and was returning; but as the dust-clouds shifted he recognized his grandmother's coach with a start of surprise, and a feeling very like alarm came over him as he saw that she herself, erect, massive, white-robed, sat within the coach. He waited, standing still till the coach drew nearer, and then went outside and turned down the folding steps—from which the little black boy sprang—and assisted her to descend. But he did not speak, nor did she. Silently he offered his arm and she took it as silently as it had been offered, and they went together toward the passage door. It touched him to see with what difficulty she walked. It moved him thus to realize suddenly how old she was. It seemed to him that age was a very pitiful thing. Yet it also impressed him to see what a fine, stately personage she still was; to read in the respectful eyes which followed her that she was still the great lady of the country, as she always had been.

The abrupt withdrawal of her hand from his arm when they reached the door told him that she did not wish him to enter the house with her, and he as abruptly drew back, feeling the blood rush to his face as Sidney came out of Miss Judy's room to receive his grandmother. Returning to his seat on the bench under the window, he tried not to strain his ears toward what was passing within the room, and he heard only the indistinct murmur of voices. But he could not help wondering miserably why his grandmother had come. He knew her too well to think that she had been induced to come by pure fondness for Miss Judy, such as had brought all these other people, who were so patiently waiting with heavy hearts and wet eyes. The sudden thought of Doris—a formless fear for her—made him leap to his feet. And then he put away the vague alarm as unworthy of the rough justice, the haughty generosity, of his grandmother's character. He sat down humbly, ashamed of his passing suspicion, to wait with such patience and composure as he might muster till she should come from Miss Judy's room. But the intensity of his suspense became almost unendurable before it was ended. When his grandmother finally appeared in the passage door, he sprang up with a nervous start and hurried to help her to the coach. Again they were both silent until she was comfortably settled on the easy cushions, silent even until the bag had been rehung closer to her hand, and the little black boy was again seated on the refolded step. Then she told him, speaking slowly and gruffly as though she found the few words hard and bitter to utter, that Miss Judy had asked her to send him to the bedside. When this had been said, and he had made no reply, old lady Gordon sat still and silent for a moment, looking grimly straight ahead, as if there were something else which she wished to say. But if so it was never said; she suddenly and roughly ordered Enoch Cotton to drive her home, and went away—poor old lady Gordon—without a single backward glance.

The young man then turned swiftly and went softly into Miss Judy's room, as the reverential enter a holy place. Doris, bending over the bed, did not see him come. Miss Sophia was dozing, worn out with watching and grief and—most of all—with trying to understand. Sidney sat motionless in the farthest corner of the quiet, shadowy old room, where the shadows were deepest. The only sound was the hushed murmur of the voices of the many others who loved Miss Judy and who

watched and waited without; some in the parlor, which had been opened wide at last, others in the passage, and more in the yard.

The little figure on the big bed lay motionless and with closed eyes. Such a little creature, so white, so beautiful, so wonderfully young—almost like a child, with the soft rings of silver hair wreathing the border of the snowy cap, and the little arms which always had been so strong for burdens, and the little, little hands, which always had been so busy for everybody but herself, resting now—as still and cold as snowflakes—on the deep blue of the old quilt. Looking down with dim sight and swelling heart, Lynn thought of the Divine Bambino lying asleep on its azure shield; he could think of nothing else so unearthly in its loveliness.

The blue eyes opened as if Miss Judy had felt his presence, and the flicker of a smile went over the sweet, quiet face. The young man, leaning down, thought that she murmured something in apology, that she tried to say something about a gentlewoman's bedchamber. But the words were so faintly uttered, and the pauses between were so long, that he could not be sure.

"Dear Miss Judy, is there anything—anything in the whole world—that I can do?" he said, with all his heart.

"It is about the selling of the house. We can't depend on John Stanley to sell it—to pay himself," panted Miss Judy with long, anguished waits between the words, almost between the breaths.

There was a still longer pause after this, a still longer wait for a slow wandering breeze to bring the needed breath.

"Dear John," Miss Judy murmured, when she could speak again, "he must not know—till the note is paid. He doesn't quite realize what is due our father. You must overlook it, sister Sophia. He means only to be kind—so, so kind."

"Just so, sister Judy," replied poor Miss Sophia, through the habit of a long lifetime, not knowing what she said.

"Dear John. Dear John," Miss Judy said again, hardly louder than her fluttering breath.

There was a slight movement of her hand, and although the nerveless, cold little fingers fell powerless on the old blue quilt, the girl who hung over her knew what the movement meant. Doris understood that Miss Judy wished to have the judge's letter read to her again; but before it could be drawn from beneath the pillow the blue eyes were closed, and Miss Judy seemed softly to fall asleep. In the deep silence which followed the shadowed room was filled with the hushed hum of the voices of the people waiting outside.

It seemed to the watchers a long time before Miss Judy's blue eyes opened gently, yet suddenly and with a clearer look. It was a look quite like her old sweet self. There was in it even a fleeting expression almost like her old innocent artfulness.

"I hope you won't mind—the—trouble," she said, going on after a long pause, after waiting for her reluctant breath to return; after waiting for her true heart to beat once more. "I—should like—you—to—to consult Doris—often."

The blue eyes wandered from the young man's face to the golden head bowed at the bedside. At least the young man thought so, but his own eyes were very dim, his own heart was beating very, very fast, and he could not see very clearly.

"I will do all that you wish, as nearly as I can," he said tremulously. "But—dear Miss Judy, have you considered? This is your sister's home—all that she has in the world."

Miss Judy's little hand tried to creep toward her sister's, but its strength failing Doris tenderly took it in hers and laid it on Miss Sophia's. Yet even then, when it had grown cold—with the coldness that never passes, and had become weak with the weakness that can never gain strength—it made a slight protecting movement.

"Sister Sophia—isn't—willing—to keep what is—not—our own. And Doris—"

There now followed so long a pause that Doris, who had been quiet and calm in her self-control up to this moment, thought it too late for her grief to disturb Miss Judy—believed it to be time to say quickly what she wished to say, if Miss Judy ever were to hear—and, dropping all guard, she burst into a passion of protest and weeping.

"Oh, you do believe that I can do what I have promised, dear, dear Miss Judy. You surely believe that I can do what I have promised!" she cried. "It would break my heart to think that you doubted. I don't know how I can do it, but I will—I will—I will—somehow. I will take care of Miss Sophia—always—I will work so hard. There must be work—somewhere, for me to do. Whatever I can make shall be hers. Anyway, our home is hers. I will try to be as good to her—as you have been to me."

"I do believe—my child," the faint and distant but sweet and loving voice said quite distinctly, and then, after one of the long, fluttering pauses, "but—you must let—Lynn—advise you."

"Oh, if Doris only would—if you only could persuade her," Lynn cried.

He fell on his knees beside the slender bowed figure, and laid his trembling hand on the golden head which rested now, shaken by sobbing, on the pillow close to the silver head that lay so

quiet. He made no further vain effort to restrain a man's rare, reluctant tears, nor to steady his broken voice.

"If you will ask Doris—maybe she can forgive me—for what I never meant to do—for what I did not know I was doing—till too late. Won't you ask?" he implored. "Dear, dear Miss Judy, she can refuse nothing—not even that—to you. And I love her so—with all my heart and soul and mind and strength. Won't you ask her to let me help her in caring for Miss Sophia—then all would be well; then there need be no more trouble. Can't you speak, dear Miss Judy? Just one word. Try —*try* to ask her to let me help her—even though she may never consent to be my wife."

But this late-found, powerful plea seemed for a space to come too late, to fall all unheeded away from death's deaf ears. A wonderful radiance, such as rarely dawns in the face of the living, was now slowly dawning in the sweet, still whiteness of Miss Judy's face. The young man could not look upon it; he could not bear to hear Doris's helpless, heart-broken sobbing; he could only keep to his knees and lay his humbled head lower on the old quilt and nearer hers.

And then after a long time, after all hope of hearing the gentle voice again seemed wholly lost, it came back like a whisper in a dream, and Lynn and Doris heard Miss Judy say:—

"I do—ask—it—Doris—dear one. But—unless—you are—married—it wouldn't—be——"

She could say no more, but she had said enough. With this crowning triumph of her last artless plot the smile on the little white face brightened forever into unearthly sweetness. With these last words Miss Judy's gentle spirit breathed itself out of the world.

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